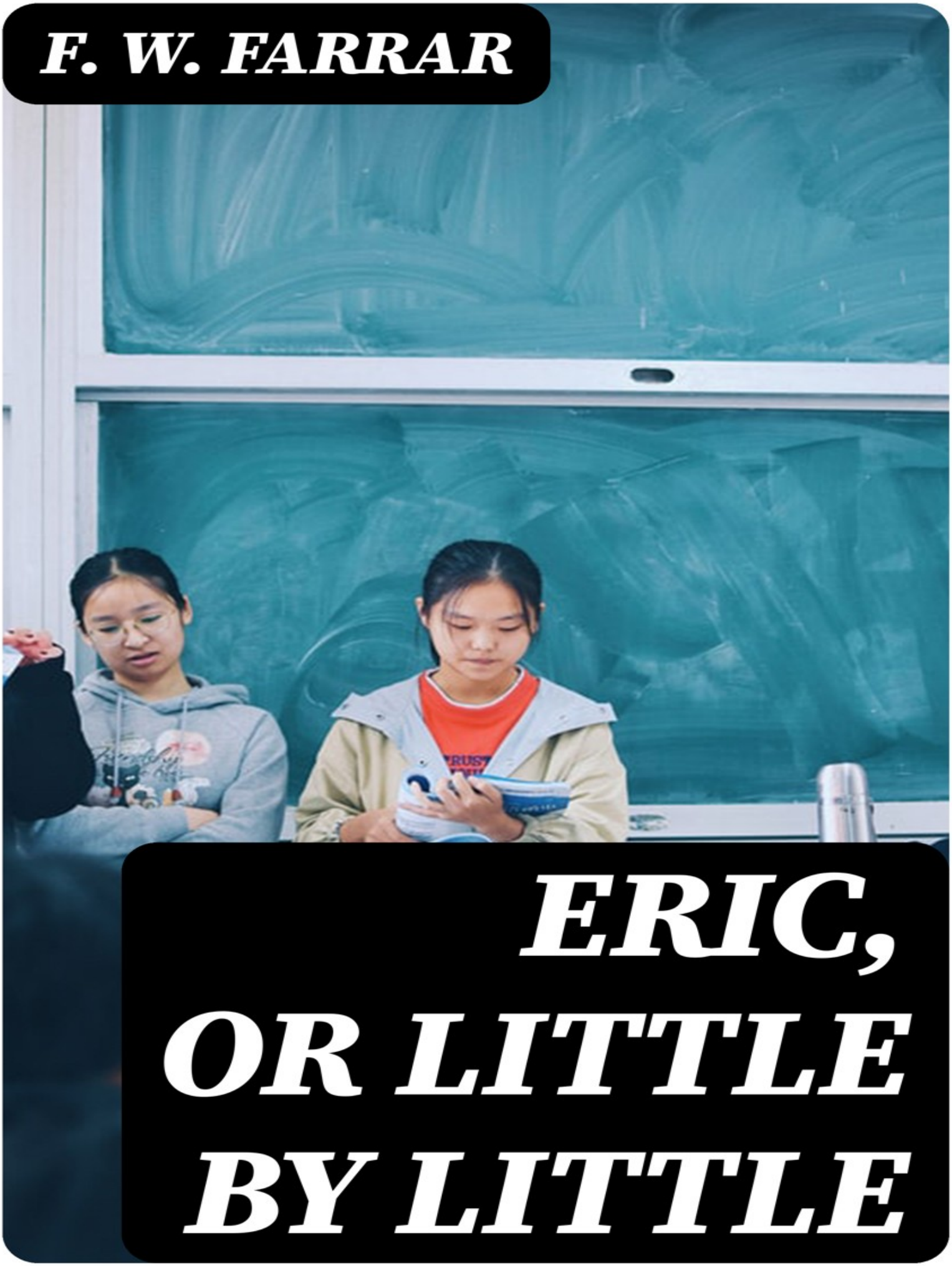
F. W. FARRAR



ERIC, OR LITTLE BY LITTLE

F. W. Farrar

Eric, or Little by Little

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Volume One--Chapter One.

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Childhood.

Ah dear delights, that o’er my soul
On memory’s wing like shadows fly!
Ah flowers that Joy from Eden stole,
While Innocence stood laughing by.
Coleridge.

“Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” cried a young boy, as he capered vigorously about, and clapped his hands. “Father and mother will be home in a week now, and then we shall stay here a little time, and *then*, and *then*, I shall go to school.”

The last words were enunciated with immense importance, as he stopped his impromptu dance before the chair where his sober cousin Fanny was patiently working at her crochet; but she did not look so much affected by the announcement as the boy seemed to demand, so he again exclaimed, “And then, Miss Fanny, I shall go to school.”

“Well, Eric,” said Fanny, raising her matter-of-fact quiet face from her endless work, “I doubt, dear, whether you will talk of it with quite as much joy a year hence.”

“Oh ay, Fanny, that’s just like you to say so; you’re always talking and prophesying; but never mind, I’m going to school, so, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” and he again began his capering,—jumping over the chairs, trying to vault the

tables, singing and dancing with an exuberance of delight, till, catching a sudden sight of his little spaniel Flo, he sprang through the open window into the garden, and disappeared behind the trees of the shrubbery; but Fanny still heard his clear, ringing, silvery laughter, as he continued his games in the summer air.

She looked up from her work after he had gone, and sighed. In spite of the sunshine and balm of the bright weather, a sense of heaviness and foreboding oppressed her. Everything looked smiling and beautiful, and there was an almost irresistible contagion in the mirth of her young cousin, but still she could not help feeling sad. It was not merely that she would have to part with Eric, “but that bright boy,” thought Fanny, “what will become of him? I have heard strange things of schools; oh, if he should be spoilt and ruined, what misery it would be. Those baby lips, that pure young heart, a year may work sad change in their words and thoughts!” She sighed again, and her eyes glistened as she raised them upwards, and breathed a silent prayer.

She loved the boy dearly, and had taught him from his earliest years. In most things she found him an apt pupil. Truthful, ingenuous, quick, he would acquire almost without effort any subject that interested him, and a word was often enough to bring the impetuous blood to his cheeks, in a flush of pride or indignation. He required the gentlest teaching, and had received it, while his mind seemed cast in such a mould of stainless honour, that he avoided most of the weaknesses to which children are prone. But he was far from blameless. He was proud to a fault; he well knew that

few of his fellows had gifts like his, either of mind or person, and his fair face often showed a clear impression of his own superiority. His passion, too, was imperious, and though it always met with prompt correction, his cousin had latterly found it difficult to subdue. She felt, in a word, that he was outgrowing her rule. Beyond a certain age no boy of spirit can be safely guided by a woman’s hand alone.

Eric Williams was now twelve years old. His father was a civilian in India, and was returning on furlough to England, after a long absence. Eric had been born in India, but had been sent to England by his parents at an early age, in charge of a lady friend of his mother. The parting, which had been agony to his father and mother, he was too young to feel; indeed the moment itself passed by without his being conscious of it. They took him on board the ship, and, after a time, gave him a hammer and some nails to play with. These had always been to him a supreme delight, and while he hammered away, Mr and Mrs Williams, denying themselves, for the child’s sake, even one more tearful embrace, went ashore in the boat and left him. It was not till the ship sailed that he was told he would not see them again for a long, long time. Poor child, his tears and cries were piteous when he first understood it; but the sorrows of four years old are very transient, and before a week was over, little Eric felt almost reconciled to his position, and had become the universal pet and plaything of every one on board, from Captain Broadland down to the cabin-boy, with whom he very soon struck up an acquaintance. Yet twice a day at least his mirth would be checked as he lisped his little prayer, kneeling at Mrs Munro’s knee, and asked God

“to bless his dear, dear father and mother, and make him a good boy.”

When Eric arrived in England, he was entrusted to the care of a widowed aunt, whose daughter, Fanny, had the main charge of his early teaching. At first, the wayward little Indian seemed likely to form no accession to the quiet household, but he soon became its brightest ornament and pride. Everything was in his favour at the pleasant home of Mrs Trevor. He was treated with motherly kindness and tenderness, yet firmly checked when he went wrong. From the first he had a well-spring of strength against temptation, in the long letters which every mail brought from his parents; and all his childish affections were entwined round the fancied image of a brother born since he had left India. In his bedroom there hung a cherub’s head, drawn in pencil by his mother, and this winged child was inextricably identified in his imagination with his “little brother Vernon.” He loved it dearly, and whenever he went astray, nothing weighed on his mind so strongly as the thought, that if he were naughty he would teach little Vernon to be naughty too when he came home.

And Nature also—wisest, gentlest, holiest of teachers—was with him in his childhood. Fairholm Cottage, where his aunt lived, was situated in the beautiful Vale of Ayrton, and a clear stream ran through the valley at the bottom of Mrs Trevor’s orchard. Eric loved this stream, and was always happy as he roamed by its side, or over the low green hills and scattered dingles which lent unusual loveliness to every winding of its waters. He was allowed to go about a good deal by himself, and it did him good. He grew up fearless

and self-dependent, and never felt the want of amusement. The garden and orchard supplied him a theatre for endless games and romps, sometimes with no other companion than his cousin and his dog, and sometimes with the few children of his own age whom he knew in the hamlet. Very soon he forgot all about India; it only hung like a distant golden haze on the horizon of his memory. When asked if he remembered it, he would say thoughtfully, that in dreams and at some other times, he saw a little boy, with long curly hair, running about in a flower-garden, near a great river, in a place where the air was very bright. But whether the little boy was himself or his brother Vernon, whom he had never seen, he couldn’t quite tell.

But, above all, it was happy for Eric that his training was religious and enlightened. With Mrs Trevor and her daughter, religion was not a system but a habit—not a theory but a continued act of life. All was simple, sweet, and unaffected, about their charity and their devotions. They loved God, and they did all the good they could to those around them. The floating gossip and ill-nature of the little village never affected them; it melted away insensibly in the presence of their cultivated minds; so that friendship with them was a bond of union among all, and from the vicar to the dairyman every one loved and respected them, asked their counsel, and sought their sympathy.

They called themselves by no sectarian name, nor could they have told to what “party” they belonged. They troubled themselves with no theories of education, but mingled gentle nurture with “wholesome neglect.” There was nothing exotic or constrained in the growth of Eric’s

character. He was not one of the angelically good children at all, and knew none of the phrases of which infant prodigies are supposed to be so fond. But to be truthful, to be honest, to be kind, to be brave, these lessons had been taught him, and he never *quite* forgot them; nor amid the sorrows of after life did he ever quite lose the sense—learnt at dear quiet Fairholm—of a present loving God, of a tender and long-suffering Father.

As yet he could be hardly said to know what school was. He had been sent indeed to Mr Lawley's grammar school for the last half-year, and had learned a few declensions in his Latin grammar. But as Mr Lawley allowed his upper class to hear the little boys their lessons, Eric had managed to get on pretty much as he liked. Only *once* in the entire half-year had he said a lesson to the dreadful master himself, and of course it was a ruinous failure, involving some tremendous pulls of Eric's hair, and making him tremble like a leaf. Several things combined to make Mr Lawley terrific to his imagination. Ever since he was quite little, he remembered hearing the howls which proceeded from the "Latin-school" as he passed by, whilst some luckless youngster was getting caned; and the reverend pedagogue was notoriously passionate. Then, again, he spoke so indistinctly with his deep gruff voice, that Eric never could and never did understand a word he said, and this kept him in a perpetual terror.

Once Mr Lawley had told him to go out, and see what time it was by the church clock.

Only hearing that he was to do something, too frightened to ask what it was, and feeling sure that even if he did, he

should not make out what the master meant, Eric ran out, went straight to Mr Lawley's house, and, after having managed by strenuous jumps to touch the knocker, informed the servant "that Mr Lawley wanted his man."

"What man?" said the maid-servant, "the young man? or the butler? or is it the clerk?"

Here was a puzzler! all Eric knew was, that he was in the habit of sending sometimes for one or other of these functionaries; but he was in for it, so with a faltering voice he said "the young man" at hazard, and went back to the Latin-school.

"Why have you been so long?" roared Mr Lawley, as he timidly entered.

Fear entirely prevented Eric from hearing the exact question, so he answered at random, "He's coming, sir." The master seeing by his scared look that something was wrong, waited to see what would turn up.

Soon after in walked "the young man," and coming to the astonished Mr Lawley, bowed, scraped, and said, "Master Williams said you sent for me, sir."

"A mistake," growled the schoolmaster, turning on Eric a look which nearly petrified him; he quite expected a book at his head, or at best a great whack of the cane; but Mr Lawley had naturally a kind heart, soured as it was, and pitying perhaps the child's white face, he contented himself with the effects of his look.

The simple truth was, that poor Mr Lawley was a little wrong in the head. A scholar and a gentleman, early misfortunes and an imprudent marriage had driven him to the mastership of the little country grammar school; and

here the perpetual annoyance caused to his refined mind by the coarseness of clumsy or spiteful boys, had gradually unhinged his intellect. Often did he tell the boys “that it was an easier life by far to break stones by the roadside than to teach them;” and at last his eccentricities became too obvious to be any longer overlooked.

The denouement of his history was a tragic one, and had come a few days before the time when our narrative opens. It was a common practice among the Latin-school boys, as I suppose among all boys, to amuse themselves by putting a heavy book on the top of a door left partially ajar, and to cry out, “Crown him!” as the first luckless youngster who happened to come in received the book thundering on his head. One day, just as the trap had been adroitly laid, Mr Lawley walked in unexpectedly. The moment he entered the schoolroom, down came an Ainsworth’s Dictionary on the top of his hat, and the boy, concealed behind the door, unconscious of who the victim was, enunciated with mock gravity, “Crown him, three cheers!”

It took Mr Lawley a second to raise from his eyebrows the battered hat, and recover from his confusion; the next instant he was springing after the boy who had caused the mishap, and who, knowing the effects of the master’s fury, fled with precipitation. In one minute the offender was caught, and Mr Lawley’s heavy hand fell recklessly on his ears and back, until he screamed with terror. At last, by a tremendous writhe, wrenching himself free, he darted towards the door, and Mr Lawley, too much tired to pursue, snatched his large gold watch out of his fob, and hurled it at the boy’s retreating figure. The watch flew through the air;—

crash! it had missed its aim, and, striking the wall above the lintel, fell smashed into a thousand shivers.

The sound, the violence of the action, the sight of the broken watch, which was the gift of a cherished friend, instantly awoke the master to his senses. The whole school had seen it; they sate there pale and breathless with excitement and awe. The poor man could bear it no longer. He flung himself into his chair, hid his face with his hands, and burst into hysterical tears. It was the outbreak of feelings long pent-up. In that instant all his life passed before him—its hopes, its failures, its miseries, its madness. “Yes!” he thought, “I am mad.”

Raising his head, he cried wildly, “Boys, go, I am mad!” and sank again into his former position, rocking himself to and fro. One by one the boys stole out, and he was left alone. The end is soon told. Forced to leave Ayrton, he had no means of earning his daily bread; and the weight of this new anxiety hastening the crisis, the handsome proud scholar became an inmate of the Brerely Lunatic Asylum. A few years afterwards, Eric heard that he was dead. Poor broken human heart! may he rest in peace.

Such was Eric’s first school and schoolmaster. But although he learnt little there, and gained no experience of the character of others or of his own, yet there was one point about Ayrton Latin-School which he never regretted. It was the mixture there of all classes. On those benches gentlemen’s sons sat side by side with plebeians, and no harm, but only good, seemed to come from the intercourse. The neighbouring gentry, most of whom had begun their education there, were drawn into closer and kindlier union

with their neighbours and dependants, from the fact of having been their associates in the days of their boyhood. Many a time afterwards, when Eric, as he passed down the streets, interchanged friendly greetings with some young glazier or tradesman whom he remembered at school, he felt glad that thus early he had learnt practically to despise the accidental and nominal differences which separate man from man.

Volume One--Chapter Two.

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A New Home.

Life hath its May, and all is joyous then
The woods are vocal, and the flowers breathe odour,
The very breeze hath mirth in’t.
Old Play.

AT last the longed-for yet dreaded day approached, and a letter informed the Trevors that Mr and Mrs Williams would arrive at Southampton on 5th July, and would probably reach Ayrton the evening after. They particularly requested that no one should come to meet them on their landing. “We shall reach Southampton,” wrote Mrs Williams, “tired, pale, and travel-stained, and had much rather see you first at Fairholm, where we shall be spared the painful constraint of a meeting in public. So please expect our arrival at about seven in the evening.”

Poor Eric! although he had been longing for the time ever since the news came, yet now he was too agitated for enjoyment. Exertion and expectation made him restless, and he could settle down to nothing all day, every hour of which hung most heavily on his hands.

At last the afternoon wore away, and a soft summer evening filled the sky with its gorgeous calm. Far-off they caught the sound of wheels; a carriage dashed up to the door, and the next moment Eric sprang into his mother’s arms.

“O mother! mother!”

“My own darling, darling boy!”

And as the pale sweet face of the mother met the bright and rosy child-face, each of them was wet with a rush of unbidden tears. In another moment Eric had been folded to his father’s heart, and locked in the arms of his little brother Vernon. Who shall describe the emotions of those few moments? they did not seem like earthly moments; they seemed to belong not to time, but to eternity.

The first evening of such a scene is too excited to be happy. The little party at Fairholm retired early, and Eric was soon fast asleep with his arm round his new-found brother’s neck.

Quiet steps entered the chamber, and noiselessly the father and mother sat down by the bedside of their children. Earth could have shown no scene more perfect in its beauty than that which met their eyes. The pure moonlight flooded the little room, and showed distinctly the forms and countenances of the sleepers, whose soft regular breathing was the only sound that broke the stillness of the July night.

The small shining flower-like faces, with their fair hair—the trustful loving arms folded round each brother's neck—the closed lids and parted lips—made an exquisite picture, and one never to be forgotten. Side by side, without a word, the parents knelt down, and with eyes wet with tears of joyfulness, poured out their hearts in passionate prayer for their young and beloved boys.

Very happily the next month glided away; a new life seemed opened to Eric in the world of rich affections which had unfolded itself before him. His parents—above all, his mother—were everything that he had longed for; and Vernon more than fulfilled to his loving heart the ideal of his childish fancy. He was never tired of playing with and patronising his little brother, and their rambles by stream and hill made those days appear the happiest he had ever spent. Every evening (for having lived all his life at home, he had not yet laid aside the habits of early childhood) he said his prayers by his mother's knee; and at the end of one long summer's day, when prayers were finished, and full of life and happiness he lay down to sleep, "Oh, mother," he said, "I am so happy—I like to say my prayers when you are here."

"Yes, my boy, and God loves to hear them."

"Aren't there some who never say prayers, mother?"

"Very many, love, I fear."

"How unhappy they must be! *I* shall *always* love to say my prayers."

"Ah, Eric, God grant that you may."

And the fond mother hoped he always would. But these words often came back to Eric's mind in later and less

happy days—days when that gentle hand could no longer rest lovingly on his head—when those mild blue eyes were dim with tears, and the poor boy, changed in heart and life, often flung himself down with an unreproaching conscience to prayer-less sleep.

It had been settled that in another week Eric was to go to school in the Isle of Roslyn. Mr Williams had hired a small house in the town of Ellan, and intended to stay there for his year of furlough, at the end of which period Vernon was to be left at Fairholm, and Eric in the house of the head-master of the school. Eric enjoyed the prospect of all things, and he hardly fancied that Paradise itself could be happier than a life at the sea-side with his father and mother and Vernon, combined with the commencement of schoolboy dignity. When the time for the voyage came, his first glimpse of the sea, and the sensation of sailing over it with only a few planks between him and the deep waters, struck him silent with admiring wonder. It was a cloudless day; the line of blue sky melted into the line of blue wave, and the air was filled with sunlight. At evening they landed, and the coach took them to Ellan. On the way Eric saw for the first time the strength of the hills, so that when they reached the town and took possession of their cottage, he was dumb with the inrush of new and marvellous impressions.

Next morning he was awake early, and jumping out of bed, so as not to disturb the sleeping Vernon, he drew up the window-blind, and gently opened the window. A very beautiful scene burst on him, one destined to be long mingled with all his most vivid reminiscences. It had been too dark on their arrival the evening before to get any

definite impression of their residence, so that this first glimpse of it filled him with delighted surprise. Not twenty yards below the garden, in front of the house, lay Ellan Bay, at that moment rippling with golden laughter in the fresh breeze of sunrise. On either side of the bay was a bold headland, the one stretching out in a series of broken crags, the other terminating in a huge mass of rock, called from its shape The Stack. To the right lay the town, with its grey old castle, and the mountain stream running through it into the sea; to the left, high above the beach, rose the crumbling fragment of a picturesque fort, behind which towered the lofty buildings of Roslyn School. Eric learnt the whole landscape by heart, and thought himself a most happy boy to come to such a place. He fancied that he should never be tired of looking at the sea, and could not take his eyes off the great buoy that rolled about in the centre of the bay, and flashed in the sunlight at every move. He turned round full of hope and spirits, and, after watching for a few moments the beautiful face of his sleeping brother, awoke him with boisterous mirth.

“Now, Verny,” he cried, as the little boy sprang eagerly out of bed, “don’t look till I tell you,” and putting his hands over Vernon’s eyes, he led him to the window. Then he threw up the sash, and embodied all his sensations in the one word—“There!”

To which apostrophe Vernon, after a long gaze, could make no other answer than, “Oh, Eric! oh, I say!”

That day Eric was to have his first interview with Dr Rowlands. The school had already re-opened, and one of the boys passed by the window while they were breakfasting.

He looked very happy and engaging, and was humming a tune as he strolled along. Eric started up and gazed after him with the most intense curiosity. At that moment the unconscious schoolboy was to him the most interesting person in the whole world, and he couldn’t realise the fact that, before the day was over, he would be a Roslyn boy himself. He very much wondered what sort of a fellow the boy was, and whether he should ever recognise him again, and make his acquaintance. Yes, Eric, the thread of that boy’s destiny is twined for many a day with yours; his name is Montagu, as you will know very soon.

At nine o’clock Mr Williams started towards the school with his son. The walk led them by the sea-side, over the sands, and past the ruin, at the foot of which the waves broke at high tide. At any other time Eric would have been overflowing with life and wonder at the murmur of the ripples, the sight of the ships in the bay or on the horizon, and the numberless little shells, with their bright colours and sculptured shapes, which lay about the beach. But now his mind was too full of a single anxiety; and when, after crossing a green playground, they stood by the head-master’s door, his heart fluttered, and it required all his energy to keep down the nervous trembling which shook him.

Mr Williams gave his card, and they were shown into Dr Rowlands’s study. He was a kind-looking gentlemanly man, and when he turned to address Eric, after a few minutes’ conversation with his father, the boy felt instantly reassured by the pleasant sincerity and frank courtesy of his manner. A short examination showed that Eric’s attainments were

very slight as yet, and he was to be put in the lowest form of all, under the superintendence of the Reverend Henry Gordon. Dr Rowlands wrote a short note in pencil, and giving it to Eric, directed the servant to show him to Mr Gordon's schoolroom.

The bell had just done ringing when they had started for the school, so that Eric knew that all the boys would be by this time assembled at their work, and that he should have to go alone into the middle of them. As he walked after the servant through the long corridors and up the broad stairs, he longed to make friends with him, so as, if possible, to feel less lonely. But he had only time to get out, "I say, what sort of a fellow is Mr Gordon?"

"Terrible strict, sir, I hear," said the man, touching his cap with a comic expression, which didn't at all tend to enliven the future pupil. "That's the door," he continued, "and you'll have to give him the Doctor's note," and, pointing to a door at the end of the passage, he walked off.

Eric stopped irresolutely. The man had disappeared, and he was by himself in the great silent building. Afraid of the sound of his own footsteps, he ran along the passage, and knocked timidly. He heard a low, a very low murmur in the room, but there was no answer. He knocked again a little louder; still no notice; then, overdoing it in his fright, he gave a very loud tap indeed.

"Come in!" said a voice, which to the new boy sounded awful; but he opened the door, and entered. As he came in every head was quickly raised, he heard a whisper of "New fellow," and the crimson flooded his face, as he felt himself

the cynosure of some forty intensely-inquisitive pairs of eyes.

He found himself in a high airy room, with three large windows opening towards the sea. At one end was the master's throne, and facing it, all down the room, were desks and benches, along which the boys were sitting at work. Every one knows how very confusing it is to enter a strange room full of strange people, and especially when you enter it from a darker passage. Eric felt dazzled, and not seeing the regular route to the master's desk, went towards it between two of the benches. As these were at no great distance from each other, he stumbled against several legs on his way, and felt pretty sure that they were put out on purpose to trip him, especially by one boy, who pretended to be much hurt, drew up his leg, and began rubbing it, ejaculating *sotto voce*, "Awkward little fool."

In this very clumsy way he had at last reached the desk, and presented his missive. The master's eye was on him, but all Eric had time to observe was, that he looked rather stern, and had in his hand a book which he seemed to be studying with the deepest interest. He glanced first at the note, and then looked full at the boy, as though determined to read his whole character by a single perusal of his face.

"Williams, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said Eric, very low, still painfully conscious that all the boys were looking at him, as well as the master.

"Very well, Williams, you are placed in the lowest form—the fourth. I hope you will work well. At present they are learning their Caesar. Go and sit next to that boy," pointing towards the lower end of the room; "he will show you the

lesson, and let you look over his book. Barker, let Williams look over you!”

Eric went and sat down at the end of a bench by the boy indicated. He was a rough-looking fellow with a shock head of black hair, and a very dogged look. Eric secretly thought that he a very nice-looking specimen of Roslyn School. However, he sate by him, and glanced at the Caesar which the boy shoved about a quarter of an inch in his direction. But Barker didn’t seem inclined to make any further advances, and presently Eric asked in a whisper—

“What’s the lesson?”

The boy glanced at him, but took no further notice.

Eric repeated, “I say, what’s the lesson?”

Instead of answering, Barker stared at him, and grunted —

“What’s your name?”

“Eric—I mean Williams.”

“Then why don’t you say what you mean?” Eric moved his foot impatiently at this ungracious reception; but as he seemed to have no redress, he pulled the Caesar nearer towards him.

“Drop that; ’tisn’t yours.”

Mr Gordon heard a whisper, and glanced that way. “Silence!” he said, and Barker pretended to be deep in his work, while Eric, resigning himself to his fate, looked about him.

He had plenty to occupy his attention in the faces round him. He furtively examined Mr Gordon, as he bent over his high desk, writing, but couldn’t make out the physiognomy. There had been something reserved and imperious in the

master’s manner, yet he thought he should not dislike him on the whole. With the countenances of his future school-fellows he was not altogether pleased, but there were one or two which thoroughly attracted him. One boy, whose side face was turned towards him as he sat on the bench in front, took his fancy particularly, so, tired of doing nothing, he plucked up courage, and leaning forward, whispered, “Do lend me your Caesar for a few minutes.” The boy at once handed it to him with a pleasant smile, and as the lesson was marked, Eric had time to hurry over a few sentences, when Mr Gordon’s sonorous voice exclaimed—

“Fourth-form, come up!”

Some twenty of the boys went up, and stood in a large semicircle round the desk. Eric of course was placed last, and the lesson commenced.

“Russell, begin,” said the master; and immediately the boy who had handed Eric his Caesar began reading a few sentences, and construed them very creditably, only losing a place or two. He had a frank open face, bright intelligent fearless eyes, and a very taking voice and manner. Eric listened admiringly, and felt sure he should like him.

Barker was put on next. He bungled through the Latin in a grating, irresolute sort of way, with several false quantities, for each of which the next boy took him up. Then he began to construe;—a frightful confusion of nominatives without verbs, accusatives translated as ablatives, and adverbs turned into prepositions, ensued, and after a hopeless flounder, during which Mr Gordon left him entirely to himself, Barker came to a full stop; his catastrophe was

so ludicrous, that Eric could not help joining in the general titter. Barker scowled.

“As usual, Barker,” said the master, with a curl of the lip. “Hold out your hand!”

Barker did so, looking sullen defiance, and the cane immediately descended on his open palm. Six similar cuts followed, during which the form looked on, not without terror; and Barker, squeezing his hands tight together, went back to his seat.

“Williams, translate the piece in which Barker has just failed.”

Eric did as he was bid, and got through it pretty well. He had now quite recovered his ordinary bearing, and spoke out clearly and without nervousness. He afterwards won several places by answering questions, and at the end of the lesson was marked about half-way up the form. The boys’ numbers were then taken down in the weekly register, and they went back to their seats.

On his desk Eric found a torn bit of paper, on which was clumsily scrawled, “I’ll teach you to grin when I’m turned, you young brute.”

The paper seemed to fascinate his eyes. He stared at it fixedly, and augured ominously of Barker’s intentions, since that worthy obviously alluded to his having smiled in form, and chose to interpret it as an intentional provocation. He felt that he was in for it, and that Barker meant to pick a quarrel with him. This puzzled and annoyed him, and he felt very sad to have found an enemy already.

While he was looking at the paper the great school-clock struck twelve; and the captain of the form getting up, threw

open the folding doors of the schoolroom.

“You may go,” said Mr Gordon; and leaving his seat, disappeared by a door at the farther end of the room.

Instantly there was a rush for caps, and the boys poured out in a confused and noisy stream, while at the same moment the other schoolrooms disgorged their inmates. Eric naturally went out among the last; but just as he was going to take his cap, Barker seized it, and flung it with a whoop to the end of the passage, where it was trampled on by a number of the boys as they ran out.

Eric, gulping down his fury with a great effort, turned to his opponent, and said coolly, “Is that what you always do to new fellows?”

“Yes, you bumptious young owl, it is, and that too;” and a tolerably smart slap on the face followed—leaving a red mark on a cheek already aflame with anger and indignation, —“should you like a little more?”

He was hurt and offended, but was too proud to cry. “What’s that for?” he said, with flashing eyes.

“For your conceit in laughing at me when I was caned.”

Eric stamped. “I did nothing of the kind, and you know it as well as I do.”

“What? I’m a liar, am I? Oh, we shall take this kind of thing out of you, you young cub; take that;” and a heavier blow followed.

“You brutal cowardly bully,” shouted Eric; and in another moment he would have sprung upon him. It was lucky for him that he did not, for Barker was three years older than he, and very powerful. Such an attack would have been most unfortunate for him in every way. But at this instant

some boys hearing the quarrel ran up, and Russell among them.

“Hallo, Barker,” said one; “what’s up?”

“Why, I’m teaching this new fry to be less bumptious, that’s all.”

“Shame!” said Russell, as he saw the mark on Eric’s cheek; “what a fellow you are, Barker. Why couldn’t you let him alone for the first day at any rate?”

“What’s that to you? I’ll kick you too if you say much.”

“Cavé! cavé!” whispered half a dozen voices, and instantly the knot of boys dispersed in every direction, as Mr Gordon was seen approaching. He had caught a glimpse of the scene without understanding it, and seeing the new boy’s red and angry face, he only said, as he passed by, “What, Williams! fighting already? Take care.”

This was the cruellest cut of all. “So,” thought Eric, “a nice beginning! it seems both boys and masters are against me,” and very disconsolately he walked to pick up his cap.

The boys were all dispersed on the playground at different games, and as he went home he was stopped perpetually, and had to answer the usual questions, “What’s your name? Are you a boarder or a day scholar? What form are you in?” Eric expected all this, and it therefore did not annoy him. Under any other circumstances, he would have answered cheerfully and frankly enough; but now he felt miserable at his morning’s rencontre, and his answers were short and sheepish, his only desire being to get away as soon as possible. It was an additional vexation to feel sure that his manner did not make a favourable impression.

Before he had got out of the playground, Russell ran up to him. “I’m afraid you won’t like this, or think much of us, Williams,” he said. “But never mind. It’ll only last a day or two, and the fellows are not so bad as they seem; except that Barker. I’m sorry you’ve come across him, but it can’t be helped.”

It was the first kind word he had had since the morning, and after his troubles kindness melted him. He felt half inclined to cry, and for a few moments could say nothing in reply to Russell’s soothing words. But the boy’s friendliness went far to comfort him, and at last, shaking hands with him, he said—

“Do let me speak to you sometimes, while I am a new boy, Russell.”

“Oh yes,” said Russell, laughing, “as much as ever you like. And as Barker hates me pretty much as he seems inclined to hate you, we are in the same box. Good-bye.”

So Eric left the field, and wandered home, like Calchas in the Iliad, “sorrowful by the side of the sounding sea.” Already the purple mantle had fallen from his ideal of schoolboy life. He got home later than they expected, and found his parents waiting for him. It was rather disappointing to them to see his face so melancholy, when they expected him to be full of animation and pleasure. Mrs Williams drew her own conclusions from the red mark on his cheek, as well as the traces of tears welling to his eyes; but, like a wise mother, she asked nothing, and left the boy to tell his own story,—which in time he did, omitting all the painful part, speaking enthusiastically of Russell, and only admitting that he had been a little teased.

Volume One--Chapter Three.

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Bullying.

Give to the morn of life its natural blessedness.
Wordsworth.

Why is it that new boys are almost invariably ill-treated? I have often fancied that there must be in boyhood a pseudo-instinctive cruelty, a sort of “wild trick of the ancestral savage,” which no amount of civilisation can entirely repress. Certain it is, that to most boys the first term is a trying ordeal. They are being tested and weighed. Their place in the general estimation is not yet fixed, and the slightest circumstances are seized upon to settle the category under which the boy is to be classed. A few apparently trivial accidents of his first few weeks at school often decide his position in the general regard for the remainder of his boyhood. And yet these are not accidents; they are the slight indications which give an unerring proof of the general tendencies of his character and training. Hence much of the apparent cruelty with which new boys are treated is not exactly intentional. At first, of course, as they can have no friends worth speaking of; there are always plenty of coarse and brutal minds that take a pleasure in their torment, particularly if they at once recognise any innate superiority to themselves. Of this class was Barker. He hated Eric at first sight, simply because his feeble mind could only realise one idea about him, and that was the new boy’s striking contrast with his own

imperfections. Hence he left no means untried to vent on Eric his low and mean jealousy. He showed undisguised pleasure when he fell in form, and signs of disgust when he rose; he fomented every little source of disapproval or quarrelling which happened to arise against him; he never looked at him without a frown or a sneer; he waited for him to kick and annoy him as he came out of, or went in to, the schoolroom. In fact, he did his very best to make the boy's life miserable, and the occupation of hating him seemed in some measure to fill up the vacuity of an ill-conditioned and degraded mind.

Hatred is a most mysterious and painful phenomenon to the unhappy person who is the object of it, and more especially if he have incurred it by no one assignable reason. Why it happens that no heart can be so generous, no life so self-denying, no intentions so honourable and pure, as to shield a man from the enmity of his fellows, must remain a dark question for ever. But certain it is, that to bear the undeserved malignity of the evil-minded, to hear unmoved the sneers of the proud and the calumnies of the base, is one of the hardest lessons in life. And to Eric this opposition was peculiarly painful; he was utterly unprepared for it. In his bright joyous life at Fairholm, in the little he saw of the boys at the Latin-school, he had met with nothing but kindness and caresses, and the generous nobleness of his character had seemed to claim them as a natural element. "And now, why," he asked impatiently, "should this bulldog sort of fellow have set his whole aim to annoy, vex, and hurt me?" Incapable himself of so mean a spirit of jealousy at superior excellence, he could not make it out; but such was

the fact, and the very mysteriousness of it made it more intolerable to bear.

But it must be admitted that he made matters worse by his own bursts of passion. His was not the temper to turn the other cheek; but, brave and spirited as he was, he felt how utterly hopeless would be any attempt on his part to repel force by force. He would have tried some slight conciliation, but it was really impossible with such a boy as his enemy. Barker never gave him even so much as an indifferent look, much less a civil word. Eric loathed him, and the only good and happy part of the matter to his own mind was, that conscientiously his only desire was to get rid of him, and be left alone, while he never cherished a particle of revenge.

While every day Eric was getting on better in form, and winning himself a very good position with the other boys, who liked his frankness, his mirth, his spirit, and cleverness, he felt this feud with Barker like a dark background to all his enjoyment. He even had to manoeuvre daily how to escape him, and violent scenes were of constant occurrence between them.

Eric could not, and would not, brook his bullying with silence. His resentment was loud and stinging, and, Ishmaelite as Barker was, even *his* phlegmatic temperament took fire when Eric shouted his fierce and uncompromising retorts in the hearing of the others.

Meanwhile Eric was on the best of terms with the rest of the form, and such of the other boys as he knew, although, at first, his position as a home-boarder prevented his knowing many. Besides Russell, there were three whom he