

***WILFRED
THOMASON SIR
GRENFELL***



***A LABRADOR
DOCTOR***

Wilfred Thomason Sir Grenfell

A Labrador Doctor

The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell

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PREFACE

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I have long been resisting the strong pressure from friends that would force me to risk having to live alongside my own autobiography. It seems still an open question whether it is advisable, or even whether it is right—seeing that it calls for confessions. In the eyes of God the only alternative is a book of lies. Moreover, sitting down to write one's own life story has always loomed up before my imagination as an admission that one was passing the post which marks the last lap; and though it was a justly celebrated physician who told us that we might profitably crawl upon the shelf at half a century, that added no attraction for me to the effort, when I passed that goal.

Thirty-two years spent in work for deep-sea fishermen, twenty-seven of which years have been passed in Labrador and northern Newfoundland, have necessarily given me some experiences which may be helpful to others. I feel that this alone justifies the writing of this story.

To the many helpers who have coöperated with me at one time or another throughout these years, I owe a debt of gratitude which will never be forgotten, though it has been impossible to mention each one by name. Without them this work could never have been.

To my wife, who was willing to leave all the best the civilized world can offer to share my life on this lonely coast, I want to dedicate this book. Truth forces me to own that it would never have come into being without her, and her

greater share in the work of its production declares her courage to face the consequences.

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A LABRADOR DOCTOR

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EARLY DAYS

To be born on the 28th of February is not altogether without its compensations. It affords a subject of conversation when you are asked to put your name in birthday books. It is evident that many people suppose it to be almost an intrusion to appear on that day. However, it was perfectly satisfactory to me so long as it was not the 29th. As a boy, that was all for which I cared. Still, I used at times to be oppressed by the danger, so narrowly missed, of growing up with undue deliberation.

The event occurred in 1865 in Parkgate, near Chester, England, whither my parents had moved to enable my father to take over the school of his uncle. I was always told that what might be called boisterous weather signalled my arrival. Experience has since shown me that that need not be considered a particularly ominous portent in the winter season on the Sands of Dee.

It is fortunate that the selection of our birthplace is not left to ourselves. It would most certainly be one of those small decisions which would later add to the things over which we worry. I can see how it would have acted in my own case. For my paternal forbears are really of Cornish extraction—a corner of our little Island to which attaches all the romantic aroma of the men, who, in defence of England, "swept the Spanish Main," and so long successfully singed

the Bang of Spain's beard, men whose exploits never fail to stir the best blood of Englishmen, and among whom my direct ancestors had the privilege of playing no undistinguished part. On the other hand, my visits thither have—romance aside—convinced me that the restricted foreshore and the precipitous cliffs are a handicap to the development of youth, compared with the broad expanses of tempting sands, which are after all associated with another kinsman, whose songs have helped to make them famous, Charles Kingsley.

My mother was born in India, her father being a colonel of many campaigns, and her brother an engineer officer in charge during the siege of Lucknow till relieved by Sir Henry Havelock. At the first Delhi Durbar no less than forty-eight of my cousins met, all being officers either of the Indian military or civil service.

To the modern progressive mind the wide sands are a stumbling-block. Silting up with the years, they have closed the river to navigation, and converted our once famous Roman city of Chester into a sleepy, second-rate market-town. The great flood of commerce from the New World sweeps contemptuously past our estuary, and finds its clearing-house under the eternal, assertive smoke clouds which camouflage the miles of throbbing docks and slums called Liverpool—little more than a dozen miles distant. But the heather-clad hills of Heswall, and the old red sandstone ridge, which form the ancient borough of the "Hundred of Wirral," afford an efficient shelter from the insistent taint of out-of-the-worldness.

Every inch of the Sands of Dee were dear to me. I learned to know their every bank and gutter. Away beyond them there was a mystery in the blue hills of the Welsh shore, only cut off from us children in reality by the narrow, rapid water of the channel we called the Deep. Yet they seemed so high and so far away. The people there spoke a different language from ours, and all their instincts seemed diverse. Our humble neighbours lived by the seafaring genius which we ourselves loved so much. They made their living from the fisheries of the river mouth; and scores of times we children would slip away, and spend the day and night with them in their boats.



VIEW FROM MOSTYN HOUSE, THE AUTHOR'S BIRTHPLACE, PARKGATE, CHESHIRE [To List](#)

While I was still quite a small boy, a terrible blizzard struck the estuary while the boats were out, and for twenty-four hours one of the fishing craft was missing. Only a lad of

sixteen was in charge of her—a boy whom we knew, and with whom we had often sailed. All my family were away from home at the time except myself; and I can still remember the thrill I experienced when, as representative of the "Big House," I was taken to see the poor lad, who had been brought home at last, frozen to death.

The men of the opposite shores were shopkeepers and miners. Somehow we knew that they couldn't help it. The nursery rhyme about "Taffy was a Welshman; Taffy was a thief," because familiar, had not led us to hold any unduly inflated estimate of the Welsh character. One of my old nurses did much to redeem it, however. She had undertaken the burden of my brother and myself during a long vacation, and carried us off bodily to her home in Wales. Her clean little cottage stood by the side of a road leading to the village school of the State Mining District of Festiniog. We soon learned that the local boys resented the intrusion of the two English lads, and they so frequently chased us off the village green, which was the only playground offered us, that we at last decided to give battle. We had stored up a pile of slates behind our garden wall, and luring the enemy to the gates by the simple method of retiring before their advance, we saluted them with artillery fire from a comparatively safe entrenchment. To my horror, one of the first missiles struck a medium-sized boy right over the eye, and I saw the blood flow instantly. The awful comparison of David and Goliath flashed across my terror-stricken mind, and I fled incontinently to my nurse's protection. Subsequently by her adroit diplomacy, we were not only

delivered from justice, but gained the freedom of the green as well.

Far away up the river came the great salt-water marshes which seemed so endless to our tiny selves. There was also the Great Cop, an embankment miles long, intended to reach "from England to Wales," but which was never finished because the quicksand swallowed up all that the workmen could pour into it. Many a time I have stood on the broken end, where the discouraged labourers had left their very shovels and picks and trucks and had apparently fled in dismay, as if convicted of the impiousness of trying to fill the Bottomless Pit. To my childish imagination the upturned wheelbarrows and wasted trucks and rails always suggested the banks of the Red Sea after the awful disaster had swept over Pharoah and his host. How the returning tide used to sweep through that to us fathomless gulch! It made the old river seem ever so much more wonderful, and ever so much more filled with adventure.

Many a time, just to dare it, I would dive into the very cauldron, and let the swirling current carry me to the grassy sward beyond—along which I would run till the narrowing channel permitted my crossing to the Great Cop again. I would be drying myself in the sunshine as I went, and all ready for my scanty garments when I reached my clothing once more.

Then came the great days when the heavy nor'westers howled over the Sands—our sea-front was exposed to all the power of the sea right away to the Point of Ayr—the days when they came in with big spring tides, when we saw the fishermen doubling their anchors, and carefully overhauling

the holding gear of their boats, before the flooding tide drove them ashore, powerless to do more than watch them battling at their moorings like living things—the possessions upon which their very bread depended. And then this one would sink, and another would part her cable and come hurtling before the gale, until she crashed right into the great upright blocks of sandstone which, riveted with iron bands to their copings, were relied upon to hold the main road from destruction. Sometimes in fragments, and sometimes almost entire, the craft would be slung clean over the torturing battlements, and be left stranded high and dry on our one village street, a menace to traffic, but a huge joy to us children.

The fascination of the Sands was greatly enhanced by the numerous birds which at all times frequented them, in search of the abundant food which lay buried along the edges of the muddy gutters. There were thousands of sandpipers in enormous flocks, mixed with king plovers, dunlins, and turnstones, which followed the ebb tides, and returned again in whirling clouds before the oncoming floods. Black-and-white oyster-catchers were always to be found chattering over the great mussel patches at low water. With their reddish bills, what a trophy a bunch of them made as we bore them proudly home over our shoulders! Then there were the big long-billed curlews. What a triumph when one outwitted them! One of my clearest recollections is discovering a place to which they were fighting at night by the water's edge; how, having no dog, I swam out for bird after bird as they fell to my gun—shooting some before I had even time to put on my shirt

again; and my consequent blue-black shoulder, which had to be carefully hidden next day. There were wild ducks, too, to be surprised in the pools of the big salt marshes.

From daylight to dark I would wander, quite alone, over endless miles, entirely satisfied to come back with a single bird, and not in the least disheartened if I got none. All sense of time used to be lost, and often enough the sandwich and biscuit for lunch forgotten, so that I would be forced occasionally to resort to a solitary public house near a colliery on our side of the water, for "tea-biscuits," all that they offered, except endless beer for the miners. I can even remember, when very hard driven, crossing to the Welsh side for bread and cheese.

These expeditions were made barefoot as long as the cold was not too great. A diary that I assayed to keep in my eighth year reminds me that on my birthday, five miles from home in the marshes, I fell head over heels into a deep hole, while wading out, gun in hand, after some oyster-catchers which I had shot. The snow was still deep on the countryside, and the long trot home has never been quite forgotten. My grief, however, was all for the gun. There was always the joy of venture in those dear old Sands. The channels cut in them by the flowing tides ran deep, and often intersected. Moreover, they changed with the varying storms. The rapidly rising tide, which sent a bore up the main channel as far as Chester, twelve miles above us, filled first of all these treacherous waterways, quite silently, and often unobserved. To us, taught to be as much at home in the water as on the land, they only added spice to our wanderings. They were nowhere very wide, so by keeping

one's head, and being able to swim, only our clothes suffered by it, and they, being built for that purpose, did not complain.

One day, however, I remember great excitement. The tide had risen rapidly in the channel along the parade front, and the shrimp fishermen, who used push-nets in the channels at low tide, had returned without noticing that one of their number was missing. Word got about just too late, and already there was half a mile of water, beyond which, through our telescopes, we could see the poor fellow making frantic signals to the shore. There was no boat out there, and a big bank intervening, there seemed no way to get to him. Watching through our glasses, we saw him drive the long handle of his net deep into the sand, and cling to it, while the tide rose speedily around him. Meanwhile a whole bevy of his mates had rowed out to the bank, and were literally carrying over its treacherous surface one of their clumsy and heavy fishing punts. It was a veritable race for life; and never have I watched one with keener excitement. We actually saw his post give way, and wash downstream with him clinging to it, just before his friends got near. Fortunately, drifting with the spar, he again found bottom, and was eventually rescued, half full of salt water. I remember how he fell in my estimation as a seaman—though I was only a boy at the time.

There were four of us boys in all, of whom I was the second. My next brother Maurice died when he was only seven, and the fourth, Cecil, being five years younger than I, left my brother Algernon and myself as the only real companions for each other. Moreover, an untoward

accident, of which I was the unwitting cause, left my younger brother unable to share our play for many years. Having no sisters, and scarcely any boy friends, in the holidays, when all the boys in the school went home, it might be supposed that my elder brother and I were much thrown together. But as a matter of fact such was not the case, for our temperaments being entirely different, and neither of us having any idea of giving way to the other, we seldom or ever found our pleasures together. And yet most of the worst scrapes into which we fell were coöperative affairs. Though I am only anxious to shoulder my share of the responsibility in the escapades, as well as in every other line of life, my brother Algernon possessed any genius to which the family could lay claim, in that as in every other line. He was my father over again, while I was a second edition of my mother. Father was waiting to get into the sixth form at Rugby when he was only thirteen years old. He was a brilliant scholar at Balliol, but had been compelled to give up study and leave the University temporarily owing to brain trouble. He never published anything, but would reel off brilliant short poems or essays for friends at a moment's notice. I used always to remark that in whatever company he was, he was always deferred to as an authority in anything approaching classics. He could read and quote Greek and Latin like English, spoke German and French fluently, while he was an excellent geologist, and Fellow of the Geographical Society. Here is quite a pretty little effusion of his written at eight years of age:

O, Glorious Sun, in thy palace of light,
To behold thee methinks is a beautiful sight.

O, Glorious Sun, come out of thy cloud,
No longer thy brightness in darkness shroud.
Let thy glorious beams like a golden Flood
Pour over the hills and the valleys and wood.
See! Mountains of light around him rise,
While he in a golden ocean lies:
O, Glorious Sun, in thy Palace of Light
To behold thee methinks is a beautiful sight.

Algernon Sydney Grenfell
Aged eight years

Some of my brother's poems and hymns have been published in the school magazine, or printed privately; but he, too, has only published a Spanish grammar, a Greek lexicon, and a few articles in the papers. While at Oxford he ran daily, with some friends, during one "eights week" a cynical comic paper called "The Rattle," to boost some theories he held, and which he wished to enforce, and also to "score" a few of the dons to whom he objected. This would have resulted in his being asked to retire for a season from the seat of learning at the request of his enemies, had not our beloved provost routed the special cause of the whole trouble, who was himself contributing to a London society paper, by replying that it was not to be wondered at if the scurrilous rags of London found an echo in Oxford. Moreover, a set of "The Rattle" was ordered to be bound and placed in the college archives, where it may still be seen.

My father having a very great deal of responsibility and worry during the long school terms, as he was not only head master, but owned the school as well, which he had

purchased from his great-uncle, used to leave almost the day the holidays began and travel abroad with my mother. This partly accounts for the very unusual latitude allowed to us boys in coming and going from the house—no one being anxious if now and again we did not return at night. The school matron was left in charge of the vast empty barracks, and we had the run of play-field, gymnasium, and everything else we wanted. To outwit the matron was always considered fair play by us boys, and on many occasions we were more than successful.

One time, when we had been acquiring some new lines of thought from some trashy boys' books of the period, we became fired with the desire to enjoy the ruling passion of the professional burglar. Though never kept short of anything, we decided that one night we would raid the large school storeroom while the matron slept. As always, the planning was entrusted to my brother. It was, of course, a perfectly easy affair, but we played the whole game "according to Cavendish." We let ourselves out of the window at midnight, glued brown paper to the window panes, cut out the putty, forced the catch, and stole sugar, currants, biscuits, and I am ashamed to say port wine—which we mulled in a tin can over the renovated fire in the matron's own sanctum. In the morning the remainder was turned over to fishermen friends who were passing along shore on their way to catch the early tide.

I had no share in two other of my brother's famous escapades, though at the time it was a source of keen regret, for we were sent to different public schools, as being, I suppose, incompatible. But we heard with pride how he

had extracted phosphorus from the chemical laboratory and while drawing luminous ghosts on the wall for the benefit of the timorous, had set fire to the large dormitory and the boys' underclothing neatly laid out on the beds, besides burning himself badly. Later he pleaded guilty to beeswaxing the seat of the boys in front of him in chapel, much to the detriment of their trousers and the destruction of the dignity of Sunday worship.

During the time that my parents were away we never found a moment in which to be lonely, but on one occasion it occurred to us that the company of some friends would add to our enjoyment. Why we waited till my father and mother departed I do not know, but I recall that immediately they had gone we spent a much-valued sixpence in telegraphing to a cousin in London to come down to us for the holidays. Our message read: "Dear Sid. Come down and stay the holidays. Father has gone to Aix." We were somewhat chagrined to receive the following day an answer, also by wire: "Not gone yet. Father." It appeared that my father and mother had stayed the night in London in the very house to which we had wired, and Sid. having to ask his father's permission in order to get his railway fare, our uncle had shown the invitation to my father. It was characteristic of my parents that Sid. came duly along, but they could not keep from sharing the joke with my uncle.

During term-time some of our grown-up relatives would occasionally visit us. But alas, it was only their idiosyncrasies which used to make any impression upon us. One, a great-uncle, and a very distinguished person, being Professor of Political Economy at Oxford, and a great friend

of the famous Dr. Jowett, the chancellor, was the only man we knew who ever, at any time, stood up long to my father in argument. It was only on rare occasions that we ever witnessed such a contest, but I shall never forget one which took place in the evening in our drawing-room. My great-uncle was a small man, rather stout and pink, and almost bald-headed. He got so absorbed in his arguments, which he always delivered walking up and down, that on this occasion, coming to an old-fashioned sofa, he stepped right up onto the seat, climbed over the back, and went on all the time with his remarks, as if only punctuating them thereby.

Whether some of our pranks were suggested by those of which we heard, I do not remember. One of my father's yarns, however, always stuck in my memory. For once, being in a very good humour, he told us how when some distinguished old lady had come to call on his father—a house master with Arnold at Rugby—he had been especially warned not to interrupt this important person, who had come to see about her son's entering my grandfather's "House." It so happened that quite unconsciously the lady in question had seated herself on an old cane-bottomed armchair in which father had been playing, thus depriving him temporarily of a toy with which he desired to amuse himself. He never, even in later life, was noted for undue patience, and after endeavouring in vain to await her departure, he somehow secured a long pin. With this he crawled from behind under the seat, and by discreetly probing upwards, succeeded suddenly in dislodging his enemy.

Our devotions on Sunday were carried out in the parish church of the village of Neston, there being no place of worship of the Established Church in our little village. In term-time we were obliged to go morning and evening to the long services, which never made any concessions to youthful capacities. So in holiday-time, though it was essential that we should go in the morning to represent the house, we were permitted to stay home in the evening. But even the mornings were a time of great weariness, and oft-recurrent sermons on the terrible fate which awaited those who never went to church, and the still more untoward end which was in store for frequenters of dissenting meeting-houses, failed to awaken in us the respect due to the occasion.

On the way to church we had generally to pass by those who dared even the awful fate of the latter. It was our idea that to tantalize us they wore especially gorgeous apparel while we had to wear black Etons and a top hat—which, by the way, greatly annoyed us. One waistcoat especially excited our animosity, and from it we conceived the title "specklebelly," by which we ever afterwards designated the whole "genus nonconformist." The entrance to the chapel (ours was the Church!) was through a door in a high wall, over which we could not see; and my youthful brain used to conjure up unrighteous and strange orgies which we felt must take place in those precincts which we were never permitted to enter. Our Sunday Scripture lessons had grounded us very familiarly with the perverse habits of that section of the Chosen People who *would* serve Baal and Moloch, when it obviously paid so much better not to do so.

But although we counted the numbers which we saw going in, and sometimes met them coming out, they seemed never to lessen perceptibly. On this account our minds, with the merciless logic of childhood, gradually discounted the threatened calamities.

This must have accounted for the lapse in our own conduct, and a sort of comfortable satisfaction that the Almighty contented Himself in merely counting noses in the pews. For even though it was my brother who got into trouble, I shall never forget the harangue on impiety that awaited us when a most unchristian sexton reported to our father that the pew in front of ours had been found chalked on the back, so as to make its occupants the object of undisguised attention from the rest of the congregation. As circumstantial evidence also against us, he offered some tell-tale squares of silver paper, on which we had been cooking chocolates on the steam pipes during the sermon.

In all my childhood I can only remember one single punishment, among not a few which I received, which I resented—and for years I never quite forgot it. Some one had robbed a very favourite apple tree in our orchard—an escapade of which I was perfectly capable, but in this instance had not had the satisfaction of sharing. Some evidence had been lodged against me, of which I was not informed, and I therefore had no opportunity to challenge it. I was asked before a whole class of my schoolmates if I had committed the act, and at once denied it. Without any hearing I was adjudged guilty, and promptly subjected to the punishment of the day—a good birching. On every occasion on which we were offered the alternative of

detention, we invariably "plumped" for the rod, and got it over quickly, and, as we considered, creditably—taking it smiling as long as we could. But that one act of injustice, the disgrace which it carried of making me a liar before my friends, seared my very soul. I vowed I would get even whatever it cost, and I regret to say that I hadn't long to wait the opportunity. For I scored both the apples and the lie against the punishment before many months. Nor was I satisfied then. It rankled in my mind both by day and by night; and it taught me an invaluable lesson—never to suspect or condemn rashly. It was one of Dr. Arnold's boys at Rugby, I believe, who summed up his master's character by saying, "The head was a beast, but he was always a just beast."

At fourteen years of age my brother was sent to Repton, to the house of an uncle by marriage—an arrangement which has persuaded me never to send boys to their relatives for training. My brother's pranks were undoubtedly many, but they were all boyish and legitimate ones. After a time, however, he was removed at his own request, and sent to Clifton, where he was head of the school, and the school house also, under Dr. Percival, the late Bishop of Hereford. From there he took an open scholarship for Oxford.

It was most wisely decided to send us to separate schools, and therefore at fourteen I found myself at Marlborough—a school of nearly six hundred resident boys, on entering which I had won a scholarship.

CHAPTER II To C

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SCHOOL LIFE

Marlborough "College," as we say in England for a large University preparatory school, is situated in Wiltshire, in a perfectly beautiful country, close to the Savernake Forest—one of the finest in all England. As everything and everybody was strange to me on my arrival, had I been brought up to be less self-reliant the events of my first day or two would probably have impressed themselves more deeply on my memory than is the case. Some Good Samaritan, hearing that I was bound for a certain house, allowed me to follow him from the station to the inn—for a veritable old inn it was. It was one of those lovely old wayside hostels along the main road to the west, which, with the decline of coaching days, found its way into the market, and had fallen to the hammer for the education of youth. Exactly how the adaptation had been accomplished I never quite understood. The building formed the end of a long avenue of trees and was approached through high gates from the main road. It was flanked on the east side by other houses, which fitted in somewhat inharmoniously, but

served as school-rooms, dining-hall, chapel, racquets and fives courts, studies, and other dwelling-houses. The whole was entirely enclosed so that no one could pass in or out, after the gates were shut, without ringing up the porter from his lodge, and having one's name taken as being out after hours. At least it was supposed that no one could, though we boys soon found that there were more ways than one leading to Rome.

The separate dwelling-houses were named A, B, and C. I was detailed to C House, the old inn itself. Each house was again divided into three, with its own house master, and its own special colour and badges. Our three were at the time "Sharps," "Upcutts," and "Bakers." Our particular one occupied the second floor, and was reached by great oak staircases, which, if you were smart, you could ascend at about six steps at a time. This was often a singular desideratum, because until you reached the fifth form, according to law you ascended by the less direct back stairway.

Our colours were white and maroon, and our sign a bishop's mitre—which effigy I still find scribbled all over the few book relics which I have retained, and which emblem, when borne subsequently on my velvet football cap, proved to be the nearest I ever was to approach to that dignified insignia.

My benefactor, on the night of my arrival, having done more for me than a new boy could expect of an old one, was whirled off in the stream of his returning chums long before I had found my resting-place for the night. The dormitory to which I at last found myself assigned contained no less than

twenty-five beds, and seemed to me a veritable wilderness. If the coaches which used to stop here could have ascended the stairs, it might have accommodated several. What useful purpose it could have served in those far-off days I never succeeded in deciding. The room most nearly like it which I can recall is the old dining-hall of a great manor, into which the knights in armour rode on horseback to meals, that being far less trouble than removing one's armour, and quite as picturesque. More or less amicably I obtained possession of a bed in a good location, under a big window which looked out over the beautiful gardens below. I cannot remember that I experienced any of those heart-searchings or forebodings which sentiment deploras as the inevitable lot of the unprotected innocent.

One informal battle during the first week with a boy possessed of the sanctity of having come up from the lower school, and therefore being an "old boy," achieved for me more privileges than the actual decision perhaps entitled one to enjoy, namely, being left alone. I subsequently became known as the "Beast," owing to my belligerent nature and the undue copiousness of my hair.

The fact that I was placed in the upper fourth form condemned me to do my "prep" in the intolerable barrack called "Big School"—a veritable bear-garden to which about three hundred small boys were relegated to study. Order was kept by a master and a few monitors, who wandered to and fro from end to end of the building, while we were supposed to work. For my part, I never tried it, partly because the work came very easy to me, while the "repetition" was more readily learned from a loose page at

odd times like dinner and chapel, and partly because, winning a scholarship during the term, I was transferred to a building reserved for twenty-eight such privileged individuals until they gained the further distinction of a place in the house class-room, by getting their transfer into the fifth form.

Besides those who lived in the big quad there were several houses outside the gates, known as "Out-Houses." The boys there fared a good deal better than we who lived in college, and I presume paid more highly for it. Our meals were served in "Big Hall," where the whole four hundred of us were fed. The meals were exceptionally poor; so much so that we boys at the beginning of term formed what we called brewing companies—which provided as far as possible breakfasts and suppers for ourselves all term. As a protection against early bankruptcy, it was our custom to deposit our money with a rotund but popular school official, known always by a corruption of his name as "the Slug." Every Saturday night he would dole out to you your deposit made on return from the holidays, divided into equal portions by the number of weeks in the term. Once one was in the fifth form, brewing became easy, for one had a right to a place on the class-room fire for one's kettle or saucepan. Till then the space over gas stoves in Big School being strictly limited, the right was only acquired "vi et armis." Moreover, most of the fourth form boys and the "Shells," a class between them and the fifth, if they had to work after evening chapel, had to sit behind desks around the house class-room facing the centre, in which as a rule the fifth form boys were lazily cooking and devouring their

suppers. Certain parts of those repasts, like sausages, we would import ready cooked from the "Tuck Shop," and hence they only needed warming up. Breakfast in Big School was no comfort to one, and personally I seldom attended it. But at dinner and tea one had to appear, and remain till the doors were opened again. It was a kind of roll-call; and the penalty for being late was fifty lines to be written out. As my own habits were never as regular as they should have been, whenever I was able to keep ahead, I possessed pages of such lines, neatly written out during school hours and ready for emergencies. On other occasions I somewhat shamefacedly recall that I employed other boys, who devoted less time to athletics than was my wont, to help me out—their only remuneration being the "joy of service."

The great desire of every boy who could hope to do so was to excel in athletics. This fact has much to commend it in such an educational system, for it undoubtedly kept its devotees from innumerable worse troubles and dangers. All athletics were compulsory, unless one had obtained permanent exemption from the medical officer. If one was not chosen to play on any team during the afternoon, each boy had to go to gymnasium for drill and exercises, or to "flannel" and run round the Aylesbury Arms, an old public house three quarters of a mile distant. Any breach of this law was severely punished by the boys themselves. It involved a "fives batting," that is, a "birching" carried out with a hardwood fives bat, after chapel in the presence of the house. As a breach of patriotism, it carried great disgrace with it, and was very, very seldom necessary.

Experience would make me a firm believer in self-government—determination is the popular term now, I believe. No punishments ever touched the boys one tenth part as much as those administered by themselves. On one occasion two of the Big School monitors, who were themselves notorious far more for their constant breaches of school law than for their observance of it, decided to make capital at the expense of the sixth form. One day, just as the dinner-bell rang, they locked the sixth form door, while a conclave was being held inside. Though everyone was intended to know to whom the credit belonged, it was understood that no one would dream of giving evidence against them. But it so happened that their voices had been recognized from within by one of the sixth form boys—and "bullies" and unpopular though the culprits were, they wouldn't deny their guilt. Their condign punishment was to be "fives-batted" publicly in Big School—in which, however, they regained very considerable popularity by the way they took a "spanking" without turning a hair, though it cost no less than a dozen bats before it was over.

The publicity of Big School was the only redemption of such a bear-garden, but that was a good feature. It served to make us toe the line. After tea, it was the custom to have what we called "Upper School Boxing." A big ring was formed, boxing-gloves provided, and any differences which one might have to settle could be arranged there. There was more energy than science about the few occasions on which I appeared personally in the ring, but it was an excellent safety-valve and quite an evolutionary experience.