

§ 6

Harbury went on with that process of suppressing, encrusting, hardening, and bracing-up which Mr. Siddons had begun. For a time I pulled myself together very thoroughly. I am not ungrateful nor unfaithful to Harbury; in your turn you will go there, you will have to live your life in this British world of ours and you must learn its language and manners, acquire its reserves and develop the approved toughness and patterning of cuticle. Afterwards if you please you may quarrel with it. But don't when the time comes quarrel with the present conditions of human association and think it is only with Harbury you quarrel. What man has become and may become beneath the masks and impositions of civilization, in his intimate texture and in the depths of his being, I begin now in my middle age to appreciate. No longer is he an instinctive savage but a creature of almost incredible variability and wonderful new possibilities. Marvels undreamt of, power still inconceivable, an empire beyond the uttermost stars; such is man's inheritance. But for the present, until we get a mastery of those vague and mighty intimations at once so perplexing and so reassuring, if we are to live at all in the multitudinousness of human society we must submit to some scheme of clumsy compromises and conventions or other,--and for us Strattons the Harbury system is the most convenient. You will have to go to the old school.

I went to Rendle's. I just missed getting into college; I was two places below the lowest successful boy. I was Maxton's fag to begin with, and

my chief chum was Raymond, who is your friend also, and who comes so often to this house. I preferred water to land, boats to cricket, because of that difficulty about pitch I have already mentioned. But I was no great sportsman. Raymond and I shared a boat, and spent most of the time we gave to it under the big trees near Dartpool Lock, reading or talking. We would pull up to Sandy Hall perhaps once a week. I never rowed in any of the eights, though I was urged to do so. I swam fairly well, and got my colors on the strength of my diving.

On the whole I found Harbury a satisfactory and amusing place, I was neither bullied nor do I think I greatly bullied, and of all that furtive and puerile lasciviousness of which one hears so many hints nowadays--excitable people talk of it as though it was the most monstrous and singular of vices instead of a slightly debasing but almost unavoidable and very obvious result of heaping boys together under the inefficient control of a timid pretentious class of men--of such uncleanness as I say, scarcely more than a glimpse and a whisper and a vague tentative talk or so reached me. Little more will reach you, for that kind of thing, like the hells of Swedenborg, finds its own.

I had already developed my growing instinct for observance to a very considerable extent under Siddons, and at Harbury I remember myself, and people remember me, as an almost stiffly correct youth. I was pretty good at most of the work, and exceptionally so at history, geology, and the biological side of natural science. I had to restrain my interest in these latter subjects lest I should appear to be a "swat," and a

modern-side swat at that. I was early in the sixth, and rather a favorite with old Latimer. He incited me to exercise what he called a wholesome influence on the younger boys, and I succeeded in doing this fairly well without any gross interventions. I implied rather than professed soundly orthodox views about things in general, and I was extremely careful to tilt my straw hat forward over my nose so as just not to expose the crown of my head behind, and to turn up my trousers with exactly that width of margin which the judgment of my fellow-creatures had decided was correct. My socks were spirited without being vulgar, and the ties I wore were tied with a studious avoidance of either slovenliness or priggish neatness. I wrote two articles in the Harburonian, became something of a debater in the Literacy and Political, conducted many long conversations with my senior contemporaries upon religion, politics, sport and social life, and concealed my inmost thoughts from every human being. Indeed, so effective had been the training of Harbury and Mr. Siddons, that I think at that time I came very near concealing them from myself. I could suppress wonder, I could pass by beauty as if I did not see it, almost I think I did not see it for a time, and yet I remember it in those years too--a hundred beautiful things.

Harbury itself is a very beautiful place. The country about it has all the charm of river scenery in a settled and ancient land, and the great castle and piled town of Wetmore, cliffs of battlemented grey wall rising above a dense cluster of red roofs, form the background to innumerable gracious prospects of great stream-fed trees, level meadows

of buttercups, sweeping curves of osier and rush-rimmed river, the playing fields and the sedgy, lily-spangled levels of Avonlea. The college itself is mostly late Tudor and Stuart brickwork, very ripe and mellow now, but the great grey chapel with its glorious east window floats over the whole like a voice singing in the evening. And the evening cloudscapes of Harbury are a perpetual succession of glorious effects, now serene, now mysteriously threatening and profound, now towering to incredible heights, now revealing undreamt-of distances of luminous color. Assuredly I must have delighted in all those aspects, or why should I remember them so well? But I recall, I mean, no confessed recognition of them; no deliberate going-out of my spirit, open and unashamed, to such things.

I suppose one's early adolescence is necessarily the period of maximum shyness in one's life. Even to Raymond I attempted no extremities of confidence. Even to myself I tried to be the thing that was expected of me. I professed a modest desire for temperate and tolerable achievement in life, though deep in my lost depths I wanted passionately to excel; I worked hard, much harder than I allowed to appear, and I said I did it for the credit of the school; I affected a dignified loyalty to queen and country and church; I pretended a stoical disdain for appetites and delights and all the arts, though now and then a chance fragment of poetry would light me like a fire, or a lovely picture stir unwonted urgencies, though visions of delight haunted the shadows of my imagination and did not always fly when I regarded them. But on the other hand I affected an interest in games that I was far from feeling.

Of some boys I was violently jealous, and this also I masked beneath a generous appreciation. Certain popularities I applauded while I doubted. Whatever my intimate motives I became less and less disposed to obey them until I had translated them into a plausible rendering of the accepted code. If I could not so translate them I found it wise to control them. When I wanted urgently one summer to wander by night over the hills towards Kestering and lie upon heather and look up at the stars and wonder about them, I cast about and at last hit upon the well-known and approved sport of treacling for moths, as a cloak for so strange an indulgence.

I must have known even then what a mask and front I was, because I knew quite well how things were with other people. I listened politely and respected and understood the admirable explanations of my friends. When some fellow got a scholarship unexpectedly and declared it was rotten bad luck on the other chap, seeing the papers he had done, and doubted whether he shouldn't resign, I had an intuitive knowledge that he wouldn't resign, and I do not remember any time in my career as the respectful listener to Mr. Siddons' aspirations for service and devotion, when I did not perceive quite clearly his undeviating eye upon a bishopric. He thought of gaiters though he talked of wings.

How firmly the bonds of an old relationship can hold one! I remember when a few years ago he reached that toiled-for goal, I wrote in a tone of gratified surprise that in this blatant age, such disinterested effort as his should receive even so belated a recognition. Yet what

else was there for me to write? We all have our Siddonses, with whom there are no alternatives but insincerity or a disproportionate destructiveness. I am still largely Siddonsized, little son, and so, I fear, you will have to be.