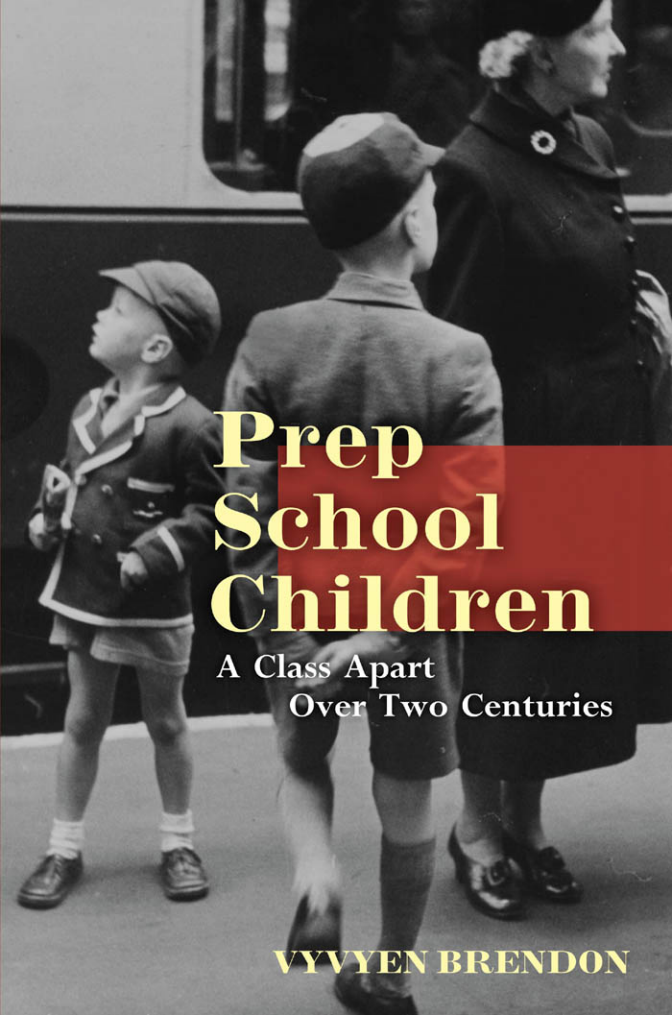

Prep School Children

A Class Apart Over Two Centuries

VYVYEN BRENDON

PREP SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Vyvyen Brendon

For my sons, George and Oliver,
and my grandsons, Beau, Sonny and Lucas.

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Introduction: 'How Would You Know?'

Fiction and fact tell the same tale. Tom Brown, a proud nine-year-old setting off from home in the 1820s, supposed that all English boys were sent away to school.[1] At the age of seven, Winston Churchill felt 'perfectly helpless' in the face of the 'irresistible tides' which propelled him towards the prep school his parents had selected for him in 1880.[2] Half a century later, Diana Athill lamented her eight-year-old brother's dispatch to prep school from their upper-middle-class Norfolk home: 'Boys had to go to boarding-schools, it was what always happened to them, poor things, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.'[3] Seven-year-old Stephen Fry accepted the same fate in the 1960s, because 'all the friends I had in the world went away to boarding school'.[4] And Harry Potter's name was put down at birth for Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Just as Harry is removed from non-magic folk (or Muggles) because he is a wizard, children from the upper and middle classes have habitually been detached from their lower-class contemporaries at a tender age. This book is about that separate system of education which, until recent years, nearly always took place in secluded boarding schools. Its focus is the preparatory school, with its aim of grooming boys aged between seven and thirteen for public school. But it also contains some references to boarders of that age group in other schools: early nineteenth-century public schools which accepted boys as young as eight; girls' boarding schools with a starting age of eleven; and other weird (or wizard) educational establishments.

Sending young children away to school is a peculiarly English phenomenon. In *The Victorians*, A. N. Wilson expressed surprise that 'otherwise kind parents were prepared to entrust much-loved children to the rigours of boarding-school', and he regards the practice as 'one of the mysteries of English life from the 1820s to the present day'.[5] Some historians account for the custom as a means of perpetuating the class system. Others explain that Britain's empire demanded both nurseries for the children of distant parents and training grounds for its hardy

leaders. It is not so much my purpose to debate these matters as to shed light on the experience of separated children, most of whom did not question why they had been sent away. If they did, they often assumed that their parents simply did not want them at home.

The timescale of the book is the same as that mentioned by A. N. Wilson. It begins in the early nineteenth century, because by that time there were many small private boarding academies which prepared boys for 'great schools' such as Eton, Harrow, Winchester and Rugby. During Queen Victoria's reign, as public schools standardized their age of entry at thirteen and became choosier about the background and calibre of their entrants, specialized preparatory schools developed apace. The Industrial Revolution increased the number of prosperous families able to afford them. By late Victorian and Edwardian times, prep schools were well established and they had also evolved their characteristic manly and Christian ethos.

In the twentieth century, they survived two world wars, the Depression, several Labour governments, Dr Spock and the Swinging Sixties, by which time they were educating one in twenty ten-year-olds.[6] Generation after generation of parents assured their offspring that these schools were less harsh than they had been in their day; but it is only in the last thirty years or so that this claim has had any real foundation. In the new millennium, prep schools have become stronger than ever, but they have had to adapt to modern requirements. Teachers cannot use corporal punishment, parents like to see more of their offspring, boys often sit in classes alongside girls and, I am assured, pupils are less likely to be bullied than in former years. The evidence for these developments and their impact upon the growing child is as interesting as it is various.

Children's fiction of these two centuries often conjures up the world of boarding school. There is plenty to choose from, for J. K. Rowling and others have found an ideal background for adventure in this setting, free of intrusive parents and complete with its own codes of behaviour. Moreover, novelists usually draw on real life. Thomas Hughes based Tom Brown's friend, George Arthur, on Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, later Dean of Westminster; as a delicate and devout young boy Stanley went to Rugby, where he was immediately nicknamed Nancy and needed the protection of a more robust character.[7] The schoolboy hero of radio plays broadcast on post-war *Children's Hour*, Jennings (known always by his surname in true prep school fashion), had his origin in Anthony Buckeridge's old

schoolfellow, Diarmid Jennings. Another fictional schoolboy (who has delighted adults as well as children) is nigel molesworth, conjured up from the teaching experiences of his creator, Geoffrey Willans, at a school bearing some resemblance to st custard's. And Groosham Grange, a wizards' school which predates Hogwarts, might never have been created had Anthony Horowitz not been sent to a boarding school he compares to the grisly horror plays of the Grand Guignol.[8] It could also work the other way round. Ten-year-old Arthur Quiller-Couch was so excited by tales of derring-do in *Tom Wildrake's Schooldays* that he begged to be sent away to school.[9]

Real schools and teachers have also prompted adult fiction. In the preface of *Nicholas Nickleby*, Charles Dickens explained that Dotheboys Hall was inspired by his own research in Yorkshire, where several schoolmasters would proudly lay claim to being the original Wackford Squeers. Evelyn Waugh's Llanabba Castle, portrayed in *Decline and Fall*, emerged from the author's teaching experiences in prep schools. P. G. Wodehouse came as close as he ever did to autobiography in depicting Bertie Wooster's feelings about his former headmaster, the Rev Aubrey Upjohn of Malvern House. This 'prince of stinkers' is not just a comic character. The name of Upjohn's school is the same as that of Wodehouse's own naval prep school, 'a very bad choice', says his biographer, 'for a dreamy impractical boy who loved reading'.[10] There is uncharacteristic venom in Bertie's description of Malvern House as a chain gang and a horror from outer space. No wonder he is appalled to find that Upjohn, an unwelcome guest at Aunt Dahlia's house party, has published a book describing the formative years at a preparatory school as the happiest of a boy's life. Luckily, Bertie's old school chum, 'Kipper' Herring, manages to set the record straight in the *Thursday Review*: 'Aubrey Upjohn might have taken a different view of preparatory schools if he had done a stretch at the Dotheboys Hall conducted by him at Malvern House, Bramley-on-Sea, as we had the misfortune to do.'[11] Other writers, such as C. Day Lewis, Pamela Hansford Johnson and John le Carré, have used the prep school rather as Agatha Christie did the country house, its self-contained environment forming the ideal background for misdeeds and mysteries.

Fictional schools crop up in many published and unpublished memoirs – the prime source for this book. Some writers recall how they were misled by preconceptions gained from schoolboy tales such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *Eric or Little by Little.*[12] Alistair Horne uses two analogies with fiction to convey the

horrors of Ludgrove in the 1930s. He regrets that there was no Tom Brown to speak up for him when he was singled out for bullying and he reckons that the school 'made Dotheboys Hall seem like the Club Med'.[13] More cheerful alumni sometimes liken their scrapes and larks to those of Jennings and Darbishire, while others identify more with nigel molesworth, the curse of st custard's. Fraser Harrison recalls that he and his fellow pupils at a Welsh prep school found the molesworth series 'the funniest our literature could possibly afford'.[14]

Again and again, the British memoir paints a vivid picture of schooldays. Spent as they often were so far from domestic affections and comforts, they permeate the collective consciousness of the race. Some critics assert that early memories cannot be authentic, arguing that they are unreliable and often vary from one member of a group to another. I have found authentication, however, in the wealth of corroborating detail both about the schools themselves and about reactions to them. Of course, careful judgements have to be made, since memory plays all sorts of tricks. As sometimes appears in my book, two pupils from the same school (like siblings from the same family) may have very different remembrances of things past. But, as Hilary Mantel argues in defending her own childhood record, *Giving Up the Ghost*, 'it doesn't mean that either of you is wrong'. She makes a convincing case for 'the power and persistence of memory', for our ability to capture the moment when 'the adult slips away and the child appears, wide-eyed and gleeful, reporting back to you with sensual precision.'[15]

That moment is frequently associated with food. Leonard Woolf conjures up not only the 'dense boredom' he experienced in classrooms at Arlington House 'smelling of ink and boys', but also 'the deliciousness of a large, hot Cowley bath bun which we were allowed to buy after bathing in Brill's Baths'.[16] Less happily, General Sir Ian Hamilton conveys the shame he felt as a ten-year-old new boy at Cheam School, when he was ridiculed by the headmaster after asking for some more butter at breakfast: 'the troubles of Oliver Twist were cheap stuff compared to mine'.[17] And Stephen Fry can never forget his 'lips-parted, heart-pounding, face-flushed state' when he broke into the headmaster's study at Stouts Hill, opened the desk and found bags and bags of confiscated sweets: 'Foam shrimps, fruit salads, blackjacks, flying-saucers, red-liquorice bootlaces, every desirable item of Uley village bounty that could be imagined.'[18] This book is packed with such tasty morsels, the fruit of autobiographies that together make such a crucial contribution to history.

Surprisingly often, writers have used poetry to convey their feelings about the rather prosaic world of school. A few lines can capture a key episode in a child's life. Samuel Taylor Coleridge is lulled to sleep by visions of his far-off rural birth-place. Henry Newbolt's Victorian schoolboy goes in as the last batsman with 'an hour to play' and ten runs needed for victory. A precocious Wystan (W. H.) Auden rags 'elderly grey' stand-in teachers during the First World War, while a fearful John Betjeman gets out of a fight with the Dragon's school hero by inventing 'rotten news from home'. In more recent times, Edward Lucie-Smith evokes a boy's realization that the genuine news of his father's death, baldly conveyed by a bald headmaster, 'Could bind the bully's fist a week or two'. (In 1942 six-year-old John Ellwood had the same experience; he was informed of his father's death by the headmaster at Beachborough and promptly sent back into class with the blunt instruction that he must be brave.)[19] Hugo Williams remembers his first day at Lockers Park:

> I was eight when I set out into the world
> Wearing a grey flannel suit.
> I had my own suitcase.
> I thought it was going to be fun.

But it is not long before the little boy starts to dream of 'leaving school' with that same suitcase.

One of Hugo Williams's collections is entitled *Writing Home*, which is the subject of several of the poems and points to another major source of evidence. 'A Letter to My Parents' consists of thirty-five lines which sound as though they come from one of the letters he wrote as a schoolboy. They recount a hit in the face, an accident to a dog, the position of his bed in the dormitory, plans for a new gang, some forthcoming sunray treatment, a lecture on the Headhunters of Borneo and a complicated game of charades, before giving his parents information on 'going out days'. The child ventures to say that the sunray treatment 'seems a complete waste of time', which suggests that the letter is not going to be as closely inspected as they often were.[20] This scrutiny varied from one school (or one master) to another, but letter-writing sessions were usually conducted under supervision. Even if there was no actual censorship, the lack of privacy could be inhibiting. Morgan (later known as E. M.) Forster complained in a letter to his

mother that there were boys looking over his shoulder as he wrote. Nevertheless, some school letters are remarkably revealing and most give clues about their writers' state of mind. Whether they were frank or formal, messy or neat, they were frequently preserved, surviving to this day either in books or (more often) in archive collections and private houses. With their shaky grammar and erratic spelling (which are retained in quotations in this book), these missives bring to life their inky-fingered authors as they struggle to convey their everyday lives and suppressed emotions to distant parents.

For more recent experiences of prep schools there is an additional source – personal interviews. I have quizzed about sixty people from different walks of life and aged between ten and ninety, usually face-to-face but by telephone or email where this was not possible. I was surprised, as I was when doing research for my previous book, *Children of the Raj*, by how willing people were to talk about their childhood. Often my studiously neutral questions stirred memories of forgotten incidents or released long-buried feelings. Many found that they enjoyed the experience but in a few cases it acted, in the words of one man, as 'the final sting in the long tail' of prep school. For some, who were wary of living parents or teachers or for other reasons preferred to be anonymous, I have used pseudonyms which are indicated by an asterisk when the name is first used. All interviewees have seen the material I have quoted and given permission for it to be used.

Many contemporary pupils (especially in boarding schools) are questioned regularly by Ofsted inspectors, anxious to ensure that recent reforms have been implemented. The resulting reports form another valuable source of evidence, as can visits to schools' Open Days and anniversary celebrations or to the archive collections which some schools are accumulating. Prominent in these repositories are sets of old school magazines which some former pupils have also preserved. While these rarely contain any contributions from boys, they afford interesting contrasts between past and present. The histories and websites of schools, whether defunct or surviving, sometimes use such documentary material as well as the recollections of their more loyal old boys.

I have drawn on this varied and abundant evidence to look at prep schools through the eyes of children in a way which has not been attempted before. This is not a painstaking institutional history such as that written by Donald Leinster-Mackay, with its wealth of important detail. Nor is it simply a 'delightful

collection of prep school reminiscences', like those composed by Arthur Marshall and Michael Gilbert.[21] It illuminates an area of childhood hardly mentioned in recent histories, such as Hugh Cunningham's *The Invention of Childhood* or Harry Hendrick's *Children, Childhood and English Society*, both of which try to encompass the 'whispers and muted articulations' of children themselves. Anthony Fletcher's *Growing Up in England* does touch on 'boys' experience of being at school' up to 1914, but he judges that this is 'hardly susceptible to analytical treatment on the basis of authentic source material'. It is true that the childhood diaries which Fletcher values most highly are rare. But he underrates the material which can be gleaned from letters and memoirs and he was not, of course, in a position to talk to past pupils.[22] A comprehensive blend of sources enables us to hear the shared laughter and the private sobs, the recited lessons and the playground cries of prep school pupils down the years.

It was not my aim to produce an affectionate apologia for the preparatory school of the type written by the fictitious Aubrey Upjohn in 1960 or by the real-life headmaster, Philip Masters, in 1966. Nor do I presuppose with Nick Duffell that former boarding school pupils are all victims.[23] Instead, I have followed the evidence where it leads. These pages encompass a fascinating and sometimes bewildering spectrum of views on the prep school experience, ranging from 'a pleasant sunlit state' through 'a rite of passage' to 'a fascist state'.[24] Such opinions were rarely sought or expressed by pupils at the time, for ironically these privileged children did not attract investigations such as the Victorian inquiries conducted by Lord Shaftesbury and Henry Mayhew into the circumstances and thoughts of young factory workers and street-traders. Many of those deprived youngsters longed for an education; one orphan flower girl told Mayhew how proud she was of having put her younger brother through Ragged School so that he could read and write – 'and I pray to God that he'll do well with it'.[25] These waifs would have been astonished to learn that Shaftesbury always 'shuddered at the thought' of the 'filth, bullying, neglect and harsh treatment' he had endured at his prep school, or that Mayhew had been so bored with 'the dead tongues' he was taught at Westminster School from the age of nine that he ran away to sea.[26] Any complaints Shaftesbury or Mayhew might have uttered at the time would have gone unheeded. And in the twentieth century, too, it remained 'a fact of life that adults never believed thirteen-year-olds'.[27] One man I interviewed told me that when his mother referred to his time at prep school as the

'happiest days of your life', his unspoken reply was 'How would you know?' This book strives to give a voice to prep school children, a class apart over two centuries.

1

'A Little Roughing It' Georgian Boys' Schools

Pick from the shelf a memoir or biography of an eminent Victorian man and the chances are that its early pages will reveal him as a small boy making the journey by stagecoach to a distant boarding school in the early nineteenth century. The fictional departure of nine-year-old Tom Brown from his quiet old-fashioned country village in White Horse Vale conveys Thomas Hughes's somewhat idealized vision of this English custom. Tom goes off in the coach (accompanied by Squire Brown) with 'his small private box full of peg-tops, white marbles, screws, birds' eggs, whip-cord, jews'-harps, and other miscellaneous boys' wealth' donated by the heartbroken village companions he is leaving behind. The stalwart young hero is sad to be losing his childhood playmates, but he also feels 'the pride and excitement of making a new step in life'. This emotion carries him through the parting with 'dear Mamma' – though he becomes dreadfully unhappy in the first week when the school housekeeper fails to seal and post his first letter to her.[1] A contrasting account comes from the pen of William Makepeace Thackeray, who never forgot the day in 1811 when, at the age of six, he departed for school alone in a 'Defiance' stage coach:

> Twang goes the horn: up goes the trunk; down come the steps. Bah! I see the autumn evening: I hear the wheels now: I smart the cruel smart again; and, boy or man, have never been able to bear the sight of people parting from their children.[2]

It was a lament that would echo down the ages.

Both Tom Brown and Thackeray were heading for one of the many private academies which proliferated in late Georgian times. Typically these were in the charge of clergymen, aided by sundry family members, but some of the larger, more expensive private establishments, such as Twyford (the model for Tom Brown's first school), Temple Grove or the Rev George Nicholas's academy at Ealing, were run 'on the Eton lines'.[3] All these forerunners of the later preparatory

schools aimed to impart enough of the Latin and Greek required for entrance to the great public schools of England, such as Eton, Winchester, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Westminster and Charterhouse. These ancient foundations had originally been endowed for needy local boys but, by the late eighteenth century, they had become elite schools patronized largely by fee-paying pupils who lived in boarding houses. With their exclusively classical curriculum, the 'vocationally useless' learning that was 'the symbol of the gentleman's education', they were the means by which suitable boys would enter the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.[4]

Some of the private schools, run by particularly learned clergymen, also prepared boys for university. Devout parents like the Wilberforces preferred this homely form of education to the 'hard world atmosphere' of the public schools, 'capital training for the world', no doubt, but less beneficial to a child's 'eternal state'.[5] Other parents, like Squire Brown, were so confident of the great schools' ability to produce 'good English boys' that they curtailed their sons' days at the private academy and moved them on when they were as young as nine. One way or another, as a German mother observed of the English upper and middle classes:

> Hardly anyone brings up his children at home, where they would cause too much noise and commotion. As soon as boys and girls emerge from the nursery they are packed off to these establishments, and only return to their parental homes when their education is complete and they themselves nearly grown up.

Actually, daughters were often educated at home. But they could be sent to polite institutions, where they were prepared for marriage by learning 'a little of everything' and a lot of graceful accomplishments.[6]

The choice of a school for sons was a thorny matter. At this time of sharp religious controversy, parents might select a schoolmaster of their own Evangelical or High Church leanings. More often the determining factor was simply financial. In Dickens's novel *Dombey and Son*, the prosperous Mr Dombey sees the high cost of Doctor Blimber's academy in Brighton as 'one of its leading merits', since he wants an establishment from which his little son can rise to his proper eminence.[7] But down-at-heel parents of 'gentle standing', such as those of Anthony Trollope, were glad to accept the 'almost gratuitous' places that some endowed

schools like Harrow still offered to a few local youngsters, even if this meant their being subjected to ignominy when they got there.[8] For boys who could sing like angels a choir school was a possibility; but parents had to be careful, since many of these medieval foundations no longer prepared choristers to go on to further schooling once their voices had broken. King's College, Cambridge, linked by its royal charter to Eton, now offered only the most elementary curriculum to its choirboys. And at Wells Cathedral, idle choristers were in the habit of kicking balls and throwing stones in the nave, leaving as their legacy a hole in the stained glass where St Andrew's nose should have been.[9] Such lax discipline would not do for lads who were bent on a career in Britain's omnipotent navy. They had to be toughened up, like the 'King's Boys' at Christ's Hospital, 'for the rough element which they were destined to encounter'. As Admiral Sir Robert Barlow observed before sending his nephew to the Naval Academy at Gosport, 'nursing is not a good initiation to a life of enterprise and hard work'.[10] This criterion was applied not only to future naval cadets. Many parents of this era shared the second Marquess of Salisbury's idea 'that the more boys roughed it in every way, the stronger and better they grew up'.[11]

How well did schools meet the varied expectations of parents? If it was difficult for them to make well-founded judgements, how much harder it is for historians to find out about conditions in schools, many of which have long since disappeared. Only the children really knew. From their dutiful letters home, from memoirs often prefaced by such phrases as 'I can see myself now', from reports by those in whom they confided and from the life-like fiction of Thackeray and Dickens, we can attempt to conjure up the pleasures and pains of children setting out on their schooldays in Georgian times.

At the little boarding school to which Lord Salisbury sent his young sons, Lords Robert and Eustace Cecil, the Rev Francis Faithfull of Hatfield tried to apply his lordship's severe maxim. He required his young charges to rise at six o'clock, fast until ten, work for seven hours a day, ride without saddles, sleep on mattresses on the floor, avoid wearing greatcoats and eat green apples as a purgative. Those who failed in these endeavours were beaten with shaving straps. Robert (who later inherited his father's title and became prime minister) remembered his three years at this school as 'an existence among devils'. Respite came at the age of nine, when he was sent to another clerical school, this time in Devon. Although

he was now much further away from Hatfield House (the family home), the boy benefited from kinder treatment; the Rev Henry Lyte, author of the hymn *Abide with Me*, took account of his delicate constitution and encouraged his interest in botany. But at the age of eleven Robert started at Eton. The clever child could cope with its intellectual demands but not with its ubiquitous bullies, who inflicted such tortures as burning his mouth with a candle. Eventually he sneaked to his father, telling him that he found the regime 'perfectly insupportable' and begging to be removed from 'this horrid place'. Thus ended a 'thoroughly miserable' school career which, in the opinion of his latest biographer, gave Cecil his life-long 'pessimism about human nature'. Years later he would dodge into a side alley if he saw a school contemporary approaching him in the street.[12]

It was not unusual for a child to be taken away from a school if he could manage to communicate his misery. When William Thackeray arrived at Mr and Mrs Arthur's highly recommended school in Southampton in 1817, he could barely write, and his letters to 'My dearest of all dear Mamas' (who was in India) were probably penned by the schoolmaster himself. They record that he enjoyed his lessons in geography, Latin and ciphering, saying nothing of the cold, the bad dinners and the awful caning which he recalled in later years. But the relations with whom he lived must have understood his plight, for he wrote in 1818 that he was 'very glad' not to be going back to the Arthurs.[13] Instead, he attended a school run by his great-uncle, Dr Turner, in Chiswick Mall, 'a stately old brick house' which makes an appearance as Miss Pinkerton's Academy in *Vanity Fair*.[14] It was an improvement. But before long young William tried to run away, fearing punishment for a caricature he had drawn of Dr Turner; he did not get further than the Hammersmith High Road, where he was frightened by the traffic. Perhaps Thackeray used this memory in his story 'Dr Birch and His Young Friends', in which a boy successfully absconds after a row with the 'croaking, scolding, bullying' Miss Birch, whom the narrator witnesses 'eating jam with a spoon out of Master Wiggins' trunk in the box-room'.[15] He settled down after this but did little work and was pronounced an ignoramus – 'The boy knows nothing' – when he arrived aged ten at Charterhouse, where a senior boy greeted him with the words: 'Come and frig me.' William never developed much 'gratitude or affection for that respectable seminary near Smithfield', where the headmaster wielded 'a forest of birch rods'. But he enjoyed such local diversions as Bartholomew Fair.[16]

It sometimes took extreme measures to convey a desperate child's message to parents and teachers. Samuel Wilberforce, son of the abolitionist campaigner and later Bishop of Winchester, so disliked the Rev Marsh's school at Nuneham Courtney that he devised a novel method of getting himself expelled in 1817.

> He ran into the road before the cottage, then traversed by a score or two London coaches a day, threw himself flat on the ground, in the very track of the coaches, and announced his intention of remaining there till he was sent home. After he remained there several hours the tutor struck his colours and Samuel was sent home.

He was transferred to the Rev Hodson's school at Stanstead Park, where he apparently indulged in no more suicidal behaviour.[17]

Physical, as well as psychological, ill health could cause a boy to be removed from a school. The mother of Edward Bulwer (later Lord Lytton) was so shocked by his appearance after two weeks of merciless bullying at Dr Ruddock's school in Fulham that she took him away immediately.[18] Some boys lasted longer. Henry Manning, Archbishop of Westminster, recalled that he had been at the Rev Davies' school in Streatham for about two years before he fell ill and was 'fetched home' in 1820. Despite the 'trail of immorality' he found at this school, Manning seems to have embarked on the religious course which led to his becoming a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. His main recollection was 'of walking about in the playground trying to think what there was before the world was made'. He spent a long time getting well at home before proceeding to a school in Totteridge run by the Rev Abel Lendon, an austere figure who inspired 'a wholesome fear' in his pupils. The 'dormitories were well watched' at this school, where there was 'more moral purity, refinement and civilisation'.[19]

Henry Coke did not last many years at Temple Grove in the 1830s under the tutelage of Dr Pinckney, the model for the 'sycophantic Doctor of Divinity' satirized by Benjamin Disraeli, whose brother had attended that 'fashionable school preparatory to Eton'.[20] After being taken to the magnificent villa in East Sheen by a family friend from his Norfolk home, Holkham Hall, Henry was 'half starved . . . exceedingly dirty . . . systematically bullied . . . flogged and caned as though the master's pleasure was in inverse pleasure to ours'. Coke's account of the three gradations of caning, of meals preceded by doughy pudding 'to save the butcher's bill' and of the complete lack of baths,[21] is borne out by his

contemporary, Major-General Sir Archibald Anson. A further torture which Anson described was the twice-yearly visit of the dentist who 'pulled teeth out causing as much pain as possible', an ordeal from which he was excused by his father.[22]

After three years of 'gerund-grinding', Henry Coke was removed from the school without getting the place at Eton to which Temple Grove was normally the 'atrium'. This was because his cheeks remained pallid despite, or because of, regular doses of sulphur and treacle. After a period of convalescence in France, he entered the Naval Academy at Gosport. Here he got the year's 'hard training' that apparently equipped him, aged twelve, for night watches aboard HMS *Blonde* bound for the Opium War in China, when he was 'blinded with snow, drenched by the seas, frozen with cold, home sick and sea sick beyond description'.[23] Coke was later to leave the navy and resume his education by studying on his own to get into Cambridge University, whence he proceeded into politics. Meanwhile, Anson had progressed to a school on Woolwich Common, where boys were prepared for the neighbouring Royal Military Academy with the help of unmerciful thrashings 'all over the body'. Thus he was equipped for a distinguished army career in the Far East. Temple Grove had already earned its reputation as a 'cradle of empire'.[24]

No political, religious, naval or military future lies before old-fashioned little Paul Dombey. He spends one long term at Doctor Blimber's 'great hot-house' in Brighton, where 'the studies went round like a mighty wheel and the young gentlemen were always stretched upon it', before the breakdown in his health leads to his death at the age of seven.[25] Dickens's exposure of Doctor Blimber's 'forcing system and its fruits' is much more good-natured than his more famous portrayal of Mr Squeers's Dotheboys Hall – to which Henry Coke, among many others, compared his prep school.[26] Both schools were drawn from life. Dickens himself claimed that 'Mr Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality.'[27] And his friend and biographer, John Forster, knew the original of Doctor Blimber's daughter and assistant, Miss Cornelia Blimber, who is portrayed as 'spectacled and analytic but not unkind'. To be sure, she gives Paul a hard time as she tries to bring him on in Latin grammar, ancient history and arithmetic. But when he collapses under the strain she and Doctor Blimber, as well as Mr Feeder BA, release him from his books and treat him gently. What Dickens does with incomparable empathy in *Dombey and Son* is to look at the

school through a child's eyes. Confused by his lessons, Paul wanders around the joyless house, listening to the ticking of the great clock in the hall:

> He was intimate with all the paper-hanging in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth.

Once the holidays approach, however, the lions and tigers become 'quite tame and frolicsome' and the faces peep out at him 'with less wicked eyes'.[28]

Just as, in real life, schools varied in their severity, so they did in academic competence. This is hardly surprising for, as a German visitor to England pointed out in 1791: 'Every person, man or woman, is at liberty to set up a boarding-school.' In his view English parents took more care in selecting a dog trainer or a horse breaker than they took in choosing a good school for their children.[29] Many schoolmasters undoubtedly resembled Thackeray's Dr Birch, who got up his Classics with translations 'or what the boys call cribs', and could easily be caught out by 'elder wags' who asked him for help with 'hard bits of Herodotus or Thucydides'.[30] One former pupil of an expensive Mitcham academy told his father that the Rev Roberts could not instil anything more than the 'the rudiments of the dead languages'.[31] Headmasters often used barely educated ushers (teaching assistants) to implement an unimaginative system of education similar to that pioneered by the Rev Thomas Lancaster at Wimbledon School and endured by Arthur Schopenhauer for a term in 1793: 'Everything – teaching, punishment and everything to do with the children – is done mechanically in accordance with given rules, regardless of age, character and ability.'[32] Still, most boys managed, like Tom Brown, to imbibe a fair amount of Latin and Greek, even if it was sometimes unhelpful to them. Manning had to begin all over again when he went to Harrow because the Westminster Greek grammar he had been made to learn at Totteridge was not used there. At the age of nine, Henry Coke could repeat, parrot-fashion, several hundred lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*. But he soon forgot it. Like many other Georgian children, he paid for this learning dearly and with 'many tears'.[33]

There were, of course, more humane pedagogues than Temple Grove's Dr Pinckney. Cardinal John Henry Newman related to a friend an affectionate memory of Dr Nicholas, who found the seven-year-old crying by himself after

his parents' first visit to Ealing School. When the doctor proposed taking John to the big room to join the other boys, the child objected because his tears would have been observed and would cause derision:

> 'O sir! They will say such things! I can't help crying.' On his master making light of it: 'O sir! But they will; they will say all sorts of things,' and, taking the master's hand, 'Come and see for yourself!' and led him into the crowded room, where, of course, under the circumstances, there was no teasing.

This memory, as revealing of the pupils' normal behaviour as it is of Dr Nicholas, tells us rather more than Newman's early diaries. These record, for instance, that on 25 May 1810 he 'got into Ovid and Greek' and that on the same date two years later he 'began Homer'. Luckily for his literary development he had enough free time at Ealing to read the novels of Sir Walter Scott and to write his own verses – though his schoolfellows 'have left on record that they never, or scarcely ever, saw him taking part in any game'. So attached did young John become to Dr Nicholas that he persuaded his parents not to send him to Winchester; he then progressed so well at Ealing that he went up to Trinity College, Oxford when he was only fifteen.[34]

It was at Oxford that Newman met Richard Hurrell Froude (as well as other future leaders of the Oxford Movement). Froude, too, had been fortunate in his headmaster, the Rev George Coleridge (nephew of the poet) of the Free School, Ottery St Mary. Belying his nickname 'Coldrage', the clergyman was kind to Hurrell (who was known by his second name) and his brother Robert, when his friend Archdeacon Froude of Dartington sent them there in 1812. The boys sometimes needed such comfort as Coleridge could give after they had been 'rapped' by the Classics master, who once beat Robert senseless and was 'far more severe' with Hurrell than with other pupils from whom he expected less. There was also a certain amount of bullying, in which Hurrell joined, rebuking himself afterwards in his journal. But the brothers also had fun with boats, wooden swords and apple feasts and were delighted when their mother sent them a 'very rich cake'.[35] Thus was Froude prepared for Eton, which he entered at thirteen, an age at which he was just about able to cope with harsh public school conditions.

The same could not be said of his youngest brother, the future historian James Anthony Froude, who never forgot the '*infandum dolorem*' (unspeakable