



Tom Brown's School-Days

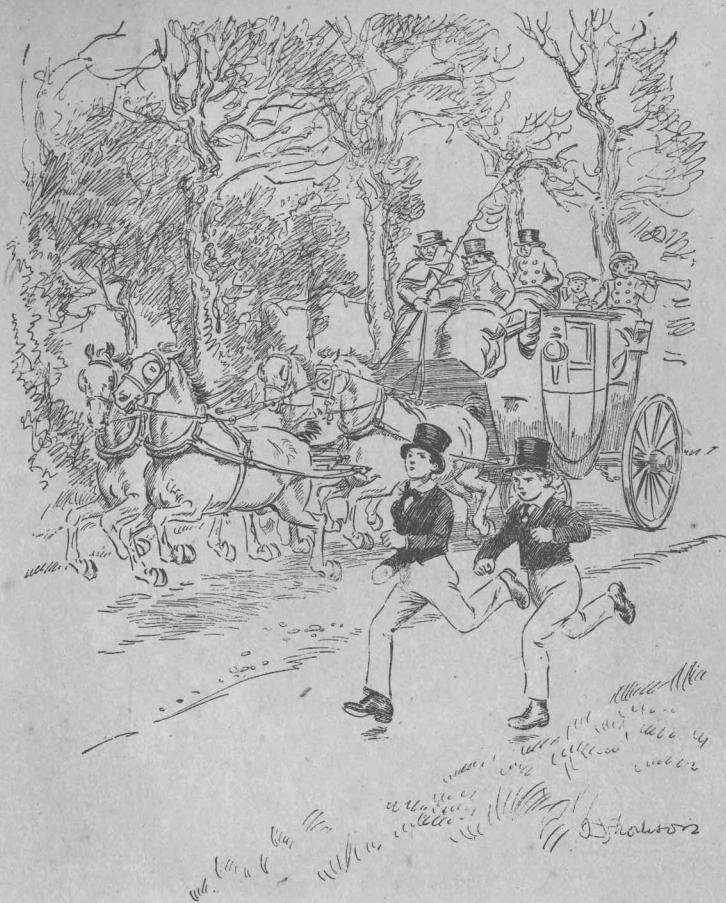
By an Old Boy
(Thomas Hughes)

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'THERE'S TWO ON 'EM, OUT AND OUT RUNNERS THEY BE'

PREFACE

EVER since 1857, when it first appeared, 'Tom Brown's School-Days' has maintained its position by universal consent as the best of school stories, and it still enjoys a wide popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. Gratifying as this must be to a Rugbeian proud of the fame of his school, it may seem at first sight a little surprising. The book contains so much local colour, and the conditions of school life under which its readers are brought up are so different from those described in it, that it might be expected to appeal less strongly to this generation than to the one for which it was written.

The truth is that the book continues to live, in spite of the fact that its setting must seem strange to many of its readers, because of the sympathy and insight with which the author paints the unchanging characteristics of boys. Conditions change, and the ways in which characteristics show themselves alter; but the types remain. Bullying of the kind described has passed away, but there are still Flashmans to be found, both in schools and in the outer world. A detailed organization and a stricter supervision, compulsory games, military training corps, and regulated societies for the pursuit of natural history and other subjects have robbed school life of much of the opportunity for enterprise and initiative, both good and bad, which was afforded in less methodical times; but the enthusiast like

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Martin, the enterprising rebel like East, the sturdy jolly boy like Tom Brown himself, are still familiar types. It is this sympathy with and insight into the point of view of boys which gives the book, like all books which show a real appreciation of human nature, a permanent interest and value.

And if the conditions of school life have altered, and many of the scenes in the book, such as the roasting of the hero and the great fight, no longer recall similar experiences to the mind of the reader, yet the book has an enormous advantage over its successors in the very fact that the school life of the time was much more picturesque and full of variety than the highly organized life with which the modern author must deal. The struggle against the bully Flashman, the great fight, the quarrel with 'Velveteens,' are perhaps among the most interesting episodes of all. And besides that, in the scenes which have become an inevitable part of any school story,—the football and the cricket match, the run, the scene in 'form,'—Hughes has the great advantage of being first in the field. The modern writer cannot dispense with these incidents, for they provide the dramatic moments of school life; but all the time he must feel that it has been done before and that he is inviting comparison.

For the description of the school life of his day Tom Hughes was singularly fitted. Eager, loyal, sympathetic, intensely interested in life, devoted to the great headmaster who had done so much for him, for Rugby, and for public schools in general, he threw his whole heart into the work, and all unconsciously raised for himself an abiding monument. The modern boy may think that in places he points the moral at unnecessary length. It was the fashion of his time, when the earnest author perhaps gave the reader too

PREFACE

little credit for being able to draw the moral for himself. But the most captious critic will feel nothing but admiration for the life and vigour and true dramatic instinct with which in his simple colloquial style he brings on his stage the successive scenes of school life at Rugby in 'the thirties.' It is a significant fact that to him alone amongst the many distinguished sons of the school has a statue been erected. It stands in front of the school museum and is the record of a feeling which was most happily expressed by an old Rugbeian at the unveiling of the statue, when he spoke of Hughes as 'the incarnation of the highest form of the British schoolboy, the best type of the character of the school which moulded him.'

I have endeavoured to explain in the notes any allusions and words that are likely to puzzle a young reader. He will not, I hope, interrupt the thread of the story by referring to the notes page by page. Let him enjoy the chapter first and then turn to the notes, which are placed discreetly at the end of the volume to help him to understand anything that he may have found obscure.

The publishers have followed the spelling and style of quotation marks used in the original text, in order to preserve its character in this new edition.

H. C. BRADBY

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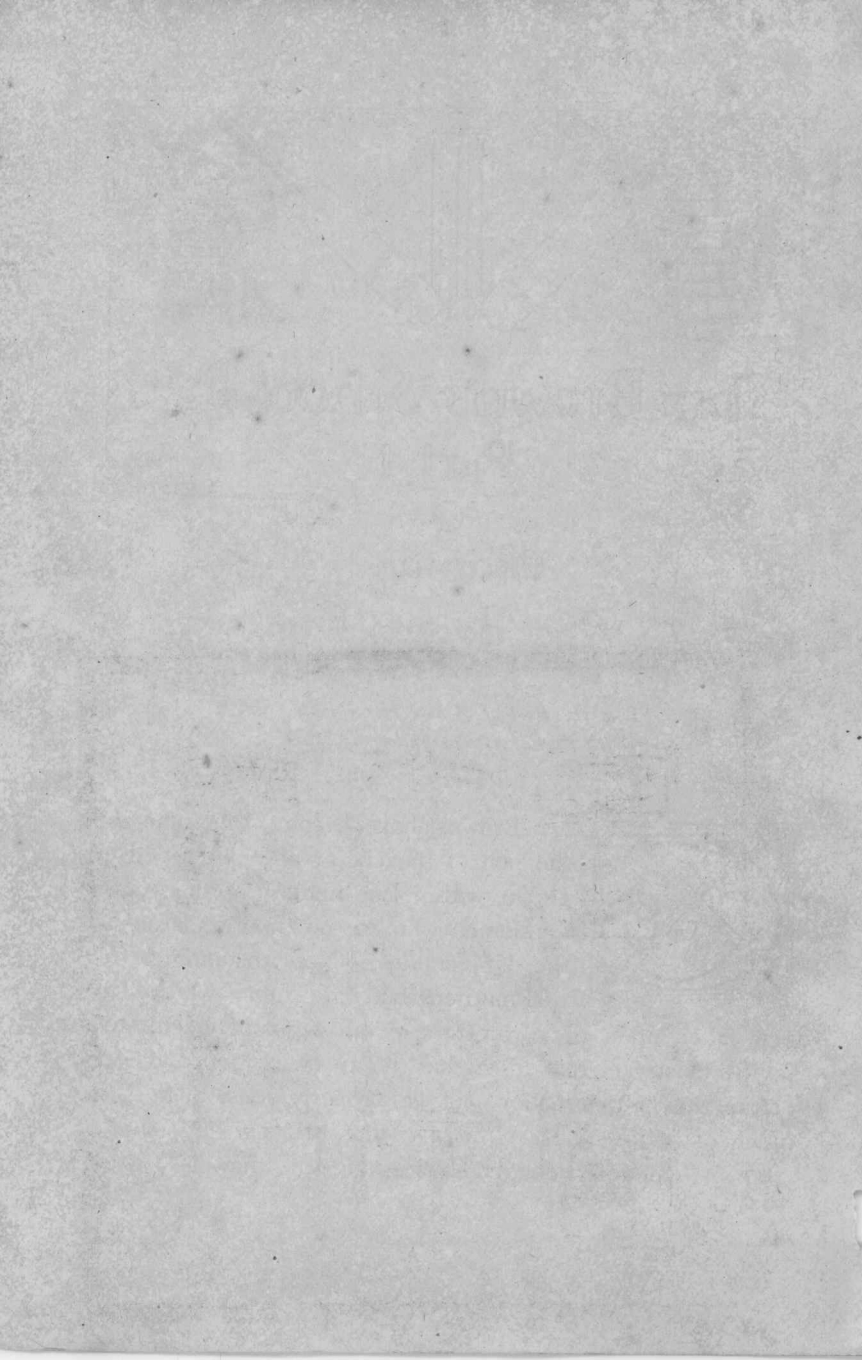
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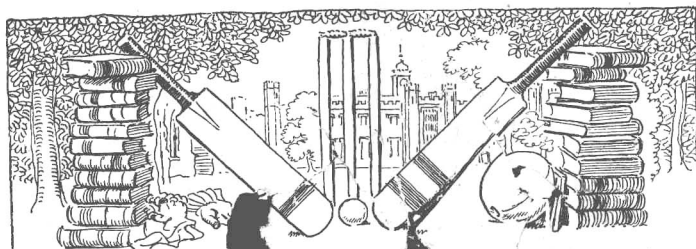
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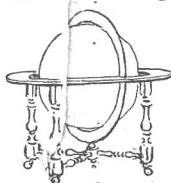


Tom Brown's School-Days

Part I

Chapter I

The Brown Family



*'I'm the Poet of White Horse Vale, Sir,
With liberal notions under my cap.'*

Ballad

have become illustrious by
hackeray and the pencil of
the memory of the young
who are now matriculating at
ies. Notwithstanding the
we-men but late fame which has
upon them, any one at all acquainted with the
must feel that much has yet to be written and said
the British nation will be properly sensible of how
greatness it owes to the Browns. For centu-
quiet, dogged, homespun way, they have been

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subduing the earth in most English counties, and leaving their mark in American forests and Australian uplands. Wherever the fleets and armies of England have won renown, there stalwart sons of the Browns have done yeomen's work. With the yew bow and cloth-yard shaft at Cressy and Agincourt — with the broad bill and pike under the brave Lord Willoughby — with cuirass and demi-culverin against Spaniards and Dutchmen — with hand-grenade and sabre, and musket and bayonet, under Rodney and St. Vincent, Wolfe and Moore, Nelson and Wellington, they have carried their lives in their hands; gotten hard knocks and hard work in plenty, which was on the whole what they looked for, and the best thing for them; and little praise or pudding, which indeed they, and most of us, are better without. Talbots and Stanleys, St. Maurs, and suchlike folk, have led armies and made laws time out of mind; but those noble families would be somewhat astounded — if the accounts ever came to be fairly taken — to find how small their work for England has been by the side of the Browns.

These latter, indeed, have rarely been sung by poet, or wanted their 'sacer vates,' the top by themselves, and with the talent of catching to, whatever good things have come to be sung, — dation of the fortunes of so many noble families. The world goes on its way, and the wheel turns, and the of the Browns, like other wrongs, seem in a fair way righted. And this present writer having for many of his life been a devout Brown-worshipper,

THE BROWN FAMILY

having the honour of being nearly connected with an eminently respectable branch of the great Brown family, is anxious, so far as in him lies, to help the wheel over, and throw his stone on to the pile.

However, gentle reader, or simple reader, whichever you may be, lest you should be led to waste your precious time upon these pages, I make so bold as at once to tell you the sort of folk you'll have to meet and put up with, if you and I are to jog on comfortably together. You shall hear at once what sort of folk the Browns are, at least my branch of them; and then if you don't like the sort, why cut the concern at once, and let you and me cry quits before either of us can grumble at the other.

In the first place, the Browns are a fighting family. One may question their wisdom, or wit, or beauty, but about their fight there can be no question. Wherever hard knocks of any kind, visible or invisible, are going, there the Brown who is nearest must shove in his carcass. And these carcasses for the most part answer very well to the characteristic propensity; they are a square-headed and snake-necked generation, broad in the shoulder, deep in the chest, and thin in the flank, carrying no lumber. Then for clanship, they are as bad as Highlanders; it is amazing the belief they have in one another. With them there is nothing like the Browns, to the third and fourth generation. 'Blood is thicker than water,' is one of their pet sayings. They can't be happy unless they are always meeting one another. Never were such people for family gatherings, which, were you a stranger, or sensitive, you might think had better not have been gathered together. For during the whole time of their being together they luxuriate in telling one another

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL-DAYS

their minds on whatever subject turns up ; and their minds are wonderfully antagonistic, and all their opinions are downright beliefs. Till you 've been among them some time and understand them, you can't think but that they are quarrelling. Not a bit of it ; they love and respect one another ten times the more after a good set family arguing bout, and go back, one to his curacy, another to his chambers, and another to his regiment, freshened for work, and more than ever convinced that the Browns are the height of company.

This family training, too, combined with their turn for combativeness, makes them eminently quixotic. They can't let anything alone which they think going wrong. They must speak their mind about it, annoying all easy-going folk ; and spend their time and money in having a tinker at it, however hopeless the job. It is an impossibility to a Brown to leave the most disreputable lame dog on the other side of a stile. Most other folk get tired of such work. The old Browns, with red faces, white whiskers, and bald heads, go on believing and fighting to a green old age. They have always a crotchet going, till the old man with the scythe reaps and garners them away for troublesome old boys as they are.

And the most provoking thing is, that no failures knock them up, or make them hold their hands, or think you, or me, or other sane people in the right. Failures slide off them like July rain off a duck's back feathers. Jem and his whole family turn out bad, and cheat them one week, and the next they are doing the same thing for Jack ; and when he goes to the treadmill, and his wife and children to the workhouse, they will be on the look out for Bill to take his place.

However, it is time for us to get from the general to the particular ; so, leaving the great army of Browns, who are

THE VALE OF WHITE HORSE

scattered over the whole empire on which the sun never sets, and whose general diffusion I take to be the chief cause of that empire's stability, let us at once fix our attention upon the small nest of Browns in which our hero was hatched, and which dwelt in that portion of the Royal county of Berks which is called the Vale of White Horse.

Most of you have probably travelled down the Great Western Railway as far as Swindon. Those of you who did so with your eyes open, have been aware, soon after leaving the Didcot station, of a fine range of chalk hills running parallel with the railway on the left-hand side as you go down, and distant some two or three miles, more or less, from the line. The highest point in the range is the White Horse Hill, which you come in front of just before you stop at the Shrivenham station. If you love English scenery and have a few hours to spare, you can't do better, the next time you pass, than stop at the Farringdon-road or Shrivenham station, and make your way to that highest point. And those who care for the vague old stories that haunt country-sides all about England, will not, if they are wise, be content with only a few hours' stay: for, glorious as the view is, the neighbourhood is yet more interesting for its relics of bygone times. I only know two English neighbourhoods thoroughly, and in each, within a circle of five miles, there is enough of interest and beauty to last any reasonable man his life. I believe this to be the case almost throughout the country, but each has a special attraction, and none can be richer than the one I am speaking of and going to introduce you to very particularly; for on this subject I must be prosy; so those that don't care for England in detail may skip the chapter.

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Oh young England! young England! You who are born into these racing railroad times, when there's a Great Exhibition, or some monster sight, every year; and you can get over a couple of thousand miles of ground for three pound ten, in a five weeks' holiday; why don't you know more of your own birth-places? You're all in the ends of the earth, it seems to me, as soon as you get your necks out of the educational collar, for Midsummer holidays, long vacations, or what not. Going round Ireland with a return ticket, in a fortnight; dropping your copies of Tennyson on the tops of Swiss mountains; or pulling down the Danube in Oxford racing-boats. And when you get home for a quiet fortnight, you turn the steam off, and lie on your backs in the paternal garden, surrounded by the last batch of books from Mudie's library, and half bored to death. Well, well! I know it has its good side. You all patter French more or less, and perhaps German; you have seen men and cities, no doubt, and have your opinions, such as they are, about schools of painting, high art, and all that; have seen the pictures at Dresden and the Louvre, and know the taste of sour krout. All I say is, you don't know your own lanes and woods and fields. Though you may be chock full of science, not one in twenty of you knows where to find the wood-sorrel, or bee-orchis, which grow in the next wood, or on the down three miles off, or what the bog-bean and wood-sage are good for. And as for the country legends, the stories of the old gable-ended farm-houses, the place where the last skirmish was fought in the civil wars, where the parish butts stood, where the last highwayman turned to bay, where the last ghost was laid by the parson, they're gone out of date altogether.

YOUNG ENGLAND

Now, in my time, when we got home by the old coach, which put us down at the cross-roads with our boxes, the first day of the holidays, and had been driven off by the family coachman, singing 'Dulce domum' at the top of our voices, there we were, fixtures, till black Monday came round. We had to cut out our own amusements within a walk or a ride of home. And so we got to know all the country folk, and their ways and songs and stories, by heart; and went over the fields, and woods, and hills, again and again, till we made friends of them all. We were Berkshire, or Gloucestershire, or Yorkshire boys, and you're young cosmopolites, belonging to all counties and no countries. No doubt it's all right, I dare say it is. This is the day of large views and glorious humanity, and all that; but I wish back-sword play had n't gone out in the Vale of White Horse, and that that confounded Great Western had n't carried away Alfred's Hill to make an embankment.

But to return to the said Vale of White Horse, the country in which the first scenes of this true and interesting story are laid. As I said, the Great Western now runs right through it, and it is a land of large rich pastures, bounded by ox-fences, and covered with fine hedgerow timber, with here and there a nice little gorse or spinney, where abideth poor Charley, having no other cover to which to betake himself for miles and miles, when pushed out some fine November morning by the Old Berkshire. Those who have been there, and well mounted, only know how he and the staunch little pack who dash after him—heads high and sterns low, with a breast-high scent—can consume the ground at such times. There being little plough-land and few woods, the Vale is only an average sporting country,

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL-DAYS

except for hunting. The villages are straggling, queer, old-fashioned places, the houses being dropped down without the least regularity, in nooks and out-of-the-way corners, by the sides of shadowy lanes and footpaths, each with its patch of garden. They are built chiefly of good grey stone and thatched; though I see that within the last year or two the red-brick cottages are multiplying, for the Vale is beginning to manufacture largely both brick and tiles. There are lots of waste ground by the side of the roads in every village, amounting often to village greens, where feed the pigs and ganders of the people; and these roads are old-fashioned homely roads, very dirty and badly made, and hardly endurable in winter, but still pleasant jog-trot roads running through the great pasture lands, dotted here and there with little clumps of thorns, where the sleek kine are feeding, with no fence on either side of them, and a gate at the end of each field, which makes you get out of your gig (if you keep one), and gives you a chance of looking about you every quarter of a mile.

One of the moralists whom we sat under in my youth,—was it the great Richard Swiveller, or Mr. Stiggins?—says, ‘We are born in a vale, and must take the consequences of being found in such a situation.’ These consequences I for one am ready to encounter. I pity people who weren’t born in a vale. I don’t mean a flat country, but a vale: that is, a flat country bounded by hills. The having your hill *always* in view if you choose to turn towards him, that’s the essence of a vale. There he is for ever in the distance, your friend and companion; you never lose him as you do in hilly districts.

And then what a hill is the White Horse Hill! There