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THOMAS HUGHES

TOM BROWN'S School Days

Introduction by Clarence A. Andrews

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS

by Thomas Hughes

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INTRODUCTION

In the *corpus* of English and American literature there are many books about young people, written perhaps for young people, which have proven eminently readable for adults: *Gulliver's Travels, Huckleberry Finn, Treasure Island, Alice In Wonderland* and *Through The Looking-Glass, The Last of the Mohicans, Oliver Twist* and *Captains Courageous,* to name a few. In this list there are two books about the life of schoolboys: Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby,* and the book in your hands. *Nicholas Nickleby* was written some fifteen years before *Tom Brown's School Days,* but both are set in the same period of time and in the same place—England at the beginning of Victoria's reign. Dickens, the social critic, attacked the English public schools with his sometimes bitter satire. He pointed to their mistreatment of the young men who were sent to the schools to be educated, but who were, according to Dickens, more likely to be beaten, starved, and barely educated at all. His novel created a furor which led to the closing of many of the schools.

In addition to the type of school depicted in Dickens' novel, there were seven "great" English public schools. The names of these schools have become a part of our language: Westminster, Harrow, Winchester, Charterhouse, Shrewsbury, Rugby and Eton. "The Battle of Waterloo (1815) was won on the playing fields of Eton," the Duke of Wellington is supposed to have said. Rugby gave its name to a game of football which is still played, and which is the basis on which the American sport was formed. Harrow was the school of Lord Byron, Anthony Trollope and Sir Winston Churchill,

to name a few. The origins of these schools are in the sixteenth century; their influence on education and on England is great indeed. They are undoubtedly responsible for the place of classical literature as a staple item in English education. Their second influence was the system of government and discipline for boys which is shown in this book; its effects on English social life and on the national character contributed greatly to the growth and power of the "tight little isle."

To learn something, then, about the educational system which helped build an empire on which the sun never set is the first reason for reading this book. The second is that it is a representative Victorian novel; and the influence, for better or for worse, of both the Victorian Age and of its prose is still with us today.

The typical Victorian novel centers around a "hero"—Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown—but also includes a rich variety of supporting characters and incidents. The story is frequently bound together more or less loosely around some action. Here events are selected almost at random from some six years of Tom's schooling. The typical Victorian novel ended with wedding bells and sometimes the pairing up of several couples. *Tom Brown's School Days* has no romance in its pages, but for wedding bells, it substitutes a spiritual reunion between Tom Brown and the Doctor—who in real life was carried off by a heart attack at the age of forty-seven. Typically, too, the Victorian novel featured a "death scene"—or at least one in which a prominent character becomes seriously ill, suffers, passes "the crisis" and survives, and this, too, is an aspect of Hughes' novel. The Victorians, living before the days of antibiotics, oxygen tents and heart transplants, were more likely to die at an early age—and an awareness of man's mutability permeates many a page of nineteenth-century fiction.

It has been said that the Victorian writer is both poet and preacher. Thomas Hughes is a poet when he rhapsodizes about schoolboy days in such a way as to make us wish to relive our own. How many of these school experiences are deliciously stolen from the catalog of forbidden sweets? To the modern youngster who thinks he is the first to be a rebel against his elders and their conventions, *Tom Brown* may come as somewhat of a surprise. A reading of the book may help convince the young that rebellion against their elders

is a commonplace experience.

But there I go moralizing—a very typically Victorian act. When you find Thomas Hughes moralizing in this book, he is revealing the preacher side of the Victorian. This act of speaking directly to the reader, of stepping out of the role of narrator of the story into the role of a commentator on it is central to the Victorian novel. Modern literary criticism usually objects strenuously to such practices. The Victorian writer would not have understood this attitude.

So much for the genre. What is even more important in this book is the success with which Thomas Hughes develops his characters. Tom Brown and his friends are real boys. The decision of Tom and his friends to rebel against certain aspects of the practice of "fagging" is more than an incident in the book—it is a stage in the growth of the boys and shows them to be thinking individuals. There are no stereotypes. Each boy has his own personality. Only with one character does Hughes come close to failure—that of George Arthur, who at first seems too much like the romantic concept of the "sensitive plant" to be true. But George Arthur is no prig—like the others, he too develops and changes in response to his environment and his fellows. And he also produces changes in Tom.

There are no really bad boys here, no saints. For the most part these are boys who, while young, will violate seemingly every rule in the book of morals and manners—and then will grow up to be like their fathers—landed gentry, merchants, rectors and deacons and members of parliament. For these are members of upper-middle-class families who have been sent to Rugby not to be scholars—although some boys became scholars—but to become "brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishmen, and gentlemen, and Christians," as Tom's father puts it in Chapter Four.

It has been said that *Tom Brown* "did a great deal to fix the English concept of what a public school should be." A great deal of credit for the improvement in English public schools after the furor caused by *Nicholas Nickleby* belongs to Dr. Arnold, the other central figure in this book. Thomas Arnold, who since 1820 had been rector of a small English church, was appointed headmaster of Rugby in 1828 largely because of the comment of one of his ex-teachers that "he would change the face of education all through the public schools of England." Arnold remained at Rugby until 1841—

he died in 1842—but in those thirteen years he carried out his duties so well that he became one of the most influential figures in nineteenth-century England. He apparently made only minor changes in the curriculum. Arnold's real influence came about because of his larger concept of what the public schools should do. He obviously also agrees with Tom's father that the function of education is to produce brave, helpful, truth-telling, Christian, English gentlemen. To this list of adjectives Dr. Arnold would have added "serious" and "earnest." Moreover, he saw the public school as a small model of the ideal State—the State is "sovereign over human life, controlling everything, and itself subject to no earthly control."

The influence of Thomas Arnold on this book may seem fairly obvious to the reader. Yet it shows up in strange ways. Consider, for instance, this famous statement of Dr. Arnold's: "My object will be, if possible, to form Christian men, for Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make; I mean that, from the natural imperfect state of boyhood, they are not susceptible of Christian principles in their full development upon their practice."

When this statement is applied to *Tom Brown's School Days,* the structure of the book takes on new interest. The book, as you have noticed, is divided into two parts; at the beginning of the second part ("How the Tide Turned"), we are told "the turning point in our hero's school-career" has now come. We see at once that the first part of the book treats of Tom's "natural imperfect state of boyhood," and that the second part treats of his formation as a "Christian man." It is no accident, then, that young George Arthur does not become a character until the second part of the book; his influence would not have reached out to a younger Tom, in the opinion of Hughes and Dr. Arnold.

And it appears in another way. It was Dr. Arnold's philosophy that his students could govern their own lives most of the time. For that reason he turned over most of his discipline to "praepostors" chosen from the sixth form boys. In this story, therefore, we do not see him dealing directly with Tom and Harry East—rather, he works through George Arthur. In *Tom Brown,* at least, the method works.

And who was Thomas Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown*? Hughes was an English lawyer and author, the son of another English author and churchman. In February 1834

he went to Rugby, primarily because his father and Dr. Arnold had been classmates at Oriel College, Oxford. After his college days and his appointment to the bar, he came under the influence of Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley, and became a Christian Socialist. He was one of the original promoters of the Working Men's College —if you would like to see a fictionalized account of what these laborers' schools were about, you are referred to Mrs. Humphry Ward's (a granddaughter of Dr. Arnold) *Robert Ellsmere*. He visited America three times and contributed greatly to the public interest in the poetic reputation of James Russell Lowell. In addition to *Tom Brown*, he wrote a sequel, *Tom Brown At Oxford*, and several other books. About him it has been said that he was "English of the English, a typical broad-churchman, full of 'muscular Christianity,' straightforward and unsuspicious to a fault, yet attaching a somewhat exorbitant value to 'earnestness'— a favourite expression of Doctor Arnold."

In these days when there is so much attention being paid to the characteristics and qualities of "good education," perhaps a reading of *Tom Brown* is in order. Compared with some of the educational philosophies advanced in our own times, the philosophy of this book as advanced by Dr. Arnold may seem rather simple. It is based on equal parts of readings in Greek and Judaic-Christian literature, with the whole scholarly effort being tempered by what happens on the playing fields. It is education, as has been said, of the heart rather than of reason. It is education of the whole man rather than of his brain alone. It was a philosophy which produced giants—Matthew Arnold, Gladstone, Tennyson, Wellington—in addition to those I have already named— and many, many more. It produced the men who in the nineteenth century created an empire and a rich body of literature. Today, as we stand at a crossroads of man's destiny, confused, embattled, self-destructive, it might pay us to pause a while and read this book and contemplate whether or not there are worthwhile values in what at first may seem to some of us to be ancient literature.

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PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION

I received the following letter from an old friend soon after the last edition of this book was published, and resolved, if ever another edition were called for, to print it. For it is clear from this and other like comments, that something more should have been said expressly on the subject of bullying, and how it is to be met.

"MY DEAR ——,

"I blame myself for not having earlier suggested whether you could not, in another edition of Tom Brown, or another story, denounce more decidedly the evils of *bullying* at schools. You have indeed done so, and in the best way, by making Flashman the bully the most contemptible character; but in that scene of the *tossing*, and similar passages, you hardly suggest that such things should be stopped—and do not suggest any means of putting an end to them.

"This subject has been on my mind for years. It fills me with grief and misery to think what weak and nervous children go through at school—how their health and character for life are destroyed by rough and brutal treatment.

"It was some comfort to be under the old delusion that fear and nervousness can be cured by violence, and that knocking about will turn a timid boy into a bold one. But now we know well enough that is not true. Gradually training a timid child to do bold acts would be most desirable; but *frightening* him and ill-treating him will not make him courageous. Every medical man knows the fatal effects of terror, or agitation, or excitement, to nerves that are over-sensitive. There are different kinds of courage, as you have shown in your character of Arthur.

"A boy may have moral courage, and a finely-organized brain and nervous system. Such a boy is calculated, if judiciously educated, to be a great, wise, and useful man; but he may not possess *animal courage;* and one night's *tossing*, or bullying, may produce such an injury to his brain and nerves that his usefulness is spoiled for life. I verily believe that hundreds of noble organizations are thus destroyed every year. Horse-jockeys have learnt to be wiser; they know that a highly nervous horse is utterly destroyed by

harshness. A groom who tried to cure a shying horse by roughness and violence, would be discharged as a brute and a fool. A man who would regulate his watch with a crowbar would be considered an ass. But the person who thinks a child of delicate and nervous organization can be made bold by bullying is no better.

"He can be made bold by *healthy exercise* and *games* and *sports;* but that is quite a different thing. And even these games and sports should bear some proportion to his strength and capacities.

"I very much doubt whether small children should play with big ones—the rush of a set of great fellows at football, or the speed of a cricket-ball sent by a strong hitter, must be very alarming to a mere child, to a child who might stand up boldly enough among children of his own size and height.

"Look at half-a-dozen small children playing cricket by themselves; how feeble are their blows, how slowly they bowl. You can measure in that way their capacity.

"Tom Brown and his eleven were bold enough playing against an eleven of about their own calibre; but I suspect they would have been in a precious funk if they had played against eleven giants, whose bowling bore the same proportion to theirs that theirs does to the small children's above.

"To return to the *tossing*. I must say I think some means might be devised to enable schoolboys to go to bed in quietness and peace—and that some means ought to be devised and enforced. No good, moral or physical, to those who bully or those who are bullied, can ensue from such scenes as take place in the dormitories of schools. I suspect that British wisdom and ingenuity are sufficient to discover a remedy for this evil, if directed in the right direction.

"The fact is, that the condition of a small boy at a large school is one of peculiar hardship and suffering. He is entirely at the mercy of proverbially the roughest things in the universe—great schoolboys; and he is deprived of the protection which the weak have in civilized society; for he may not complain; if he does, he is an outlaw—he has no protector but public opinion, and that a public opinion of the very lowest grade, the opinion of rude and ignorant boys.

"What do schoolboys know of those deep questions of moral and physical philosophy, of the anatomy of mind and body, by which the treatment of a child should be regulated?

"Why should the laws of civilization be suspended for schools? Why should boys be left to herd together with no law but that of force or cunning? What would become of society if it were consti-

tuted on the same principles? It would be plunged into anarchy in a week.

"One of our judges, not long ago, refused to extend the protection of the law to a child who had been ill-treated at school. If a party of navvies had given *him* a licking, and he had brought the case before a magistrate, what would he have thought if the magistrate had refused to protect him, on the ground that if such cases were brought before him he might have fifty a-day from one town only?

"Now I agree with you that a constant supervision of the master is not desirable or possible—and that telling tales, or constantly referring to the master for protection, would only produce ill-will and worse treatment.

"If I rightly understand your book, it is an effort to improve the condition of schools by improving the tone of morality and public opinion in them. But your book contains the most indubitable proofs that the condition of the younger boys at public schools, except under the rare dictatorship of an Old Brooke, is one of great hardship and suffering.

"A timid and nervous boy is from morning till night in a state of bodily fear. He is constantly tormented when trying to learn his lessons. His play-hours are occupied in fagging, in a horrid funk of cricket-balls and foot-balls, and the violent sport of creatures who, to him, are giants. He goes to his bed in fear and trembling,—worse than the reality of the rough treatment to which he is perhaps subjected.

"I believe there is only one complete remedy. It is not in magisterial supervision; nor in telling tales; nor in raising the tone of public opinion among schoolboys—but in the *separation of boys of different ages into different schools.*

"There should be at least *three* different classes of schools,—the first for boys from nine to twelve; the second for boys from twelve to fifteen; the third for those above fifteen. And these schools should be in different localities.

"There ought to be a certain amount of supervision by the master at those times when there are special occasions for bullying, *e.g.* in the long winter evenings, and when the boys are congregated together in the bedrooms. Surely it cannot be an impossibility to keep order, and protect the weak at such times. Whatever evils might arise from supervision, they could hardly be greater than those produced by a system which divides boys into despots and slaves.

"Ever yours, very truly,
F. D."

The question of how to adapt English public school education to nervous and sensitive boys (often the highest and noblest subjects which that education has to deal with) ought to be looked at from every point of view.* I therefore add a few extracts from the letter of an old friend and schoolfellow, than whom no man in England is better able to speak on the subject:—

"What's the use of sorting the boys by ages, unless you do so by strength: and who are often the real bullies? The strong young dog of fourteen, while the victim may be one year or two years older . . . . I deny the fact about the bedrooms: there is trouble at times, and always will be; but so there is in nurseries;—my little girl, who looks like an angel, was bullying the smallest twice to-day.

"Bullying must be fought with in other ways,—by getting not only the Sixth to put it down, but the lower fellows to scorn it, and by eradicating mercilessly the incorrigible; and a master who really cares for his fellows is pretty sure to know instinctively who in his house are likely to be bullied, and, knowing a fellow to be really victimized and harassed, I am sure that he can stop it if he is resolved. There are many kinds of annoyance—sometimes of real cutting persecution for righteousness' sake—that he can't stop; no more could all the ushers in the world; but he can do very much in many ways to make the shafts of the wicked pointless.

"But though, for quite other reasons, I don't like to see very young boys launched at a public school, and though I don't deny (I wish I could) the existence from time to time of bullying, I deny its being a constant condition of school life, and still more, the possibility of meeting it by the means proposed. . . ."

"I don't wish to understate the amount of bullying that goes on, but my conviction is that it must be fought, like all school evils,

* For those who believe with me in public school education, the fact stated in the following extract from a note of Mr. G. De Bunsen, will be hailed with pleasure, especially now that our alliance with Prussia (the most natural and healthy European alliance for Protestant England) is likely to be so much stronger and deeper than heretofore. Speaking of this book, he says,—"The author is mistaken in saying that public schools, in the English sense, are peculiar to England. Schul Pforte (in the Prussian province of Saxony) is similar in antiquity and institutions. I like his book all the more for having been there for five years."

but it more than any, by *dynamics* rather than *mechanics*, by getting the fellows to respect themselves and one another, rather than by sitting by them with a thick stick."

And now, having broken my resolution never to write a Preface, there are just two or three things which I should like to say a word about.

Several persons, for whose judgment I have the highest respect, while saying very kind things about this book, have added, that the great fault of it is, "too much preaching;" but they hope I shall amend in this matter should I ever write again. Now this I most distinctly decline to do. Why, my whole object in writing at all was to get the chance of preaching! When a man comes to my time of life and has his bread to make, and very little time to spare, is it likely that he will spend almost the whole of his yearly vacation in writing a story just to amuse people? I think not. At any rate, I wouldn't do so myself.

The fact is, that I can scarcely ever call on one of my contemporaries now-a-days without running across a boy already at school, or just ready to go there, whose bright looks and supple limbs remind me of his father, and our first meeting in old times. I can scarcely keep the Latin Grammar out of my own house any longer; and the sight of sons, nephews, and godsons, playing trap-bat-and-ball, and reading "Robinson Crusoe," makes one ask one's self, whether there isn't something one would like to say to them before they take their first plunge into the stream of life, away from their own homes, or while they are yet shivering after the first plunge. My sole object in writing was to preach to boys: if ever I write again, it will be to preach to some other age. I can't see that a man has any business to write at all unless he has something which he thoroughly believes and wants to preach about. If he has this, and the chance of delivering himself of it, let him by all means put it in the shape in which it will be most likely to get a hearing; but let him never be so carried away as to forget that preaching is his object.

A black soldier, in a West Indian regiment, tied up to receive a couple of dozen, for drunkenness, cried out to his captain, who was exhorting him to sobriety in future,

"Cap'n, if you preachee, preachee; and if floggee, floggee; but no preachee and floggee too!" to which his captain might have replied, "No, Pompey, I must preach whenever I see a chance of being listened to, which I never did before; so now you must have it all together; and I hope you may remember some of it."

There is one point which has been made by several of the Reviewers who have noticed this book, and it is one which, as I am writing a Preface, I cannot pass over. They have stated that the Rugby undergraduates they remember at the Universities were "a solemn array," "boys turned into men before their time," "a semi-political, semi-sacerdotal fraternity," etc., giving the idea that Arnold turned out a set of young square-toes, who wore long-fingered black gloves and talked with a snuffle. I can only say that their acquaintance must have been limited and exceptional. For I am sure that every one who has had anything like large or continuous knowledge of boys brought up at Rugby from the times of which this book treats down to this day, will bear me out in saying, that the mark by which you may know them, is, their genial and hearty freshness and youthfulness of character. They lose nothing of the boy that is worth keeping, but build up the man upon it. This is their *differentia* as Rugby boys; and if they never had it, or have lost it, it must be, not because they were at Rugby, but in spite of their having been there; the stronger it is in them the more deeply you may be sure have they drunk of the spirit of their school.

But this boyishness in the highest sense is not incompatible with seriousness,—or earnestness, if you like the word better.* Quite the contrary. And I can well believe that casual observers, who have never been intimate with Rugby boys of the true stamp, but have met them only in the every-day society of the Universities, at wines, breakfast-parties, and the like, may have seen a good deal more of the serious or earnest side of their characters than of any other. For the more the boy was alive in them the less will they have

* "To him (Arnold) and his admirers we owe the substitution of the word 'earnest' for its predecessor 'serious.'"—*Edinburgh Review*, No. 217, p. 183.

been able to conceal their thoughts, or their opinion of what was taking place under their noses; and if the greater part of that didn't square with their notions of what was right, very likely they showed pretty clearly that it did not, at whatever risk of being taken for young prigs. They may be open to the charge of having old heads on young shoulders; I think they are, and always were, as long as I can remember; but so long as they have young hearts to keep head and shoulders in order, I, for one, must think this only a gain.

And what gave Rugby boys this character, and has enabled the School, I believe, to keep it to this day? I say fearlessly, —Arnold's teaching and example—above all, that part of it which has been, I will not say sneered at, but certainly not approved—his unwearied zeal in creating "moral thoughtfulness" in every boy with whom he came into personal contact.

He certainly *did* teach us—thank God for it!—that we could not cut our life into slices and say, "In this slice your actions are indifferent, and you needn't trouble your heads about them one way or another; but in this slice mind what you are about, for they are important"—a pretty muddle we should have been in had he done so. He taught us that in this wonderful world, no boy or man can tell which of his actions is indifferent and which not; that by a thoughtless word or look we may lead astray a brother for whom Christ died. He taught us that life is a whole, made up of actions and thoughts and longings, great and small, noble and ignoble; therefore the only true wisdom for boy or man is to bring the whole life into obedience to Him whose world we live in, and who has purchased us with His blood; and that whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we are to do all in His name and to His glory; in such teaching, faithfully, as it seems to me, following that of Paul of Tarsus, who was in the habit of meaning what he said, and who laid down this standard for every man and boy in his time. I think it lies with those who say that such teaching will not do for us now, to show why a teacher in the nineteenth century is to preach a lower standard than one in the first.

However, I won't say that the Reviewers have not a certain plausible ground for their dicta. For a short time after

a boy has taken up such a life as Arnold would have urged upon him, he has a hard time of it. He finds his judgment often at fault, his body and intellect running away with him into all sorts of pitfalls, and himself coming down with a crash. The more seriously he buckles to his work the oftener these mischances seem to happen; and in the dust of his tumbles and struggles, unless he is a very extraordinary boy, he may often be too severe on his comrades, may think he sees evil in things innocent, may give offence when he never meant it. At this stage of his career, I take it, our Reviewer comes across him, and, not looking below the surface (as a Reviewer ought to do), at once sets the poor boy down for a prig and a Pharisee, when in all likelihood he is one of the humblest and truest and most childlike of the Reviewer's acquaintance.

But let our Reviewer come across him again in a year or two, when the "thoughtful life" has become habitual to him, and fits him as easily as his skin; and, if he be honest, I think he will see cause to reconsider his judgment. For he will find the boy, grown into a man, enjoying every-day life as no man can who has not found out whence comes the capacity for enjoyment, and who is the Giver of the least of the good things of this world—humble, as no man can be who has not proved his own powerlessness to do right in the smallest act which he ever had to do—tolerant, as no man can be who does not live daily and hourly in the knowledge of how Perfect Love is for ever about his path, and bearing with and upholding him.