CHAPTER VI

THE time passed so quickly that the six people concerned in this chess-like exchange in their relations toward each other, felt moved to take their new positions by a power outside themselves. Even Camilla, who had been more steady in the experiment than any of the other parents, had a strange unreal feeling. Palmer seemed suddenly, since his outburst at the breaking of the news to him, very small and vulnerable. She woke in the night and had a mind to cry out when morning came, — "Let's put an end to this! Let us separate and be as we were!" But with daylight she was again caught up by the strange exhilaration of the experiment.

Robert pressed forward doggedly. If the thing had to be done, let it be done and over with. He had a talk with Dick Rendel about education. He had a talk with Palmer in which he was falsely cheerful and, to Palmer, appeared unfeeling. When he and Phyllis

were together there was a wordless sympathy between them.

Mark was the happiest of the six. He was swept along by his desire for adventure. But, at the last, when he came to say good-bye, he discovered something strange in the atmosphere. Dressed in his travelling clothes and followed by Humphrey, he had come into the morning-room where Phyllis and Dick waited. He was very excited but he spoke quietly.

"Good-bye, Mummie. Good-bye, Daddy."

He came toward them, his eyes bright, his nostrils a little dilated. Then he stopped.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

Dick laughed. "Well, you're going away, aren't you? Isn't that enough to make us look serious?"

"Well . . . I thought . . . you looked rather funny."

"We feel funny."

Phyllis took Mark's hand and held it against her cheek. Of her three boys he was her favourite. It was all wrong to have favourites among one's children, she knew, but there had always been something in Mark toward which her spirit moved in sympathy and understanding. She loved Clive who was his

father's favourite, and Humphrey who was her baby, but there was something different about Mark. There was something so steadfast, yet so finely poised in him. The knowledge that she had not actually given birth to him had made no difference. This parting for a year was going to be cruel — and what lay beyond, at the end of the year ?

" You will be careful about the water," she said. " You know you are inclined to be reckless. And, if you take a chill, go to bed. Will you promise ? "

" For the forty-second time, yes," said Mark. " Mummie, how hot your cheek is ! "

" Your hand is nice and cool." She drew it across her lips and kissed it.

" Try to remember at least a quarter of my admonitions," said Dick. " And be sure to write good long letters. We shall want to know all your impressions."

" Oh, yes."

" Write to me too," put in Humphrey.

" Humphrey will miss you terribly in the holidays," said Phyllis.

" He'll have Palmer."

" I don't much like him."

".Then you're a silly little ass."

" Humphrey will miss you. Won't you, Humphrey ? "

" Oh, I shall get on." He spoke huffily.

Mrs. Maltby bustled in. She tucked a clean handkerchief in Mark's pocket. " Now remember," she cautioned, " you're not to be greedy when you first go on board ship. If you are, you'll be seasick."

" All right, Nanny." He threw his arms about her and hugged her.

" The car's at the door ! " shouted Humphrey.

Phyllis clasped Mark to her breast.

" Good-bye, my darling."

" Good-bye, Mummie. And you'll write and tell me all the news, won't you ? "

" Indeed I shall."

" Good-bye, Mark," said Dick.

" Good-bye, Daddy." They gripped hands. A look passed between them. Once again Mark was conscious of something he could not understand.

Again Humphrey shouted and, in a moment, they all were in the hall in the confusion of leaving. Mark bent to kiss the top of the setter's head.

" Good-bye, old fellow," he said. " Be good till I come home again."

Palmer had been quite calm when he had said good-

bye to Camilla and Robert. Everything had moved so swiftly at the last that he had felt only bewildered excitement but none of the exhilaration Mark felt. Still, he was more reconciled to the change. At night he and Mark had lain awake in the four-poster talking of all they would do.

But now Mark was gone. His father and mother were gone. Captain and Mrs. Rendel had disappeared into the house. He and Humphrey were left together on the flagged terrace where cushions of Alpine plants spread above the crevices. The mellowed stone of the house with its many leaded-paned windows rose behind them and, away and away, the hills, the valleys and the woods.

Humphrey said, — " Well, they're gone."

" Sure," agreed Palmer.

" I wish I might have gone too."

" So do I."

Humphrey stared. " Didn't you want to stay ? "

" Not much."

" Then why did you ? "

" I had to."

" Oh." Humphrey looked at him curiously.

The air was full of bird song. Round white clouds were casting their shadows on the hills. All this was

so much a part of Humphrey's life that he was scarcely conscious of it. He said :

" I'm to have Mark's horse while he is away. Granny gave it to him on his last birthday. Shall we go to the stable ? "

" O.K."

Humphrey saddled and mounted the mare. He cantered round and round the paddock. It was rather nice having Mark out of the way. Now he would be able to do pretty much as he liked. But he trotted up to Palmer and said after a little :

" Want to try her ? "

" I don't mind." He spoke without enthusiasm.

" Of course, if you don't *want* to——"

" I'll try her."

Humphrey dismounted and Palmer got into the saddle. The mare was frisky. He galloped her round and round the paddock. Humphrey was laughing. He said, when Palmer trotted up to him :

" I say, who taught you to ride ? "

" I learned at camp."

" You ride like a stable-boy. But perhaps that's the way everyone rides in America."

" The hell we do ! " bawled Palmer. " We ride as good as any Englishman ! "

They settled down to lively recrimination.

Some cousins from Cirencester came to tea. There were three children, all girls. They were charmed by Palmer's way of talking. They crowded about him.

"Oh, Listen to Palmer!" they cried. "Isn't it lovely to hear him! Say some more, Palmer!"

Obligingly he gave a spirited display of his vocabulary. He made his voice as nasal as he could. For a while it amused him to send the pink-cheeked little girls into ecstasies of gigglings, but he tired of it and went away by himself. He felt lost, alone. He felt himself a foreigner to those about him. Even the way he spoke was a subject for laughter. He wondered if Mark would feel as strange in America. If your family was with you it was all right, but being alone made everything different.

He held his lips stiff and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He trotted across the meadows down to the brook. The air was thrilling with joyful sounds, the gurgling of the stream, the call of the cuckoo, the singing of a lark. The path was moss-grown and soft beneath the feet. Where a tree had fallen and rotted, a mass of glowing violets had sprung from its trunk. He found a throng of marsh marigolds by a bend of the stream and beyond them a little brood of dabchicks

with their mother. But he was alone.

When night came he crept far down beneath the bed-clothes, pulling them tightly over his head, In this shelter he felt better. After a while he slept.

The next day Mrs. Maltby was in a bustle getting Humphrey ready for school. His trunk was set in the middle of the nursery and she was constantly trudging between it and his bedroom. Humphrey was the centre of interest. No one paid much attention to Palmer. The Rendels thought it best to let him settle down in his own way. They thought it was better to ignore him a little than to fuss over him. But he felt lonesome. "I'm lonesome," he said to himself. "I'm lonesome. I wonder what they're going to do with me."

Then Humphrey was gone to his preparatory school. In two days Clive would leave for Eton. He called Palmer into the library and said :

"Look here, I'm going to try to find out how much Latin you know. From what your father says I imagine you will never pass the exam. for Eton without special coaching."

He sat down by the leather-covered table, looking rather severe. Palmer grew hot all over.

"Gee," he thought, "am I in a spot ?."

He fixed his eyes apprehensively on Clive's handsome face.

Clive handed him an open book and pointed.

"Now," he said, "let's hear you construe this."

Palmer simply couldn't. Clive's eyebrows went up. He chose a passage near the beginning. "Then try this," he said.

Palmer floundered feebly through half a paragraph.

Clive groaned. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know any boy of your age existed who knew so little Latin. You'll never get into Eton without special coaching. Are you good in other subjects? Maths, for instance."

"I've always been near the top of my grades."

"Your grade! What's that?"

"You call them forms."

"I see. Well, if you're good in other things we may be able to cram you in Latin. Do you know any English history?"

"Only about George III. And I've read stories about Robin Hood and King Arthur and his Knights."

Clive stared, then laughed good-humouredly.

"Well, I'll tell my governor and see what he thinks. I know of a crammer in Malvern."

The result was that Dick Rendel made a trunk call

to Malvern. After a short conversation he told Phyllis that he had arranged to take the boy there the next day. She answered indifferently :

" Very well. I shall see that his things are ready."

" Really, Phil," he returned, with some exasperation, " I think you might take a little interest in the boy."

" You started all this."

" You agreed."

" It was against my will."

" He's your son as much as mine."

" I find nothing in him that makes me feel the relationship."

" How can you — if you don't try ? "

" I do try."

" You have not had a single talk with him alone."

" Give me time ! " she broke out. " Good heavens, I'm just trying to get used to giving up Mark ! "

" That's only temporary, Phyllis. You will have him back again."

She wrung her fingers together.

" I wonder."

He came to her and kissed her.

" Look here, darling — this affair has made you nervy and depressed. It's not surprising. But you'll

feel different in a little while. I'll send him to Malvern for a term. Then we can get acquainted with him in the holidays. He seems quite a nice kid. . . . I think he's feeling pretty homesick."

"Oh, that woman!" she broke out again. "How could she do such a thing to us! I know her sort. All that talk about truth is rubbish. What she is after is sensation. She doesn't care what she does to her child or to ours — so long as she has excitement and a sense of power."

"When you say *her* child and *ours*, Phyllis," he asked, with a meaning look, "which do you mean?"

Her eyes filled with burning tears. "I don't know," she whispered. "Either, I suppose."

He spoke with forced cheerfulness. "Well, we'll see what we can make of the little codger. As for Mark, he will have a great experience. Don't imagine that I have in any sense given him up. I only feel——"

"Oh, I know, I know." She moved from him and went to the window. Through it she could see Palmer, perched on the wall beside the terrace, a small, somewhat disconsolate figure.

The next day he set out with Dick Rendel for Malvern. His trunk was in the back of the car and Mrs. Maltby had given him a package containing a

cake, some tarts and six bananas. They sped along the smooth road among the hills. They went through greystone villages, past ancient ivy-covered churches into open, level country. Dick talked a good deal, trying to draw Palmer out. Palmer lost some of his shyness but somehow he could not feel quite at his ease. His answers puzzled Dick Rendel. Sometimes he seemed even younger than Humphrey. At other times there was a startling shrewdness in him, most noticeable when the question of money came up. He appeared very conscious of its value and showed a keen desire to acquire it with as little fatigue to himself as possible. To Mark money was a matter of his weekly allowance and what windfalls came his way from godparents or grandmothers. Palmer seemed more conscious of the future than Mark was. He spoke like a grandfather of what a queer place the world was becoming but, when it came to world affairs, his knowledge was slight as compared to Mark's.

Still, Dick thought, the drive had not been without fruit. He was a little nearer this strange boy whom he had begot, who looked at him with eyes so like Phyllis'.

It was late afternoon when they neared Malvern. First they glimpsed the hills in the distance, then lost

them. For a time they drove past park-lands and orchards and commons. Then suddenly, after a bend in the road, the hills loomed before them stark, like prehistoric animals, raising their humps against the sky. Close in their shadow lay Malvern, the cream-coloured houses with their iron balconies and square roofs making it look like a Continental town. These hills had none of the roundness of the Cotswolds, no wooded valleys or bright streams. They were austere, immutable, bringing twilight to Malvern long before its time.

"Now there are some hills for you," said Dick Rendel cheerfully. "You'll have some fine walks over them. When you get to the top you can look right across to Wales and the Black Mountains."

Palmer regarded the hills pessimistically. He didn't like the looks of them at all. He thought, — "Gosh, they're going to be a headache!"

When the car stopped he took one end of his trunk and they set it down at the gate of a square slate-coloured house behind a white brick wall. There was a wrought-iron gate in the wall. They passed through it along a brick walk and Dick tapped on an iron knocker The door was at once opened by the tutor himself. He greeted them with a wide

smile. Palmer looked on while the two men shook hands. Then Dick introduced him to Mr. Cutler.

Palmer's hand was limp. Mr. Cutler's was even limper. Their two hands fell apart after a depressing contact. But Mr. Cutler still smiled.

"Come in," he said. "We are waiting tea for you, and the other boys are eager to meet the young visitor from America."

If the hills, thought Palmer, were a headache, what was the tutor? Gee, am I in a spot? he thought. He slunk into the dining-room behind the two men. A tall woman and two youths and a small boy were already there. The tutor introduced the woman as Mrs. Cutler. She had a thin face, with very red cheeks, black hair which she wore in a Dutch cut, and long earrings. She gripped Palmer's hand in a bony clasp and asked him how he was enjoying England.

"It's swell."

"And how do you think you will like being at school here?"

"It'll be swell."

She laughed merrily. She turned to the two youths.

"Isn't he quaint?" she exclaimed.

They agreed that he was. Then Mrs. Cutler turned

to the small boy. "This is Corbold," she said. "You two must be the greatest of friends."

Corbold who was ten, very small and thin, with mouse-coloured hair and large grey eyes, bowed gravely.

"Now for tea!" cried Mrs. Cutler. "You must be starving after your long motor drive. Captain Rendel, will you sit here? And I'm sure the two small people will want to sit together."

They sat down at the table. On it was a large plate of thick bread and butter, a large plate of thin currant loaf, a plum-cake, a sponge-cake, a plate of chocolate biscuits, a pot of blackberry jam and a jar of honey.

"We are having a special tea in your honour, Wylde," said Mrs. Cutler. "I must warn you that we don't always live so lavishly. Do we, Evans?" She turned to the dark, sharp-featured youth.

"No, indeed," he agreed, laying two slices of currant loaf face to face and cutting them into convenient squares.

Perhaps there had been too much heartiness in his tone, perhaps she disapproved of his table manners, at any rate she gave him a chilly glance.

"How do you take your tea?" she asked Palmer.

"I don't take it," he answered. "I take milk."

Her face fell, then she laughed gaily. "Of course, you shall have milk." She rang a silver bell that stood on the table and a round-shouldered, round-eyed maid appeared.

"Effie," said Mrs. Cutler, "bring Master Wylde a mug of milk. Bring that pretty little mug with the picture of the Abbey on the side."

The mug was indeed pretty and indeed little.

Palmer disposed of the milk in three mouthfuls. Mrs. Cutler pressed him to have more of the currant loaf.

"I hope you are enjoying your tea," she said.

"It's swell," he answered.

As he ate he listened to Captain Rendel and Mr. Cutler discussing his studies. Mr. Cutler talked as though his life depended on how much Latin and English history he could cram into Palmer.

As he said good-bye to him at the door, Dick Rendel bent over Palmer and said, — "I hope everything here will be all right, old man. Work hard and you'll be able to take a good place in your form. Write and let me know how you get on."

He was gone. Palmer went upstairs to the room he was to share with Corbold. His trunk had already

been unpacked, his clothes hung up or neatly laid in the chest of drawers. The room had once been large but was now divided into two by matchboarding which did not quite reach the ceiling.

"Who sleeps on the other side of that?" Palmer asked Corbold.

"Ames," answered Corbold, and added, — "I wish he didn't."

"So do I. It's a nuisance. Where does Evans sleep?"

"Across the passage. He studies all the time. He's Welsh. Ames wouldn't study at all if Mr. Cutler didn't make him. He's failed in his matric, twice. His father says if he fails next term he must find a job."

Outside it was beginning to rain. It had turned cold and a chill damp air came in at the open window. Palmer closed it with a bang.

"Suffering cats," he said, "this place would freeze a brass monkey!"

"It is pretty cold," agreed Corbold. "But it's nothing to what it was in the winter. You should have seen my chilblains."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last September. You see, my parents live

in India. My father is an officer. My mother came to England to see me last summer."

"Oh," said Palmer, looking him over curiously. There was something odd and lonely about little Corbold. "Then I guess you don't often see your folks."

"I haven't seen my father since I was five. When my mother came last summer I was in a prep school. My mother wanted to see me alone at the very first. So they sent her to the form-room where I was. But there were fifteen of us there and she didn't know which was me, and I didn't recognize her."

"And she hadn't seen you since you were five?"

"No. When they brought me to England I lived in a nursery school till I was eight. Then I went to the prep school. I wasn't very well. So I had my tonsils out and then I got a heart condition and so they sent me here where I'll be quiet and have good care." He moved his eyes from Palmer's face to his own hands. He began to touch the fingers of his left hand with the forefinger of his right as though he were counting them. He went over them several times in this way.

"What do we do now?" asked Palmer.

"We have prep for tomorrow, but I thought you'd like to see our room."

"How do you like it here?" asked Palmer.

Corbold smiled. "Well, I think it's pretty poisonous. But Mr. Cutler is a good crammer. If you've any brains at all he'll stuff them with knowledge for you. He says I haven't any, so it's lucky for me I'm delicate, because he often longs to take the hide off me."

A bell sounded from below.

In a classroom where there were several desks and a table they found Mr. Cutler waiting. He greeted Palmer with toothy anticipation.

"Now," he said, "we'll see what this young fellow knows." He frowned at Corbold. "Remember," he said, "you have fifty lines to do."

When Mr. Cutler was finished with him Palmer felt that he had been mentally turned inside-out. But he was not so discouraged as he had expected to be. Mr. Cutler had been prepared to find him backward in certain subjects. In some, he seemed quite pleased with him. He beamed at Palmer.

"We will do it," he said. "It will be quite a task but we will do it."

Yet Palmer had never felt more depressed than when he climbed the two flights of stairs to his room. Corbold was already there, undressing. He began

to talk at once, glad of Palmer's company.

"It's jolly nice to have someone to talk to," he said. "Ever since I came here I've never had anyone to talk to. Do you like being here or do you wish you were home with your mother?"

"I guess I'd sooner be home."

"So should I. I'm always remembering India, even though I was only five when I left. Have you brothers and sisters?"

"Two sisters in America."

"I have a sister. She's seventeen. She was twelve when my mother brought us to England. She was a nice little girl then. But what do you suppose? When Mummie met her again, last summer, Barbara had grown into just the sort of girl Mummie can't bear. They simply did not hit it off."

Palmer stared. "Didn't they like each other?"

"No, Mummie told me how disappointed she was in Barbara. And Barbara had imagined Mummie as much nicer."

"Was your mother disappointed in you?"

Corbold smiled happily. "Oh, no, we got along famously together. We went to Switzerland. The only thing about me that disappointed Mummie was my health."

Palmer looked at his thin little body. "You are awful skinny," he said. "Do they give you enough to eat?"

"Yes. But the food's beastly. You can't judge by tonight's tea."

"I have a cake in that box, and some tarts and bananas. Like some?"

"You bet I should."

Palmer opened the box. They cut the cake with a ruler. Palmer could not eat much, but Corbold, in a kind of nervous greed, devoured a large slice, two tarts and a banana.

The window in the bathroom stood wide open and the rain was drifting in. Before he closed it, Palmer stood looking up at the hills. He knew he was looking at them, because he could see lights twinkling high up. There was no hot water. The two towels were worn thin and both had been used. When he went back to the bedroom, Corbold was already in bed. He exclaimed:

"You'd better hurry up. There'll be trouble if Ames comes up and finds our light burning."

"Huh," said Palmer scornfully. But his morale was weak. He did not feel ready for an encounter with Ames.

Corbold was hopping out of bed again. "I forgot to say my prayers," he exclaimed.

He knelt by the bed and began to gabble a prayer. At first he just gabbled, as though to get finished in a hurry, then he began to cry. It was just a soft sniffling but it made Palmer uncomfortable. He looked the other way till he heard Corbold get into bed, then he glanced uneasily at him. Corbold was sitting up in bed. He was touching his fingers in that odd way, as though he were counting them.

"Why do you do that?" asked Palmer.

Corbold gave a sly look. "I don't know. I've been doing it a long time. I began it in India." But he shut his hands and thrust them beneath the bedclothes. Then he said, — "It's funny, Wylde, but saying my prayers always makes me cry. It doesn't really matter."

"Why do you say them, then?"

"I promised my mother I would. And I want to, because I've special things to ask, you know."

Palmer grunted. He didn't know what to say. He got into his narrow bed that stood beside Corbold's and drew the coverings up to his chin. The coverings seemed very thin. It was dark and silent save for the gurgling of a gutter just outside.

"Good night, Corbold," said Palmer.

After a little Corbold said, — "I wish you'd call me David. I haven't anyone who calls me David in this house."

"O.K., David. And you call me Palmer."

At first Palmer thought that the sobbing sound came from the eave. Then he discovered that Corbold was crying again. He lay feeling miserable, wondering what to do, when he heard Ames coming up the stairs. A light flashed above the partition. He could hear Ames throw his books on the table, pull up a chair and strike a match. Evidently he was settling down to smoke and study. Palmer wondered what Ames would do if he heard Corbold crying. He soon found out. Ames rapped sharply on the partition and called:

"Stop that blubbing in there!"

There was dead silence for a few moments, then Corbold began to cry more loudly than he had before and on an hysterical note. Palmer went hot all over.

In the next room the chair was pushed back. Ames sprang to his feet and came lightly and quickly to Corbold's bedside. He switched on the light. Palmer intensely disliked his fat face and small cruel eyes. Ames jerked the bed-coverings from Corbold, who

began to double himself up. However, Ames held him still with a hand on the back of his neck. With the other hand he drew down the trousers of Corbold's pyjamas and smacked him repeatedly with a hair-brush he had brought with him.

Petrified, Palmer looked on. He saw Corbold's thin little buttocks grow scarlet, then an ugly, dark red.

"Now," said Ames, "if I have to come in here again I'll take the other side of the brush to you."

He turned to Palmer. "This goes on all the time," he said. "I can't study. I haven't the life of a dog. Don't you mention this to Cutler." He went back to his room.

Palmer's heart was beating fast. There had been something especially vicious in the way Ames had beaten Corbold. Before he left he had turned out the light. Palmer could hear Corbold getting under the blankets — crying very softly, then ceasing. He heard Evans go into Ames' room and the two talk together in low tones. Then he fell fast asleep.

He did not stir until morning, when a loud bell woke him from sleep. Through the window he could see the great hump of a hill, purple against the clear blue sky. The air that came in was moist and sweet.

He looked anxiously at Corbold, who had just opened his eyes.

"Hey, David," he said, "you awake?"

Corbold smiled back at him. As they dressed they made no reference to what had happened the night before. The Cutlers the two youths and the two small boys, gathered round the table for breakfast.

Mr. Cutler's eyes glinted in anticipation of the day's work. He was immaculate, in contrast to the untidy youths. Evans' beard had begun to grow but apparently he had not yet noticed it. There was no cream or fruit juice on the table but the pretty little mug was at Palmer's place, filled to the brim with bluish milk.

Mrs. Cutler beamed at him. "You see," she said, "I remember your tastes."

"Oh, yeah?" said Palmer.

He looked across the table at Corbold, eating thick porridge with thin milk. He had dark shadows under his eyes. Palmer wondered if the Cutlers had heard anything of the crying and whacking the night before. He noticed that neither of them looked at Corbold or spoke to him. He believed they knew all about it and didn't care. After breakfast, work began.

With ruthless zeal Mr. Cutler went from one to

another of his pupils, cramming each in his turn. He went in order of age, beginning with the Welshman, who received him with an equally fierce desire for knowledge. He ended with Corbold, on whom he poured irritation he had collected on the way. Corbold got so excited that he could not take in anything and his answers often consisted of, — "Yes, sir — please, sir — I know — just a minute, sir — just a minute — please, sir, I knew just a minute ago."

Palmer had gone to a very modern school where he had had a good deal of time for play. He found the day long and exacting. He was tired at the end. Then came a pleasant surprise. The boys were allowed to go where they liked about the town. Even the hills were not out of bounds. If they chose to buy their tea in a tea-shop, so much the better. Corbold said that Ames often did this but Evans and himself never. He was too shy to go alone to a tea-shop.

"But I'll go if you'll come with me, Palmer," he said. "I have plenty of money."

"The hell I will," said Palmer. "You'll come with me."

Banging the gate behind them they felt suddenly hilarious. They could see Ames' lumpish figure ahead of them plodding toward Church Street. It was

sunny and warm but already the dark hills were casting their first shadow over the town. The street went steeply up to the Terrace where Corbold said the best tea-shops were. Half-way up a gipsy woman with bright brown eyes and a gay scarf over her head was selling bunches of mimosa. Its exotic scent filled the air. Palmer noticed her buttoned boots and her bare toes right out on the pavement. The street was full of people at this hour and motor-cars and lorries were crowding round the steep bend that led to the Terrace.

Up there Palmer stopped to stare at the ancient Foley Arms where the gilded lion and unicorn reared themselves above the low doorway. They found a tea-shop unpolluted by the presence of Ames, and Palmer ordered a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a chocolate milk-shake and a pineapple sundae with a marshmallow sauce.

But the waitress had nothing more complicated than vanilla ice-cream. Palmer astonished her by his capacity for this. Corbold exclaimed :

" It's great fun having you here, Palmer. It makes me feel quite different. I don't think I shall mind even that beast's lickings now." His eyes were bright with happiness.

Palmer glowered. "I'd like to take that lousy throw-back for a ride," he said. "Why do you stand it? Why don't you complain?"

"I think Cutler knows."

"Then tell Mrs. Cutler."

"I think she knows too. I don't think they like to offend Ames. Besides, they don't much like me."

"Then why don't you write and tell your folks?"

Corbold reddened, then he said, — "Well, you see, my mother thought she'd found a jolly good place for me here and if I told her about Ames she'd begin worrying all over again."

Palmer scowled. "Gosh, I hate that guy!" he said. "I'd bust a gut laughing if I saw him run over by an army truck."

"So should I," agreed Corbold. "I'd bust a gut laughing if I saw him skinned alive."

They became so hilarious over their ice-cream that people stared at them.

This hatred for Ames drew them even closer together. Palmer sometimes found it hard to come down to the level of the ten-year-old, but on the other hand there was always that admiring audience for whatever he did. Saturday was the same as other days, but on Sunday after service in the Abbey Church

they were free. They spent the day in the hills, running along the narrow paths that wound their way through gorse and bracken. The hills unfolded themselves to the far purple horizon of Wales. Below gleamed the reservoir like a little blue lake. Two horsemen ambled along the paths and a flock of sheep bundled themselves out of the boys' way. Eastward the plain lay, sunning itself. Only a few white clouds drew their shadows across the land.

The boys lay on a warm slope to eat their lunch. They had supplemented what had been given them by purchases of the afternoon before. Corbold looked like a different boy with his cheeks red and his teeth showing in laughter. They talked of various ways by which they would like to do in Ames. The night before, Palmer had been witness to another scene that had filled him with a cold anger.

Side by side they lay, their bodies supple as young lambs, their eyes on the hill opposite which rose, in its prehistoric bareness, out of a nest of apple blossoms from the orchard at its base. But their thoughts were of the tortures to which they would like to subject Ames. Palmer had to confess that Corbold was the best at thinking them up. In truth Corbold made him open his eyes at the ingenuity of them. At the

thought of some especially good one they would roll on the hillside in joy.

There was no way of locking the door of their room, but two nights later, before Ames came upstairs, they dragged their washing-stand across the door and, against the partition, the chest of drawers. They lay whispering, suffocated by suppressed laughter, their hearts thudding against their ribs. It seemed a long time before Ames' heavy step sounded on the stair. He went into Evans' room for a while. Then he came slowly into his own and turned on the light. Corbold was giggling audibly.

"Shut up!" warned Palmer in a fierce whisper.

Half dead from excitement, Corbold controlled himself. They heard Ames settle down to study.

"Now," whispered Palmer.

They crept out of bed.

"Go ahead," ordered Palmer.

Corbold tried to cry but could only giggle.

"I can't."

"You've gotta cry!"

"I can't."

"Then you've got to pretend to."

But Corbold could produce nothing more than an hysterical squeak. Palmer clapped his hand over the

little boy's mouth. Then he himself began to give a very good imitation of Corbold's weeping. Corbold stopped giggling and listened, entranced.

Ames' voice came from beyond the partition.

"Shut up, in there," he growled.

The two boys stealthily mounted the chest of drawers. Its top was mounded with their ammunition. They looked over the partition. Ames' back was turned to them. His feet were on a chair. An open box of chocolates was at his side. Palmer gave a really horrible howl. Ames sprang up.

"Take that, you lousy throw-back!" said Palmer. He hurled a boot at Ames' head. "Give him both barrels, David!"

Corbold followed with another boot. They threw brushes, soap-dishes, a can of water and a dozen cooking eggs which Palmer had that day bought, in quick succession. For a moment Ames was dazed. He had got a hard blow in the eye. Then he recovered himself and ran into the passage to the boys' door. The washing-stand was wedged between it and the foot of Palmer's bed. Ames could not open it.

He tore back to his own room, mounted his chair and prepared to climb over the partition. Palmer

switched off the light. As Ames came down on one side of the partition the two small boys scrambled over it and dropped into Ames' room. In terror they fled from it and down the stairs. Corbold was shrieking. The Cutlers came out of their bedroom. Mrs. Cutler was wrapped in a bath-square.

"Oh, Mr. Cutler, save us!" cried Palmer. "That big guy up there is trying to kill us! He's gone berserk!"

Mrs. Cutler screamed and Mr. Cutler looked apprehensively up the stairway. Horrible thumpings and bumpings came from above. Then Ames appeared. "If you don't move those two little bastards to another room, I shall leave,' he shouted. One of his eyes was closed and his nose was bleeding. Mr. Cutler was relieved. He said sternly:

"I cannot have such language in my house. You will apologize at once to my wife."

"Sorry," muttered Ames, and flung back to his room. His door banged.

The Welshman had never looked up from his books but his black brows made a fine bridge above his nose as he forced himself to concentrate in spite of the noise.

The next day the belongings of the two boys were

carried down to a room on the same floor as the Cutlers. Little Corbold was no longer ill-treated by Ames. His companionship with Palmer, their walks on the hills, made a happy boy of him. By degrees he ceased to cry when he said his prayers. In truth, he gabbled them as fast as he could, for he was thinking of the promised pillow-fight with Palmer.

Palmer went through the days with endurance. The weeks piled up behind him and the future stretched in a confused fog ahead. Sometimes he wondered if ever he would see his own home again. He had letters from Mark telling of the good time he was having there, and these made him feel more cast-off than ever. He had been used to a school where lessons were made easy, where the entertainment of the pupils was one of the principal preoccupations of the staff. Mr. Cutler cared for nothing but learning. He left no stone in Palmer's mental equipment unturned. Palmer himself was surprised at how fast he was learning.

Camilla's letters brought Boston so close to him, he felt he could put out his hand and touch it. He would shut his eyes and run across Beacon Street on to the Common. He would look in at the windows of Schwartz's store and watch doughnuts being cooked. He would stand by the river and watch the Harvard

crews practising. He dared not let himself think long about Camilla.

Robert wrote regularly too, but his letters were not so vivid. He ended each one by some such remark as, — " Don't have such a good time that you forget us."

Palmer would set his jaw. " Hey, Boss," he would growl, " what you givin' us ? As though I could ever forget you ! "

His own letters home were brief and non-committal. They sounded almost as though he were forgetting.