

Trubshaw's Folly

John Everett

Copyright © 2015 John Everett
All rights reserved.

ISBN:1508430764

ISBN-13:978-1508430766

Alas, regardless of their doom,

The little victims play!

Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College

Thomas Gray

PREFACE

Everything here is pure invention. There is no connection between any name used and any real person.

Similarly there is no intention, in describing the school which is the setting of this story, to depict any real school, past or present.

Readers will find it helpful if they have already read Trubshaw's Ghost. It is possible, however, to read this story without having done so. This book is the second in the series, and more are planned.

My other books are to be found at the website <http://johneverettbooks.co.uk> and this site holds my email as well.

John Everett

(February 2015)

Easton

It was now my second term as a nineteen-year-old schoolmaster at Melton Hall Preparatory School for Boys.

You are right to wonder how one can be a schoolmaster at so young an age. The reason is simply that at a school like this the headmaster can employ whomever he wishes to, qualified or not. As the war had ended only five years ago, the country still needed a large army, and so every eighteen-year-old was liable for National Service.

I had applied for a place at the smallest college in Cambridge in two years' time, and had been granted that place. This would have suited me perfectly, with two years' National Service to do.

Then I found that the army had got their medicals all muddled, and that I was actually excused my service time. But it proved to be impossible for the college to vary their admissions, so I had to find something to do for two years.

Following my father's advice I had looked

for a job at a prep school, and that is how I ended up here. I am officially in charge of all games, and I teach a class of the youngest boys, all eight years of age at the beginning of the school year.

I really needed lots of help to get the hang of teaching boys of this age, and the Headmaster, Mr. Walker, supplied that admirably. Teaching the older boys to play a decent game of rugby was a joy, and although I was effectively on duty full time, seven days a week, I have to admit that I was enjoying my life as a young and very inexperienced schoolmaster.

I had spent the Christmas holidays at home with my family, as my salary was a pittance, little more than pocket money. It was all right in term time, as I was fed and accommodated by the school. And with nothing to spend my money on during term time, the lack of funds was tolerable.

The boys were largely kind enough to treat me as if I was a real schoolmaster, but with my colleagues it was rather a different matter.

Our staff common room had comfortable seats for five men, and I was the displaced sixth person. If any boy came to the door, on which was the notice 'Knock and Wait', I was expected, as the junior member of the staff, to go and see who it was and what they wanted.

The other 'down' of the staff room was the barrage of tobacco smoke. Only one of my five colleagues, the Chaplain, did not smoke a pipe. The other four smoked continually, whenever they were in our common room, since it would have been wrong to smoke in the classrooms.

During my first term there, the common room chat had often focused on an eleven year old new boy, by name of Trubshaw. Usually boys joined the school at the age of eight, and of course moved on to their senior school at thirteen or fourteen. But Trubshaw had been educated at home by his father, a Cambridge professor. His father apparently believed in learning but not teaching, but also recognised that his son needed the social education of mixing with boys of his own age.

Trubshaw had proved to be something of a mixed blessing. He was incredibly smart. Within weeks, in our midst, he had been given the nickname 'Trouble' by some of us. The best example of his acute mind was related to us by the Maths teacher, Mr. Peale. He told us how he had given the Fourth Form a mental arithmetic exercise. They were to add up in their minds all the numbers from one to one-hundred. They were forbidden to write down anything until they could write down the answer. I know this would have given me a huge problem. How to keep track of where you were in the exercise as you added the next number to the total in your mind. Anyway, as Peale narrated the incident, within a few seconds Trouble had written something down, and Peale had naturally thought he was disobeying the instruction not to write down any preliminary numbers. He had rebuked him for disobedience, only to be told that the boy had actually written down the full total. And, entirely to Peale's surprise, it was the right answer.

We all asked Peale to explain how he had

done this. The answer was simple enough. The boy had not added up the numbers in sequence. He had divided them all into pairs: one plus ninety-nine, two plus ninety-eight, three plus ninety-seven, and so on up to forty-nine plus fifty-one. So forty-nine hundreds, plus the one-hundred itself, giving an easy fix at five thousand, plus the missing fifty, provides a quick and easy total of five thousand and fifty. Even I could see that once you had spotted the simple short-cut, you could easily get the answer in a few seconds.

What could we simple folk do with an eleven year old mind like this? And how could we stretch him adequately?

The discussion had reached the conclusion that the Chaplain would take him for extra work, and teach him, all on his own, New Testament Greek. Apparently the boy's father had already let the boy learn Latin by simply giving him the Latin text of St. John's gospel, a Latin dictionary and grammar book, and let him work out the rest.

The Chaplain is in many ways the boy's

biggest defender. He is not as old as the other teachers, and was an army chaplain during the war. He is responsible for Latin as well as, rather obviously, Scripture. He spends a great deal of time alone with the boy, giving him these extra lessons, and I guess they talk a great deal more about issues outside the mere learning of Greek.

Marsden, who teaches French, says he is sure that Trouble is the only boy who actually understands him. His teaching method is to say nothing, ever, in English to the boys. He converses continually in French. According to Marsden, Trouble has the advantage of frequent holidays in France, and that is how he excels.

Newberry, who teaches English, says that Trubshaw is the only responsive member of his English lessons, and never refers to him as Trouble. Newberry likes to present his boys with lots of poetry, and apparently only Trubshaw ever shows any pleasure in the poems Newberry offers them.

The final member of the staff room quartet of older men, and they are all in the late fifties or early sixties, is Mitchell, and

he teaches History and Geography. He is rather taciturn, and I have not yet heard very much from him about Trubshaw. The only clue I have is that he does not refer to him as Trouble.

Mitchell

I must admit that when the Headmaster first told us about this eleven year old new boy called Trubshaw I was worried about how much history the boy might already know. I need not have worried. His father had simply supplied him with history books. So he had already read Charlotte Yonge's 'Young Folks' History of England' and the same author's history of Greece and Rome.

"What did you think of them?" I had asked him.

"Well, sir, my father was a bit critical of Charlotte Yonge for having too many built in moral judgments. He said history was not like this. But he said I would be getting a good summary of the main drift of events from these books, so it was a worthwhile start for me."

I must admit I had read none of these books. As a History graduate, admittedly rather a long time ago, I had read much more advanced and detailed books than would be suitable for a boy of his age. Now

that I was teaching history to boys, I was beginning to be curious about books that were intended for that level.

During the Christmas break I had managed to get all three of Charlotte Yonge's books at second-hand bookshops, and suddenly realised what a treasure they were. Instead of struggling to make history intelligible to young minds by my own summaries, and I had notebooks full of these, I could use these ready-made summaries instead. Needless to say, I would have to edit the presentations somewhat. For a start, Yonge's history of Greece spends a long time with all the Greek mythology and background of semi-historical heroes. And she even begins by describing the ancient Greeks as 'childlike'. Obviously I would skip past all this stuff if I was going to present the real history of Greece. So I decided that when I did Greek history I would start with her general chapter about politics and religion, and then on to the foundation of Sparta. Either I would dictate extracts for them to write in their exercise books, or I would read out a

chapter, having told the boys that they would have to listen very carefully, as they would have to write a short summary in their own words when I had finished. Before reading the chapter I would put the key personal and geographical names on the board, as they could not be expected to get their spelling right from just listening, and it would give them an outline for their précis. The only downside of this teaching method would be the marking I would have, so I would insist in the précis being no more than one page long in their exercise books.

Understandably, I hope, I had said nothing of this to young Trubshaw, though I privately recognised my debt to him. I decided that starting immediately I would work through the 'Young Folks' History of Greece' with the Fourth Form. Only Trubshaw would recognise the source. Since these were the books his father recommended, he might even approve. How odd, I thought, to be looking for approval from an eleven-year-old.

It would be difficult to explain how my

newly found teaching method owed its inspiration to this new pupil, so I rather tended to stay out of the staff common room discussions of the boy some of my colleagues referred to as Trouble. I thought of him simply as a bright young lad with, as I soon found, an excellent memory.

Wetherill

My young life seems to have been changed by the arrival of a new boy at the beginning of this term, and for the first time in my life I have a friend the same age as me. I mainly have the Chaplain to thank for this, since he deputed me to look after this new boy. There was a good reason for this. Trubshaw had not been to any school before, even though he was eleven years old. As Trubshaw explained to me: "My father believes in learning but not in teaching. So he just fed me books, once I had learnt to read, and let me get on with it."

You might think this a bit daft, but in Trubshaw's case it seems to have worked. He taught himself Latin by just reading the gospel of John in Latin with only a grammar book and a dictionary. The Chaplain, who takes us for Latin as well as Scripture, has no doubt about the method and is now giving Trubs (as I call him) extra lessons. Trubs is learning Greek (I ask you!) by reading the gospel of Mark,

using the same resources: just a grammar book and a dictionary.

It was the Chaplain who asked me to look after Trubshaw when he arrived, to show him the ropes and all that. I rather think he chose me for this task because he knows I have no friends here. You see, I am hopeless at games, especially rugby, which is a very silly way of getting regularly hurt. So all the other boys in the Fourth Form think I am a wimp, and treat me as an outcast.

Trubshaw is an absolute boffin. At first one or two of us thought badly of someone being so brainy, and that might have led to trouble for Trubs. But he quickly showed how useful it is for us to have a brainbox in our midst. He could show us how to do difficult mathematics stuff, and he regularly asked the teachers awkward questions. This is the best bit. Our teachers are usually pompous, but Trubs knows how to ask the really tricky questions, and that puts them on the back foot. He is a far better mathematician than our Maths teacher, Copper, we suspect. Trubs caught him out one day by getting the answer to a

fiendish mental arithmetic test in seconds rather than in virtually a whole lesson, and this gave us all a welcome break.

So we all cherish having a boffin in our midst, and Trubs never brags about being brainy, just gets on with life in his own sweet way. The teachers all seem to be wary of him, and give him extra work. He just laps this up, as if it were some sort of challenge.

Near the end of the autumn term I had a brainwave. I decided I would ask my folk if Trubs could come and stay with us for the Christmas holiday. You see, not only do I have no friends here at school, apart from Trubs now, but I have no friends at home either. Sad, isn't it?

I suppose the reason is that my folks own a hotel on the sea front of Eastbourne. So with hotels on either side of where I live, how can I have neighbours who have boys the same age as me? Even the buildings that are not hotels are full of flats, with just old retired people living in them. So where can I find friends?

The good news is that my folks agreed

that we could have Trubs for the Christmas holiday, and when Trubs' father was asked he agreed too. And he suggested that I spent the Easter hols with him and Trubs, where they live in Cambridge. Trubs' father is a professor there. It looks like Trubs has inherited his father's brains, and Trubs has not got a mother, so a bit of extra company would be good for him too.

We had a good time together. Eastbourne is a bit odd in the middle of winter, with most of the usual entertainment places closed. But wrapped up well a stroll along the beach is very refreshing. There are even some locals who go swimming in the sea in the middle of winter. It is good fun to watch them shivering with cold. The world is full of strange people.

Chaplain

As I looked back on the Autumn term during the Christmas holiday, I reflected on the most important event in my whole teaching career so far, all five years of it. I now had responsibility for the most challenging young pupil I had ever met, and I spent a pleasant half hour each day except Sunday teaching him New Testament Greek.

He was a pleasure to teach; he just absorbed everything, and yet he also questioned everything. Most lessons with boys of this age can easily turn into monologues. They present a taciturn boredom if you are not careful. It may be the material I teach, of course. Scripture lessons are at best simply tolerated by the boys.

But with Trubshaw it was different. We were reading through the First and Second Books of Samuel. Lots of strong narrative: David kills Goliath, and could have killed his arch enemy many times. David has a love life, and even gets up to what the

Sunday papers would call hanky-panky. But only Trubshaw seemed to get involved with any of the issues raised by these events. In fact I had a real problem dealing with the issues raised by the account of Saul seeking out a medium to connect to the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. In the end Trubshaw and I did something that only he and I know about. And that is strange enough in itself, sharing a secret with an eleven-year-old and relying on his discretion.

Of course there are some interesting problems when one reads through the life of David. He is described as a 'man after God's heart', and yet the narrative of his life is not an easy one to explain to boys of this age. Take his relationship with Saul's son Jonathan. How can you explain to eleven-year-olds what it means when it says 'the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul'? And several chapters later we get to what David says about Jonathan, when lamenting his death in battle against the Philistines: 'I am distressed for thee, my

brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.'

You can just imagine the questions that Trubshaw posed when we read these words. At eleven he has no idea, of course, about the love of women; but what on earth could exceed even that? I had to be careful talking about the love between a husband and wife, since Trubshaw's mother had died in giving birth to him, so he had grown this old without witnessing the tenderness between his mother and his father. I struggled to find appropriate words, like 'a very deep and special friendship', but he is still too young for this to have much meaning for him. His closest friend is Wetherill, whom I had tasked with mentoring Trubshaw in how to adapt to a boarding school like ours. But given the huge difference in their intellectual levels, I now find it hard to imagine Trubshaw needing any mentoring at all. And yet he stays very close and supportive of Wetherill, who is shunned by all his peers for being such a duffer at games.

This term we will progress to Solomon, and perhaps I will be able to avoid the challenge of difficult questions, even though as a teacher they are a joy to have.

Mitchell

Here is how I set about teaching the Fourth Form about Ancient Greece. The first step was easy, and in their Geography exercise book each boy had to fill a whole page with a map of Greece, using the set of atlases I passed round. I checked each outline drawn in pencil, before allowing any boy to continue. I put a list of all the important cities on the board: Sparta, Athens, Corinth, and so on.

This took a whole lesson. The next lesson I began by summarising all the gods and goddesses the ancient Greeks believed were active in their lives, giving both their Greek and their often more familiar Roman names. All these I wrote on the board, and they copied them into their exercise books.

At the next lesson we came to the extracts from Miss Yonge's book that I dictated to them. So they began writing down this summary for me:

'Originally all Greece, small as it is, was divided into very small states, each of which had a chief city and a government of

its own, and was generally shut in from its neighbours by mountains or by sea.'

Then we moved on to include names they all needed to be familiar with:

'Everybody sent to ask questions of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and there really were answers to them, though no one can tell by what power. And at certain times there were great festivals at certain shrines. One was at Olympia. There were chariot races, horse races, foot races, boxing and wrestling matches, throwing weights, playing with quoits, singing and reciting of poems. The winner was rewarded with a wreath. Nothing was thought more of than being first in the Olympic games, and the Greeks even came to make them their measure of time, saying that any event happened in such and such a year of such an Olympiad. The first Olympiad they counted from was the year 776 B.C.'

This led on to a useful discussion about the modern Olympic Games tradition. All very topical as only three years ago in 1948 the Games had been resumed after

the end of the war. The 1936 Games had been in Berlin and were notorious as a propaganda exercise put on by Hitler. London had the honour of hosting the 1948 Games, and all this was still pretty fresh in our memories.

I let the discussion of Olympic Games and our modern equivalent go on till the end of the lesson. All very pleasant to have actually caught the imagination of every boy in the class.

Next we turned to politics, for Greece was the source of the idea of representational democracy. They wrote, at my dictation:

'The Greeks seem for the most part, between the heroic and the historical ages, to have dropped the king or chief of each state, and only to have managed themselves by various councils of the chief heads of families, who were called aristoi, the best, while those who were not usually called into council, though they too were free, and could choose their governors, and vote in great matters, were termed demos, the people. This is why we hear of aristocracy and democracy. Under these

freemen were the people of the country they had conquered, or any slaves they had bought or taken captive, or strangers who had come to live in the place, and these had no rights at all.'

At this point Trubshaw asked a question, very typically for him: "Please, sir, which is best: aristocracy or democracy?"

I naturally, as the experienced teacher I am, asked the boys for their answers to this question. This led to a fairly vigorous discussion, as each boy realised that taking any viewpoint strongly could keep the lesson going without their having to do any more real work. And I was happy to let this proceed too.

A bit more about religion came next, all from chapter 12 of Miss Yonge's simple book:

'Greek cities were generally beautiful places, in valleys between the hills and the sea. They were sure to have several temples to the gods of the place. These were colonnades of stone-pillars, upon steps, open all round, but with a small dark cell in the middle, which was the shrine of

the god.'

Trubshaw latched on to this straight away: "Sir, is the folly built at the far end of our playing field meant to be a Greek temple?"

What we all called the 'folly' was a strange construction. The Headmaster told me he knew very little about why it had been built, and thought it had been put up at least a hundred years ago, maybe even much longer. It was certainly similar in design to any Greek temple. It was rectangular in shape, with four columns along the short sides, and five columns along the longer sides. The floor they were placed on was paved with flat stones. But it was miniature compared with the real thing, with the columns a mere six feet high, and there was nothing on top of the columns. They stood alone, like a mouth of teeth.

"You might call it an unfinished replica," I answered.

"But why was it built, sir?"

"We call it a folly precisely because there is no obvious reason for it to be built, and

no obvious use for it either. Perhaps the owner of the hall then had some grand idea, then gave up on it."

I could see from his expression that Trubshaw thought my answer was not as complete as it might have been. Did he know more about the folly than I did? No point in taking that thought any further, though.

There was a pause as we all thought about the folly, and I could see that for Trubshaw the topic was by no means concluded. I was to find out later how right that guess of mine had been.

Finally, as far as the twelfth chapter of the Yonge book was concerned, I dictated:

"The Greeks had more power of thought and sense of grace than any other people have ever had. They always had among them men seeking for truth and beauty. The truth-seekers were called philosophers, or lovers of wisdom. They were always trying to understand about God and man, and this world, and they used to gather young men round them under the pillared porches and talk over these thoughts, or

write them in beautiful words. Almost all the sciences began with the Greeks; their poems and their histories are wonderfully written; and they had such great men among them that, though most of their little states were smaller than an ordinary English county, and the whole of them together do not make a country as large as Ireland, their history is the most remarkable in the world.'

Trubshaw seemed to come alive at the use of the word 'philosopher', and when they had all finished writing down this paragraph he put up his hand to ask a question.

"Please, sir, is it possible to be a philosopher today?"

"Well," I replied, "you can certainly study philosophy at university these days, but I cannot imagine if you look through any newspaper with job advertisements that you will find an entry saying 'philosopher required.'"

This answer seemed to disappoint him, and that is where we ran out of time.

Newberry

This term, I had decided, I would take my poetry lessons with the Fourth Form one stage further. I would attempt to teach them to understand the importance of metre in poetry.

A lot of modern poetry has not only abandoned rhyme but even metre as well. Free verse it may be called, but I am old-fashioned enough to think it is not even verse at all. So how can I convey my enthusiasm for the more traditional styles to eleven and twelve year olds? We will see.

I started with the most obvious poet, Thomas Gray, and his best known poem, the 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. I read the first verse, which you probably know quite well:

*The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.*

I then asked the boys what they had

noticed about the poem's rhyming and rhythm. The boys all looked round at Trubshaw, whom they expected to come up with an answer that would satisfy me. That was the role he had adopted and that they expected of him.

“Well, sir, the rhyming pattern is simply the first and third lines rhyme. And so do the second and fourth.”

“So what about rhythm?”

“It is sort of 'ti-tum ti-tum' all the time.”

“And how many 'ti-tums' are there in each line?”

A pause for thought. “Five, sir.”

“Excellent, and you have just described a classic Iambic Pentameter.”

I then went on to explain to them that the 'ti-tum' pattern, unstressed then stressed syllables, was called an iamb, and that pente was Greek for five, so five of them a line.

With this introduction completed I then read them the whole poem, and it is rather long, so I probably lost all of them bar Trubshaw in the process. When I asked for comments, they all looked at me with blank

faces.

“Come on, Trubshaw, perhaps you have had some thoughts.”

“Yes, sir but they are rather critical.”

“Criticism is permitted, Trubshaw.”

“I was disappointed, sir, because he spent all this time thinking about the people buried in the graves, and all he could say about them was all the things they were no longer doing. No more home life, no more working in the fields, and so on.”

“And . . . ?”

“I know they are not doing earthly things any more. I want to know what they are doing now.”

This comment left me with no answer. The class looked at me for one, but I had none to give. Fortunately it was near enough to the end of the lesson, as our wonderful clock would soon be striking the quarter-hour that would signify this, for me to wrap things up with a final command:

“Trubshaw, for homework you will use the Palgrave's Golden Treasury you will find in the school library to collect the next poem of Thomas Gray we are to study. It is called

'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College'. Next lesson you will read it to us, and for homework you are to prepare some comments about it for us to discuss as a class."

"Thank you, sir," he replied, in a tone more of willing than unwilling acceptance of the task.

The Headmaster had told all of us staff that we were to stretch this very bright young pupil as much as we cared to, and that this was better for him than putting him straight into a higher class. He was already getting extra lessons from the Chaplain in Greek, and I wanted to play my part effectively as well.

I must admit that this task I had given him, very much on the spur of the moment, left me wondering what might be his response. Would he analyse the very obviously different metrical pattern? Would he draw attention to the rather complex rhyming pattern too?

So with some trepidation, but some hopefulness as well, on the very next day I called Trubshaw to the front of the class,

and announced: "Trubshaw will now conduct an English lesson on the poem by Thomas Gray called 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College'.

Trubshaw had his copy of Palgrave with him and walking calmly to the front of the class declared: "I will begin by reading the whole poem to you."

Which he did. Then he said: "In order to analyse the rhyming and rhythm patterns I will now dictate one verse, for you to copy into your exercise books." And he slowly read out:

*Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond today:
Yet see how all around 'em wait
The ministers of human fate,
And black misfortune's baleful train!
Ah, show them, where in ambush stand
To seize their prey the murth'rous band!
Ah, tell them, they are men!*

"The metre is, as you can see, four iambs in one line followed by three in the next, for

the first four lines, then four iambs in the next five lines, back to just three in the final line. This is much more complex than the elegy we did yesterday, and this is why we need to have it written down in front of us.”

All this was perfect analysis, from a young boy, even though the analysis was somewhat mathematical.

“Now look for the rhymes. Some are good, but some are near-misses. ‘Play’ and ‘today’, ‘wait’ and ‘fate’ ‘stand’ and ‘band’ are all good matches in sound. But ‘doom’ and ‘come’ and ‘train’ and ‘men’, although they are obviously intended as rhymes, are not really up to scratch.”

The boys all started smiling. They were learning the intended rhyming pattern, and now fully understood why Trubshaw had made them write down the whole ten lines. So there was no negative body language when Trubshaw said: “Now I will read another verse for you to all write down, so that I can present you with much more serious criticism.”

*To each his suff'rings: all are men,
 Condemned alike to groan;
 The tender for another's pain,
 Th' unfeeling for his own.
 Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
 Since sorrow never comes too late,
 And happiness too swiftly flies.
 Thought would destroy their paradise.
 No more; where ignorance is bliss,
 'Tis folly to be wise.*

“Well, fellow pupils, we have been taught one thing in History, about how the Greeks of olden times are to be praised for their love of wisdom. How this sparked off nearly all of what we now call science, even though they had no real scientific instruments such as we have today. But the thing is they loved wisdom, and sought out answers to all the questions that really mattered. And here is a poet who wants to convince us of the exact opposite, that it is folly to be wise. I reject this advice. I find it deplorable. I too want to love wisdom, and will not follow Thomas Gray at all. If it is folly to be wise, then I for one will embrace this folly.”

Needless to say you could have knocked me down with a feather. The boys just grinned. I could see that they really appreciated one of their fellows tearing apart the thinking of a poet they obviously thought I approved of.

Trubshaw's final comment was: "To say nothing of one or two rather near-misses in the rhyming department."

They spent a little time quietly looking for these too.

"Shall I sit down now, sir?"

"Yes, Trubshaw, you may sit down."

There was little time left for the lesson, which was effectively finished anyway, and I used this time up by pretending to check up by pretending to check what the boys had written down in their exercise books, while I absorbed what had happened.

I resolved to advise my colleagues in the common room to be very careful about giving this kind of task to Trubshaw. But the more I reflected on what had happened the more I was glad I had heard what the boy had said. I wish I had had the courage to say such things when I was his age.

Chaplain

I was making good progress in Scripture with my Fourth Form and we continued on through the life of King David and so came to the First Book of Kings in the Old Testament. It was still a bit of a struggle to hold the boys' interest, except where we got to the gory bits. Eventually we came to the accession of King Solomon. At the beginning of his reign one reads of how God appeared to him in a dream, and asked him to choose a gift.

The obvious thing to do was to pause at this point and ask the boys: "What should Solomon choose as a gift from God?"

There was quite a lively discussion at this point, with some sensible and some facetious answers. It is a shame that boys of this age attempt humour whenever possible. Trubshaw had said nothing during this interchange, so I asked him directly: "What is your answer, Trubshaw?"

"He should ask for wisdom, sir."

"Were you already familiar with this passage, Trubshaw?"

“No, sir. I just imagined I was Solomon, and asked for the thing I would have wanted.”

“Well, that is what Solomon asked for, and God was so pleased he promised all the other things he might have asked for instead, riches and honour and a long life.”

We then moved on to the rest of the same chapter where a wonderful example of Solomon's wisdom is recounted. Two women came to Solomon with a quarrel. Unfortunately they are described as 'harlots', so we needed a long digression as I answered the obvious question one of the boys asked, to define the meaning of the word. My compromise was 'unmarried mothers', which was entirely true.

Each of the unmarried mothers had had a baby and one of the babies had died. Now both mothers claimed that the surviving baby was theirs. They brought the living baby boy to Solomon and asked him to adjudicate.

Once again I paused, and asked the question:” How could Solomon make a judgment?”

Even Trubshaw failed to offer a useful answer. So I told them that Solomon had asked one of the courtiers to bring a sword, and cut the baby boy in half and give half each to the two women.

Again I paused. Trubshaw by now was able to guess the outcome.

“The true mother would say: ‘No, give the boy to the other woman.’”

“Quite right. Well done, Trubshaw. That is exactly what happened. And in saying that she preferred the boy to live she revealed that she was the true mother, and Solomon awarded her care of the boy.”

To close down the lesson I explained that a lot of the wise sayings of Solomon were recorded in the Book of Proverbs. Following the Headmaster's advice that we give Trubshaw extra work to stretch him properly, I tasked Trubshaw to read the first few chapters of the Book of Proverbs and prepare a summary to present to the class next lesson.

It had seemed a good idea at the time.

Wetherill

This is the second time one of the masters has given Trubs the chance to take over teaching us. The last time was great, and poor Blueberry, as we call our English teacher, had his favourite poet torn apart.

So we were expecting Trubshaw once again to perform another teacher demolition exercise. There was a Sunday to come before our next Scripture lesson, when we have lots of time to ourselves, apart from a proper church service in the morning. We could see our hero with his head firmly inside his Bible, and making notes in his Scripture exercise book.

On Monday we were not disappointed.

In fact, if I had thought about it at the time, Trubs had given me a foretaste.

“Soapy,” he had said on Sunday after lunch, and by the way that is my nickname, “tell me how many columns are there in our famous folly.”

“Well, the front and back has four columns and the sides have five. So that makes eighteen, doesn't it?”

“Wrong, Soapy. Go and count them to make sure.”

I thought he was serious so I marched off across the playing field. Half way there I realised the mistake I had made. I was counting the corner columns in twice, and there were really only fourteen columns. Mind you I still went on and counted them. Yes, definitely fourteen.

On Monday we were all looking forward to our Scripture lesson, quite a rare thing that is too.

Chappers invited Trubs to come to the front of the class. “As you know, boys, I have invited Trubshaw to present us with a lesson on the Book of Proverbs.”

Trubshaw had his exercise book in his hand as he stepped forward.

In a manner that was very nearly a parody of any schoolmaster, Trubs began: “Take out your exercise books and write as I dictate the opening verses of Solomon's Proverbs:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of

understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

As you see, young men, we too are addressed by Solomon. He wants us to receive wisdom.”

We all smiled as we recognised how close the message was going to the way Trubs had torn apart the Thomas Gray poem.

“Solomon has a great deal to say about wisdom,” continued Trubs, “and the most important thing is that she is a sort of person. And definitely a female person. Copy this:

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, she is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.”

We all dutifully wrote this down, and given that it was all at dictation speed, it was hard not to think about what Trubs was telling us.

More was to come:

“Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my

mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom."

We were all now aware of Chappers leafing through his Bible, and checking that Trubs was giving us totally accurate quotations. Trubs had noticed it too, and quietly said: "We are up to chapter four now, sir."

To us he said: "See how wisdom is personified, and definitely female."

Being boys we had all noticed the very explicit 'love her' which we had just written down. No one actually tittered, but I certainly came close to it.

"Wisdom is even given words which she utters directly," continued Trubs, "as follows:

I wisdom dwell with prudence, I am understanding; I have strength. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."

Very quietly to Chappers: "Chapter eight, sir."

To us, in a very confident voice, he announced: "And finally, in the very next

chapter we have a revelation we all need to take proper note of. The opening verse says:

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.

“As we all know these grounds contain something of a mystery. We call it a folly, a folly built no one quite knows when, perhaps more than a hundred years ago. No one knows what it was built for either.” He paused. “Till now.”

You could almost hear the gasp, and certainly Chappers looked very directly at Trubs.

“Yes, it is obvious. We are told that wisdom has seven pillars, and columns are a form of pillar if they have nothing on top of them. Now you cannot have a proper building with just seven, but if you double seven you get fourteen. How many pillars does our building have, the one on the far side of the playing field?”

At this point I put my hand up and pretending that Trubs was a real teacher, said: “Fourteen, sir. You sent me to count them.”

The other boys now all looked at me, and I just smiled.

“Precisely,” said Trubs. “The builder of what we call the folly was obeying the words of Solomon, and constructed a building in honour of Wisdom, and gave her a temple with twice seven pillars, to double the strength of her power.”

There was a pause while we were allowed to digest this fantastic claim.

“Now that we know the purpose of this building,” said Trubs with some emphasis, “I propose that we rededicate our Temple to Wisdom, or Sophia, which is her name in Greek.”

He looked at Chappers, and then, with a rather dramatic flourish, closed his exercise book and went and sat down.

You could have heard a pin drop. Chappers did not know what to say. Eventually he said simply: “You and I will discuss this later, Trubshaw.”

Chaplain

I should have taken Newberry's advice. I had heard him say in our common room: "Never give Trubshaw the chance to deliver a lesson to the Fourth Form. You are inviting trouble if you do."

"I agree," Peale had said immediately.

Privately I had not agreed, but said nothing. So I had only myself to blame.

Every evening, except Sundays, Trubshaw comes to me for a half-hour of New Testament Greek. He is really doing it all himself, with me more of a spectator than anything. He has a grammar book for the endings, and a dictionary, and he does the translation of each verse himself. Every now and then he asks me a question, more often than not about a point of theology rather than a language matter. I will say no more about the ghost thing that happened last term.

So on the evening after his lesson about Solomon's Proverbs I had the chance to talk to him about what he had proposed at the end of his lesson. His lesson!

“We have something to discuss before you start your Greek work,” I began.

“Yes, sir.”

“Your ridiculous proposal.”

“With respect, sir, I think it is a very sensible proposal.”

“Why did you not consult me beforehand? You have undermined my authority as chaplain here, and therefore responsible for all religious matters.”

“I had consulted a higher authority, sir.”

Good grief, I thought. Has he spoken to my bishop?

“Which higher authority?” I demanded.

“King Solomon, sir.”

What could I say to that?

“So you think King Solomon knows about our folly?”

“No, sir, but he does tell us that Wisdom,” and he stressed the word very particularly, “is someone we should love and honour, and I think this would be they best way to obey that instruction. Especially since we have a building with double the right number of pillars.”

I was determined to stand firm. How

could I approve of another building besides *my church* being the focus of any religious feelings the boys might have. A temple to Wisdom, or Sophia as I am sure young Trubshaw was thinking of, could easily become a rival to the building I was responsible for. I knew my duty perfectly well.

“I am not going to argue with you, Trubshaw,” and using his name, which I rarely did, was adding emphasis to my pronouncement, “and you have my answer. It is a flat No. I will not permit this . . .” and I was about to say ‘folly’, of course, but checked myself in time, “. . . foolishness.”

“I understand, sir. You are a supporter of the Thomas Gray view of life.”

This made no sense to me. Perhaps I should ask Newberry what the boy was on about.

“Shall I start my Greek now, sir?”

This was asked with a more defiant tone than I was used to hearing from him. It did give me some concern that I had obviously disappointed him. But I could see that there was no sign of surrender in his body

language. There would be another battle
some day, I could tell.

Wetherill

I was waiting for Trubs after his usual Greek lesson with Chappers.

“How did you get on, Trubs?”

Actually I already knew the answer, because Trubs was looking very miffed instead of his usual happy self.

“Chappers is a good chap, as we both know from last term, but he is the prisoner of his own mind. He sees the Temple of Sophia as a rival to his church. This is nonsense of course. Loving wisdom is in the Bible, after all.”

“But I expect you can see his point of view.”

“Of course I can. I made my proposal in our last lesson knowing full well what to expect.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“Look, Soapy, I am a philosopher, so I have to deal with every problem philosophically.”

Trubs never fails to amaze me. So he now thinks of himself as a philosopher. Better than stamp-collecting I suppose, which I

can understand. But being a philosopher is just a bit beyond me.

“So how does a philosopher deal with a problem like the refusal of one master to support a project that has become so important to him?”

“He looks for support elsewhere, of course.”

Pretty obvious answer I suppose.

“Who then?”

“I think it will have to be Titch to start with.”

All our masters had nicknames, and in the case of our History master his was all too easy to explain. He was rather short, and by the time some of our oldest boys had reached their growth spurt, he was barely as tall as they were.

“That will be quite a challenge. When will you start?”

“I already did. You remember my comments about Greek philosophers. You just watch what happens in our History lessons from now on.”

Mitchell

When I read through the next chapter of Yonge's book, which describes the origins of the city-state of Sparta, I thought it rather tame. So instead of reading that chapter for them to do a *précis* on, I decided instead to read to them extracts from the life of Lycurgus written by Plutarch.

This was good history anyway, as Plutarch is our nearest and best source for those times, and Plutarch did not sentimentalise matters in the way that Yonge does.

Having read my extracts, which took about ten minutes, having put the name of Lycurgus on the board under the heading Sparta, I told them they had the rest of the lesson to write a summary of what they had just heard.

"One page will be sufficient, boys," I told them.

Getting a summary short but inclusive of all that matters is a good skill to learn, and keeps the marking task down to reasonable

proportions. As expected I got a reasonable output from them all, as I found when I sat down to mark their efforts. But I was a bit taken aback when I opened Trubshaw's exercise book. His writing was much smaller than usual, and he literally filled the whole page. He got a good summary of the details, but what marked his essay out as radically different from the others was that he included a lot of value judgments as well. I can only make this evident to you by quoting his whole essay.

THE FOUNDATION OF SPARTA

The city state of Sparta lies in the middle of the southern land mass of Greece. It was founded by Lycurgus. The whole system was geared to training all males to be warriors. I think this is a false objective to have, because it destroys the family as the core institution of the nation. Lycurgus did not regard sons as the peculiar property of their fathers, but rather as the common property of the state. This is totally immoral. Because adult males spent all their time in the army, young children were

brought up at home by their mothers alone. That is if they were allowed to live at all, since weak-looking boys were killed by exposure straight after they were born. At the age of seven boys were taken away from their mothers and sent to a school. They were only taught the minimum skills of reading and writing, but were given full-time physical and weapon training to make them strong. They went bare foot, with little clothing summer and winter, and little food, so they had to steal it to make up that deficiency. If they were caught they were beaten, not for stealing but for getting caught. This was totally immoral, obviously. The boys were often beaten anyway, to harden them against physical pain, so that they would not flinch from pain in battle. Some were even victims of the cult of Artemis, where they were flogged as sacrificial offerings to the goddess. Who would respect a goddess who wanted the blood of innocent people on her altar? The male Spartans did no real work except soldiering, as they had lots of captured slaves called Helots to do that. So here was

the deliberate defining of a nation as a set of bullies, encouraged by a heathen form of education of the mind and body to achieve this aim.

Trubshaw had had to write very small to squeeze all this on to one page, but I could see that he was thinking about more than the mere detail, all of which was pure Plutarch, apart from his personal comments, of course. I even found that one of his sentences was word for word what I had read out to them. What a memory the boy must have to achieve this.

But here was a mind I could relate to. It was difficult to have the kind of discussion in the staff common room with my colleagues that a true historian would like to have. I decided that I needed to get to know this Trubshaw much better, and looked forward to continuing with the ancient Greeks in his company.

Wetherill

The next lesson we had with Titch was really interesting. He came in with a beaming smile on his face, and said 'Good morning, boys' as if he really meant it. We were all taken aback by this. Had he won the pools or something?

"Well, boys, one of you has made my life as a History teacher worthwhile."

What has Trubs done now? We all knew there was only one boy in our form capable of doing anything, good or bad, that would actually change the outlook of any master of ours.

After he had dished out our exercise books we all looked straight away to see what mark or comment we had received. Mine had a beta grade. The masters here think it is smart to use Greek letters for grades, and gamma is the third letter in the Greek alphabet, and means really horrible, but beta, the second letter, is passable. They vary this with pluses and minuses too. All very daft. The comment was the usual scathing 'merely adequate', which

almost amounted to praise from a master like Titch.

“Trubshaw, I would like you to bring your exercise book to the front of the class, and read your essay to everyone,” came the announcement from Titch after giving us time to digest our own essay markings.

Trubs duly walked out to the front, and after waiting for a nod from Titch, read his essay to us.

When he had finished, Titch asked us this question: “Boys, in what way was this essay different from the one you wrote?”

Total silence of course. The unwritten rule, obeyed by all except Trubshaw in our form, was never to volunteer an answer. But Trubs is my special friend, and everyone was now looking at me, which sort of gave me permission to speak.

“It was longer than mine, sir,” I volunteered.

“Yes, Wetherill, but so were many others. Something more specific, if you don't mind.”

This rather put me on the spot, and then I realised what Titch wanted.

“Trubs, I mean Trubshaw, said what he

thought about everything. Like he said treating boys as belonging to the state was wrong. And I think he said other things were wrong, and that Spartan soldiers were just a lot of bullies.”

“Well done, Wetherill.”

This was said in the usual sarcastic tone masters use, and this was only slightly less embarrassing than receiving praise from a master, which made you immediately very unpopular.

“This is what History is about,” continued Titch. “Not just learning facts and regurgitating them, but recognising what is the impact of events on people, what is the outcome of events, and whether these outcomes are good or bad. Now I do not endorse everything Trubshaw said, of course. But he has got an alpha plus for making the attempt.”

We sat in silence. Trubshaw would not be in trouble with us for getting an alpha plus. In fact the reverse. He had made Titch happy, and a happy teacher is better than a grumpy one. So Trubs would have our approval, in spite of the alpha plus.

It would make no difference to the way I would write my essays in future, of course. I would simply do enough to avoid getting a gamma minus. But if Trubs gave Titch the impression that he was actually getting somewhere as a teacher, that would be a good thing.

Mitchell

I was really looking forward to my next History lesson with the Fourth Form. Following from the example I had seen in Trubshaw's willingness to really think through issues that our historical narrative of ancient Greece raised, I determined to experiment and see if I could get some others of his peers to follow the same path.

"Good morning, boys," I began in my usual way.

They all responded, not too reluctantly.

"Today, boys, we are going to do something a little different. I am going to excuse you writing a précis for me, on certain conditions."

There were flickers of smiles at the suggestion of no précis, and some frowns when I referred to conditions.

"The condition is that we have a real discussion of all the issues raised by the chapter I will read you, and some really good questions. And not just from one pupil."

They all knew which pupil I was thinking

of.

“Instead of getting you to write a whole page of summary I am going to write some names on the board, and you will write this list down in your exercise books, leaving a line spare between each name. When I have read the section about each name I will pause, and you will write just one line as a summary. Then, when the chapter is complete we will see if we can have a really good discussion about everything.”

It looked as though some of the class though this was a lot better than having to write a whole page essay, so I went ahead and wrote this list of names on the board, under the heading 'Athens'.

Athene

Acropolis

Parthenon

Draco

Solon

Croesus

Aesop

Oracle of Delphi

I actually left out some of the superfluous detail from Yonge's chapter on the

foundation of Athens, so there was time after my reading and their short notes for the discussion I was hoping would make the lessons more interesting, both for them and for me. It did not begin very well, though.

“Please, sir, what's a virgin?”

This from Smithson Major, who was a boy I did not care for very much. Was this an attempt to embarrass me, or was it genuine ignorance? You never know with boys of this age as they begin to discover the 'facts of life'. They tend to titter over any reference to human reproduction.

“A virgin is a young woman who has not yet got married.” Hardly accurate, but adequate, and avoiding a pathway to the kind of discussion I did not want. And all because the Parthenon is described as a 'virgin's shrine'.

I waited for the next question, and it came from Trubshaw.

“Please, sir, why did the Athenians worship Athene?”

A good question at last.

“They believed the goddess was the

patron of wisdom, with her name possibly meaning 'divine mind'."

"Well, sir, I think the Athenians are a lot better than the Spartans. They rate philosophy, don't they? That is my priority too."

"Very commendable, Trubshaw."

A pause. Would anyone else ask a sensible question, or make a sensible comment. The class sensed that they were on a knife edge regarding whether I would find the discussion element sufficient. Then a boy who is usually silent, called Beckwith, rescued them.

"Sir, I don't understand what a goddess is. In church we are taught that there is only one God. Were the Greeks all mixed up? Were they worshipping some one real, or just imaginary?"

I knew that if I took the easy way out and told them this was a question for the Chaplain I would lose face, so I did my best.

"I think they were struggling to make sense of the way the world works. They saw unexplainable things happening, so they attributed the power that achieved

these to invisible entities they could only hope to get on their side rather than against them. So the worship of a goddess of wisdom was a way of hoping that they would be helped to be wiser.”

“Well, sir, I think that even if there really is no actual goddess of wisdom, at least wanting there to be one is a good thing.” This from Trubshaw, of course.

“I agree,” I replied, “and I expect you all do too.” There were some heads nodding in agreement, so we were definitely making progress.

“Please, sir, may I ask another question.” Again from Trubshaw, but that was inevitable, and the others seemed happy for him to ask questions, hoping for perhaps another difficult one to put me on the spot again.

“Go ahead.”

“How did the oracle at Delphi make accurate predictions?”

Another indication of his insight into a question that I too had asked myself.

“Good question. Assuming that we rule out the supernatural, perhaps they were

careful not to give absolute answers, but often very ambiguous ones. Like the answer Croesus got about fighting the Persians: 'a great empire will fall', which was true enough, except Croesus thought it referred to the Persians, when it was actually his empire that fell."

Time was running out, so I collected their books, which would not take too long to check over. I think that on balance I may have made progress, and was determined to continue trying. I know I can always rely on Trubshaw to ask good questions or make good comments. It is the others that are not yet truly there. But I must persist with my efforts.

Fairbrother

I remember very clearly, even though it was at the beginning of last term, the arrival of the new kid in the Fourth Form. And we also had a new games master, a very young chap who quickly earned the nickname Easy. Easy had asked me to coach the Fourth Forms boys on tackling, and especially the new kid, since he had never played the game before. Trubshaw is his name, and he did all right. His first mistake of not getting his head out of the way when tackling was soon corrected. Easy asked me to keep a general eye open for this lad, in case of any bullying, which was a perfectly reasonable thing to ask me to do, as I am a prefect here now that I am in my last year. Not all the Sixth Formers are prefects, so it is an honour I try to live up to.

It was obvious that Trubshaw quickly learnt to fit in, and I got indications that his fellow Fourth Formers actually admired him. He had achieved the reputation of asking very direct questions of the masters,

often even quite awkward ones.

Every once in a while I had a quick chat with him, and he certainly seemed very settled. He also came over as much more thoughtful than most boys of his age.

I wish I could be as confident about Easy. His real name is Easton, and he is straight from school to here. No university yet. And that is part of the problem, and why we call him Easy. He is not a bad rugby coach, and probably a good enough player. But he is much too easy-going. He lets us constantly offer suggestions about how we should be coached, and nearly always agrees to what we suggest. Some of my fellow pupils take advantage of this, especially the lazy ones. So if the weather is bad he gets advice that we need some tactical coaching indoors, and he lets these lazy ones have their way. This means that our First Fifteen is getting distinctly soft, and we have only won one match so far, and that against a very weak side. This is very disappointing to some of us, but we don't know what to do. It is not up to us to tell him how to do his job.

I was chatting with Trubshaw about just

this problem one day. To my great surprise he said: "Don't worry, Fairbrother, I'll sort it out for you." He obviously thought that I had been talking about this problem as if I wanted him to provide a solution, when really all I was doing was chatting generally about the school.

It will be interesting to see how he tackles this challenge.

Easton

I always referee our home rugby matches against other schools, but when we have an away match that duty is fulfilled by the games master of that school. I usually travel with the team, of course, so that I can see how well they play and note what areas need more coaching in. But I decided that I also needed to see how well the younger boys were getting on, and they were usually supervised by the Chaplain.

So I asked the Chaplain if we could reverse roles for the match we were due to play against a school that was much weaker than us, so I expected an easy win. The Chaplain was very happy to be the travelling master, as this would give him an afternoon off from getting changed and minding our younger boys.

This is how I came to be coaching what was effectively our second fifteen, all aged twelve and younger. This is how I came into direct contact with Trubshaw for what was really the first time. I remembered that the Chaplain had earlier asked me to keep an

eye open for any problems he might be having. Judging from the way he was playing rugby by now, he had certainly settled in perfectly well, but I still decided to have a word with him when our session was over.

“How are you getting on, young chap?”

“Very well, thank you, sir. We both have something in common, don't we?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I am new to being a schoolboy, and you are new to being a schoolmaster, aren't you, sir.”

He seemed to be much more forward than most of the boys of his age I had already met.

“Does it show?” I dared to ask.

“May I speak frankly, sir?”

“Of course.”

“Well, sir, I am dedicated to being a philosopher so I think a lot about everything.”

“Yes...”

“It seems to me that boys are very tribal. They want to join a group, be a member of something. For instance, my friend

Wetherill is shunned by all the other boys in the Fourth Form because he does not like games."

"Yes, I have noticed that he tries to avoid doing anything when on the rugby field."

"So Wetherill is outside the tribe we could call 'the Fourth Form'. He does not mind very much, or at any rate he has got used to it."

"Are you in the tribe?"

"Oh yes, sir. The others like the way I stand up to the teachers. I am their spokesman. They don't mind that I have been given the chance to learn much more than them. They are sort of glad of it."

"So why are you telling me this?"

"Because you may not have noticed that there are two tribes in your First Fifteen."

"Two tribes?"

"Yes, sir: those who want to be a top prep school rugby team, and those who want an easy and comfortable life."

I thought about this. He was dead right. There were some boys who took every chance to avoid having to be out in the cold. Rugby is a winter sport, and you

cannot avoid the cold and the wet in winter. And I could recall a number of occasions when I had given in to the 'comfort tribe'.

“Thank you, Trubshaw, you have given me food for thought.”

“I think I know which tribe you think are the better of the two.”

“You do. And I will do something about it straight away.”

Fairbrother

It was not long before I had a chance to catch up with Trubshaw about his project to convert Easy into a tougher and stricter coach of us rugby boys. When I did I asked him if he had spoken to Easy.

“Yes, I have done,” he said.

“What did he say?”

“I think it is more important to wait and see what he does, don't you?”

That was a good answer, and as boys in the top form are not supposed to be too friendly with much younger boys, I left it at that.

The test came the very next day. It was raining, and the usual request was made by the laziest boy in the Sixth Form, a large boy called Gardner. He should be, with his size, the most useful forward on the field. When he complained about the weather Easy simply said: “I am glad it is raining, because we need to practise the best style of playing in wet weather. When the rugby ball is slippery in the wet conditions, our style of play needs to adapt to this. So we

will practise wet weather tactics today.”

“But, sir...” complained Gardner.

“You can hold your peace Gardner. This is my decision, not yours. And we need strong forwards like you to be on their best mettle.”

So we all got changed and went out and practised dribbling the ball in a forward rush, and other such wet weather stuff.

That evening, in the play room, I went over to where Trubshaw was reading a book.

“All right, Trubshaw, I need to know something. How did you do it?”

“My dear Fairbrother, it was not difficult. It was simply a matter of being philosophical with him.”

“Philosophical?”

“Yes, philosophical.”

I had no idea what he was talking about, but could hardly say so.

“Well thanks anyway.”

I mused on this a little. Philosophy, whatever that is, must be powerful stuff.

Wetherill

It was now almost possible to look forward to our History and Geography lessons with Titch, and he called it a Geography lesson when we had to draw a map. The next map came out of our atlases, and showed the whole of Greece, the sea bit on the right of it, and a large country which the atlas said was called Turkey, and which Titch said was called Persia.

So we dutifully drew the map and that is quite a pleasant way to spend time, and you can colour the sea blue and the land green.

Titch explained that Persia was an empire which was trying to conquer its neighbours, and this included the cities on the western coast of their land mass, and the many islands in between there and Greece. All the cities and islands were occupied by Greek people, and they all soon found themselves overcome by the Persian king, a chap called Darius.

While we were drawing our map, taking as long as possible, of course, Titch was

wittering on about how Darius planned to conquer the whole of mainland Greece too, and how disastrous this would have been for civilisation if this had happened.

This managed to fill the whole time for that lesson, and at the end Titch said: "Tomorrow we will find out what happened," as if this was some dreadfully interesting thing. We all managed to conceal our boredom pretty well, and even Trubshaw had not spoken throughout the whole lesson.

So next lesson we got the story of Darius and his evil intentions. Titch put the word Marathon on the board, and this gave me the opportunity to ask a silly question: "Did Darius organise a race then, sir?"

"No, Wetherill, Marathon is a place. There was a battle fought there in 490 B.C.. Darius was trying to defeat the Athenians first, and then he would move on to conquer the rest of Greece. He showed us where to mark Marathon on the map, and said, as though it was really important: "Marathon is on the coast, 26 miles and 385 yards away from Athens."

He then read to us the account of the battle, straight from the book he often read to us. We sat back, feigning attention.

It turns out that it was important the Athenians actually won, and they did so by a good tactics, and all the Persians ran away to their boats when the tide of the battle turned against them. And then we got to the origin of the race we still run today, because a messenger called Pheidippides ran all the way to Athens to give the news of the victory. Apparently he interrupted the assembly of the top Athenians to say 'We have won,' and promptly died from exhaustion.

It seems we re-enact all this with a race of exactly the same length, but you don't have to die when you cross the finishing line.

Trubs managed to fill in some time talking about how philosophers can win battles as well as trained bullies. Trubs keeps on talking about philosophers, but we don't mind because any kind of remotely sensible discussion keeps Titch in a good mood, and he forgets to give us proper

work to do.

Mitchell

Our staff common room is an interesting place, and we all find it essential to take time off from being in contact with our pupils. We are a perfect example of a closed community, and four of us have been together for what seems like a lifetime. We were each too old for the war, so were knit together by a sort of comradeship. There are the inevitable tensions, of course. We all want to be seen as exemplary teachers, with unrivalled pedagogic skills.

Privately we are all, and I assume the others feel as I do, failures. Socially and professionally. We know that the best schoolmasters can find a place in a top public school, and here we all are in a mere prep school. And there are no doubt better prep schools, but at least there are probably lots of worse ones. We can feed boys to decent schools when they leave us, and that is about the only measure we regard as significant.

I know that the Headmaster measures our

status by the social quality of the parents who choose to send their sons here, as well as by the quality of the schools we feed into, and that is not lost on us either. The boys have a completely different measure: they simply want to beat all the other schools we play at rugby and cricket. That is why the competence of Easton as a sports coach matters so much to them.

After lunch every day we relax in the common room with our pipes, in the chairs we use every time; mine is on the right of the fireplace, a very privileged position, as I have been here almost as long as Peale, and longer than the other two. Seniority here is simply length of service.

We try to avoid talking shop, but apart from the news on the radio which we listen to every evening at nine-o'clock on the Home Service, there is really not much else to talk about.

The one boy who, quite naturally, we most often refer to is young Trubshaw. So it was not out of place for me to refer to his contributions to my History lessons.

“I am continually impressed with the way

Trubshaw conducts himself," I began one day.

"Well I am very wary of him myself," said Newberry.

"Yes, I agree, he is sometimes dramatically unpredictable. I was amazed when I read his essay about the foundation of Sparta. He called the city a training ground for armed bullies."

"Boys have a great propensity for being bullies themselves," replied Newberry.

"Surely that is a bit unfair." The moralist who is Chaplain always talks like this, and we would be worried if he did not.

"I bet there is quite a lot of bullying goes on here, that we are simply not aware of," countered Newberry. "The boys' code of honour, of never snitching, ensures we will never know about it."

"I doubt it," said Chaplain.

"I don't." This from Marsden, who never speaks much in our circle, though apparently never stops talking, and always in French, in his classroom.

"I don't mean necessary physical bullying, for Matron would soon spot bruises and the

like, but mental and psychological power games. It is only human nature to want power, and to enjoy exercising it." Newberry was being rather too honest, I thought, for what are schoolmasters other than men who have chosen a lifetime of telling weaker, younger, souls what to do?

"The prefects would soon put a stop to it, I am sure," responded Chaplain.

"Unless it is the prefects who are the bullies! *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*"

There seemed no answer to this, so we let silence take over, and puffed happily on our pipes. Silence is never a problem for a pipe smoker.

Wetherill

We were beginning to get used to the newly enthused Titch, and the stories of ancient Greece. Still on the Persian war on Greece, and the salvation of civilisation, as he put it.

So we dutifully listened to his account of the battle at Thermopylae. This was the second time the Persians had attacked Greece, and they had brought a huge army into the north of Greece. This army was marching southward, and the Greeks decided to halt them at a very narrow place, called Thermopylae, where there was little room for soldiers to fight.

This was a famous battle, Titch told us, where a mere 300 Spartan soldiers fought for three days, massively outnumbered but able to resist because the place was so narrow. A high mountain cliff on one side and marshes and the sea on the other.

Eventually a traitor revealed a hidden pathway so that enough Persian soldiers could make their way to the other side of these Spartans. The Spartans knew that

the enemy were beginning to surround them, and could have saved themselves by retreating, but decided to stay and fight on till the last man died. All very heroic stuff, and you could sense Titch's enjoyment of reading this tale to us.

The Spartans did all die of course, but the bravery of these few Spartans so impressed the Persian king, Xerxes, that he asked if all the Spartans were like this.

"So, Trubshaw, what do you make of the way the Spartans fought? You were very critical of their training methods, and called them bullies."

"Did they actually save Greece, sir?"

"Well, no actually."

And Titch read on, and we found that the Athenians had actually saved Greece by winning a sea battle at Salamis. Apparently this was achieved by cunning tactics rather than by sheer power.

This gave Trubs the chance to make his point.

"Sir, it seems that wisdom is more effective than mindless power, doesn't it?"

"What do you think, boys?"

This gave us the opportunity to keep a discussion going till the end of the lesson, all about the difference between the Spartans and the Athenians, between tactics and force, and all that. Very satisfactory way to avoid work and keep a teacher happy.

Fairbrother

Being a prefect at this place has some definite advantages. There are two that stand out: one is the prefects' room, which only we prefects can use. It is not a very grand room, and I think it was once a store room in what used to be the stable block, where all the classrooms are now. This room would never have made a classroom. Too small. So the Headmaster put a couple of old settees in it and dedicated it for our use. There are two small windows, too high up for anyone to see in or out, so we have a great treasure in a place like this: a measure of privacy.

The other advantage is that we prefects, and we only, have the privilege of wearing long trousers. It is such a visible mark of distinction. Even the other sixth-formers who are not prefects still have to wear the short grey flannel trousers that are part of our uniform.

We were talking about this.

"Whacker is a wily old so-and-so, you know," said Gardner. "He gives privileges so

that he can take them away if any of us displeases him.”

“But why should any of us displease him?” asked Robertson, who is not the brightest fellow.

“Well I personally think that being a prefect is not as much fun as it could be. We have no real power, yet we are supposed to manage all the bad behaviour of the junior kids.”

“What sort of power do you want then?” I asked.

“I have an older brother, and at his school there is fagging, and the prefects there can cane any of the junior boys for misbehaviour.”

“But that is a public school, where traditions are very different.”

“Why is Mr. Walker our Headmaster called Whacker?” asked Robertson. “He has never actually whacked anyone since I came here.”

“That is the point, you clot,” I said. “He only threatens to. He simply tells people off, then demands if they want to be whacked. They always say No, so he then says ‘then

don't do that again.”

“Fairbrother, this is the problem we have, don't you see? He needs sanctions other than whacking. So we prefects get privileges that he can easily take away. Think of the disgrace of having to go back into short trousers again. The public humiliation of it.”

“So what is the problem?” I asked.

“We have no sanctions. There is no way we can enforce our will on others. Yet we are supposed to keep the younger kids in order. But if we step out of line, we can be demoted.”

“So what sanctions do you want? You know perfectly well that Whacker made it clear that we are not allowed to use corporal punishment.”

“Yes, I know that.”

“So?”

“I will think of something, rest assured of that.”

Gardner is a born bully, is what I was thinking. By far the biggest boy in the school, and definitely overweight. Yet lazy on the rugby pitch. We are going to have

problems with him for sure.

Mitchell

I thought I was getting on famously with my Fourth Form and the history of the ancient Greeks, and we ploughed on till we came to the chapter about Socrates. For a change I decided to dictate an extract from Miss Yonge's book, which was as follows:

Of the men who sought after God in the darkness none had come so near the truth as Socrates, a sculptor by trade, and yet a great philosopher, and, so far as we can see, the wisest and best man who ever grew up without any guide but nature and conscience. Even the oracle at Delphi declared that he was the wisest of men, because he did not fancy he knew what he did not know, and did not profess to have any wisdom of his own. It was quite true—all his thinking had only made him quite sure that he knew nothing; but he was also sure that he had an inward voice within him, telling him which was the way in which he should walk. He did not think much about the wild tales of the Greek gods and goddesses; he seems to have

considered them as fancies that had grown up on some forgotten truth, and he said a healthy mind would not dwell upon them; but he was quite sure that above all these there was one really true Most High God, who governed the world, rewarded the good, punished the bad, and sent him the inward voice, which he tried to obey to the utmost of his power, and by so doing, no doubt, his inward sight grew clearer and clearer.

It was quite obvious how closely young Trubshaw was following all this. As soon as I had finished dictating this he put his hand up straight away.

“Please, sir, how do we know all this? Did Socrates write any books?”

“Good question, and the answer is No. But he had a pupil called Plato, and he wrote lots which has survived to this day.”

“What sort of books were they, sir?”

“Many of them were accounts of Socrates debating various issues with his young pupils, of whom Plato was one, and another Aristotle, who also wrote a great deal that has survived. Socrates himself wrote

nothing, but he was the inspiration for these two great philosophers who did write extensively.”

“How did Socrates teach these young people?”

“Not by telling them answers, that is for sure, but by asking them questions. He insisted that asking the right questions was what really mattered.”

“Gosh, sir, I am sure that is exactly right.”

“But he came to a sticky end, you know.”

Trubshaw's face fell. So I narrated to them the accusation that Socrates had faced of corrupting the young, his trial, and his death by poison, which he accepted even though he was given the chance to escape.

I could see that even some of the other boys besides Trubshaw were moved by this account. But Trubshaw actually had tears in his eyes.

Our lesson was one that preceded the morning break, and at the end of the lesson Trubshaw approached me.

“Can I have a word, please, sir?”

“Surely.”

“You know we have clubs on a Sunday, when we have lots of free time. There is a table tennis club, a chess club, a Meccano club, and a model aeroplane club.”

“Well?”

“Could we have a Socrates club as well, so that some of us can meet and discuss philosophical questions?”

“Any club has to be sponsored by a master, and have a prefect present, you know?”

“Would you be our sponsor, please, sir?”

“What about a prefect?”

“I think I know who to ask.”

“Very well, if you can find a prefect who is willing to be there to keep an eye on things, I will form this club for you.”

“Thank you very much, sir.”

I was pretty sure this would fizzle out pretty quickly. How could he persuade another boy two years older than him to give up his time? Especially for something so not obviously fun as a philosophical discussion club. But I could hardly have said No, could I?

Fairbrother

It was break and I was just coming back from the bog to the stable courtyard when I was accosted by young Trubshaw.

“Have you a moment, please, Fairbrother?”

At least he was always polite.

“Yes.”

“You remember when I helped you with a problem with Easy?”

“Yes.” I had no idea where this was going, so I just waited to find out.

“And you remember I told you it was all down to philosophy?”

“Yes.”

“Well I really would like you to do me a favour in return.”

“Such as?”

I want to start a Sunday club to promote philosophy. Mr. Mitchell has said he would sponsor it if I can get a prefect to be there. And . . .”

“You want me to be that prefect?”

“Yes, please.”

Since I had no idea what philosophy was, my curiosity was stimulated somewhat. It

was a silly idea of course, and would hardly last, I thought. But I was intrigued to find out what this smart youngster had in mind.

“So what precisely would actually happen at your philosophy club?”

“We would meet to debate things, just as happened in the days of Socrates. We have been learning about him in History. In fact I want to call it the Socrates Club.”

I had only the vaguest idea who this Socrates fellow was, and was becoming more and more certain the idea was balmy, but still, I thought, what could I lose finding out?

While I was pausing to find a way of responding he went on: “As it is nearly the end of this Spring Term, I thought we could have the first meeting at the beginning of the Summer Term. And my plan is we meet out of doors, so long as it is not raining.”

“Where?”

“At the folly.”

Madness.

“Because the folly is built as if it was a Greek temple with no roof, you see. And I think that the original idea was to create a

temple there to Sophia, the goddess of wisdom.”

Total madness, I thought, but the sheer madness of the idea somehow made it more interesting.

“Very well. Tell Titch you have found your prefect.”

“Gosh, thanks a million, Fairbrother. You are a gem.”

Somehow being complimented by someone I should not really have cared about at all seemed rather nice. Very flattering to the ego. The whole thing would fail miserable, of course, but it might be rather fun to be part of that failure.

Mitchell

I had the Fourth Form for History as the last lesson before lunch, and I was not surprised when Trubshaw asked if he could have a word with me. I told him to wait for me outside the staff common room as soon as lunch was over, and we would speak then.

There was no doubt in my mind what we would be talking about, and I was expecting news that he had not been able to find any prefect for his philosophy club, and so it was all off. I would be relieved at the prospect.

There he was, waiting for me, and I was happy to talk to him in the corridor. No one was about there at this time of day.

“About getting a prefect, sir.”

“Difficult, eh?”

“No, sir. The first prefect I asked has agreed to be the club prefect.”

“Who might that be?”

“Fairbrother, sir.”

That was a relief. Fairbrother was one of the most sensible prefects we had, so I

could hardly raise any objection. So I looked for some other way to dampen the boy's optimism."

"And where do you propose to meet?"

"Well, sir, I was thinking this term is nearly over so we should start next term. When the weather is fine enough, I was thinking we would meet out of doors," he paused, "actually in the folly."

Good grief!

"Why the folly, of all places?"

"I want us to call it the Socrates Club. Your lessons have inspired me, sir."

I was perfectly aware that I was being buttered up. These boys are so cunning.

"I would like to recreate a sort of Athens, like in your lessons. Young folk meeting to discuss philosophical questions. And the folly is so like a Greek temple, it would create the right atmosphere."

This left me non-plussed. But it was rather a feather in my cap, to have inspired (if that is the right word) such a response to my teaching in so young a mind.

"Very well. The Socrates Club will meet at the folly on the first Sunday of next term.

Weather permitting.”

“Thank you, sir.”

And off he went, with me going into our common room for a much anticipated pipeful of tobacco.

Wetherill

We have a tuck shop here, run by Matron, and it opens most days after lunch. No money passes, though. We all deposit our pocket money into Matron's 'bank', and when we buy something she deducts the cost from our account. She has a hard-backed book, credits the money in, and notes a new balance after each purchase. The Head explained to us that this removes the chance of money being stolen. I suppose it makes sense, though I keep forgetting how much credit I have left at any time. Since we are all so hungry all the time the tuck shop is a life-saver. Sweets, chocolate biscuits, and stuff like that, are all that are on offer.

I mention all this because I need to explain why there are lots of sweet wrappers and similar litter all over the place. And this matters because one of the high and mighty prefects has started picking on me. His name is Gardner, and he is a fat slob. And why me, I ask. An easy target because no one likes me, except my

good friend Trubshaw.

This is how it started. Gardner on break picked on me.

“Wetherill, you are scruffily dressed. Your tie is undone and your socks are hanging down. As a punishment for this I am putting you on litter picking.”

“You have no right to do that, Gardner.”

“Oh yes I have. You will report to the prefects' room at the end of lunch, and you will bring me all the litter you have picked up.”

“And if I don't?”

“It will be the worse for you, I promise. You really do not want to find out what nasty things will happen to you.”

With that he marched off.

I ask you, who does he think he is? Can prefects dish out punishments? This has never happened before. I asked Trubs what I should do, as soon as I could.

“Soapy,” he answered, “we will simply be philosophical about this.”

“Yes ... philosophical ... of course.” I wish I knew what he meant.

“Come to me just before the end of lunch

break, and I will see you right.”

I had to trust him, and as ever he was being inscrutable. He never explains things, just does them.

So at the end of lunch break I went to him, as instructed. He gave me a large paper bag, and it was full of litter.

“Take this to Gardner, and tell him you have done lots of litter picking.”

“But how?”

“Simple, I went to the tuck shop and emptied the litter bin there. Every one who buys sweets starts eating them straight away. What do you suppose they do with the wrappers they have just taken off?”

“Well, they put them in the litter bin there in the tuck shop. Matron's eagle eye is on them, after all.”

“Guess who, when he bought a few sweets, asked Matron for a paper bag to hold them in.”

“You.”

“Guess who, when Matron was busy selling sweets to another boy, went to the litter bin there and emptied all the wrappers into the said paper bag.”

“Gosh, so that was how you did it.”

“Yes, philosophically.”

I wish I knew what the word means, but I suppose at the very least it means being clever.

“So off you go the prefects' room and offer Gardner the evidence of your toils. But say nothing. No words. No explanations, just give him the bag of litter and walk away.”

Which is just what I did. The look on Gardner's face was a picture. Worth all the hassle I had been through.

Mitchell

Matron does not often come into the staff common room, but today she did before the evening meal. She had a specific reason.

“Will someone please tell me more about this new boy Trubshaw? At the lunch break in the tuck shop he filled a paper bag with sweet wrappers from the waste paper bin I keep there for the boys to put their discarded wrappers in. Now, someone tell me, why would he do that?”

“Yes, he is strange and unpredictable in my experience.” And I told them all about the Socrates Club that he was going to start next term.

“I suppose he thinks he will use the folly,” said Chaplain.

“How did you guess that?” I asked.

“He has a fixation about it being a Greek temple, and wants it dedicated accordingly. I have told him No, of course.”

“I see no reason why he should not use it for any meeting,” I countered. It rather surprised me that I was being defensive about a boy, in opposition to a colleague,

but there it was. I had spoken without thinking very much.

“Do you think anyone will actually come to such a meeting?”

“Time will tell. Fairbrother will be the prefect in charge, and Trubshaw has one close friend, so there will be three at least.”

“Actually he seems to have quite a following among his peers,” said Peale. “He is their leader in their ‘let’s embarrass the teachers’ campaign.”

“Really, I have not noticed any such campaign,” was all I could say. Perhaps, in later reflection, I thought it not such a wise thing to say. Were we taking sides, one against another, in our own safe haven?

“Chaplain, you are taking him for Greek on a one to one basis; what do you think?”

“He is very diligent, and very bright.”

Peale coughed at this. “Bright? That is an understatement. I cannot get the better of him in my subject.”

Why should he want to? I thought.

Peale continued: “I have a favourite trick question, and it always fools them. But not Trubshaw.

“What question is that?” I asked, then regretted the impulsive response.

“Well I have to smuggle it in with with lots of other ordinary mental arithmetic questions of course, but here it is: ‘A lily growing in a pond doubles in size every day; if it takes 20 days to completely fill the pond, how many days does it take to half fill the pond?’”

We remained silent for the denouement.

“Of course the boys all put down 10 days, since that is half of 20.”

He looked round at us. I could not see what was wrong with this.

“And the correct answer is 19, which only Trubshaw got right.”

Peale looked at us, none of us daring to say anything. I too would have not dreamed of putting down 19.

“If it doubles in size every day, and on day 20 the pond gets filled, one day before that the pond would be half filled. Hence 19.”

Obviously. I suddenly saw the point. No one had to be a calculating genius to get that right, but one had to be good at logic.

Or should I be calling it philosophy?

Wetherill

It was nearly the end of the Spring Term and we were all looking forward to the hols. I was due to stay with my good friend Trubs, since he had stayed with me over the previous hols. I was curious about what his house and family would be like. So I asked him about it.

“My dad works as a professor in the University, which is great, because that means he can get anything he wants from the University Library. He gets books for me too, of course.”

All this about books is a tad off-putting, but I make no comment.

“He has rooms in college, but we live in a nice house on the Huntingdon Road. There is lots of open space at the end of our garden. We are on the posh side, facing south and west.”

“I know you have no mother, so who looks after you, and who cooks the meals?”

“My mum died just after I was born, and I had a nurse to start with. Then, when I was a bit older dad engaged a housekeeper, and

she has been with us since then.”

“What’s her name?”

“Strictly it’s Mrs. Zakary. She escaped the Nazi occupation of Poland, and changed her name a bit, because Polish has lots of unpronounceable letters, and she wanted to sound more English. Her husband stayed to fight in the forests, and she has not seen or heard of him since then. Very sad really, I suppose, but she stays cheerful. And I don’t call her by her proper name. When I was a toddler I couldn’t get my tongue round ‘Mrs. Zakary’, and said ‘Mystery’ instead. Dad thought this was great, because she was something of a mystery to him too. He explained that she had no home, no family, and so we would give her a home and a family too, even though her past was a bit of a mystery.”

“Do you still call her Mystery?”

“Oh yes, she would be surprised if I called her anything else.”

“She must have become a sort of mother to you, I suppose.”

“I do not know how a real mother would be different from Mystery, never having

had a real mother to bring me up. You are raising some interesting questions now, Soapy. I will think about this.”

“My mum nags me a lot. Does this Mystery nag you?”

“She does not often tell me what to do, but whenever she does I simply do it. I think I have a lot of freedom really. This is something else I have not thought about.”

What a contrast, I was thinking, between Trubs' home and mine. His a quiet house with a sunny garden, and mine a busy hotel on the sea front, with lots and lots of hassle: complaining guests, panic laden kitchen staff, stropky waiters, careless maids getting things wrong in the bedrooms, and my mother always at the end of her tether. And Trubs with a mystery for a mother.

Mystery

The Prof, which is what I call him in my mind, had warned me what to expect for the Easter holidays.

“You will need to get the spare room ready for my son to bring home a school friend for the whole of the holidays. I will be fetching them on Saturday morning in the car, so it will be lunch for four.”

“Very well, sir.”

“The boy's name is Wetherill. No idea what his first name is; they only use surnames at this school, so he will answer to Wetherill. He probably has a nickname, and we will pick that up in due course.”

Just like the Prof, I thought: more or less indifferent to social niceties. But a heart of gold, which is why I have the privilege to be his resident housekeeper. I am a sort of charity as far as he is concerned, and have been now for almost ten years. All he knows about me is that I am a displaced person, a refugee from the Hitler invasion of Poland. My husband was last heard of

that many years ago, and as I am still technically married there is no problem about my living in the house of a widower. He always refers to me as Mrs. Zakary, and Theo his son still calls me Mystery, usually with a wry smile. His full name is Theodore, but he prefers the shortened version. The Prof once explained the name to me: he is a gift from God. And I have been the only mother figure he can remember, since his real mother died very soon after his birth, from the complications of the birth process. Theo is the only child I have, or ever expect to have, but he cannot call me Mother. So he calls me Mystery instead.

I was wondering what his friend would be like. Theo is so quiet and internal, and so it was a bit unexpected that he has a close friend at all. If he is anything like his father, this friend may be a rather needy person. When Theo is on his own, as he has been until the Prof sent him away to boarding school, he spends all his time reading. So there was another question: how could the household adapt to another boy, unless he was the studious type as well?

Time will tell, I thought.

Wetherill

The holidays at last. We slung our suitcases on the Prof's luggage rack, and he drove us off. This will be the first ever time I have been away from home for a holiday, and it was beginning to occur to me that I had no idea how we would pass the time. At my own home, the hotel in Eastbourne, I am either given jobs to do round the hotel, as a glorified porter, or I escape and wander round the town. There is so much going on in a seaside resort that people watching is quite diverting. Families come here for a good time, and the kids quarrel amongst themselves, and the parents do too. Very diverting.

The drive to Cambridge did not take too long, and soon we had arrived at Trubs' house. It was much bigger than I was expecting, and a kind lady showed me to my room.

"Trubs tells me your name is Mrs. Zakary," I said to her.

"You may call me Mystery, if you like, which is what Theo calls me. What would

you like me to call you?"

Theo! I suddenly realised that I had never actually found out what his name was.

"Er," moment of decision, "well Trubs calls me Soapy, so we had better stick to that here too. And he will probably slaughter me if I start calling him Theo. He won't want that name used at school, I am pretty sure."

"I am sure you are right."

"What should I call his father?"

"Professor will do. Theo, Trubs I mean, calls him Dad of course. If he wants anything different he will let you know."

This seemed to have solved the name problem, but I still has no idea how we would spend the time for four weeks.

Mystery

After the meal I saw the boys go out into the garden and Theo was showing Soapy round everywhere. There is a lovely open vista from the end of the garden, facing in a south-westerly direction.

Unfortunately it looked like rain so the boys came in and went into the drawing room. Apart from the kitchen and scullery, we have a dining room, a living room, and a library. The library was where Theo used to do his schoolwork all day before he went to school. It is crammed with books and there is a big desk.

I joined the boys in the living room, where the Prof was too. He asked them what they would like to do next. Theo looked at Soapy and he just shrugged his shoulders.

“No idea, eh?” asked the Professor. “Well I will introduce you to a game you may not have played before. It is called Nim.”

He asked me if I would find them a box of matches. I quickly went into the kitchen and came back with a box. It was quite full.

The Prof emptied the box of its matches

onto a coffee table, and arranged them into three piles.

“The rules are simple: each player must take at least one match away at every turn, and may take as many as he likes, but only from one pile. The winner is the player who picks up the last match.”

This certainly seemed an easy enough game, and the boys started playing. Theo started first and won the game. Soapy did not seem at all surprised. Theo won the next game too, even though Soapy started first. After several games, which Theo won every time, Soapy asked:

“All right, what is the trick?”

“There is no trick,” replied Theo, “you just have to think ahead.”

“Can you beat your father?”

“Don't know. We have never played this game before. I expect not, mind you.”

So Theo and his father played, and they won alternate games. Whoever started first seemed to have some advantage.

“There you are boys,” said the Prof, “you can see that there is some sort of logic that means that the first player should always

be able to work out a winning strategy. But it all depends on how many matches there are, and how they are arranged into piles. So the fairest way to play would be to have a random number of matches, and to somehow let the piles be random too.”

So the boys returned to playing each other, throwing the matches down from a height so there were never the same number being played, and never exactly the same number in each of the three piles. The result was still the same, with Theo winning every time. Then a change, and Soapy won a game. He looked very surprised, then said:

“That was kind of you. You let me win that game on purpose.”

Theo just smiled.

After the boys had gone to bed I sat for a while with the Prof. “That was an interesting game,” I said. “So little equipment and yet it seems quite complex. Did you invent it yourself?”

“Oh no,” he replied. “It is probably very old, perhaps Chinese in origin. But I was taught it by a chap called Alan. From the

university. He is a mathematician, brilliant too, one of the youngest men ever to be made a fellow by Kings.”

“Is he still there now?”

“No, he is in Manchester now. He has moved about quite a lot since the war. He won't talk about what he did in the war either, so he is a bit of an enigma.”

“How come you got to play a game like Nim with such a man?”

“He was interested in making an electronic machine that could solve problems better than a human. When a human computes something it can take for ages. But an electronic computer could do things instantaneously. He was using games like Nim to test the kind of logic a machine could use to solve the problem of what the best move would be to win the game. He thought the ultimate test would be a game like chess, so Nim was just a start.”

“Sound interesting. Has he got there yet?”

“No idea. I have lost touch with him since the late 30s. But I dare say that is what he is doing in Manchester right now. And who

knows what sort of electronic computers we will eventually have, even perhaps ones that children can play games with.”

“And right now we need to think of something young Westerill can do to keep him occupied.”

“You are right. I have an idea. I will take the boys on a special outing.”

I had no idea what the Prof had in mind, but agreed with the idea that Soapy and Theo would never find a mind game they would both enjoy.

Wetherill

After breakfast Trubs' dad told us he was going to take us to see something interesting. I managed to refrain from asking 'what?', as I knew that would not be polite, and by now I was used to the Trubshaw habit of doing things without explaining.

We had to catch a bus to get into the centre of Cambridge, and what a contrast with Eastbourne. "It is not term-time," said the Prof, "otherwise the place would be swarming with bicycles."

You could have fooled me. There were bikes everywhere, but it was all the old buildings that caught me eye. The medieval college buildings were something different. And we went past a huge church building, and that, I was told, was merely a college chapel. Then we got to a building that had a huge columned portico, and to my great surprise walked up the steps and straight in.

I saw a sign that said Fitzwilliam Museum, but the chap on the door almost

bowed as he said: "Good morning, sir."

"These boys are with me. I have arranged by phone with the curator to see the Turner collection."

"Yes, professor, I have been advised. Please follow me."

It seemed we were like royalty.

"Quite a number of the paintings we will see, boys, are watercolours. These need to be protected from the light, otherwise they fade badly. I am a trustee here, so we are going to see them all, oil and watercolours."

In the special room we were able to look at what seemed about a hundred pictures, all by this chap Turner. The Prof drew my attention to one painting in particular.

"This is pen and ink, with colouring by watercolour."

I looked at it. It was a church. It was rather nicely done I thought, but there was something just a bit wrong with it, though I couldn't say exactly what.

"It's the perspective," said the Prof. "It is not quite right, is it?"

I looked a bit harder, and I could see he was right.

“Turner was your age when he painted this, Wetherill. He was staying at Margate, and this is St. John's church there. In winter, as you see.”

“My age?” I gasped.

The Prof nodded.

“Do you think a boy my age could produce something as lovely as this?”

“Only one way to find out,” the Prof answered. “You will need the right kind of paper, a good pen, some Indian ink, and a paint set. So look at what Turner did, and imagine yourself doing the same.”

So we looked even harder at all the paintings. There were lots of countryside scenes, lots of boat scenes, sometimes in storms, and lots of buildings. But I noticed one thing in particular: the sky in his paintings seemed almost the most important thing. The sky was always dramatic. Sometimes very bright, sometimes very dark and gloomy. But you always looked longer at the sky than at the boats, or the fields, or the buildings.

What a thing it would be to make pictures like these, I was thinking. Eventually we

trooped out of this magnificent place and back towards the huge chapel, and then turned right into the town centre. Off into a side street and we found a shop where the Prof bought me a large book of the right paper, pen, ink, and the paint set. This was very embarrassing, as I had no idea whether I could get my parents to accept that a friend's dad had given me such a great present. I stuttered something to that effect, and got the answer:

“Think nothing of it. You can pay me back with pictures when you have learnt how to make them.”

Seemed a fair exchange. It would give me even greater incentive to learn how to draw and paint.

“There is a book on how to use watercolours at home in my library. You will be able to read that. Getting the right mix of colours, and the right amount of water in the mixing dish, will all take time to learn. You will get it horribly wrong to start with. But persevere. It is the same with everything that is worthwhile.”

On the bus back to their house I asked

Trubs: "Did you put him up to this?"

"No, Soapy, I had no idea of his plans at all. But you do realise, don't you, that you had to pass the test?"

"What test?"

"When you were looking at the paintings, my dad was looking at you. And he asked you whether there was anything wrong with the church at Margate, didn't he? He wanted to know if you had the eye, as he would say, of a painter."

"Did I pass the test?"

Trubs patted the bag with all the painting stuff in it. "There is your answer."

Mystery

It was lovely to see young Soapy, as I was now getting used to calling him, with a set purpose. He had been given a folding chair and was in the garden with his drawing pad on his knee and a pen in his hand.

The other three of us agreed just to let him get on with his self-tuition, so I was in the living room when Theo's father asked him how the term had gone.

"Well, Dad, I have begun to define myself."

The Prof, in his usual manner, merely nodded for the boy to continue.

"I am a philosopher."

Again silence from the Prof.

"We have been doing the history of the ancient Greeks, and I have learnt all about Socrates. I have asked Titch, I mean Mr. Mitchell our history teacher, if we can have a Socrates Club, so that we can have philosophical debates."

"Has he agreed?"

"Yes, actually, and we are going to have them in the folly."

"Tell me about the folly."

“It is a sort of miniature Greek temple, but with just the floor and columns round the outside; no roof.”

Another nod.

“And I want to make it a temple of Wisdom, or more precisely a temple to Sophia.”

Theo raised his eyebrows at this point.

“Yes,” his father replied, “I know the Greek for wisdom.”

“I asked the Chaplain, and he said ‘No way.’”

“Hardly surprising. His responsibility is to maintain Christian activity. He can hardly encourage you to arrange a competitive pagan temple, can he?”

“So what do you advise, dad?”

“Some research. I will find you the books you will need.”

Later that evening, when just the Prof and I were having a cocoa together before retiring, he explained to me what he had in mind. “The Chaplain will come round if there is a Christian dimension to Theo’s plans, maybe. So I will give Theo stuff to

read about the Hagia Sophia.”

“Istanbul?”

“Yes, or Constantinople as it was when the church dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God was originally built. Interestingly by that phrase they actually were referring to the second person of the Trinity. Did you know that the Holy Wisdom of God had its annual feast day on December 25th, our Christmas Day? They were celebrating the incarnation.”

“So you are going to hope that Theo will work out that if he dedicates his folly to the Hagia Sophia, the Chaplain can hardly object?”

“Precisely. It will be an excellent test of Theo's persuasive powers.”

Wetherill

The Prof had shown me one or two books about painting in watercolours, but I explained to him that I was unlikely to get much benefit from books.

“Quite right, my boy, you have got to do what Turner did, and I am pretty sure he did it without books.”

I smiled a 'thank you'.

“But may I give you some advice?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Try your hand at draughtsmanship to start with. See if you can draw a good outline with the pen first. Go into the garden with a chair, and draw something with pen and ink. If you draw a watering can and I don't think it's a flower-pot, that will be a good start.”

So, armed with my pad of paper, really thick paper it was too, and the pen and ink, off I went into the garden. Where to put the chair? What to draw. I decided to draw the garden shed, and then, to amuse the Prof, I looked round for a watering can and a flower-pot and put these in front of the

shed.

The trouble with using a pen is that you cannot erase any line you draw. The shed had any number of straight lines. So you dip your pen into the ink, which is carefully placed on the ground, and you hope you won't knock the bottle over, and you give it a go.

One line, at an angle, and you have committed yourself. That is the ridge of the roof of the shed, and there is no undoing it. It is there for all eternity. Now the slopes of the roof either side of the ridge, then the door. I don't need to go on, do I?

Actually the flower pot had such interesting curves. Trubs would know the right geometrical name for a squashed circle, something like an eclipse, but I think that is wrong.

Getting the flower-pot done gave me some good practice for the watering can, with a dome to think about as well as the curves of its body. But it was recognisable as a watering can, I decided.

This was the first time in my life that I began to feel a sense of achievement.

Lunchtime, and I carefully put the lid back on the bottle of this magic drawing ink, and closed the cover of my drawing pad once I was sure the ink lines were all fully dry. I went in the house quietly, not sure whether I wanted anyone else to see my efforts, but also desperately wanting someone to admire them.

Trubs was reading in the library, and in any case I was not sure I wanted him to see my work. It would have to be a grown-up. Mystery was in the kitchen, so I sauntered in with the drawing pad under my arm.

“May I see?” she asked.

“I suppose so,” I said.

She opened the book and looked hard at my sketch.

“This is very good,” she said.

“Well it is my first effort.”

“You must show it to the Prof when he gets back.”

We waited, and when he did come back he immediately asked to see my work. At first he was completely silent, which worried me a lot. Then he said: “You have

the eye, my boy.”

That was all I needed to hear.

“You may progress to experimenting with the watercolours. And I will give you a tip, if I may.”

He paused, and I smiled him encouragement.

“When you do a landscape, the colours of all the bits that are near should be strong. The further away anything is, trees especially, and fields and hills, these should all get progressively fainter.”

I nodded.

“There are books in the library full of pictures. Look at them, at your leisure. Study the colour strengths.”

I nodded again.

“Watercolour is very good for skies. If you use enough water you can get different shades blurring in with each other. This is what you want to happen. Clouds do not have sharp edges, do they?”

“You’re right. They don’t”

“Painting is nine tenths looking. That is why I said ‘you have the eye’. Without the looking, you will fail.”

We sat down for lunch after this, with my mind holding everything the Prof had said.

After this the holiday seemed to fly. I was out in the garden every day, and the view from there was painted many times. The terrain beyond the garden was rather flat, with little of any great interest, but each day there was a different sky, and somehow a different sort of light. I tried to capture these differences as best as I could.

At the end of the holiday my book was nearly full, and the Prof presented me with another one.

“Choose a picture to give me in return, if you will, please,” he asked.

I gave him the latest one I had just finished.

“I will have it framed, and it will hang in the study.”

You cannot know how proud I felt. I was a painter now.

Mitchell

There is something about the summer term that makes a schoolmaster's life almost bearable. It's warmer, for a start. And cricket is a game that is so much easier on the staff than rugby. You don't have to change into ridiculous clothing, and if you have a shooting stick to perch on the umpiring of a game is not too physically demanding.

"Welcome back, boys," I was saying to my Fourth Form for our first History lesson of the term, and on we went with our classical Greek narrative.

There was some matter that had gone completely from my mind, which caught up with me at the end of the lesson. Young Trubshaw came up and asked: "Can we talk about the Socrates Club, please, sir?"

So he had not forgotten about it.

"Well?"

"We need to arrange the first meeting, sir, and I have no idea how we do that."

"We will get the Headmaster to make an announcement at the very end of the

morning assembly on Saturday. So you devise the exact form of the announcement you want made, and bring it to me. If I approve, I will pass it on to the Headmaster."

"Certainly, sir."

And off he went. Later that day he brought me a piece of paper. He had taken the trouble to write in neat handwriting and with nice large letters. I suppose he thought all us older men pretty senile. His notice read:

The Socrates Club meets to discuss topics of importance, and is open to all boys. The first meeting will take place on Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Folly. The topic for discussion will be 'porridge'.

I could hardly believe my eyes.

"Porridge, Trubshaw?"

"Yes, sir, porridge."

"You propose to be philosophical about porridge?"

"Indeed so, sir."

There were several lines of thought

running through my head at this point. Could this ridiculous start mean the demise of the Socrates Club? This would be a relief, obviously. How could I explain it all to the Head, and not have the whole thing treated as a silly joke? I sighed. I would just have to try, and so I took the slip of paper from him with no further word.

When I approached the Headmaster I did so with some hope that he might see that at least my teaching the boys about ancient Greek history and the life and death of Socrates had inspired some reaction. I tried explaining all this to him to begin with, and got some nods of approval. Then the bombshell. I produced the proposed notice of the first meeting.

At first he said nothing. Then he said: "Your Trubshaw takes after his father, whom I know pretty well."

'My' Trubshaw, as though there were some level of ownership.

"Very subtle," he added.

I could not see any subtlety at all.

He could tell that I had not got the point, so he went on: "You will see the purpose of

it in due course. You have appointed a prefect, I trust, to oversee this interesting event?"

"Yes, Headmaster, Fairbrother."

"He will do. A sensible enough boy for his age."

"So you are happy to read this notice out on Saturday?"

"Certainly. Let us hope the weather is fine enough for them to use the Folly."

"Would you like me to attend too, to keep an eye on things?"

"No, that would stifle the debate they must have, but brief Fairbrother that you want a full report on what took place afterwards."

Suppressing the natural desire to be told more of what was in the Headmaster's mind, I went off to look for Fairbrother, and to give him very precise instructions for Sunday afternoon.

Fairbrother

For the first time that anyone could remember a master came to the prefects' room to speak to someone. Titch knocked very politely on the door then came in and said he wanted to speak to me. We both stepped outside.

"Fairbrother, you remember that you said you would be willing to look after the Socrates Club that young Trubshaw wants to start?"

"Yes, sir."

"On Saturday the Headmaster will announce the first meeting, which will take place on Sunday afternoon in the Folly."

"Ah."

"So I am going to hold you to your promise, and ask that you go along, make sure that all goes well, and then bring me a report about what actually happened."

"Got it. Will do. Have you any idea if there is a topic fixed for debate?"

"Porridge."

"Courage?" I asked, pretending to mishear, as I could not believe such a mundane

thing would be suitable for a philosophical discussion.

“You heard me. Porridge!”

And with no further words Titch stalked away.

Back in the prefects' room I told the others what Titch had just told me. After a pause for thought Robertson said: “The crafty so-and-so. You realise what Trubshaw intends. He is going to organise some sort of campaign against the dreadful breakfasts we get here. Why didn't we think of this first?”

Suddenly we were all chipping in with comments about what a good idea it was, how awful porridge was for breakfast, and what different sorts of breakfasts we would much prefer.

“Well I have got to go to the Folly on Sunday, but I reckon it would be a good thing if most of us went too,” I said.

“I am certainly going to,” said Robertson, and there were several 'me-too's' from the others.

Later that day I sought out Trubshaw, and told him a bit about about the reaction

from my fellow prefects.

“Yes, Fairbrother, and may I ask you to get things started properly, as if you were running the show?”

Cheeky blighter, I thought, but simply asked: “What do you want?”

“Soapy and I will carry my tuck-box over to the Folly, and put it at one end. The rule will be that only one person can speak at any time. That person will have to be standing on the tuck-box to do so. If someone wants to speak they must come and stand next to the tuck-box. When the person speaking is finished, they get up on the box next and say their bit.”

“Sounds reasonable,” I said.

“So will you start first, standing on the tuck-box and making sure every understands the rule?”

“OK.”

“And then as you are the prefect in charge you can intervene if anyone breaks the rule.”

“Yes, I will do that too.”

“Thanks very much, Fairbrother. See you at the Folly on Sunday.”

For a fourth-former I thought this little kid was a good organiser, and I determined to do my best to make sure that the discussion was orderly.

Wetherill

We keep our tuck-boxes in the senior games room, which is shared by the fourth, fifth, and sixth forms. There is a junior games room for the youngsters. The boxes are all round the sides of the room, and there are unwritten rules about them. They are utterly private, so no one ever locks theirs, though you could with a padlock if you wanted to. Usually we keep our tuck in them, but I keep my painting equipment there too. In fact I take the whole thing outside now when I go painting, as it is just the right height for sitting on, and you need to be sitting when you are sketching or painting, of course.

When the Head announced the first meeting of the Socrates Club on Saturday during the morning assembly there was an immediate stir. In fact he had to tell us to be quiet, which was quite rare for an assembly in the chapel. Everyone looked at Trubshaw, because by now everyone knew it was his idea.

Sunday came, and after lunch Trubshaw

and I collected his tuck-box from our games room. There were carrying handles on the two end sides, and there was very little in it, so, although it was a long walk to the Folly, it was no great bother to carry it there.

I was quite surprised to see how many older boys, including prefects, were beginning to stroll over. Fairbrother I knew would have to come, as he was technically in charge. But I was not expecting very many others.

We chose a good spot for the tuck-box, and Fairbrother was looking at his watch. He eventually decided it was time to start, and stood up on the tuck-box.

“This is the first meeting of the Socrates Club. We will come here to discuss philosophical topics. To make sure these are orderly discussions, here is the rule. Only one person may speak at any time. That person must be standing on the tuck-box as I am now. If someone wants to speak they must come out and stand next to the tuck-box, on my left, where Trubshaw is now. When the person on the

tuck-box has finished speaking he stands down to the right, and the next speaker mounts the tuck-box and has his say."

Fairbrother paused, while we all digested this.

"I now hand over to Trubshaw who will begin the debate for us. We all know the topic from the Head's announcement."

With that Fairbrother stood down and Trubshaw mounted the tuck-box. You could have heard a pin drop.

"When doing my research for this topic during the Easter hols I consulted the famous dictionary of Doctor Johnson. We all know that porridge is made from oats. His entry for oats reads: 'A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.'"

There were some chuckles, and Trubshaw quite obviously had their full attention.

"When I came here I was not used to school life at all, having been educated at home. The most obvious contrast was breakfast. I personally agree with Doctor Johnson, that oats are a suitable food for horses. Now I know that there was

rationing during the war, but it is now 1951 and the war has been over for six years. Bread is no longer rationed, and only sugar still is. So I believe the Headmaster of this school can no longer appeal to the rationing situation to justify treating us like horses.”

This provoked a cheer.

“So let us consider how we can best put pressure on our Headmaster to treat us better.”

Trubshaw stepped down of the tuck-box and several older boys moved towards it to say their piece.

The discussion was lively. Everyone obeyed the rule, and boy after boy agreed with Trubs. One boy suggested a boycott, but everyone knew he always had a full supply of food from his home, and this was quickly opposed by everyone else. We are all too hungry to think of missing breakfast completely. Eventually there were really only two positive suggestions. One was a petition which we would all sign, and the other was that we all write home to our parents asking them to write to the Head

on our behalf.

When more or less everybody had got up and said something, not me of course, Trubshaw got up again and said: "The Socrates Club aims to bring the Greek traditions of open discussion into our affairs. There have been two good suggestions, so we will now take a vote. The option which gets the most support will be the action we take. So hands up for a petition."

A few hands went up. But only a few. I know I did not put my hand up because I did not want my name on a list the Headmaster would see.

"Now hands up for letters home."

This got far more votes, and so Trubshaw declared: "This has been carried. We will all write to our parents asking them to take up the matter with our Headmaster. Thank you. I declare the meeting closed."

Fairbrother

I could not help but admire the way Trubshaw had handled everything. Getting me to lay down the rule he had invented, and then knowing exactly how and when to bring the whole thing to a good conclusion.

I was thinking these thoughts as I wandered slowly back towards the main school buildings. Then I spotted Titch lurking, and obviously waiting for my report. This was going to put me in a quandary. How much was it purely private, what we had decided, and could I keep it from getting to be public knowledge?

“Well, Fairbrother, how did it go?”

“Very orderly, sir. No bad behaviour. Everyone discussed the topic very sensibly, I thought, and you must have seen how many attended. Quite surprising, I thought.”

The issue of behaviour and attendance was a safe area for my report, and Titch seemed satisfied with this. He clearly had no interest in what our opinions on anything might be, which I suppose must be typical of schoolmasters.

“Oh, by the way, the Headmaster would like to see you.”

Oops, I thought.

“Yes, straight after the meeting, he said to me.”

You can imagine my trepidation at this news. I went to the Head's study door and knocked and heard his 'come in' straight away.

“Ah, Fairbrother, thank you for coming so promptly.”

His window looked out over the playing field and even as far as the Folly. So he had seen everything. In fact I wondered if he had used binoculars and had watched us closely. His quiet and almost charming manner raised all my fears. Beware of schoolmasters speaking softly, I thought.

“You have made your report to Mr. Mitchell?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you told him everything had gone well?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was there any outcome?”

“What do you mean, sir?” I had to pretend

ignorance. I knew perfectly well what he wanted to know.

“Any decisions?”

I either had to lie or break what I thought was a trust the other boys would have in me.

“I suppose so, sir.”

“But you feel it would be wrong to go into detail, don't you?”

“Er . . . yes, really.”

“Very well, I will not press you.”

But his silence was a pressure.

“A petition would take a lot of courage, as the boys would have to put their names down, and those who did not put their names down might avoid it simply for fear of consequences.”

An escape, possibly.

“We voted against a petition, sir.”

“Understandable.”

Again the demanding silence.

“And presumably you are all too hungry for a boycott?”

“It was mentioned but nobody fancied it except . . . one boy.”

“So you are all going to write home to

your parents. Very much what I would do at your age."

I said nothing, and I suppose my silence was as good a confirmation as he needed. But I could truthfully say that I had not told him of our decision. Oh dear, I had failed miserably, but I could not bring myself to tell him a direct lie.

"Thank you, Fairbrother. You may go."

Back at the prefects' room I realised I had to come clean. They all knew I had been sent to see the Head.

"He's guessed what we are going to do," I admitted, "but I never told him."

They were all kind enough to leave it at that. Even Gardner, who I think hates me, said nothing.

Mitchell

Monday morning, and we were all in the staff common room waiting to go into the morning assembly in the chapel.

The Head knocked on the door, as he always does, and then walked in. We all paused in our own conversations to listen to what he had to say to us.

“Gentlemen, I have been thinking since yesterday afternoon what to do about the decision taken at the Socrates Club.”

This really caught my attention. Decision? What decision?

He was looking at me as he continued: “The boys have decided that having only porridge for breakfast is an insult to them. They considered a boycott, but are too hungry for that, and they came to the conclusion that a petition might put those that signed it at risk. I have reason to believe that they plan to write to their parents with a complaint and a request that the parents write to me asking for a remedy.”

Why had Fairbrother not told me about

this? Then I realised I had not actually asked him about any decisions, just how well the meeting went.

“So, gentlemen, I have spoken to Cook, and with effect from tomorrow the boys may choose either to have porridge as they do now, or to have bread and margarine as an alternative. Or even both if they are hungry enough. I will be making that announcement in a few minutes. In fact it is time we went to the chapel now.”

So we trooped out together. When it came to the announcements which always concluded our assembly, the Head spoke as follows: “It has come to my attention that some boys feel that our breakfast provision is somewhat lacking.”

There was immediate attention when he said this. I was looking at the row of Fourth Form boys, who now all turned towards Trubshaw.

The Head went on: “In future I would prefer concerns of this nature to be reported directly to me. But I have thought through the nature of your concerns as expressed yesterday in your meeting of the

Socrates Club. I have consulted with Cook and beginning tomorrow bread and margarine will also be provided at breakfast. You may continue to eat your porridge, you may have the bread instead, and even for those who are hungry enough you may have your fill of both.”

There were broad smiles all round at this announcement.

“Anyone who thinks this a sufficiently important piece of news to convey to their parents is at liberty to do so.”

With that the Head stalked out, and we followed him. I have no idea what anyone said to Trubshaw, but it occurred to me that the Socrates Club was now established in everyone's mind as well worth having. Did I deserve any credit for this? Not really, I was honest enough to admit to myself. The credit belonged to an eleven-year-old, or maybe he was twelve by now. Whatever age, he was old beyond his years.

Fairbrother

We all were in our prefects' room at break, and straight away Robertson said to me: "Well done Fairbrother for organising an improved breakfast for us all."

"It wasn't Fairbrother who organised it, you clot," said Gardner quickly, "it was Trubshaw in the Fourth Form."

"That's right," I admitted.

"And I think that is part of the problem," went on Gardner. "Too many junior kids getting too cocky. We need to bear down on them and keep them in their place."

I looked round to see if any of the other prefects would say anything to this, but they all looked at me. I did not want this to turn into a battle of wills between me and Gardner, but it looked as though this could not be avoided.

"Being a prefect is not just about bossing other people, you know. It's leading by example."

"Pious nonsense," came the answer from Gardner.

"So what do you think we should be

doing?" asked Robertson, who is not very quick on the uptake.

"We should control their behaviour by whatever means we choose. We need to show them who is in charge in this place, and make sure they obey us."

"How, precisely?" I asked.

"That is what I am working on," said Gardner. "Even if it means overstepping the limits set by you-know-who."

"If you do that you will get no support from me," I said firmly, "and you may end up not being a prefect any more. So watch out."

"Is that a threat?"

"No, a promise."

We heard the bell at this point, and I thought it was a bit like the bell at the end of a round in a boxing match. But we had to troop off to our classroom as the break was over.

Wetherill

For the first time that I can remember I was beginning to enjoy school. I had managed to get out of playing cricket by offering to be scorer. Cricket is a silly game with a very hard ball, which can easily hit you and hurt you. But you need a scorer for every game, and now I was the First XI's scorer, and sat in the pavilion at the open window, which is a safe enough place.

I was beginning to be recognised as having a sort of status: friend of Trubshaw, who was now revered as a real character. Some of our chaps had even taken to calling him Socrates, a nickname which I know he privately rejoiced in having. The nickname you get in a school such as ours is like a badge of honour – or a badge of disgrace. I will for ever be Soapy, but now I was also friend of Socrates.

The painting and sketching I could do was the main source of my happiness. I had no idea whether what I drew or painted was any good, but I had now a target. I really wanted to become good at it, and

watercolour painting is something you can only get any good at by doing it. To get the right shade you have to mix the primary colours you start with in a saucer shaped bowl, and you have to have just the right amount of water. You keep trying to get it right by trial and error. I made sketches of the folly regularly, from different angles and different distances away. It was a good challenge to get the perspective right of a very angular structure. Sometimes I coloured the sketches, and sometimes I just left them as pen and ink drawings. If I did a distant view it left plenty of room for the sky. Getting the sky looking interesting really kept me absorbed, and I now knew what I would be doing at home in Eastbourne: sea and sky. Perfect for a painter.

But, talking of skies, there was a dark cloud on the horizon. A big fat slob called Gardner was going round making a nuisance of himself. He had picked on me once, claiming he had authority to give me litter picking as a punishment for being untidy. Now he was mainly picking on boys

even younger than me. He would invent some fault, tell the boy off for that fault, and when the boy said that it was none of his business, or words to that effect, he gave him 50 lines to write. Usually something like 'I must show more respect to prefects.' I even saw him slap one junior boy on the face who questioned his right to do this.

Trubs had noticed this too, and we talked about it. "There will be a philosophical solution, my dear Soapy," he had said.

Needless to say I did not ask what solution he had in mind. I would find out eventually, and just had to be patient, I knew from past experience.

Fairbrother

I tended to keep a look out for Trubshaw and talk to him about this and that. In fact I needed to ask him when the next meeting of the Socrates Club was going to be.

“When we have a good topic to debate,” was his answer.

Then he asked me a difficult question: “What do you think of your fellow prefect, Gardner?”

This really put me on the spot. I did not want to be disloyal to another prefect, but I could hardly avoid telling the truth either.

“Why do you ask?” This a good way to evade a direct answer.

“He is going around bullying the juniors. He invents some fault then gives them lines to write. Surely only teachers can give you lines?”

This was something I had not been aware of, and it worried me.

“What happens if they don't do the lines?”

“He hits them. Usually slaps them on the face.”

Oh dear. I knew he was a bully at heart,

but did not realise it had got as bad as this.

“Can you do anything about this, Fairbrother?” he asked me.

“I doubt it. He and I do not see eye to eye, and he will ignore any criticism I make. And none of us can go snitching on him to any of the masters, can we?”

“You are right, I suppose.”

“Look, Trubshaw, you are good at solving problems. You remember how you helped me with Easy last term. Well, I now ask you to put your mind to this problem.”

“Is that an official request?”

He is getting a bit pompous, I thought, or was he just covering himself?

“Yes. Official.”

Trubshaw just nodded, and went off obviously thinking very hard. How would he solve the problem of a bullying prefect who was just too big and strong to be challenged physically?

Wetherill

It was a lovely evening and in June the daylight lasted till our bedtime, so I was out on the playing field sitting on my tuck-box and painting the folly, again. Suddenly I was aware of a presence behind me. Oh dear, it was Gardner.

“Wetherill, what are you doing out here?”

“Painting,” as if it was not obvious.

“Well you have no right to be.”

“Why is that, Gardner?”

The prefect paused and then said: “You are not allowed to take tuck-boxes out of the games room.”

“Rubbish. You just made that up. Fairbrother lets Trubshaw take his tuck-box to the folly for when we meet there.”

At first Gardner seemed not to know what to say, then he picked up my jam jar of water and poured it over the painting I was doing before it could protect it.

“You do what I say, or your suffer. Simple enough message even for a sissy like you.”

The painting was ruined, with all the detail washed out in the deluge of water.

And it had been one of my best.

“Now take your tuck box back to the games room, and don't let me catch you out here with it again.”

And with that Gardner stalked away.

I know it is babyish for a boy of my age to cry, but I can tell you there were tears in my eyes. I watched Gardner walking back towards the school. My future as a painter was in the balance. I must talk to Trubshaw straight away.

I struggled back to the school with all my painting gear inside the tuck-box, and quickly found Trubshaw.

“We must talk,” I told him.

So we went off to a quiet place where we would not be overheard, and I told him all that had happened with Gardner. I even showed him the ruined painting, which I had removed from the pad of art paper. It was unrecognisable as anything but a collection of blotches.

“Ruined!” I was nearly in tears again and he could see that.

“OK, Soapy, you are right. This is the last straw.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“The Socrates Club will meet again.”

I did not like to challenge Trubs, but for the life of me I could not see how the Socrates Club could achieve anything. But I had to trust him.

Mitchell

I am never quite sure whether I welcome private contact with Trubshaw, or whether he makes me a bit apprehensive. So when he asked for a chance to talk with me at the end of our History lesson, just before break, I was unable to refuse.

“Sir,” he began, “the Socrates Club will meet again this coming Sunday.”

“Indeed?”

“So would you give this notice to the Headmaster to read out at the end of Saturday morning assembly.”

“Certainly,” I replied, before I had actually read the piece of paper he handed me. Perhaps I should have read it first before agreeing so easily. Here is what it said:

The Socrates Club will meet at 2 p.m. on Sunday at the Folly. The agenda will be the Trial of the School Bully.

This seemed a bit like dynamite to me, and I straight away wondered how the Headmaster would react.

"I will give this notice to the Headmaster, but I cannot guarantee anything beyond that."

"Of course, sir, and thank you."

I hurried on to our staff common room, even though there was not the usual fifteen minutes left for my pipe. As you can imagine there was some interest among my colleagues when I read them the notice Trubshaw had given me to pass on to the Head.

"Who was it who said we had no bullies in this school?" asked Newberry.

"A slightly more interesting question might be 'who is the school bully?'" said Peale.

"I wonder whether the Head will agree to this," said Chaplain, who still had some sort of grudge about using the folly, which I must admit I could not understand.

"I will present the notice to the Head after lunch, and then you will know the answer to that question, anyway."

As lunch was ending, which the Headmaster shared with us and all the boys, I caught him and asked him for a few

words. We went together to his study.

“Trubshaw gave me this notice earlier this morning, Headmaster, asking me to pass it you for reading out on Saturday.”

The Head took the notice and read it. I wondered if he was going to say anything at all, as he merely stroked his chin in thought.

“Good,” he said eventually.

“So you will read it out on Saturday?”

“Most certainly, Mitchell. And I congratulate you on the way our young philosopher is developing under your guidance and tuition. His father will be most pleased.”

This was heady praise indeed, even though it left me rather puzzled. Why was our Headmaster pleased that there would be a gathering like this? I would have thought he would be worried at the implication that there was bullying going on in his school. Or did he already know, and saw this as a solution? Even, dare I ask the question, does he know who the school bully is? I certainly didn't.

Fairbrother

I was walking toward the prefects' room after lunch when Trubshaw caught up with me and asked if we could talk together. I agreed, and at his suggestion we started walking round the playing field so that we could talk privately.

"I have decided we need to put a stop to Gardner's bullying," he began.

"And how do you propose to do that?" I asked.

By way of answer he told me the notice he had given the Headmaster which he believed would be read out to the whole school on Saturday, which was tomorrow. He recited the exact words of the notice to me, making a good mimicking of the Headmaster's usual way of speaking.

"Gosh," was all I could think of to say.

"So I need to brief you on how you will conduct the meeting. You are the prefect in charge of the Socrates Club, remember."

This was pretty cheeky for a Fourth Former speaking to a prefect, I thought but said nothing.

He then gave me precise instructions, and I could begin to see from what he said that there was a chance that our common hope might be realised.

“But, surely, it all depends on whether Gardner comes or not,” I said.

“Oh, he will come all right. After all no one is named in the notice, and if he is the only prefect not to come it will be an open admission of guilt. That is why when you next get the chance you must emphasise to all your fellow prefects that it is very important they all attend the meeting of the Socrates Club on Sunday.”

“I can do that.”

“But don't give any hint as to what the meeting will be about. If they ask you just say they will all find out on Saturday morning.”

“Right.”

“Meanwhile Wetherill and I will go round the school and make sure that every little kid who has been bullied understands that they too must attend.”

“Yes, obviously.”

My mind was reeling by the time

Trubshaw and I had finished hatching our plans for Sunday afternoon. I was determined to play the part he had instructed me to play to the very best of my ability.

Wetherill

Saturday morning assembly, and you could have heard a pin drop when the Headmaster read out the notice for the Socrates Club meeting tomorrow. Everyone was talking about it while we marched off to our classrooms.

At break Trubs and I were very busy rounding up all the juniors whom we knew had been bullied by Gardner, telling them must turn up and say their bit. "It will not be snitching because their will be no staff there," we said to all of them. And we also told them to pass the message on to everyone they knew who had also been bullied.

During our History lesson Titch seemed very subdued and pensive. I guessed he was worried whether the Socrates Club, for which he was ultimately responsible, was about to get him into trouble with his boss, the Headmaster.

None of us mentioned the matter, of course, and I personally thought he was right to be worried. My concern was

whether all the prefects would band together to support one of their own. We could end up with some sort of war between the prefects and everyone else. Since Trubs had told me that I was to be the first to speak accusing Gardner of bullying, I realised I would be in the firing line if the prefects were going to support Gardner, and my life would become not worth living. But I knew that if we did not do something my life would not be worth living anyway. So what did I have to lose?

We also noticed, both during break and lunchtime, that there was very little sign of any prefects. They must all be in their private room. I wondered what they were saying. I doubted that they would simply be discussing the weather.

Fairbrother

After the Head's announcement we prefects all looked at Gardner to see what his reaction would be. Interestingly he did nothing and said nothing there and then. But when we gathered during the morning break he went straight into battle verbally. Looking straight at me he said: "You realise this is an attack on all of us prefects, don't you?"

"How so?" I countered.

"Anything a prefect does can always be described as bullying."

"What about pouring water all over a boy's painting?"

"Wetherill is a sneak."

"It wasn't him who told me, and even if it was he was perfectly justified in thinking that was not the right thing for any prefect to do."

Gardner shrugged his shoulders. "He was being cheeky." This sounded a bit flat, and I could see that the others in our room had no idea that Gardner had done such a thing.

“We need to stamp out this lack of respect for prefects, so we must all go and present a united front,” went on Gardner.

“I agree, we must all go,” I said.

Gardner looked rather surprised when I said this. He was not expecting support.

“Yes,” I continued, “we must all go and do the right thing when we have heard what all the junior boys have to say.”

I looked round. The others, apart from Gardner, all nodded in agreement. I could see they had got the message I had intended them to get. Gardner looked round at them too, but they all avoided his eyes. I began to be hopeful that the right outcome would be achieved, because my reputation was really at risk now. Everyone presumed that the subject for tomorrow's discussion at the Socrates Club was down to my initiative. I don't think any of them knew who the real author of the notice was.

Wetherill

Sunday came at last, and I had certainly slept very little during the night. This was the big day for me. I know I am a coward when it comes to physical pain, which is why I avoid games as much as I can. But now I knew that courage could also simply mean doing the right thing, however difficult.

I have no idea what the morning church service had in it. For all I know we sang Christmas carols in the middle of summer. I have no idea what we had for lunch either.

Eventually the time came for me and Trubs to carry his tuck-box out to the folly. We were well ahead of everyone else. Then came Fairbrother, who gave me a pat on the shoulder to encourage me. I think he had some idea of the mental ordeal I was going through. Next came what seemed like the whole school, and Fairbrother began to organise where they were to stand, so that those who were going to give evidence were at the front. Trubs and I pointed out the ones we were pretty certain were

willing to speak. And finally, all together, came the five other prefects, including Gardner. They stood together as a group and Gardner glared at me.

Fairbrother looked at his watch when it was obvious no one else was going to come, and stood on the tuck-box.

"I declare the meeting open. This is the procedure. First we will hear evidence from those who wish to name the person they think is the School Bully here," he said putting emphasis on the two key words. "Then there will be the opportunity for any person named as the School Bully," again the emphasis, "to say what they wish to say, and provide evidence to support this. Then, finally, we will hear any proposal as to what we should do, and we will vote on that proposal."

There was a lot of nodding at all this and it certainly seemed to me that this was very much a well prepared speech, and I could guess who had done the preparing. Anyway, Fairbrother now beckoned to me to stand up and say my piece. I too had been coached beforehand by Trubs.

So I stood up and said: "I name Gardner as the School Bully. He invented a rule about tuck-boxes and when I objected he ruined one of my paintings." That was all. Trubs had told me to keep it simple, but to provide a pattern for others to follow.

Next a Third Form kid stood up, and I rather think he too had been primed by Trubs, and he said: "I name Gardner as the School Bully. He gave me lines for no good reason and when I said only teachers could give lines he hit me across the face." The boy then stood down, to followed now by a succession of boys.

Each boy began with exactly the same words, 'I name Gardner as the School Bully' and then gave a similar account of his cruel acts; some had even written their lines being totally in fear of some physical response if they were not done. One boy had been threatened with a cricket stump, another had had his arm twisted behind his back. And so it went on. The more there were boys willing to come forward, the more encouraged the later speakers seemed to be. There was safety in numbers,

and I was beginning to feel less frightened too.

I also noticed the group of prefects next to Gardner were begin to move away from him every so slightly. There were visible frowns, as matters they obviously had no idea of were coming to light.

Eventually it was clear there were no more speakers coming forward for stage one, and Fairbrother mounted the tuck-box and said: "We have heard seventeen accusers all naming the same person as the School Bully. Is there anyone who wishes to name another person?"

Total silence, needless to say.

"I now invite any speaker who wishes to give evidence of rebuttal."

Where ever had Fairbrother got that big word from? I had never heard it before, but it was obvious what it meant. Gardner now looked at his fellow prefects, obviously expecting them to get up and defend the honour of prefects. But his disappointment was immediately clear. None of them intended to say anything.

Fairbrother looked over to where Gardner

was standing. "I invite the accused to say whatever he wishes in his own defence."

Gardner did not move, but simply said: "I will not dignify this gathering by saying anything. I will do what I choose to do, and none of you can stop me."

Fairbrother should have told him to come and say this standing on the tuck-box, but as he was still standing on it himself he let the matter pass.

"Very well. I now call upon the first witness to propose a course of action. We will then vote on it."

Oops, me again. But I was feeling a lot more confident and Trubs had told me exactly what to say. I stood on the tuck-box and declaimed in my strongest voice: "I propose that Gardner be not fit to hold the office of prefect, and this body requires him to go to the Headmaster within 24 hours to resign his office."

I always thought that office meant a work room but Trubs had assured me that it also meant an official position or status.

Fairbrother stood up on the tuck-box again and said: "You have heard the

proposal. All in favour raise their right hand.”

I looked to see what the prefects next to Gardner would do. Obviously all the junior kids put their hands up straight away. Then it happened; all the prefects, except Gardner of course, raised their right hands too. When Gardner saw this he realised he had lost and started walking away towards the school. We watched in silence as the lone figure departed, his head down in solitary defeat. No one seemed in any hurry to move off, as we watched the isolated boy walking back to the main school building. Fairbrother had moved over to join the other prefects, and they were now talking together. The younger kids were also talking to each other.

I went up to Trubs, and asked him: “Do you think he will go to the Headmaster and resign being a prefect?”

“Oh, yes, he'll go straight away if he has any sense. Get it over with.”

Headmaster

I had been watching the boys assemble at the folly, for I have a good view of it across the playing field. Everything there is too far away for me to do anything other than gain a rough impression of what is going on. So all I could see was boy after boy, all young ones, standing on something higher than the floor, and obviously saying something to the assembled boys.

Eventually I saw one tall boy saying something, then more talking, then many hands raised.

When I saw a single boy walking back all on his own I could guess pretty well that this was the School Bully. What delighted me was the very orderly way everything had happened. No obvious scuffles, no aggravation.

Soon I could recognised the boy: Gardner, a prefect, and it looked as though he was going to come into the main school building rather than the classroom area where the prefects have their private room. He is coming to see me, I surmised.

Soon there was a knock on the door, and Gardner came in at my invitation. He looked absolutely crestfallen.

“Sir, I don't know how to say this . . .”

I kept silence.

“They have said I must come to you.”

Again he paused, and again I offered no help.

“I am so sorry. I thought I was doing my duty as a prefect, but they all took it as bullying.”

“And was it?”

A long pause now.

“Yes, I suppose it was. At first it just seemed the right thing to do. And then some of the juniors were obviously very frightened, and some were very stropky. And I suppose I got carried away a bit.”

“Did you physically hurt anyone?”

The boy lowered his head, and very softly said: “Yes, sir.”

“So what happened over there at the folly?”

“They told me I must come to you and ask you to make me no longer a prefect.”

“Their wish is granted. From this moment

you are no longer a prefect.”

“Sir, about the long trousers . . .”

“Yes, you are returned to short trousers.”

“But I have not got any here, sir.”

“Not a problem, Gardner. Go straight away to Matron. She has several pairs of short trousers, which she keeps in store in case of, er, accidents.”

“What about my parents, sir?”

“You will write and request that your short trousers be sent here as soon as is convenient.”

“But will you write to them?”

“No need. As far as I am concerned this is an internal school matter.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“But I will give you some advice.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Incidents like this are all part of growing up. How you handle it is what matters. This could be the making or the breaking of you. You now have the opportunity to do the right thing.”

“What is that, sir?”

“I recommend you seek out everyone you have hurt and say sorry to them, and ask

their forgiveness. If you do that well and quickly you will regain the trust of this community. In any place like this we all have to learn to live together. That is both the strength and the weakness of a closed community. Do you understand this?"

"I will try to," answered the boy, showing the beginnings of real contrition.

"You were at fault, without a shadow of doubt. But we masters were at fault too. This has been a lesson to me too, you know. That a serious problem in this school needed a boy to sort out the way to solve it rather than an adult is rather worrying."

"Fairbrother did speak to me about it, sir."

So he thought that Fairbrother was the source of his downfall. I suppose no harm would come from letting him continue to think that.

"Very well, Gardner. You will report directly to Matron, and I expect that the next time we meet, at supper this evening, you will be wearing short trousers."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." And off he went.

Mystery

Theo's letters home usually arrive on Tuesday. The boys are encouraged to write their letters on a Sunday, and they are collected on Monday. I can always tell a Theo letter from the handwriting and the envelope. The post arrives after the Prof has left to go into college, so his letter remains on the hall table till he gets back.

He does not always share them with me. He usually just says something like 'the boy is fine'. This particular letter was interesting enough for him to pass it to me with a 'read this.' I read:

Dear Papa,

Things are going well here. We have just had our meeting of the Socrates Club. We brought the School Bully to trial. The last straw was when he ruined one of Soapy's paintings. When the Socrates Club meets we need to lug out my tuck-box so as to provide a pedestal for each speaker to stand on. I am wondering if I may presume on your kindness, given it is my twelfth

birthday next week. For a present could you get our gardener to knock up something better than a tuck-box? If it could be made of oak or some other hard wood that could allow it to stand outside in all weathers that would be perfect. It needs to be about knee high, and roughly two feet by three feet, a bit like a coffee table. It would be all right for it to have square legs, nothing fancy or pretty looking.

If you could get it finished in time to bring it with you to the fathers versus boys cricket match on Saturday week, that would be great. You remember how I looked up all that stuff about Hagia Sophia? I would just love to install the new pedestal as if it were an altar in a temple, though all we would use it for would be to stand on. It might be wise if you mention this to the Headmaster, and sort of get his permission.

Looking forward to seeing you at the match.

Your own,

Theo

“Will you get George to make him a

pedestal?" I asked.

"Certainly. If my boy wants a pedestal there will be very good reasons. And I will have to write to Mr. Walker about it, to be sure he won't mind."

Headmaster

After supper I suggested to my colleagues that we meet briefly in their common room. I needed to talk to them about my demotion of Gardner.

When we were all assembled I began: "It turns out that the School Bully was Gardner."

I paused to note their reaction. There were some raised eyebrows, but nothing said.

"He came to me as soon as the meeting of the Socrates Club had finished to tell me that the boys had decided that he should come to me to ask to be demoted from being prefect."

"Good Heavens!" This from Chaplain, whose expletives are always of this religious nature.

"You are surprised, Chaplain?" I asked.

"Yes, actually. I had no idea we were harbouring a bully, and him a prefect."

"Have you expelled him?" asked Peale, who is always the most vindictive of my colleagues.

“No. I have simply given him what he asked for, what he was made to ask for by the boys. I could hardly go against their wishes, could I?”

Peale frowned at this. The idea of boys deciding a punishment was totally foreign to him.”

“I actually think it will be harder for Gardner to stay amongst his peers back in short trousers than to have been sent home. Obviously I want you to keep an eye on this new situation.”

“How on earth did the boys get sufficiently organised to achieve this outcome?” asked Peale.

“I can tell you,” said Mitchell. “It is all down to Trubshaw. The Socrates Club was all his idea, and I agreed to sponsor it supposing that no one would ever go there. Then he got Fairbrother to be the prefect in charge, and now there have been two meetings that have been very well attended. I look forward to seeing what he manages to do next.”

“He asked me to turn the folly into a temple to Wisdom. Sophia to be precise. I

said No, of course," said Chaplain.

"Did you think it might become a rival to your church, Chaplain?" I asked.

"I suppose so, Headmaster."

"Well I think they can exist alongside each other," I replied. "I rather like the idea of boys seeking Wisdom. Is that not what we are here for, after all?"

"I agree," said Mitchell.

The others said nothing, so Chaplain could see he was in a minority.

"If the request is repeated to you, Chaplain, please refer the matter to me."

Chaplain nodded, rather reluctantly, I thought.

All this was still in the forefront of my mind when a letter came a few days later from my good friend Professor Trubshaw. It read.

My dear Walker,

My son has told me a little about his activity in the Socrates Club. He has asked me to get him a proper wooden pedestal, of a type that would stay outside in your folly permanently. Please let me know as soon

as you can if you are in agreement with this. If so I hope to bring it with me to the fathers versus boys cricket match.

Yours truly,

Trubshaw

I wrote back saying I would be delighted for him to bring such a pedestal with him, and would be very happy for it to be put to this proposed use.

It then occurred to me that the new item could be installed with some ceremony, and with an overt indication of headmasterly approval. There was only person I needed to discuss this with, and I resolved to do so.

Headmaster

It is usual for boys to dread any summons to see the Headmaster, as the invitation is often a prelude to disciplinary activity. So when I spoke to his form master, Chaplain, asking him to get Trubshaw to see me, I added the comment that he could tell the boy he was not in trouble.

“Is this something to do with the folly, Headmaster?” he asked me.

“Yes. I have decided to discuss with the boy what he would like done next. His father has asked permission for a more or less permanent pedestal to be installed. At the moment the boys use a tuck-box to stand on when speaking, which is not entirely satisfactory in my view.”

“I trust you will remember my reservations, Headmaster.”

“You are concerned about a rival edifice to your church, which might prove more attractive, I take it.”

“That is one way of putting it.”

“The eternal conflict between the secular and the religious, eh?”

Chaplain paused, not apparently able to think of anything useful to say to this.

“I think you need to know that in my view we have an educational duty to prepare our wards for adult life, where the tension between the secular and the religious is a daily experience.”

Again there was no response. My colleague either agreed with me but did not like to say so, or did not but chose silence. No matter. In the final analysis he was simply my employee.

“Let us see what Trubshaw suggests,” I said in parting.

When Trubshaw arrived after lunch, as summoned, I invited him to sit down. This was my symbolic way of indicating that he was not in trouble.

“Your father has written to me about a pedestal, Trubshaw.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And I have written back agreeing he may bring one for you on Saturday when he come here for the cricket match.”

“Oh, sir, thank you.” The boy was beaming with pleasure.

“What precisely is it for?” I said, feigning a certain degree of ignorance, while wanting to ask an open question.

“Well, sir, when the Socrates Club meets we need a way to keep order so that there is only one speaker at a time. So they have to stand on something to speak. And the something is my tuck-box. But what we really need is a similar object, a pedestal, to stay there in sun and rain all the time.”

“I can see the benefit,” I replied.

“And I asked my father to have one made to become just that.”

“He will be bringing it tomorrow. So will you just take it there yourself when it arrives?”

“Actually, sir, what I would really like is a proper installation ceremony.”

“Be more precise.”

“Would you please give me something to write on, sir, so that I can give you a notice to be read out in assembly.”

I did, and this is the notice he drafted:

The Socrates Club will meet on Sunday at 2 p.m. for a brief meeting to install a new

pedestal, and to conduct a naming ceremony for the folly.

“A naming ceremony? What name have you in mind?”

“Hagia Sophia, sir.”

“And have you suggested this before, to our Chaplain perhaps?”

“Yes, sir, I was going to mention that.”

“And he said No, didn't he?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You realise this gives me quite a problem, don't you.”

“Yes, sir.” Trubshaw looked me straight in the eye.

“I will have to mollify him, of course, but you have my blessing on the proposal.”

“Gosh, thank you, sir.”

“Think of it as a birthday present, Trubshaw, and keep up the good work you are doing for the benefit of the school.”

One of the joys of being a schoolmaster is the opportunity to deliver happiness. All boys have their date of birth registered in our records, so to have taken note of this date earned me great gratitude. And so

easily achieved.

My next conversation with Chaplain would be a difficult one, but when it occurred that evening I sensed that he had already accepted defeat on the matter. He even thanked me for letting him know, and he was gracious enough to concede that he had not expected the Socrates Club to have achieved any good things at all. He understood why I wanted to give it every encouragement. So we were able to part without acrimony after all, and for that I was glad.

Wetherill

When the Head gave out the notice about the Socrates Club on Saturday morning there was the usual stir when anything to do with the Socrates Club was mentioned. I already knew about it, of course, because Trubshaw had told me all about his conversation with the Head.

Trubs' dad had brought the new pedestal on his roof rack, and we solemnly stored it in the games room for the time being.

I was scorer for the cricket match against the fathers, which we boys narrowly won. We said goodbye to Professor Trubshaw after it, and looked forward to the Sunday events.

After our Sunday lunch, Trubshaw and I led out the boys who were curious to find out what would actually happen. We carried the new pedestal between us. It was a lot heavier than a tuck-box and I felt glad that we would only be doing this the once, all being well.

Fairbrother had been briefed by Trubs as to what to do, and so when we were all

ready to begin he mounted the pedestal and said: "Boys, we are here to dedicate this lovely new wooden pedestal, which has kindly been donated to the Socrates Club by Trubshaw's father. To honour this generosity, I am going to ask Trubshaw to perform the dedication."

So he stood down and Trubshaw mounted the pedestal, and in a very formal voice made a speech which I could tell he had thought about long and hard.

"I hereby dedicate the pedestal I am standing on to be the place where every speaker may say what he wishes. The Socrates Club welcomes free speech. May this pedestal be the vehicle for much wisdom to be delivered. We are here because we love wisdom, and with the permission of the Headmaster of this school, I hereby name this mock temple as a temple to wisdom. Using the Greek words which mean Holy Wisdom, this folly will henceforth be known as Hagia Sophia. May it inspire us to love wisdom in the spirit of both Solomon and Socrates."

He stood down from the pedestal to a

round of applause, and Fairbrother announced that the ceremony was over.

As we walked back to the school across the playing field it was nice not to be carrying anything.