

Trubshaw's Ghost

John Everett

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the many good teachers I have known, both as mentors and as colleagues.

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.

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

John Everett

September 2014

Chaplain

We were all together in the Staff Common Room as ever at the beginning of the new term. The Headmaster was addressing us standing with his back to the fireplace. On either side of the fireplace there were single-seater armchairs, and opposite it was a three-seater settee. There were five of us, the core of his staff, all comfortably seated. There was no fire lit in the fireplace, after all this was early September, so no fear of his gown catching fire. He always wore his M.A. gown as a kind of uniform, while we assistant masters did not.

“Well, gentlemen, here we are for a new term. I am pleased to say we have a full set of First Form eight year olds starting. In fact two of them are younger brothers. So we will have to get used to a Smithson Major and a Smithson Minor, and a Prebble Major and a Prebble Minor.”

The Headmaster always pretended to be no good at names, when in fact he was always spot on.

“In addition to our First Form new boys

we have another one, who is rather a special case. His name is Trubshaw, and he is coming here as a special favour to a friend of mine. This friend is a Cambridge don, and his son is eleven years old. His mother died in childbirth, and my friend Trubshaw has rather . . ." (he paused) ". . . special views on education. So son Trubshaw has been at home till now. No school. No school friends. He has been studying on his own, in his father's study, under his father's tutelage. He has Latin, Algebra, Geometry, some History, and has read quite widely. I am quoting his father here, and we will have to reserve judgment on all these points."

At this point he looked at me: "Chaplain, I have put him in your form, the Fourth Form, and I recommend you appoint a mentor from your form to look after him. In addition to all the gaps we will find in his education, he will need a friend of the same age to tell him how this school works. All our silly customs, and suchlike."

I nodded my head in agreement. "Certainly, Headmaster."

“As you know, gentlemen, I have had to find a replacement for our young sports master, er . . . Rowley.” He never loses an opportunity to pretend a loss of memory regarding names. We all exchange glances, waiting for the next one.

“Well, I have been quite lucky, I hope. There is a chap who has got two years free between school and university. Some mix up over his medical for National Service. I have not met him yet, but the agency has interviewed him. They told me the school he is leaving, and by a lucky chance I know the Head there, and he vouches for him. First fifteen rugby and first eleven cricket, good prefect, and so on. So he will arrive later today. He will have the First Form to look after, and he will not be too stretched academically there I presume. His name is . . . (again the pause, and the referral to his notes) . . . Easton. He will take Rowley's room in the hall, of course.”

This was the way our esteemed Headmaster ran the school. There were five what you might call permanent staff, four of whom had been too old for the war. I

had been ordained in 1938, and had finished my curacy just in time to have the problem solved of where I would find a parish by the start of the war. The obvious solution was to volunteer to be an army chaplain. Of course, when the war ended and I was demobbed, there were lots of us in the same boat, looking for a parish. In desperation I had applied to be on the staff here, which included the incumbency of the original parish church attached to the school. Five years on I had assumed that this would be my working life. I rather liked teaching, and my parish consisted of sixty boys from eight to thirteen or fourteen, all the staff of the school, and no one else. I had come to realise that this was a rewarding way to live out my life.

To explain my incumbency a little further, the main building was an old manorial hall, with a few cottages originally built for the workers on the farm land. So in what was originally a very small village, a church owned by the hall was built. Some time later the hall became a hunting lodge, and a large set of stables was built around a

quadrangle of space. It even had a small tower with a clock that would have looked fine on any market town hall. All the stables were now classrooms, after suitable transformation internally, and my church was a non-stipendiary living, with me receiving the salary of a schoolmaster of Melton Hall Preparatory School for Boys.

After the meeting the Headmaster called me to one side.

“Chaplain, I would like you take the school car and meet young Easton at the station. He will arrive on the evening train.” There were but two trains a day, so this was sufficient detail.

“Please show him to his room in the hall, and help him get to know the layout of the place, his classroom, that sort of thing. He can join us for our evening meal. I will make sure Cook knows.”

“Certainly, Headmaster.”

This was typical of him. My four colleagues were so much older that tasks like this normally fell to me. I had become a sort of administrative assistant, though regarded by my colleagues as very much

the junior member in the Staff Common Room.

So after tea I was off in the Armstrong-Siddeley to the station, a twenty minute drive away, wondering what sort of a fellow this Easton would turn out to be.

Easton

It had been a long journey; all the way to London, then across London by Underground, then out to this remote market town. But I was really looking forward to starting this next chapter in my life. A schoolmaster, and me not yet, well almost, nineteen. The two suitcases had been a bit of a bind, especially with me not knowing whether I was bringing too much or too little.

It was not what I was expecting either. I had decided to do my National Service before Cambridge. I had applied to my father's old college, and been granted a definite place for two years' time. Then the silly army people had lost my original medical test record and told me to take it again. For some reason I managed to fail the second medical, so no National Service to do after all. Something was wrong with the shape of my spine apparently. I did not argue with their decision, of course, and still felt perfectly fit. And this was only three weeks ago. When asked, the college

said they were fully allocated for this year, and even the next one too, so only my original allocation of a place would have to stand. Panic. What to do for two years? My father suggested teaching at a prep school, and told me there was an agency in London that would tell me what vacancies there were anywhere.

There was little to choose from, but it seemed I was acceptable to Melton Hall Preparatory School for Boys, subject to references being taken. I named the Headmaster of the school I was leaving, and our local doctor who was a friend of my father. With just a week to spare I was told that Mr. Walker, the Headmaster of Melton Hall would employ me for two years, subject to my performance being satisfactory. There was a minuscule salary on top of full board and lodging at the school. Barely enough to keep body and soul together, but I was not in a strong bargaining position. No mention of hours of working, but at least the holidays were long enough.

The train was pulling in at last to my

station, and I lugged the two suitcases out and looked around. There was only one person standing waiting for an arrival, a clergyman in a dark suit, black shirt and dog-collar, and he advanced towards me.

“Mr. Easton, I presume.”

He held out his hand in welcome, and I shook it.

“Can you manage those suitcases?”

“Yes, having both makes a balance.”

So I followed him to the ticket collector and we went into the car park and loaded the suitcases on to the luggage rack of a rather nice car.

“Let me tell you a bit about the school while we drive along,” he said as we got into the front seats of the car.

“I am the Chaplain. We rather go in for titles here, when we can, so there is the Headmaster, Matron, and Cook, as well as my four colleagues whom you will know by their surnames. They are Peale, Marsden, Newberry, and Mitchell. Peale is Maths, Marsden is French, Newberry is English, and Mitchell is History and Geography. I do Scripture, of course, and Latin.”

I nodded, wondering if I could possibly digest and remember all this detail in one go.

“You will have the First Form, all eight year old new boys, and you will teach them everything. It is only higher up that the boys get different masters for each subject. So each of the subject specialists will guide you on teaching whatever is their speciality.”

“Do I have to teach Latin to eight year olds?” I asked.

“Yes, I am afraid so. The Headmaster will come in and see you a lot to begin with, and I will guide you in what there is to do with First Form Latin. It is all rote learning. No more difficult than learning meaningless poetry, and you will have the advantage of having a text book, which the boys will not have.”

Perhaps because I made no reply to this he continued: “There is no skill in teaching Latin, or anything else at this level. The skill is in managing boisterous boys. One golden rule: do not try to be liked. Show them who is boss from the very beginning.

Demand obedience, expect obedience, do not not permit defiance, impose your will.”

“But what do I do if they do not obey me?”

“They are more frightened of you than you are of them, believe it or not. They are away from their home, which they are deeply missing. Your authority will be a sort of security for them. Just give no hint that you are in any doubt about anything.”

“But . . .”

“Your question has not been answered. I know. Well only the Headmaster uses any form of corporal punishment, and even that only once in a blue moon. Give them lines if you have to. Anything non-physical. Anything reasonable. Make them stand outside the room if they are noisy inside it. This will put them in fear and trepidation of a wandering Headmaster. Just remember what happened at your own prep school, but always give the impression that you expect total obedience. Do not threaten anything, because that assumes you consider disobedience a possibility.”

“I have so much to learn,” was all I could

say at this point.

“You are also in charge of games. Rugby this term, of course. This will bring you into contact with the oldest boys. They are all willing to be coached and trained. So they will want you to be a good coach. You will referee all our home matches against other schools. The boys really care about this immensely.”

“Well I was First Fifteen in the school I have just left, so that will be be less of a challenge, at least.”

“You will have the First Fifteen here, while us old duffers sometimes look after the boys too young for that. We basically stand and watch them going through the motions of passing, and tackling and so on. I am not too old for that, but I am afraid Peale, Marsden, Newberry and Mitchell find even getting into the right kit a huge challenge. So if you can reduce their load they will be eternally grateful.”

We were now drawing into the grounds of the school. I was surprised at what I saw. A typical medieval manorial hall, not moated but very impressive, with a small church

almost attached to it, and an adjacent large quadrangular low building which the Chaplain told me, when he saw my gaze fall on it, was originally a massive set of stables. There was even a fine clock on a short tower, which I noticed was showing the right time when I glanced at my watch to check it.

He saw me checking my watch and the clock, and said: "The clock strikes every quarter, and we are ruled by it. Lessons are 45 minutes long, and we rotate around the classrooms as it strikes. You will not move, but the older boys stay put while we masters change rooms to teach the subject we are responsible for."

We parked in front of the imposing entrance, and together got my suitcases down from the roof rack.

"I will show you to your room, and then I suggest I take you to visit the Headmaster. A brief warning: our Headmaster has an amusing foible; he likes to pretend he has forgotten names; no idea why; it amuses him to see the reaction. In the Staff Common Room we have already had a set

of predictions. Two are in favour of Weston rather than Easton, one says he will not bother with you, and my guess is Easter. So please let us know in due course.”

My room was a long way up several different staircases, and contained the minimum of furniture: a bed, a comfortable chair, a small table with an upright chair, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers.

“The facilities are at the end of the corridor,” he said in anticipation of my obvious question. “Unpack later, I suggest, so I can take you to the Staff Common Room next.”

This was on the ground floor, just off the main hall, and had a notice on the door which said: 'Knock and Wait'.

“The boys call our room Knock and Wait for obvious reasons. They are not allowed to enter, and when we hear a knock on the door the custom is for the junior of those present to go to the door and see what is wanted. That will be you, of course, whenever you are here. And another thing: there is a hierarchy about the comfortable chairs round the fireplace; we each of us

have a place, and there are only five places. If they are all full your only sitting will be round the table in the bay window, where there are enough upright chairs for us all. We use the table for marking books and suchlike.”

I looked around. The room was empty. It was the last day of the summer holidays. The boys would arrive tomorrow. But the one thing I noticed straight away was the smell. Before I had a chance to comment on this, the Chaplain provided an explanation.

“Yes, they all smoke their pipes. It seems to take the place of religion for schoolmasters of a certain type. That's why each has his own chair, because arm of each chair is where their pipes are put down, on the ashtray placed there. Overnight they are stored in a special rack on the mantelpiece. I don't need an ashtray, as I don't share their religion. So I am placed in the middle of the three-seater settee.”

I now spotted that this was so, and straight away decided that it would be an embarrassment for me to start smoking a

pipe too.

“Now I will take you to the door of our Headmaster's study.”

Headmaster

My study has a good view of the area outside the main entrance to the hall, and I had seen the Chaplain arrive with the new man. I thought there would be a knock on my door fairly soon as obviously he would have to report to me pretty soon after his arrival. I would learn a lot from the way he knocked and how he responded to his first meeting with me.

The knock duly came and I bellowed: "Come in."

"Ah, Easter, welcome to Melton Hall," I said looking carefully for the frown I was expecting from my getting his name wrong. But no frown. Instead a wry smile, but no challenge about the name.

"Why the smile?" I asked.

"Well, sir, I hope this does not sound impertinent, but I was smiling . . ."

"Wait a minute," I interrupted, "let me guess. The Chaplain warned you, wicked man."

"More than that, sir, he guessed right. Two of his colleagues thought you would go for

'Weston', while the third predicted no mistake at all."

"Oh dear, I have become transparent to my own staff," I sighed.

"Never mind, enough of this frivolity, let me brief you about your duties. The primary one is to train our Rugby boys into becoming a first class team, able to beat our rivals. This matters more to the boys than you can imagine. Next you are to teach all subjects to our youngest boys in the First Form. I will start you off and show you the ropes for a little while, then I will leave you to cope on your own. I will inspect their exercise books regularly, as that will be the best measure of their progress. Apart from subject particulars, which you will get from the senior staff, you can rely on the Chaplain, bless him, for all general guidance. Anything else you need with regard to your accommodation is in the purview of Matron."

I paused, looking for the best way to put this next point.

"We employ two young ladies as Assistant Matrons. Actually that is just a fancy title

for skivvies, for they do everything that needs doing, cleaning, peeling vegetables for Cook, washing the boys' clothes and bed linen, and anything else Matron or Cook reckons needs doing. They are local girls, and not very bright, but they are off limits to boys and staff. No contact let alone anything that could be construed as friendship. Am I clear on this point?"

"Yes, sir, quite clear," he responded.

"Good. Now the boys arrive tomorrow, and the younger ones come first. Make yourself useful to Matron and the Chaplain. Attend meals, and our first formal event which will close down our day tomorrow will be Evensong in the church. The Chaplain will tell you where to sit."

He seemed to have taken all this in without looking puzzled. Perhaps I was going to have a useful new member of staff, which would be very fortunate considering he was the only applicant for the vacancy.

"Any questions?"

"Not at this moment, sir."

"Very well. I suggest you go and find

Matron next. She has a room in the main hall, where all the dormitories are.”

Matron

I was supervising Florence and Ivy making up all the beds for the boys arriving tomorrow when there came a knock on my door, which was slightly ajar so I could see what my helpers were doing in the dormitories.

The new sports master was there.

“Have you found your room?” I asked.

“Yes, thank you,” he replied, “but I wonder if I might be allowed a bedside table and lamp, as I like to read before I go to sleep.”

“I can manage a bedside table. It will be what each boy has at the side of his bed, with a small drawer and somewhere to store things in. I can get an unused one for you, as not all the dormitories are full. But a lamp is more of a challenge. I think there is a socket. I will have to check. Leave it with me.”

“Thank you very much.” At least he seemed polite enough with few airs and graces.

“The Headmaster asked me to help you with the arrival of the boys tomorrow,

especially the new boys as I am to be their teacher.”

“Good. Please come here again straight away after breakfast tomorrow, and I will show you where they are to go in their dorm. Don't be put off by any tears, by the way. That is to be expected. Just send the sobbers to me. I am their surrogate mother for the next five years.”

“Do they really cry?” he asked.

“Oh yes, regularly. Don't let it upset you. Just send any to me.”

He still looked a bit puzzled, but I let it go at that.

“Is there anything else, because I have to check that Florence and Ivy are making up all the beds properly.”

“No, that's fine. I have something to tell the Chaplain, and I suppose I will find him in the Staff Common Room.”

“Actually more likely in the church, as he regards that as his sanctuary.”

Chaplain

The sun was shining brightly through the windows of my vestry, which has no door, and I rarely pull the curtain closed in the doorway. I could hear someone coming in through the main door of the church, and I was not surprised when I went out of the vestry to greet whoever it was to find that it was Easton.

“You were right, Chaplain, he tried ‘Easter’ on me, and I am afraid I had to admit that I had been warned by your good self about his usual ploy. But he took it in good spirit, I think.”

I smiled.

“And he has asked me to help you and Matron with the arrival of the new boys tomorrow. So what am I to do, please?”

“Very simple. New boys are told to arrive before lunch, and others after lunch. There is one new boy who will be my responsibility, as he will go in my form, chap called Trubshaw apparently. All the others are your lot of eight year olds. You let Arthur do all the carrying . . .”

Easton raised an eyebrow.

“... Arthur is our groundsman and general handyman. Only he can persuade our boiler to work in the winter. He is Cook's better half, and they have a teenage son called Bill who does whatever Arthur asks him to do. I do not know if Bill is on the payroll, but he does get fed in the kitchen, and still lives in one of the village houses with his parents.”

“So your job is to greet every parent and their son. If one arrives while Arthur is still shifting luggage, you simply talk to them till Arthur emerges, then direct the boy to follow Arthur. Then Matron takes over. So you are at the main hall door on sentry duty, as it were.”

“I will keep a lookout for Trubshaw, but in any case he will be obvious enough, being eleven years old rather than eight.”

“That seems clear enough,” Easton replied, “but please tell me more about the village.”

“Right. The original cottages were built for the workers who worked on the hall's estate. It had become an important hunting lodge by the fifteenth century, and was

owned by a high ranking peer of the realm. It passed eventually into the family that now still owns it all. The fields are now let out to tenant farmers, and the cottages are used by Cook's family and my four senior colleagues. Their tenancy is a benefit in kind which makes the economy of a school like this easier to manage. Low wages, but somewhere to live free, and all meals provided in term time. The only residents in the hall are the Headmaster and his wife, myself, Matron, and now you."

I paused, to let all this sink in.

"As you will have guessed that means we are on continuous night duty. Either Matron or myself or you, by rotation, will be responsible for what goes on in the dorms after lights out. The Headmaster's suite of rooms is on the other side of the hall, by the way."

"So we get no time off at all?"

"Well you can go into the nearby village of Driffield where there is a half-decent pub. It is only two miles away. That is where Matron's helpers come from. That is why I keep a bicycle, as Driffield is the only real

escape. You can borrow it when I don't need it, of course. You might as well get used to cycling. You're going to be a Cambridge man, I'm told. You will find one essential there."

"All right, and thank you. Perhaps when I am settled I will save up and buy my own bicycle."

This chap Easton seems to have the makings of a good colleague, I thought. It is so important in the closed community that we represented for every one to get on with each other. Fatal to have rifts and animosities.

Just then the stable clock rang and that reminded both of us that it was time for supper.

"There will be some food in the dining hall, I reckon, by now. Shall I show you the way?"

Chaplain

Day one of the new term. A Sunday, and the climax of the arrivals would be Evensong in the church.

The Headmaster asked me over breakfast to collar young Trubshaw and have a long conversation with him to find out what gaps there were in his education so far.

“His father has told me,” he said, “that he has done his best to empower his son to learn fairly widely. Trubshaw senior believes in learning but not teaching, apparently, and has provided his son with, and I quote, ‘all the books he might need to become educated.’”

He looked at me in his usual forceful way. “Your job is to find out precisely what has been achieved thus far. Also I recommend you appoint one of his fellows to be a sort of mentor to him. He may be well read, but he will have no idea how a school like ours operates. And a fellow his own age will be the best guide for that.”

A wise counsel, I decided, and set to thinking who would be the best for such a

task. Young Wetherill, I thought, would be ideal. A quiet reserved boy, not aggressive, rather shy in fact, so being trusted with a task like this would be good for him.

Easton and I waited in the main hall for arrivals, and they began in mid morning. All the eight years old were seen upstairs, following Arthur with their luggage, to the tender mercies of Matron.

“Try to get their names as soon as you can, surnames only of course. You need to get them into your mind perfectly, so use them at every opportunity,” I told Easton.

Eventually Trubshaw senior and junior arrived and I went out and greeted them.

“I am the Chaplain here,” I said to Mr. Trubshaw, “and your son will be in my Form.” To the boy I said: “Follow Arthur up to Matron then come back here and find me so we can get to know each other.”

“Yes, sir,” he replied deferentially. A good start in attitude, I thought.

His father and I chatted for a while, he asking about the hall's history and me supplying appropriate details. We both studiously avoided talking about his son's

education. It surprised me slightly that he did not take any opportunity to explain about his son's education, but that was what happened. No reference at all. I would have to find out from the boy himself.

When he returned as instructed, we both said goodbye to the father. There was no show of affection, but their unspoken trust in each other was evident notwithstanding.

"Let me show you the church, which we always call the chapel," I said after the car was out of sight. "We will have Evensong here after supper, as it is Sunday, and I will show you where to sit."

We entered the church and walked towards my vestry, which is off the chancel. "You are in the Fourth Form, and so sit four rows back from the front. We masters all sit at the front, facing towards you. This way we can keep a good eye on you all."

I led the way forward to the chancel and then into my vestry, and Trubshaw followed me. This was my *sanctum sanctorum*, a bit of privacy that was so valuable in a community like ours, and I used it when I needed to speak to anyone on their own. I

sat at the far side of a table and motioned to Trubshaw to sit opposite me.

“I am your Form Master, and am responsible for your well-being. Whenever you want to see me, just ask, and we will talk together here. You address me as Chaplain, in the same way that you address the headmaster as Headmaster. The other teachers are all called by their surnames, like Mr. Easton, who is our games master, and the other names you will learn in due course. I understand you have not actually been to any school yet.”

“Yes, sir. My father said he would take responsibility for my education. Once I had learnt to read, of course, all he had to do was supply me with books, and he had access to anything he wanted from the university library.”

“Did your mother teach you to read?”

“No, sir. She died giving birth to me. There was a nursemaid till I was four, and she taught me to read and write. She was a sort of housekeeper too, I suppose, but from about five onwards my father chose the books for me, and read the summary of

each when I had written it.”

“So you have been reading books on your own for six years have you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell me what you think were the most important books you have read.” I was trying to get to grips with his mind. He did not seem at all phased by being questioned, and looked me straight in the eyes all the time. He certainly gave the impression of being bright and intelligent.

“Well, sir, it is difficult to pick out individual books.” Good point, I thought. “Could you give me a topic to narrow it down, please?”

“Right. Let us start with History.”

“My first history book was the ‘Young Folks’ History of England’ by someone called Charlotte Yonge. My father said she was overly moralistic, but if I ignored her constant moralising I would get a good overview of our nation.”

Good grief, I was thinking. What a father, what a son. I had never heard of the book, so thought it might be interesting to explore further.

“Tell me more about the book.”

“She starts with the Romans, and gets everything from then onwards, right till the reign of Queen Victoria. But everyone seems to be either good or bad people, according to her judgments, and Dad, my father I mean, says this is just too much of an oversimplification. She even calls Mary Tudor a 'silly old woman' or some such phrase, which Dad said was not the way history really worked. But he also said it was good to start learning history this way, so long as you did not take everything written as gospel truth. I was, after all, only five when I read it, and he next gave me the same lady's books on the history of Ancient Rome and Greece. It was easy reading, and I rather enjoyed it, as far as I can remember now. Then I was given Charles Dickens' Child's History of England, which my father said was a good title because it was very childish, but better than Miss Yonge's book because it was more witty and humorous.”

He paused for my reaction, but I could not think of anything worth saying as I

digested these revelations. I was thinking about the other eleven years olds he would be alongside soon, and how they would react to a precocity I had never come across before.

“Of course I have read more grown up history books since then,” he continued, “shall I tell you about them?”

“Er, later perhaps. Tell me about Latin. Have you learnt any Latin yet?”

“My father and I discussed Latin when I was seven. He said the way he had been taught Latin was . . . I think he used the word 'ridiculous'. Bad, anyway. He wanted me to learn to read Latin, not to write it. So he got me a dictionary, a grammar book so I could work out the endings, and gave me a Latin book to read. It was rather slow to begin with, as of course all the words were not ones I had come across before. And the endings mattered so much. And the words were not always in the obvious order, too. But I gradually got used to it, and it got easier and easier in time.”

“So what Latin book were you reading?”

“The Gospel of John, translated into Latin

by a chap whose name sounds like Jeremy. Dad said it was written originally in Greek, but I would have to wait till later to get on to Greek, and Latin was more useful at this stage in my life, he said.”

I hardly dared ask the next question, but I braved it: “How far have you got?”

“I have got to the end. It is such a good ending too. And I have a question, which my father said he did not know the answer to.”

Oh dear, I thought. I will not know the answer too, I dare say.

“So what is this question?”

“Well, sir, it is about Jesus and Pontius Pilate. In the Gospel of John they have quite a long conversation. Now I know the book was originally written in Greek, but reading this conversation in Latin I wondered whether Jesus and Pontius Pilate were actually talking to each other in Latin. My father said he thought it more likely that Jesus knew enough Latin for this than that Pilate knew enough Aramaic to use the language Jesus would speak in naturally. Unless they both used Greek.

What do you think, sir?"

"Like your father, I do not know for sure. I will think about it, though."

Now my mind was racing. What on earth could I tell the Headmaster about this boy? It was not so much a question of what gaps the boy might have, but what gaps we masters might have in our ability to stretch and do proper educational justice to this precocious youth. No wonder his father thought he needed a real school, for the boy needed to learn how to live with other human beings far more than to burrow any further in his intellectual research into the sum of human knowledge.

I did not dare find out more. I would simply have to warn my colleagues in general terms to tread warily in dealing with this young soul, who obviously had no idea that where his mind had got to was in any way unusual. So I decided to wrap things up.

"Trubshaw," I said, "to help you find your feet here I am going ask a boy of the same age as you, a chap called Wetherill, to show you the ropes. Has Matron shown you

where you are to sleep? What dorm, I mean?"

"Oh yes, sir, I am in the Hamlet dorm."

"What do you mean, the Hamlet dorm?"

"Well Matron said it was 2B, in other words the second dorm on the second floor, between 2A and 2C, so I told her I would think of it as the Hamlet dorm."

"What did she say to that?"

"Well I am not sure she really understood my train of thought, because she simply told me not to be stupid. But you understand, don't you sir?"

"Yes, I understand." Only too well I thought, and I could imagine the perplexity in poor Matron's mind.

The clock was striking the hour, which gave me the chance to terminate our time together naturally.

"Time for lunch, and when Wetherill arrives I'll introduce you to him. He will arrive some time this afternoon."

"Is there a library here, sir?"

"Yes I'll show you that after lunch," I said, thinking how disappointed he would probably be with the range of books the

school had in supply for the reading habits of normal prep school boys.”

Wetherill

I had just followed Arthur up with my trunk and looked into 2B, my dorm, when Matron collared me.

“The Chaplain wants to see you, Wetherill. Go and find him.”

Whatever for, I was wondering. I have not had time to do anything wrong yet. So I went down and knocked on the door of Knock and Wait and a new master came to the door, whom I have never seen before.

“Reporting to the Chaplain, sir, on Matron's instructions.”

This brought the Chaplain to the door. Although he has no sense of humour I quite like him, because he never tries to make you feel small, like all the other masters do.

“Follow me please, Wetherill. I have a job for you.”

We went off to the main hall where every one was gathered, chatting in groups about the hols and suchlike. Alone in a corner, squatting on the floor reading a book, was a boy I had never seen before. His uniform looked brand new, and I could see he was

about my age. We walked over to him, and he stood up as soon as he saw the Chaplain.

"Trubshaw, this is Wetherill. He is in the same form as you, and the same dorm. Wetherill, I would like you to take Trubshaw under your wing, and guide him around the school so that he can get to know the place. Tell him all about our customs, how everything works, so that he can fit in quickly."

Typical of the Chaplain, I thought, wanting to get us all sorted out. And why me? He could have picked anyone in the Fourth Form. Anyway I was obviously stuck with this, so better get on with it.

"Come with me, Trubshaw, and I will give you the guided tour."

Let us get out of the hall first, I thought, so I took this new chap first to the playing fields, then to the classroom area.

"These rooms all used to be stables," I explained. Each door has a Roman numeral, which is the number of the Form in there. We stay in our room, and the masters come to us. Lessons change when the bell rings

on the quarter hour. We are four," I said, "pointing at the 'IV' on the door of our classroom."

"Yes, I know Roman numerals," he replied.

"So what school were you at before here?" I asked.

"My dad taught me at home," came the reply.

"So this is your first ever school? Seems a bit odd. No wonder Chaplain wanted someone to show you round. You had better stick close with me, till you learn the ropes."

Wily Chaplain, I was thinking. He seems to know I have no friends here because I am no good at games, so he foists a friend on me. We went all round everywhere: the dining hall, the dorms, the pavilion on the games field, the main hall again, the changing rooms, the bathrooms, with him asking no questions, just taking in everything I told him.

The only place he seemed mildly interested in was the folly at the far end of our games field.

"What on earth is this?"

"It is the folly." What we were looking at

was a mock classical temple, but half-size and no roof at all. There were just four columns front and back and only five down the sides. They were about six feet tall and stood on a flat raised paved floor.

“Apparently it was built over a hundred years ago by the mad owner of the hall at that time, ages before it got turned into a school. We are told that it was intended to be a burial place, but was left unfinished. As you see, no roof.”

“Was anyone ever actually buried here?”

“No idea,” I said. “It’s just there, and no one takes any notice of it.”

Eventually, as we strolled back towards the hall, he did ask me another much more obvious question. “Tell me about the teachers,” he asked.

Where to begin? The Headmaster, obviously.

“The Headmaster is actually Mr. Walker, but we always have to call him Headmaster rather than use his name. Behind his back we call him Whacker instead of Walker.”

“Why is that?”

“If you get in trouble you get sent to him.

Well, serious trouble only. And he looks very sternly at you and tells you how naughty you have been, for an age, and you have to look sorry and sheepish and hope he won't take for ever going on at you. And then you know he has finished when he asks you 'Do you want me to whack you, boy?' You say 'No, sir' of course, and he says 'then you had better behave much better next time,' followed by 'now get out of my sight.'"

"Happens every time. Sure as eggs is eggs. He has never actually whacked anyone as long as I have been here, but you always get the same lecture, and always the same question: 'Do you want me to whack you, boy?' So that is why he is called Whacker."

My new friend frowned a bit. "My father said school discipline would be good for me, which was why he was sending me to this school. But I am not sure he knew that Mr. Walker, who he said was a friend of his, was actually a non-whacker."

"The Chaplain next," I continued, but paused when Trubshaw told me he had

already met him.

“Mr. Peale, then, will teach us Maths. Like all the others he smells of pipe smoke, wears a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows, a bit like a uniform for our masters. They all wear tweed jackets and smoke like chimneys in their room, which we call Knock and Wait because that is what is written on the door. He is totally without humour and unless you like Maths his lessons are deadly boring.”

“Mr. Newberry teaches us English, and he is just the opposite from Peale. He thinks he is funny and makes what he thinks are jokes all the time. We all dutifully laugh of course, even at the ones we have heard before. It must be difficult to teach English, I suppose, since we all know English anyway.”

“Now French is a different matter. That is Mr. Marsden. He speaks in French all the time, even when he is explaining things to us. You have to pretend you understand him, otherwise he rants and raves even more incomprehensibly. I think he just likes the sound of his own voice.”

“Finally Mr. Mitchell. He does History and Geography. History is all stories about dead people, and Geography is all drawing maps. No great challenge in all that, of course. You’ll see.”

We chatted on like this, with Trubshaw asking the occasional question, until it was time for supper. We went into the dining hall together and sat together and I told the chaps near us what his name was and that he had never been to school before. They all quizzed him about this, asking things like if he had ever played rugby or cricket, and if his dad was too poor to afford a school, and lots of silly questions like that. Trubshaw took it all in his stride, answered every question, and asked none himself.

I explained to him about life in the dorms, where the bogs were, and all that. I also told him about the morning routine.

“We get up when Matron comes round and shouts at us. She hangs around until she can see we are all out of bed. Then we wash and get dressed and go down for breakfast. Breakfast is a disaster but you

will soon get used to it. You go in past the kitchen hatch, and pick up your bowl of porridge. You will hate it, but it is all we get for breakfast so you have to eat it. You get a cup of tea too, and no use asking for sugar because you won't get any. You can sit where you like, as only Chappers and whoever this new chap is will be there. Not like lunch or supper where we have to sit at the right table with our form master dishing out the food."

"Sounds pretty grim to me," said Trubshaw.

"You're right. But you get used to it. When you have finished your porridge and tea you are more or less free till morning chapel in the church. So stick with me. We must be in chapel by the time the school clock strikes a quarter to nine."

"Grief, church every day?"

"What happen there is more like an assembly than a church service. Whacker takes it and starts with the same prayer every time, something about being brought safely to the beginning of this day. Silly long prayer. Then he does notices, and then

we all chant the Lord's Prayer. If you don't know that you'll soon learn it. Then each master comes and leads his form out and off to the right classroom and usually the clock is striking nine by then."

"I have been told where we sit by the Chaplain."

"Yes, we sit in a row for each class. We will be all on the fourth row back. The masters all sit out at the front facing us. There is a sort of a space there. There are side bits. No idea what they are called."

"The transepts."

"So what is the wide bit called?"

"The nave, and the narrow bit is the chancel."

"Right. The tall book holder thing . . ."

"Lectern"

". . . is in the middle and Whacker stands there, with the masters on either side of him with chairs of their own. They glare at us, to make sure we are not up to any mischief, and I suppose if anyone was missing they would spot that too."

That seemed to be enough for my young new friend to have to grasp in one go, and

at least he would know what to do tomorrow. A new friend, I was thinking. Something of a rarity for me.

Chaplain

Although it was quite late I decided that I needed to make my report on Trubshaw to the Headmaster before the day was over.

He was glad to be disturbed as soon as I began recounting my conversation with the boy.

“I am not surprised, Chaplain. I know his father well enough to understand his logic. His son is the intellectual replica of the father, and so he would want him to be stretched in a way impossible for any pre-preparatory school or the early years of a school like ours. So he feeds him a supply of books, and lets the boy go forward at his own pace. Impossible for us, of course, and it misses out all the social education we can provide.”

“So what are we to do?” I asked.

“Early meeting tomorrow in the Staff Common Room. Straight after breakfast. You give them the same summary you have given me first, and then I will guide everyone on how to tackle this problem. Or should we call it an opportunity?”

So we met as planned and I began to explain what I had learnt so far about our new boy. The questions came thick and fast.

“What Maths has he been taught?” asked Peale.

“I did not get that far, I’m afraid.”

“How can he know any French?” Marsden demanded. “Unless, of course, he has spent some time there. Yes, I bet that is what the blighter has done.”

Before the speculation could go any further the Headmaster took over.

“Gentlemen, we have a great challenge here, but also a great opportunity. We can prepare this boy for a scholarship to the best school his father wants to him go to and gain great credit to us as a school.”

None of us had thought about it in this way.

“The problem, if I dare use that word,” he continued, “is the integration of Trubshaw into the community of his peers. The boys will quickly ferret out how different from them he is. We must make sure he is not ostracised or bullied. Already Chaplain has

got another boy in his form, Wetherill, to nurture and mentor Trubshaw. So we will be on the lookout for any signs of bullying.”

“Easton, obviously Trubshaw will have no experience at all of team games, so your task may eventually amount to individual coaching. You must not protect him from the knocks of rugby, but you must give him every chance to learn how to play the game so that he does not actually get injured.”

“Newberry, his handwriting may be poorer than his reading, for I suppose he read much more than he wrote. So there is your focus.”

And that was all we had time for, as the stable clock was chiming a quarter to the hour and we all had to go and begin the school day with the customary assembly. None of us had spoken about the possibility that this new charge would reveal gaps in our own knowledge and skills, but I doubt if I was alone in thinking precisely that.

Wetherill

I did not sleep very well as usual on the first night of term, and maybe I was a bit worried about Trubshaw. He seemed to be relaxed enough once I had shown him where the bogs were, and told him about lights out, and to pretend to be asleep whenever Matron or someone came round to check on us.

Breakfast happened. Porridge is disgusting, but you have to eat it. It is one of the school rules, and eventually you get used to it. I had to explain all this to Trubshaw, of course, and he dutifully cleaned his bowl.

“I suppose this is what my father meant about school discipline,” he said to me, “eating disgusting food and using a lavatory that smells awful.”

I am beginning to think he might become a real friend, after all. He seems to take everything in his stride, without complaining. Perhaps he may get to like me too. No one else does.

And so off to our first lesson, which was

to be Maths with Mr. Peale. I told Trubshaw we had to stand when the master came in, and also to stand whenever we spoke to ask or answer a question. Because seating in our form room was based on the alphabet, I was on the back row, and I moved one to the side so that Trubshaw could take my place and we would still be in alphabetical order.

As soon as Copper came in (Copper was the name we used for Mr. Peale; something to do with policemen which I never understood) he looked straight away to see where Trubshaw was sitting.

“Well done, Wetherill, I see you have preserved the right order of seating.”

So the wily Chaplain had explained my role already. It is awful being complimented by any master. It makes the others all think you are sucking up to them, which is a crime worthy of death in this school, perhaps all schools. I said nothing, hoping that no one had noticed the praise.

“We will begin the term with Geometry, boys,” Copper began pompously. “As we have a new boy in our midst, I must

determine whether there are any gaps I may need to attend to, to ensure he catches up. Please stand, Master Trubshaw.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What geometry have you done thus far in your short life, my boy?” Copper was trying to sound friendly, always a prelude to some cutting remark.

The answer Trubshaw gave was rather beyond me. Something about a chap called U. Clidd, or it might be U. Klidd, that is what it sounded like anyway. I will have to ask him at break. The answer seemed to mean something to Copper, even if it meant nothing to me. He also said something like ‘but only in translation, sir, and the book had lots of diagrams in.’ This all went right over my head.

“Tell me, Trubshaw, do you know how to calculate the area of a triangle?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Kindly come to the front and explain it to the class.”

Cripes, I thought. A trap already. Poor Trubs (for that is the name I was giving him in my mind).

Trubs walked out to the front as if the task was nothing, and began our lesson as if he were a seasoned teacher himself. It went something like this.

He first drew a large triangle on the blackboard. The bottom line of it was level with the bottom side of the blackboard.

“The formula for the area of a triangle is half the length of the base of the triangle times the height of the triangle. The height of the triangle is the distance from the base line to the point above it. Thus . . .”

And with that he took down the large set square Copper used for drawing right angles and held it so that he could draw a line that was an exact right angle from the base up to the top point. He marked out the line with chalk and showed the line to be a right angle at the bottom by adding a little square. “To get the area of the triangle you measure the base line and this height line, multiply them together, and then halve the result.”

He put down the chalk and faced towards Copper.

“Thank you, Master Trubshaw. You may

sit down.”

There was total silence as Trubs walked back to his place. I don't know about the others, but I had never heard such a simple explanation of any bit of geometry before. I even dared to think I might remember what I had just learnt. I certainly knew who would be helping me with my geometry prep in future.

It was difficult to tell what was going through Copper's mind. He made no comment. Was he cross or pleased? From the expression on his face it could be either.

“Boys,” he said after a while, “you will copy the example on the blackboard, and using your rulers and set squares you will take measurements and do the multiplication and division by 2 to get an answer for the triangle you have drawn.”

So we all got on with it, except Trubs.

“Trubshaw, you will come out here, as I have yet to supply you with an exercise book for geometry.”

When Trubs went forward to the big desk at the front of the room, Copper addressed

him very discreetly in whispers. At the back I could not catch what was being said, but when Trubs came back to his place next to me I could see he was writing lots of things as well as more drawing, rather than doing the same as us. I would ask him later about it, of course.

This triangle area stuff took us to the end of the lesson, thank goodness. Copper went round all this time looking at our work, and towards the end picked up Trubshaw's exercise book to see what he had written. Eventually Copper left us to ourselves when the stable clock struck the quarter hour. In the short gap there would be before the next teacher came and the next lesson would begin everyone stared at Trubshaw. I heard words like 'boffin' and 'creep' being uttered, but I did not think my mates were against Trubs really. He might turn out to be useful, so everyone seemed willing to accept him as he was.

We all stood as the new master came in for our next lesson, and then it would be break for fifteen minutes and we could all interrogate Trubs about how he knew all

this stuff.

Peale

I hurried back to our common room, after the second lesson, which was a simple algebra revision class with the Fifth Form, and as I sat in my chair filling my pipe I thought a lot about this new boy. The different task I had given him was to write out a proof of the formula for the area of a triangle, and glancing over his shoulder towards the end of the lesson I could see he knew it perfectly well. If he had digested all the Euclid he said he had read then he already knew as much geometry as my best Sixth Formers, and possibly knew it better. Time would tell. But I knew I could not stretch him properly while continuing with the course I gave to Fourth Formers.

Marsden came in to the common room a few minutes after me, and he had obviously just had a lesson with Trubshaw's form.

"He knows enough French, this new boy," he announced to me. "He has been on holiday to France. I gave him instructions in the French language, which he obviously understood, and his accent when he

answered my questions in French was far better than any other of his peers. So at least we will have no trouble there." He put quite an emphasis on the word 'trouble' and I began to suspect that we might all soon have a nickname for the new boy, at least among ourselves.

With only a fifteen minute break in the middle of the morning, there was no time to enter into a proper discussion on the topic, and getting my pipe going properly was a more important task. But I resolved on a proper discussion on what to do about our parcel of trouble after lunch.

So two lessons and a meal later we masters were all gathering in our common room, with the exception of Easton, who was on playground duty. It was Newberry who started the discussion.

"Well I have just had an English lesson with the Fourth Form. I asked Trubshaw to write a list of the books he had read, while the others did an essay on their holidays, which is how I always begin the new school year. Guess what. He has not only read some Austen and Dickens, but a good deal

of more recent authors. He said his father had given him a long list of school stories, so that he could get his mind in gear for going to school himself. Yes, everything from Hughes and Farrar to that wretched book by Evelyn Waugh called 'Decline and Fall' which paints a very unappetising picture of an abominable prep school. Nothing like us, of course, but what sort of an impression has that bloody book given him of us. And 'Stalky & Co' too, which paints a very negative picture of our profession. Plus all the usual adventure stuff, Buchan and Haggard, and suchlike. Actually, in all fairness, he has read far more than even our oldest boys. I suppose having nothing better to do than read it was inevitable."

"Newberry," I said, while the loquacious man paused to take breath, "that is the whole point. He may know nothing of rugby and cricket, but he knows already more geometry than my brightest, and I could safely let him teach every lesson I take too. Algebra and arithmetic I have yet to explore, but I am fearful the same will

apply. So is he a god-send to our scholarship reputation, or is he trouble?"

"That is rather up to us." Typical of the Chaplain to say such a thing, with his instant moral overtones.

"I would put him straight into the Sixth Form," said Mitchell, "for he has read more History than any of my best lads there."

"Well he is currently my responsibility," said the Chaplain quickly, "and such a move would have far-reaching consequences. I will discuss it with the Headmaster, though, if you think I ought to."

"Yes," I said, "it needs thinking about. He will just tread water in my subject if he stays where he is."

"Very well. I will talk to the Headmaster, and to Trubshaw himself too."

So that was how we left it.

Wetherill

During morning break I stayed close to Trubs, as the other chaps all gathered round. They were full of questions now that it was obvious to them all that Trubshaw was a boffin beyond belief, from just two lessons. He not only knew more geometry than us, but he also even understood the Frog, and could converse in that stupid language with him without batting an eyelid.

Then, two lessons later, after lunch, when we had a fair bit of time to ourselves, the scrutiny went on. The only lessons we had not yet had were Latin and Scripture. "Do you know any Latin?" they all asked. "Some," he replied. Scripture could be ignored, as totally irrelevant, so no one asked about that.

"But never been to school?" asked Smithson, who was always very bossy.

"No," Trubs answered, "but my father is a professor at Cambridge, so I got lots of help from him. He gave me what I needed to read. And I will be awful at games, I

expect.”

“You had better learn pretty quickly, then,” said Smithson, “or you will make no friends here except Wetherill, who is an absolute dummy at games.”

I thought this was typical of Smithson, who now had a younger brother here and was already bragging about being Smithson Major, as if that made him somehow a better person.

“And you had better not start sucking up to the teachers either,” said Smithson, “or you will find yourself in trouble. With me, at any rate.”

“But he will be useful when we get stuck doing prep, won't he?” said Brown, and Smithson glared at him.

“There is that,” said Tranter, and Smithson got the unspoken signal from these two remarks to back off a little. Not many people liked Smithson, and he sort of sensed that he could overplay his resentment if he was not careful.

It would soon be time for games, so I caught Trubs by the arm, saying so the others could hear that I would show him

where the changing rooms were. So off we two went, leaving the others to follow, chatting as they did so about this new situation.

Easton

The Headmaster had collected me after breakfast on the first day of term and told me that he would join me in my classroom immediately after assembly in the chapel, and would stay with me all morning to 'get me settled'.

The First Form were shepherded into their places in the church, and we two masters led them to their classroom after the short service had ended.

The Headmaster had a list of the eleven boys, and he directed them in alphabetical order to sit at the desks in the room, which were arranged on three rows of four desks.

They all looked so smart in their uniform, which reminded me of the clothes I used to wear at my own prep school. Grey blazer, grey flannel short trousers, grey knee length socks, grey shirt, and no doubt a grey woollen pullover when the weather got colder. The only colour that was not grey was their school tie, which was striped in maroon and a rather silvery white.

“Rule number one,” the Headmaster

intoned. "You will stand when any master enters this room. Also you will stand to speak at any time, whether to ask or answer a question. If you wish to speak you will raise your hand and wait. When permission is given, you will then stand. Understood, everyone?"

They all looked at the two of us blankly. We took this for understanding.

"You may supply your own fountain pens, if you have them; otherwise you will use the dip pen you can see on your desk, and the inkwell that is also inset there. You will not mess around with ink, and you will look after your pens and not damage the nibs. Mr. Easton will appoint an ink monitor in due course, for the maintenance of your writing equipment."

Some boys now picked up their pens and inspected them.

"Pencils will be distributed for when you need them, by a pencil monitor. You will apply to this monitor for use of the pencil sharpener when you need it."

All this in a solemn but theatrical tone of voice. I was so glad the Headmaster was

easing me gently into the role of schoolmaster.

“Your first lesson will be handwriting.”

He checked his list of boys names.

“Adams, you will distribute these exercise books to every boy.”

My own desk lid was raised, and there I saw the exercise books, and pencils and spare nibs. My desk was much taller than those of the boys, with a stool sufficiently high for me to be able to supervise the class with a good view from my raised position.

“You will print your name in capital letters on the cover of the exercise book very neatly.”

This was an exercise the eleven boys all set themselves to, and the Headmaster went round to check the results. Everyone seemed to have managed this task to his satisfaction. Now he went to the blackboard and wrote in a perfectly regular and large copperplate:

'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'

“You will write this sentence out very neatly in exactly the style I have used, and then put your pens down and wait while I come round and correct your work.”

The boys all set to work. I was being taught by example. Clear and simple instructions. I was a schoolmaster in training, and I was beginning to think I might just survive after all.

He now spoke quietly to me. “There is a red pencil in your desk. Please pass it to me, then come with me as I go round the class.”

Some boys got a tick, and were simply told: “Write the line again, for practice.” Others were given some correction, such as, “the upward loops should be the same length as the downward loops. Write it again properly this time.” This went on a fair while, and by the time we heard the quarter hour strike to indicate the end of the first lesson, every boy had filled almost a page of his exercise book, and had produced an end product that passed muster.

“Close your exercise books and put them in your desks.”

“We will now do mental arithmetic. Adams, stand up and recite the two times table.” This he did. “Berridge, the three times table.” This also he did, and the task went round the whole class till the last boy had to do the twelve times table. Then it was Adam's turn again, and he was given the three times table to do, and then on to the four times table for Berridge. This continued until every boy had recited every table, and it became clear that all had been sufficiently grounded in whatever school they had already attended to be able to do this without fault. I realised that by this simple method of naming each boy for his solo task their names were being driven into my mind. By the time the morning was over I reckoned I would know them all.

The next exercise was now slightly different. Each boy was named and told to stand. Then the Headmaster would say a number and the boy had to reply with the factors. Thus “56” got the response “7 8s, sir.” If any boy forgot the appendage of 'sir'

there would be a pause with raised eyebrows, until the 'sir' was added. This only happened twice. The boys were learning, and so was I.

When eventually the quarter struck which meant it was break, the Headmaster announced: "Break till the next quarter strikes, then back here. You will use the toilet if you need to," and he gave them directions to that needful place. Meanwhile we stayed in the room, briefly.

"Getting the idea, Easton?"

"Yes, sir." I felt not so very different from the eight-year olds we had just dismissed.

"Good, we will repair to the Staff Common Room, and attend to our own needs. We will let them all get back in the room, to ensure they have the practice in standing when we enter. Discipline is all a matter of simple rules and enforcing them without exception."

And thus the morning proceeded. For Latin the boys were given the task of copying from the board the cases of 'mensa' into their exercise books, then learning to repeat the six cases verbatim.

They were told only that the first case was the nominative, and that this case meant that the word was the subject of the sentence. I am fairly sure not one of the boys really understood the concept of 'subject of a sentence', but this was not explained, merely learnt.

Every boy was expected to be word perfect, as if this was some sort of meaningless poetry, and all had managed it by the end of the Latin lesson.

The final lesson of the morning was spelling, and once again words were written on the board, copied into exercise books, then memorised, then recited.

As we broke for lunch the Headmaster explained: "I will be doing this with you for about a week, giving you an example of each type of lesson, and then you will be on your own. Think you can cope?"

"Yes, sir," and I actually thought I might be able to.

"I will not teach you how to coach rugby, as I trust you will be doing your games teaching much better than I could."

Games. sixty or so boys from 8 to 13

years old, and I am to coach them into a good rugby team, ready for our first school fixture. What a challenge.

Fortunately the Chaplain, bless him, had given me some advice. Delegate. Use the older boys to supervise the younger boys. This of course meant that the older masters could put their feet up. But it also meant that I would not have their critical eye on me, so I settled for taking all the boys on my own to start with.

I got them all first of all to stand in groups according to which form they were in, Sixth Form on the left in sequence down to the First Form. This year's Sixth Form were of course last year's Fifth Form, but as each form had somewhere between 10 and 12 in them there would be some who were in the First Fifteen last year. I told these to step forward, and I had now six boys to choose from.

"Who is good at passing?" I asked.

They all shuffled around a bit and then one boy sheepishly put his hand up.

"Your name?"

"Crabb, sir."

“Right, Crabb, take this rugby ball,” I had six available from Arthur, “and go over there with the First Form and teach them how to pass and receive a pass. Standing still to begin with, then running and passing backwards like in a line of three-quarters.”

Crabb smiled, pick up a ball, and collected his group of eight-year-olds, and took them off to the fringes of our large playing field and took over their tuition.

“Right, now who is good at kicking and catching?”

They had got the idea and two boys put up their hands together. They gave me their names as Dann and Peters.

“Dann, you take this ball and teach the Second Form how to punt a ball. Nothing smart, no drop kicks or place kicks. Off you go over there,” I said pointing to another corner of the field.

“Peters, you take the Third Form off to another corner, and throw them high catches. When they are all good at catching, join in with Dann's lot and get your lot to catch their lot's punts. Then you

and Dann swap over the tasks, yours catching, his kicking. Got it?"

Peters nodded and ran off with his group.

There were still three left and I looked them over, and picked the smallest of them, and said, "What is your name?"

"Fairbrother, sir."

"I picked you because you are the smallest experienced boy left and I need you to be not too big for this. Your group is the Fourth Form and some of them will be nearly as big as you. Your skill to teach is tackling, and to begin with you get one of them to try to run past you and you tackle them. When they have all got the idea of what it is like to be tackled, you get them to tackle each other in pairs, swapping over, one running one tackling. Understood?"

Fairbrother grinned, obviously looking forward to his role in this training.

Now I had only the top two classes left and these would be my pool from which to select and train the best fifteen. I decided we would do scrummaging first, and told them to stand in a line based on height,

tallest down to shortest. The tallest, and therefore in a sense biggest, 16 I divided alternately into two more or less balanced scrums of 8 each. The smallest two or three that were left were going to be scrum halves to put the ball in to every scrum, and we got on with practising scrummaging for most of the time that was left.

Towards the end of the time I sent the younger boys off to get showered and changed, keeping only the Fifth and Sixth form boys back.

“Gather round, gentlemen,” I said. “I know next to nothing about you so at prep this evening I want each of you to use a single sheet of paper. Put your name on the top, then write down what position you think you would be best at playing. Not just forward or back, but prop, hooker, and so on for forwards, and scrum half, stand off, three-quarter, and so on for backs. Now here is the important part. Write down all fifteen positions in a column, and next to each position write down the name of the boy you think would be the best player to

fill each position. You may write your own name anywhere if you think that is helpful to me. Any questions?"

They all looked round at each other to see if anyone wanted to ask a question, but it seems no one did.

"Who will collect the Sixth Form sheets?"

"I will, sir," said a boy whose name I did not yet know.

"Thank you. And the Fifth Form?"

Another stranger to me volunteered. I suppose the school may have some sort of Form monitor post or other which I did not know about.

"Thank you. I will get to know who you are eventually, but I need lots of names to mull over first. Right. Off you go to the changing room. All except my new-found tutors."

These four boys stayed, and I spoke to Crabb first.

"Tell me about the new boys."

"Well, sir, one or two are hopeless, but the rest will work out given time, I suppose." Something of a shrug of a shoulder went with this.

“Right. Thank you. Please take some of these balls back to the pavilion, and then you can go.”

Dann next and without being asked volunteered: “None are absolute beginners, sir, and a few are really keen to improve. Shall I give you names next time?”

“Good idea. And you can take the rest of the balls back too.”

Peters next, and he too knew what I needed to know. “One lad will make a very good stand off in a couple of years' time, but the rest are average, with no obvious stars. But all pretty willing.”

“Many thanks, Peters,” and I waved him away towards the hall, and the changing room.

So now I was left with Fairbrother, all on his own, which was all part of what the Chaplain had hoped for. A report on the new boy, of course.

“So, Fairbrother, what about your lot, and especially the new boy?”

“Well, sir, they are all reasonably good, apart of course from Wetherill, who is never going to be a rugby player however

hard we try.”

I liked the 'we'.

“The new boy seems very plucky and keen to learn. Does not know how to protect his head in a tackle yet, so needs some more coaching, but assuming he stays keen will develop into a decent player, I reckon.”

“Good. Would you mind keeping an eye out for him. The Chaplain has appointed Wetherill as a mentor, as that role needs to be someone his own age. But he also wants a senior boy to keep a watching brief as well. Would you mind?”

“Happy to, sir. He got a bit hurt to start with, as you would expect from a total novice, which is what Wetherill explained to me. Never been to a school at all, he said. But I don't think he minded too much. Expected it rather, I thought.”

“Fine. Report anything to me that you think I or the Chaplain need to know. Thanks again.”

So off he trotted, and my games session was over. This schoolmastering business seemed a good enough way to pass the

time, I thought as I strolled back to the hall.

Chaplain

Following the discussion we had had earlier about Trubshaw, I sought a time with the Headmaster after supper.

“We are worried about how we can stretch Trubshaw,” I said to get the conversation going without actually saying what I thought we should do. Much better if the Headmaster thought the solution was his idea.

“Some colleagues think we should move him up a form or two.” I paused, with the hint that this was not my view.

“And what do you think, Chaplain?”

“I think that would be contrary to his father's hopes. He obviously wants his son to experience as far as possible an ordinary school life. If we single him out for special treatment, it will hardly be that.”

“But we must stretch him too, surely. Do you have any views on how to do that?”

“Well, Headmaster, yes, there is one option available to us. We have done this before I think. An additional Greek language class for scholarship hopefuls, and add Trubshaw

to it.”

“Yes, that would be a good idea,” he replied, “if only we had some scholarship hopefuls good enough. But I fear we would have no takers from the present Sixth Form. However . . . let me think . . . we could set up a Greek class anyway, and invite volunteers, and the only volunteer would be Trubshaw himself. I am sure I could get his father to agree. No extra charge on the fees, of course.”

“And who would take this class?” I asked.

“You, of course, Chaplain. And you could teach him New Testament Greek, which you obviously did as part of your clerical preparations.”

Just what I wanted the Headmaster to suggest, and it had been his own unprompted idea.

“Happily, Headmaster.”

“Good, I will announce the new class simply as Greek, of course, and invite volunteers. There will be none, and after a day or two to let the notional letters pass between me and his father, you will tell Trubshaw that it is OK for him to volunteer.

You can arrange extra time with him in your vestry, and make sure he has lots of extra work to do in prep time in the evening.”

“And that will give me a chance to monitor how stretched he is getting in the other subjects, and I can add prep tasks to those given the other boys, to keep him really busy.”

So the next day the Headmaster made the announcement asking for volunteers for an extra class in Greek, and you could hear a pin drop. His forecast that there would be no volunteers looked pretty certain to be accurate. As he made the announcement I was looking directly at Trubshaw, and detected a faint smile on the boy's face. Surely he would take the bait.

That break I reported to my pipe puffing colleagues that the Headmaster's decision was that Trubshaw would be kept on the Fourth Form, to receive lessons with boys of his own age all the time.

“He may possibly want to do the Greek, of course,” I said. “In fact the Headmaster intends that he shall 'volunteer', having

advised his father of this new addition to our curriculum.”

“And who gets to do this extra course. Not the Headmaster himself surely?” asked Marsden, as a language teacher being fearful of being asked to do this himself.

“That duty will fall to me,” I replied quickly.

They all nodded.

“We can all give him extra prep too, the Headmaster has instructed. But he really does want him to continue to mix with his own age range, and I personally think that is precisely what his father is looking for.”

So there was enough agreement among my colleagues, at least no open opposition, and we got on with talking about the prospects for the new rugby team, which brought Easton into the conversation.

“Too early to tell, yet,” was all he said on this subject. And anyway our break time was up, so pipes were extinguished and we went back to our tutorial duties.

Wetherill

After the morning assembly, as we walked to our classroom, I caught Trubshaw up and spoke to him about the Whacker's announcement.

"I suppose you will want to do this Greek stuff", I said.

"What will all the other chaps think if I do?"

"Now that they know about you being a boffin they will think it quite in character. Don't worry about them anyway. Just do what you want to do."

"I will certainly give it some thought. Who will take this class do you think?"

"Not the Frog, for sure. I doubt if he knows anything else except French. Maybe German, but we don't do German here. Ask our Form Master, Chappers. he will be bound to know."

It was odd for me having a friend who asked me questions and relied on my answers. It was lonely enough being such a duffer at games, and so being looked down on by everyone, and constantly sneered at.

Trubs was obviously going to make a half-decent rugby player. He did not seem to mind getting the knocks that I hated getting. Tackling practice was a disaster for me, but Trubs had shown enough willing to fit in, and was no worse than some of the chaps who had been playing the game since they were just eight years old.

Having just mentioned Chappers in talking to Trubs, it was a bit of a coincidence that our next lesson after this conversation was Scripture with Chappers himself. Scripture lessons are dreadfully dull. We read stuff out of the Bible and then discuss it. And I mean read aloud. Each of us gets to read a whole chapter while the rest of the class just listens, and then we are invited to ask Chappers questions about what we have read. It is a matter of honour among us to remain steadfastly silent, and usually Chappers has to single one or other of us out and suggest a question to be asked. Then he has to force someone else to come up with an answer. The only escape from this nonsense is for someone to ask a silly question, but you

have to be inventive to do this, and most of us cannot be bothered.

Of course Trubs had no idea about this. He was straight in with a sensible question as soon as the first chapters had been read. We started the new term with a book called Samuel. The first book of this chap, who turns out to have been a favourite of the Almighty, and even as a boy got called by God to be a prophet. So we had read about this unfortunate lad and how he had heard a voice he thought belonged to his boss, an old duffer called Eli, only to discover, eventually, that it was a divine summons. Eli was half blind anyway, according to this story, and comes over as not very bright. And God was pretty cross with him because of the way his sons were carrying on.

So as soon as the chapter was over when we had the story of the boy Samuel being promoted to the status of prophet, up stands Trubs and says: "Please, sir, why did God choose Samuel to be a prophet?"

"Good question, Trubshaw. Who would like to answer this question?"

Deathly silence, needless to say.

“What do you think, Trubshaw?”
Chappers asked.

“I do not know, sir. That is why I asked.”

That straight answer made everyone look round with admiration at Trubs. I could see that they thought it was a good thing to have someone in the class who was totally direct with a master, and did not back off at all. Chappers was on the spot, and drivelled on about God knowing who he could trust, and lots of stuff like that.

At break after this lesson we all congratulated Trubs, and told him he was now officially the class spokesman and asker of awkward questions.

“Keep it up, Trubs.” Even Smithson Major was on his side. “We need someone with a decent mind to confuse the enemy.”

So Trubs was now not only the solver of thorny problems when we got stuck with our prep, he was also the spearhead of our mental battles in the classroom. I felt my status as Trubs' special pal had risen slightly too.

A couple of days later, when Trubs and I

were strolling round the perimeter of the playing field, as was our custom by now during free time, he told me the answer to the other question we had left open.

“It is Chappers who is taking the Greek, and he told me that my father wanted me to be on this course. It turns out that I am the only one who wants to do it, so I will be having extra lessons with him on my own.”

“I suppose you will enjoy this extra stuff. Rather you than me. Chappers is the only decent master we have got, apart from Easton of course, who doesn't count.”

“There are different types of Greek apparently, and according to Chappers we will be doing the later type. I must admit I am quite looking forward to it. But don't tell the other chaps that.”

“Don't worry, Trubs. They were expecting it anyway. They have decided having a smart boffin in the class is a plus not a minus. So long as you keep asking awkward questions.”

Chaplain

A couple of days after the Headmaster's announcement about the Greek class I had the chance for a quick word with Trubshaw.

"You heard the Headmaster inviting volunteers for an additional class in Greek, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. Who will be taking the class?"

"I will."

"Oh, good. Do you think it would be right for me to join this class, sir?"

"I am sure your father would approve."

"Count me in then, sir, please."

So it was all arranged as I had hoped. We discussed when and where would be best. The timing would be the half hour before evening prep, and I suggested we meet in the vestry. I explained that he was the only volunteer, and that did not seem to surprise him, or disappoint him. I have a small blackboard in the vestry, so I will be able to use that to demonstrate how to write the letters of the Greek alphabet, or anything else when I need to write it up. And being

lost in a big classroom would not be as conducive to learning, I thought.

I said we would do the same as his father had decided as a method of learning. We would read through a gospel in its original language of Greek.

"Do you want to read St. John's Gospel again, or a different one?"

"Perhaps a different one, sir. You decide."

"Very well, we will read St. Mark's. It is in many ways the simplest of the four for a beginner."

During the very first lesson, and we had decided on weekdays only, I got him to learn the Greek alphabet. He was to have a new exercise book, which we would keep in the vestry, and I found my battered copy of the New Testament in Greek, and an old grammar book, and a Greek dictionary. It was going to be just like old times for me, and I was glad to have the company of a brilliant young mind.

To start with there would be little for me to do, as learning the shape of all the new letters, and their names, would take him a little while. Soon he was word perfect on

alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and so on. Then would come the declensions and conjugations, but I resolved not to make this a rote learning process, but only to look at the noun, adjective, and verb endings as we came to each of them naturally in our reading. And the first sentence of Mark has no verbs in it, being more or less a title, so we got off to a good start. Just learning to read the words in their strange alphabet was a task enough, and he quickly caught on. Although this was extra work for me, of course, I was very relaxed about it. It was much more pleasant to have a single willing pupil than any other aspect of my working life. And it would give me the chance to get to know pretty well this fascinating character.

And then we read together the very first sentence in Greek of St. Mark's gospel.

"You will notice the difference," I said, "between this and the other gospels. Matthew and Luke give us lots of details about Mary and Joseph, and in Matthew's story we have magi and Herod, and in Luke's account we have angels and

shepherds. John gives us philosophy: the word by whom all things were made becoming flesh and living in our midst. But Mark goes straight in with no birth stories at all. No reference to the incarnation” - I hoped he knew the meaning of this rather theological word, and I was not disappointed - “at all.”

“Forgive me, sir, but I think you are wrong.”

Oops. I, the trained theologian, an ordained minister of the Church of England, am about to be corrected.

“How so?”

“Well sir, just look at the words 'son of God' in the first sentence which says 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' Surely that is the incarnation, but in just two Greek words. And right at the very beginning. What would an ordinary reader of the first century, an ordinary Jew, make of those two words?”

I had no answer, of course. Here was an insight that had passed me by.

“I concede. Mark has the incarnation as well as the others, but in so few words you

might just not notice.”

Wetherill

We all noticed how keen Trubs seemed on our Scripture lessons. Unlike the rest of us he was always asking questions. We were plodding through this book written by a cove called Samuel, all about Saul and his son Jonathan and a more famous guy called David. Even I had heard about his fight with Goliath. Chappers explained that the stone that felled him was probably the size of a cricket ball, and that would be enough to knock anyone out. He also told us the measurement of a cubit, and so we get Goliath being nine feet tall.

So we read on through this book, with Chappers struggling to get us interested, and only Trubs really taking part in the lesson. This suited the rest of us fine, since that meant we did not really have to pay much attention. Then we came to what I did not realise at the time was a really important chapter. Poor Saul was losing his rag because he could not defeat the Philistines, and there was going to be another battle. He was desperate to find out

what was going to happen, and did what Chappers explained was a very wicked thing. He went to someone called the witch of Endor. Chappers told us that a modern word would be medium. So Saul asked her to call up the spirit of Samuel to get answers to his question. And the ghost of Samuel turns up and tells Saul that he is going to lose the battle, and he and his sons would die in it.

Well Trubs really latched on to this part of the story, and wanted to know if this means there really are ghosts, that the spirits of dead people can actually get in touch with us, and all sorts of questions like that. Chappers did his best, but you could tell he was uncomfortable with all these questions. He really did not want to say anything certain, and used words like possibly, and rarely, and exceptionally, and so on. This added to our fascination, needless to say.

With these thoughts in our minds for the rest of the day, when we were getting ready for bed, the silliest boy in our dorm, a fool called Mason, put a sheet over his head and

went creeping around saying: "I am a ghost."

Trubs said: "No you are not. You are just a silly boy with a sheet over you. You do not understand what a real ghost would be like."

"I suppose you do," said Mason.

"Yes, actually."

And that might have been the end of it, but it wasn't.

The next day it was me who carried it on. "What would it be like if there was a real ghost in this place?"

"Well, first of all a ghost is a spirit. So there is nothing physical about him. Second, you really only know there is one there from the effect he might have on things we can see. The Germans call some ghosts poltergeists. They knock things off shelves. Stuff like that."

"So you only know there is a ghost doing it when there is no other explanation?"

"Absolutely right."

Then, I confess, I started something. "Suppose we did things that made it look like there was a ghost here. That would be

a prank, would it not?"

"Wetherill, you are a genius." Music to me ears. "My father told me that if I went to a school with other boys, they would lead me into all sorts of naughty pranks. I think he half wants me to do something a bit naughty, because normally I do everything the masters tell me to do. I think he would approve of a prank, so long as nobody gets hurt."

He paused and thought for a while, then said: "Yes, Wetherill, I will create a ghost in Melton Hall. But nobody but you and I will know that it is not a real ghost. You must give me your word. Total secrecy."

"You have my word, Trubs. Total secrecy. Just you and me will know."

Oh, the joy for me. Normally I am on the outside of whatever is going on, because I am such a duffer at games. Now I will be the only one on the inside. I am sure Trubs is smart enough to pull off a really good trick or two, and I will be the only one who knows it is not a real ghost.

Chaplain

I must admit I never did like the bit in the story of Saul and David when Saul goes off to consult the witch of Endor. I could tell how the level of interest rose when Trubshaw, predictably, asked all the awkward questions that that incident gives rise to. Have I started a hornets' nest? I wondered.

Later that day in our common room my fears were given confirmation. Newberry asked a general question: "Why are the Fourth Form talking about ghosts all the time? I have never before been asked to recommend a book about ghosts, from boys who would much rather be reading comics or Biggles books."

"My fault, I think." And I told them all about what we had been doing in my Scripture lesson.

"Well we have Henry James's novel 'The Turn of the Screw' in the library, I think. It won't be a bad thing if I can get the boys to read a modern novelist, I suppose. It was what I suggested, anyway."

And there we left it, or so I thought.

The very next day it was Peale who gave us a bit of a start.

“Do you know who is doing silly things in here? I went to get my pipe from the pipe rack on the mantelpiece and there it was, wrong way up. And so were all the other three.”

I need to explain. The four pipe-smokers on our staff all put their pipes on a pipe rack with the bowl at the bottom, as the rack is designed to keep them that way. That is where they will stay while their owner is away, to save cluttering up pockets. And they all leave them there overnight, having second pipes in their rooms at their houses.

So overnight someone had obviously come in and switched their positions to the reverse of this.

I knew straight away who would have done this, as there was only one boy in the school with the intelligence and imagination for such a trick. But for some reason which I cannot fully explain, I said nothing. I had begun to feel rather

protective of my star pupil, and did not want to see him get into trouble. I was also curious to observe the progression of his talents. What would he do next?

But I had my duty as a schoolmaster of course. That evening as we had worked through the Greek of Mark for a good while I surprised him, I think.

“Trubshaw, I need to tell you something. It would be very wrong for a boy to enter the Masters' Common Room on his own.”

He did what I think is called a 'double take'.

“I am sure you are right, sir.”

“Need I say more?”

“No, sir, I have got the message.”

“Good, then I will say no more.”

Wetherill

Trubs and I were strolling round the field, and when we were effectively alone I heard him say: "Well I have made my first mistake already, Soapy."

He was using my nickname now, which although I do not like it, showed the level to which our friendship was getting.

"Yes, I began targeting the masters, and that was a daft thing to do. One of them, at least, is smart enough to spot what is happening."

"What did you do?"

"I crept into Knock and Wait last night when everyone was asleep, and switched all their pipes round in their pipe rack. It seemed a smart thing to do, as no harm was being done to anything, but it was bound to be noticed. Well it must have been noticed. The upshot is that Chappers at least realises it was me."

"Gosh"

"Yes, completely stupid. The masters will not rise to the bait. It is us, the boys of this school, I have to target. I will have to think

of something they will spot but the masters may well ignore.”

“You are right, Trubs. The only way we can get a ghost believed in here is if we boys can believe in it.”

“It must be much more subtle than doing something that can easily be explained. It must be unexplainable, and preferably not noticed by the masters. Thinking caps on.”

And that is how we left it, and many days passed before the next attempt would be made. I knew Trubshaw would not tell me beforehand what he was going to do. He was like that. Decisive and rather private. But I would be the only other person who would know the real explanation.

Newberry

I am finding that my lessons in English with the Fourth Form have been somewhat transformed by the new boy. Normally I get little response from them. They tolerate me, moderately well. They learn lists of spelling that I give them. They learn punctuation rules. They do dictation. They memorise poetry and recite it to order. But can I get them to read for pleasure anything but puerile stuff, and can I get them to enjoy good literature? Such is the lot of a school master, and as years turn into decades the hope of raising awareness of good literature begins to dim somewhat.

But within weeks of getting this new boy in my class I have been asked for suggestions of good books to read.

All right, a rather schoolboyish topic on which to recommend good books to read. Ghosts! Better that than nothing, though. And not a subject the best novelists often tackle, of course.

It was Trubshaw who asked me, needless to say, and I was stretched for an effective

answer. But I remembered that we had a few Henry James books in the library, well two anyway, and that one was 'The Turn of the Screw'. So this was the one I had recommended.

A couple of days later I checked in the library, and in the row for authors beginning with J the book had been borrowed. There is a borrowing book, where each boy writes the name of the book he borrows, with a date for 'out' and a day for 'returned'. Trubshaw had entered 'The Turn of the Screw' in his very neat writing, and yesterday's date for 'out'. Not yet returned, so he is still reading it. I really must ask him how he gets on with it. I need to get closer to his mind, I resolved. It is some years since I last read it, but I remembered the plot quite well, as it is a very dramatic book. A young governess is employed to take charge of an eight year old girl called Flora and a ten year old boy called Miles, who are orphans. The governess finds that her predecessor, Miss Jessel, has died. But she thinks she sees her ghost, and believes that Flora has seen her too, but will not

admit it. Then Miles comes home. He has been expelled from his school. Reasons not given. Then there is another apparition, this time of a former servant called Quint, who has also recently died. The book leaves the reader wondering if these apparitions are all in the mind of the governess, or whether there really are two dead people trying to gain possession of the minds of Flora and Miles. The governess's struggle to save the children is the main point of the story.

I determined to wait until Trubshaw had read the whole book, and then quiz him on his own conclusions.

So I checked the library return dates until I saw that he had returned the book. Towards the end of one lesson after this I asked Trubshaw the obvious question: "Trubshaw, tell me please, have you finished reading 'The Turn of the Screw'?"

He stood politely. "Yes, sir."

"Please give the class a summary of the story, and your thoughts about it."

This got the whole class settled, waiting to hear what Trubshaw would say.

"Well, sir, it is about a servant who dies

and a governess who dies. They both come back to haunt the place they had worked in.”

So rather than focus on the heroine of the story who tries to save the two children in her care, he saw the story as principally about the two ghosts.

“And why did they come back to do this haunting?”

“To gain possession of the minds of the two children who lived there.”

“And did they succeed?”

“Hard to say, sir. The girl, she's eight and called Flora, gets so ill she has to be taken away, and the book ends before we are told what happens to her. But the boy, Miles, a ten year old, dies in the very last sentence of the book.”

“What did he die of?”

“It just says his heart stopped beating, sir. So we don't really know.”

“And what did you think of the book?”

“I liked it sir. Lots of surprises. Lots of mysteries. Please, sir may I ask you a question?”

I nodded, with some trepidation.

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

“Well, 'The Turn of the Screw' is pure fiction, a made up story, so no evidence about ghosts one way or the other.”

“But that is not what I was asking, with respect, sir.”

I hate it when my colleagues say 'with respect', as you know an insult is on its way. But from an eleven year old boy!

“That is a question for the Chaplain.”

Everyone in the room knew that this was an evasion too, but it was the best I could manage.

“Thank you, sir. I will let him know you have directed me to ask him.”

Fortunately the school clock, with a perfect sense of timing, tolled out the quarter hour and I was able to escape.

Chaplain

Newberry took me to one side after lunch when we were both in the Staff Common Room. “Chaplain, I need to warn you. I am afraid the fixation on ghosts in the Fourth Form has been exacerbated by my suggesting of the Henry James book I told you about. I was asked whether I believed in ghosts – I need hardly tell you by whom – and I have suggested that Trouble asks you that question.”

This was the first time any colleague had applied the nickname we all carried in our minds to my charge. “Thank you, old chap, I will prepare an appropriate answer.”

I was seeing Trubshaw every day now, for his Greek lesson, and so with a few minutes to go I forced myself to raise the topic.

“Mr. Newberry tells me he has delegated me to address a question you asked him.”

“Yes, sir. Do you believe in ghosts?”

“Which ghosts do you have in mind?”

Always a good ploy, I have found, to answer one question with another question. It certainly worked well this time.

Trubshaw said nothing, and so I ended the silence myself.

“I certainly do not believe in the ghost who came into our common room and moved some pipes around.”

He looked at me, our eyes met briefly, and he had the grace to look away. He was obviously somewhat ashamed of his prank, but I chose not to make any further reference to it. He knew I knew, but both of us did not want to be explicit about our knowledge.

“Can I rephrase the question, then, sir?”

“Go ahead.”

“What happens to us when we die?”

A much better question, I thought, and well within my sphere of interest as a clergyman.

“I can tell you what the Bible teaches, but it is a very complicated answer. Our time is up right now, but I will give you a lesson in theology tomorrow, if you really want it.”

“Yes, sir. I really do.”

So the next day, instead of a Greek lesson, I took him through the elementary parts of the answer.

“The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. They have a word for the afterlife: Sheol.”

He nodded.

“The New Testament, which we are now reading in the original Greek had its own word: Hades. There are lots of Greek myths about Hades. It is both the name of the Greek god who ruled the place and the place itself. It is seen as the place where the soul or spirit of a dead person goes.”

“Would it right to say that that is where his ghost goes?”

“Yes, but it is not as simple as that. The trouble is with words. The Greek word for 'spirit' is 'pneuma', and when we talk about the Holy Spirit a lot of the prayers in our Prayer Book say 'Holy Ghost'. So if you mean by 'ghost' someone's spirit, or disembodied soul, you could say that the New Testament accepts that Hades is the right word for that place.”

“But I don't remember ever reading about Hades in the New Testament.”

“Spot on. The translation we use, which was made about three hundred and forty

years ago uses a different word. Do you know what it is?"

"I think I might do, sir. Is it 'hell'?"

"Quite right. And of course this is the problem. We have all sorts of ideas of hell as a place of torment and pain."

"Sir, this is very confusing. I don't mind the idea of Hades, but I do not want to go to hell."

"Nor shall you, my boy. But my advice is not to think too much about the next life when you have so much of your present life to go."

I knew I had not said enough about the Christian hope about the next life, but I also sensed that it would be too much to go on about that just now.

"Have I answered your question about ghosts?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose you have. When we die something that is still us goes on, somewhere, in some sort of way, without it being a physical body. Is that the right answer?"

"That is an excellent summary."

"And that is how Saul could get to talk

with Samuel, even though Samuel was dead and buried?”

Oh dear, the book of First Samuel has a lot to answer for. I must make sure that next time I do this part of the Bible story I somehow skip that particular chapter.

“This is forbidden territory. God has forbidden us from trying to get in touch with people who have died. That is the real lesson of the story we have read about Saul and Samuel.”

“But supposing the ghost wanted to talk to us?”

I had no answer for this question. So I did the obvious thing.

“That is pure conjecture. I do not know of any ghost who does. And nor do you,” I said with some emphasis on those last four words.

And that is how we left it.

Wetherill

Trubs and I were having our usual stroll round the field and I could see Trubs was in a bit of a glum mood.

“What's the matter, Trubs?”

“Yesterday I had a long chat with Chappers about ghosts. He knows it was me who sneaked into Knock and Wait and moved the pipes around. But he keeps on not actually saying so.”

“So . . . ?”

“Well, he sort of lectured me about ghosts. He really does not approve of my trying to get our chaps to believe this place is haunted and has a real ghost. But he does not quite come out and say so directly.”

“Typical of Chappers. Always moral. Always saying we have to make the right decisions. But we have a project, Trubs, and we are not going to give it up just to please Chappers. Are we?”

“If you put it like that, I suppose not. We just have to find somewhere where we boys go and never the masters. Or something we can see, but they can't. I will have to think

about it. I must not make the same mistake as last time. You think about it too, Soapy. Something we can see, that they can't."

"Agreed. Thinking caps on."

So that was our challenge. We had to find some noticeable thing that might be thought to be the act of some ghost. But no good if the masters spotted it, as they would not so easily be fooled, and would work out that it was just some silly boyish prank.

Would Trubs be able to find out how to fool us boys? I was sure he would, given time.

Chaplain

I must say that doing Greek with Trubshaw was both a challenge and a pleasure. We soon reached the point where he could read a whole sentence in the first chapter of St. Mark's gospel, and he quite quickly got used to the pattern of endings Greek uses. This is vital. You need to be able to spot if it is a conjunction or preposition, which remains constant, and there are not all that many of those. Nouns and adjectives have a rather different pattern of endings compared with verbs, so you have to spot those. I did not insist that we do all the rote learning and repeating of these patterns, because Trubshaw just assimilated these quite naturally, once the grammar book was consulted where these are all laid out in tables. And Mark uses a very simple narrative style, and a relatively small vocabulary, so we could begin to make reasonable progress.

Inevitably we soon went beyond just the challenge of translating what was there, to thinking about what it all meant. This is

why I found so much pleasure in teaching this nimble mind. I rarely found my adult colleagues willing to discuss these matters, which meant so much to me as a parson.

As you may know, St. Mark does straight into the activity of John the Baptist, announcing that someone mightier than he was coming, whose sandals he was not even worthy to touch. And then comes the difficult bit. John says, 'I baptize with water, but he will baptize with the Holy Ghost.'

That dreadful word again. I do wish that the translators had been more consistent at this point. It is 'pneuma' in Greek, of course, and in the next but one sentence it is translated as 'Spirit', the Spirit descending on Jesus as he was baptized by John.

So, as I am sure you can imagine, Trubshaw and I had to discuss the idea of 'pneuma' all over again. Ghost or spirit, we could not get away from the idea of a presence that was real but somehow not physical.

He spared my blushes by not asking me again whether I believed in ghosts, but I sensed that he was not letting go of the

idea of ghosts. He had already once tried to provide a ghostlike intervention, and I could tell he had not given up on the idea.

Still, nothing I could do about that. It might well turn out to be counterproductive to try to forbid this attempt, so I decided to let the matter go without further comment. But I was fairly sure something would happen sooner or later. In fact, somewhat to my shame, I suppose, I was intrigued to know what this creative mind would come up with.

Newberry

One of the pleasures of teaching English is that you get to rehearse your favourite poems. Having them read aloud in class uses up a good amount of time, and results in no marking. The labour of marking is one of the curses of teaching, and I always complain that an English teacher has more to do than any other subject. Maths is so easy; you can even get the boys to swap books and mark each others' work, tot up the score of ticks for correct answers, and job done.

So poetry reading is a significant part of my teaching method, and one of my favourite poems is nice and long, but beautiful just to listen to. I am referring to Edward Fitzgerald's translation, a very loose translation I might add, of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

You can make a very good lesson by explaining that rubaiyat means four line verses, and that Omar Khayyam was a very accomplished mathematician as well as a poet. So with the Fourth Form this is what

we began to do. Each boy would read aloud a few verses, and the book would be passed from boy to boy, so economical on text books too. Every now and then we would stop and discuss what Omar was saying and what we thought of it. So take a verse like:

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by that same door as in I went.*

This would easily lead into a discussion of the duty of all boys, 'even boys as young as all you lot', I would say, to search out the truth. This got Trubshaw waxing very lyrical, agreeing completely with me. The others glared at him a bit, I fear.

In spite of their obvious resistance to taking poetry seriously, I found Trubshaw getting very interested in another verse:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

He seized on this and asked what the poet was referring to. So I had to explain about the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, and the Jewish captivity, and the Babylonian king call Belshazzar, and how somehow there was a finger of a hand writing on the wall when he was having a big party, with a message telling him he was doomed. Ask the Chaplain, I suggested to Trubshaw, if you want more details, or look it up in the book of Daniel. Chapter five I think you will find.

For some reason this was the last time I got any response from Trubshaw about the Rubaiyat. He seemed quite lost in his own thoughts. This did not worry me. I was enjoying Fitzgerald's lovely rhythms, and it was keeping the boys quiet and occupied.

Wetherill

"I've got it, Soapy!"

This was Trubs to me a week or so later from the last time we had thought about our prank.

"What have you got, Trubs?"

"The answer. What is our ghost going to do? He is going to write a message on a wall, somewhere."

"Yes, of course, just like that chap Belshazzar we had in English. A message from somewhere. That will make people sit up and take notice."

"We will have to use chalk of course, so as not to do any lasting damage, but chalk is easy enough to get hold of, I mean borrow."

Trubs was so moral, I thought. We must not steal chalk, but we could borrow it.

Thus was our plot beginning to take shape, so I asked the obvious question.

"Where are we going to write the message? Which wall?"

"Good question, my friend. It will have to be somewhere that generally speaking only boys see, and never any masters."

“The obvious answer is our bogs, then.”

Trubs frowned.

“No, that will not do. It will be too obvious that one of us boys has just pinched, borrowed I mean, some chalk and written something on the wall. We have got to be more subtle than that. There has to be mystery attached. It has to imply that it was not a human who did the writing, but a real ghost.”

We both said nothing for a while. You could almost hear the cogs grinding in our brains.

We had a plan, but only half a plan.

“These things take time,” said Trubs, “and I am not going to make another mistake. We must get it perfectly right this time”

I agreed, of course. But I had no idea how we could add the element of mystery. Creating a ghost is beginning to look a lot more difficult than I had thought, especially if you have got to provide it for just one group of people, and exclude another group.

Still, I trusted even this dilemma would not be too much for my genius friend.

Chaplain

We were having our daily Greek lesson, Trubshaw and I, and it was getting so that we often had discussions about various things. He is so naturally curious and wants to soak up knowledge continually. So it was no surprise when he asked me about Belshazzar and the writing on the wall.

We looked together at the book of Daniel, and the moving finger writing the four words that proclaimed the doom of the king of Babylon. I did not think very much about his reasons for all these questions, at the time.

Then came another time when, being in my vestry where I keep everything that a church needs, he spotted the device I used for lighting and snuffing out the very tall candles on the altar. He asked me what it was for.

It is a brass device secured to a thin pole, about four or five feet long, rather like a billiard cue. So I explained its function to him, wondering if he was even considering, with all this curiosity, the possibility of

becoming ordained in the fulness of time.

“The business end has two functions,” I explained. “This socket at the very end is where I put a short thin candle in, more like a taper, and light it. Then, using the long pole I can reach up to light the two altar candles. These are so high I could not possibly reach them without getting a self supporting ladder, or taking the candles down off the altar to light them, and then putting them back. The other part you can surely guess the purpose of, given its shape.”

This part is a sort of hollow cylindrical pyramid, like an upside-down ice cream cone.

“Of course, it's to snuff out the candles at the end of the service.”

We only use these very tall altar candles when we have a proper service on Sundays, and not for what is really only a formal assembly on all the other days of the week.

I had no idea why he was so interested in this simple candle accessory, and was glad he did not ask me what it was called. I think the right word may be sconce, but I

am not absolutely sure.

It was only later that I discovered the reason for his interest.

Wetherill

I can always tell when Trubs is happy, and the day came when he obviously was, and we were doing our walk round the field again.

"I have got it," he said.

"What?"

"The answer, of course. I know where I am going to do my mystery writing and how I am going to do it."

"Great," I said. "Tell me all about it."

"Well actually I want to use you as a test. I will give you a clue, but I want to find out from you whether what I write will be spotted by any other boys. So if you can spot it, then I'll know they can too."

I was not sure whether I actually wanted to be part of a Trubshaw experiment, but I had to agree.

"So what is the clue?" I asked.

"In tomorrow morning's assembly in chapel you will see a single letter written in chalk somewhere. I am going to write the word 'HELLO', but putting up just one letter a day so as to prolong the tension."

“But where?”

“That will be for you to discover, my dear fellow.”

So next morning, as I went in to our usual morning assembly in the church, I was looking everywhere. I expected it to be on the back of a pew. No joy there, as far as I could see. I looked on the floor of our pew row. No joy there either. I was flummoxed, and assembly does not last very long, so I had to admit defeat.

At break I demanded to know where he had put his first letter, the letter 'H' I presumed.

“Just think, Soapy. We are all sitting in our rows facing towards the lectern, and the Headmaster at the lectern and the masters on their chairs either side of him are sitting facing us. So what are we looking at, and they not looking at?”

“Well the chancel, leading towards the altar, of course.”

“And what is there at the end of the nave, and above the entrance to the chancel?”

“A blank wall, of course.”

“What did you notice about that blank

wall.?"

"Oh no. So that is where you wrote your 'H'."

"It was indeed. And we boys are obviously too sleepy and bored to look up there. As you have just proved. Tomorrow you will know where to look, and you will see my second letter, an 'E' of course. I will write one letter every day until my HELLO is complete."

"Gosh, Trubs, you are a genius."

"Now, Soapy, not a word to anyone. Having you look up at an otherwise blank wall may be taken for a sudden conversion, or serious piety, or whatever. But if all sixty or so of us boys are doing the same, the masters are bound to spot that something odd is happening. We want our ghost to be a 'boys only' appearance."

"Yes, that makes sense."

I could hardly wait for assembly on the next day, and I spotted Trubs' 'HE' straight away as soon as I sat down in my pew. The entrance to the church is from the side door in the middle of the church, so the masters would walk to their seats at the

end of the nave facing us, and we boys would not turn round to face towards that wall until we had made our way to our pews.

Trubs is a genius, I was thinking, but there was still a huge question in my mind. How could he possibly reach as high up as this wall over the entrance to the chancel?

“How did you do it, Trubs?” I asked at break after our first two lessons.

“Can you not guess?”

“No, actually I darn well can't.”

“On the left hand side is a pulpit, which never gets used because the Headmaster always speaks from that lectern in the middle.”

“But this is still not high enough, even if you go up the steps to it.”

“True. That is why you need the candle snuffer thing that is in the vestry.”

I knew nothing about candle snuffers, of course. But break was over, so I had to wait till lunch break for the rest of the explanation. He described the snuffer thing to me, and my eyes were opened.

“I take the lighting taper out of its socket,

and put in a piece of chalk in its place. I have had to whittle the chalk down with my penknife till it is thin enough to go in there, and now I have a five foot long writing device. So I can stretch up with this and write my letters. It is a bit tricky to get enough pressure, which is why those letters are a bit faint. But you saw them all right, so that will do. And you did not work out how the letters got so high, so that was the test I wanted to make by not telling you about my methods beforehand.”

“But when do you do this writing?”

“Simple. We all get up and go into breakfast in the dining hall don't we? And then after that, usually in a desperate rush, into chapel for morning assembly. Now supposing someone gets up as soon as we are called, and then goes into the church before breakfast.”

“Of course.”

“And remember, everyone knows I have my Greek lessons in the vestry inside the church, so if I am seen on my way in or out they will just think I have gone in there to pick up something of mine from the vestry,

where I have every right to be because of my lessons there.”

“You are right. No one would think twice about it.”

“It does not take very long. I pick up the snuffer thing, take out the taper that is used for lighting candles, put in my shaved stick of chalk, get up to the pulpit, write my letter, back into the vestry, swap my chalk back out and the taper back in, and the job is done.”

It all seemed so simple, now that I knew the answer, but Trubs was right, not one of us boys, on seeing those letters, would have any idea how they got there, and would have only a ghost as a possible explanation. And Trubs and I would be the only two who knew the real answer. This was a prank to end all pranks.

“Now remember, Soapy, the rest have got to discover this for themselves. Not a word from either you or me. We can look, but it must be a silent message. If either of say ‘Look at that’ we will be giving the game away. People will guess that it is our scheme, and are bound to put two and two

together eventually. Even if they do not guess about the candle snuffer, they will still think of it as a prank.”

“You are right. They have got to believe in our ghost all on their own, with no help from us. No link to us. That is vital.”

So we agreed. However long it took, neither of us would say a word, and Trubs would write the third letter of HELLO tomorrow morning.

Chaplain

It was pure chance that took me to the west end of the nave that day, to where the boys always sat. This is where the hymn books are kept, and I wanted to check out a particular hymn I had in mind for the upcoming Sunday service, when, unlike our usual morning assemblies, we would have hymns to sing as well.

Walking back towards the chancel I happened to glance up, and saw that three letters 'HEL' had been chalked high up on the end wall of the nave, above and a bit to the right of the pulpit.

After a moment or two of puzzling, I realised who had done this, and why. There were two reactions in my mind simultaneously: outrage that someone had desecrated my holy place; and admiration for the inventiveness of a certain young mind.

I went back to the vestry, to see what he could have used to give access to a part of the nave wall that was obviously out of reach for an eleven year old boy. It did not

take me very long to spot the candle snuffer. There was a faint indication of chalk dust on the pointed socket part, where my lighting taper was. I checked out my blackboard and the supply of chalk which I used for writing on it, and sure enough one stick of chalk had been shaved down to be thin enough to go where my lighting taper was.

I decided to wait until our evening Greek lesson before doing anything about it. This would give me time to work out what action to take. Perhaps it would be good not to respond to this impudence immediately, but let my mind settle on what to do about it.

Trubshaw came into my vestry that evening at the usual time giving no impression that anything was untoward. But he did sit up and take notice when I started our lesson by saying, in a very authoritative voice: "Put your books away, Trubshaw, we have something far more important to talk about."

I could see that he immediately guessed that he had been discovered. The key thing

was to determine whether he would admit it or not. So I tried the oblique approach.

“What word were you intending to write?”

“Actually 'HELLO', sir, and I was going to do the next two letters together so as not to have a rude word up there,” he said, after a short pause.

“Let us be thankful for small mercies,” I thought but did not say aloud. Instead, I simply said nothing.

Trubshaw kept silent too, even though I had hoped by my silence to spur him on to further explanations or self defence.

“How many boys know about this?” was my next question.

“Just me and one other boy, sir. I don't think anyone else has spotted it yet. This other boy and I really wanted it to be found out without us saying anything.”

I knew who the other boy was of course, and recognised the schoolboy ethics of never telling tales on another boy.

“Can Wetherill be trusted to keep silent about this?” I asked.

“Yes, sir. And he is not to blame at all. It was all my idea, all my responsibility.”

I did not doubt this for one minute.

“You realise I cannot tolerate this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“To do this in God's house is technically sacrilege, you know.”

“Sorry, sir. I did not think of it like that. I suppose I will have to be punished.”

“Well I certainly think you have let me down, given the extra time I have been giving you, and you have abused the privilege of access to this building.”

A long silence followed, and I let him stew in it.

“But we will put remedy ahead of punishment. You will remove your graffiti, and then give me your solemn word that you will cease all attempts to introduce a spurious ghost into our midst.”

“Yes, sir. I promise. On my word of honour. And I agree it was totally wrong of me to write anything on the walls of a church. But ...”

“Well?”

“I am not sure how I can rub the letters all off. It was jolly difficult just writing them. You can get very little pressure stretching

up with your candle snuffer thing.”

“So you are saying you will need a step ladder?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you think I am going to let you take the risk of climbing up a step ladder?”

“I suppose not, sir.”

“Very well. I will do it myself. Tomorrow is Sunday, so no morning assembly after breakfast, but church in the middle of the morning. I probably cannot get a ladder this evening. It may be too late to get Arthur to find me one right now. I will ask him to put one in the church first thing tomorrow morning if it is too late to do that now. It will have to be an extending ladder. And I will do the job myself. The fewer people who know about this the better.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And you are banned from entering this church on your own, ever. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir. I really am sorry sir.”

“And tell Wetherill that if he utters a single word about this to anyone I will regard him as equally responsible for all

this as I do you. Now get out.”

Wetherill

I have never seen Trubs so downcast as when we both went up to the dorm that evening. It did not take any words from him for me to spot that our prank had misfired.

“Chappers knows everything,” was all he said. “Do not ask me how. Let us go somewhere where we can talk alone.”

So, defying all rules, we crept down to the games room, hoping no one would catch us.

“Here is the state of play, Soapy. Chappers knows it was me, and he has guessed that you know about it.”

“You didn't sneak on me, did you?”

“Of course not. Chappers did not even ask me for a name, but he did ask me how many boys knew about it, and I had to say 'two' or it would have been lying. And I really am in deep enough trouble as it is. My only hope is to be completely honest.”

“So what is he going to do to you.”

“I am not sure. I suppose he will have to send me to the Headmaster, but he seems more concerned at the moment to ensure that no one else but him, and you, and me,

knows about it. He says you will be punished as well as me if you say a single word.”

“I will not say anything then.”

“To anyone?”

“Come off it, Trubs. I have given you my word.”

Chaplain

I was up early on Sunday, and after a hurried breakfast I went straight round to the church. I suppose Arthur thought that I needed a ladder for clearing away some dust or cobwebs, but when I had asked him yesterday evening to leave an extending ladder inside the church for me all he had done was ask if I needed any help. I declined his offer and simply asked him to leave a ladder on the floor of the nave.

And there it was. I had armed myself with a cloth for the cleaning process, and if I needed water to dampen it there was always a carafe of water in the vestry so that I could have a glass nearby during any service in case I need to remedy a dry throat.

So I picked up the ladder and held it in position to extend it and prop it up against the nave wall just under the chalk marks.

I nearly dropped the ladder when I looked up.

Someone had added a fourth letter, and what was there now read HELP.

I knew in an instant that this was not done by Trubshaw. My understanding of his psyche ensured that once he had given his word, it could be relied on. And Wetherill had neither the cunning nor the courage to carry out a repetition of his friend's work.

There was very little time before the church would be needed for the usual Sunday morning service, so I got on with removing all the letters. The chalk marks were easy to rub off, and I soon had the ladder back on the nave floor, and went straight off to get Arthur to collect it again. He was expecting me, since we obviously did not want to leave a ladder lying around the church during a service.

“All done, Chaplain?”

“Yes, thank you, Arthur, and thank you also for responding so promptly to my need.”

He did not ask me what my need had been, and I offered no explanation.

One of the strengths of the Church of England is that our services are all written down for us in the Prayer Book. We do an abbreviated Matins service on Sundays,

and the Headmaster and I take turns with the sermon. Fortunately it was not my turn today, so that fact that my mind was still preoccupied with the new problem made it possible for me simply to announce hymn numbers, read out Bible passages and all the prayers, without anyone guessing my internal turmoil.

At the end of the service I collared Trubshaw and told him to wait for me outside the church as soon as Sunday lunch was over. He was not in the least surprised, of course. He would have seen that there were no longer any chalked up letters on the nave wall, and would have presumed that my next action would be his punishment.

If only it had been as simple as that.

Anyway, after our meal I went straight round to the church door, and there he was waiting, looking understandably rather apprehensive.

"Follow me," I said, and walked into the vestry.

"Did you obey me with regard to entering the church?"

“Oh yes, sir. I waited till all the other boys were already going into the church, and joined them as I have to do for the service. And I saw that there were no marks on the wall.”

“What about Wetherill.”

“He knows to keep totally quiet, sir. I told him he would be in deep trouble if he breaths a word to anyone. And he has given me his word, sir, just as I have given you mine, sir.”

I said nothing, because I did not know what to say.

“You do believe me, sir, don't you?”

“Yes, Trubshaw, I do believe you. And that is the problem.”

“Problem, sir?”

The moment of decision had come. Should I say nothing about the fourth letter, or should I regard this eleven year old boy as a collaborator I might need in solving the problem. As far as I knew the Headmaster knew nothing about what had happened. By rights this was a disciplinary matter sufficiently serious for the boy to be punished by being sent to him. The

alternative was to share the information with Trubshaw that a fourth letter had been written, and that would mean that we would become fellow conspirators of silence with regard to the Headmaster, and fellow solvers of a mutually shared mystery.

I needed time to think this through.

Here was a boy with no intended harm in mind who had been foolish. No more than foolish. Culpably foolish, yes, but how much would any punishment, especially knowing the Headmaster's usual way of dealing with errant culprits, be appropriate or effective.

My own punishment of him would be enough I decided. Another day of fretting could be applied, and that amount of mental anguish would suffice.

"Tomorrow we will continue our Greek lessons. The only difference now is that you will wait for me at the church door before we go into my vestry."

"Is that all, sir?"

"We will see. I will decide tomorrow what is the right thing for me to do."

"Thank you, sir"

"Now go."

He turned and went, and I could see from his body language that he now expected not to have to face an unpleasant interview with the Headmaster. But of course he could not be certain, and I would have time to plan my own response to the fourth letter.

Wetherill

I was waiting for Trubs in the games room hoping to catch him after his interview with Chappers. We went into the corner of the room and talked quietly enough for no one to overhear us. Since it was Sunday we had lots of time off from school stuff.

“What happened, Trubs? Tell all.”

“Well I am still alive. He was mighty angry yesterday, I could tell, and I thought I was for the chop today. Being sent to the Whacker as a minimum, or even being told I was expelled. He had used the word 'sacrilege', you know. Strong language for a parson.”

“So?”

“I am to see him as usual tomorrow evening, for my Greek lesson, when he will make up his mind what to do with me.”

“He is just stringing out the agony of you not knowing what will happen. Typical schoolmaster.”

“You may be right, but it is not as simple as that, I think.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He is talking about a problem. What problem, I keep asking myself. Is it the problem of what to do with me, or is there a problem I do not know about yet?”

“I expect he is not sure what to do with you. Perhaps he is worried that the Headmaster will expel you rather than whacking you.”

“You could be right. It would be awful to be sent home and have to explain everything to my father. Much better to be whacked, however much it hurt.”

“I agree.”

“It does mean inventing a ghost is all over, Soapy. I hope you are not too disappointed.”

“I can live with it. And you are right. It must stop here. We will have to think of a completely different sort of prank, but not one that puts us at risk of being expelled.”

Chaplain

I spent the rest of Sunday thinking through my options. It was already getting too late to report Trubshaw to the Headmaster. How could I explain why I had delayed two days from finding the chalked up letters before telling him?

So the first part of my decision was effectively made. Trubshaw would spend most of today half expecting a summons to the Headmaster, but by the evening would realise that he was going to be spared that fate.

But I simply could not make my mind up about the fourth letter. Should I just ignore the fact that it had been put there, but not by Trubshaw? Or should I pursue the matter with him as my Watson? Or, spare my blushes, with me as his Watson?

I knew that I would be crossing a line if I chose the latter course. There is something very delicate whenever the relationship between a schoolmaster and a schoolboy gets to a point of mutual trust and collaboration. This is especially true in a

boarding school like ours. We need to be fatherlike, and provide a male model that can be imitated. But too much closeness can easily be misunderstood. This was a fact of life we schoolmasters were keenly aware of. Distance was maintained. And rightly so, I thought. But I also knew there were depths in this young soul it would be perfectly proper to explore.

My teaching throughout the day was no doubt pretty mechanical and uninspiring. I taught some Latin in the boring way the boys were now used to and expected. We read some Bible passages and I did not press for much discussion or analysis. In fact this day of being so preoccupied with my own thoughts as to make myself more of a machine than an inspiring stimulator of impressionable young minds gave me a foretaste of what it might be like when, like my four main colleagues, I was somewhere in my fifties or sixties.

By the time I had caught up with Trubshaw waiting at the door of the church for our Greek lesson, I half knew what I would do. First I would put him out of his

misery. We sat opposite each other at the table in my vestry.

“What am I to do with you, Trubshaw?”

“I deserve to be whacked, sir,” he said, without delay.

“Probably,” I said, but with a wry smile.

“Please don't get me expelled, sir.”

An escape route being offered.

“Do you think the Headmaster might expel you?”

“He might, sir.”

“I agree. He might. And that would be too severe. You were very silly, very foolish, and you did a wicked thing, but in your own juvenile mind you meant no harm. If I report this to the Headmaster he might take the view that you should be expelled, along with your accomplice.”

“He did nothing, sir. It was all my idea, all my doing.”

“I know, but I cannot be sure how the Headmaster would react.” I paused. “So this will go no further.”

His face lit up.

“Thank you, sir.”

“And there is another reason for saying

that.”

I now crossed the line. I was going to explore the depths of this young soul, and I could only pray that it would be for his benefit as well as mine.

“I need your help, Trubshaw.”

He frowned, then smiled. He also knew a line was being crossed. I could see that he welcomed it too. He needed his young mind to be stretched by an older mind, perhaps wiser, though obviously less sharp, than his own. And this was something he could not get from Wetherill or any other of his peers.

“Yes, after you had written your three letters, some time between Saturday evening and Sunday morning, someone came in and wrote a fourth one.”

“Sir, it was not me!” He almost shouted this.

“I know, Trubshaw, I know.”

He calmed down on hearing this, and then became the Trubshaw I was beginning to get to know quite well, the Trubshaw who sought out knowledge.

“What letter, sir?”

“The letter P. The word I removed with my

cloth was HELP.”

“Heavens.” That was his only response.

“So, Trubshaw, who could that have been?”

He thought for a while, then instead of answering, asked me a question.

“When did Arthur deliver your ladder? Was it later on Saturday or first thing on Sunday?”

“I do not know. I just asked him to have it in church by early Sunday morning, and it was there when I went to do my cleaning work straight after breakfast.”

“You could ask him, sir.”

“In theory I could, but that would raise suspicions in his mind that something serious had happened, and I do not want that. Right now he thinks I was just clearing up dust or cobwebs.”

“Then we will have to assume the worst case, that the ladder was there overnight, giving someone the chance to use it and reach up high enough to add another letter to my three.”

“Are you sure no other boy besides you and Wetherill knew about what was there

to start with?"

"Well, not absolutely, but pretty sure."

"So it might have been a boy ..."

"Or Arthur himself," Trubshaw interjected.

"Not likely, but possible, I suppose. Not in character, though, unless I am much mistaken."

"Are you ruling out all the other masters, sir?"

Tactfully put, I thought.

"I have to. Only Easton is young enough to be doing pranks, and again not in character, by my judgment."

"So if it none of these, who could it be?"

"That is what we must find out, Trubshaw."

I could sense he liked the 'we'.

"Is it possible that the thing that matters is not that something was written, but what was written? Is there someone who needs help, and this is the only way he can tell us that he does?"

He had just promoted himself to Sherlock, I thought, remembering the line where Holmes says 'when everything else has been ruled out, whatever is left, however

improbable, has to be considered', or words to that effect.

"Am I allowed to use the word 'ghost', sir?"

"Let us say an 'unknown being' instead."

"We need to devise a way that this unknown being can tell us what sort of help he needs."

"Without writing on my church's walls."

He smiled. "Yes, we cannot have any more sacrilege can we, sir?"

Our eyes met, and I smiled too.

"But," he continued, "writing on your blackboard here in the vestry would not be sacrilege, would it?"

I waited for him to explain.

"And only you and I would become aware of what was written."

I was beginning to follow him.

"May I . . .?"

And he got up, went to my blackboard, which had nothing written on it at the moment, and chalked up at the very top of the board 'WHO ARE YOU'.

"I suppose I should have put a question mark as well," he said after sitting down.

"He may not be a grammarian, and the

sense is clear enough," was my amused reply.

"We may have a very long wait now, sir, and nothing may ever happen."

"That is true enough."

"And I suppose nobody, not even my friend who knows a bit about all this, will be told. We two will be the only ones who know the question has been asked."

Once again, by not naming any names, he was maintaining the schoolboy ethic of no sneaking.

"Absolutely right. If you tell Wetherill anything about the fourth letter, and our response to it, we will have so many more uncertainties that we will never be sure of anything."

"I agree, sir. All I will tell Wetherill now is that you have decided not to send me to be whacked by the Headmaster, because you are a forgiving man."

"And possibly a very foolish one, but you need not tell him that."

Wetherill

I was waiting for Trubs in the games room, still half not knowing whether I was in trouble as well as he. It was always possible that whatever Trubs' fate was would be mine too. So when he came in with a huge grin on his face I knew that it was good news for both of us.

"So, has he let us off?"

"Yes."

"Yippeel!"

"He is the best schoolmaster we could hope to have. He is not sure whether the Headmaster would whack us or expel us and so the matter is now closed."

"Given that Whacker does not whack he was right to think we might have been sent home. Good old Chappers. I will never think bad of him again."

"But you know what this means, don't you, Soapy?"

"Yes, I know. Not a word to a single soul."

"More than that."

"What do you mean?"

"No more pranks."

“I suppose you are right. But it will be dreadfully boring. It will be all right for you, because you have games you can enjoy. I suppose I will have to take up collecting butterflies, or some daft thing like that, to relieve the boredom of only having lessons to do.”

“There are books in the library, you know.”

“Look, you are used to reading books. That is how you amassed so much knowledge. But with poor simple me it is another case altogether.”

“Chess, then, or draughts.”

And that is how Trubs and I got started on draughts. He won every match, of course, being such a boffin in everything he put his mind to. But at least I still had my one and only friend in this place, and we had something to do together that we could both enjoy.

A guy needs friends.

Chaplain

The next day we resumed our Greek lessons in the vestry, with the question still there, chalked on the blackboard, but nothing else.

“I have decided that you may come into the church on your own, Trubshaw, as before. I am relying on being able to trust you. In fact we cannot continue to work together if I cannot trust you.”

I was not sure if by 'work together' he would understand being collaborators in solving the HELP mystery, or merely my teaching Greek to him. Ambiguity is a very useful thing.

“You can trust me, sir,” was his predictable reply.

“Open your Mark's gospel, and carry on looking up the words you do not know and doing you best to translate each sentence.”

My teaching method was simple. He had a grammar book to check out the patterns of endings of all the inflected parts of speech, and my Liddell and Scott dictionary. He was working his way through St. Mark's

gospel, writing his own translation in the exercise book I had given him. I could check his progress very easily. If he got stuck at any point he would ask for help, and it was a measure of his intellectual capacity that these moments were becoming fewer and fewer.

For those not familiar with Liddell and Scott it is worth mentioning that it covered the whole of the Greek period, from Homeric Greek to New Testament Greek, a period spanning about a thousand years. This means that some words are given different meanings, depending on where they are in that span. The earliest are given first.

The interesting thing was that Trubshaw's questions were tending to move from simply asking for help with a difficult translating issue towards, more and more, what something actually meant theologically. I had chosen Mark because he has the simplest narrative style of all the four gospel writers. You would suppose that complex theological questions would rarely arise.

How wrong I had been, especially in trying to help him understand what Mark meant when he used the word 'pneuma'. This was how we had got onto the English word 'ghost', and it was at this point that I told him to stop referring to our own 1611 translation.

It would also, I thought, be fascinating to check the Trubshaw translation of holy scripture with the one we were all used to, which really went all the way back to Tyndale in the 1520s.

So this was how our lessons progressed now. To keep me occupied I had a book with me, or brought marking in to do, but the high point was when our time was up and Trubshaw left to rejoin his fellow pupils in the hall. I always eagerly reached for his exercise book, and read through the few sentences he had managed to translate in our half hour together. This was teaching at its very best and most relaxing and enjoyable. Yes, the question on the blackboard was still there. Every time I looked at it I could see it applied to me, and to him. 'Who are you?' indeed. An excellent

question. 'I am a teacher dedicated to the well-being of all my pupils,' I could truthfully reply.

Days were going by now without anything of interest happening. Trubshaw's translation of the first chapter of Mark was progressing too. He had got through the events after the baptism by John, which is where our 'pneuma' issue had first raised its head. So he had 'done' the temptation in the wilderness, the start of Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God, the calling of the first disciples from their fishing, and then on to Jesus' preaching on the sabbath day in Capernaum.

And it was here that Trubshaw wanted help. The translation was simple enough: the two words were 'pneuma' (again!) and 'akathartos', for which Liddell and Scott suggest 'unclean'.

"Please, sir, what is an unclean spirit?" brought me back to earth from my peaceful sense of security.

One's training to be a cleric does not prepare one for such things. The thorny bits of scripture can be ignored in one's

sermons, and in ordinary counselling one does not get questions like this.

The easiest answer, which of course I gave, was: "Some sort of evil influence."

"But, sir, Mark says that the unclean spirit was speaking, even recognising Jesus as 'the holy one of God'."

It has always been a problem for me to suppose that there are what appear to be spiritual beings who are active in our physical world. We modern people want to look like scientific students of the world we live in. So real spiritual beings we cannot actually see and (hopefully) control are out of the question. I know I did not sound convincing – I was not even convinced myself – but I had to put on the best sort of reassuring answer I could muster.

"Nowadays there are no such things, dear boy, so we have nothing to worry about. In those days they had no way of understanding things scientifically, as we have today. So stories like this crept in."

"Are you saying this account is not true then, sir?"

"No, of course not." I was a cleric so that

line could not be taken. “But we would simply understand it differently.”

“How exactly?”

“Well, we might consider that the man Jesus cured was mentally ill, in the same way that you will read that Jesus healed people of physical illnesses.”

“Seems a bit odd, sir, that you have to be mentally ill to know who Jesus is.”

I could not say any more, and let this comment pass. His job was to translate, not understand. But I knew I was in the presence of a mind that was prepared to be utterly logical, and who was firmly focused on acquiring knowledge, whatever the implications. Not for the first time I was glad to hear the school clock chiming to tell us our time was up. I could only hope that my answer would not be challenged when we next met.

Wetherill

Every now and then Trubs would come up with a massive victory in our continuous warfare against the masters.

Copper had decided on a mental arithmetic exercise, the sort of thing that keeps us busy and quiet, with no marking penalty for the master.

So the usual pompous announcement to get us started: "Today a mental arithmetic exercise, boys. You are to add up all the numbers from one to one-hundred. You are not allowed to write anything down except the final answer. You must do it all in your head. Any questions?"

The usual silence.

"Very well. Begin."

I had got as far as adding six to fifteen when I saw Trubs write something down in his exercise book.

"Trubshaw!" bellowed Copper, "I said you were only to write down the final answer, and not any intermediate workings."

"Yes, sir, that is what I have done. I have written down the final total."

“Impossible!”

“Well, I did cheat a bit I suppose, sir.”

This was working up into something really interesting, and as you can imagine, we were all paying attention to this confrontation rather than doing sums in our heads.

“Bring your book out here at once.”

Trubshaw walked out to the front with his exercise book and showed it to Copper. We were all expecting that the answer he had written down was wrong, or at least Copper was. When he saw the answer he frowned, so we knew it must be the right answer after all.

“Well, Trubshaw, I can see you have written down the right answer. Please explain to the class your method.”

“Well, I knew you had intended us to add the numbers up in sequence,” Trubs began, “but I decided to do them in a different order, so I suppose it was cheating really. I am very sorry, sir, and I should have not written the answer down so quickly.”

“But what order did you add them up in, boy?”

You could see Copper was really cross now.

“I added one to ninety-nine, which is a hundred. Then two to ninety-eight, which is another hundred, then three to ninety-seven, again another hundred, and so on till I got to forty-nine plus fifty-one. So with the one hundred number I had not yet included I had fifty hundreds to multiply, which is easy and gives five thousand. Then I had to add the single number fifty, which is the middle number not included in all my pairs, and then I wrote down five thousand and fifty as the total. Is that the right answer, sir?”

Trubs knew it was the right answer, and so did we simpletons by now, once the method had been explained to us.

“Yes, Trubshaw, that is the right answer.”

“Am I in trouble for cheating, sir?”

“No, Trubshaw, you are not in trouble. Go and sit down.”

Poor Copper. He looked utterly defeated, at first, and then he smiled briefly. We could all work out why he smiled. He had just learned something from our good

friend Trubs, and we could imagine him presenting this clever method to his top class as his own invention.

I forget what we did for the rest of the lesson, but we abandoned adding up numbers in our heads, which is a frightful pain. Afterwards everyone congratulated Trubs for his victory, and for sparing us a whole lot of mental grief.

Chaplain

The day the blackboard became the focus of my attention was like any other day, and I am not entirely sure for how long the question 'who are you?' had been there unanswered.

As usual Trubshaw had got there before me, but I suppose I should have immediately noticed that he was just sitting there and had not even opened his books. I was about to ask why he had not started his work when I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw that someone had written on the blackboard, underneath our question, a name. It read 'THOMAS'.

"Did you write this?"

"No, sir." He said this calmly, looking me straight in the eyes. Once again I believed him.

"Oh dear," was all I could think to say.

There was a long silence as we both mused on the implications, and Trubshaw broke it with the question that was actually going through my mind.

"Is this a first name or a surname, do you

think, sir?"

"It could be either, I suppose."

"Is there a boy called Thomas in this school, sir?"

"No"

"Or ever has been?"

"I cannot be sure. I have only been a master here for five years."

"How long has this place been a school, sir?"

Once again he was echoing the very questions that were going through my mind.

"I am not sure exactly. I believe the hall was converted into a school by the Headmaster's own father, so it might go back fifty years or more."

"It would be good to find out if there ever was a boy called Thomas here, sir. It might explain a lot."

"Unless there is someone else playing a prank on us. I do wish we could rule that out."

Obviously we could not lock the vestry up as it had no door, only a curtain. What kind of explanation could I give to Arthur if I

asked him to lock the church door? We used the church every day, and there was nothing worth stealing in it. We were so remote that any passing stranger would be instantly noticed. I believe the church was locked continuously during the school holidays, as it was never used then. But if I asked Arthur to lock and unlock it several times a day I would have to give a good reason, and in any case I like the freedom of popping in whenever I wanted some time to myself.

And how could I go to the Headmaster and ask him to look in the school records for a particular name? What explanation could I give? Then a possible explanation dawned on me.

“So you want me to ask the Headmaster if there was ever a boy called Thomas as a pupil here?”

“Yes, sir, I think we ought to find that out.”

So I could truthfully phrase my question as 'a boy has asked me ... etc.' and it might not sound so stupid, or require some explanation that I would rather not give.

“Leave it with me, Trubshaw. Now get on

with your work."

My conversation with the Headmaster proved not to be embarrassing at all. I put my question to him in a very lighthearted way.

"Some boy, without giving me any reason, has asked me to enquire of you whether there has ever been a pupil here named Thomas."

Totally truthful, and totally deceitful.

"I will check. Do you have a forename?"

"No, none was mentioned, and of course there may have been several whose first name was Thomas, Headmaster."

Chaplain

The very next day I was able to give my Greek scholar his answer.

"The Headmaster has checked and no pupil with the surname of Thomas has ever attended this school. There have been a few whose first name was Thomas, but I said that it did not really matter all that much."

"Sir, I think the only way we will find out what our possible ghost wants is if we ask him."

"You mean write another question on our blackboard?"

"Yes, sir. Let us ask him why he wanted help."

"Very well," I said, thinking it could do no harm.

So Trubshaw took a piece of chalk and wrote simply: "WHY HELP?" The other two lines of writing were still there, so our board now read:

WHO ARE YOU

THOMAS

WHY HELP?

This was how we left it, and although my

mind was half way between thinking this was all a silly game and, at the other extreme, that this was a mystery that I must solve.

Wetherill

The main difficulty about being in a boarding school is night-time. Instead of your own quiet bedroom, which has just you in it, you are in a big room with lots of other chaps. It is not that they are nasty to you, which actually sometimes they are, but I am used to that, it is just that they are there. You are never on your own.

And the other thing is that you dare not bring your special 'friends' with you to school, because they would all think you were soppo and girlish and would give you no peace at all. So Teddy has to stay at home. Teddy is very important to me, and I miss him when he is not around. I can tell him all the important things that happen to me and he never says anything silly in return.

The nearest I have got to Teddy is my friend Trubshaw, and he is not like the other chaps. I do not mean because he is so ridiculously clever, but because he listens so well and never passes judgment. He just accepts everything you say to him, as if he

was storing information, and if you want to know what he thinks about it you actually have to ask him. So he is nearly as good as Teddy and I can tell him private things just as I would to Teddy.

You see, I have just had this alarming dream. It was alarming for two reasons: one was what happened, and other was how vivid it was. I have never had a dream like it before. It seemed so real in a way that the dreams I have had so far have failed to.

So I had to tell Trubs about it, just to relive it in my mind, because thinking about it would not go away.

“Trubs, I had the most horrible dream last night,” I said when we were having our usual stroll round the field after lunch.

“Yes,” he replied. See what I mean? He is just going to listen without comment.

“I was about here, not far from the folly. In my dream I mean. I could see the folly, but it was different. There were only four columns standing, one at each corner of the base. Not like now, with all fourteen of them. It was as if they were still building it. And there was a great pile of earth to one

side, with a spade stuck in it. The base was not flat like it is now, either. Two of the flagstone were standing upright, leaving a great hole between them. Then there was a huge man, dressed in a big black overcoat, and wearing a strange big floppy hat. And he was holding on to a young boy, about my age, and it was not me, thank goodness, just a boy I did not know. And he was dragging this boy along towards the folly, and the boy was struggling like mad to get free, but could not. That was what was so frightening about this dream. The horrid man and the poor struggling boy. When they got to the folly he was holding the boy in both hands by his throat, choking him. After a while the boy stopped struggling and the man let him drop, lifeless, to the ground. There ought to a law about not having dreams like this, I reckon, it was so horrible. Next thing he pushed the boy into this hole between the upright flagstones, and started shovelling the earth on top of him, till all the earth in the pile was gone. Then he lowered the two flagstones back flat, covering the top of where he had

pushed the boy and filled up with soil. He spent a lot of time making sure the flagstones were quite flat, and that no soil was left. That was when I woke up.”

“Gosh, what a dream,” said Trubshaw. “It must have been very scary for you.”

“It sure was. So, what does it mean, Trubs?”

“Not sure, Soapy. I suppose sometimes dreams have a meaning and sometimes they are just dreams. I hope you don’t mind if I tell Chappers about your dream, and ask him what he thinks.”

“No, I don’t mind. Having a dream is not something you can be blamed for, is it?”

We strolled over to the folly, though I was still scared by the sight of it, and checked the base carefully. The flagstones were all perfectly flat and even, but we could not help wondering if there really was a murdered boy buried underneath them.

Chaplain

Our next lesson together once again began with Trubshaw attending to the messages on the blackboard. There had been no new addition, but I could see he was urgently in need of discussing the matter.

"You know, sir that we were thinking the writer on the blackboard might have been a school pupil once. "

"Yes, it was the natural thing to presume."

"Well, sir, I think we need to think of a time much longer ago than the present, or the immediate past. I think we need to find out when the folly was built."

"Why do you think that?"

"My friend Wetherill had a very vivid dream, just yesterday, and he told me all about it. In his dream a very strong man murdered a boy by strangling him and buried him under the floor of the folly. But the folly was not yet fully built. Only the corner columns were up. So if we knew when the folly was being built it would give us a date for the murder."

"As it happens I do have a rough idea that the folly was being built at the end of the eighteenth century. I remember the Headmaster giving me a potted history of the hall when I first joined his staff."

"Sir, am I right in thinking that before the hall and the stables were converted into a school this church would have served a farming community?"

"Yes," I said very carefully, with the intonation of a question.

"So the vicar in those days would be taking services for the bigwig who owned the manor, all his family and servants, and all the farm labourers and their families who lived in the cottages. This was quite a decent little village once, was it not?"

I knew where this was going, and could have kicked myself for not thinking along these lines myself.

"So there will be a register of all the church events here, all the baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals?"

"It is in the safe," I said pointing to where a very old metal structure stood in the corner of the vestry. One of the integral

parts of being appointed to the incumbency of this parish church, as it still technically was, was to have been given the key to the safe where the church register was kept. In any normal village church the keys would be held by the churchwardens, but in this church there were no churchwardens. I suppose Arthur could be thought of as such, but he held the keys of all the doors of the hall and the classrooms and everywhere else.

“I keep the key to the safe in my room in the hall, of course, as there are the silver communion chalice and paten in there which are quite valuable.”

I remember seeing the leather bound church register in there too, though I had never had any need to use it. Baptisms obviously are not needed for schoolboys, and we encouraged families to attend communion services in their own local churches during the holidays. With no weddings or funerals either, this record had needed no entries in my time.

Partly because I needed time to think, and partly because I wanted to read the church

register on my own, I decided on no immediate action.

“We will check the register out tomorrow, Trubshaw, when I will bring the key to the safe with me.”

His frustration was barely concealed. He had the natural impatience of his age, and regarded the solving of our mystery as far more important than doing a few more sentences of his Greek translation. But it needed no further words from me for him to get his books open. I simply looked at his books as a silent message.

In actual fact I was as impatient as he, and knew that I would be checking out the register long before the beginning of tomorrow's lesson with Trubshaw.

Chaplain

That evening I read through the old church register from the date of 1750 to 1800. In it I found what, on reflection, I was hoping to find. There had been a baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial during that period of one Josiah Thomas. There had also been a baptism of his son, Jonathan, but no confirmation or burial. No further record of Jonathan Thomas at all.

This gave me a lot to think about. Was it possible that there was no confirmation because the lad never reached the age of twelve or thirteen? Was there no record of his death and burial because he simply disappeared?

I spent some time reading the register through, and saw that for the admittedly very few farming and hall resident families there was often a complete record along the line of what I was looking for. I had found it for Josiah Thomas, and now for most of the other named families that had lived in this parish when it was an ordinary, if very small, farming community.

I knew that this would have the same impact on Trubshaw as it had had on me. I decided I would let him read the register too.

That evening he did no Greek translation, but read through the register for the same dates as me, and a little beyond either way, before and after, too.

I had given him no prompting of my own conclusions, and eventually he gave me his.

“I think Jonathan Thomas was buried in the folly, sir.”

I was reluctant to agree with him, even though I privately did.

“It would explain why he is unhappy and is trying to get someone to help him, sir.”

“How could anyone help him, Trubshaw?”

“Sir, I do not know as much about ghosts as you do, sir, but I suppose they get in touch with us living people only if they are dreadfully unhappy in the spirit world, whatever it is called.”

“Well anyone who was strangled would be pretty unhappy, but we have little evidence that all murdered people become ghosts.”

Trubshaw paused, and thought that over.

“But being murdered is only part of it, sir. He was dumped in a hole in the ground by the man who murdered him, and so never had a proper burial, no good prayers asking God to receive his soul.”

“Yes, that is another aspect, if we are taking Wetherill's dream as a true record of what happened.”

“Can dreams be true, sir? What does the Bible say about dreams?”

As ever, the difficult questions come from this bright boy.

“Well, in the story of the birth of Jesus, Joseph was several times given a message in a dream. The first time telling him that it was all right to marry Mary, and the second time warning him that King Herod was looking to kill the baby Jesus so they needed to escape quickly to Egypt to avoid this danger. Finally he had another dream, after Herod had died, telling him it was safe to return to Nazareth.”

“Were there any other people who had dreams?”

“Yes. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate,

who was deciding what to do with Jesus when the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to him accusing him of all sorts of things, was given a message by his wife. His wife told Pilate to do nothing against Jesus, because she had a terrible dream about him, and thought he was a just man. And there is another possible dream, though it is called a vision in the night, which Paul had. In this dream or vision he saw a man from Macedonia, that's northern Greece, asking him to come over to him."

"So all these dreams were true dreams then."

"Yes, I agree. It is possible for dreams to be true."

His silence at this point was more eloquent than if he had said something.

And there was the school clock chiming away to tell us our time was up. We left the room with the message on the board asking WHY HELP still unanswered, but our own thoughts, mine certainly, wondering if we already knew the answer.

Chaplain

After a few days of having the thoughts about the mysterious Jonathan Thomas stewing in my mind, and wondering how much the dream about the details of his murder and interment under the base of the folly, the whole matter reached a different level when, coming to the vestry for the usual evening Greek session with Trubshaw, and ahead of Trubshaw this time, I saw that our question had been answered. Under the question WHY HELP was written a single word: FOLLY.

While I was still reacting in my mind to this, in came Trubshaw. He too saw the new word straight away.

Our eyes met. For a while we both said nothing. Then he put into words what was in my mind too.

"Perhaps Wetherill had a true dream about what happened at the folly a long time ago."

"It is beginning to look as though that might be possible."

Again a silence, while we both digested

the implications.

“Sir, I think I know what Jonathan wants us to do.”

“Do you?”

“Or rather what he wants you to do.”

“Me?”

“Yes, sir, you. You are a clergyman. The words have all been written in your church. They are directed to you.”

“But . . . ?”

“He is unhappy because he was never buried properly. Just dumped in a hole. Not in a proper cemetery, with proper prayers, and all that.”

Another pause while I digested this.

“He knows he cannot be un-murdered, but if you said all the right prayers where his actual tomb now is, at least he would have a proper burial.”

Here was an eleven year old defining my spiritual duties as a clergyman. It was rather disturbing to find it happening, as if this boy was my audible conscience.

“I will give the matter some thought.”

I had to say something, and this was the best I could manage.

“Now get on with your Greek.”

It was obvious that Trubshaw recognised that his powers of persuasion were best left now with no further words spoken, and he worked on solidly till our time was up. Meanwhile, as you can imagine, my mind was working overtime.

I felt the pressure of responding to the image this young mind had of what my duty was as a clergyman. It was still absolute supposition that the boy Jonathan was ever actually murdered. That he existed was in the church register. The gaps of the record could be explained by other eventualities. The writing on the blackboard could still be something done in a perfectly explainable way, even if the explanation was getting more and more remote. But what would Trubshaw think of me if I did nothing? How odd that I was beginning to care so much about what an eleven-year-old was thinking about my character. But I could not get away from it. I actually cared what Trubshaw thought about me. The superior being, the godlike director of young minds, caring so much

about what a young mind thought of him.
The ultimate overturning of values. The
penalty of being a schoolmaster.

Chaplain

By the time of our next Greek lesson I had made my mind up. It could do no harm, I decided. But it would need to be done discreetly with just one witness. My collaborator would be my acolyte. And we might as well do it in full ceremonial. We would go to the folly, and say prayers to consecrate it as holy ground, now that it had become a tomb, and I would say the prayers for the soul of Jonathan Thomas as if I was conducting the burial of any other person quite normally.

“Trubshaw, I have decided to do as you have suggested. We will try to bring peace to a troubled soul. I will give Jonathan a full formal funeral, and you may join me as my assistant.”

“I think that is right thing to do, sir.”

“Once again you will tell no one. Only you and I will know about it. Especially not Wetherill.”

“Yes, sir, I understand.”

“I will not wear any robes, of course. My clerical collar is always what I wear

anyway, and that will suffice.”

“When will we do this?”

“It will be Sunday, of course, when the two of us taking an apparent stroll round the field where the folly is will not seem unusual.”

“Wetherill will notice, sir, because this is what I often do with him on a Sunday afternoon.”

“Then you will have to find a way to make sure he is not aware of our full intentions.”

“That will be easy enough, sir. I will tell him we need to spend some time together on theological matters, and strolling round the field will be better than me shut away with you in the vestry at a time when I am not having a Greek lesson.”

“Good. I agree that should satisfy him, and is not actually untruthful too.”

Chaplain

Sunday came, and by good fortune the weather was kind and so we could avoid doing something that would look very strange in the rain.

After lunch Trubshaw came over to the church porch and waited for me as I had told him to. I had my small Bible in one pocket, and my Prayer Book in another, and we strolled off together as if having no special purpose other than chatting together theologically, as Trubshaw had put it.

When we came to the folly I began by saying some prayers that I had devised myself. I could not find in my regular Prayer Book any special formalities to make a place consecrated. I expect my bishop was the only genuinely authorised person for doing this, but I had ruled out any discussion with such a remote and lofty official. I could hardly begin to find a way to explain my actions to a bishop, could I?

That done, and I felt rather proud of the

ceremony I had invented, I read through all the formal prayers of a regular burial and committal, using the name Jonathan to make it totally personal to him.

Trubshaw said 'Amen' to my prayers when appropriate, and to anyone watching from a distance it would have looked exactly as Trubshaw had described it to his friend: he and I having a theological discussion. Even my obvious reading from the Bible or the Prayer Book would have fitted that explanation readily enough.

As soon as the formalities were over we returned, still strolling casually of course, until we got back to the church. Then Trubshaw made a suggestion. With his usual insight he supplied what I might well have omitted.

"May I write another question on the board, please, sir."

"What question?"

"The obvious one, sir. We need to close this matter properly. We need to ask if Jonathan is happy now."

Again the thought came that it could do no harm, so in we went and Trubshaw

wrote:

ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?

under all the other messages.

Chaplain

On Monday the last question still had no answer, but we were not expecting an immediate answer, I suppose.

Trubshaw carried on with his work translating the Greek of Mark's gospel, and since he was apparently not minded to discuss the matter any more, we both carried on as though no further discussion was needed.

Tuesday evening was much the same, although the board with its messages still loomed over us, a perpetual reminder of recent events.

But Wednesday evening we arrived to find

YES THANK YOU

written on the board.

I was expecting Trubshaw to be exultant that the outcome he had hoped for was apparently achieved.

Instead he said nothing, so I made the first comment: "It looks as though you were right, Trubshaw."

He only nodded, thoughtfully. I was rather

surprised at this, because I was expecting him to be rejoicing that his suggestion that we conduct a formal burial service at the folly to set the soul of Jonathan Thomas at peace had had such good outcome.

“Please, sir, I have been wondering. Would our Jonathan Thomas be able to read and write?”

“Good question. I have thought about this too. The parson in any small community, like this village would have been a hundred and fifty years ago, would have also taught the youngsters basic reading and writing. He would have plenty of time for this, with only thirty or so souls to care for. And it would have been a useful, though small, addition to his income. The children of a farm worker's family would be put to work in the fields as soon as they could do anything useful. But they could be taught to read and write when they were young. In fact their writing would always have been with chalk on a slate.”

After a while of thoughtful silence he then asked a not very obvious question: “Is the church ever cleaned, sir?”

“Yes, I think Arthur's son Bill does it once a week.”

“Do you know which day, sir?”

“No idea.”

I could not understand why he wanted to know, other than possibly to find out if anyone else might have seen our blackboard with all its messages. But the messages were innocent enough, and no one who did not know the context of the messages would think them very strange. They might well have seemed to have been part of my teaching process to any casual visitor, perhaps some translations of difficult sentences, or whatever.

So our Wednesday lesson continued as usual, and by now my mind had presumed that the Jonathan Thomas matter was actually closed at last.

Bill

My father, who everyone calls Arthur, even though they must know his surname is Thomas, has told me that I must not talk to any of the boys. So it gave me a bit a problem when one of the boys found me doing one of my jobs and insisted on talking to me. I try to keep clear of all these snooty boys, who think I am inferior to them. I am much better educated than they imagine. I can get books from the school library, and I bet I read more than they do.

My father uses me for all the jobs he does not want to do. Cleaning the Headmaster's car is one of these jobs, and that is what I was doing on Sunday. The boys are pretty free, apart from meals and church, to do what they like on a Sunday. So that was why he could seek me out and force his conversation upon me.

I do not not know his name, but I do know he is the only new boy this term who is not in the eight-year-olds' form. He started polite enough: "Do you mind if I talk to

you?”

“I am not supposed to talk to the school pupils, you know.”

“Well this is very important, so will you please make an exception?”

“All right.”

“Some while ago was it you who took the big ladder into the church after the Chaplain asked your father for it?”

“Yes, Dad asked me to. He does not like going into the church, for some reason. Says it gives him the creeps, that place.”

“And did you see some writing on the wall?”

“Yes. I could not help wondering what a ladder was needed for, so started looking upward for anything you might need a ladder to get to. And I saw some letters in chalk a long way above the pulpit. They were HEL.”

“And did you ...?”

“Yes, I thought it would be rather fun to write another letter and so make a proper word. I know the parson keeps some chalk in his room in the church, so I got a stick of it, put up the ladder, and added the letter P

to make a proper word. I could have made a proper word with the letter L, but, though I was tempted, I decided not to.”

“So you did it just for a joke?”

“Yes, no harm done. But you won’t tell my father will you. He would go mad if he knew.”

“You are all right. I will not not tell anyone.”

“And the writing on the blackboard in the parson’s room?”

“Well my job is to clean the church. It gets very dusty you know. My father, well I told you he does not like the place. So once a week, during lessons, it is my job to clean the place.”

“And you saw the question WHO ARE YOU written on the parson’s blackboard?”

“Yes, I have to clean that room too.”

“And . . . ?”

“Yes, after it had been there for a week or two I thought maybe the parson wanted to know who was cleaning his room, so I wrote my name THOMAS on the board by way of an answer.”

“And the next time you cleaned the room

you saw the next question WHY HELP?"

"Yes, I did. I supposed he wanted to know why I had written the extra letter to make the word HELP, and I wanted just to explain it was foolish for me to have done so, so I wrote FOLLY as my answer."

"I see. So when you saw the next question ARE YOU HAPPY you just wrote your answer YES THANK YOU?"

"Well I have been brought up to be polite."

"Bill, may I call you Bill?"

"Sure."

"Thank you for your honesty."

"Am I in trouble for this? I have told you because you seem a nice enough kid, but I really would like your word that you will not tell anyone else."

"Certainly, you have my word."

"Will the parson write any more questions for me to answer?"

"No. I think we can be pretty sure there will be no more questions."

"Right, now let me finish my work cleaning this lovely car. I wish my Dad could afford a car like this. Cheerio."

And off the boy went. He seemed rather

pleased, and I never did get to ask him his name. Better that way, since I am not supposed to talk with the school kids.

Chaplain

The next session with Trubshaw began, as many recent ones had, with the blackboard. He started by saying: "I think we can clean the blackboard now, sir."

"Yes, the matter seems settled, even though we still don't know for sure who our Thomas is, and whether he wants to write any more messages."

"Actually, sir, I know."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it a boy in this school?"

"No, sir, definitely not a pupil here."

"How do you know for sure?"

"I am afraid I have given my word not to tell."

What does this mean, I asked myself. Has he spoken to the culprit? How does he know for sure? Was the writer even human? Was the spirit of some murdered boy so comforted by what I had done that he had somehow communicated this to Trubshaw?

I knew it would be wrong to press

Trubshaw if he had already given his word.
I will just have to settle for not knowing.
That is the trouble with ghosts, you never
know anything for absolutely certain.