

(continued from previous page)

No Admittance. By order. It said, in crooked capitals:

KEEP OUT OF BOUNDS.

Someone had obviously been reading the military notices.

"How long has he been here? How old is he?" I asked.

"He's 14. Been here five years," Mr. Knight said. I felt somewhat breathless at the idea of a "flaming obstructionist" of nine years. When I regained my breath I said so.

"Oh, but he was. The day he came here he rushed straight for a wall and wrote an obscene expression all over it. Then he started in on a tour of the hostel saying the same word to everyone he met. For four solid hours he made no other remark, but he made that one every two seconds or so. None of us made any remark in reply."

"And the result?"

"No particular result at once. He got tired of saying the word, but he still refused to eat, refused to sit down, refused to stand up, refused to go to bed, refused to go outside, refused to go inside—just refused on principle. That's a common trouble. His language varied—but it was full of colour. Come and see him now."

We went round the corner of the hostel and came upon a group of children with three teachers. It seemed to be storytime in the sun. A beautiful face, one of the most beautiful faces I have ever seen, was lifted from a book, was turned round so that the eyes and the mouth could join in the smile with which I, as a visitor, and especially Mr. Knight, who had been away at least an hour and a-half, should be greeted.

"This is Terry," Mr. Knight said. We had a conversation about his hut. He listed his gang, pointed each member out, told me the different things still to be done. His voice and his way of talking were as charming as his face. A flaming obstructionist!

Later I asked Mr. Knight if Terry was Irish; I had seen a boy as beautiful once and he was Irish.

"No. He's French. At the end of the year he'll be going to join his father on the farm."

"Is that all right? Is that what he wants to do?"

"That's all right. That's what he wants. He's no obstructionist any more. He's got initiative and he's handy. He'll be right on the farm."

* * *

SOUNDS of wailing came from a big box.

"That's Peter. He's our grouser. We always have a grouser and Peter's our current one. He probably wants Johnny's bit of coke. They play in the coke bin for pleasure I imagine. Johnny's the

youngest here, he's the one with the white hair."

We bent over the coke bin. Neither had white hair. But it was true that Peter wanted Johnny's bit of coke. Mr. Knight set him to work to find another piece like it.

We went inside, watching out of a window as the house-mother, Mrs. Morrison, organising a firewood drive, put a bundle of sticks into a small boy's arms. "Take them inside, Tim, take them inside," she said, thrusting him gently a few steps on his path. He stood still for a while and then wandered off the track, gazed at the sky, dropped all the sticks, stood staring apparently at nothing. His particular trouble was that he was, but not in the manner of Macbeth, infirm of purpose; forgot what he was doing, almost as he began doing it. He was eight years old, he hadn't been there long, and yes, probably he would be all right soon. It mostly depended on why he was like that. You find out why and then you can begin to put the thing right. Mr. Knight told me this, as well as pretty well every-

thing else he told me about his work, in the most matter-of-fact way. In all my conversations with him I heard him use only two words of what I shun as "the jargon of psychology." And try as I can I just can't think of what circumlocution he could have used in place of those two technical terms. I mentioned this to him and he brushed it off: there's no need to use the jargon, that was just a silly fashion, he said in effect.

Johnny arrived at the door, screeching like a rusty nail on a tin.

"Mitter Knight, Mitter Knight, Peter wantochopmyhead!"

"What's that?"

"Peter says put my head on the block and chop it all up!"

"Well, you tell Peter to put his own head on the block and chop it up first."

A terrific whirl of legs, staccato of voices; the huge joke was told, repeated, giggled over, told again, repeated round and round the chopping block.

* * *

SOON Peter would find something else to grouse over: in the meantime the wood-gathering received a rush of energy, hands scraped up and grabbed up the sticks, there began a wobbly trail to the house—Peter, Johnny, Myrtle, Michael, stumbling over their own feet, giggling, complaining, boasting, dropping half their untidy armloads of sticks and leaves and brush. Behind came the house-mother, bending to scoop up the gleanings, urging her mule-train on till at last everyone reached the school-room, the strewn firewood and the big fireplace ready for the fire. Someone had to move his house-building operations, someone had to budge with her paper and her chalks—but there was plenty of space in this big school-room with

the desks and tables all back against the walls for the evening's occupations.

"It's the biggest and brightest and best room in the hostel," Mr. Knight said. "It needs to be. Imagine the fun, keeping 20 creatures at different stages in order. No question of class teaching here—it's individual work the whole time."

—J.

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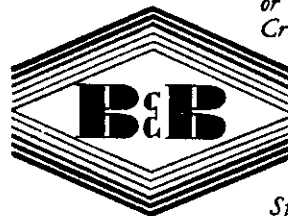


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