

"Tom Brown's School Days"

"Tom Brown's School Days," the finest and most famous example of stories, depicting English public school life, was written by Thomas Hughes and published in 1857, when the author was a young barrister of thirty-three. It leaped at once into a deserved popularity it has never lost. Tom is a typical middle class lad with the distinctive British virtues of pluck, honesty and the love of fair play. The story portrays his life from the moment he enters the lowest form of the great school, a homesick timid lad, who has to fag for the older boys, and has his full share of the rough treatment which obtained in the Rugby of his day, to the time when he has developed into a big brawny fellow, the head of the school, a football hero, and ready to pass to Oxford—another story, a failure, being devoted to his experiences there.

A faithful, life-like, and most entertaining picture of the Rugby of Dr. Arnold is given; its social habits, methods of teaching, its sports, beliefs, and ideals. The wide influence of that great man is sketched with hearty appreciation and in another figure—that of the gentle, high charactered lad Arthur—one may recognise Dean Stanley in his student days.

Individual scenes, like the bullying of Tom when he is "green" in the school, the football match, and the boat race, will always cling in memory for their graphic lines and fullness of life.

To read "Tom Brown" is to have an exhilarating sense of the vigorous young manhood of that nation, its joy in fruitful activity.

TOM was the eldest of the children of Squire Brown, J.P. for the County of Berks. He was a Tory, but nevertheless held divers social principles, the foremost of which was the belief that a man is valued for what he is, apart from all externals. Therefore, it did not matter a straw whether Tom associated himself with the sons of lords or ploughmen. It is not to be wondered at that, when the time came for Tom to go to Rugby, there was great grief among all the village boys.

It was long before the time of motors, and trains were few, so in the cold grey hours of the morning Tom crept up beside the driver of the stage coach that would pass through Rugby.

"And now, Tom, my boy," said the squire, "remember you are going to be chucked into this great school, like a young bear, with all your troubles before you—earlier than we should have sent you perhaps. You'll see a great many cruel blackguard things done and hear a deal of foul, bad talk. But never fear. You tell the truth and keep a brave heart, and never listen to or say anything that you wouldn't like your mother or sisters to hear, and you'll never feel ashamed to come home, or we to see you."

Something choking welled up inside Tom at the mention of his mother, and he would have liked to have hugged his father. But he couldn't do that now, so he only squeezed his father's hand and said bravely, "I'll try, father."

The coach rumbled into Rugby just in time for dinner, and as Tom passed the school gates and saw the boys standing there as if the town belonged to them, his heart beat quickly and he felt proud. One of the younger boys ran out and greeted him by name. Tom was terribly astonished, but the boy explained that his aunt lived somewhere near his home and knew his father.

"She asked me to give you a lift," he went on, "and I want to please the old lady, for she gave me a half-sov. this half, and perhaps she'll double it next, if I keep in her good books."

Tom rather resented the patronising air, for this boy, East, was scarcely older than himself, and, as it transpired, in the lower fourth while Tom was joining the third. In this form, Tom made great progress and earned a good reputation. As a new boy, he was excused from fagging, though, in his enthusiasm, took turn about with East and the others of the fourth. So he soon gained the character of a good-natured, willing fellow, ready to do a turn for anyone. Tom came up into the lower fourth as one of the "good boys" of the third, but he rapidly fell away, and at the end of two months, his character for steadfastness was gone. For years after, he went up to the school without it and regarded the masters as a matter of course and as his natural enemies.

FAGGING was on the increase, but it would not have mattered so much if the fifth hadn't started it. It was all right for the sixth, they were privileged, but apart from them—well, it shouldn't be.

Tom, who shared a study with East, was one night brooding over the wrongs of the school, and the abuse of the fagging system, in particular.

"Do you know, old fellow, I won't fag except for the sixth."

"Quite right, too, my boy. I'm with you and all for a strike myself. It's getting too bad," cried East.

At that particular moment there sounded from down the corridor the well-known voice of "that blackguard Flashman."

"Fa-a-a-g," but the call was not answered. It came again and again, but each time the voice died away without any reply. The colours of the revolt had been hoisted. Tom bolted the door and East put out the candle.

"Now, Tom, no surrender."

The assault was a rough one, and one (Continued on page 31.)



Scenes from this great School Story from 4YA, Friday