

DO YOU REMEMBER your first day at a new school? In this memoir Charles Kohler tells of his trials and joys at a quaker co-educational boarding school in the nineteen-twenties.

He recalls the agonising shyness in speaking to a girl: football matches in which boys and masters played together, and bike rides to Cambridge for a shilling cream tea. The lively narrative re-creates his boyhood within "a community of friends."

John Reader, late headmaster of Friends School, Great Ayton, contributes the perceptive Introduction.

CHARLES KOHLER has spent most of his long life in Dorking. His publications include *Grandpa Tell Us a Story*, a biography *A Quartet of Quakers*, and poetry *Still Centre*.



Kohler & Coombes

£1.50

# Charles Kohler



## UNWILLINGLY TO SCHOOL

Charles Kohler  
**UNWILLINGLY  
TO SCHOOL**

MEMOIRS OF THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL  
SAFFRON WALDEN 1924-1928



Dorking  
KOHLER & COOMBES  
1985

## INTRODUCTION

I have found great pleasure in reading Charles Kohler's recollections of his schooldays at Friends School Saffron Walden: they capture with a rare perception the atmosphere and quality of life of a Quaker boarding school at the time he attended it. Too often reminiscences of former pupils about their schools are swamped with nostalgia or soured by resentment, depending on the experience of the writer. Charles is appreciative, sympathetic but also shrewd in the way he describes his life at Walden; he is not uncritical but he is never unkind. But that is his character in all things.

I remember him at school as someone who was sufficiently older than me to appear almost adult in my eyes, which is the view, when seen from below, of those at the top of the school. Though I never aspired to claim friendship with him I was always aware of his presence. He was known to us younger boys for his exuberance, for his wit and for being something of a character. It was only later that I discovered the depth of his thought, his essential kindliness and his whimsical humour. These qualities permeate his writings and I always find pleasure and inspiration in them.

I am particularly pleased that he has undertaken to describe the school we both attended in the inter-war period. And I am glad to be given an opportunity to commend the script to others far beyond the range of Quakers or old scholars of that school.

It is a delightful account of an era in education which has now passed into history but has been splendidly re-captured by Charles.

JOHN READER

Late Headmaster of  
Friends School, Great Ayton

## **"UNWILLINGLY TO SCHOOL"**

[I]

In the summer of 1924 I was thirteen years old. My parents' marriage had collapsed so I felt uprooted and unsettled. After the break-up my English mother brought me with her to England but my German father and my two brothers remained in Germany.

While she was trying to get a job in this country I was shuffled about and ended up as a foster child with a family in Hove. They were kind and tried to do their best for me, and put me to the local school with their own sons. Hove High School, that was the name of the school. It provided only a limited education and boys left at the age of fourteen or fifteen.

One day, while on holiday with my mother, came a surprise.

"You're going to a Quaker School, dear," she announced. "It's called the Friends' School, Saffron Walden." She paused, wondering what more to say.

"The Gillettes are going to pay all of the fees. You remember them, don't you? Jenepher and Agnes and that nice Quaker family in Oxford. They helped us during the war. Remember?"

So a choice had been made that would affect the rest of my years, though I had no say in the decision.

I wasn't looking forward to life in a boarding school as I had disturbing recollections of the Reform Schule in Germany, with its cruel canings and harsh military discipline.

Uncertainties make for anxieties. I knew nothing about Walden, nor did my mother. Neither of us had visited the school or spoken to a boy or teacher at the school. I had glanced at the prospectus which did not make enticing reading. It displayed a photo of boys standing like dummies by the side of a swimming bath or posed statue-like in a gym. And there was a picture of girls, drably dressed, moving in pairs along an avenue of trees. I had never mixed with girls and the prospect alarmed me. I would much have preferred to continue the easy-going life with the foster-parents in Hove. I was accepted there and had a boy of my own age as a

close friend.

It's understandable that I felt troubled and miserable when the day came to say good-bye. It was on a Thursday in April of 1924 that I was taken by my mother to Liverpool Street railway station. I remember standing there, under the cathedral-like arches, dulled by the clang of shunting wagons, the hiss of steam and snort of engines. I felt bewildered and crept apart to hide behind one of the giant pillars, where I could weep unseen.

But I knew there was no going back and part of me was stirred by curiosity so I soon emerged and looked around. Already there were clusters of children and parents waiting for the train. Boys were mostly dressed in grey suits, some in brown, a few wore short trousers and pullovers. The girls looked unattractive in their dark gym dresses, black stockings and navy blue felt hats. I could spot new boys and girls by their clean, tidy clothes and the way they stood close to parents. Old-timers huddled in groups and chatted with animation.

At last the long train (known as the *London Squash*) chugged into the platform. Several carriages were reserved for the school—some for boys, others for girls. I remember getting into a compartment already occupied by boys, including a sandy-haired, lanky youth.

"You look a responsible kind of lad," said my mother. "I'm sure you'll look after my boy." "Lanky" responded with a fatuous grin, while I wished my mother had kept quiet. Once under way this youth took a grubby paper bag from his pocket and offered us sweets. Old-timers shook their heads but new boys timidly accepted his offerings.

The lanky youth was a touch simple. There were always two or three similar lads in the school—usually non-Quakers. Their parents hoped a Quaker school would be more understanding—less harsh—than a traditional boarding school. This expectation was unfounded. Boys in groups, whatever their religious background, are not oversensitive to odds and ends. Individually we were kind, but less so in a crowd.

I sat back, sucking the sweet, alert to what I could hear and see. Smoke from the engine was no longer clouding the window. The country looked undulating; mostly ploughed

fields, small copses and streams. Corn country rather than dairy land. We stopped at Harlow and again at Bishops Stortford. I remember a boy pointing to a block of school buildings adjacent to a field and pavilion.

"Newport Grammar School," he said. "We play them at cricket and football. A lousy lot. We'll soon be there, now."

He was right. The train slowed down and stopped at a long, empty platform. No town, not even a village; only a few farm buildings.

"Audley End, Audley End! Change here for Saffron Walden."

Doors opened, boys jumped down. I grabbed my attaché case and followed the crocodile of children crossing a bridge towards a train waiting on a single track: a perspiring old engine hitched to three shabby carriages.

There wasn't a long wait. Soon the engine chugged through a chalk cutting, nosed into a tunnel and emerged, panting, at Saffron Walden station. No need to ask the way. I just followed the crowd up the hill.

I remember the lofty school wall at the top of the rise. I believe there was a board on that wall with the lettering FRIENDS SCHOOL—FOUNDED 1702. But what impressed me more was the red brick water-tower. Like other new boys I thought this rather ornate structure was part of the school complex.

Girls and boys in front of me turned the corner and hastened through open gates, up a gravel drive, towards the school porch. Here a man was standing, welcoming each child. It was Mr Rowntree, the headmaster, known to us as Chas. A short, erect man, he looked at you through pince-nez glasses that magnified his blue, blinking eyes. He always wore a black jacket, high stiff collar and striped trousers. In those days this was a kind of uniform for bank managers and solicitors. I don't know why he dressed with such formality.

"Your name?" he asked me.

"Kohler, sir."

"Ah yes, Charles Kohler. The boy from Germany." He shook me by the hand.

"I hope you will be happy with us, Charles. Pass along, to the left, please." He pointed, somewhat short-sightedly,

towards a passageway. I followed his directions and soon came to a long stone corridor, paint flaking from the walls. This was the dividing point between the boys' side and the girls' side. Boys to the left: girls to the right. I picked up my attaché case and walked along the corridor towards the din coming from a shed-like room with open doors.

No furniture, a stone floor, and all windows screened with wire mesh. Trunks rested on shelves around the grimy walls. We kept our jars of jam and tuck in those trunks. Some boys were barging about, kicking a tennis ball, others rattling past on roller skates. A few stood by a notice board and I joined them.

They were reading a printed list showing the names of all the boys in the school. I think there were about one hundred at that time. I quickly spotted my name and the number of my dormitory and my school number—thirteen. Another boy, with dark hair and brown eyes, stood by my side.

"I'm a new boy," he said. "My name's Woodhead."

"I'm new, too. Kohler's my name."

We discovered that we were in the same dormitory so that made a bond and gave us courage. We decided to explore the premises.

We mounted the worn stone stairs to the first landing and there found the wash room. The place smelt of carbolic soap. All boys had to sluice themselves mornings and evenings by stripping to the waist and pressing the stuttering taps and then waiting for the stream of cold water. At the side of the room were rows of small pigeon-holes, each one numbered. Here a boy kept his hair brush, comb, toothpaste etc. A few dandies treasured a jar of brilliantine to keep their hair tidy and older boys were proud of their safety razors. Numbered pegs, carrying white cotton towels, were fixed along other walls.

My dormitory was nearby. A cold room with ten iron bedsteads covered by white spreads. There was no heating, no chairs, no curtains, but each bed concealed its chamber or "potty". We didn't linger in that bare room as the sun was shining and inviting us to go outside.

We strolled on to the gravelled playground where boys of all ages were playing a game of cricket. The batsman stood

close to a moveable iron wicket while the rest took it in turns to bowl with cork-composite balls. Nearby stretched the hill-top playing field. It was much larger, much greener than any field I had ever seen. In the winter it could easily accommodate four football pitches and two hockey pitches. On one side the field was shielded by a wooden fence and long wooden benches: trees and hedges marked the other boundaries and, far away, we could see a line of low hills.

But what interested us was the red-brick swimming bath with its glazed roof. The door was unlocked so we crept inside. It was quiet as a church, the bluish-green water placid, the air steamy. We knelt down, dangling our fingers in the lukewarm water, gazing at the waving, distorted patterns in the depths. It seemed almost a sacrilege to talk so we tip-toed outside into the bright light.

We could see boys running across the field summoned by the clanging of a bell. A tall boy, looking officious, was shaking the hand bell and called to us:

"Hurry up, it's tea-time. Line up with the others in the playroom."

Quite a crowd had already gathered, big lads standing at the back, shorter boys in front. I jostled my way into the middle ranks and stood by a boy who looked about my height. He was clasping a jar of jam and grinned at me. Later I found out that his name was Dunstan.

Mr Whitlow, a middle-aged master, was on duty. He was thin-haired, fleshy-faced with cod-like eyes. Boys called him Fishy. He waited for quiet then raised a clipboard and called out names.

"Aplin, Armstrong, Barrett, Burtt, Cousins I, II, III ...." The names were called out monotonously, followed by barks of "Yessir" or "Here sir".

A gong boomed far down the passage and we moved off, along the corridor towards the dining hall. Girls were hurrying from the other side of the building, their stream entering the room by another door. They had exchanged gym slips for print dresses. Small girls skipped along at the front, plaits dangling down their shoulders. Taller girls followed, mostly with bobbed hair, some with fringes. Many tried to soften strict uniformity by touches of individuality: a stray curl, a

coloured hair slide, or shiny belt. Last of all came the composed prefects.

At breakfast and midday the children mixed up, a boy sitting next to a girl, but at tea time the boys sat together at long tables on one side of the room, the girls on the other side. Top Table stood on a raised platform. Masters and mistresses were already there, each standing behind his or her chair. At the centre of Top Table stood Mr Rowntree, rocking nervously on his toes. When all the children were assembled he sat down. A grating, scraping and coughing as teachers and children pulled out their chairs and followed his lead. Two hundred heads were lowered, a moment of silence and then a tumult of talk, laughter and clatter of crockery.

In front of each child lay a bowl, a plate, a spoon and a knife. The meal was the same as breakfast: baskets with chunks of bread—"bricks"—huge jugs of cold milk, slabs of margarine. It was the last meal of the day and we made the most of it. As it was the beginning of term, nearly everyone had brought in "extras" such as a pot of jam, marmite or fish paste. A few boys were flavouring their milk with Camp Coffee essence. Most children brought with them a story book. We were encouraged at breakfast and tea—but not at midday dinner—to read after finishing our meal.

After tea we normally did our homework but on this, the first day of term, we were free to play. Most of us went to our form room and sat at our desks or along the hot water pipes. Some looked at stamp albums, others played draughts, read books or talked about the holidays. More active boys kicked balls about in the playroom or roller-skated along the stone passages into the lavatories or bogs. There were no common rooms, studies, hobby rooms, curtains or comfortable chairs. It wasn't possible to be alone. I wasn't sorry to hear the clanging of the bed-time bell. I was tired and sleep would bring release.

*First term at boarding school: dim dormitory at night,  
a gas jet moaning, plumed in halo'd light:  
shadows fluttering up the walls. The live  
flame trembling, stretching up ... to droop, to die.*

*Ten beds, each draped in starch cold white,  
ten shrouded humps, dark heads tucked out of sight;  
ten boys secreted in their blanket hides.*

*Come sleep, deep sleep, anaesthetize the loneliness,  
the lovelessness within each solitary cell.  
Come Child of healing dreams,  
erase the hurts sustained. Console.*

*Walls whiten.  
Uneasily I stir in twilight sleep  
tensed for the clanging of the bell.*

## [II]

I woke early. It was quiet, all the boys still sleeping. Then came the clanging of the bell and a voice bawling "Lower school up! Lower school up!"

Boys turned, stretched and yawned and then the younger ones stepped from their beds, thrust on trousers and jackets and hastened to the washroom. We carried our shirts in our hands, as we had to sluice ourselves in cold water, stripped to the waist.

David Pearson (D.P.) was the master on duty. About fifty years old, a bachelor and a fanatic for self-discipline. I think he rather enjoyed slapping the bare bottoms of naughty boys. "Always take the *harder path*" was one of his admonitions. He now stood by the door, supervising us at our ablutions. When finished each of us reported to him, "Washed and cleaned my teeth, sir."

It was 6.45 and still chilly. I had dressed and was following the boys leaping down the stone stairs to the playroom. I could hear Mr Pearson again ringing the bell, this time shouting "Upper school up! Upper school up! I stood alone, wondering what would happen next.

A friendly boy told me. "Bible reading. In the Lecture room, when the bell goes. Got a bible?"

I remembered that my mother had packed a bible in my trunk, as it was on the school's list of *Requirements*.

Mrs Gillett had given it to me and I've still got it. Inside the cover she wrote:

Charles Köhler. March 1924.

This was the last time anyone wrote my surname in its original German fashion.

The now familiar bell was ringing again: we lined up and then trooped into the Lecture room. This room looked out on an avenue of lime trees, their trunks shining in the morning light. The seats rose in tiers and from the top pews we gazed down on a long table, backed by shelves of books. Mr Whitlow sat by the table, legs crossed, broody in thought.

It was a quarter past seven so we were quiet, many of us still sleepy-eyed. A few boys flicked the pages of their bibles but most sat day-dreaming or smoothing squares of silver foil with their finger nails. (I was looking through this bible the other day and found a piece of smoothed silver paper.) There were always one or two boys—greatly daring—who concealed story books within their bibles. Fifteen minutes later Mr Whitlow stood up and we all followed him into the playroom. But not for long. Again the clang of a bell, the standing in rows, the answering to our names. Then a gong boomed from the corridors and we filed into the dining room.

This time each of us had a table and a place allotted to him. When I sat down there was a girl to my left and another to my right. As I was a vegetarian the age-range at the single vegetarian table was wide. I remember, vividly, the acute shyness at sitting between two girls, who were strangers to me. I had never been so close to the female sex and felt tongue-tied and did not know where to look or how to behave.

The food was much the same as at the evening meal. Baskets of bread, jugs of milk, slabs of marge and, in addition, bowls of treacle. One or two children enjoyed a boiled egg: this was, I assumed, an “extra” charged on their termly bills. No one was allowed to bring jam or marmalade into breakfast. What happened next can best be conveyed by dialogue.

The girl to my right had bobbed hair and brown eyes. She was older than I, perhaps fourteen or fifteen. She was a farmer's daughter and came from a nearby farm in Essex. Good at games and rather pretty she was popular with girls and boys. She pushed the basket my way, saying

“Have some bread.”

“Thanks.” I took a hunk and put it on my plate. She smiled in a friendly way and waited for some response, while I gazed at my plate.

“Are you going to offer *me* some?” she asked.

“Oh yes, of course, sorry.”

“Now pass the basket to Isabel Evans, the girl to your left.”

I followed instructions, taking the opportunity to glance at this Isabel. She had a snub nose, long fair plaits and—as I was to find out later—a sharp wit. I knew, instinctively, that my right-hand neighbour was the kinder of the two.

She told me her name and asked me where I came from. Then she offered me the margarine and the treacle.

“You're supposed to pass things to your neighbour; *never* grab any food for yourself—see?”

I nodded, not knowing how to continue the conversation. I felt like a castaway marooned on an island of strange creatures. But I had learned the survival rules. I munched my bread, sipped milk from my bowl and watched both of my neighbours' plates and offered them food when needed. But I didn't feel hungry and waited in agony for breakfast to end.

My friendly mentor tried to make me feel at home by taking some snapshots from her pocket and showing them to me. They were pictures of her home and of her parents, her sister, and animals on the farm such as pigs and chickens. I think the girl's name was Freda Empson. I don't know what happened to her in later life but I shall never forget her kindness to me, a lonely and unhappy boy.

At last there was a ping on the handbell. Mr Rowntree got up from his seat at Top Table and moved towards a rostrum and opened a thick bible. He blinked, rocked on his toes, then read a few verses. After that he made some announcements and breakfast was over. Throughout my four and a half years at Walden I sat thought the bible sessions before and after breakfast. But I don't recall reading the bible or listening to Mr Rowntree's words: the great book seemed to me boring and irrelevant.

It was now eight o'clock and the sun shining so I went out on to the playing field and stood watching boys of my age enjoying an impromptu game of cricket. It came as a relief

when they invited me to join them. I had never played cricket before and found the red ball hard on the hands. They stationed me at long stop and I determined to suffer pain rather than let a ball pass my grasp.

Lessons started at a quarter to nine. I was placed in Stage 3A, with about fourteen or so other children. At that time most of the pupils left school at the age of fifteen or sixteen, without any examination certificates. They then went into small businesses or the Friends' Provident Life Assurance Company or helped on family farms. Quite often they continued education for a year or more at a home-based Technical College. This early exodus resulted in the one-year Matriculation form seldom numbering more than about fifteen. The bulk of the children was concentrated into forms or stages 1 to 5 which were divided into A groups and B groups. The A groups were considered quicker-minded than the B's and the pace of teaching and the contents of the curriculum were adapted to the differing abilities. I'm sure there was no feeling that the B stream was inferior. Since those days there have been dramatic developments. Now the school is concentrated mostly into the sixth form, where pupils—or should I say young adults—prepare for university entrance.

In the nineteen-twenties the school was very much a *Friends' school*. The governors were all Quakers, the staff nearly all Quakers and most of the children came from Quaker homes. Many were "birthright members" of the Society and children of old scholars. We were much more enclosed, isolated from the activities of the town and from the presence of our families. In a sense the school was a protective community, almost monastic in its seclusion.

But Quakerism was never preached or taught or even explained and no one told us what was supposed to happen in a Meeting for Worship. It was assumed we had imbibed the atmosphere from early childhood and that the school was an extension of the Quaker family.

What influenced us most was the quality and dedication of our teachers. They exemplified Quakerism better than any books or precepts. I'll start with my recollections of Mr Beer (Booze), the long-haired history master. In the Great War he

had suffered imprisonment in Dartmoor as a Conchie, so was understandably drawn to a Quaker school on his release. It's unlikely that he would have been accepted by, or acceptable to, a traditional public or grammar school. He was a man of many gifts: a humorous entertainer, a talented pianist, a teacher who used original and imaginative props. Above all he was a person of exceptional charm. If you opened a door for him, he always bowed and said "Thank you". The fact that he was hopeless at games endeared him to us.

George Morris, or Moke, was a very different character. I recall his shaggy, leonine head, his shambling walk and his untidy, unbuttoned clothes. Erratic, fiery-tempered, enthusiastic, his voice would rise with his emotions. I remember, during my first term, that he once struck a boy on the head. It was only a cuff and no doubt deserved. But a few minutes later Moke went back to that boy, saying: "I'm sorry. I should not have hit you." I cannot visualise my cruel German masters reacting with such humility!

Moke wasn't an outstanding class teacher and because of his temper he had to put up with a lot of ragging. The Reynolds brothers, three boys of unusual ability and character, were a continuing thorn in his side. But we all recognised his sincerity and respected him. He opened up Natural History and Geology to many boys and girls. I think that he was most effective as a teacher on excursions into the country with a small group of attentive children. Fossils in the chalk railway cutting or ancient burial mounds roused his enthusiasm and brought out his stores of learning. He was one of those who could read and interpret the landscape.

And then there was Mr Smiley (Jock), the wee Scots laddie who took us for carpentry and for gym. He had been a pilot in the RAF during the war, was unmarried and a bit of a loner. I don't imagine he held high teaching certificates. But Mr Rowntree must have spotted some concealed gifts, because Jock settled into the school and gave a lot to games and friendships with older boys. I have a hunch it was the first time in his life that he had been accepted and found a supportive community.

The school seemed to attract unusual characters, most of whom shared with us their special interests and enthusiasm.

They stayed at the school for decades: perhaps because they were happy and not over ambitious: perhaps because headships were scarce. Whatever the reasons, staying-put gave the school stability.

About half of the men were married and lived in the town, the others were given accommodation in the school. Older teachers enjoyed the luxury of two rooms, the rest had to be content with a bed-sitter study. There was no common room or comfortable lounge for their recreation: most of their free time was therefore spent in their solitary dens. Probably these restrictions explain their involvement with our lives. They found fulfilment in sharing their hobbies with us and enjoying our confidences. We lived in a community of acceptance and toleration with few age or authoritarian boundaries.

But we missed out on parental love and the comforts of a home. Hence the importance to us of parent-substitutes, in this context teachers who cared for us.

Not having enjoyed a father's affection, I yearned for a father-figure and Mr Whitlow (Fishy or JPW) helped to satisfy this need. He was a bachelor, then about fifty five years of age and—like the legendary Neave Brayshaw—an avuncular character with unfeigned affection for boys. True, he *did* have favourites, but I surmise this is not unusual within closed communities. I knew he liked me because of the humorous names he applied to me, the tone of his voice and his benevolent regard. I valued this quiet affection and support.

Some might think that JPW lived a narrow life within the confines of the Society of Friends and its schools. He had been educated at the Friends' School, Ackworth, gone on to university with other Friends, then settled down as a teacher at the Friends' School, Saffron Walden. His relatives, his acquaintances and his interests all lay within the Quaker community. He never married, taught mainly English literature and did not rise above the grade of senior master. His only break-away occurred in the 1914-1918 war when he went to France with the Friends Ambulance Unit. But despite—or because of—this concentrated life he impressed by depth and stability. He had read widely and with sensitivity: excelled at producing school plays and was acknowledged to be near

County standard with his slow, right-arm bowling. English literature, drama and games were his passions and he was fortunate that his gifts could be so easily and fully exercised at Walden. Generations of boys—perhaps girls, too—look back on him with affection and respect. He was, truly, a good man.

Boys had to play games twice a week; once on Tuesday afternoon and again on Thursday afternoon. It was football in the winter, cricket in the summer. Girls, too, had compulsory games. They played hockey in the winter and spring terms and—surprisingly—cricket, with a hard ball, in the summer. But we also enjoyed other activities. There was the large, heated swimming bath and several grass tennis courts for use in the summer months, while in the spring term most of us trained for competitive athletics.

And there was the gymnasium, with its dangling ropes and climbing bars: paper chases over ploughed fields: cross-country running: *mixed terza*, high cock-a-lorum, rounders and country dancing.

I was lucky in enjoying sports. Looking back, there was, I think, too much emphasis on organised games. Boys and girls with little sporting aptitude, but with other talents, must have suffered from this concentration on team games. I'm told the obsession was even stronger at public schools, where it was obligatory for all boys to watch school matches. There was no such pressure on us and boys who weren't keen on games often wangled ways of opting-out.

### [III]

My first twelve weeks were shadowed by loneliness. The summer term is not the best start for school life, because it comes at the end of the school year. Friendships have already been formed and the newcomer feels an outsider. I longed for a confidant: for a friend with whom I could feel at ease and with whom I could walk to the tuckshop, or sit next to in the evenings.

It wasn't that the other boys were unkind or bullies; it was just the feeling of being alone and not needed. There was

nobody with whom I could share my anxieties and my enthusiasms: nobody to bolster my self-confidence. Sadly, I hadn't much to contribute to my peer group. I wasn't tall and strong or good at cricket or a born leader.

My sense of loneliness was heightened by the extent of our free time: there were so many hours in each day without prescribed activities. Looking back I think we were left too much to our own resources and not sufficiently stimulated or stretched. Children keen on games or hobbies, or very sociable, found plenty to occupy them, but those without close friends or special interests often felt isolated and homesick.

Once at ease within the community, life brightened. My generation benefited by not being rushed towards maturity. We could remain children and did not have to conform to any imposed culture or group behaviour pattern. We boys were particularly fortunate. We could do as we pleased every afternoon between 1 and 2.45 and again from the end of evening prep until bedtime. Wednesday afternoons and most of Saturdays were holidays and we were given many hours of leisure on Sundays. But Quaker morals—or were they middle class morals—forbade the playing of games on the Sabbath. On Sundays we got up later, took our pressed trousers from under the mattress and generally behaved with decorum. In the mornings the whole school walked to the Quaker Meeting in the town. Boys slouching singly or in twos and threes, with one hand in trouser pocket: girls tripping in ordered rows and under supervision of a mistress. We had hymn-singing in the afternoons and a school "Meeting" in the Lecture room in the evening. Sundays were relaxing but rather dull.

We were children of our times and in a decade of industrial depression didn't feel deprived. We seldom grumbled at the plain, monotonous food. In January and February we put up with the bitter cold within the dormitories. Conditions were not much better in our homes and such luxuries as pocket radios, TV sets and discos were unknown. We lived in a narrow, protective community where it was almost impossible to enjoy solitude. I remember on my first day going to the lavatories. I shut the door but it was immediately kicked open by a boy, who shouted "No closed doors here!". The only time you could feel undistracted was when sitting in

Meeting, eyes closed, on a Sunday morning.

When it came to freedom we boys were privileged. A boy could stroll down town alone, if he wished, any weekday afternoon and on a Saturday he could cycle by himself, or with friends, into the undulating country as far as Cambridge. The girls were much more tightly controlled. They could never go outside the gates unless accompanied by a teacher and within a group. For them, town leave was very restricted and conditioned. But I'm sure they accepted this protective care because it was customary, and supported by parents and generally approved by the society in which they lived.

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During that first summer term I was a model scholar, working diligently and aiming to please all whom I encountered. "He is a very pleasant, well-mannered pupil, and gives splendid promise" was the flattering comment by Mr Brereton (AB) in my first school report. But although outwardly I appeared happy, inwardly I was longing for a close companion. My uneventful life changed dramatically towards the end of that summer and it was ginger-haired Teddy Dunstan who wrought the change.

Dunstan was broad-shouldered, bold and mischievous and a trial to the masters. Although he was charged with energy he was never cruel or mean. One of his typical pranks was timed for April Fools' Day. He had crept out of the dormitory at dawn and altered by one hour the hands of the great clock in the gallery of the dining hall. Unfortunately this manoeuvre disturbed the clock's chiming mechanism and repairs would be complicated and costly. Next morning, after breakfast, Mr Rowntree asked whether any boy or girl was responsible for the damage. At once Teddy Dunstan stood up, in front of the assembled school, saying, "I did it, sir".

Teddy was an only child and his father and mother were both doctors, practising in a slum district of London. The father was a pale, serious-looking man and a convinced Communist, active in local politics. His mother was a lively Scotswoman, so there was plenty of radical energy in Teddy's ancestry!

At tea time I sat next to Mr Pearson, attentive to his needs but not always understanding his sardonic humour. Dunstan sat at another table, where his boisterous behaviour caused endless alarm. It was then that Mr Pearson hit on one of his machiavellian ploys. I remember that I was spreading jam on my bread when he turned to me, asking

"How would you like to sit next to someone your own age, Kohler?" "What me, sir?" "Yes, you. I think it would be a good idea." And, to my surprise, he acted forthwith, placing me next to Teddy Dunstan. But the consequences were not as anticipated. Instead of my quietening Dunstan's exuberance, he infected me with his mischievous energy. We were complementary characters and became firm friends.

There followed two years of slackness, fooling about and bad school reports. Instead of optimistic remarks like "shows splendid promise" came criticisms. Mr Pearson said of me "he needs far too much looking after to get anything well done", adding "it would be a help were he more willing to own himself in the wrong and to have the courage more readily to tell the truth." My fifteen exam results showed two safe passes, five minimum passes, six doubtfuls and two failures! Little wonder that most of the staff said "he could do better".

Was the deterioration due to the advent of teen-age—or were there deeper causes? Looking back I surmise that my wayward behaviour was connected with the withdrawal of restraints. For most of my early childhood I had been the focus of adults; my emotional development had been curbed by a puritanical mother and my mischievous side repressed by the harsh discipline of German schools. Also, it was unnatural that I had rarely even spoken to a girl of my own age.

Suddenly, restraints were lifted. I was now exposed to the impact of a co-educational community of some two hundred and fifty boys, girls and teachers. I was on my own in a strange world and had to find an identity. At that stage I think the role of clown or buffoon came most readily.

What does stand out is the tolerance and generosity of Henry and Lucy Gillett. They were the two Quakers who paid the whole of the school fees (£99 a year); and they knew of my behaviour because they were sent my reports.

But not once did they threaten to withdraw me from the school or speak a word of censure to me or my mother.

My friendship with Teddy Dunstan heightened my self-esteem and confidence: leisure hours were no longer tedious and lonely but opportunities of being together and of larking about. I could walk with him to Meeting, cycle with him down town and borrow his roller skates. And at teatime we shared our pots of jam.

About twice a week we went together to the tuck shop at the bottom of the hill. Mrs Fitch and her dark-eyed niece served boys and girls from behind a broad counter and occasionally we glimpsed the stout figure of Mr Fitch, in a white overall. There was a bakery at the back of the shop and I think the Fitches supplied the school with bread.

Fourpence bought a quarter pound of sweets. I remember the huge "gob-stoppers", the size of golf balls; jelly babies; bars of marzipan and yellow sweets that stained the tongue. Girls told us that Miss Priestman, the headmistress, did not like them to buy wine gums. Was this because of the Quaker testimony against drink? I recall, also, two of the prefects, namely Kenneth Whitlow and Byles, reclining on chairs and being served by the attractive niece with coffee and doughnuts. We younger boys were much impressed!

Half-way through my schooling, when I was just fifteen, I began to pull myself together. My school reports for the Spring term of 1926 made more cheerful reading. Miss Priestman wrote against *Literature*, "his work has improved considerably and is quite promising." Looking back, I hope that my mother and the Gillettes were reassured by Mr Pearson writing, "he has shown himself much more pleasant and responsive, and has made a distinct improvement in general straightforwardness."

I was fortunate in enjoying good health and during my years at Walden never had to go to the school sanatorium or see the school doctor. My 1926 report lists age 15; height 5 foot 4; weight 7 stone 11. I was settling down, beginning to find my particular talents and to widen my relationships.

At this stage I'm sure that my friendship with Claude Hardy helped my growth. He was a cheerful, thoughtful lad of about my age and in my form. His parents were Belgian

and his father tutor to an Indian prince. He had three—or was it four—sisters and flamed into temper if they were even mentioned. He was more of an extrovert than I am and he was popular with boys, girls and masters. He was nimble and a natural ball player and, like me, keen on football.

That Christmas my mother bought me a new bike. I think that Mr Pearson had hinted it would help “my development”. The bike came from Gamages, the London departmental store, and cost £4. I did not tell my mother that really I wanted a bike with three-speed gears as I knew that would cost her an extra pound. Most boys of fifteen owned a bike and the possession opened up new pleasures.

I remember cycling with Hardy, past the seventeenth-century mansion house at Audley End, to a roadside restaurant where they served us large cups of coffee for only two pence a cup.

But much more exciting would be a sixteen-mile bike ride to Cambridge. A Saturday afternoon in October was ideal for such a jaunt, with the weather sunny, though not too hot. Cycling was easy as soon after leaving Walden the land flattened, clouds billowing above the wide horizon. We passed through sleepy villages like Littlebury and Great Chesterfield: the whole afternoon was before us so we could stop, if we wished, to watch a horse-drawn plough turning up a stubble field. An hour later those twin humps—the Gog Magog hills—came into view and then the spires and towers of Cambridge.

Once in Cambridge we could stroll through the archways of colleges or sit on the banks of the river, gazing at “shadowed water, green and clear”. We enjoyed browsing in the second-hand book shops and then finding a restaurant and spending a shilling on a cream tea. It was dark on the ride back to school, not much traffic on the quiet roads. We kept our eyes on the beam of light cast by our lamps, aware only of the humming of the bicycle wheels. We were tired but content and looking forward to a highlight of the winter term—the Saturday evening lantern lecture.

I remember how warm and cosy it felt, sitting in a top pew of the stuffy lecture room. The whole school assembled there, with the lecturer standing in front of us, pointer in hand, and close to the white screen. The gas lights were dimmed and we sat in darkness as in a cinema. We huddled together, eyes

focussed on the screen, attentive and listening to the speaker.

We were spellbound by those magic lantern shows: perhaps because we were sitting in darkness and all of us concentrating on the same brilliant image. But we also gathered knowledge and widened our outlook on the world.

I remember a talk on “Exploring England” by Kuklos, a contributor to the *Daily News*. He was well known for his weekly articles, enlivened by sketches, about cycling in the countryside. He and his wife arrived on a tandem and after the lecture she gave a recital of songs. Another speaker was the Rev A R Runnels-Moss on “Life in the West Indies”. Once, Mr Whitlow told us of a holiday in Switzerland and enchanted us with his hand-coloured slides. The last picture, as with most lecturers, showed a vivid sunset above snow-capped mountains.

We trooped out, dazed but happy. A prefect stood in the hall carrying a square tin of biscuits. Each boy took a biscuit and mounted the stone stairs towards the wash room and then to bed.

I had now spent two years at Walden: I felt involved, integrated in the school community. This was my home. I went back to my mother and stepfather for the holidays but all my interests, my friends and my future were centred on the life in the school community.

#### [IV]

Walden enabled me to develop my character and enlarge my talents. The school did not set out to propagate a philosophy or mould children to a preconceived pattern. The community was friendly and trusting—yet sufficiently supportive to nourish our roots.

By nature I’m meditative and receptive; not an innovator, leader or activist. The tolerant atmosphere of Walden suited me. I felt free to absorb what I needed from relationships with other children: I responded to the example and presence of masters and mistresses whom I liked. While I took the food that was available, I wasn’t spoon fed.

We didn't live in a competitive society: there weren't any pressures to conform, class placings to achieve or silver challenge cups to be won. Possibly we were over protected from the outside world, but there is a stage of growth when young plants benefit from shelter.

What were my talents and interests in those years? I suppose much the same as my present hobbies and concerns. The Arts, Nature, the mystery of life, friendships and games. Put in those abstract words these interests may sound pretentious, even lofty, so I'll try to humanise them, bring them down to earth.

By the Arts I mean the enjoyment of reading good books, the practice of creative writing, reading poetry—and listening to classical music. As a young child I loved drawing and painting, but that pastime I only revived in middle age. It's strange, in the twenties, how much the pictorial arts and the crafts were neglected. We missed out on a wide range of practical activities such as pottery, metal work, weaving, lino cutting, lettering and carving. I'm sure the talents were in the school: what we lacked was instruction and example.

What a lot of our intellectual and spiritual growth was helped by the enthusiasm of teachers! It was Mr Whitlow who opened up for me, and many others, the enjoyment of good novels and narrative poems.

Every Sunday, after tea, my age group gathered in a class room for letter writing; this was the hour set aside for communication with parents. Half-way through the period, when we could think of little more to write, Mr Whitlow entertained us with readings. He never chose a dull classic or text book but always a work he himself enjoyed. Sometimes he read Sherlock Holmes detective stories, at other times a romance, like *The Moonstone*. He was gifted with an expressive voice, a sense of drama and emotional warmth. We sat silent, absorbed, while he transported us to magic worlds.

Sunday evenings, after Meeting, he held a social hour in his study. Attendance was voluntary and usually about six to eight of us squatted on the floor, while he read to us. On these evenings he selected long narrative poems that he could intone, like a minstrel. I remember his reading to us Masefield's *Reynard The Fox* and subsequently *The Everlasting Mercy*.

Who could not be captured by the opening lines of that poem.

*From '41 to '51  
I was my folks' contrary son;  
I bit my father's hand right through  
and broke my mother's heart in two.  
I sometimes go without my dinner  
now that I know the times I've gi'n her.*

At about quarter to nine the book was closed and we listened to gramophone records: perhaps a sonata by Brahms or by Beethoven. It seemed right that we should end with such a benediction.

But it was drama-school theatricals—that allowed the widest participation of age groups. And it was again Mr Whitlow—JPW—who provided the drive and who took the lead as actor and producer.

I remember playing a small part as one of the Welsh miners in Galsworthy's play *Strife*. Several of the masters and one or two of the mistresses were in the cast and quite a lot of boys. Most of the staging and props had to be improvised as we had no purpose-built hall, curtains, spotlights or wardrobe of clothes. We used the raised platform in the dining hall as the stage and the kitchen hatch for entry and exits.

In one of the crowd scenes Mr Brereton was cast as a hot-headed agitator, employed by the Union to whip up emotions. We boys, acting as miners, had to jeer or cheer him, using such expletives as came to our tongues. It was a role we relished! When the curtain fell, all who had taken part experienced the same euphoria.

One of our more literary stimulations came from membership of the Reading Club, that rather select circle who met at the end of each term in Mr Rowntree's house. It was the one Society within the school limited to boys: why, I don't know.

First we tucked into an ample tea provided by Mrs Rowntree. Then, when the cloth had been cleared, we settled down and discussed the books read during the term. Lastly, we chose three or four new books for reading in the holidays.

We each paid a shilling a term towards costs. Mr Rowntree

then bought the selected books and these were handed from member to member. I recall that one choice was a volume of radical plays by Bernard Shaw, another choice (mine) was essays by the dramatic critic Agate. During my last term we read *By An Unknown Disciple*: this book stirred my emotions and I tightened my writing style to conform with the simple, almost biblical prose of the author.

I still possess that book and inside it is a list of signatures, dated 1928. These were the members of the club and their names read:

Gertrude Rowntree	E J Burtt	C H O Kohler
J Harris	A G Tawell	P B Snow N Forward
C Brightwen Rowntree	J F Harper	A Brereton
J Parley	E R Le Mare	E Dunstan C Hardy
J Penrose Whitlow		

A signature missing is that of Miss Bird, one of our piano teachers. She was a timid, dove-like creature and perhaps felt too diffident to sign the slip of paper!

I was also a member of the Senior Literary Society, which met once a fortnight in the Lecture room. Recently I found the programme for 15th March 1928 printed in *The Avenue*, the school magazine. It reads:

<i>Diary of School Events:</i>	Barbara Sandwich
<i>Essays:</i>	Newspapers: Peggy Krippendorf
	War and Peace: G Tawell
	God and Man, Prince Bessie McGowan
	and Slave (a story):
<i>Music:</i>	Piano Duets (Schubert): N Forward and A Furrell
	Viola Solo (Burgmülle): Francina Close

There were other societies in the school, such as the *Band of Mercy* (a group who wanted to protect animals, initiated by Mr Beer) and the long established Junior and Senior Natural History Societies. All of these societies were *mixed*, meaning that boys and girls could participate.

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The girls fascinated me. During Meeting I would gaze at them, unobtrusively, marvelling at the beauty of some faces. But I found it very difficult to talk with a girl naturally, or to sit with a girl and feel at ease. I was woefully shy and could best view them romantically and from a distance. I lacked self-assurance, believing that no girl could be drawn by my timid personality and plain features. Often I would dwell on the attractions of a particular girl; the sheen of her hair, the curve of her cheeks. I would have liked some response, if only a smile, but seemingly I was not bold enough or worthy of the beauty's attention.

The nineteen-twenties marked the start of planned co-education, but boys and girls were still very much separated into guarded groups. We were allowed to mix with girls at defined times, providing we met in the open.

A boy could walk with a girl around the playing fields, sit with her on a rug in the sunshine, stroll with her up and down the Avenue. After lessons and before tea a boy and girl could meet in the Lecture room and together glance through magazines. And, a boy could have a special girl friend, walk about with her as a "couple", perhaps shyly take her hand. But that was the accepted limit.

There were unwritten procedures for starting such friendships.

Suppose I was "keen" on a girl, for example Betty French. I would then write to her but on no account hand the folded paper to her directly. That had to be done through the agency of another boy. The contents of the note were prescribed and brief:

"Betty French, I would like to be your friend"—followed by the signature "Charles Kohler".

Afterwards came an agonising wait until some girl —*Not* Betty French—handed me the reply. This might read:

"Dear Charles Kohler. I'm sorry, but I already have a friend. Betty French."

Had I been successful, the contents would have been more expansive!

"Dear Charles. Yes, I would like to be your friend. Love, Betty."

I did write to several girls, asking for their friendship, but

always the response came, "I'm sorry, but I already have a friend."

Dunstan was more successful—perhaps too successful. He was a year younger than I so stayed at the school after I had left. During his last term, while a prefect, he was keen on a girl called Betty Law. On one occasion his fervour overshot propriety and he kissed her in a school corridor. Unfortunately the Head, Miss Priestman, witnessed his indiscretion.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, I was demoted," said Teddy. "Mr Rowntree made an announcement during dinner—told the school I had set a bad example and that I was no longer to be a prefect." How times change!

I found relationships with girls easier after I had left school. Perhaps because I was older, perhaps because I was not being watched. I wish there had been more occasions when we could have joined in some shared project or interest that would have brought us closer, without embarrassment. The School Tramp was an example of such an activity.

This annual event was one of Mr Rowntree's ideas and the holiday made a memorable end to our school days. Each summer he invited the boys and girls who were leaving the school to join him—and some of the staff and a few old scholars—for a week's walking tour. Sometimes the party tramped the Dales, on other summers they went to the South Downs or the Yorkshire moors. In my year the trip was to Dartmoor.

His choice had a special significance for me, because of my early childhood memories of the narrow lanes and misty tors near to Horrobridge. There were about twenty of us in the party and all the boys and girls were my contemporaries. Mr Beer was there and so too Miss Priestman, Mrs Rowntree and Mr Smiley. Kathleen Robson, an old scholar, was also invited.

That week of tramping through the solitude of Dartmoor revived my love of walking and my passion for the English country scene. It was also an opportunity for unstrained companionship with girls and with teachers. Memories glow. I recall a Meeting for Worship on the summit of one of the tors; the plaintive piping of curlews; paddling in a cold stream

and the feel of the wind as we swished through the heather.

The short Meeting for Worship on the hill top awakened a sense of heightened friendliness. Perhaps this was the result of walking together across lonely moors and sharing our picnic food: perhaps it was because our school days were ending. This feeling of togetherness was concentrated by the silence of the Meeting so that we were receptive and ready to listen to Kathleen Robson's experiences in South Wales.

She told us about the relief work she was doing, with a group of Quakers, in the mining valleys. She described the pitiful poverty suffered by many families and told of attempts to lift the depression of unemployment. It came as a revelation to us that a girl of about our age should be so concerned for others. It was an early hint of the crueler world that all of us would soon join.

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The regular Meetings for Worship in the town Meeting House had little influence on me—though I appreciated an hour of quiet sandwiched between the clatter of our activities. Only twice do I recall ministry that "spoke to me". Once, when Mr Whitlow recited a long narrative poem; I still recall the theme. It was about a monk who put obedience to the bell, the call to communal prayer, above the private vision. My other memory is of Miss Priestman telling us she had failed an important exam three times. I admired her moral courage and humility in standing up and confessing to failure: I surmised that she spoke to encourage us in perseverance. The only other event that stirred our lethargy was vocal prayer. If a Friend knelt to pray it was the signal for all of us to stand, heads bowed. These uprisings were infrequent.

What we did appreciate were the Sunday evening Meetings in the Lecture room. These were truly "gathered" meetings, helped by the singing of tuneful hymns and by short talks that touched our lives. Mr Beer had his own, highly original approach. I remember him once wheeling his old motor bike into the room. He kicked at some kind of starter but the engine did not respond. He grinned at us, removed a sparking plug, cleaned it and replaced it. Another kick and the engine

roared. He ended by linking this performance to St Paul's simile of the human body. I don't think all of the staff favoured Mr Beer's gadgetry but his inventiveness certainly spoke to us boys and girls.

Evening Meetings ended by singing together a hymn, perhaps Whittier's "Oh brother man! Fold to thy heart thy brother". There would then be a short silence after which we left the room, feeling content and at peace. Whether at that age other forms of worship would have left a deeper imprint I don't know. I doubt it.

When I was seventeen I became interested in the complexities of man's behaviour, the mystery of life or more colloquially "what makes us tick". Psychology seemed to offer explanations so I asked Mr Pearson to lend me one of his books.

He listened to me, warning that the subject was serious and complex. Then he lent me a book but I can't recall its title. It was written for students and was heavy going but I persisted, to the last page. Years later Mr Pearson told me he had purposely started me off with a tough study to test my interest. This incident illustrates, I think, the trust and communication between boys and masters. But psychology is a remote subject, not of much interest to the majority. For most boys sport was the bridge between generations.

At that time most of the Quaker schools ran a so-called *Club XI* for cricket and football, in addition to the conventional *Boys' First XI*. Usually about five masters were in the *Club XI* so we learned a lot about their characters and their approach to games by playing with them in compulsory games and in matches. The *Club XI* enabled us to extend our range and sometimes play against men's teams. In cricket our fixture list included North Essex Wanderers, Saffron Walden 2nd XI and Cambridge County School: in football we played local teams such as the Rovers and the Rangers. But our keenest rivals were Newport Grammar School and that ancient foundation, Saffron Walden Grammar School.

Football was a game I enjoyed, although I never became a skilled performer. I wasn't exceptionally fast or aggressive or a dribbler of the ball. I only got into the team by choosing the position that few wanted, namely left-half. The majority

preferred goal-scoring and playing on the right hand side of the field. My contribution was persistence: throughout the 90 minutes of a match I never allowed the opposing winger any space to manoeuvre. While I never scored a goal, neither did he. "Marking my man" suited my character. I'm a defender, not an attacker.

Away matches provided more excitement. It was an adventure to visit a different school and gratifying—often amusing—to sample their hospitality. At Bishops Stortford School, the match over, both teams sat together in a panelled room and were served sweetened tea from a huge enamel canister. The waiter, who hovered around us, was decrepit and clad in a frock coat with black tails. We also played Harlow College. In the changing room there was a square bath brimful of hot water in which both teams soaked themselves. I remember crouching in the steam, lathering myself with a hunk of carbolic soap, while pressed to the bodies of about twenty other boys.

Conditions were much more civilised at St Christopher's, the independent co-ed school near Letchworth. Discipline here was visibly laxer than with us. Boys were demonstrably friendly with girls, and in the dormitory—set aside for changing—we noticed teddy bears in some of the beds.

More satisfying for me, even than football, were Athletics. I had a sense of achievement in coming second in the half mile and long jump. My time for the run was a little short of two minutes, thirty seconds: my jump seventeen feet six inches. In 1984 boys would more likely aim for two minutes flat and twenty feet. But cross-country running was my real love.

In the Christmas holidays I had read a book about the importance of training. It was written, I believe, by an athlete called Abrahams. Thereafter, on most evenings before tea, I changed into football shorts and started out on the three-mile course. It was a relief to be alone. At school much of my life was spent indoors with the bustling community. It was difficult to get away from the noise of the class room, the play room, the dining room and the clanging of the bell.

Out of doors, by myself, the steady jogging was relaxing, the countryside restful. In the rhythm of running I felt at

one with the winter trees, the still lake, the young wheat greening in the fields. Occasionally an arrow of wild ducks sped across the evening sky: ice puddles cracked under my strides: at the Abbey farm a dog barked. Towards the end of the run, trotting along the Debden road, I passed the Council houses. Lights were already switched on in living rooms, families sitting around the tea table. After the solitary run it was good to change and rejoin the community.

We ran the race on a cold day in March. The whole school stood at the top of the drive waiting for the runners to come into sight. Parley won, le Mare was second, then came Rees, Kohler and Tawell. I had forgotten the order of finishing until I looked up an old copy of the school magazine. It amused me to see that in the junior cross country John Reader came third, followed by Harper II.

•••••

My last year at Walden was one of the happiest in my life. All my interests seemed to flower and my ambitions to be fulfilled. I was made a school prefect and so enjoyed the comfort of the prefects' study with its rickety armchairs and a gas fire for making toast. Not that we were short of food. Lena, the school cook, sometimes slipped us a whole apple pie. She explained that she liked boys and I think she relished her part in these clandestine gifts.

Another joy was the tiny gramophone given to us by Hardy. We played, again and again, a tune popular in those days, with the refrain "Your eyes once told me a story". We were very much our own masters but had quite a few duties. My special job, as fifth prefect, was to gather up the school mail before bedtime and take the bag of letters to the town post office. I enjoyed riding down the hill on my bike in the dark. It was one of the rare opportunities to be alone.

That year I won the Senior Literature prize for the best essay. The prize was only ten shillings (say ten pounds in

1985 coinage), but it was a recognition and an encouragement for the future. About the same time Laurence Housman, the poet and dramatist, visited the school for an Old Scholars' lecture weekend. He impressed me by his venerable appearance and his manner of reciting Wordsworth's poetry in a melodious, sing-song voice. His enthusiasm and diction awakened my sensibility to rhyme and rhythm. After his visit I started to read poetry for enjoyment and to write one or two sonnets—all of them sombre and traditional.

An achievement of greater excitement was the award of *Colours* for both football and athletics. Sartorially this allowed me to wear a red and green striped blazer, with a falcon embroidered on the pocket. I experienced a moment of pride when I first sat at the head of a table, wearing this prestigious garment.

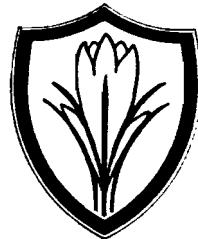
Academically I also did well and was rewarded with the second Leavers' Scholarship. I recall the tension of waiting for the announcement of the successful names. It was a special occasion, in the Lecture room and in the presence of the school and the school governors. When the chairman called out *Charles Kohler* I had to get up, go down the steps and shake hands with him. Was it the bearded Stafford Allen or one of the Crosfield family? I forgot. The grant was not large, only £30 for two years, but it would have provided the nucleus for taking a degree at Dalton Hall, Manchester. That was my hope, but my mother had other ideas.

I left Walden in July of 1928. Mr Whitlow stood waiting for me in the play room and gave me his own copy of *The Unknown Disciple*. On the flyleaf he had written the date and his initials. His choice touched me. I knew then that he had recognised the influence of the book on the style of my prose.

Unwillingly to school! On my first day at Walden I had gone to the dormitory an unhappy and lonely boy: I stayed awake until it became dark then buried my head in the blankets and cried silently.

Now came my last day. I remember creeping to the bogs, closing the door and weeping.

When I'm ill and feverish I often have the same dream. In that dream I'm a boy again at Walden. Sometimes I'm sitting in the lecture room, at other times in the dining hall but there are always boys and girls by my side. Maybe this is a regression, a return to childhood. But for me it expresses a longing for a lost family, for the Community of friends.



Publication has been made possible by grants  
from two Charitable Trusts. Net proceeds  
of sales to Friends School, Saffron Walden.

First published 1985

ISBN 0 903967 24 3

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Cover design by Caroline Coombes 1985  
Printed by Typing & Printing Services Ltd., London