

to live on. As long as we are in this class we must either feel guilt because we have not paid the tax or penury because we have. The Christian doctrine that there is no "salvation" by works done according to the moral law is a fact of daily experience. Back or on we must go. But there is no going on simply by our own efforts. If the new Self, the new Will, does not come at His own good pleasure to be born in us, we cannot produce Him synthetically.

The price of Christ is something, in a way, much easier than moral effort — it is to want Him. It is true that the wanting itself would be beyond our power but for one fact. The world is so built that, to help us desert our own satisfactions, they desert us. War and trouble and finally old age take from us one by one all those things that the natural Self hoped for at its setting out. Begging is our only wisdom, and want in the end makes it easier for us to be beggars. Even on those terms the Mercy will receive us.

### *My First School*

"Next week would be no good", said the boy. "I'm going back to school on Friday." "Bad luck", said I. "Oh, I don't know", said the boy. And stealing a look at his face I saw that this was not stoicism. He really didn't mind going back to school; possibly he even liked it.

Was it merely envy of a generation happier than my own which filled me with a vague distaste at this discovery? One must not dismiss the possibility too lightly. The spirit that says "I went through it, why shouldn't they?" is a strong one and clever at disguises. But I believe I can, on this occasion, acquit myself. I was feeling, in a confused way, how much good the happy schoolboys of our own day miss in escaping the miseries their elders underwent. I do not want those miseries to return. That is just where the complexity of things comes in.

My first preparatory school was one of the last survivals of the kind depicted in *Vice Versa*,<sup>1</sup> except for one detail. There were no informers. Whether the hirsute old humbug who owned it would have run the place by espionage if the boys had given him the chance, I do not know. The treacle-like sycophancy of his letters to my father, which shocked me when they came into my hands years afterwards, does not make it improbable. But he was given no chance. We had no sneaks among us. The Head had, indeed, a grown-up son, a smooth-faced carpet-slipper sort of creature apt for the sport; a

<sup>1</sup> F. Anstey, *Vice Versa* (1882).

privileged demi-god who ate the same food as his father though his sisters shared the food of the boys. But we ourselves were (as the Trades Unions say) "solid". Beaten, cheated, scared, ill-fed, we did not sneak. And I cannot help feeling that it was in that school I imbibed a certain indispensable attitude towards mere power on the one hand and towards every variety of Quisling on the other. So much so that I find it hard to see what can replace the bad schoolmaster if he has indeed become extinct. He was, sore against his will, a teacher of honour and a bulwark of freedom. The Dictators and the Secret Police breed in countries where schoolboys lack the No Sneaking Rule. Of course one must wish for good schoolmasters. But if they breed up a generation of the "Yes, Sir, and Oh, Sir, and Please, Sir brigade", Squeers' himself will have been less of a national calamity.

And then, the end of term. The little pencilled calendar in the desk. Twenty-three days more, twenty-two days more, twenty-one days more . . . this time next week . . . this time the day after tomorrow . . . this time tomorrow . . . the trunks have come down to the dormitory. Bunyan tells us that when the Pilgrims came to the land of Beulah "Christian with desire fell sick; Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease".<sup>2</sup> How well I know that sickness! It was no mere metaphor. It thrilled and wobbled inside: passed along the spine with delicious, yet harrowing thrills: took away the appetite: made sleep impossible. And the last morning never betrayed one. It was always not less, but more, than desire had painted it: a dizzying exaltation in which one had to think hard of common things lest

<sup>1</sup> Wackford Squeers is the headmaster of Dotheboys Hall in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39).

<sup>2</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. James Blanton Wharey, second edition revised by Roger Scharrock (1960), Part I, p. 155.

reason should be overset. I believe it has served me ever since for my criterion of joy, and specially of the difference between joy and mere pleasure. Those who remember such Ends of Term are inexcusable if ever, in later life, they allow mere pleasure to fob them off. One can tell at once when that razor-edged or needle-pointed quality is lacking: that shock, as if one were swallowing light itself.

But one learned more even than that. At the beginning of each term the end was incredible. One believed in it of course, as a conventionally "religious" person "believes" in heaven. One disbelieved in it as such a person disbelieves in heaven. Consolations drawn from that source availed against the imminent horror of tomorrow's geometry (geometry was the great flogging subject with us) just as much as talk about heavenly glory avails against a worldly man's suspicion that he is getting cancer. The joys of home were, for the first half of the term, a mere "escapist" phantom. Theoretically there was somewhere a world where people had comfortable clothes, warm beds, chairs to sit in, and palatable food: but one could not make it real to one's mind. And then, term after term, the incredible happened. The End did really come. The bellowing and grimacing old man with his cane, his threats, and his ogreish facetiousness, the inky walls, the stinking shed which served both as a latrine and as a store for our play-boxes, all "heavily vanished" like a dream.

There was of course a darker miracle. For the first half of the holidays, Term was likewise unbelievable. We knew - would you call it knowing? - that we must go back: just as a healthy young man in peacetime knows - if you call it knowing - that his hand will some day be the hand of a skeleton: or as we all know that the planet will one day be uninhabitable, and (later) the whole universe will "run down". But each time the unbelievable came steadily on, and happened. There came a

week, a day, an hour when the holidays were over, "portions and parcels of the dreadful past", as if they had never been. And that is why I have never since been able, even when I held a philosophy that encouraged me to do so, to take quite at its face value the apparent importance of Present Things. I can (quite often) believe in my own death and in that of the species, for I have seen *that kind of thing* happening. I can believe with nerves and imagination as well as intellect, in human immortality; when it comes it will be no more astonishing than certain other awakenings that I have experienced. To live by hope and longing is an art that was taught at my school. It does not surprise me that there should be two worlds.

What is the moral of this? Not, assuredly, that we should not try to make boys happy at school. The good results which I think I can trace to my first school would not have come about if its vile procedure had been intended to produce them. They were all by-products thrown off by a wicked old man's desire to make as much as he could out of deluded parents and to give as little as he could in return. That is the point. While we are planning the education of the future we can be rid of the illusion that we shall ever replace destiny. Make the plans as good as you can, of course. But be sure that the deep and final effect on every single boy will be something you never envisaged and will spring from little free movements in your machine which neither your blueprint nor your working model gave any hint of.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (1955), Lewis devoted a chapter to his first school which he refers to as "Belsen". Its real name was Wynyard School and it was located in Watford, Hertfordshire. Wynyard was sliding into ruin when Lewis went there in 1908, and he won his freedom when the school came to an end in 1910. It was not until after the publication of *Surprised by Joy* that Lewis discovered that the extremely brutal headmaster had long been insane. A year after his school collapsed he died in an insane asylum.

### *Is English Doomed?*

Great changes in the life of a nation often pass unnoticed. Probably few are aware that the serious study of English at English Universities is likely to become extinct. The death-warrant is not yet signed, but it has been made out. You may read it in the Norwood Report.<sup>1</sup> A balanced scheme of education must try to avoid two evils. On the one hand the interests of those boys who will never reach a University must not be sacrificed by a curriculum based on academic requirements. On the other, the liberty of the University must not be destroyed by allowing the requirements of schoolboys to dictate its forms of study. It is into this second trap that the writers of the Report have fallen. Its authors are convinced that what they mean by "English" can be supplied "by any teacher" (p. 94). "Premature external examination" in this subject is deprecated (p. 96); and I am not clear when, if ever, the moment of "maturity" is supposed to arrive. English scholars are not wanted as teachers. Universities are to devise "a general honours degree involving English and . . . some other subject" (p. 97); not because English studies will thus flourish, but to suit the schools.

<sup>1</sup> The title of "The Norwood Report", so called after its chairman Sir Cyril Norwood, is *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools: Report of the Committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council Appointed by the President of the Board of Education in 1941* (1943). See also Lewis's essay "The Parthenon and the Optative" in his *Of This and Other Worlds*, ed. Walter Hooper (1982). The American title of this book is *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (1982).