

A Troublesome Boy.

Condensed from the book "My Early Life,"
by Winston S. Churchill.

"I WAS ON THE whole considerably discouraged by my school days. All my contemporaries seemed, in every way, better adapted to the conditions of our little world. They were far better, both at the games and at the lessons. It is not pleasant to be left behind at the very beginning of the race.

"I was first threatened with school when I was seven years old. At the time I was what grown-up people, in their off hand way, called 'a troublesome boy.'

"Although much that I had heard about school had made a disagreeable impression on my mind, an impression thoroughly borne out by the actual experience. I thought it would be fun to go away and live with so many other boys, and that we should have great adventures. Also I was told that 'school days were the happiest in one's life,' all the boys enjoyed it. Some of my cousins had been quite sorry—I was told—to come home for the holidays.

"Cross-examined, the cousins did not confirm this, they only grinned.

"It was a dark November afternoon when the last sound of my mother's departing carriage died away, and I was taken into a Form Room and told to sit at a desk.

"All the other boys were out of doors, and I was alone with the Form Master. He produced a greeny-brown covered book. 'This is a Latin Grammar.' He opened it at a well-thumbed page. 'You must learn this,' he said pointing to several words in a frame of lines. 'I will come back in half an hour and see what you know.'

"Behold me then on a gloomy evening, with an aching heart, seated in front of the declension of Mensa.

"What on earth did it mean? It seemed absolute rigmarole to me. However there was one thing I could always do. I could learn by heart.

"In due course the master returned. 'Have you learned it?' he asked. 'I think I can say it Sir,' I replied, and I gobbled it off.

"He seemed so satisfied with this that I was emboldened to ask a question. 'What does it mean, Sir?' 'It means what it says, mensa, a table.' 'Then why does mensa also mean O Table?' I enquired, 'and what does O Table mean?' 'Mensa O Table is the (—) case,' he replied. 'You would use that in speaking to a table.' 'But I never do' I blurted out in honest amazement. Such was my first introduction to the classics from which, I have been told, many of our cleverest men have derived so much solace and profit.

"Flogging with the birch was a great feature in the curriculum. Two or three times a month, the whole school was marshalled in the library, and one or two delinquents were heeled off to an adjoining apartment and there flogged until they bled freely, while the rest sat quaking, listening to their screams.

"How I hated this school and what a life of anxiety I lived there for more than two years! I made very little progress at my lessons and none at all at games. The greatest pleasure I had was reading. When I was nine-and-a-half my father gave me *Treasure Island*, and I remember the delight with which I devoured it.

"My teachers saw me at once backward and precocious, reading books beyond my years and yet at the bottom of the form. They were offended. They had large resources of compulsion at their disposal, but I was stubborn.

"Where my reason, imagination or interest was not engaged, I would not or I could not learn.

"In all the 12 years I was at school, no one ever succeeded in making me write a Latin verse or learn any Greek except the alphabet. To stimulate my flagging interest they told me that Mr. Gladstone read Homer for fun, which I thought served him right.



Sir Winston Churchill as a
Harrow School Boy.

"I had scarcely passed my twelfth birthday when I entered the inhospitable regions of examinations. These were a great trial to me. The subjects which were dearest to the examiners were almost invariably those I fancied least.

"I would have liked to have been examined in history, poetry and writing essays. The examiners, on the other hand, were partial to Latin and mathematics. Moreover, I should have liked to be asked to say what I knew. They always tried to ask what I did not know. When I would willingly have displayed my knowledge, they sought to expose my ignorance. This sort of treatment had only one result. I did not do well in examinations. This was especially true of my entrance examination to Harrow.

"The Headmaster, Dr. Welldon, however, took a broad-minded view of my Latin prose, he showed discernment in judging my general ability. This was remarkable, because I was found unable to answer a single question in the Latin paper. I wrote my name at the top of the page. I wrote down the number of the question—I. After much reflection, I put a bracket round it thus (I), but thereafter I could not

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)