

## THE DUD

HE is the spoilt boy at home, the only child. Nearly always he has his own way, although he is often deprived of little necessities and many innocuous superfluities through his parents' lack of thought, or laziness.

He is adored, and never rebuked for interesting himself in affairs that do not concern him; indeed, all subjects, private and public, are discussed before him without reticence, and he is permitted, often encouraged, to take a disproportionate share in conversations that once would have been reserved until the younger generation were absent. His parents desire to keep him with them in and out of season, so that when friends pay visits he seems parasitic and entirely unattractive. Being so much in company with grown-ups, his early outlook on life is perverted, for a precocious child must of necessity be unbalanced, since he has neither the experience, the judgement, nor the reason required for a studied point of view; but he early discovers the way to inspire his parents with admiration; he has little else to do; and presently he is elevated to a pedestal which, he becomes aware, is sometimes pleasantly secure, but occasionally very precarious, and he is so hard put to it to retain his place that he welcomes the aid of lying when he is in difficulties and the aid of 'showing off' when he is quite at ease; for he is quick to sense the disappointment of his parents when he falls below the standard they have arbitrarily set him, and he is fearful to lose grown-ups' privileges.

The lack of discipline in his parents reacts most unfavourably on him. They give or withhold sanctions in a completely haphazard way, and having said, 'No, dear,' once, they are only too liable, upon being urged, to add, 'Oh, very well, then—just this once!'

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and both he and they know that such weakness of decision can be traded on in the future.

Inevitably he is selfish, and when on rare occasions he meets other boys, he finds them stronger than his parents and resents their forceful attitude. Straightway he complains, refuses to join in their games, and ends the meeting with sulks or a storm of angry tears. Then he finds that girls are more amenable; he chooses them when he is allowed to play with anyone, and over-rules them in all details.

At last he reaches prep-school age. He is encouraged to believe that a new and delightful field for conquest lies open to him, and no one warns him that his parents have given him the worst possible preparation for the contest. They themselves decide, indulgently, that it is time the dear lad had the benefit of other boys' company, and they tacitly agree that the masters shall be given the responsibility they themselves have shirked: 'He will soon settle down there!' is the way they express the matter. They choose a large school because of its name, without considering the difficulties that overwhelming numbers must create, and send him off with many such absurd injunctions as not to let other boys ride his bicycle, and they explain to the headmaster, the housemaster, the matron and everyone else whom they meet that theirs is rather an unusual boy, and that in this way or that he requires peculiar treatment.

The child begins his career at school with the impression that he can behave there as he does at home. He is bumptious. Quickly he finds himself disregarded. He is aggrieved by a rough-and-tumble, loses his temper, is overpowered, cries, and is marked down as 'mother's baby'; he further earns the sobriquet by carrying out his parents' instructions not to share his play-things, though he monopolises them for reasons of selfishness rather than obedience, and fails

to see that he makes himself ridiculous by his petulant reiteration, 'Mummy said I wasn't to lend it!'

He now becomes a tempting subject for ragging; he loses his temper and weeps whenever his inferiority is thus demonstrated and so exposes himself to further baiting. He finds he has entered a completely new and incompatible world. His inability to see things from other people's points of view, and his appalling lack of generosity, preclude any chance of his accepting the situation philosophically or of attempting to reform his manners. He becomes more and more determined to have his own way, and employs craft to get it; he finds that he can impose his will on smaller and younger boys, but as he is secretly ashamed and exasperated to have to fall so low for effect, he takes a malicious delight in coercing them into vagaries or mischief. Older boys, always on the alert for offensiveness in those whom their code of honour brands as undesirable, are quick to punish him; he receives his chastisement cravenly or out of temper, and so further offends against school canons.

The masters have no time for the excessive amount of personal supervision he requires, and he is left to the rough justice of his fellows; and so great is the expenditure of nervous energy occasioned by his disappointment, his resentment, his brooding, and his punishments, that he grows thin and pallid, hollow-eyed and wasted, and becomes the easy prey of whatever ailment is prevalent. Illness offers a means of escape, of which sub-consciously, or even consciously, he avails himself; he enjoys the respite of the sick-room and looks forward to the rewards that follow the heroism of sickness—kind attentions from his companions during convalescence and immediately afterwards—but before these are exhausted he disgraces himself again by over-assurance or meanness, and the vicious circle is continued.

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His development has been retarded; he is a failure; he is ill. The school, his parents decide, is too large to provide the individual attention required by a delicate and sensitive child, so he is removed.

The parents, meanwhile, have shared no part of their son's punishment for their ill training, and the pain of separation makes them yet more stupid in their behaviour when he returns home. They permit him still more licence, and sympathise indiscriminately with him in his tale of horror.

He is now exultant. His deranged nervous system fastens on every chance of excitement, which overtires him and leaves him peevish and moody. He has no regrets for leaving lessons and games, for he remembers his failure in both—failure due, solely, to the wretchedness of his state of mind. He has escaped!

After a time he may be given lessons by a private tutor, but lack of discipline increases his old discontent and makes him more unmanageable. His parents look out for a more suitable school, and decide upon one that is new and small, and highly recommended for special cases.

Once more a new world opens out before him. Backed by experience of a large school, secure in the certainty that his unsuccessful career will not be guessed at, he begins the new era with his parents' promise that here he will find things much more to his taste.

He is, indeed, over age, and has the advantage of a small stock of knowledge that at first stands him in good stead. He seems to have more social sense than his handful of school-fellows, for he is able to converse with his elders in a way that is not at first recognised as fawning. He is delighted to be more in grown-up society and free from the ridicule that did much to make life unbearable before: he is so en-

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grossed in the happiness of escape that he proceeds without caution.

He begins to domineer. He spoils his social success by exaggeration when he finds his stocks running low. He asserts himself on every occasion, and when the smaller boys rebel, he is so fearful of losing his pre-eminence that he injudiciously starts to tyrannize. At once he is branded as a bully; a league is formed against him by outraged pupils. Remembering his former disasters and rejecting the lessons they taught, he repeats his mistakes and aggravates them in a feverish attempt to make his position sure. His ferocity, emphasised by sad experience, enables him to listen with terrible understanding to frank advice from his masters, but, so dominant has his lust for superiority become, he never tires of trying again and again to get his own way, to assert and to maintain his position, by lies and cowardice. Exasperated to find the old unpleasant elements persisting in the new school, he determines, in spite of authority and help, to over-ride them. He falls into pitiful errors of judgement, and descends to the meanest of tricks in the prosecution of his aim; errors and tricks that he recognises to be degrading and that enrage him further against the stubborn individuals who will not submit to him. Again his work and games suffer from the awful diffusion of his nervous energy, but he is still stronger than the smaller boys, and, in his frantic efforts to strengthen his hold over them, he overreaches himself.

One day, inevitably, consumed by his insane longing to demonstrate his superiority but too tired and dulled by the expense of his nervous powers, he attacks a chosen victim, who is constrained to turn and hit back. The effect is startling and instantaneous. The Dud cries out. The victim is spurred on to complete his triumph. A fight ensues. The spoilt boy's

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utter collapse through weakness and his own improvidence coincides with a spurt of courage on the part of the victim; the other boys cheer the victory of the smaller one, and urge him to complete his conquest; that is not a difficult matter; the Dud is thoroughly disheartened, and he knows himself so well that he imagines that others must see his real failure—cowardice. He gives in, weeps, and complains of unfair attack or of being unwell.

From that moment he is vanquished. He tries frequently to regain his position of bully, but no one is afraid of him any longer, and what success he meets with by foul means is more than nullified by his defeats. He is more and more humiliated; he is meaner, more subject to brooding, and, gradually, a prey to the fears he was wont to instil in others; he grows less and less aggressive in action and more despicable in design. His assumption of equality with his elders seems more offensive for being blatant: his immediate and grovelling advances towards older and bigger new-comers bring on him the scorn of the boys and strengthen the alliance against him. Once more he is accepted as a suitable subject for ragging, and he tries to escape by hiding, by subterfuge, or in morbid reflections.

Sometimes he tries to redeem his character in class, either by a show of irrelevant information or by 'taking a rise' out of his masters, but the boys' attitude towards such tactics is far from complimentary. The masters reason with him, appeal to him, try to induce him to laugh at himself, assert their authority, and try to co-opt the other boys in an effort to save him from the fever of himself; but boys have a very definite code of honour and sense of *esprit de corps* that is more honest and direct than ours, and in spite of their repeated (if short-lived) magnanimity towards him, fights are provoked and occasions of teasing recur.

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Still, he runs away : only during intervals of respite is he amenable to discipline or the suggestions of others ; and any hint of support from his elders is the signal for abuse of their friendship with consequent rebukes. He consoles himself with thoughts of martyrdom and the refuge of illness. He avoids his companions and is miserably lonely and introspective. . . .

Perhaps his parents take him away again. Perhaps he lingers on and becomes the butt of all the high-spirited. Perhaps those in authority protect him until he goes to a public school. At best, he seeks comfort in work and contents himself with social isolation. In any case he is a failure until, with extreme patience and perseverance and good sense he is helped to see himself as others see him, and to fight the matter out himself, to change himself, to reform himself into a reasonably unselfish human being. He must do that or fail, at his preparatory school, his public school or n after-life ; and if he fails he will have, chiefly, his parents to blame.

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