



THE CROFTON



BOYS

THE  
CROFTON BOYS

BY  
HARRIET MARTINEAU



WITH FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. FITZGERALD

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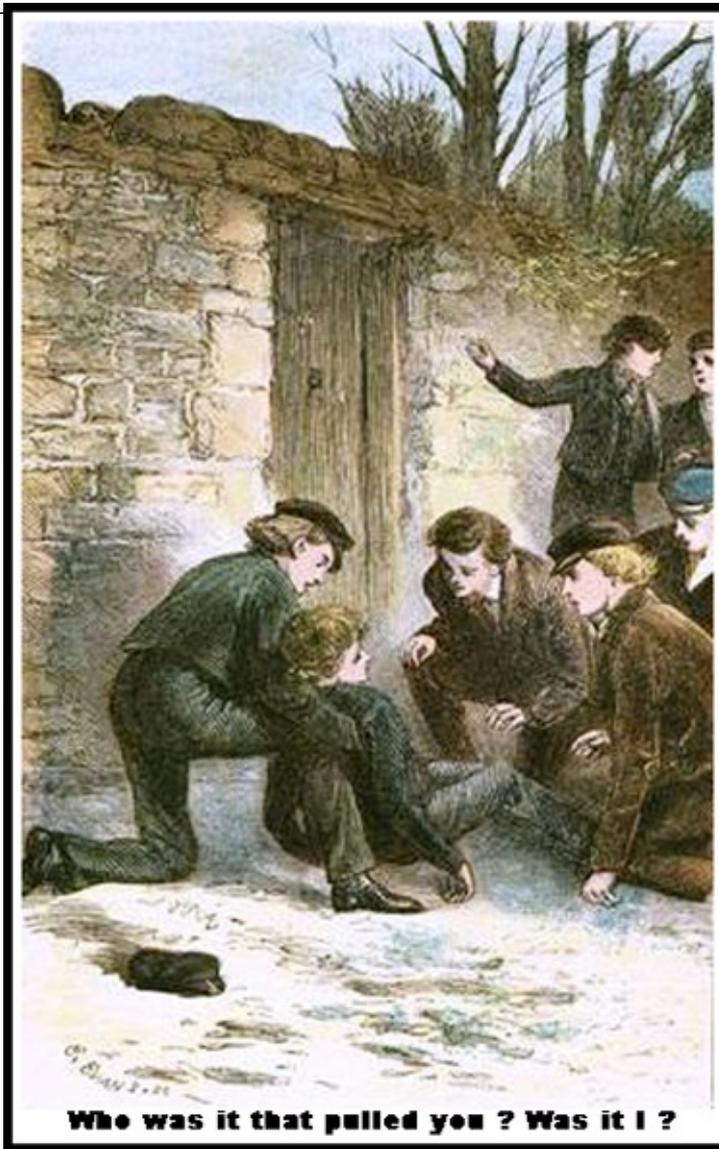
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**Who was it that pulled you ? Was it I ?**

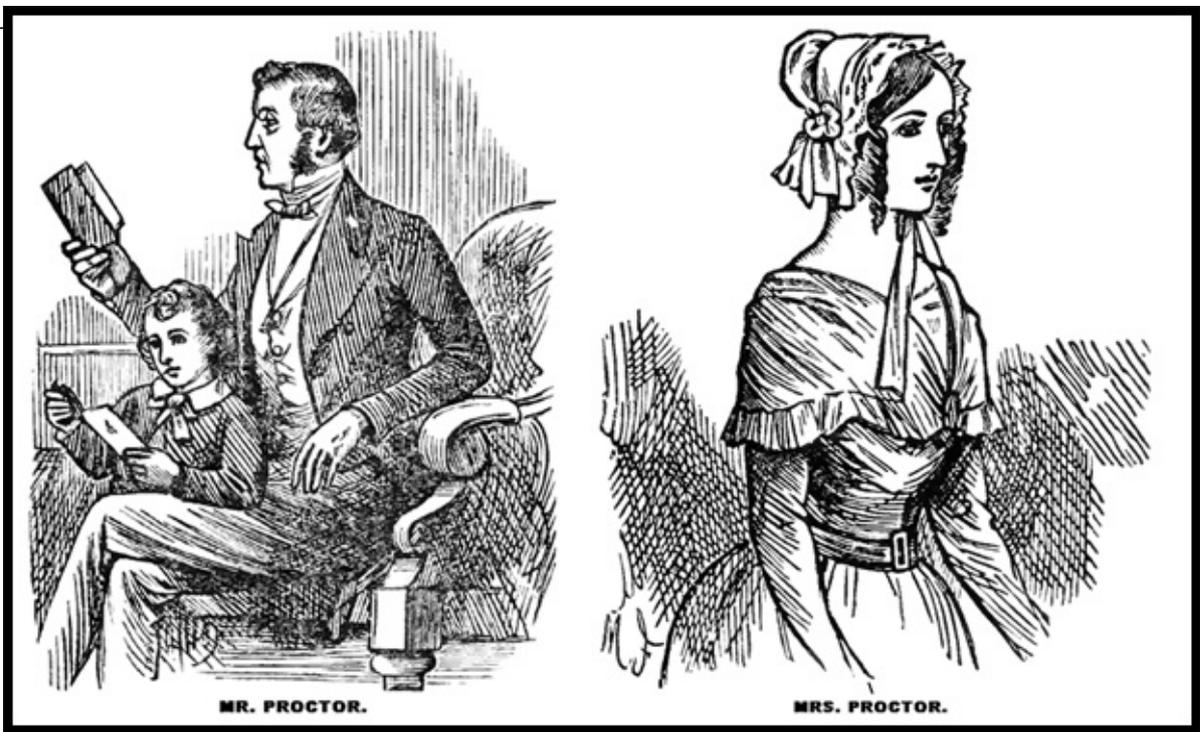
# CHAPTER I.

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## ALL THE PROCTORS BUT PHIL.

Mr. Proctor, the chemist and druggist, kept his shop, and lived in the Strand, London. His children thought that there was never anything pleasanter than the way they lived. Their house was warm in winter, and such a little distance from the church, that they had no difficulty in getting to church and back again, in the worst weather, before their shoes were wet. They were also conveniently near to Covent Garden market; so that, if any friend dropped in to dinner unexpectedly, Jane and Agnes could be off to the market, and buy a fowl, or some vegetables or fruit, and be back again before they were missed. It was not even too far for little Harry to trot with one of his sisters, early on a summer's morning, to spend his penny (when he happened to have one) on a bunch of flowers, to lay on papa's plate, to surprise him when he came in to breakfast. Not much farther off was the Temple Garden, where Mrs. Proctor took her children every fine summer evening to walk and breathe the air from the river; and when Mr. Proctor could find time to come to them for a turn or two before the younger ones must go home to bed, it seemed to the whole party the happiest and most beautiful place in the whole world,—except one. They had once been to Broadstairs, when the children were in poor health after the measles: and for ever after, when they thought of the waves beating on the shore, and of the pleasures of growing strong and well among the sea-breezes, they felt that there might be places more delightful than the Temple Garden: but they were still very proud and fond of the grass and trees, and the gravel walks, and the view over the Thames, and were pleased to show off the garden to all friends from the country who came to visit them.

The greatest privilege of all, however, was that they could see the river without going out of their own house. There were three back windows to the house, one above another; and from the two uppermost of these windows there was what the children called a view of the Thames. There was a gap of a few yards wide between two high brick houses: and through this gap might be seen the broad river, with vessels of every kind passing up or down. Outside the second window were some leads, affording space for three or four chairs: and here it was that Jane and Agnes liked to sit at work, on certain hours of fine days. There were times when these leads were too hot, the heat of the sun being reflected from the surrounding brick walls; but at an earlier hour before the shadows were gone, and when the air blew in from the river, the place was cool, and the little girls delighted to carry their stools to the leads, and do their sewing there. There Philip would condescend to spend a part of his mornings, in his Midsummer holidays, frightening his sisters with climbing about in dangerous places, or amusing them with stories of school-pranks, or raising his younger brother Hugh's envy of the boys who were so happy as to be old enough to go to school at Mr. Tooke's, at Crofton.



The girls had no peace from their brothers climbing about in dangerous places. Hugh was, if possible, worse than Philip for this. He imitated all Philip's feats, and had some of his own besides. In answer to Jane's lectures and the entreaties of Agnes, Hugh always declared that he had a right to do such things, as he meant to be a soldier or a sailor; and how should he be able to climb the mast of a ship, or the walls of a city, if he did not begin to practise now? Agnes was almost sorry they had been to Broadstairs, and could see ships in the Thames, when she considered that, if Hugh had not seen so much of the world, he might have been satisfied to be apprenticed to his father, when old enough, and to have lived at home happily with his family. Jane advised Agnes not to argue with Hugh, and then perhaps his wish to rove about the world might go off. She had heard her father say that, when he was a boy, and used to bring home news of victories, and help to put up candles at the windows on illumination nights, he had a great fancy for being a soldier; but that it was his fortune to see some soldiers from Spain, and hear from them what war really was, just when peace came, and when there was no more glory to be got; so that he had happily settled down to be a London shop-keeper—a lot which he would not exchange with that of any man living. Hugh was very like papa, Jane added; and the same change might take place in his mind, if he was not made perverse by argument. So Agnes only sighed, and bent her head closer over her work, as she heard Hugh talk of the adventures he meant to have when he should be old enough to get away from Old England.

There was one person that laughed at Hugh for this fancy of his;—Miss Harold, the daily governess, who came to keep school for three hours every morning. When Hugh forgot his lesson, and sat staring at the upper panes of the window, in a reverie about his future travels; or when he was found to have been drawing a soldier on his slate instead of doing his sum, Miss Harold reminded him what a pretty figure a soldier would cut who knew no geography, or a sailor who could not make his reckonings, for want of attending early to his arithmetic. Hugh could not deny this; but he was always wishing that school-hours were over, that he might get under the great dining-table to read Robinson Crusoe, or might play at shipwreck, under pretence of amusing little Harry. It did make him ashamed to see how his sisters got on, from the mere pleasure of learning, and without any idea of ever living anywhere but in London; while he, who seemed to have so much more reason for wanting the very

knowledge that they were obtaining, could not settle his mind to his lessons. Jane was beginning to read French books for her amusement in leisure hours; and Agnes was often found to have covered two slates with sums in Practice, just for pleasure, while he could not master the very moderate lessons Miss Harold set him. It is true, he was two years younger than Agnes: but she had known more of everything that he had learned, at seven years old, than he now did at eight. Hugh began to feel very unhappy. He saw that Miss Harold was dissatisfied, and was pretty sure that she had spoken to his mother about him. He felt that his mother became more strict in making him sit down beside her, in the afternoon, to learn his lessons for the next day; and he was pretty sure that Agnes went out of the room because she could not help crying when his sum was found to be all wrong, or when he mistook his tenses, or when he said (as he did every day, though regularly warned to mind what he was about) that four times seven is fifty-six. Every day these things weighed more on Hugh's spirits; every day he felt more and more like a dunce; and when Philip came home for the Midsummer holidays, and told all manner of stories about all sorts of boys at school, without describing anything like Hugh's troubles with Miss Harold, Hugh was seized with a longing to go to Crofton at once, as he was certainly too young to go at present into the way of a shipwreck or a battle. The worst of it was, there was no prospect of his going yet to Crofton. In Mr. Tooke's large school there was not one boy younger than ten; and Philip believed that Mr. Tooke did not like to take little boys. Hugh was aware that his father and mother meant to send him to school with Philip by-and-by; but the idea of having to wait—to do his lessons with Miss Harold every day till he should be ten years old, made him roll himself on the parlour carpet in despair.

Philip was between eleven and twelve. He was happy at school: and he liked to talk all about it at home. These holidays, Hugh made a better listener than even his sisters; and he was a more amusing one—he knew so little about the country. He asked every question that could be imagined about the playground at the Crofton school, and the boys' doings out of school; and then, when Philip fancied he must know all about what was done, out came some odd remark which showed what wrong notions he had formed of a country life. Hugh had not learned half that he wanted to know, and his little head was full of wonder and mysterious notions, when the holidays came to an end, and Philip had to go away. From that day Hugh was heard to talk less of Spain, and the sea, and desert islands, and more of the Crofton boys; and his play with little Harry was all of being at school. At his lessons, meantime, he did not improve at all.

One very warm day, at the end of August, five weeks after Philip had returned to school, Miss Harold had stayed full ten minutes after twelve o'clock to hear Hugh say one line of the multiplication-table over and over again, to cure him of saying that four times seven is fifty-six; but all in vain: and Mrs. Proctor had begged her not to spend any more time to-day upon it.

Miss Harold went away, the girls took their sewing, and sat down at their mother's work-table, while Hugh was placed before her, with his hands behind his back, and desired to look his mother full in the face, to begin again with "four times one is four," and go through the line, taking care what he was about. He did so; but before he came to four times seven, he sighed, fidgetted, looked up at the corners of the room, off into the work-basket, out into the street, and always, as if by a spell, finished with "four times seven is fifty-six." Jane looked up amazed—Agnes looked down ashamed; his mother looked with severity in his face. He began the line a fourth time, when, at the third figure, he started as if he had been shot. It was only a knock at the door that he had heard; a treble knock, which startled nobody else, though, from the parlour door being open, it sounded pretty loud.

Mrs. Proctor spread a handkerchief over the stockings in her work-basket; Jane put back a stray curl which had fallen over her face; Agnes lifted up her head with a sigh, as if relieved that the

multiplication-table must stop for this time; and Hugh gazed into the passage, through the open door, when he heard a man's step there. The maid announced Mr. Tooke, of Crofton; and Mr. Tooke walked in.

Mrs. Proctor had actually to push Hugh to one side,—so directly did he stand in the way between her and her visitor. He stood, with his hands still behind his back, gazing up at Mr. Tooke, with his face hotter than the multiplication-table had ever made it, and his eyes staring quite as earnestly as they had ever done to find Robinson Crusoe's island in the map.

“Go, child,” said Mrs. Proctor: but this was not enough. Mr. Tooke himself had to pass him under his left arm before he could shake hands with Mrs. Proctor. Hugh was now covered with shame at this hint that he was in the way; but yet he did not leave the room. He stole to the window, and flung himself down on two chairs, as if looking into the street from behind the blind; but he saw nothing that passed out of doors, so eager was his hope of hearing something of the Crofton boys,—their trap-ball and their Saturday walk with the usher. Not a word of this kind did he hear. As soon as Mr. Tooke had agreed to stay to dinner, his sisters were desired to carry their work elsewhere,—to the leads, if they liked; and he was told that he might go to play. He had hoped he might be overlooked in the window; and unwillingly did he put down first one leg and then the other from the chairs, and saunter out of the room. He did not choose to go near his sisters, to be told how stupidly he had stood in the gentleman's way; so, when he saw that they were placing their stools on the leads, he went up into the attic, and then down into the kitchen, to see where little Harry was, to play at school-boys in the back yard.

The maid Susan was not sorry that Harry was taken off her hands; for she wished to rub up her spoons, and fill her castors afresh, for the sake of the visitor who had come in. The thoughtful Jane soon came down with the keys to get out a clean table-cloth, and order a dish of cutlets, in addition to the dinner, and consult with Susan about some dessert; so that, as the little boys looked up from their play, they saw Agnes sitting alone at work upon the leads.

They had played some time, Hugh acting a naughty boy who could not say his Latin lesson to the usher, and little Harry punishing him with far more words than a real usher uses on such an occasion, when they heard Agnes calling them from above their heads. She was leaning over from the leads, begging Hugh to come up to her,—that very moment. Harry must be left below, as the leads were a forbidden place for him. So Harry went to Jane, to see her dish up greengage plums which he must not touch: and Hugh ran up the stairs. As he passed through the passage, his mother called him. Full of some kind of hope (he did not himself know what), he entered the parlour, and saw Mr. Tooke's eyes fixed on him. But his mother only wanted him to shut the door as he passed; that was all. It had stood open, as it usually did on warm days. Could his mother wish it shut on account of anything she was saying? It was possible.

“O Hugh!” exclaimed Agnes, as soon as he set foot on the leads. “What do you think?—But is the parlour door shut? Who shut it?”

“Mother bade me shut it, as I passed.”

“O dear!” said Agnes, in a tone of disappointment; “then she did not mean us to hear what they were talking about.”

“What was it? Anything about the Crofton boys? Anything about Phil?”

“I cannot tell you a word about it. Mamma did not know I heard them. How plain one can hear what they say in that parlour, Hugh, when the door is open! What do you think I heard mamma tell Mrs. Bicknor, last week, when I was jumping Harry off the third stair?”

“Never mind that. Tell me what they are talking about now. Do, Agnes.”

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Agnes shook her head.

“Now do, dear.”

It was hard for Agnes to refuse Hugh anything, at any time; more still when he called her “dear,” which he seldom did; and most of all when he put his arm round her neck, as he did now. But she answered,—

“I should like to tell you every word; but I cannot now. Mamma has made you shut the door. She does not wish you to hear it.”

“Me! Then will you tell Jane?”

“Yes. I shall tell Jane, when we are with mamma at work.”

“That is too bad!” exclaimed Hugh, flinging himself down on the leads so vehemently that his sister was afraid he would roll over into the yard. “What does Jane care about Crofton and the boys to what I do?”

“There is one boy there that Jane cares about more than you do, or I, or anybody, except papa and mamma. Jane loves Phil.”

“O, then, what they are saying in the parlour is about Phil.”

“I did not say that.”

“You pretend you love me as Jane loves Phil! and now you are going to tell her what you wont tell me! Agnes, I will tell you everything I know all my whole life, if you will just whisper this now. Only just whisper—Or, I will tell you what. I will guess and guess; and you can nod or shake your head. That wont be telling.”

“For shame, Hugh! Phil would laugh at you for being a girl, if you are so curious. What mamma told Mrs. Bicknor was that Jane was her right hand. What do you think that meant exactly?”

“That Jane might give you a good slap when you are so provoking,” said Hugh, rolling over and over, till his clothes were covered with dust, and Agnes really thought once that he was fairly going over the edge into the yard.

“There is something that I can tell you, Hugh; something that I want to tell you, and nobody else,” said Agnes, glad to see him stop rolling about, and raise himself on his dusty elbow to look at her.

“Well, come, what is it?”

“You must promise beforehand not to be angry.”

“Angry! when am I angry, pray? Come, tell me.”

“You must—you really must—I have a particular reason for saying so—you must learn how much four times seven is. Now, remember, you promised not to be angry.”

Hugh carried off his anger by balancing himself on his head, as if he meant to send his heels overboard but that there was no room. From upside down, his voice was heard saying that he knew that as well as Agnes.

“Well, then, how much is it?”

“Twenty-eight, to be sure. Who does not know that?”

“Then pray do not call it fifty-six any more. Miss Harold——”

“There’s the thing,” said Hugh. “When Miss Harold is here, I can think of nothing but fifty-six. It seems to sound in my ears, as if somebody spoke it, ‘four times seven is fifty-six.’”

“You will make me get it by heart, too, if you say it so often,” said Agnes. “You had better say ‘twenty-eight’ over to yourself all day long. You may say it to me as often as you like. I shall not get tired. Come, begin now—‘four times seven——’”

“I have had enough of that for to-day—tiresome stuff! Now, I shall go and play with Harry again.”

“But wait—just say that line once over, Hugh. I have a reason for wishing it. I have, indeed.”

“Mother has been telling Mr. Tooke that I cannot say my multiplication-table! Now, that is too bad!” exclaimed Hugh. “And they will make me say it after dinner! What a shame!”

“Why, Hugh! you know mamma does not like—you know mamma would not—you know mamma never does anything unkind. You should not say such things, Hugh.”

“Ay, there! you cannot say that she has not told Mr. Tooke that I say my tables wrong.”

“Well—you know you always do say it wrong to her.”

“I will go somewhere. I will hide myself. I will run to the market while the cloth is laying. I will get away, and not come back till Mr. Tooke is gone. I will never say my multiplication-table to him!”

“Never?” said Agnes, with an odd smile and a sigh. “However, do not talk of running away, or hiding yourself. You will not have to say anything to Mr. Tooke to-day.”

“How do you know?”

“I feel sure you will not. I do not believe Mr. Tooke will talk to you, or to any of us. There you go! You will be in the water-butt in a minute, if you tumble so.”

“I don’t care if I am. Mr. Tooke will not come there to hear me say my tables. Let me go!” he cried, struggling, for now Agnes had caught him by the ankle. “If I do tumble in, the water is not up to my chin, and it will be a cool hiding-place this hot day.”

“But there is Susan gone to lay the cloth; and you must be brushed; for you are all over dust. Come up, and I will brush you.”

Hugh was determined to have a little more dust first. He rolled once more the whole length of the leads, turned over Jane’s stool, and upset her work-basket, so that her thimble bounded off to a far corner, and the shirt-collar she was stitching fell over into the water-butt.

“There! what will Jane say?” cried Agnes, picking up the basket, and peeping over into the small part of the top of the water-butt which was not covered.

“There never was anything like boys for mischief,” said the maid Susan, who now appeared to pull Hugh in, and make him neat. Susan always found time, between laying the cloth and bringing up dinner, to smooth Hugh’s hair, and give a particular lock a particular turn on his forehead with a wet comb.

“Let that alone,” said Hugh, as Agnes peeped into the butt after the drowning collar. “I will have the top off this afternoon, and it will make good fishing for Harry and me.”

Agnes had to let the matter alone; for Hugh was so dusty that she had to brush one side of him while Susan did the other. Susan gave him some hard knocks while she assured him that he was not

going to have Harry up on the leads to learn his tricks, or to be drowned. She hardly knew which of the two would be the worst for Harry. It was lucky for Hugh that Susan was wanted below directly, for she scolded him the whole time she was parting and smoothing his hair. When it was done, however, and the wet lock on his forehead took the right turn at once, she gave him a kiss in the very middle of it, and said she knew he would be a good boy before the gentleman from the country.

Hugh would not go in with Agnes, because he knew Mr. Tooke would shake hands with her, and take notice of any one who was with her. He waited in the passage till Susan carried in the fish, when he entered behind her, and slipped to the window till the party took their seats, when he hoped Mr. Tooke would not observe who sat between Agnes and his father. But the very first thing his father did was to pull his head back by the hair behind, and ask him whether he had persuaded Mr. Tooke to tell him all about the Crofton boys.

Hugh did not wish to make any answer; but his father said "Eh?" and he thought he must speak; so he said that Phil had told him all he wanted to know about the Crofton boys.

"Then you can get Mr. Tooke to tell you about Phil, if you want nothing else," said Mr. Proctor.

Mr. Tooke nodded and smiled; but Hugh began to hand plates with all his might, he was so afraid that the next thing would be a question how much four times seven was.

The dinner went on, however; and the fish was eaten, and the meat, and the pudding; and the dessert was on the table, without any one having even alluded to the multiplication-table. Before this time, Hugh had become quite at his ease, and had looked at Mr. Tooke till he knew his face quite well.

Soon after dinner Mr. Proctor was called away upon business; and Hugh slipped into his father's arm chair, and crossed one leg over the other knee, as he leaned back at his leisure, listening to Mr. Tooke's conversation with his mother about the sort of education that he considered most fit for some boys from India, who had only a certain time to devote to school-learning. In the course of this conversation some curious things dropped about the curiosity of children from India about some things very common here;—their wonder at snow and ice, their delight at being able to slide in the winter, and their curiosity about the harvest and gleaning, now approaching. Mr. Proctor came back just as Mr. Tooke was telling of the annual holiday of the boys at harvest-time, when they gleaned for the poor of the village. As Hugh had never seen a corn-field, he had no very clear idea of harvest and gleaning; and he wanted to hear all he could. When obliged to turn out of the arm-chair, he drew a stool between his mother and Mr. Tooke: and presently he was leaning on his arms on the table, with his face close to Mr. Tooke's, as if swallowing the gentleman's words as they fell. This was inconvenient; and his mother made him draw back his stool a good way. Though he could hear very well, Hugh did not like this, and he slipped off his stool, and came closer and closer.

"And did you say," asked Mr. Proctor, "that your youngest pupil is nine?"

"Just nine;—the age of my own boy. I could have wished to have none under ten, for the reason you know of. But——"

"I wish," cried Hugh, thrusting himself in so that Mr. Tooke saw the boy had a mind to sit on his knee,— "I wish you would take boys at eight and a quarter."

"That is your age," said Mr. Tooke, smiling and making room between his knees.

"How did you know? Mother told you."

"No; indeed she did not,—not exactly. My boy was eight and a quarter not very long ago; and he \_\_\_\_\_"

“Did he like being in your school?”

“He always seemed very happy there, though he was so much the youngest. And they teased him sometimes for being the youngest. Now you know, if you came, you would be the youngest, and they might tease you for it.”

“I don’t think I should mind that. What sort of teasing, though?”



“Trying whether he was afraid of things.”

“What sort of things?”

“Being on the top of a wall, or up in a tree. And then they sent him errands when he was tired, or when he wanted to be doing something else. They tried too whether he could bear some rough things without telling.”

“And did he?”

“Yes, generally. On the whole, very well. I see they think him a brave boy now.”

“I think I could. But do not you really take boys as young as I am?”

“Such is really my rule.”

It was very provoking, but Hugh was here called away to fish up Jane's work out of the water-but As he had put it in, he was the proper person to get it out. He thought he should have liked the fun of it; but now he was in a great hurry back, to hear Mr. Tooke talk. It really seemed as if the shirt-collar was alive, it always slipped away so when he thought he had it. Jane kept him to the job till he brought up her work, dripping and soiled. By that time tea was ready,—an early tea, because Mr. Tooke had to go away. Whatever was said at tea was about politics, and about a new black dye which some chemists had discovered; and Mr. Tooke went away directly after.

He turned round full upon Hugh, just as he was going. Hugh stepped back, for it flashed upon him that he was now to be asked how much four times seven was. But Mr. Tooke only shook hands with him, and bade him grow older as fast as he could.



## CHAPTER II.

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### WHY MR. TOOKE CAME.

After tea the young people had to learn their lessons for the next day. They always tried to get these done, and the books put away, before Mr. Proctor came in on his shop being shut, and the business of the day being finished. He liked to find his children at liberty for a little play, or half an hour of pleasant reading; or, in the winter evenings, for a dance to the music of his violin. Little Harry had been known to be kept up far too late, that he might hear the violin, and that his papa might enjoy the fun of seeing him run about among the rest, putting them all out, and fancying he was dancing. All believed there would be time for play with papa to-night, tea had been so much earlier than usual. But Agnes soon feared there would be no play for Hugh. Though Jane pored over her German, twisting her forefinger in the particular curl which she always twisted when she was deep in her lessons; though Agnes rocked herself on her chair, as she always did when she was learning by heart; and though Mrs. Proctor kept Harry quiet at the other end of the room with telling him long stories, in a very low voice about the elephant and Brighton pier, in the picture-book, Hugh could not learn his capital cities. He even spoke out twice, and stopped himself when he saw all the heads in the room raised in surprise. Then he set himself to work again, and he said "Copenhagen" so often over that he was not likely to forget the word; but what country it belonged to he could not fix in his mind, though Agnes wrote it down large on the slate, in hopes that the sight of the letters would help him to remember. Before he had got on to "Constantinople," the well-known sound was heard of the shop-boy taking the shop-shutters out of their day-place, and Mr. Proctor would certainly be coming presently. Jane closed her dictionary, and shook back her curls from over her eyes; Mrs. Proctor put down Harry from her lap, and let him call for papa as loud as he would; and papa came bustling in, and gave Harry a long toss, and several topplings over his shoulder, and yet Hugh was not ready.

"Come, children," said Mr. Proctor to Agnes and Hugh, "we have all done enough for to-day. Away with books and slates!"

"But, papa," said Agnes, "Hugh has not quite done. If he might have just five minutes more, Miss Harold——"

"Never mind what Miss Harold says! That is, you girls must; but between this and Michaelmas——"

He stopped short, and the girls saw that it was a sign from their mother that made him do so. He immediately proceeded to make so much noise with Harry, that Hugh discovered nothing more than that he might put away his books, and not mind Miss Harold this time. If she asked him to-morrow why he had not got down to "Constantinople," he could tell her exactly what his father had said. So, merry was Hugh's play this evening. He stood so perfectly upright on his father's shoulders, that he could reach the top of his grandmamma's picture, and show by his finger-ends how thick the dust lay upon the frame: and neither he nor his father minded being told that he was far too old for such play.

In the midst of the fun, Hugh had a misgiving, more than once, of his mother having something severe to say to him when she should come up to his room, to hear him say his prayer, and to look back a little with him upon the events of the day. Besides his consciousness that he had done nothing well this day, there were grave looks from his mother which made him think that she was not pleased with him. When he was undressing, therefore, he listened with some anxiety for her footsteps, and, when she appeared, he was ready with his confession of idleness. She stopped him in the beginning,

saying that she had rather not hear any more such confessions. She had listened to too many, and had allowed him to spend in confessions some of the strength which should have been applied to mending his faults. For the present, while she was preparing a way to help him to conquer his inattention, she advised him to say nothing to her, or to any one else, on the subject; but this need not prevent him from praying to God to give him strength to overcome his great fault.

“Oh, mother! mother!” cried Hugh, in an agony, “you give me up! What shall I do if you will not help me any more?”

His mother smiled, and told him he need not fear any such thing. It would be very cruel to leave off providing him with food and clothes, because it gave trouble to do so; and it would be far more cruel to abandon him to his faults, for such a reason. She would never cease to help him till they were cured: but, as all means yet tried had failed, she must plan some others; and meantime she did not wish him to become hardened to his faults, by talking about them every night, when there was no amendment during the day.

Though she spoke very kindly, and kissed him before she went away, Hugh felt that he was punished. He felt more unhappy than if his mother had told him all she thought of his idleness. Though his mother had told him to go to sleep, and blessed him, he could not help crying a little, and wishing that he was a Crofton boy. He supposed the Crofton boys all got their lessons done somehow as a matter of course; and then they could go to sleep without any uncomfortable feelings or any tears.

In the morning all these thoughts were gone. He had something else to think about; for he had to play with Harry, and take care of him, while Susan swept and dusted the parlour: and Harry was bent upon going into the shop—a place where, according to the rule of the house, no child of the family was ever to set foot, till it was old enough to be trusted: nor to taste anything there, asked or unasked. There were some poisonous things in the shop, and some few nice syrups and gums; and no child could be safe and well there who could not let alone whatever might be left on the counter, or refuse any nice taste that a good-natured shopman might offer. Harry was, as yet, far too young; but, as often as the cook washed the floor-cloth in the passage, so that the inner shop door had to be opened, Master Harry was seized with an unconquerable desire to go and see the blue and red glass bowls which he was permitted to admire from the street, as he went out and came in from his walks. Mr. Proctor came down this morning as Hugh was catching Harry in the passage. He snatched up his boys, packed one under each arm, and ran with them into the yard, where he rolled Harry up in a new mat, which the cook was going to lay at the house-door.

“There!” said he. “Keep him fast, Hugh, till the passage-door is shut. What shall we do with the rogue when you are at Crofton, I wonder?”

“Why, papa! he will be big enough to take care of himself by that time.”

“Bless me! I forgot again,” exclaimed Mr. Proctor, as he made haste away into the shop.

Before long, Harry was safe under the attraction of his basin of bread and milk; and Hugh fell into a reverie at the breakfast-table, keeping his spoon suspended in his hand as he looked up at the windows, without seeing anything. Jane asked him twice to hand the butter before he heard.

“He is thinking how much four times seven is,” observed Mr. Proctor: and Hugh started at the words.

“I tell you what, Hugh,” continued his father; “if the Crofton people do not teach you how much four times seven is when you come within four weeks of next Christmas day, I shall give you up, and

them too, for dunces all.”

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All the eyes round the table were fixed on Mr. Proctor in an instant.

“There now!” said he, “I have let the cat out of the bag. Look at Agnes!” and he pinched her crimson cheek.

Everybody then looked at Agnes, except Harry, who was busy looking for the cat which papa said had come out of mamma’s work-bag. Agnes could not bear the gaze, and burst into tears.

“Agnes has taken more pains to keep the secret than her papa,” said Mrs. Proctor. “The secret is, that Hugh is going to Crofton next month.”

“Am I ten, then?” asked Hugh, in his hurry and surprise.

“Scarcely; since you were only eight and a quarter yesterday afternoon,” replied his father.

“I will tell you all about it by-and-by, my dear,” said his mother. Her glance towards Agnes made all the rest understand that they had better speak of something else now. So Mr. Proctor beckoned Harry to come and see whether the cat had not got into the bag again, as she was not to be seen anywhere else. It is true, the bag was not much bigger than a cat’s head; but that did not matter to Harry, who never cared for that sort of consideration, and had been busy for half an hour, the day before, in trying to put the key of the house-door into the key-hole of the tea-caddy.

By the time Agnes had recovered herself, and the table was cleared, Miss Harold had arrived. Hugh brought his books with the rest, but, instead of opening them, rested his elbow on the uppermost and stared full at Miss Harold.

“Well, Hugh!” said she, smiling.

“I have not learned quite down to ‘Constantinople,’” said he. “Papa told me I need not, and not to mind you.”

“Why, Hugh! hush!” cried Jane.

“He did,—he said exactly that. But he meant, Miss Harold, that I am to be a Crofton boy,—directly, next month.”

“Then have we done with one another, Hugh?” asked Miss Harold, gently. “Will you not learn any more from me?”

“That is for your choice, Miss Harold,” observed Mr. Proctor. “Hugh has not deserved the pains you have taken with him: and if you decline more trouble with him now he is going into other hands, no one can wonder.”

Miss Harold feared that he was but poorly prepared for school, and was quite ready to help him, if he would give his mind to the effort. She thought that play, or reading books that he liked, was less waste of time than his common way of doing his lessons; but if he was disposed really to work, with the expectation of Crofton before him, she was ready to do her best to prepare him for the real hard work he would have to do there.

His mother proposed that he should have time to consider whether he would have a month’s holiday, or a month’s work, before leaving home. She had to go out this morning. He might go with her, if he liked; and, as they returned, they would sit down in the Temple Garden, and she would tell him all about the plan.

Hugh liked this beginning of his new prospects. He ran to be made neat for his walk with his mother. He knew he must have the wet curl on his forehead twice over to-day; but he comforted himself with hoping that there would be no time at Crofton for him to be kept standing, to have his hair done so particularly, and to be scolded all the while, and then kissed, like a baby, at the end.



## CHAPTER III.

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### MICHAELMAS-DAY COME.

Hugh was about to ask his mother, again and again during their walk, why Mr. Tooke let him go to Crofton before he was ten; but Mrs. Proctor was grave and silent; and though she spoke kindly to him now and then, she did not seem disposed to talk. At last, they were in the Temple Garden; and they sat down where there was no one to overhear them; and then Hugh looked up at his mother. She saw, and told him, what it was that he wanted to ask.

“It is on account of the little boys themselves,” said she, “that Mr. Tooke does not wish to have them very young, now that there is no kind lady in the house who could be like a mother to them.”

“But there is Mrs. Watson. Phil has told me a hundred things about Mrs. Watson.”

“Mrs. Watson is the housekeeper. She is careful, I know, about the boys’ health and comfort; but she has no time to attend to the younger ones, as Mrs. Tooke did,—hearing their little troubles, and being a friend to them like their mothers at home.”

“There is Phil——”

“Yes. You will have Phil to look to. But neither Phil, nor any one else, can save you from some troubles you are likely to have from being the youngest.”

“Such as Mr. Tooke told me his boy had;—being put on the top of a high wall, and plagued when he was tired: and all that. I don’t think I should much mind those things.”

“So we hope, and so we believe. Your fault is not cowardice——”

Mrs. Proctor so seldom praised anybody that her words of esteem went a great way. Hugh first looked up at her and then down on the grass,—his cheeks glowed so. She went on—

“You have faults,—faults which give your father and me great pain; and though, you are not cowardly about being hurt in your body, you sadly want courage of a better kind,—courage to mend the weakness of your mind. You are so young that we are sorry for you, and mean to send you where the example of other boys may give you the resolution you want so much.”

“All the boys learn their lessons at Crofton,” observed Hugh.

“Yes; but not by magic. They have to give their minds to their work. You will find it painful and difficult to learn this, after your idle habits at home. I give you warning that you will find it much more difficult than you suppose; and I should not wonder if you wish yourself at home with Miss Harold many times before Christmas.”



IN THE TEMPLE GARDENS.

Mrs. Proctor was not unkind in saying this. She saw that Hugh was so delighted about going that nothing would depress his spirits, and that the chief fear was his being disappointed and unhappy when she should be far away. It might then be some consolation to him to remember that she was aware of what he would have to go through. He now smiled, and said he did not think he should ever wish to send his lessons to Miss Harold, as long as he lived. Then it quickly passed through his mind that, instead of the leads and the little yard, there would be the playground; and instead of the church bells, the rooks; and instead of Susan with her washing and combing, and scolding and kissing, there would be plenty of boys to play with. As he thought of these things, he started up, and toppled head over heels on the grass, and then was up by his mother's side again, saying that he did not care about anything that was to happen at Crofton;—he was not afraid,—not even of the usher, though Phil could not bear him.

“If you can bring yourself to learn your lessons well,” said his mother, “you need not fear the usher. But remember, it depends upon that. You will do well enough in the playground, I have no doubt.”

After this, there was only to settle the time that was to pass—the weeks, days, and hours before Michaelmas-day; and whether these weeks and days should be employed in preparing for Crofton under Miss Harold, or whether he should take his chance there unprepared as he was. Mrs. Proctor sa

that his habits of inattention were so fixed, and his disgust at lessons in the parlour so strong, that she encouraged his doing no lessons in the interval. Hugh would have said beforehand that three weeks' liberty to read voyages and travels, and play with Harry, would have made him perfectly happy; but he felt that there was some disgrace mixed up with his holiday, and that everybody would look upon him with a sort of pity, instead of wishing him joy; and this spoiled his pleasure a good deal. When he came home from his walk, Agnes thought he looked less happy than when he went out; and she feared his spirits were down about Crofton.

His spirits were up and down many times during the next three weeks. He thought these weeks would never be over. Every day dragged on more slowly than the last; at every meal he was less inclined to eat; and his happiest time was when going to bed, because he was a day nearer Crofton. His mother, foreseeing just what happened, wished to have kept the news from him till within a week of his departure, and had agreed with Mr. Proctor that it should be so. But Mr. Proctor hated secrets, and, as we see, let it out immediately.

At last, the day came;—a warm, sunny, autumn day, on which any one might have enjoyed the prospect of a drive into the country. The coach was to set off from an inn in Fleet-street at noon, and would set Hugh down at his uncle's door in time for dinner, the distance being twenty-eight miles. His uncle's house was just two miles from the school. Phil would probably be there to meet his brother, and take him to Crofton in the afternoon.

How to get rid of the hours till noon was the question. Hugh had had everything packed up, over which he had any control, for some days. He had not left himself a plaything of those which he might carry: and it frightened him that his mother did not seem to think of packing his clothes till after breakfast this very morning. When she entered his room for the purpose, he was fidgeting about, saying to himself that he should never be ready. Agnes came with her mother, to help: but before the second shirt was laid in the box, she was in tears, and had to go away; for every one in the house was in the habit of hiding tears from Mrs. Proctor, who rarely shed them herself, and was known to think that they might, generally be suppressed, and should be so.

As Hugh stood beside her, handing stockings and handkerchiefs, to fill up the corners of the box, she spoke as she might not have done if they had not been alone. She said but a few words; but Hugh never forgot them.

“You know, my dear,” said she, “that I do not approve of dwelling upon troubles. You know I never encourage my children to fret about what cannot be helped.”

There was nothing in the world that Hugh was more certain of than this.

“And yet I tell you,” she continued, “that you will not be nearly so happy at Crofton as you expect—at least, at first. It grieves me to see you so full of expectation——”

“Does it indeed, mother?”

“It does indeed. But my comfort is——”

“You think I can bear it,” cried Hugh, holding up his head. “You think I can bear anything.”

“I think you are a brave boy, on the whole. But that is not the comfort I was speaking of; for there is a world of troubles too heavy for the bravery of a thoughtless child, like you. My comfort is, my dear, that you know where to go for strength when your heart fails you. You will be away from your father and me; but a far wiser and kinder parent will be always with you. If I were not sure that you would continually open your heart to Him, I could not let you go from me.”

“I will—I always do,” said Hugh, in a low voice.

“Then remember this, my boy. If you have that help, *you must not fail*. Knowing that you have the help, I expect of you that you do your own duty, and bear your own troubles, like a man. If you were to be all alone in the new world you are going to, you would be but a helpless child: but remember, when a child makes God his friend, God puts into the youngest and weakest the spirit of a man.”

“You will ask Him too, mother;—you will pray Him to make me brave, and—and——”

“And what else?” she inquired, fixing her eyes upon him.

“And steady,” replied Hugh, casting down, his eyes; “for that is what I want most of all.”

“It is,” replied his mother. “I do, and always will, pray for you.”

Not another word was said till they went down into the parlour. Though it was only eleven o’clock Miss Harold was putting on her bonnet to go away: and there was a plate of bread and cheese on the table.

“Lunch!” said Hugh, turning away with disgust.

“Do eat it,” said Agnes, who had brought it. “You had no breakfast, you know.”

“Because I did not want it; and I can’t eat anything now.”

Jane made a sign to Agnes to take the plate out of sight: and she put some biscuits into a paper bag, that he might eat on the road, if he should become hungry.

Neither Miss Harold nor Hugh could possibly feel any grief at parting; for they had had little satisfaction together; but she said very kindly that she should hope to hear often of him, and wished he might be happy as a Crofton boy. Hugh could hardly answer her;—so amazed was he to find that his sisters were giving up an hour of their lessons on his account,—that they might go with him to the coach!—And then Susan came in, about the cord for his box, and her eyes were red:—and, at the sight of her, Agnes began to cry again; and Jane bent down her head over the glove she was mending for him, and her needle stopped.

“Jane,” said her mother, gravely, “if you are not mending that glove, give it to me. It is getting late.”

Jane brushed her hand across her eyes, and stitched away again. Then, she threw the gloves to Hugh without looking at him, and ran to get ready to go to the coach.

The bustle of the inn-yard would not do for little Harry. He could not go. Hugh was extremely surprised to find that all the rest were going;—that even his father was smoothing his hat in the passage for the walk,—really leaving the shop at noon on his account! The porter was at his service too,—waiting for his box! It was very odd to feel of such consequence.

Hugh ran down to bid the maids good-bye. The cook had cut a sandwich, which she thrust into his pocket, though he told her he had some biscuits. Susan cried so that little Harry stood grave and wondering. Susan sobbed out that she knew he did not care a bit about leaving home and everybody. Hugh wished she would not say so, though he felt it was true, and wondered at it himself. Mr. Proctor heard Susan’s lamentations, and called to her from the passage above not to make herself unhappy about that; for the time would soon come when Hugh would be homesick enough.

Mr. Blake, the shopman, came to the shop-door as they passed, and bowed and smiled; and the boy put himself in the way, with a broad grin: and then the party walked on quickly.

The sun seemed to Hugh to glare very much; and he thought he had never known the streets so noisy, or the people so pushing. The truth was, his heart was beating so he could scarcely see: and yet he was so busy looking about him for a sight of the river, and everything he wished to bid good-bye to that his father, who held him fast by the hand, shook him more than once, and told him he would run everybody down if he could,—to judge by his way of walking. He must learn to march better, if he was to be a soldier; and to steer, if he was to be a sailor.

There were just two minutes to spare when they reached the inn-yard. The horses were pawing and fidgeting, and some of the passengers had mounted: so Mr. Proctor said he would seat the boy at once. He spoke to two men who were on the roof, just behind the coachman; and they agreed to let Hugh sit between them, on the assurance that the driver would look to his concerns, and see that he was set down at the right place.

“Now, my boy, up with you!” said his father, as he turned from speaking to these men. Hugh was so eager, that he put up his foot to mount, without remembering to bid his mother and sisters good-bye. Mr. Proctor laughed at this; and nobody wondered; but Agnes cried bitterly; and she could not forget it, from that time till she saw her brother again. When they had all kissed him, and his mother’s earnest look had bidden him remember what had passed between them that morning, he was lifted up by his father, and received by the two men, between whom he found a safe seat.

Then he wished they were off. It was uncomfortable to see his sisters crying there, and not to be able to cry too, or to speak to them. When the coachman was drawing on his second glove, and the ostlers held each a hand to pull off the horse-cloths, and the last moment was come, Mr. Proctor swung himself up by the step, to say one thing more. It was—

“I say, Hugh,—can you tell me,—how much is four times seven?”

Mrs. Proctor pulled her husband’s coat-tail, and he leaped down, the horses’ feet scrambled, their heads issued from the gate-way of the inn-yard, and Hugh’s family were left behind. In the midst of the noise, the man on Hugh’s right hand said to the one on his left,

“There is some joke in that last remark, I imagine.”

The other man nodded; and then there was no more speaking till they were off the stones. When the clatter was over, and the coach began to roll along the smooth road, Hugh’s neighbour repeated,

“There was some joke, I fancy, in that last remark of your father’s.”

“Yes,” said Hugh.

“Are you in the habit of saying the multiplication-table when you travel?” said the other. “If so, we shall be happy to hear it.”

“Exceedingly happy,” observed the first.

“I never say it when I can help it,” said Hugh; “and I see no occasion now.”

The men laughed, and then asked him if he was going far.

“To Crofton. I am going to be a Crofton boy,” said Hugh.

“A what? Where is he going?” his companions asked one another over his head. They were no wiser when Hugh repeated what he had said; nor could the coachman enlighten them. He only knew that he was to put the boy down at Shaw’s, the great miller’s, near thirty miles along the road.

“Eight-and-twenty,” said Hugh, in correction; “and Crofton is two miles from my uncle’s.”

“Eight-and-twenty. The father’s joke lies there,” observed the right-hand man.

“No, it does not,” said Hugh. He thought he was among a set of very odd people,—none of them knowing what a Crofton boy was. A passenger who sat beside the coachman only smiled when he was appealed to; so it might be concluded that he was ignorant too; and the right and left-hand men seemed so anxious for information, that Hugh told them all he knew;—about the orchard and the avenue, and the pond on the heath, and the playground; and Mrs. Watson, and the usher, and Phil, and Joe Cape, and Tony Nelson, and several others of the boys.

One of the men asked him if he was sure he was going for the first time,—he seemed so thoroughly informed of everything about Crofton. Hugh replied that it was a good thing to have an elder brother like Phil. Phil had told him just what to take to Crofton, and how to take care of his money, and everything.

“Ay! and how do the Crofton boys take care of their money?”

Hugh showed a curious little inner pocket in his jacket, which nobody would dream of that did not know. His mother had let him have such a pocket in both his jackets; and he had wanted to have all his money in this one now, to show how safely he could carry it. But his mother had chosen to pack up all his five shillings in his box,—that square box, with the new brass lock, on the top of all the luggage. In this pocket there was only sixpence now,—the sixpence he was to give the coachman when he was set down.

Then he went on to explain that this sixpence was not out of his own money, but given him by his father, expressly for the coachman. Then his right-hand companion congratulated him upon his spirit and began to punch and tickle him; and when Hugh writhed himself about, because he could not bear tickling, the coachman said he would have no such doings, and bade them be quiet. Then the passengers seemed to forget Hugh, and talked to one another of the harvest in the north, and the hopping in Kent. Hugh listened about the hopping, supposing it might be some new game, as good as leap-frog; though it seemed strange that one farmer should begin hopping on Monday, and that another should fix Thursday; and that both should be so extremely anxious about the weather. But when he found it was some sort of harvest-work, he left off listening, and gave all his attention to the country sights that were about him. He did not grow tired of the gardens, gay with dahlias and hollyhocks, and asters: nor of the orchards, where the ladder against the tree, and the basket under, showed that apple-gathering was going on; nor of the nooks in the fields, where blackberries were ripening; nor of the chequered sunlight and shadow which lay upon the road; nor of the breezy heath where the blue ponds were ruffled; nor of the pleasant grove where the leaves were beginning to show a tinge of yellow and red, here and there among the green. Silently he enjoyed all these things, only awakening from them when there was a stop to change horses.

He was not thinking of time or distance when he saw the coachman glance round at him, and felt that the speed of the horses was slackening. Still he had no idea that this was any concern of his, till he saw something that made him start,

“Why, there’s Phil!” he exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

“This is Shaw’s mill, and there is Shaw; which is all I have to do with,” said the coachman, as he pulled up.

Hugh was soon down, with his uncle and Phil, and one of the men from the mill to help. His aunt was at the window too; so that altogether Hugh forgot to thank his companions for his safe seat. He would have forgotten his box, but for the coachman. One thing more he also forgot.

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