

September rains, followed by a day of warm sunshine, had lured from the earth a soft haze which obscured the big fields at the foot of the Hill. John could make out fences, poplars, elms, Scotch firs, and spectral houses. But, above, everything was clear. The school-buildings, such as he could see, stood out boldly against a cloudless sky, and above these soared the spire of Harrow Church, pointing an inexorable finger upwards.

Afterwards this spot became dear to John Verney, because here, where mists were chill and blinding, he had been impelled to leave the broad high-road and take a path which led into a shadowy future. In obedience to an impulse stronger than himself he had taken the short cut to what awaited him.

For a few minute; he stood outside the palings, trying to choke down an abominable lump in his throat. This was not his first visit to Harrow. At the end of the previous term, he had ascended the Hill to pass the entrance examination. A master from his preparatory school accompanied him, an Etonian, who had stared rather superciliously—so John thought—at buildings less venerable than those which Henry VI. raised near Windsor. John, who had perceptions, was elusively conscious that his companion, too much of a gentleman to give his thoughts words, might be contrasting a yeoman's work with a king's; and when the Etonian, gazing across the plains below to where Windsor lay, a soft shadow upon the horizon, said abruptly, "I wish Eton had been built upon a hill," John replied effusively: