

CHAPTER III

FIRST GLIMPSE OF JESUITRY

HAVING just left his mother in her sitting-room, Rudd was standing in the hall wondering whether he would go for a walk or play in the garden. He was rather in favour of a walk, but there was always the risk of meeting Oran.

Oran was a lame boy who terrorized the neighbourhood. He had one very high boot with an enormous sole and heel, and a crutch, but he could get over the ground faster than most boys even of his own age, while no little boy could escape him. It was terrible to hear his crutch clattering behind you as you ran.

Oran was an incipient magnate: he took small boys' property from them—their tops, marbles, pencils—and never returned it; he teased them about their clothes; he twisted their arms, and used bad words. Rudd was not only in his person miserably afraid of Oran's powers, but his little soul was disturbed too: he had the feeling that it was doubly wrong for a lame boy to be wicked. It was long indeed before he lost this idea, and longer still before he ceased to believe that the blind were pre-eminently set apart for virtue.