

# LITERARY CONTEST WINNERS - CROSSED NIBS

## TO KISS THE CROSS

"Timmy! Timmy! Are you awake, dear?" Mary O'Shea called from the foot of the stairs. "You mustn't be late on your first day of school."

Her small son yawned sleepily from the recesses of his bedroom and manager to mumble, "Yes, Mummy, I'm coming."

Mary turned and walked thoughtfully to the kitchen. The odour of cocoa hung on the air and mingled with the spicy fragrance of coffee bubbling in the percolator. The steaming porridge had escaped her notice for a moment and was threatening to burn to the bottom of the double boiler. The sun, appearing from behind a passing cloud, began to play darts with her new chintz curtains. In the milkhouse, the separator was humming tunelessly under Jim's steady hand. Oblivious to most of these stimuli, Mary automatically moved the porridge to the side of the stove. For a moment, nothing seemed to penetrate the curtain of her reverie.

A mist of whirling, confused thoughts enveloped her mind. Timmy's first day at school... What had she been reading only yesterday about schools? Oh yes, "Out of the educational institutions of today will come the leaders of tomorrow." Weighty words... what did they mean for her, for Timmy? At last her baby was going to school. Dared she dream of the future? Her mind clutched at straw ladders leading to successful professions, high-paid government posts, management in business, careers on the stage, in education, in the Church. A chill of fear was mingled with the warm flush of hope.

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Was Timmy really ready to start school? "I went through it myself," she argued, but he's so young, so desperately young. No! That was ridiculous! She knew it was very foolish to worry. All children started school when they were six. Had her mother worried endlessly about sending the children off to school on the first morning? Probably not. A family of seven would keep her too busy to think... Timmy was a normal, healthy boy. Why was she worrying? Hadn't she read all the articles about child care that she could lay her hands on? For weeks, yes months, she had looked forward to this day. "Mother would have called it a waste of time," she muttered ruefully, "but I shall use intelligence as well as instinct."

An idea struck her with the force of lightning. Mother's busy days left no time for reading or paper plans. The activities of her life were carried out by feeling, feeling which through endless repetition was moulded into habit. Mother was conscious only of the needs of each moment and she met them automatically. But times had changed. Mothers must be modern, too. Oh well, it was probably silly to worry about Timmy's first day at school. Miss Melvin seemed so good with children that it was hard to picture anything going wrong in her school. Then she must stop worrying. More easily said than done.

Jim would probably scoff at her for giving it a second thought. Dear Jim! So blunt and hearty in his approach to everything, yet she felt strangely thrilled to think that Timmy was not like him. He was hers rather than his. For some reason Timmy was not the sturdy, independent person his father was. He was shy, slightly awkward, and terribly sensitive about it. Would he like his new schoolmates? Would they like him. First impressions were so important for children. Well, he was coming downstairs. She could not let him see that she was worried—Timmy was not going to be a baby all his life.

"Good morning, Mummy," piped a thin, persistent voice, bringing her back to normal once more.

"Isn't it a lovely morning to start school, Timmy? I wish I could go myself," she said brightly. As an afterthought she added, "Wash your face and hands, dear. Breakfast will soon be ready."

"Did I hear the word breakfast, honey?" boomed a voice from the doorway. More than six feet tall, Jim leaned his muscular, sunburned

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### ESSAYS

First Prize: Crossed Nibs—  
Second Prize: Time Immaculate—R. A. Craig.  
Third Prize: Loch Ness—A. F. Clarke.

### POETRY

One Prize, the poem by Lance-Jack.

height against the doorway and puffed contentedly at his pipe. Drops of sweat glittered on his forehead. A battened straw hat, pushed far back on his forehead, left uncovered a shock of reddish brown hair. His straight-forward blue eyes swept round the kitchen and rested teasingly on Mary. "I'm ready to cave in unless you perform a miracle pretty soon," he stated.

"We'll eat as soon as I get this last pancake turned in the griddle. Then, I've a surprise for you. We're having syrup—there's your miracle, Jim. Now don't fall over before I can get it on the table."

"Mary, this is a miracle," Jim replied. "How did you manage it?" he asked mystified.

"I skimped on sugar for two weeks, but I think a little surprise is worth it, now and then."

"Take a bow, Mary," said Jim, while Timmy clapped his hands.

"Here's your oatmeal, Timmy. Here's yours, too, Jim. By the way you must have come right in after you finished separating."

"Yes, I figured Timmy and I would have lots of time to feed the calves before he goes to school."

"Timmy is not going near those calves with his school clothes on. I declare, you men would let your children run around like tramps," she admonished sternly. Perhaps, she thought, perhaps if he had to do the washing, he would have more regard for clothes.

"Easy there. Don't act so upset. I didn't mean any harm by it, honey," Jim soothed.

"Do you want me to take Timmy over in the truck? I'll leave the separator and milk pails until I get back."

"O. K. I've got to fix up the reaper before we can start cutting oats."

Noticing a puzzled look on Timmy's face, Mary asked what was wrong. Timmy confessed that he didn't know whether or not he would like his first day at school. "Of course you will," Mary reassured him. She tried to sound convincing, but the effort seemed to be lame. The effect on Timmy was not at all pleasing.

Jim decided to take over at this point and began a sermonette on what Timmy should do at school. "When I was your age," he began, "I could lick anyone my own size. Most of the bigger fellows would leave me alone, too, after we'd tangled once or twice."

(To Be Continued.)

Essay by D. GREENBANK

The dishes away, the kettle on its stand, the study almost tidied. That must have been the 'fog' careening past me on his way to the 'den'. No doubt some new scandal was there brewing. He must fine out — for on what else could he ponder during preparation? And that bell would soon ring. The fire ablaze, and there, as I expected, cockroaches still busy clearing away their crumbs from the hearth; darting into shadow whenever the coals sputtered and hissed flame. The curtains drawn, withholding this little warmth from the massive bleakness without. The smell of toast, the tang of ginger, still clinging to the 'fuggy' air. Surely not the study to which I ran after breakfast to rummage out the morning's books from that pile, the mark of last night's disappearing work? Now still in neat line, the books pleading me to forget, encouraging me to start afresh. Not the study to which I brought a few of the team, all of us tired and muddled, all of us with the sole idea of lying back and enjoying that simple tea awaiting us? "A nice study" one casually remarked as he let his eyes wander freely. "Why hadn't Hack passed the ball?" Sparked—we were off in heated lively arguments. It was not easy to muse there with half-shut eyes. Pictures hung on all four walls. Above the mantel, Bradman cutting to leg, Jessie Owens at the tape, Louis in a clinch, and there, in that flame, Cambridge pulling ahead. A hive of activity. But now all in gloom, one lamp undisturbingly spotlighting the desk; the fire cast weird shapes on the threadbare carpet, glowing on the maroon chintz. Warm, peaceful, soothing, a sleepy study. It was "prep" time.

And so I sit down to write. Do you remember having just put down Chesterton's "on turning out my pockets," or Lamb's "Dissertation upon Roast Pig," being asked to write an essay? Do you remember the novel eagerness that possessed you? You just wanted to run to some secluded spot and there write. The topic did not matter you just wanted to write. And then the blow, you remember, that flattened this still matter keenness, when the Master added "Yes, you will write on swimming" Wasn't that just the subject you didn't want?.. You wanted to write on—well you wanted to write like Lamb or Chesterton, but then, they would never have written on swimming. And so, in disgust, you spent all your "preparation time" trying to give those few lines you eventually did produce an ugly undertone. Wasn't it winter? How could you write on swimming? Remember those little remarks you cunningly allowed to creep in unobserved? You would show that new English Master. When you won't remember the apology beside your first alpha but it was finally handed back to you. And so I sit down to write — to write on a shoe.

Pen, paper, prepared. Ideas, like dreams shoot up from nowhere, disappear nowhere, and no matter how slowly the reels of thought are rewound they never quite return to form. Pen, paper, prepared. None will escape tonight. A shoe — an essay on a shoe — pen, paper, prepared. No, they never come, never since that day.

This is my first study. I barely know my way around. The little cranny behind the hearth, hardly large enough to shelter a bottle, the loose floor boards that reveal, when removed by inquisitive hands, a cupboard. How many more secrets does it hold? Its personality is still unknown to me. And you C. J. R. what manner of man were you? Not a mathematician to be sure. Remember last night, the trouble we had finding that simple formula? Perhaps a wicked, perhaps a writer like the Gothic T. D. He is on the long junior table. You may have been here with him. What original essays he and I would write.

Pen, paper, prepared. C. J. R. — R. J. C. a shoe. An essay on a shoe C. J. R.

Listen to the wind, howling as it comes from the north, rolling over the hills, sweeping through the gullies, soon, soon, snow, soon. Warning even the rugged sheep to abandon their drafty nooks, to set off down for the dales. And there the shepherd — no C. J. R. I am shivering contagiously. There must be snuggler places for my thought to ramble — to ramble on a shoe.

A horse shoe, a slipper, a bed shoe. A bed shoe, C. J. R.? Oh! a bed sock. I know little about them. They would be discarded in "Victorian days". When the "double—'one poster" became the habit. For then man could no longer sneak into his bed, with feet wrapped in woolly socks and at the same time mock his wife as she pulled the clumsy warming-pan from beneath the sheets of her bed. The hardy husband had then unfortunately to do away with his comfort. And I, C. J. R., will have to do away with that idea of yours, for that is all I know about a bed shoe.

(Continued Next Week.)

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