

From the day he was born, he was destined for a seat in his father's counting-house, but from early childhood he showed an aversion to the work and also complete unfitness. This caused his father to hate him, as it was contrary to his dearest wish. The result was that the boy was often cruelly punished. On such occasions which were but too frequent, the only assistance his mother could render, was to indulge in one of her dramatic fainting fits.

At the age of ten, John William Walshe began his studies with a tutor. Special attention was to be given to "reckoning," and it was grudgingly that the rudiments of Latin were allowed. But he seemed instinctively to realize the bracing intellectual qualities of that language, and he was soon consumed with a passion for classic literature. In order to wean him from the habit of "moping over books," Mr Walshe resolved to send his son to a boarding-school. The head master had been properly warned that there was "much nonsense to be knocked out of this boy, and much licking into shape to be done." The parental wishes were most faithfully executed.

All during his boarding-school life he continued the child-mystic ; and many pathetic scenes are described in all of which the strange unhappy lad is misunderstood. But although he suffered many torments from both the students and the masters, he fortunately escaped the pollution of the blasphemy and obscene talk which pervaded the whole atmosphere of the place.

An interesting feature of the book is the development of the religious side of his character. He had never been taught religion at home ; and at school the same influence was lacking. But his naturally keen imagination had been aroused by reading the lives of self-sacrificing men ; and he began to practise little austerities of his own invention, which are as amusing as they are pathetic. His first religion was the Methodist. He was attracted by the groans of people attending a revival-meeting, and went into the church. The religious excitement seemed to be contagious, and he was converted, swept away in a flood of "incontrolable sobbing and crying." This was while he was still a boy at school. In the same manner it was the mystical side of the Catholic religion that afterwards appealed to him.