

Chapter 1

Home, School and Oxford

My son did not die on July 22nd, 1945," his mother once wrote. "He just passed through the doorway of death to a life of further possibilities." George Aylwin was born on 26 January 1915, to Kathleen and Robert Hogg at Red Gables on Leyton Road in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Robert Hogg was a successful merchant tailor in business with his brother in Hanover Square, London, and Aylwin was the youngest of a family of six children. The first memories are of an aureole of curls like a pale gold cloud about Aylwin's head; he loved to put on his brother's cricket cap and black school waistcoat, which looked ridiculously incongruous on him.

He repudiated the idea of death at the age of four. He had been distributing drawings with great pride, and one of his brothers, to tease, said, "I suppose when you're dead you'll want us to frame them and stick them on the wall?" To which Aylwin replied in astonishment, "I shall never die, Stephen! When my body gets old and worn out, I shall go to God's land. He'll have the window open. He'll be all ready, and He'll pop me into a new body." Another time he was overheard saying to his sister, "If heaven isn't much nicer than earth, Rosemary, I shall ask God to let me come back."

Aylwin was fortunate in having for his nurse and first governess Gladys Owen (Soney, for short), who later worked with Aylwin's aunts, Muriel and Doris Lester, at the Kingsley Hall Settlement in Bow, the heart of London's East End. After some years in London, she went to dedicate her life to the "untouchables" of India, working for the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. She started to teach Aylwin when he was six by the Dalton Laboratory Plan, an educational concept created by Helen Parkhurst and inspired by the Montessori way, and so set him thinking things out for himself at that early age. One morning, in the year that Émile Coué popularised autosuggestion, Soney was awakened by the following conversation between Aylwin and the minute teddy bear he took to bed with him: "Now, Tiny Tim, what is your worst fault?" After a pause she heard, "Oh, swank! Well, Tiny Tim, before you go to sleep, and directly you wake up in the morning, you must say to yourself: 'Every day in every way I am getting less and less of a swank.'"

Aylwin was nearly ten when he showed a feeling for words. His father had been reading aloud Tennyson's "The Eagle", and then asked: "How would *you* describe an eagle, Aylwin?" After a moment's thought, he replied, "A whirring mass of fierce glory."

Soon after this, Aylwin's parents decided to send him to Switzerland to an international school which had been inspired by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and was run on Montessori principles at Gland on the shores of Lake Geneva. Rosemary was returning there for a second year and begged to take her little brother with her. The school's aim was to break down barriers of age, sex, class, and nationality. All the staff shared the housework with the children, and the cook, the only one who was not a teacher by profession, taught Italian as it was her native language. The gardener came in to school meals and was waited on by the children, as everyone else was. Indicative of the style

of discipline at the school, the bursar one lunchtime tapped on his glass for attention. "Anyone wanting pocket money for the midnight feast tonight, call in at my office after lunch." That particular feast, of course, didn't materialise. What is the fun of a midnight feast when the powers that be know all about it in advance? On another occasion, just as a midnight feast was beginning to get into full swing, one of the teachers popped her head around the door to wish everyone "Bon apétit!" Once a week, there was a school meeting at which the girls and boys were free to criticise the teachers and even the head, and to express their views on anything that they thought unfair or wrong. All this is bound to have influenced Aylwin's subsequent work.

Before their departure, Rosemary, in schoolgirl fashion, was describing and discrediting someone at the school, but Mother intervened and declared it was not fair to prejudice the boy's mind and that she must let him judge for himself. On the night before departure, Aylwin's mother sat on his bed and tried to prepare him for the sudden severance of home discipline. "You will no longer be able to hear my voice, or Soney's voice. You must learn to listen to your *inner voice*. It will always tell you what is right, if you make a practice of listening to it."

The following week, two letters arrived from Switzerland. Rosemary's recounted, "Aylwin's inner voice is coming along just fine. Yesterday it made him wash out his own pants and vest." Aylwin reported, "I have looked at Miss -- from my own point of view, and I also think that she is a silly old fop."

After this emancipating year abroad, Aylwin went, at the age of eleven, as a dayboy at first, to St. George's School, a co-educational school in Harpenden. Here, his three brothers had established a tradition, which meant Aylwin had considerable living up to do. He

became the ordinary English schoolboy, going through the normal stages at the normal ages.

Two other families who had children of the same ages as the Hoggs lived just across Harpenden Common. The Hunters, with six children in all and father abroad most of the time in the Rumanian oil fields, provided a second home to the younger four Hoggs. They and the Hunters' older four were all best friends right through school. The house was always full of youngsters, including frequent visitors from the orphanage across the road. The Hunter family had left Russia in haste during the revolution, leaving all their worldly possessions behind, and the youngest son had been born in a truck on the hazardous journey. Mrs Hunter seemed to hold open house for just about everyone. She was a remarkable woman whose very practical Christian way of life made a great impression on the Hogg children. It was so different from their own home environment, and made much more sense to them than all the preaching and church-going that went on at home.

In 1928, Robert Hogg bought a plot of land from Mrs Hilda Salisbury of Gables End, just down the road from Red Gables, where he built a slightly smaller and very beautiful house, which they called Wayfarings. By this time, the elder children, Gary, Barbara (my mother), and Daniel (Dan'l) had grown up and gone out into the world.

Rosemary and Aylwin, supposedly attending school chapel along with their brother, Stephen, who was in the choir, would regularly sneak off to spend Sunday mornings at the Hunters. They would decide between themselves on their story, knowing that Mother would want to know all about the sermon at lunchtime. Stephen never let on. Once, when imparting the "vital information" for Mother's benefit, Aylwin became so carried away with his own inventiveness on the arranged story that he "retold" the supposed sermon in intricate detail. Stephen,

true to form, displayed remarkable self-control and managed not to choke and splutter on his lunch in his totally suppressed amusement.

The second home-from-home for the Hoggs was the Nelson household. There was Muff, who was in Aylwin's class at school. Winifred Nelson, known as Muff, remembers that, at about the age of nine, she met Aylwin for the first time. Aylwin was out on Harpenden Common with his brother Stephen. Muff was inquisitive. She already knew the older Hoggs, who were friends of her older brother and sister, Robert and Cicely. After due introductions, Muff rushed home in great excitement to announce: "There's another Hogg - a smaller one, with a funny name - Neptune or something." Thereon in, Aylwin was always known as Neptune to Mr Nelson, who insisted that the boy didn't like being called Pig. Rosemary remembers the Nelson household as a wonderfully happy home with "just the right hospitable but keep-out-of-the-way parents." Everyone there had a pet name. Aylwin, almost without exception, called Mrs Nelson by her nickname, Arab, but on occasions by her first name, May, which apparently amused them both as though they had a private joke going that no one else was allowed to share. Why Arab? Because Mrs Nelson's daily help boasted the same surname as the legendary T. E. Lawrence!

Aylwin, known as Pig, was a very close friend of both of Muff's brothers, RP and Bosh. He spent most of his weekends and holidays at their home where cricket, tennis, touch-rugger, and strange games of hockey were hilariously played. The girls would join in everything, even the rugger. These energetic bouts would be frequently followed by blowouts at Bunty's, the nearby café, and evenings were spent listening to records and playing riotous card games. Muff recalls Aylwin's lovely singing voice and tremendous sense of humour, along with a very serious, conscientious, thoughtful side to his nature. She and Aylwin became head girl and head boy together in their final year at St.

George's, in the same way as Cicely Nelson and Stephen Hogg had been five years earlier.

Aylwin also followed a family tradition by becoming captain of the Rugby XV. His sixth form master wrote:

I was very wide awake to his possibilities for I sensed in him great reserves and a high sense of purpose. He was modest to a degree and had true humility. Quiet and unassuming, he nevertheless was a dominating influence in the form. It was a joy to observe, in the years after he left, a new generation of prefects showing traits of character which they had unconsciously copied from him, so his influence lived on. It was equally a feature of his rigger that, in the hardest game, he always seemed to have something in reserve to call upon in an emergency.

Reports in the school magazine reveal further apparent admirable qualities, but he *was* prone to an occasional lapse of his sense of high purpose. On one such occasion, while a prefect in the fifth form, he and a few similarly mischievous friends "borrowed" a little car belonging to the French teacher, Miss Terry. Late at night they secretly drove a few miles out into the country to where the St. George's scout troop was camping, and let down all the tents onto the unsuspecting occupants. There was a terrific row the next day back at school. The headmaster, Cecil Grant, gave the culprits a sound caning, and they were all deposed from their positions of prefect for a couple of weeks. Muff got all the details of the escapade from a very shamefaced Fig. "He was a very upright boy and usually kept out of Roger's and David's ridiculous behaviour", recalls Muff. "While being very amused at

Roger's and David's doings, Aylwin worked hard and did well. He was very kind and gentle, and very understanding." Roger Hunter was in the same class as Aylwin, as was his other good friend David Proctor, known as Dippy. They were a very tight threesome all the way through school. Dippy remembers Aylwin as "a man of few words who strove for personal perfection. He never said anything without seeming to think carefully first about what he was going to say. Those few words always made sense."

When the time came for him to follow his three brothers to Wadham College, Oxford, Aylwin walked into the Wadham 1st XV, was elected secretary of the Rugby Football Club in his second year, and captained the College in 1937 just as his brothers had done in their turns. He also played regularly for the Oxford University Greyhounds Rugby Football Club and went on tour with them. The warden of Wadham, Maurice Bowra, wrote of Aylwin, "He has great reserves of character and seems to have some inner vision of his own which shows him where to go and what to do."

During the long vacations, Aylwin would visit the various countries of Europe, with little money in his pocket and expecting adventure. In 1935 he spent some weeks at the home of a German undergraduate friend whose father was a member of the Nazi Party. He was a landowner of considerable influence, and he took Aylwin about with him, explaining the various ways in which they were working for "the betterment of the people". Aylwin, naturally, had a good deal to say on the other side, and lively discussions followed.

In the summer vacation of 1936, Aylwin set out on a hitchhiking tour through central and southeastern Europe with £4 in his pocket and a Rhodes Scholar for a companion. En route to Dresden, via Cologne and Berlin, they gathered some interesting sidelights on events and opinions in the Reich. From Dresden they hitched to the

Czech border and the Sudetenland and thence to Aussig and Prague on practically anything that had wheels, asking searching questions of all and sundry. Their route took them through Bohemia to Austria; to Hungary, along the Szeged road to Arad in Transylvania; to Poland, through the High Tatra region; and so to Krakow.

The time had come for Aylwin to return and prepare for his last year at Oxford. So, bidding farewell to his companion, who had decided to go on to Russia, he set out alone on the return journey. At one town, which he reached so late that the workhouse was the only available sleeping place, he had the experience of being stripped of clothing and marched naked along the aisle between the rows of beds, whose occupants raised their heads to watch his slightly embarrassed progress.

After a few more days of hitching, he reached home in high spirits and with a keen realization of the rivalries and factions in Europe and a fairly representative knowledge of the poverty and dissatisfaction among the people, which augured ill for the future.