opening extract from

William at War (90th Anniversary Edition)

written by

Richmal Crompton

foreword by

Charlie Higson

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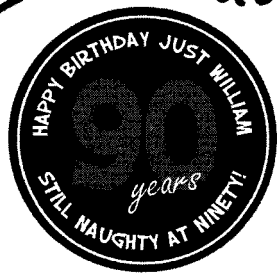
WILLIAM at war



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FOREWORD

I came to William Brown late in life. I was forty-odd, and had never read the books or seen any of the TV series, but I had three boys of my own and was always looking for ways to keep them entertained. They had an older cousin, Marlon, who handed down to them a battered cardboard box stuffed with cherished old cassette tapes. Surprisingly, apart from a couple of Masters of the Universe stories, they were all Just William tapes. I say surprisingly because, as might be surmised from his name, Marlon was a modern London teenager through and through, cynical, streetwise and surly. His dad assured me he had loved the tapes, but somehow I didn't think my own kids would be interested. All they seemed to like were computer games and bizarre impenetrable American cartoon shows. How could they could possible relate to some schoolboy from the 1930s? But I put a tape on for them one night and left them to it.

Ever since then my two youngest boys have gone

to sleep every single night to the sound of Martin Jarvis reading Richmal Crompton's ageless stories. They must have heard those tapes hundreds of times – no, thousands. The originals are worn out, replaced and updated from the huge library available. I don't know if the boys even hear the words any more, or if they have simply developed a Pavlovian response to Martin Jarvis, whose voice transports them to a safe and comforting world of tea-parties, scraped knees and an endless sunny summer's afternoon that has lasted ninety years.

Listening with the kids on car journeys and in hotel bedrooms, I've grown to love the stories just as much as they have. The only problem is that when I read the originals I can't get Martin Jarvis's voice out of my head, and can't imagine how Richmal Crompton thought the boy should sound. Martin Jarvis is William Brown.

And I understand now why the stories cast such a spell over my own kids. They are boys and William is a boy, and Marlon was a boy, and boys are the same the world over and have always been the same,

and probably always will be. And we never grow up. William is essence of boy. He has everything a boy could want – a dog, a stick, a penknife, a gang, a den, trees to climb, stones to throw, sweets in his pocket . . . Also, in these stories there's a war on, sheer bliss for an eleven-year-old boy, so there's shrapnel to collect, soldiers to admire, parachutists to spot, spies to thwart. There is no death and hardship and horror, but the William stories are nevertheless quite tough. William and his gang are always getting into punch-ups and some of his exploits would be quite alarming to a namby-pamby, overprotective modern parent. Today William would probably be put into therapy and made the subject of a documentary on Channel Five. Except, of course, William always gets away with it. Despite the trail of chaos and anarchy he leaves behind, he always ends up as the only thing that any boy has ever wanted to be. A hero.

Charlie Higson

CHAPTER I

WILLIAM AND A.R.P.

'WELL, I don' see why we shun't have one, too,' said William morosely. 'Grown-ups get all the fun.'

'They *say* it's not fun,' said Ginger.

'Yes, they say that jus' to put us off,' said William. 'I bet it *is* fun all right. I bet it'd be fun if *we* had one, anyway.'

'Why don't we have one?'

'I asked 'em that. I said, "Why can't we have one?" an' they said, "Course you can't. Don't be so silly." Silly! S'not *us* what's silly, an' I told 'em so. I bet we could do it as well as what they do. Better, come to that. Yes, I bet that's what they're frightened of – us doin' it better than what they do.'

'What do they do, anyway?' demanded Douglas.

'They have a jolly good time,' said William vaguely. 'Smellin' gases an' bandagin' each other an' tryin' on their gas masks. I bet they bounce out at each other in their gas masks, givin' each other frights. I've thought of lots of

games you could play with gas masks, but no one'll let me try. They keep mine locked up. Lot of good it'll be in a war locked up where I can't get at it. Huh!'

There was a pause, during which the Outlaws silently contemplated the absurdity of this situation.

'I told 'em I ought to be able to wear it a bit each day jus' for practice,' went on William. 'I told 'em I wouldn't be much use in a war 'less I did. Why, anyone'd think they *wanted* me to get killed, keepin' my gas mask where I can't get at it. It's same as murder. Just 'cause of us playin' gladiators in 'em the first day we got 'em! Well, the bit of damage it did was easy to put right. It was a jolly good thing really, 'cause it sort of showed where it was weak. They said I'd been *rough* on it. Well, if war's not s'posed to be *rough* I don't know what is. Seems cracked to me to have somethin' for a war you can't be *rough* in. I bet they're rough in 'em in those ole classes they go to.'

'Well, even if they won't let us go to theirs,' said Ginger, 'I don't see they could stop us havin' one of our own.'

'No, that's a jolly good idea,' said William, brightening. 'A jolly good idea. They can't stop us doin' that.'

'We'll call it A.R.P. Junior Branch,' suggested Ginger. 'Same as what they do with Conservative Clubs an' things.'

'Yes,' agreed William. 'A.R.P. Junior Branch. An' we'll do the same things they do an' do 'em a jolly sight better.

I bet they'll be jolly grateful to us when a war comes along. I bet we'll save the country while they're messin' about tryin' to remember where they put their gas masks. If they won't let me have mine, I'll make one. I bet they're quite easy to make. Jus' a bit of ole mackintosh cut round for a face an' a sort of tin with holes to breathe through. I've got an ole mackintosh an' the tin I keep my caterpillars in'd do to breathe through. It's got holes in ready, an' I bet, if caterpillars can breathe through it, I can. Only two of 'em've died.'

William and Ginger canvassed the junior inhabitants of the village that evening, and Henry and Douglas wrote out the notice and prepared the old barn for the meeting. The preparation of the old barn was not difficult. It consisted simply of an ancient packing case for William's use as lecturer and demonstrator. The audience was expected to sit on the floor. The audience generally did sit on the floor. It grumbled, but it put up with it. The notice was the work of Ginger alone. It was executed in blacking ('borrowed' from the kitchen) on a piece of cardboard broken from the box in which his mother kept her best hat. It ran:

AIR RADE PRECORSHUN
JUNIER BRANCH
ENTRUNCE FRE.

'They'll come if it's free,' said Douglas, with a tinge of bitterness in his voice. 'They always come to free things.'

'They'll jolly well have to come,' said William sternly. 'What'll they do in a war if they don't know how to do it? They've gotter learn same as grown-ups. I bet they'll feel jolly silly, the grown-ups, when this war comes along an' we do it all a jolly sight better than what they do. P'raps they won't put on such a lot of swank after *that*. I bet they *knew* we'd do it better than them, an' that's why they've been tryin' to keep us out of it. Huh!'

At the time advertised for the meeting, a thin stream of children began to trickle over the fields to the old barn. There were Victor Jameson and Ronald Bell – always friends and supporters of the Outlaws – Arabella Simpkins, a red-haired, sharp-featured maiden of domineering disposition, dragging after her a small sister exactly like her, and a rag, tag, and bob-tail of juveniles. With much scuffling and shouting and criticising of the accommodation provided, they settled themselves on the floor. William's mounting upon the packing case was the signal for cheers that increased in volume as the rotten wood gave way and he disappeared backwards. He picked himself up with a not very successful attempt at dignity, smoothed back his hair, collected the scattered sheaves of his lecture notes, scowled round upon his audience, and,

putting several bits of broken wood together for a platform, took his stand on it precariously.

'Ladies an' gentl'men,' he shouted above the uproar, which was still far from subsiding, 'will you kindly shut up an' listen to me? I'm goin' to tell you how to win the war. Well, d'you want to win the war, or *don't* you . . . Arabella Simpkins, shut up makin' all that noise . . . Victor Jameson, I tell you I'm tellin' you how to win the war . . . You'll be sorry you've not listened when it comes an' you're all blown to bits. You've gotter listen to me, if you want to win the war. D'you want to be blown to bits by bombs an' balloons an' things jus' 'cause you wouldn't shut up an' listen to me? . . . I *didn't* start her howling. She started herself . . . Well, I only said she'd be blown to bits if she didn't listen. I *never* said I'd blow her to bits . . . All right, *tell* your mother. I don't care . . . All right, *take* her home an' I'm jolly glad you're goin' . . . Shut *up,* all of you!'

After the departure of Arabella Simpkins with her small sister – the small sister still howling, and Arabella still threatening reprisals – the uproar subsided slightly, and William, purple-faced and hoarse with shouting, turned to his typewritten papers. They were the notes of Ethel's A.R.P. classes, which he had managed to abstract from her writing desk, and he had not had time to look through them before the lecture.

'LADIES AN' GENTL'MEN,' HE SHOUTED ABOVE THE UPROAR, 'WILL YOU KINDLY SHUT UP AN' LISTEN TO ME? I'M GOIN' TO TELL YOU HOW TO WIN THE WAR.'

'Now, listen,' he said, 'an' I'll tell you all about these gases an' suchlike. They're' – he studied his notes with frowning concentration – 'per-sis-tent! That's what they are.

Per-sis-tent. Well, that's what it says here. It *mus'* be right, mus'n't it, if it says so here? An' there's one – well, it's got a long name, I won't say it to you 'cause you can't understand it, an' it smells like pear drops. It *says* so, I tell you. Shut up . . . No, I've not got any pear drops. I never said I'd got any pear drops. Why don't you *listen* when I'm givin' a lecture? I wouldn't give you any if I had, either, not with you not

giving me any of your liquorice all-sorts last Sat'day. You *had* got some. You were eatin' 'em. Shut *up* about pear drops. I never said a bomb was made of pear drops. I said it *smelt* of 'em . . . Well,' uncertainly, 'p'raps it is. P'raps it is made of pear drops. No, it doesn't say so here . . . Well, so are you, anyway . . . I didn't. I said the bombs *smelt* of 'em . . . It says so here . . . I dunno . . . All right, if you don't want to listen, *don't*. I don't care . . . No, I've not gotter bomb. Shut up about pear drops. I'm sick of 'em. I'm not talking about pear drops. I'm tellin' you how to win the war . . . Well, you gotter know what bombs smell like to win a war, haven't you? I *do* know what I'm talkin' about . . . I never said they dropped pear drops. I said they dropped bombs. I said these bombs smelt of pear drops . . . I *dunno* why they smell of pear drops . . . Listen,' he pleaded, hastily scanning his paper, 'I'll tell you somethin' else if you'll listen . . .'

But the meeting was breaking up in disorder. Its members had seized on the subject of pear drops and refused to be diverted from it. In any case, they wanted to do something a little more exciting than sit and listen to William holding forth from a typewritten paper. William was not altogether sorry for the curtailment of his lecture. He had caught a glimpse of several lengthy and quite unintelligible words further down on the sheet and was glad to be rescued from them.

'All right,' he said. 'We'll do bandagin' next. We've got some bandagin' things.'

Several members of his audience, however, refused to stay.

'Said he was goin' to tell us how to win the war, an' all he could do was talk about *pear drops,*' they said indignantly. '*Pear drops.* Tellin' us what *pear drops* smell like. I bet we know what *pear drops* smell like all right without *him* tellin' us. Batty. That's what he is.'

They lingered only to exchange a brisk volley of insults with the Outlaws, ending on both sides when further invention failed with 'Pear drop yourself!' then took their way over the field to the village to resume the normal activities of their life.

'*Now*,' said William, addressing his depleted audience, 'we've gotter practise bandagin'. That's what *they* do. Then, when people get blown up by these pear – I mean bombs – you can bandage 'em up . . . Where's the bandagin' things, Henry?'

Henry, with an air of modest pride, brought out a cardboard dress-box full of a strange assortment of ribbons, straps, bits of material, with a few genuine bandages somewhat grimy and blood-stained. Henry's mother was what is known as a 'hoarder', and Henry had carefully gone through the cardboard boxes of odds and

ends that she kept in the spare bedroom and taken out everything that could possibly, by any stretch of the imagination, figure as a 'bandage'. He assuaged his conscience (for Henry was a conscientious boy) by the reflection that they had been put there in case they should ever 'come in useful', and that that contingency had now arrived. The real bandages he had acquired the evening before by an act of stupendous heroism – deliberately drawing blood by means of a blunt penknife on both legs and an arm.

'Gracious, child!' his mother had said. 'What on *earth* have you been doing?'

'I – sort of slipped against somethin',' said Henry vaguely.

His mother was fortunately a generous bandager, and Henry had thus acquired three bandages of enormous length that, cut into smaller portions, made a brave show.

'Now,' ordered William, 'one of every two's gotter have a bandage an' bandage the other. Then do it the other way round. That's what we've gotter do now. Practise bandagin' each other up for when we get blown to pieces by these pear – these bombs. Let's start on each other's heads an' work down to each other's feet. That's the way they do it. We've gotter work very hard with this. All these bits of stuff an' ribbons an' things'll do jus' as well as real bandages. Jus' to practise on. Now we'll start on heads. Have you all got

somethin' to bandage with? Well, start when I say "go" an' see who can finish first. One . . . two . . . three . . . *Go!*'

The free fight that ensued was, perhaps, only to be expected. Each pair was scuffling for the possession of the bandage even before the signal for the bandage race was given. The bandaging of heads degenerated almost at once into the punching of heads. Bandages were used as weapons to trip up, to gag, to tie up, to flick, and generally to obstruct, harass and annoy. Old scores were wiped off, new scores were accumulated – all in a gloriously carefree spirit of give and take. The barn was full of joyously shouting, scuffling, fighting boys.

At first William tried to quell the uproar.

'*Stop* it,' he shouted sternly. 'Stop it an' get on bandagin'. It's a *bandagin'* class, I tell you, not a wild-beast fight. Don't you want to *learn* to bandage each other when these pear—?'

At this moment Victor Jameson lassoed him from behind with a piece of black velvet that had formed the belt of Henry's mother's last year's evening dress, and he went crashing to the ground. After that he forgot about the bandaging and joined heartily in the fight, shouting encouragement and defiance to everyone round him indiscriminately. It wasn't till the bandages were reduced to shreds that they stopped, breathless and exhilarated, and

surveyed the battlefield. Bits of material were in their hair and eyes and noses and all over their clothes. They looked like the survivors of a remnant sale . . .

'I got you in a jolly good one,' panted William to Ginger.

'Yes,' said Ginger, 'an' I got you a jolly good one back.'

'You went with a jolly fine wallop when I tripped you up,' panted Victor Jameson.

'Yes, an' I'd've tied you up if the bandage hadn't broke. I'd got it right round your legs.'

A small boy near the door was howling loudly and asserting that someone had pinched his bandage and stuck their finger in his eye.

'I'm goin' home,' he bawled. 'I'm not learnin' to win no more wars. It's nothin' but people talkin' about pear drops, an' pinchin' your bandage, an' stickin' their fingers in your eyes . . . It's not fair . . . I'm goin' to tell my mother.'

'All right,' said William. 'Go home. We don't want you. That's the end of the bandagin' class, anyway.'

The small boy departed still howling, followed by one or two others who had fared badly in the bandage fight.

Though still further depleted in numbers, the temperature of the A.R.P. class was now considerably raised. Its members were ready and eager for the next adventure.

'Come on,' said Ginger gleefully. 'What do we do next?'

William looked a little doubtful.

'Well, they practise wearin' their gas masks,' he said, 'but we can't do that 'cause we've not got 'em. I tried makin' one with a bit of ole mackintosh an' a tin, but the tin wouldn't stay in the hole.'

A faint anxiety clouded his spirit at the memory. It had certainly been an old mackintosh, but he wasn't really sure that it was old enough to be cut up into a gas mask. He had hung it in the hall so that the hole did not show, but his mother was certain to discover it sooner or later. She might even be discovering it at that moment . . . But the exhilaration of the bandage fight still remained, and he decided not to waste the glorious present in anticipating trouble.

'We only want things over our faces,' Ronald Bell was saying. 'Anythin' over our faces'd do for gas masks.'

Henry had a sudden inspiration.

'Flower pots!' he yelled excitedly. 'Flower pots! We've got some big 'uns. Come on!'

Whooping, shouting, leaping, they ran across the field, down the road, to Henry's home.

'Come in at the back garden,' said Henry. 'They're by the greenhouse. An' this is the day the ole gard'ner doesn't come. Don't make a noise.'

They entered the garden gate in single file and looked warily around them. The garden was empty. No one was

in sight. By the greenhouse stood piles of large red flower pots, in which the gardener meant to pot his chrysanthemums the next morning. Henry tried one on. It completely enveloped his face.

His voice came muffled, but joyous, from behind it. 'Come on. Put 'em on. They make jolly fine gas masks.'

Hilariously the band put the flower pots over their heads and began to leap about in wild excitement. They did not intend to do anything beyond leaping about, but the spirit of the bandage fight still lingered with them, and they were soon charging each other with re-echoing war whoops, putting on new flower pots as the old ones were shattered. They went on till no new flower pots were left, and the place was littered with fragments of pottery. Then they stopped and looked at each other in growing dismay.

Henry glanced apprehensively towards the house.

'Gosh!' he said. 'It's a good thing my mother's out, an' Cook puts on the wireless loud 'cause she's deaf. Let's get away quick.'

They hurried from the scene of the crime as fast as they could.

'P'raps they'll think it was an aeroplane accident or somethin',' said Ginger hopefully.

'An' p'raps they won't,' said Henry. 'More like they'll

start on me straight away without even givin' me a chance to explain, same as they always do.'

'Tell 'em we were only havin' gas-mask drill,' said William. 'Tell 'em it was their fault for keepin' our gas masks locked up.'

'Yes,' said Henry sarcastically. 'Yes, that'll do a lot of good, won't it?'

A few of the more fearful spirits at this point decided that they had had enough A.R.P. practice for one day and set off homewards (by a miracle the casualties of the flower-pot fight consisted of nothing more than a few scratches), but the Outlaws, with Ronald Bell and Victor Jameson and a few other brave spirits, felt this to be a tame ending. The exhilaration of the two fights had produced a spirit of dare-devil recklessness. They were all going to get into trouble, anyway, over Henry's flower pots, and they might as well, they felt, be killed for the proverbial sheep.

'Come on,' said Ginger. 'Let's do somethin' else. What else do they do?'

William considered.

'Well,' he said, 'there *was* somethin' else. I saw it in Robert's book. It was called a jolly long name – somethin' beginnin' with De. Detramination, or somethin'. It was takin' all your clothes off an' havin' a hose pipe turned on you.'

'Come on!' they shouted with whoops of joy. 'Come on!'

'Come to my house,' yelled Ginger. 'It's nearest. An' my mother's out, too, an' the hose pipe's right at the bottom of the garden. I bet no one sees us . . .'

It was, however, Ginger's mother, who, returning about a quarter of an hour later, came upon the disgraceful scene – a wild medley of naked boys on the lawn, wrestling and leaping about in the full play of the garden hose, manipulated by Ginger. Their clothes, which they had flung carelessly on the grass beside them, were soaked through . . .

That, of course, and its painful sequel, should have been the end of the A.R.P. as far as William was concerned. He fully intended that it should be. He meant to have no more dealings with it of any kind. He even abandoned a secretly cherished project of turning the spare bedroom into a gas-proof chamber, as a pleasant surprise for his family ('Jolly well serve 'em right now not to have one,' he said bitterly to himself). He glared ferociously at a heading in his father's newspaper, 'A.R.P. Muddle', thinking at first that it must be making fun of his short-lived, but eventful, leadership of the A.R.P. Junior Branch. ('Muddle!' he muttered. 'We didn't do a *thing* that wasn't in the book.

They can go on doin' it for weeks an' weeks an' no one stops 'em, but the minute we *start* they set on us. Well, they'll jolly well be sorry when the war comes, that's all, an' it'll be their own faults.')

If it hadn't been for the local 'black-out', William would not have given the thing another thought except as a faint memory of a glorious day followed by much ill-merited suffering. But the local 'black-out' thrilled and impressed him, and made him long again to take his part in the great national movement. The dark roads, the shuttered windows, the blazing search-lights, the sound of the aeroplanes roaring overhead, stirred his blood, and he wanted to be up and doing – shooting down aeroplanes, or fighting with them in the search-lit sky. He took his air-gun and pointed it upwards between the drawn curtains.

'Bang, bang! That's got 'em,' he muttered with satisfaction. 'That's got 'em all right! Listen to 'em comin' down. That's got another. *An'* another.'

As he dressed the next morning he decided that the failure of his previous attempts at A.R.P. work lay in the large number of its participants.

'When there's a lot of 'em they always start gettin' rough,' he said sternly, scowling at his reflection in the mirror and brushing his hair with almost vindictive energy.

'Always start gettin' rough when there's a lot of 'em. I bet if I'd done somethin' alone it'd've been all right . . . *I bet* it would . . .'

After breakfast he happened to see the *National Service Handbook* lying on his mother's writing desk. It had only arrived a few days before, and he had not had an opportunity of examining it yet. He took it up and turned over the pages with interest. Police . . . Fire Service . . . First Aid . . . Not much he could do . . . Then he began to read with interest the section headed: 'Evacuation of Children from Dangerous Areas'. 'Removing children from the dangers of air attack on crowded cities to districts of greater safety.' Well, he could help with that, all right. Anyone could help with that. An' he'd do it himself, too, not get in a lot of other people. It was that that had messed things up before . . . Hadley would come under the heading of a crowded city, surely . . . It had shops and streets and rows of houses, and it was jolly crowded, especially on market day. And – William threw a glance out of the window – this must be a district of greater safety, all fields and hedges and that sort of thing. Well – he could easily fetch children in here from Hadley. He wouldn't mind doing that. In fact, his spirits rose as he saw himself bringing in a swarm of Hadley children, rather in the manner of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and establishing them in his home, and those of his friends.

He couldn't do it till there was a war, of course, but he'd do it then, all right. He'd start off as soon as the war broke out. People'd be jolly grateful to him . . .

That afternoon, having nothing much else to do, he set out for Hadley in order to study it in its new light of danger zone. Yes, there were quite a lot of people in the High Street and in the Market Square. It certainly came under the heading of 'crowded city'. He'd collect as many of the children as he could as soon as the war broke out, and escort them at once to the safer surroundings of his home. No one could object to his doing something that he was told to do in a book sent out by the Government . . .

Dismissing the subject for a time, he gave his whole attention to examining the windows of Hadley's leading toyshop. He spent several minutes in comparing the different merits of a *6d.* pistol and a *6d.* trumpet – a purely academic process, as he possessed no money at all. Having, after deep thought, decided in favour of the pistol, he was just about to move on to the sweetshop next door in order to make a theoretical choice between the wares in that window, too, when he banged into two children who were standing watching him. They were stolid, four-square children and exactly alike – with red hair and placid, amiable expressions.

'Well, what're you starin' at?' demanded William truculently.

'You,' they said simultaneously.

'Anythin' funny about me?' he said threateningly.

'Yes,' they said.

This took the wind out of his sails, and he said rather flatly:

'Well, you're jolly funny yourselves, come to that. What've you done to your hair?'

'What've you done to yours?'

'Funny colour for hair, yours.'

'Well, yours is all stickin' up.'

'You look like a couple of Guy Fawkes.'

'So do you. You look like two couples.'

Friendly relations having been thus established, William continued:

'How old are you?'

'Seven.'

'Both of you?'

'Yes, we're twins. How old are you?'

'Eleven. What's your names?'

'Hector an' Herbert. What's yours?'

'William. Where d'you live?'

'There. In that street.'

William's gaze followed the direction of the pointing

'WELL, WHAT'RE YOU STARIN' AT?' DEMANDED WILLIAM TRUCULENTLY.
'YOU,' THEY SAID SIMULTANEOUSLY.

fingers. It was one of the narrow, crowded streets that ran off from the High Street – one of the streets, without doubt, from which William would have to rescue his child

protégés when the time of emergency should come. It occurred to him that he might as well explain matters to the twjns. There wouldn't be much time for explanation when war had actually broken out. He assumed his sternest expression and most authoritative manner.

'You've gotter be 'vacuated when war comes,' he said.

'We've been it,' said Herbert. 'Our arms swelled up somethink awful.'

'I don't mean that sort of 'vacuation,' said William. 'I mean, took out. Took out of crowded cities to districts of greater safety, same as it says in the book. 'Cause of bombs an' things.'

Light dawned upon the twins. Their eyes gleamed. They leapt excitedly up and down on the pavement with squeals of joy. They had had staying with them recently some cousins from London who had been evacuated in the last crisis and who had told them thrilling tales of camp life – games, entertainment, unlimited food of unusual kinds, and a glorious crumbling of the whole fabric of discipline.

'Coo! Lovely!' said Hector.

Herbert looked expectantly at William and said simply:

'Come on. Let's start now.'

William was somewhat taken aback by their matter-of-

fact acceptance of the position. He had expected to have to explain, persuade, cajole . . .

'Well . . .' he began uncertainly, but Herbert had already taken his hand.

'Come on,' he said urgently. 'Let's start off. Shall we have sausage an' fried potato for breakfast, same as they had?'

'Well . . .' began William again, and then thought suddenly that he might as well take them up to the village. It would show them the way. They would be able to help him bring the other children when the war broke out. It would save time then to have two, at any rate, who knew just where to go.

'All right,' he ended. 'We might as well jus' go there . . .'

They accompanied him joyously up the hill to the village, telling him excitedly all the stories that their cousins had told them.

'They had a tug-of-war.'

'They had sports every afternoon.'

'They had picnics.'

'They had treacle tart.'

'They jus' had a few lessons, but not real 'uns.'

'It was jus' like Christmas.'

'They made as much noise as they liked, an' no one stopped them.'