

CHAPTER XIII

The summer half was almost over. Trials, O.T.C. camp, and then the holidays.

Owen Jones and North were holding an auction sale of their minor belongings. Taunton acted as auctioneer.

"Now, gentlemen," said Taunton. "Here is a set of huntin' prints of unknown value. Even if you don't hunt, no lower boy can afford to be without a knowledge of the sport of kings."

"Racing, not hunting," said Owen Jones.

"Never mind," said Taunton. "Leighton Minor, I happen to know you want a set of huntin' pictures.

"No thanks, Taunton," said Leighton Minor, edging away behind a group of friends.

"We can't have that, can we, ladies and gentlemen?" said Taunton. "Here's a gentleman who wants to buy but hasn't the courage to say so. Well, Leighton Minor, I'll start the bidding for you. Shall we say half a crown?" Leighton Minor turned very red and said nothing. "Thank you, two shillings and sixpence, bid by Leighton Minor. Come along, gentlemen, these prints may be extremely valuable for all we know. Ockley? Featherstone? Holmes-Norton? I'm sure you'd like some huntin' prints, Holmes-Norton? No? Well, you surprise me. Going to Leighton Minor for half a crown. Going. Going."

"Five shillings," said a voice from behind. Owen Jones and North sat with Swinley and looked innocently before them.

"Five shillings," said Taunton. "I am bid five shillings for these amazing prints of priceless value."

"They are priceless," said Oliver.

Taunton ignored him. "Any advance on five shillings? Five and sixpence, did I hear you say Leighton. I accept your bid." Leighton Minor smiled sheepishly. He would have to ask for some more journey money. "Five and sixpence from Leighton Minor. Going. Going. Gone," and he smashed a clothes brush on the table. "There you are Leighton, and I congratulate you."

"Thanks, Taunton." He took the prints and departed.

"The next lot," said Taunton, "is literature, which throws unexpected light on the study of the classics." General laughter among the audience. "I will therefore offer it separately. First we have the eminent and highly esteemed Mr. Kelly." Shouts of applause. "Author of the series known as Kelly's keys to the classics. Virgil, Aeneid, Book two. Now, gentlemen, read Mr. Kelly and improve your order cards. What am I bid?"

"Two bob," said Warburton.

"Two and six," said Featherstone.

"What, half a crown from a member of the debate?" said Taunton. "The debate should save their half-crowns for other occasions." The lower boys laughed appreciatively.

"Three shillings," said Warburton.

"Three and six," said Featherstone.

"Four shillings."

"Four and six." The room was temporarily quiet. Mr. Kelly might have been an important Rembrandt.

"Any advance on four and six?" said Taunton. There were hurried whisperings in the corner.

"Will you let me use it?" said Warburton.

"All right, when I don't want it."

"Any advance on four and sixpence? Going. Going. Gone to Mr. Featherstone, and if you get a distinction in trials I'm afraid I shall have to write to m'tutor about it," said Taunton.

Other works by Mr. Kelly and Dr. Giles, author of the equally famous series. Dr. Giles's classical translations were knocked down for double their value, as the booksellers

in Eton and Windsor were becoming more and more reluctant to stock cribs and run the risk of being put out of bounds. The audience hailed each new work with loud cheers. North and Owen Jones sat, grinning in the corner, while the sources of their classical inspiration were offered for sale. Members of middle division snapped them up and smiled at the years of idleness which lay ahead—provided the texts were literal. For both Kelly and Giles had a tiresome habit of omitting altogether a passage in the translation, or, worse still, of rendering in their flowery manner a sentence, which, for propriety's sake, had been cut from the school edition. Kellyites were always being caught for construing more rather than less than their set share.

Division work was nearly over and trials were about to begin. Denis, Robin, and Peter had nothing to fear, as they had taken the School Certificate and were excused trials. Next half they would be able to specialise and all three had chosen history.

"Ah, gentlemen, ah. Offal bawer, Manley," said Denis.

"If we're only up to Raven," said Robin. "But we may be up to Fatty. I've got no use for Fatty."

"I like him," said Denis. "Besides the poor brute is always ill. He spews after every meal, so I heard. I don't wonder he's bad tempered."

The last hour with Hunter was peaceful. No one ragged him and a certain amount of work was done. Denis put his back into an unseen construe and Shivers became excited.

"Good, Bailey. That's more like construe. That's enough. Next." But Shivers's enthusiasm soon cooled. Some boys could, and others simply could not, and however much they tried, it was difficult to sustain interest in the sense of a piece of Latin, when every other word was a stumbling block."

On the last Sunday of the half, Denis went to tea with Shivers and stayed till chapel.

"Where are you going in the holidays?" said Hunter.

"Home, sir, after camp. Speenmouth near Barford, do you know it?"

"I've heard of it," said Hunter.

"And then up to stay with some friends in Scotland, I hope. Are you staying here, sir?"

"Good gracious, no. I'm doing a walking tour with . . . Mr. Cherry." Shivers hesitated to name Mr. Cherry. Everyone in the school knew that they were great friends, but Shivers alone knew that Mr. Cherry was the only man on the staff he could call his friend, and the life of a master makes it hard to keep up acquaintances in the outside world. Shivers, as other senior beaks, had got into a rut, and an academic sort of rut, from which his old Oxford friends had utterly failed to move him. The long holidays of a public school master have their compensations.

Denis thought of Shivers in open shirt and shorts, striding along the road with Mr. Cherry.

"Where are you going, sir?"

"We're not certain. Probably the Lake district and into Scotland."

"How lovely," said Denis.

"And next half you will be specialising," said Shivers. "I hope you will like history."

"It's my favourite subject, sir, after drawing."

"A knowledge of history is a great thing," said Shivers sadly. "I hope you won't forget all your classics."

"Of course not," said Denis.

There was a silence.

"I am afraid I can't give you a prize for your division order this half." Shivers laughed.

"No, sir."

"But I'd like you to have something, by which to remember your time with me." He went over to a table and picked up a book. "*The Rose and the Ring*; I hope you'll like it."

"It's awfully good of you, sir. How ripping." He turned

over the pages. "I say, sir, I'm sorry if I ragged you this half. I didn't mean to ; but you know what it's like with other fellows."

"I know," said Shivers. "I hoped you would have done better this half, but perhaps you will get on in history. I shall miss you."

"I'm sorry to be leaving your division, sir."

They talked of the holidays and Denis said good-bye.

Outside the house he looked inside the book. "D. Bailey with kind wishes from Clarence Hunter." Clarence. What a name. Lucky for Shivers that no one seemed to know he was called Clarence. He wondered why Shivers had given him a book. What a funny old bird he was.

Cricket was over, except for the final of the house match. On Agars Plough, Macfarlane's and Huntley's were fighting out an even game. The sun was scorching and the turf was hard and cracked.

"I'm sick of this," said Peter. "What happens if they don't finish it to-night?"

"They have to go on to-morrow and come on late to camp. Huntley's ought to win."

"About the middle of next week. Let's go down town and get some fags to take with us to-morrow. We parade at some godless hour."

"We must look for the hag, if she comes round to-night," said Denis. "Last year she caught Featherstone with a hundred cigarettes and tobacco."

"We'll get some crème de menthe, and put them in the tins. We shall want some oranges too. It will be bloody hot in the train."

They went back through the playing fields. On Upper Club the elms were heavy and white with dust from the Slough road. Stumps had been put away for another year, but there were brown scrares in the turf, where the first and second elevens had batted and bowled. The river had sunk from sight during the long drought. A couple of pops in light grey flannels and house colour blazers sat on Fourth

Form Bench, and watched the thin trickle of Jordan river, where it mingled with the Thames. The backwater, which ran up beside Fellows' Eyot, was hard, dry mud. College Field, where Y company had stamped and sweated on the spring turf, was now a sunburnt desert, and the long grass under the elms was rank and coarse and yellow. Fellows' Pond was a stagnant slough. Twice during the half Denis had gone fishing with a boy from Huntley's, who knew how to throw out a triple barbed hook and jerk it into the sides of the pike, as they basked in the sun. He had lent Denis his rod, but he only roused the pike with his ill-timed splashes. The other boy had landed several fish, which fought all the fiercer for being foul-hooked in the flank. But now the pond was low and full of weed. The snake stems of the water lilies had spread their flat leaves from bank to bank. There was something foul and horrid about the place.

The sun blinds were out down town. On the marble slabs of the fish-shop, plaice and cod lay limp and tired in the heat. Black corps coats were being rolled in the tailors, ready to be sent up to the houses the same evening.

"You keep watch," said Peter, "while I skip in here. What do you want?"

"Anything you like. Same as you."

"A hundred Abdullas? Right, here goes." He dived into the tobacconist's. Two men were at the counter, buying a pipe. The shopkeeper saw Peter and excused himself.

"Two hundreds of Abdullas, quick," said Peter.

"I say, you're attending to us, I thought," said one of the men. "What's the price of this briar?"

"Four and six," said the tobacconist. "You'll excuse me a second, gentlemen."

"Hang it, can't you wait till I've finished? First come, first served, I always thought. What about this pipe here?"

Peter stood in the background. He was very calm. "Serve these people first, if they are in a hurry," he said.

A face appeared at the door. "Stay where you are. Beaks. I'll tell you when it's safe." Denis strolled towards the masters and raised one finger in a slovenly salute. He gazed into New & Lingwood's window till the beaks had passed. In the shop the two men turned round and stared at Peter with interest. He took the two boxes of cigarettes and stowed them in his tailcoat pockets.

"All clear," said Denis, and Peter joined him.

"Collegers have to be served before us," said one of the men.

"Bloody cads," said Peter. "I think I showed them."

Denis and Peter went down a lane to the right. The lane itself was out of bounds, but it led direct to the college boathouse. From the river bank they wandered back across South Meadow.

"In two month's time the goal posts will be up," said Denis.

"I played my first game on South Meadow," said Peter.

"How silly it all seems in summer. I must say I've enjoyed this half."

"Not so bad," said Peter. "I'm glad you joined our mess. We should never have made friends otherwise."

"I suppose not."

"I always looked on you as a bit of a sap, you know. You and Manley. It only shows how wrong you can be."

"Most people did," said Denis.

"I can't think how anyone makes friends at all," said Peter. "The whole business is a bloody fluke. You make friends with people because they are good at games, or aren't. Or because they are new boys together or are in the same division and can use each other's crib."

"I messed with Featherstone my first half," said Denis. "God knows why. He asked me, I believe."

"I've made damned few friends, I suppose," said Peter. "I knew Oliver and Spencer-Mace at my private school, and I shouldn't have asked that little worm to mess, if I had known anyone else."

"And I shouldn't have chosen Featherstone of my own free will ; though he's not so bad when you get to know him, as you said. But you're right. You don't choose your own friends. Nobody messes with anyone because they like them in the first place. I like you Peter, because, because you're a damned good chap. But I don't know why we started messing together."

"Didn't I ask you ?"

"I can't remember."

"Anyhow, we shall probably never see each other again after we've left."

"Why do you say that ? We shall go on being friends, shan't we ?"

"I hope so. If you want to. But Farrar, who left last year, told me that you make entirely different friends at the Varsity, and he never saw a soul from m'tutor's except Hurlingham."

"I wonder why," said Denis.

"There's no reason why they should. We're all chucked together in the same house, and we've got to mess with somebody."

"Friendships are based on the same sort of tastes in the end, I suppose," said Denis.

"But no one has any tastes at Eton, unless you count socking and games."

"They develop later. But I hope we shall go on being friends, Peter."

"Unless you develop a taste for Art with a big A and long hair."

"Or you become a guardee."

"No fear of that."

The red block of the science schools came in sight.

"By God," said Denis, "It seems as if this half finished years ago."

"It's the last time I shall watch Wilson's little experiments."

"I've almost forgotten what a retort stand looks like. Let's go inside, if it's open."

"Christ," said Peter. "What a graveyard smell there is. I'm Wilson." He mounted the dais and seized a pointer. "Now boys, hurry up, hurry up. Bailey, you're late. Fifty lines."

"Can we try the Magdeburg hemispheres again, please sir."

"Do you remember Fortnum?" Fortnum was the school heavyweight boxer.

"Do I not?" said Denis. "And Wilson was so proud of his experiment."

"Fortnum," said Peter. "Come here. Gentlemen, I have now pumped all the air out of these two hemispheres. There is now a vacuum inside and the pressure of the atmosphere outside in consequence renders them inseparable. Fortnum, take this end. Gentlemen, we will now endeavour to part the hemispheres against the pressure of the atmosphere."

"Ten to one against the atmosphere," said Denis. Peter went through the motions of a frantic tug-of-war and collapsed in Wilson's chair.

"And I shall never forget Fortnum's face," said Denis. "He just stood there, holding his half with a look of faint surprise, as if he had done something wrong."

"Not so surprised as poor little Wilson was."

"I'm rather sorry stinks are over. We had some damned good rags."

"Don't get sentimental. Think of all the poenas Wilson gave you."

"Well, old boy." Denis took Mr. Wilson's skeleton by a yellowish rib. "I hope you'll enjoy your holidays. Don't catch a chill with nothing on. Here, you shall wear your master's ancient gown. Doesn't he look nice, Peter?"

"Stick the mortarboard on while you're about it."

"Mr. Wilson, about to enter the next world in cap and gown," said Denis.

"Messrs. Bailey and Ockley about to enter the school

stores," said Peter. "Come on ; time for a last mess before lock-up." They left the skeleton in cap and gown and closed the science room door behind them.

During supper Spencer-Mace made a last attempt to get off camp. "Of course, I'm longing to go, ma'am ; but do you think I ought to with this cold ? I might give it to the whole corps, mightn't I ?"

"Now, go on, Spencer-Mace," said Miss Fuller. "I know your little tricks."

"But m'dame, what would happen if the whole O.T.C. caught my cold ?"

"Camp would break up and you'd be a school hero for the first and last time in your life," said Oliver.

"Oh, shut up, Oliver," said Spencer-Mace. "But ma'am, really, do you think I ought to go ?"

"It will do you a lot of good. And you'll enjoy it once you're there."

"You won't," said Oliver. "You'll be made to sweat up every hill on Salisbury Plain and the rain will drip through your tent at night."

"Now Harbord," said the dame, "don't interrupt when I am talking."

"Sorry, ma'am."

"I believe you two are in league together to get off camp."

Miss Fuller was always scenting leagues and conspiracies to get off early school or corps parade.

"I love camp, ma'am," said Oliver. "It's made me what I am. Good old Tidworth. Good old corps."

"Harbord, you are making fun of me."

"I swear I'm not, ma'am. I'm the backbone of the company. You ask Freeman."

"Hush," said Miss Fuller, "he'll hear you."

"But if it rained ma'am, my cold would get worse," said Spencer-Mace.

"Now that's enough, Spencer-Mace. I'll give you an extra strong dose of quinine to-night, and you'll have forgotten all about it by the morning."

"Please not quinine, ma'am, it always makes me worse."

"Very well, if you are worse by to-morrow, we'll see about camp." Miss Fuller smiled at her cleverness.

"I wish the devil we were all in the same tent," said Oliver.

"It's that swine Taunton," whispered Denis across the table. "He's afraid we'd rag him, if we were together. At any rate, Peter and I are worse off than you, as Freeman has a tent to himself."

"Yes, Owen Jones isn't too offensive. Here's m'tutor."

The house stood up as Wren entered. They took up the thumb-marked prayer cards, handed round previously by a lower boy, and repeated a few prayers. Then they knelt down on the linoleum. Wren said a special prayer for the end of the half, and the house said amen. "Our Father, which art in Heaven," said Wren.

"Which art in Heaven," droned the boys.

"Hallowed be Thy Name . . ."

"Thy name."

"For thine is the kingdom . . ."

". . . the king . . ."

"The power and the glory . . ."

". . . glory . . ."

"For ever and ever, amen."

". . . ar.en."

Wren said the blessing and the house rose to its feet. On the last night of the half, boys hung about talking in the passages till Freeman came up from the library and drove them to their rooms. There was little excitement. The half was over ; but for those, who had to go to camp, the holidays had not yet begun.

Denis took his black clothes along to the slab. The last he would see of them till next September. His kitbag had already been stuffed with socks, grey flannels, sweater, pyjamas, and a couple of Ol' ver's thrillers, and stacked with five hundred others, by the armoury door. He finished packing his trunk and strapped it up ready to be collected and sent home by goods train. A sharpness, projecting from

his haversack, reminded him of the hundred cigarettes stowed away in a crème de menthe tin. Camp would be more of a rag this year and he was no longer afraid of being laughed at. If only Joan hadn't asked Robin Marley to stay in the holidays. Blast girls. Blast them.