

## CHAPTER XIX

The house smelt of venison. From the kitchen the strong odour crept along twisting passages and spread upwards to the boys' side. For the last ten days there had been venison for dinner. Hot haunch of venison with red currant jelly was better than tough mutton or shepherd's pie. "Good," said Wren, sniffing the air like a stag itself scenting the stalker. "Nothing like a haunch of venison." His words were prophetic. After a week of roast and cold and hashed and roast again, the atmosphere in the dining-room was quite incomparable. A few haunches still hung in the kitchen, with labels attached, "H. Wren, Esq.," and a highland postmark ; and the cook held her breath as she opened the oven. The man looked sideways out of the steam, and he rushed the dish to the dining-room. Miss Fuller talked loudly to her neighbours to drown adverse comments, and Mr. Wren seized his knife and fork expectantly.

The new library had settled down. Denis bought four records and a box of needles. Peter suggested that the *Sketch* should be added to the library papers, *Punch*, the *Bystander*, the *Tatler*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*. Swinley asked if anyone objected to the library subscription being raised, and no one objected. The last library had been poor and destructive. Freeman had written his private letters on foolscap or plain paper and Taunton had kicked holes in the wicker armchairs in his spare time. All the house canes were either burnt or frayed at the end. A few days later a supply of new canes lay on the slab in the passage. Lower boys picked them up and made playful cuts at each other. A messenger returned and removed a second bundle he had left by mistake. They were stiff and knobbly,

like army swagger canes, and only pops were allowed to use them. A pop tanning was an unforgettable experience. Occasionally, when a boy had let down the school in some way, the members of the Eton Society were allowed to deal with him themselves, and after a stroke each from a score of members in the privacy of Pop Room, he behaved better in future. Featherstone in his youth had been pop-tanned for smoking in the street after lock up. A week later one of his executioners was caught by a master doing the same thing and was given a Georgic.

Denis had not yet called a boy. Only the library might shout for fags. The rest of upper division, who had the right of fagging, had to prowl round the passages on the chance of finding a lower boy idle, or open the door of a room, which at the beginning of the half often turned out to be full of newly fledged uppers. Denis stood at the bottom of the stairs and tried a string of names. His voice sounded far off and feeble. "Redbridge, Royds, Towne, Shalfont, Beverley," he called a little louder. A door opened on the second passage and closed again. Robin came out of the library. "Here, listen to me. Shalfont, Beverley, Redbridge, Royds, roy, roy, oyoy oyoyoy," he bawled in a long roar. A dozen doors opened and a wild rush began. Down the narrow stairs lower boys came running, jumping, slithering and arrived in a flushed heap at their feet.

"You're last as usual, Shalfont," said Robin. "You had better do it, whatever it is."

"My room's farthest off, Manley."

"It's only to go up to my room and fetch an atlas, you'll find on the table," said Denis. The lower boys trooped back up the stairs. In some houses "boy" was called, when a fag was wanted. But Wren had forbidden the practice on account of the dismal noise echoing through the house and had told the library to call a few names distinctly. At the beginning of each half the library composed a war cry of four or five names with a fine swinging sequence, and bawled them in a mournful singsong, not less dismal and rather louder than the forbidden "boy."

Only one lower boy was excused general fagging. Heath, the library fag, who was supposed to look after the room and tidy up the papers, had far more excuses than duties. Three weeks from the beginning of the half, Swinley came in after lock up and found the library fire a pile of ashes.

"I told Royds to keep it up, as I had to go out to see Rawson," said Heath, plausibly. Royds was summoned but could not be found, and an inspection of the dame's counterfoils showed that he was also visiting an outside master.

"You had better bend over there," said Swinley. The rest of the library were already in their chairs, with expressions suitably composed. Heath got four up and made no sound. "Too high," said Beckett, when he had gone.

"You're too quick between the strokes," said Robin. "You want to wait till it sinks in, and then hit the same spot, if possible."

"I didn't want to kill the little beggar," said Swinley. "I'll give it to him harder next time."

After the first stroke, Denis had looked away and listened for the next. He wanted to get up and leave the room, but he had not the strength to make the effort. He was glad when he heard the library door shut.

"We must do something about this debate," said Peter the next morning. Denis was reading *Kidnapped* in an arm-chair. He had plenty of leisure now he was a specialist, and he had taken his father's advice and started on the volumes in the library bookshelves.

"Which side are you going to take?" he said, without looking up.

"For, I think," said Peter. "Everyone seems to be going against. Denis went on reading. The books in the library were little used, except as an excuse for lingering in the passage after prayers. Though Wren's had done little in the athletic world of late, it could not as a whole be described as a literary house. Peter threw a fives glove at him. "Wake up, Denis. What about this bloody debate?"

"Well, what about it?" said Denis.

"You might help me evolve a few arguments instead of sitting unsociably in the corner."

"I can't help you if you don't know your own mind. Besides, I'm reading. Go to the school library and ask Hector." Peter went.

On the first floor landing Oliver and Warburton leaned against the notice board. On a sheet of paper was written :

H. WREN, ESQ.'S, HOUSE DEBATING SOCIETY

"A debate on the following subject will be held in the library on Saturday, October 20th, after prayers.

'Which is better—a Classical or a Modern Education.'

"SWINLEY."

"I saw Worming in the school library," said Oliver. "I bet Hector has given him all the points."

"Hector ought to give one point to everyone," said Warburton.

"I don't think it's right that the opener or opposer should consult the school librarian at all," said Holmes-Norton.

"Don't you?" said Worming. Being the next junior member of the debate, it fell to him to oppose Spencer-Mace's opening.

"At any rate, I have no intention of going near the school library," said Holmes-Norton.

"Of course, Holmes-Norton has brains, you see," said Warburton.

"At any rate, I have got one argument in favour of a modern education which you will never think of," said Holmes-Norton.

"Yourself, I suppose," said Oliver. Holmes-Norton turned away and left them. Though comparatively low down in school order he had the best brain in the house.

Wren had promised to attend the first debate of the half, and even Miss Fuller said she might put in an appearance. She was very shy of her intellectual powers and took a back

seat near the door. When demands for a speech grew pressing, she remembered a sick boy who must be visited and slipped out quietly.

Wren came in on tiptoe, just as Spencer-Mace was sitting down. He had exceeded the minimum three minutes and had put the classic case against the classical education. Wren took a seat at the back among the members of the debate. The library sprawled in easy chairs at the far end of the room. Swinley, president, and Robin, who had to write out the minutes afterwards, were making notes at the table.

"Mr. Worming," said Swinley, half rising from his chair.

"Mr. President, m'dame, m'tutor, and gentlemen," said Worming, and stopped. He took out a square of paper and peered at it. "The main advantage of a classical education is that it provides the growing boy with a sense of proportion and balance, while at the same time—while at the same time—while at the same time teaching him to express his thoughts as they develop in his mind." Worming Major stopped and looked round. "Hear, hear," said Beckett. Miss Fuller began to clap and caught Wren looking at her. Worming Major unfolded his paper. "It has been well said by the famous Dr. Arnold, headmaster of Rugby."

"Shame," said Featherstone.

"Go on, please," said Swinley.

"It has been well said by Dr. Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby, that, that . . . maths and stinks may be all right in their way." Worming stopped and bent over his paper. Mr. Wren stared at his boots. Peter reached for the *Taller* and opened it quietly.

"The point is," said Worming. "Maths and stinks and that sort of thing are not, well, they're all right as far as they go."

"Did Dr. Arnold say that?" whispered Oliver.

"I'm afraid I've left out a bit," said Worming, unfolding his paper into a large square.

"Try not to read your speech," said Swinley.

"Anyhow, with a classical education such as we have here

at Eton, what could be better? Is there anyone among us who has not profited from the Odes of Horace or book twenty-one of Livy? No one," said Worming with a gesture. "At least I don't think so. That's all I've got to say." He glanced at his watch and sat down quickly.

"Hear, hear," said Wren. There were loud whispers among the debate.

"I call on Mr. Harbord," said Swinley.

Oliver got up very slowly and made a fatuous face at Peter. "Mr. President," he began.

"M'dame, and m'tutor," added Warburton.

"What?" said Oliver, leaning down. Miss Fuller nodded and smiled at him.

"I will begin again. Mr. President, m'dame, m'tutor, and gentlemen. A modern education prepares one in the most efficient manner to face the practical problems of existence as they arise."

"Hear, hear," said Peter.

"When we look round on the world to-day—a world, I may add, of money and machines, can we doubt that the Latin hexameter and the Greek iambic are no longer sufficient?" Oliver looked round the library for an answer. Wren was smiling, probably at the thought of Harbord composing a Greek iambic.

"No, we cannot doubt it," said Oliver, as no answer came. "We need something more to-day. We need a system of education more in touch with the facts of life." Oliver smiled, bit his lip and recovered himself. "More flexible, more vital, and more, yes, I think that's all I've got to say." He sat down and grinned.

"Very good, Harbord," said Miss Fuller, tapping him on the shoulder. She smiled her warm approval.

Warburton added a point to the classical case and sat down again.

"Will you say something, ma'am?" said Swinley. Miss Fuller half rose as if to address the house. "Not now, Swinley. It's very nice of you to ask me. Perhaps later."

"Come on, ma'am," said Denis.

"M'dame," said several voices. But Miss Fuller sat in her corner. Her smile became more compressed and her cheeks a little redder.

"Will you speak, sir?" said Swinley.

There was a silence. Peter put away the *Tatler* and everyone looked interested.

"Mr. President, m'dame, and gentlemen, the difficulty in a case like this is to determine what we mean by education." Mr. Wren took out his toothpick. "We are educated, I might put it, as much by the mental efforts we make as by the lessons we learn, if I make myself clear." The library looked interested.

"'Aequam memento rebus in arduis,' as Horace said, is sound advice so far as it goes. But in Latin construe, for instance, one learns as much, perhaps more, by losing our heads over a knotty sentence—groping blindly, as it may often seem to you—than by the easy mastery of a page of Livy." The library looked puzzled.

"In other words, poor old Horace never got very far. He was a lazy devil and a bit of a prig, thrown in." The library smiled.

"He made himself too comfortable. In learning as in life, it is fatal to stop. One must go on. That is the real meaning of 'We live and learn.' When we have finished learning, we have ceased to live. And the same test should be applied to any system of education, whether on classical or modern lines. I hope I have made my point clear." Wren sat down and worked his toothpick, while the library clapped in a subdued way. The atmosphere was rather grave.

"You will excuse me, Swinley, but I have a few boys to see to." Miss Fuller rose and hurried from the room. Wren listened to a few more speeches and excused himself. Oliver held the door open and he slipped out while Holmes-Norton was speaking. "And just as a classical education involves an appreciation of the Latin and Greek authors for their own merits, in the same way . . ." Holmes-Norton

stopped short. A roll of toilet paper, uncoiling across the room, had hit him on the chest.

"Thank God, they've gone," said Beckett. "Now we can breathe."

"Jolly good speech, Hector," said Denis.

"We librarians are no fools," said Oliver. Peter added the *Sketch* to his pile of papers. Worming and Spencer-Mace began to talk. "Chuck us back the bumph," said Featherstone. "I may need it later."

"Silence," said Swinley. He looked round the room for the next speaker. "Put those gramophone records away, Featherstone, and give me that paper. I call on Mr. Featherstone for a few remarks."

"Mr. President and gentlemen, I agree with Mr. Worming. As Dr. Arnold said . . ." The debate laughed. "What we want is more languages. I think we ought to be taught Turkish, Cockney, and American. I think that camps ought to be abolished."

"Excuse me, Mr. Featherstone," said the president. "But which side are you supporting? Mr. Worming spoke in favour of a classical education."

"So am I," said Featherstone. "I maintain we don't play enough games. We should have kick-about on Sunday after chapel, and the final of the house cup between Wren's and Raven's should be played on the last Sunday of the half. I maintain . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. Featherstone. Lord Ockley."

"I am in favour of a modern education," said Peter. He held the *Sketch* in one hand and a slip of notes in the other. "When you look round on the world to-day—a world, I may add, of money and machines—can we doubt that the Latin hexameter and the Greek iambic are no longer sufficient?" Peter looked round and found the debate dissolved in laughter. His eyebrows lifted.

"Go on, Lord Ockley," said the president.

"No," said Peter, still puzzled. "I don't think we can doubt it." Had Hector let him down with some obvious floater? "We need something more than hexameters



and iambs to-day. I agree with the opener. That's all I have to say." He sat down suddenly.

"Mr. Bailey."

"I agree with Lord Ockley," said Denis. "I don't think I have anything to add. All the arguments I had so carefully thought out, seem to have been used by other gentlemen. I think we ought to read more history, and, in fact, do more history altogether." He sat down again. The last few speakers added little to the general knowledge, but Robin noted down everything they said. Swinley was collecting the points. The members of the debate stared curiously about the room. Some had only visited the library for the purpose of bending over a wooden chair. Now they tried to identify it. Above the gramophone hung the new selection of house canes. A large wooden clock on the mantelpiece showed twenty-five minutes past ten.

"Has anyone else got anything they would like to add?" said Swinley. The debate looked at each other.

Beckett rose. "I should like to ask the president what exactly m'tutor meant. I didn't quite get it."

"Thank you, Mr. Beckett. I will allude to m'tutor's remarks in a moment. Stop playing with that football, Warburton. I've cautioned you already. You had better give me half a crown by to-morrow night."

"Another record," said Beckett.

"I will now sum up," said Swinley. He picked up his notes and gave a short and fairly clear summary of the various points, throwing a slight bias on the classical education. "I will put the motion," he said. "'Which is better, a classical or a modern education?' Those in favour of the classical put up their hands." Worming's arm shot up. Featherstone and a few others followed him. Swinley counted. "Four. Those in favour of a modern education?" There was a forest of hands. "One's enough, Harbord. Featherstone, you can't vote for both sides."

"Oh, can't I? Sorry." Swinley looked at Denis. "Are you behind the chair?"

"Yes. I've decided that all education is wrong."

"Is any one else abstaining?" asked Swinley. No reply.

"1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. I myself shall vote for a classical education. The modern education therefore wins by seven votes to five, with Mr. Bailey behind the chair." Robin wrote rapidly. "The house will now adjourn. Don't make too much noise going up to bed. Good night, everyone." The house scraped back the chairs, restored them with obsequious care to their places and adjourned. In the library, Denis sat back and yawned. Featherstone put on a record and was told to take it off again. Beckett whistled a hymn tune and Robin wrote. "Get the opener and seconders to write their speeches in the book," said Swinley. "What about bed, everybody?"

Beckett and Featherstone slouched upstairs together. Denis took down a book from the shelves. Peter was turning over the *Bystander*. Swinley busied himself in a corner. "I'm going to bed, you chaps," he said. "Good night." He remained standing by the door.

"All right, we're coming," said Peter. Denis followed him up and Swinley shut the library door behind him.