

CHAPTER XXI

Miss Fuller sat at the desk in her drawing-room. Half a dozen upper and lower boys crowded round her, and leaned over her shoulder. From a heavy black box she drew pound and ten shilling notes, and ticked off names on a sheet of paper as she handed them out.

"Shalfont?"

"Two pounds, please, ma'am."

"Here you are, Shalfont."

"Lawrence?"

"Three pounds, please, ma'am."

"Royds? Seven pounds? Whatever do you want seven pounds for?"

"I've got to get all the way to Ireland, you see, ma'am."

"All right, Royds. I ought to ask your tutor, but here you are." She put a tick against his name and Royds went out grinning. What did it matter asking for a pound or two more journey money than he really needed? It all went down on his people's bill, and, meanwhile, the school stores were still open.

Denis was in Tap, drinking cider with Peter and Oliver.

"This time next week," said Oliver.

"I shall be in London, knocking down bobbies in my new car," said Peter.

"And with any luck I shall have a motor bike," said Denis. "That is, if I get this bloody scholarship."

"How did you do?" said Oliver.

"I haven't the faintest. The Latin papers were easy enough; and the history; but the English essay was a brute. I floated pretty badly, I think."

"You've got another shot, anyhow, in the summer, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes. It doesn't matter particularly, if I've failed. But I rather want a bike this holidays. It's impossible to get about without one. I shall get an A.J.S., I think."

"What happens if you don't get a scholarship?" said Peter. Denis took a pull at his cider. "Another Bridge roll, please, Mr. Hendren. Nothing, I suppose. I shall just go up to Gloucester as a commoner. My father got a scholarship himself, so naturally wants me to do the same. It's a damned sweat, of course."

"Lucky I haven't got to get a scholarship," said Oliver. "A fat chance I should have of going up to Cambridge."

"Same here," said Peter. "Scholarships are nearly always won by tugs, aren't they?" The seventy tugs, or collegers were looked down on by the rest of the school.

"Tugs mostly get them," said Denis. "But, anyhow, you can pass the Matric. by taking the scholarship exam. And besides, it was a damned good rag at Cambridge. We had the hell of an evening on Thursday."

"Pity Feathers wasn't there."

"I had nearly a bottle of port as it was, and Atkinson from Raven's was very squiffy on a couple of glasses."

"Yes, there's something to be said for going up," said Oliver. They finished their glasses and went out. At the corner of Keats Lane Denis left them to say good-bye to Llewellyn. He walked slowly down the street with his hands in his pockets. The half had gone so quickly that he could not believe he would be at Anglersmead next week. The winter half usually dragged. But being in the library made a difference; and history specialists had a pretty good time on the whole. Denis really enjoyed writing essays and sitting in Raven's grand, untidy study, while he read them.

"Not bad," Raven had said. "You want to get your facts together first; arrange the points against at the beginning, then smash them with the points in favour. You should take more trouble about your style and write better. $\beta +$ or, perhaps, $\alpha -$." Wandering back in the dark along Judy's Passage, Denis had a comfortable impression that the world was all right. He was just beginning to enjoy

Eton. A bit late in the day. But it had taken him time to see things in their true proportion. Football, too, had ceased to be an ever-present terror. He enjoyed his second sine games. On the distant fields, where the second sine played, he was an important person. The fate of ten boys was in his hands. Spencer-Mace had complained to Beckett that Denis put him post out of spite. "He's such an excellent post, that's why," said Denis, and Beckett had smiled and told Spencer-Mace he should feel honoured.

Cambridge had been great fun. He had written quickly and with ease on most subjects and come out before the end. He felt satisfied he had done fairly and as well as he had hoped. He had stayed in college, and the silence of the big courts, where even smoking was forbidden, impressed him. Between papers he walked along the Backs, and was struck, as other freshmen, by the miniature dignity of the Cam and the high splendour of King's Chapel. Men on bicycles careered through the narrow streets, and men in plus fours with gay scarves, trailing in the wind, roared past in powerful cars. Cambridge was a man's place and he looked forward to becoming a man. Denis whistled as he walked up the passage to Llewellyn's studio. The final of the house cup was that afternoon and Wren's were in the final. He had almost forgotten the most important cause of his cheerfulness.

A row of pops sat arm in arm on the low wall in front of chapel. They kicked their feet together and made remarks on the passers-by. A few of them wore top-hats, sealed with coloured wax on the crown and brim, and in their button-holes were pink or white carnations. Their tailcoats were braided and double-breasted pearl or fawn waistcoats were in fashion. But most of them were in half change—a tweed coat or blazer and black trousers and waistcoat and some colour on their head. It was very difficult to get into pop without some colour.

As the clock in school yard struck the half-hour, the pops rose and, arm in arm, strolled towards school field in a long line. One of them made a flick with his cane at a small boy

from his house. The boy grinned and hung back till they had passed. Another hailed a boy in a Lower Boats cap and linked arms with him. He was too young to be elected to pop at present.

From school field came the deep thud of kicks and the crisp note of half a dozen balls bouncing on the hard ground. Beckett, in pale blue and scarlet cap and stockings and house colour scarf, knotted behind his back, raised a ball on his toe and punted it high in the air. Featherstone, hands in pockets and scarf dangling to the ground, volleyed it with a resounding crack. Warburton and Oliver, in bright new caps, scarves, and stockings, were kicking about in a far corner. Every member of both sides in the final received their house colours automatically.

A whistle blew and a man collected the balls in a huge sack, while the two teams hung their scarves and sweaters on the wall. Twenty brightly quartered shirts took their places in the field. Only the two goals kept their white sweaters with house colour trimmings. The whistle blew again and one of the "corners" threw the ball into the bully. At the same moment the crowd opened their mouths. A roar of "Wreeeee. . .n's" blended in a longer drawn "Raveeeeen's" in a chant, which rose and fell with the movement of the game. A few yards from Peter and Denis, stood Royds in grey flannel shorts. Though still a lower boy he was twelfth man for the house, and if Wren's won he would get his house colours. In front of the wooden platform, packed with boys, a line of pops strolled to and fro. The keepers of the Field drove knots of boys over a white line with their pop canes. Opposite Denis the pops took up their position on the side line itself, incidentally blocking all view of the ground.

"M'tutor's seem to have started pretty well," said Denis. "They're pressing heavily."

"Beckett said he was going to rush them in the first five minutes. Their 'long,' Williams, is apparently a bit shaky at the start."

"Raveeen's" croaked a small boy in a scug cap. Denis

bent down and bawled "Wreeeen's" in his ear. The small boy moved away. "Wreeeen's" was being drowned in the roar of "Raveeeeen's." Raven's were being hard pressed but Wren's was also the least popular of the two houses. The umpire blew his whistle. An appeal for "sneaking"—the Eton equivalent of "off-side"—had been upheld. Wren, stamping round the ground, with a faded rowing cap on his head, stopped short and shaded his eyes. The house trooped back for the free kick against them. Williams took the kick. It soared high in the wind, then turned sharply away. Robin had it. "Back me up, bully," he called. He dribbled; dodged through Raven's loose, and before "long" could recover his position, sent in a low shot. Goal did not wait to steady himself, and took a flying kick. The ball came bouncing over the frosty turf. Goal heard a far away roar, pierced by a whistle. Wren's led, three to nil.

Denis and Peter got down from their platform and hurried round the ground. The pace of the game had slowed down. Wren's pressed again after the kick-off, but Raven's defence was surer now. "Let's stay in the corner here on the chance of a rouge," said Denis.

"And be ticked off by an officious pop."

"No, we're all right here." They elbowed their way to the front and struck up a sing-song "Wreeeen's," whenever the Raven crowd started cheering. The shouting rose and fell more regularly now, and scarcely followed the fortunes of the game. The supporters of each house had massed themselves in groups, and, without conscious leadership, cheered in perfect unison. Raven's were kicking the ball out in their efforts to keep out Wren's. A lower boy in a top-hat and Eton jacket ran to retrieve a ball a good fifty yards behind the crowd. Afraid of miskicking, he carried the ball under his arm and threw it on to the field. Still the cheering rose and fell till the ball was put back into the bully.

Masters walked round the ground or stood in small groups on the line. Most of the younger beaks were in change coats

and caps. Wilson and Hunter appeared in tailcoats and top-hats. Old Willoughby, one of the classical masters, was perched on a shooting stick. Raven himself, whose white tie and stick-up collar were quite the smartest in Eton, chatted calmly to a fellow master. Unable to control his excitement, he stumped off round the field, followed by his fox terrier. "Come here, Jim," called a few boys, and threw it chocolate biscuits and bits of toffee. The cheering faltered a moment and a few laughs were heard in the crowd. Willoughby's shooting stick had slipped and left its owner on the turf.

The two sides sucked lemons and gathered round their captains. At half-time the score was still three love. Wren and Raven hurried into midfield and encouraged their boys. Peter pulled Denis's arm. "There's time for a quick visit to the school stores." At the door they passed Spencer-Mace with a lower boy. The pair quickened their step when they saw them.

"That's Spencer-Mace all over; socking during the final," said Denis. "He could be beaten for that."

"And little Carps, too; well, well." Peter ordered a couple of banana messes.

"You are doing pretty well," said Tom behind the counter. He watched every match from the fives courts wail and knew most of the school by name.

"Not bad, Tom," said Peter. "Do you think we shall win?"

"Too early to say. The match isn't over yet. Hi, come out of it, there." A boy was helping himself to lemonade. Only colours were allowed to sock behind the counter. "You've got a good chance all the same," said Tom.

"Have a drink, Tom," said Denis.

"Thanks. I'll have a lemonade. He poured out a glass of cold, rather sour lemonade. "How much do I owe you at the moment?" said Denis.

"Twelve, thirteen, fourteen and seven up to date, Mr. Bailey."

"Right; I'll pay you to-morrow. Come on, Peter."

The game was in midfield when they got back. A resounding duel was in progress between the "behinds" of each side. A spectacular volley from Williams brought clapping from the whole ground. Oliver at goal was left several bouncing balls to return; but, ignoring the gallery, he steadied them first and kicked nicely judged balls into the loose. Spectacular kicking seldom gave the bully time to charge the ball down.

But Wren's were tiring. Beckett at "fly" urged on the bully, and himself made some good rushes; but the heavier side were pressing them. Raven's post held the ball tightly between his feet, while the bully slowly gained ground. In the loose the house trooped after the ball in a dazed procession. Sanders, Raven's "fly," had his field, but had not done much up till now. Suddenly he got the ball and, closely backed up, cooled past Robin and reached the line in the far right-hand corner. A crowd of cheering boys made a dash for the line. Pops joined hands and held them back. Sanders moved in quick hops along the line, the ball, loose between his feet, and another boy waiting to take it on behind him. Beckett feinted; ran in to barge him off his balance and leaped back. Sanders took no notice. Beckett looked over his shoulder and saw the goal only fifteen yards away and Sanders had hopped a couple of yards in the meanwhile. "All together, bully," Beckett hurled himself at Sanders and overbalanced him for a moment. The ball came out into the loose. Some one booted it. A crisp report. The ball rebounded off a knee and spun away over the line. The crowd stampeded, while two figures raced down a clearing and fell on the ball. The umpire bent low and examined them, as they lay locked on the ball. He put his whistle in his mouth. "Rouge." The crowd roared and rushed for a good place behind the goal-posts. Denis and Peter stood in the front row of the great semi-circle. The umpire inspected the formation of Wren's defence. Featherstone leaned against the post, ready to lead a counter attack on the bully, as soon as the ram was in. He rested an arm on his hip and tossed back his hair. "Ready?" said

the leader of the ram. He raised his knee. "Left Right, leftright," the five heaviest members of Raven's rolled into the defending bully. The battle swayed and oozed in the goal-mouth. The mud turned to slime and boot studs slipped and skidded across the mire. Featherstone wedged one boot against the goal-post and heaved with his back. The umpire squatted low and peered between the struggling legs. The ball had vanished. The cheering died down. Peter laughed. The middle of the bully had collapsed and lay crushed on each other with the ball somewhere beneath them. The umpire stood up and blew his whistle. "Reform," he called.

Slowly the two sides separated and stood up, brown with mud, gasping for breath. The umpire placed one foot on the line and stepped a generous yard, this time a little to the right of the goal's centre. The defence reformed. Beckett whispered something to post and the ram lumbered in again. There was a short struggle and the ball came out on the left. Featherstone kicked it clear and the bully broke up and raced after it. In a moment the ball was in mid-field and the immediate danger over.

Three to one in Wren's favour with some ten minutes to go. Encouraged by their position, the house played up strongly, and Raven's backs were once more pressed. Williams at "long" was playing a fine game. He had forgotten all about the gallery now. He seemed to invite Wren's bully to charge down every kick. Then at the last moment, when he had drawn them, he sent the ball flying back over their heads among his own bully. Raven himself had given up all thoughts of calmness. With his sharp nose thrust forward, he strained at the game, turned and hurried along the line with every movement of the ball. Wren's face was detached. He stood with his hands in the pockets of a loose tweed coat. When his "behinds" took a kick, he half raised a foot in sympathy. Every now and then he made a classical allusion to one of his colleagues.

The cheering was becoming hoarser and was beginning to die down. Denis looked at his watch. Five minutes more according to his reckoning. With a lead of two, it looked

safe enough. He put away his watch, and as he looked up, a harmless movement by the side line resulted in a long dribble by one of Raven's. Robin lost his head, barged into him thirty yards from the goal line and the boy kicked. Far out over the side line. Robin tore after to touch it down ; but the other boy was faster. He barged Robin off his course and by the time he reached the ball, it was behind the continuation of the goal line. " How's that ? " He smacked the ball in triumph. After a short pause came the whistle. Three to two, and if Raven's forced the rouge, the score would be three all and extra time would have to be played.

" Hurry up ; get back. Form up," said Beckett. The opposing ram were already waiting. Wren's could not be accused of dawdling to gain time. In a few seconds the ram was in and another struggle begun in goal mouth. This time it was short. The ball came out behind, and Oliver gave it a tremendous boot, which sent it over the side line forty yards up the field.

In the few minutes left, Raven's went all out to score. Slicks and curses flew about the bully. Sanders made two long shots at goal which Oliver allowed to bounce harmlessly over the line, and the defence held. Raven stood alone, a few beaks edging near with condolences. Wren's classical allusions grew more and more philosophic. The poets had taught him restraint in the hour of victory as well as resignation in defeat. A large part of the crowd had drifted away to form a lane by the wall. Denis and Peter talked quietly and the umpire's whistle went for the last time. The crowd jumped off the platform and the cars and motor cycles, which had halted on the Slough Road to watch the match, roared and spluttered and streamed away in clouds of blue smoke.

In Wren's passages lower boys chattered in high voices and tore up and down on errands. Steam poured from the bathroom. Warburton in a brown flannel dressing-gown limped from a shower and hobbled along to the dame's sitting-room. Spencer-Mace and Holmes-Norton were reading books in their rooms. Denis pushed open the door of

the library bath. Beckett lay in a foot of filthy water. Robin, Swinley, and Featherstone were examining their bruises. "It's that side post, Filson," said Featherstone. "He slicked like hell in the bully and the loose."

"I say, congratulations, Beckett, and everyone," said Denis. "Damned good show. You all played bloody well." He felt a little out of it and slightly uncomfortable.

"Not so bad," said Beckett. "Nobody in pop thought we would win."

"Look at that slick I got in the last ram," said Robin.

"Good God. You damn well deserved to win." Denis hoped they didn't think him condescending. It was so difficult congratulating his contemporaries. Peter pushed open the door.

"Oh, Lord, another?" said Beckett. "Standing room only, Peter."

"Well, you all look very pleased with yourselves," said Peter. "Did the naughty boys from Mr. Raven's hurt you, then?"

"Chuck a sponge at him."

"No, you've lost it. The captain of the house throwing sponges in front of lower boys. That's what comes of winning a football match. By the way, there's a boy outside from Huntley's. He's got a sort of silver goblet affair with him."

"Bloody fool," said Beckett. "It's the house cup. Tell him to leave it on the library table. Hurrah."

"Right," said Peter. "I told him to come up here, as I thought you might like to drink your bath water out of it, or whatever is usual on these occasions." Beckett laughed.

Denis went upstairs. "Oh, Bailey, Harbord has let me off fagging. Is that all right?" said Royds.

"Has he? Right. Where's Redbridge?"

"Here, Bailey."

"You needn't come either. Just put the tea on the table, if it isn't already, and have a look at my fire before supper."

"Thanks awfully, Bailey."

Denis walked along to Peter's room. He didn't want

much tea. Besides, there was to be a sock supper that night in honour of the house cup, and he could do quite enough eating then. He sat waiting for the others. One of Peter's house groups caught his eye. Next summer the tall house football cup would be among the trophies on the table. Wren's was certainly looking up. Next summer would be fun. And, in a few days, the holidays. Christmas at Speenmouth and his visit to the Peritons in London. He was looking forward to it much more now that he knew how things were done in a big house.

"Hullo," said Peter, coming into the room. "Eaten all the tea, I suppose?"