

CHAPTER VI

Monday morning. The May sun shone on the deep red brick of Eton buildings and warmed their cold exterior. The limes, that stood sentry before chapel, were throwing off frail, inconsequent leaves. Summertime trailed the purple grey shadows of the houses at long, flat angles across the street. A milk cart clattered over Barnspool Bridge. Several cars sped through on their way to London and their echoes came back from the chapel walls. A waking puff of steam hung solidly over the distant station. Labourers were already out in the fields and the early morning business train was filling fast. A bugle sounded from Windsor barracks. At half-past six the school woke up to a new week's work.

One after another, boys in pinkish uniform, puttees, and cap emerged from their houses and wandered off to early school. As seven o'clock came nearer, the footsteps in the streets began to hurry. Boys came running from dark narrow passages, and the streets were suddenly full. There was a wild clatter. The clock struck seven and all was still.

Every Monday morning the O.T.C. paraded for one hour, marched into the playing fields and tied and untied improbable knots of military semblance.

Denis hated Monday morning and he hated the corps. To have to get out of bed with the knowledge of the boring and humiliating sweat before him, was as much as he could bear. He got up and sponged his face. He took out his corps clothes and puttees from the ottoman and a khaki shirt from a drawer of his burry. Eton alone among O.T.C.'s wore a uniform of its own. It varied from deep chocolate, when it was new, to a pale pink grey, and it had Eton blue

facings. Denis's uniform had seen long service and many owners. It had cost him ten and six, and did not pretend to fit him. The shoulders were too broad, and when he tightened his belt, bulging pleats appeared round the waist. His face was small and in his high peaked cap he looked an odd sight. No wonder they laughed. He had taken the wire out of his corps cap to level things up and had been ticked off by Freeman, who was a cadet officer.

Denis put on his puttees. He was good at winding puttees and rolled them round from the outside at a great pace. He tucked the strings in at the top and stood up. He flattened his cap down on his head and went off to school.

There were four companies in the Eton O.T.C. and G company. Denis had been over a year in G company, v. here all the dwarfs of Eton were to be found, and had only joined the corps proper, when he got into tails.

At a quarter to nine Denis walked over to Cannon Yard and chose a rifle from the rack. The rifles had had their share in one of England's earlier wars, and the soldiers of the day had doubtless grumbled at their bulk and weight. They kicked like horses and bruised painfully. Denis had once won a shooting competition at butts ; but the sergeant had noticed a pair of five's gloves protruding from his coat and he had been disqualified and given a week's extra drill. The rifles had long blunt bayonets, which could never have caused the enemy any serious inconvenience. During the annual inspection of the corps a boy fainted on the point of his bayonet, but no blood was shed. The bayonet supported his chin and the weight of his body until the inspecting general had passed by and the boy could be removed. It was always very hot on inspection days.

"Hon parade," piped the school sergeant-major. "Hon parade." "Slow . . . Hipe," roared Sergeant Taunton a few minutes later. The ancient rifles were hoisted to the slope in a clattering sequence. "Presen . . . Hipe," and Denis found himself displaying his weapon like a prize exhibit at a baby show. The sergeant-major pointed out in a high falsetto that his feet were wrongly crossed. Spencer-Mace

giggled and dropped his rifle. "Take that man's name," snapped Freeman. It was taken and drill continued.

"Feeeks," spat out Taunton, and Harbord, right hand man, walked sheepishly forward. "Bants." He gripped his rifle between his knees as a child on its hobby horse. The long, blunted blades flashed in the air and groped blindly for the rifle ends. All eyes on Harbord, while the gropings continued noisily. His hand fell and rifles were withdrawn to the side. A loud tinkle, as Denis's bayonet dropped on the cobble stones; the rusty clasps were brutes to fasten. "Take that man's name," and Denis was added to the list.

Unfixing bayonets was an old joke in the corps, "Un-feeek's . . ." Harbord as usual came smilingly forth amid suppressed titters. Seeing the left man was also in front, correctly, he retreated with a grin. "Bants," and the noisy scramble began again. All eyes on Owen Jones this time, while bayonets stabbed wildly in the region of the left-hand pocket in search of the sheath. As the hand dropped the weapons were rammed home—all except Ockley's, which had lodged in his tunic flap, and when thrust home, neatly pierced the pocket lining. Ockley was in the rear rank and no one had noticed. He stepped back smartly and bent down to adjust a shoe lace; at the same time he restored the bayonet to its proper place. After a little more rifle drill the company formed fours and moved off towards the playing fields. Caps rose and fell as the column strode along with a fine, springy gait. Rifles leaned at every angle as if a hundred road-menders with their picks were returning from the day's work. The school sergeant, trotting up and down, added caustic comments on their carriage, step, and time.

In the playing fields the turf was firm but elastic. Their gait became more springy. Discipline slackened with the sight of bursting elms and the river floating away in the distance. A flock of sheep cantered off at their approach and turned round in surprise to find they were not the object of Y company's manœuvres. Freeman got them into

platoons and put them at the double. "Left wheel," he shouted, and they panted round, Harbord lumbering heavily on the far wing of his platoon. "Left wheel," again. Harbord ran through another right angle. He and Freeman had little love for each other.

At last, "Halt, and stand easy," were given. Major Sandymore, who commanded Y company, came up and gave his views of the drill. Major Sandymore had been through the war and was popular and respected. He was a good disciplinarian but no martinet. He did his best to relieve parades of their deadly monotony, and he had a sense of humour. He could not himself treat the O.T.C. as a bad joke; but he was fair and lenient with boys, who did. For if corps was not a joke, it could be nothing but an intolerable sweat. There were times when Denis felt a certain pride in his uniform; when Major-General Sir Blankety Blank made a stirring speech before the assembled O.T.C.; or when they marched past some other school in plain khaki. But it was a pride in Eton rather than in arms. If Eton had deserted in a body to the enemy, Denis would have been just as proud. He had never got a stripe because he purposely played the fool on parade. He had been laughed at for his odd appearance and he had got his own back by mocking authority and hoping to become popular in the process. He was not very successful, but someone usually laughed when he dropped his rifle.

"Y company will advance in column of fours from the right."

"Thank God," murmured Peter. "That's the end of Monday morning, number one."

"Twelve more of them," said Denis. The company moved off. It stepped out smarter and more briskly, like a donkey that knows it is going home. In a few minutes they were dismissed. Spencer-Mace, Denis, and two boys from another house waited and reported to Major Sandymore. "Do better another time," he said. "Drill can be dry as dust; but it can be made interesting. It's up to you."

They thanked him, saluted smartly and hurried back to

their tutors. There were twenty minutes before eleven o'clock school and they could change now or after twelve.

Robin was walking down Common Lane towards the science schools. His hands were in his pockets and he was in tails and top hat. A large notebook was wedged flat between his arm and his hip. Denis saw him and broke into a run. "Hullo, Robin, we're early, aren't we? What a bloody parade."

"Oh, I don't know. Harbord made an ass of himself as usual."

"I was just waiting for him to come out on the 'Unfix.' He's a comic, old Harbord."

"Ruddy buffoon, and likes to be thought so. I say, why don't you try for a stripe, Denis? Tony was saying only this morning that you let down the section every time. I didn't mean it like that, but it makes it pretty difficult for us if you will go on playing the fool."

Denis thought for a moment. They were passing the entrance to Llewellyn's passage. "I don't see why. Yes, perhaps you're right, Robin. I'll have a shot at Certificate A if Taunton likes, but I thought he didn't. I'm sorry if I was an ass this morning. I didn't mean to make it awkward for you; but you must admit that Harbord looked pretty funny with his fat bottom sticking out."

"I know," said Robin. "By the way, whatever are you messing with Spencer-Mace for? Surely he's not quite your line."

"He's always messed with Ockley. They're cousins or something."

"Everybody in the library hates him. Freeman's just waiting for a chance to beat him. He's always talking to the lower boys. I saw him in Shapeleigh's room yesterday evening; admiring his pictures, I suppose."

"You like Ockley, don't you?" said Denis.

"Ockley's a decent fellow, when he's away from his friends."

Denis felt angry. It was all very well being nice to Robin. "I say, you needn't be so down on everyone just because

you're in the library, Robin. We can't all be good at games like you and Taunton."

"What are you talking about?" Robin spoke coldly. "I don't mind Spencer-Mace and his crew not being any use at games. I merely think m'tutors would be better off without them."

"What about Featherstone?" said Denis. Featherstone played football for the house.

"What about him?" said Robin. They walked on in silence. "By the way, have you done your stuff for Raven this afternoon, Denis?"

"About nine pages; I've skimmed through it. I can't say I know much about it."

"Nor do I. I'll ask you questions in your room after twelve if you like."

"Thanks awfully," said Denis, "but I've got a drawing lesson; thanks all the same."

In the science schools things were going nicely, although Wilson had not yet been signalled from Chambers. Two boys were racing blobs of mercury along grooves in the desk, while a small crowd laid bets on them. Another boy was drawing a picture of a prehistoric absurdity on the blackboard. He wiped it out with a quick stroke of the duster as Mr. Wilson appeared. The division took their seats. Mr. Wilson went to a pile of notebooks in the corner and threw them one after the other at the boys in his division. Some caught them neatly. "Butter fingers," said Mr. Wilson, as others fumbled and dived in the dust of the floor. Mr. Wilson removed an over friendly skeleton from reach and planted it in the corner. He was a small man with sharp, finished movements like a conjuror. When he turned to the division and held out a hand to show how simple it all was, somebody always laughed. "What do you find to laugh at in that?" said Mr. Wilson. "What do you think I am, a public buffoon?" Nobody knew whether to laugh or to look grave, knowing that Mr. Wilson rather liked to appear a buffoon.

He began the science hour with some slides. "Pull down

the blinds, please," he said. "Williams," he clapped his hands and a birdlike assistant appeared and shuffled off to the lantern. Mr. Wilson held out a hand to show the division how simple his assistant was. The room was dark except for thin sun rays, that crept between the blinds. A square of feeble light flickered on the screen, and the shadow of Mr. Wilson's long pointer quivered in the light. The upper rows became restive. A pencil landed on Grainger's head. An inkpot streamed silently on the floor. India-rubbers flew through the air. A scuffle was heard in a corner and a half suppressed squeak and the room was deluged in sunlight. Mr. Wilson stood with his hand on the blind catch. His face was expressionless. He appeared neither bored nor interested. Spencer-Mace and another boy sat up very straight and looked intelligently at the screen. They were flushed.

"Two hundred lines by lock up to-morrow, Spencer-Mace and Overbury." Mr. Wilson walked to his desk and wrote it gravely in a book. He pulled down the blind. "First slide, please, Williams." A monster of cumbrous proportions flickered on the screen. It lay on its back and kicked its legs into a primæval marsh.

"Wrong side up, fool," said Mr. Wilson. "Time you knew a Brontosaurus when you saw one." The lantern was changed and the Brontosaurus appeared, stepping delicately over a marsh. Mr. Wilson explained.

After twelve, Denis went round to Llewellyn's. Llewellyn himself was the centre of a group, clamouring for a subject. One by one he got rid of them; to the playing fields, or to his garden, or, the most popular subject of all, the chapel or upper school from school yard. Half a dozen artists sat down patiently to draw urns, bits of arms or legs, plaster hands severed at the wrist or the muscular torso of some ancient Greek.

"Is the model coming, sir?" asked someone.

"Tuesdays and Thursdays th' half," said Llewellyn. "You'd better do a still life to-day." The model was a seedy old man, who sat in a deathlike trance, as far removed from

life as the boys' own drawings. Once he had a fit and dashed screaming from the dais and hit out right and left in the studio. He used such shocking language that the boys could do nothing but laugh. After a little he returned to his dais and sat bolt upright and glared before him for the rest of the morning.

"What are you going to do, Bailey?" said Llewellyn. Denis took up a campstool. "What about the castle from Brocas Clump, sir?"

"Nothing like an old favourite. Yes, do it before the elms get too heavy, I'll come round later."

Denis got his things and went out by himself. He was glad no one else was doing the same view. He liked to be alone with the river. That was the best of Eton; at other schools, he supposed, boys were seldom left alone. He unpacked his things on the river bank and started to draw.

He had done the castle from the Brocas before; several times. He had done most of the Eton views, which had roughly the same ingredients. There was the peaceful Thames with the photographic pile of Windsor Castle mirrored in the water. There was the deep red brick of Upper School and the block of buildings surrounding the Cloisters, the cold grey buttresses of chapel, brilliant green playing fields, which he painted yellow, as summer and cricket progressed; and there were elms. Fat trunks of elms, which branched up into kite-shaped masses like the delta of the river Nile; and at their base, feathery bushes, sprouting with green. Elms, he had learnt by now, should be painted grey yellow with warm, blueish shadows put on with a wet brush.

But the castle remained a problem. He was always painting it, but it was never a success. It looked so new and smart and near, though much of it had been built by Edward the Third and it was nearly a mile from the centre of Eton. Denis would never admit that the castle came out better in picture post-cards than in paint, and he was too honest to follow Turner's example and disregard utterly its structural limitations.

He drew the outline of the castle and the near bank of the river, slanting across his paper. In the left foreground was the big mass of Brocas Clump. It was one of those natural compositions, which give a false impression of facility. He threw down his pencil and held out the drawing. Not too bad. He had been careful to avoid too much detail. He sat back and screwed up his eyes and looked over at the castle. The Union Jack floated from a standard; when the King was at Windsor, the Royal Ensign was flown. It was quiet by the river. Pleasure steamers were not yet running. A man was fishing a few yards away. He pulled up his rod, inspected the bait and dropped it into the water again. Denis put his hands into his pockets and looked round. He was going to be happy this half.

"How are you getting on?" said Llewellyn. He dropped his bicycle on the ground and leaned over Denis's shoulder. The pedals of the bicycle went on spinning. Llewellyn cocked his head on one side and took a piece of charcoal from his waistcoat pocket.

"You've got the Round Tower too high. Yes. Ye-es." He measured a distance on the charcoal with his thumb and forefinger and applied it to the drawing. "Near enough. Those trees want drawing more carefully. Are you going to start painting this morning?"

"I think so, sir," said Denis.

"All right. I shan't have time to get round again." He picked up his bicycle and went bumping over the grass on his way to another pupil. Denis rubbed out Llewellyn's charcoal lines and altered his drawing. When the school clock struck one, he had put on the first blue wash of the river and sky. He watched the paper dry in the sun and packed up his things. He threw the dirty paint water in the river and went over to the fisherman. "Caught anything?" "Not yet," said the fisherman. Across the river a siren hooted in the lower part of Windsor. Dinner time for everyone.

"That's coming all right, Bailey," said Llewellyn, in the studio. A group of boys still surrounded him. Some had been

drawing ; others asked stupid questions, whenever the master appeared. Llewellyn knew well that they only wanted to impress him, but he answered their questions with the tolerance of a father at the Zoo.

“ Please, sir, are woodcuts easier to do than linocuts ? ”

“ May I have an order for a new paintbox ? ”

“ May I take up oils this half, sir ? ”

“ Can we have the horse again soon, sir ? ”

“ No you can't,” said Llewellyn at last. “ And you couldn't draw it if we did. When you've finished a still life of a common or garden flowerpot, we'll see about horses.” The horse, an amiable, Chirico-like beast, had not distinguished itself on its last visit. It objected in the first place to being led up the tile-flagged passage and the rest of the hour had been spent removing the traces of its presence from the outside studio.

In the afternoon, Denis was up to Raven. History, after drawing, was his favourite subject. Mr. Raven knew how to teach history. He knew how to seize the pictorial interest of any event, however dead and dry, and throw it before his class with a dynamic energy, that was irresistible. He had never quite grown up, and the boys liked him for it. Young beaks, when they came to Eton, made the mistake of being older and more serious than they really felt. But Mr. Raven remained a boy. He had written history books and they were as live and boyish as himself.

Denis sat down next to Ockley and skimmed through the pages he should have read. There was a commotion in the corner of the room. Raven was upon them, driving loiterers to their seats, shooing them like a lot of geese. He laid a great pile of volumes, marked with slips of paper, on the desk and glanced shortly at the division. A sly smile hovered about his sharp features ; for he had traps, as well as facts in store for them that afternoon.

Questions were set and the slips of paper corrected. Denis got five out of ten ; about as much as he expected. “ Now, gentlemen,” said Raven, “ Ah, who's that bawler over there ? ” Grainger had just completed a leaning tower

of top-hats. "Offal bawer, you. Now, gentlemen, baby Grainger can play with his hats." The division laughed. "Roll up that map of Europe, who said that? Now, gentlemen, quick, Manley, Barford, Bailey, P . . . P P . . . P P P . . ." "Pitt, sir," roared the division. "Ah, gentlemen, but which Pitt?" said Raven sadly, as if a terrible tragedy lay hidden in the Pitt family.

"Young Pitt, sir," came a bland voice.

"The younger Pitt," corrected Raven. "Now, young Harbord, tell me. . . Ah, it was a sad thing, that," as if he remembered a further tragedy in the family. "There was Bony marching across Europe. He'd just won the battle of, battle of . . ."

"Austerlitz, sir?" said someone.

"Battle of, battle of . . ."

"Jena, sir?"

"Battle of O O . . . O O O . . . O O O O . . ."

"Ulm," roared the division, waiting till the last possible moment.

"And there was Pitt," continued Raven. "Which Pitt, Harbord?"

"Young Pitt, sir."

"The younger Pitt, offal bawer. There was Pitt dying, when all the time what was happening, Grainger?"

"The Industrial Revolution, sir?"

"Bailey?"

"Nelson was saying good-bye to Lady Hamilton." Titters of laughter, which Raven ignored. "When all the time Nelson was approaching; now, gentlemen, Nelson and his fleet of how many ships of the what? Twe . . . Twen . . . Twenty-seven ships of the . . ."

"Line," roared the division.

"What part of the metropolis has anything to do with the battle, if any?" said Raven casually, turning away to the blackboard to hide his cunning. There was a silence. He led off "T . . . Tr . . . Trr . . ."

"Trafalgar."

"And all the time Pitt had said, what did he say?"

“Roll up that map of Europe, it will not be needed these ten years,” came as one voice from the room.

“Which Pitt, Ockley?”

“Lord Chatham’s son, sir.” Raven smiled.

Raven dealt with the weakly saying lesson in the same way as with history. He prompted and spurred and compelled boys to get it right, and as soon as they had succeeded, they were free to go. The saying lesson varied. Sometimes it was the Kings and Queens of England, for which Denis held the present speed record. Twenty-eight seconds by Raven’s watch, from William the Conqueror 1066, to George the Fifth 1910; but no one but Raven could have understood a name or a date.

A favourite saying lesson was Wordsworth’s Ode on the “Intimations of Immortality.” For some minutes the division bent over their books in silence. “Are you ready, Bailey?” and Denis would dash up to the desk and start. “‘There was a time when meadow grove and stream.’”

“‘The earth and every common sight,’” said Raven.

“‘To me did seem,’” put in Denis, to keep him going.

“‘Apparelled in celestial light,’” declaimed Raven, with a gesture.

“‘The glory and the freshness of a dream,’” they shouted in unison. Raven held up his hand, and started further on to catch him out.

“‘To me alone,’” he said, with a sly glance at Denis.

“‘There came a thought of grief,’” and Raven finished off grandly, “‘A timely utterance gave that thought relief and I again am strong.’ Next, Manley,” and Denis was free.

Occasionally someone presumed too far on Raven’s good temper and he never forgot it. But public opinion saw to it that the occasions were rare. Ragging Raven was as unpopular as sapping with other beaks. Raven did the ragging himself and his division worked.