

TOD HALE
with the CREW

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TOD HALE WITH THE CREW



“Ten more!” he yelled. “Ten hard ones!”

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FULLBACK FOSTER, RIGHT HALF HOLLINS,
TOD HALE AT CAMP, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
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TOD HALE WITH THE CREW

CHAPTER I

A NEW BOY

NOSTRAND SCHOOL was supposed to be one mile from the Belleford station. The School catalogue distinctly stated the fact, and a weathered citizen, answering Tod Hale's inquiry from the seat of a tumble-down flivver, restated it—though far less distinctly. Tod surmised that the citizen had false teeth, which would account both for the indistinct speech and the careful, even anxious, manner in which he manipulated his jaw. Probably, Tod reflected as he shifted his bag and went along an interminable street, the gentleman had bought the set at a bargain and it didn't fit. Perhaps he wore a six and seven-eighths and an enterprising salesman had sold him a six and three-quarters. Or didn't false teeth come in sizes, like hats and collars? Tod didn't know, and didn't really care. The thing that really interested him just now, just now being eighteen minutes after three by the clock on the tower of the old church across the Common, was where the dickens was Nostrand School?

Of course school catalogues didn't lie, and the gentleman with the artificial teeth had looked

truthful enough, but, thought Tod, if he hadn't walked a mile already he was a Piute! He had deliberately declined the invitations of various taxicab drivers and had watched some thirty other lads disappear hurriedly up the long sun-smitten street without envy. If this town of Belleford was to be his place of residence during the ensuing nine months he ought to get acquainted with it, and what better time than now? But September, even the last week of it, can be extremely warm in New England, and Tod had realized it before he had reached the center of the town and, following main traveled thoroughfares, had swung eastward to the Common. There, with the old elms providing a welcome shade, observed with calm severity by the big church on one side and the town hall and a second building guarded by two decrepit cannons on the other, he had paused long enough to get his bearings. Since then he had crossed a small river by a stone bridge and had set his steps on the perceptible acclivity of North Street. Just beyond the bridge he had made a second inquiry of a youth of about his own age, which was fourteen, who was swinging and whistling his way toward the town.

"School? Yeah, straight ahead. Go to the end of this street and you're there."

"Maybe this street hasn't got any end," said Tod pessimistically, wiping a damp forehead.

The other boy grinned. "Warm, isn't it? Well, it's only three more blocks." He went on, whistling, and Tod took up his bag again. It wasn't really heavy, or it hadn't been until recently, but he could have got along nicely without it, he concluded. The street was paved and the sidewalks were flagged, and a line of maples marched uphill on either side. The residences were newer than those beyond the river; rather smart houses for the most part, with attractive gardens and graveled drives that led to small garages past pergolas or leafy arbors. But the sun was reflected from the paving and the trees were too young as yet to afford much shade, and Tod found scant joy in the scene. Ash Street was crossed, and then Maple and then Elm, and still the sidewalk sloped up and onward and Tod felt his light blue shirt sticking to his back and heartily wished that he had taken a cab. And then, worlds away, as it seemed, beyond acres of very green sward, the end of a red brick, slate-roofed building came into sight between the maples, and he took heart. A few minutes later he stood at the end of North Street, his further progress in that direction barred by a low wall of field-stones, random-set, against which ivy spread green fingers. And beyond the wall, beyond a broad expanse of lawn, stood the School.

He set down his bag for perhaps the tenth time

and, under the shade of a tree at the corner, wiped his perspiring face and neck, readjusted his tie and took stock of what lay before him. And while he is so occupied let us take stock of him. First, then, his full name was George Todwick Hale. He had been named George after his father and Todwick after his mother, Todwick having been her maiden name. As calling him George had been confusing when there was another George around, his mother had early dubbed him Tod, and Tod he had always been. I have said that he was fourteen, but had you asked him his age he would probably have answered: "Fifteen—nearly." To be exact then, he was fourteen years, eight months and some days old, and looked older, though not by reason of his size. He was rather small for his years and decidedly thin. But he didn't look weak. On the contrary, absence of flesh seemed to emphasize strength of muscle. He was a wiry-looking boy, and, back home in Grovedale, he had held his own with youths much older and bigger. Since Mr. George Hale, Senior, was a large man—half an inch over six feet and correspondingly broad—it was generally believed that some day Tod would start growing in earnest and make as big a man as his father. Just now, however, that was hard to believe. He was rather good-looking so far as features went. That is, he wasn't exactly plain. You wouldn't have called him hand-

some, though. And he wouldn't have wanted you to, I fancy. He had a nose that turned up a trifle, a mouth that turned up too, a somewhat pugnacious chin, brown eyes that looked forth from a healthily tanned face very straight and steadily and a good deal of brown hair that could look like copper in the sunlight. Rather a self-possessed, self-respecting chap, pretending more experience of life than he had had and more ease than he felt.

There was a wide gateway a few rods to the right, a gateway flanked by stone pillars, and he passed through it and proceeded along a straight drive toward the group of buildings ahead. There were no trees here; only an occasional narrow bed of scarlet geraniums and coleus that glowed hotly in the sunlight. After a while the driveway divided to form a broad loop before the main building, Nostrand Hall. This was amazingly large, three-storied, many-windowed. There was a long middle section, and then, at each end, a wing extended at a slight angle. Squarely in front of him, from the gray slate roof arose an airy belfry wherein the lip of a great bell met his upturned gaze. Most of the windows were open, and at many of them Tod could see boys moving about or staring down at him as he approached. At least, he felt that they were staring, though it is possible that the sight of a small youth in a not

too smart blue serge and a jauntily tilted straw hat, carrying a somewhat ancient suitcase, was not novel enough to gain their interest. Other boys, a few only, were in sight about the steps of Nostrand and along the brick walls. Tod followed the looping path and climbed the eight broad stone steps. Somewhere was a School Secretary with whom Tod had business, and doubtless this wide doorway led to his lair.

Against the brick lintel leaned a stout youth of perhaps seventeen. He was chewing gum assiduously and, as Tod discovered at about the third step, viewing the arrival with ill-concealed amusement. Tod didn't dislike gum and had been known—frequently known—to indulge in that delicacy, but he had never thought that the chewing of it was an elegant performance to be indulged in in public. That is, Tod wouldn't have selected the main entrance of Nostrand as a place at which to extract the sweetness from a cent's worth of gum. As a result, he felt disapproval of the stout youth, although he did not express it in the serene regard with which he met the other's stare. Had the stout youth—who, by the way, was splendidly attired in cream-colored knickers and a round-necked sweater which displayed a futuristic design in two shades of blue on a canary-yellow ground—had he gone right on chewing his gum and kept his thoughts to himself this story would

have been much different. But he didn't. He emitted a chuckle—or perhaps it was more of a snicker—and said: “Hello, kid, did the buggy break daown?” Then he chewed twice very hard on his gum and added: “How'd ye leave the faolks ter hum?”

Tod, having surmounted the seventh step, found himself on the point of retiring from the scene. One more step followed by two strides would take him into the welcoming shadow of the corridor. But he was not a discourteous boy. This stranger youth had addressed a question to him, in fact two questions; and common civility demanded a reply. Tod diverged from the straight line of approach to the door and, smiling brightly, stepped toward the stout youth. The latter had his hands sunk in the capacious pockets of his capacious knickers, and at Tod's advent started to withdraw them, being, perhaps, doubtful of the other's intentions. But Tod's smile was disarming, the hands remained out of sight and the faintly startled expression on the rather pudgy countenance faded. Tod stepped close, and—

“Oberammergau,” he said pleasantly, confidently.

Then he stepped back, flashed his bright smile and went again toward the door. But—

“Here! Hold on!” sputtered the stout youth. “What's that?”

Tod turned, placed a finger to his lips and reiterated softly but distinctly: "Oberammergau!" Then he nodded in the manner of one who has made everything quite clear and satisfactory, waved gayly and passed from sight, leaving a much perplexed youth behind, a youth in whose mind a suspicion began slowly to form, the suspicion that that innocent appearing, small-town kid had been razzing him!

Tod found the Secretary without trouble and transacted his business with celerity. A number of questions were answered, the replies verified by reference to a large square card produced from amongst a great number of other similar cards by Mr. Howe—"Hinkey" to the students—and then Tod received the information, crisply supplied, that he had been assigned to Study Number 36 West. "Two flights and to your left, Hale. Your room-mate is Stuart Younge. He is also a Lower Middler. A very fine boy. This card gives you the name, also, of your adviser, Mr. Borrow. See him to-day regarding your study course. And go to him if you want advice or information of any sort. I trust you will enjoy and profit by your stay with us, Hale. Ahem."

The central corridor was broad and there were many doors affording glimpses of rooms that asked exploration: rooms with leather chairs and benches before wide fireplaces, book-lined rooms,

rooms set with game tables. But Tod had other fish to fry. He climbed the slate treads of a curving stairway, paused a moment to look out a narrow window with leaded panes and went up again. Corridors stretched to right and left, the cocoa-fiber runners barred here and there with light from open doorways. Talk and laughter, the strumming of a banjo, the thud of a lowered trunk, came to him. He set forth to the left, as instructed, and went along the corridor searching for his number. The corridor bent to the right before he found it above a door in the wing of the building. The door was slightly ajar, and so Tod pushed it wider and walked in.

CHAPTER II

ROOM-MATES DISAGREE

A BOY several years older than Tod was transferring his belongings from a trunk to the drawers of a chiffonier. He was a tall, wide-shouldered youth, and the gaze he turned on Tod was oddly expressionless. Being without coat or shirt, arms and neck were bare, and Tod's wandering eyes fastened fascinatedly on the muscles apparent under the smooth brown skin. Admiration brought an almost awed ejaculation from the new arrival.

"Gee-golly!" said Tod.

The other continued to observe him calmly, and Tod tore his gaze from the fascinating muscles and remembered that an announcement was called for. He had read several school stories and knew what was proper on such occasions. Setting down his bag, he walked forward, using his best smile and extending the hand of fellowship.

"I'm Hale," he said pleasantly, "and I suppose you're Younge."

The broad-shouldered fellow allowed a faint trace of interest to appear, an interest slightly spiced with amusement. He took the proffered hand, shook it politely and indicated a chair.

“Sit down,” he invited in a deep, pleasant voice. “You look warm. Now what is it you’re selling?”

“Selling?”

The other nodded at the worn suitcase. “Aren’t you selling? Or just taking orders? Frankly, you know, Hale, I’m quite certain I don’t want any, but if you insist on showing goods, why, all right.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” replied Tod, puzzled. Was Younge trying to make fun of him? But surely not, for the other continued to maintain the soberness with which he had greeted Tod’s appearance. “I—I’m not selling anything. I’m Hale. I’m going to room here.”

The other received the information very calmly indeed. “That’s interesting,” he answered, although it didn’t seem to Tod that he found it so. “Then what do you carry around in the bag?”

“Why, my things! That is, some of them. My trunk’s at the station. I mean, it was. I gave the check to a fellow and he said he’d have it right up here. Will he bring it to the room or ought I to—”

“Was the fellow known to you?”

“What? Why, no, of course not. He said he carried trunks to the school, and—”

“Risky, Hale, very risky. However, he may be honest. Some of them are. By the way, are

you a descendant of the man who had but one life to give to his country?"

"Yes. At least, dad says we are. Look here, Mister—the Secretary downstairs said you were in the lower middle class. He was wrong, eh?"

"‘Hinkey’ very seldom is wrong," answered the other doubtfully. "What makes you think him in error, Hale?"

"Why—why," Tod stammered, "you're too old!"

"Old? But you just said I was young."

Tod wished the chap wouldn't look so serious. But he grinned at the joke. "Well, your name's Younge. Anyway he said so. It is, isn't it?" He was beginning to feel oddly confused. The other shook his head slowly.

"No, my name isn't Younge. It's merely New."

"New?" Tod smiled politely. Secretly he was beginning to find the fellow's jokes a bit tiresome. "Then he made a mistake?"

"‘Hinkey?’"

"Well, the Secretary. Is his name Hinkey?"

"His name is Howe."

"Then—then—say, are you trying to razz me?" Tod's voice became suddenly querulous. "Don't you—don't you know *any one's* name?"

"My dear fellow, I'm telling you," replied the older boy soothingly. "My name's New. His name's Howe. Your name's Hale. Or is it?"

“Of course it is! I’ve told you! But he said your name—”

He was interrupted by the advent of a third person, a heavy-built fellow of perhaps seventeen with a round, jovial face. He entered without knocking, tossed a cap to the table and took possession of a chair. Then he looked at the others inquiringly.

“Hale,” said the tall chap, “shake hands with Johnson. Lee, this is Mr. Hale. He’s going to bunk in here.” A wink accompanied the introduction, but Tod didn’t see it. Lee Johnson arose with alacrity and shook hands.

“Glad to know you, Hale. I’ve always wanted to meet you.”

Tod stared. Was every one crazy here? Had he mistaken the Insane Asylum for Nostrand School? But Johnson went on to explain.

“I’ve heard a lot about you, you know. ‘Hail fellow, well met.’ That’s you, isn’t it?”

Tod managed a faint grin. Then he got up. “I—I guess I ought to look up my trunk, eh? Maybe they won’t know where to fetch it.”

“Not a bad idea,” approved the tall fellow. “Were you thinking of bringing it in here?”

“Why, yes, I suppose so. That is, until I get it unpacked.”

The others appeared to consult in silence. Then Johnson said: “Oh, it’s all right by me. A bit

crowded, of course, but I dare say we can make out. He could have half your drawers, Jack, and half my closet.”

Jack nodded. “Yes, but what puzzles me is—ah—”

“Yes, there’s that. How about the window-seat?”

“Too short, don’t you think? How tall are you, Hale?”

“I’m— Say, what’s it all about?” Tod looked from one to the other. Intensely serious countenances met his gaze. “Look here, you fellows, quit kidding, won’t you?”

“You don’t understand, Hale,” said Johnson. “You see how we’re fixed here. Two beds and both narrow. Of course I could let you have mine, but, hang it all, you know, I was here first. I was, wasn’t I, Jack? I mean before Hale.”

“Yes, I’m afraid he was, Hale. You see, he was here all last year. And so was I. We don’t want to seem inhospitable—”

“Does he room here, too?” gasped Tod. “You mean there’ll be three of us in a room? Mr. Whatshisname didn’t say anything about him! He said I was to be in Number 36 with a fellow named Younge!”

“Strange,” muttered Johnson. “We haven’t any one of that name here. Maybe, though, ‘Hin-

key's' going to send him up later. That'll make four of us, won't it?"

"You're not in this room!" charged Tod indignantly. "You—you're just trying to—to get my goat!"

"Hold on," said the tall chap. "I think I have it. Did 'Hinkey' tell you 36 East or 36 West, Hale?"

"What? He just said— He said I was to turn to my left. Isn't this 36? What do you mean, east or west?"

"Oh, that's it then," said Johnson, with a relieved sigh. "You're doubtless in 36 West. West is the other end of the building, Hale. It's a mistake easy to make."

"Then—then— But he said turn to the left!"

"He meant *his* left," explained Jack New patiently. "You see, when you reach the top of the stairs you're facing the other way, and his left is your right. I hope I make myself plain. In other words, 'Hinkey' referred to the left of the building as you face it. This is the right. Quite simple when you understand it, isn't it?"

Tod wouldn't have minded half so much if either one of them had laughed, or even smiled, but their inscrutable gravity was too much for him. Miserably, red of face, he seized the suitcase, tried to say something, failed, and stumbled toward the door. Behind him came New's calm voice.

“Straight along the corridor, Hale, past the stair well and almost to the end. Awfully glad to have met you. Drop in again some time, won't you!”

Tod closed the door behind him, resisting a desire to slam it, and strode wrathfully away, his cheeks burning hot. Suddenly a sound brought him up standing. Above the chatter from a close-by door came, from beyond the closed portal of Number 36 East, howls of mirth! He went on again, almost running, thinking only of escaping from those sounds.

Gosh, he reflected presently, what a beginning to make! Probably those two idiots would tell it all around the school! Still, maybe they wouldn't. They hadn't seemed a bad sort, either of them, except for their silly practical joking. Gee-golly, what a pair of arms and shoulders New had! Maybe he was a football man. Well, anyway, here was 36 again, and this time there wasn't going to be any nonsense. Or, if there was, some one was going to get hurt!

The door of 36 West was closed. Of course, since it was his room as well as Younge's, he had a right to go in without knocking, but his recent experience had taken away something of his confidence, and he compromised by knocking and opening the door as nearly simultaneously as was

possible with the use of but one hand. The scene which met his eyes this time was different.

On the farthest of the two narrow beds a boy of about Tod's age was stretched, his head and shoulders supported by two pillows—one from the other bed—and a magazine open against his raised knees. Tod saw that he had light hair, something Tod didn't approve of, but that was about all he could see at the instant because the light from the two windows was behind the other. Younge had turned his head and was observing the newcomer in silence. Tod didn't attempt the ritual of greeting this time. He just plumped his suitcase on a chair and looked around the room. It was much like the wrong Number 36, but, possibly because the windows looked slightly westward, was far lighter at this time of afternoon. It was much smaller than Tod had pictured the rooms, and it was by no means over-furnished. But it wasn't bad, and, since this was his first experience in boarding schools, he was prepared to like it.

“You in here?” asked the boy on the bed, finally breaking the silence in a not very amiable tone.

Tod nodded. “Yes. My name's Hale. What's yours?” He wasn't taking chances this time!

“Younge. That's your side over there. Got any fixings?”

“Fixings? No, only a few photographs. I suppose you haven't seen my trunk, have you?”

“No.” Tod gathered that the other didn’t care if he never saw it. Being in a decidedly antagonistic mood himself, he found the other’s manner quite to his mind. He went over and pulled out a drawer of the chiffonier. Then he closed it not too gently and opened another. The second one stuck and he had to tug hard. Then, when it was finally out, it refused to close. Tod prevailed on it with a well-directed kick. “Swell furniture they give you,” he observed sarcastically.

“Sorry you don’t like it,” said Younge nastily. “Maybe if you go on kicking it it’ll get better.”

Tod turned and had a look at him. He could see him now. He had light hair, as before noted, and, worse yet in Tod’s judgment, light eyes. They appeared to be blue or, maybe, hazel. Like a girl’s, the observer reflected disgustedly. Younge’s features were regular and he showed color under the faint tan of his cheeks. On the whole, Tod decided, he was too good-looking. And he didn’t like him. And maybe he conveyed the fact, for Younge, staring back, said: “Take a good look, Farmer. There’s no charge.”

“Where,” inquired Tod, beginning to smile at the prospect of working off some of his grouch, “do you get that ‘farmer’ stuff?”

“Oh, I sort of thought you looked—er—rural,” answered Younge, undisturbed. He placed his

hands under his head and tried to swallow a yawn.

“My mistake.”

“I’ll say so. Too many mistakes like that won’t be good for you, neighbor.”

“Well, see who’s here! Cocky, what? Listen to me, Hale, or whatever your silly name is; don’t try to start anything with me, because I’m not in any condition to take it. Get that? You let me alone, kid, or you’ll wish you had.”

“That so? Now you listen to me.” Tod leaned over the foot-rail of the bed and met Younge’s glare with a bright smile. “You started it, not I. I’ll let you alone, all right. I’d a sight rather. I don’t like your looks. I don’t like tow hair and I don’t like blue eyes. I don’t like one blamed thing about you. And, look here, you put my pillow back where you got it.”

Stuart Younge was too surprised for an instant to do anything but stare. Then, with a strangled exclamation, he lit on the floor. “You—you cheeky nut!” he said indignantly. “What you don’t like isn’t in it with what I don’t! You look like a piece of cheese to me! Right out of the barnyard, I’ll bet!”

“Go ahead and say it!”

“Sure, I’ll say it! Farmer!”

Tod aimed a quick blow at Stuart’s well-shaped nose, but it didn’t land, for Stuart snapped his head aside and swung against Tod’s ribs so hard

that the latter said "Ugh!" as he staggered back against his own bed. Stuart got in again while Tod was unbalanced, this time on his neck. The bed went creakingly across the floor as Tod kicked backward, and he had room for action. He landed nicely then on the adversary's cheek and Stuart half fell. But he bounded up from the edge of his bed and came back, hammer and tongs. They fought silently save for an occasional involuntary grunt and the sound of hoarse breathing. Once they clinched and hammered each other fast but ineffectually, finally breaking by common consent, and once Tod forced Stuart back on the latter's bed and found himself on top and the battle won if he chose to take advantage of the situation. But he sprang clear and waited for the other to find his feet again. They circled and feinted for a long moment, getting their wind back. Then Tod jumped in and landed hard on the other's ribs, left and right, getting a glancing blow on his chin as he ducked away. Stuart was no mean antagonist, for he knew quite as much about boxing as Tod did, and he had the advantage of some twenty pounds of weight. The latter, though, was possibly offset by Tod's longer reach.

The minutes passed. Both fighters showed the marks of the battle and both were tiring. Tod's nose was bleeding profusely and Stuart's cheek trickled blood. Blows became short and seldom

landed. Still watching each other, they tramped ceaselessly about between the beds, gasping hoarsely from tired lungs, fainting, countering, giving and taking futile blows. Finally Stuart dropped his arms and sank wearily to the edge of his bed.

“That’s . . . enough,” he muttered.

Tod’s legs gave out beneath him and he, too, found himself sitting on his bed, trembling hands hanging loose between his knees. They looked at each other across the three scant yards of floor, a sort of mild perplexity superseding the late antagonism. Tod managed a faint smile and shook his head.

“All . . . in,” he gasped.

Stuart nodded. “Me, too. Gee!” Tod’s smile became reflected in a brave attempt at a grin. “Some scrap, eh?”

“I’ll say so!” Tod chuckled. “I’m satisfied if you are.”

“Gee, yes! Say, you’d better stop that nose-bleed. Wait a sec.” Stuart pulled himself up limply and wavered to his closet. “Use that,” he said. “No use spoiling a handkerchief.”

Tod accepted the article, a not too clean shoe cloth, and stanchied the flow, sniffing unmusically. “Thanks,” he said. “That was a sure-enough punch, Younge.”

“Well, you handed me a few, too! We’ll have

to get some water in here. If we both go to the lavatory we may get spotted by a Fac. I'll fetch some. I don't look quite as bloody as you do."

"Don't bother," protested Tod.

"That's all right; I need some myself. How are your hands?"

"Sore. Knuckles skinned, too. Suppose any one will notice?"

"We should worry. You sit tight and I'll fetch some water in something. My towels are in that lower drawer there. Pull out a couple, will you?" He opened the door, peered up and down the corridor, winked portentously at Tod and vanished.



“Go ahead and say it!”

CHAPTER III

TOD REFLECTS

Tod sat in the uncovered stand and waited for Stuart. Stuart had stayed behind to confer with Mr. Farley, Greek instructor. Out on the field the football candidates were at work, a round half hundred of them, and Tod had been watching them with ever-dwindling interest. There is nothing very thrilling in the early season procedure of a football squad; especially if, as in Tod's case, ignorance of the science renders the reason for the procedure obscure. It was a warm afternoon and Tod shared the stand with some two score other fellows who lolled lazily in the seats and, although viewing events with perhaps more understanding, showed scarcely more interest. Tod yawned and sought a new position, pulling his straw hat down to further shade his eyes. Presently the moving figures on the gridiron faded from conscious sight and he was reviewing the happenings of the last three days.

He was still unable to recall that first day of school without a twinge of dismay. What a general mess he had made of things! First, that horrible mistake as to the location of his room. He

could yet hear in fancy the raucous laughter from behind the closed door of 36 East! Then that silly fit of temper and the resultant scrap with Stuart. And, finally—and here Tod squirmed visibly in his seat—that beastly incident at the Principal's reception!

Professor Nostrand occupied a residence some two hundred yards west of the dormitory, and there on the first evening of the new school year he gave a reception, primarily for the entering class but attended by all who desired to go. Tod had allowed Stuart to beguile him into accompanying him, although social functions of any sort appalled him. Stuart declared that since Tod was a new boy, even if not a junior class fellow, it was his duty to put in an appearance. For his part, Stuart frankly went on account of the "eats." The "eats" were always excellent. Apparently every fellow in school wormed his way into the crowded rooms at some time during the evening, the majority appearing very shortly before nine, at which hour the refreshments were served. Stuart timed their arrival with great nicety, he and Tod reaching the dining room only a fraction of a minute before the onslaught began. Tod felt extremely ill at ease amongst so many strangers, and he resisted every effort of his companion to introduce him. He caught his first glimpse of Professor Nostrand and found him not

at all up to his preconceived notion of what the Principal should look like. "H. P.," as the students called him—his full name was Henry Pratt Nostrand—looked more like a successful merchant than a full-fledged professor of mathematics and the head of a preparatory school for boys. He was about forty-five years of age, looked nearer thirty-five, was tallish, rather slim, dressed little like a pedagogue and had a long, lean countenance with high cheek-bones and deep-set gray eyes. And he was clean-shaven. And his necktie, instead of being the black stringy thing associated in Tod's mind with professors and such odd persons, was a decidedly smart four-in-hand of alternate bars of blue and brown. On the whole, while the Professor proved a distinct shock to Tod's expectations, he made a good deal of a hit with that youth. Mrs. Nostrand, who sought valiantly to relieve the embarrassment of the new crop of junior class boys without much apparent success, and who later presided at the distribution of sandwiches and salad, cake and ice cream, was a small lady with dark hair above a rather pretty round face. Tod caught only glimpses of her and went away with an impression of a white gown that showed touches of pale green serving endless plates of salad and ice cream.

Tod didn't eat much, leaving that pleasant task to Stuart. But he did follow the latter through

the throng about the long table to receive his dish of ice cream and wedge of frosted cake. And just after he had transferred the first spoonful of the ice cream to his mouth the catastrophe happened. He was moving slowly along with the outward-bound current toward the library, his dish held level with the lowest visible button of his shirt, the spoon in the act of descending for a second attack on the pink and white slab. Directly ahead of him was the broad back of a faculty member; Mr. Phillips, as it afterwards turned out. Mr. Phillips—"Flips" in school phraseology—wore a darkish coat. Had it been a light coat the incident would have looked less tragic. Some one ahead of the instructor stopped abruptly. Mr. Phillips thereupon likewise stopped abruptly. And so, of course, did Tod. And so did Tod's dish. But the ice cream didn't. Having accumulated a certain amount of warmth, the inch-thick slab had attained a surprising degree of slipperiness, and when the dish on which it reposed suddenly ceased its forward progress the slab of melting pink and white stuff continued right on, slid gracefully over the edge of said dish, covered the intervening space of some twelve inches without apparent loss of speed and landed squarely in the center of Mr. Phillips' immaculate coat. Finding progress barred, the slab dropped to a perpendicular position, clung a

moment to the material and then began a slow but gradually hastening descent.

Tod stared aghast, glued to the spot. Some one behind him laughed explosively. The ice cream dropped to the floor with a *plop*, leaving behind it a creamy wake from the center to the tails of "Flips'" coat. And at about that instant "Flips," dimly conscious of something untoward having occurred, turned around. But, since the crowd was thick, the instructor's turning necessitated that Tod should give way. He did so quite unconsciously, being still bereft of his faculties. Consequently, when the disaster was discovered by the victim he still occupied a position behind the latter. Fortunately, perhaps, his unnerved arm that held the now empty dish had fallen to his side, thus concealing the incriminating evidence. Mr. Phillips tried at one and the same time to ascertain the damage and fix the blame. The first was easier than the second, since of all those who crowded before him with sympathetic expressions none exhibited an empty dish. Confusion of a mild sort ensued. Some quick-thinking youth scooped the squashy mess from the floor with the aid of, first, a wedge of crumbly cake and, second, a paper napkin. Mr. Phillips, squirming agitatedly around to view the back of his coat, edged toward the hall. Driven, possibly, by much the same motive that induces the criminal to revisit the scene of his

crime, Tod followed his victim. By the door stood a small table, and, discovering that he still held the dripping weapon, Tod hastily deposited it thereon. Then, impelled against his better judgment, he dogged the instructor to a bathroom under the stairway. Mr. Phillips had removed the coat and was regarding it anxiously when Tod appeared.

“Ah!” said “Flips” in a decidedly irritable tone. “Just look at this mess! Just look at it!”

Tod looked at it, remorseful, aching to apologize. It hadn't occurred to him that the instructor was ignorant of his criminality. He momentarily expected to be taken to task, and he wondered how much coats like that one cost! His troubled expression was noted by “Flips” and interpreted as one of sympathy.

“Nice of you to bother,” he muttered. “Don't suppose there's anything to be done, though. You know anything?”

A vast relief overspread the transgressor. He wasn't suspected! Mr. Phillips believed he had followed out of pure kindness of heart, from a desire to be of service! He swallowed once very hard and, summoning from some dark corner of his brain a fragment of domestic lore he hadn't been conscious of harboring, blurted:

“I've heard that water will take out almost anything, sir!”

“Flips” looked dubious. “Water? You mean—er—cold water?”

“Yes, sir, just plain cold water.”

“Not—er—hot water? Or, possibly, tepid water?”

“No, sir, just cold water,” replied Tod almost sternly.

“Well—” Mr. Phillips sighed, took a hand towel and began the treatment. Tod stood by to assist. He handed a fresh towel. Mr. Phillips absently sought to place the used one in his pocket, discovered the pocket wasn't there and dropped it to the floor. The application of water worked like a charm. Evidences of the catastrophe vanished, leaving, to be sure, a thoroughly dampened garment but changing “Flips” from an aggrieved person to one of quite cheerful mien.

“Well, well, that seems to have done it!” he declared in triumph. “Surprising, too, wouldn't you say? I mean, more or less grease in ice cream; fat, you know; and water, just ordinary cold water, now, why, you wouldn't expect it, would you? By the way, I don't seem to recall your name.”

“Hale, sir, Lower Middle. I'm in your French class.”

“Ah, yes, doubtless. Well, Hale, I'm certainly greatly obliged to you, very greatly obliged to

you, I'm sure. Of course it may be that daylight will show a stain not at present discernible"—Mr. Phillips held the coat close to the electric lamp and peered narrowly at the wet surface—"but I must acknowledge that at present the result appears—er—miraculous."

"Yes, sir," replied Tod, edging away through the door. "It looks like it had done the trick, doesn't it?"

"Oh, absolutely! And now—I wonder— But perhaps it would be best to return to my room and hang it up. Yes, I think I will do that," he continued musingly. "After all, I had some salad."

Tod made his way back to the library, finally discovered Stuart busy with his second helping of ice cream, edged his way to him as unostentatiously as possible—if Mr. Phillips didn't know the identity of the miscreant who had assailed his coat, there were probably plenty of others who did—and whispered hoarsely: "Come on home, Stu!"

"All right. Wait till I finish this."

"No, now," answered Tod desperately. "I'm going, anyhow."

"Oh, well, all right." Stuart made three spoonfuls of six, choked painfully and followed. It took them quite five minutes to cover the distance from the Principal's residence to the west door of Nostrand Hall because Stuart hadn't witnessed the

contretemps and found Tod's narration of it intensely amusing, so amusing that twice he had to pause and lean against a tree. Afterwards he pretended to believe that Tod had premeditated the affair and blamed him bitterly for not letting him in on it. He declared that if Tod had told him what he was up to he would willingly, nay, gladly, have donated his own dish of ice cream to such a noble purpose!

That had ended an eventful, an unfortunate, day. Lying in bed that night, listening to the comfortable breathing of Stuart, Tod had thanked his stars that he hadn't reached the school earlier, since with more time there was no saying what other horrible things he might have pulled off! He comforted himself, however, with the old adage that a bad beginning makes a good ending, and finally fell asleep.

If you left out that first day, though, he reflected now, he hadn't done so badly. That is, he had survived all of one succeeding day and most of a third, and held only pleasant memories of each. He was going to like the school. He had made up his mind on that point. He liked it already. "Gus" Borrow, instructor in History and Tod's adviser, had turned out to be a whale of a guy. The words were Tod's own. And then Stu was a corker, too. They had got on wonderfully after that initial misunderstanding. You couldn't help respecting a

fellow who was capable of putting up such a fight as Stuart had, or of liking one who, honor satisfied, had fetched water and towels and ministered to Tod's battered nose and laughed and joked as though ten minutes before they hadn't been trying their best to knock each other to pieces! Yes, sir, Stu was one swell guy! No two ways about that!

Studies which had appeared formidable in anticipation had proved not very difficult so far. He expected to have—indeed, was having—trouble with Greek and German, neither of which he had ever tackled before. And they had jumped him far ahead in Latin. But he guessed he could keep his end up once he got into the swing of it. The instructors, or such as he had had contact with, seemed decent chaps; "Sammy" Langham, the Math. instructor; "Gruff" Farley, who taught Greek, and two or three more; especially "Gus." Tod was going to like History a whole lot with Mr. Borrow teaching it. Oh, he'd get on! And Stuart, who had been here last year, knew the ropes pretty thoroughly, and was looking after him like a mother!

The place was mighty pretty, too, and the buildings weren't just buildings. That is, they were attractive; as though the folks who had put them up hadn't just thought of the usefulness of them but had tried to build them so a fellow could,

somehow, sort of get fond of them. Tod guessed Professor Nostrand—he hadn't yet got used to calling him "H.P."—had kind of planned the buildings himself. They were rather like him, Tod thought. The big hall held the studies—Tod couldn't see any reason for calling them "studies" when they were just rooms, but that was the Nostrand custom—and the recreation rooms, and the dining hall and the offices. And somewhere, doubtless, there was a kitchen. Tod hadn't seen that, but he had smelled it! Two smaller buildings, Goodman and Manster, flanked Nostrand, and those held the recitation rooms. Then the Junior Class boys lived and had their being, quite separate from the others, in Bates, the hall between Manster and Staley Laboratory. You didn't see much of the kids except in class. The gymnasium stood behind Goodman, on the edge of the playing field.

CHAPTER IV

HERO WORSHIP

“HELLO, Farmer!”

Tod came out of his reverie to find Stuart climbing over the back of the next seat. “Hello, Whitey,” he responded, grinning. “What kept you so long?”

“‘Gruff,’ of course. He was horribly long-winded. Anything doing here?”

“Only what you see. Some one said there’d be a scrimmage, but I don’t see any signs.”

“They’ll probably have a short one before they quit. Look at ‘Cold Slaw’s’ get-up, will you? Pipe the pretty pants!”

Tod identified the person mentioned and chuckled. “Look as if they’d shrunk. What’s he do, anyway? Just help Mr. Loferman?”

“He does that for a week or so. Then he gets a second team together and coaches that. Not a half bad coach, either. They say he was a pretty good tackle in his day. Tackles must have been heavier then, or else he’s grown sidewise!” Stuart chuckled. “I’ve heard he was a pretty tough guy as a football player, but he’s a regular crank now on clean playing. Last year he chucked ‘Tub’ Par-

rish off the team because 'Tub' got into a hot argument with another fellow and gave him a tap on the nose. Then Joey grabbed 'Tub' for the big team and 'Tub' did mighty well. Joey's not so particular as 'Slaw.' But then, 'Slaw' teaches Bible History and Joey doesn't!"

"Who's Joey? Mr. Loferman?"

"Yes, Coach Joseph Loferman, Esquire. Late of Dartmouth—or was it Williams? One or the other. Not so very late, either, because he coached six or seven years before he came here. Out west somewhere most of the time; some small college. Then a prep school down around Washington. There's 'Tub' Parrish now; the wide gentleman approaching us."

"Oh, I know him," replied Tod. "I mean, I've seen him. He's the fellow I told you about, the smart aleck who got gay the day I arrived. Called me 'Hayseed'—or nearly."

"So that was 'Tub'? Sounds rather like him. Say, I hope he didn't call you 'Farmer'!"

"If he had I'd have licked him, like I always do," answered Tod, grinning.

"Yes, you do! Whose little nose got whanged?"

"Whose little cheek got biffed? It doesn't look very respectable yet!"

"Well, it's funny how folks insult you, Tod. Always making references to your—your bucolic appearance, I mean. Why is it? You know you

really don't look like a farmer—that is, not much.”

“Shut up. Maybe it's this hat.” Tod took it off and viewed it appraisingly. “It does look sort of—sort of country, doesn't it?”

“Where'd you buy it? Or did you just find it?”

“I paid real money for it. A dollar and a quarter at the Haberdashery. The Haberdashery is our swellest store. Sol told me the Prince of Wales wore a straw just like this when he was over here.”

“Who's Sol? The man who sold the hat to you?”

“Sure. Sol Meyer. He and his brother Izzy run the store. They had a store in New York once, right on Broadway, Sol says, but they got burned out.”

“Wasn't that too bad?” said Stuart sympathetically. “They saved one thing from the fire, though, I notice! It's a fine hat, Tod, but there's something about it that—that—well, maybe it's too advanced in style for this place. Why don't you get a cap? Straws are called in, anyway.”

“I thought I would when I got to the village.”

“Well, I'll show you where to go. There's only one place to buy hats and clothing and such things: Wilkins'. You can get tick there if you like—and faculty doesn't hear of it!”

“It wouldn't be the faculty I'd be afraid of,” replied Tod grimly, “but my dad. He'd whale me, I guess, if he ever found me running up bills.”

“He would? Glad he isn’t my dad, then, for I’m owing Wilkins nearly thirty dollars right now from last year. I’ll have to pay it pretty soon, too. He’s been nagging me since June. That’s one reason why I’d like to steer a customer to him. He might forget my account for another month. Say, don’t you need a new suit or an overcoat or something, Tod?”

“Not that I know of. Anyway, I wouldn’t go to Wilkins for it and get stung just to square you!”

“I thought you were a true friend,” sighed Stuart. “Now we’re going to get action. Here comes Joey. Guess he’s going to call ’em in. Yep, there goes the whistle.”

“Who’s the biggish fellow coming toward the bench, the one just taking off his head-harness?”

“Where? Oh, that’s Johnson, Lee Johnson. Plays left guard, or maybe right. Know him?”

“I’ve seen him,” said Tod. “He rooms with a chap named New, doesn’t he?”

“Correct, young fellow. Jack New. Crew captain. Great guys both of them. But how do you know so much about ’em?”

“Oh, I—I keep my eyes open,” answered Tod carelessly. He meant to tell Stuart some time about his attempt to room with New and Johnson, but not yet. He still remembered Stuart’s laughter over the ice cream incident! “You say New

is captain of the crew?" he asked interestedly. "That's where he gets those arms and shoulders, eh? Gee, I'd like to row!"

Stuart regarded him pityingly. "You, you poor minnow? You'd never make the boat unless they took you aboard for ballast! Crewmen have got to be big, strong guys like me."

"Well, you're not much of a whale yourself," signed Tod, "but I'd like to be even as big as you are!"

"Oh, no, Toddy!" Stuart threw an arm about the other and squeezed him violently. "You're a cute little chap as you are."

"Cut it out! I'm not little. I may be—er—smallish, but don't you start to calling me little, doggone you!"

"Never! You're a big old buster of a fellow. O-o-oh, so big! Got hands and feet and everything! A regular guy and—"

"I'll hand you one if you don't shut up! Say, when do the crew fellows start to row?"

"They're rowing right now."

"Where?"

"Down the river about a mile."

"Let's go and see them. Will you?"

"Sure, but not to-day. They'd be through by the time we got there. Besides, I want to see this scrimmage. Gosh, but there's a bunch of new fellows there! Look at the tall guy with the hunched-

up shoulders. He'd make a pretty good goal post if they needed one, eh? And look at him run! Go it, Skinny! Say, I hope he doesn't get broken in two when he's tackled! Ever play football much, Tod?"

"Not much. Too small. Smallish, I mean. I like to watch it, though. What sort of teams do we have here?"

"The usual sort; eleven men, you know."

"Is that so? Don't get fresh. Can they play? Who beats when we meet Melton?"

"I guess it's about fifty-fifty to date. Melton beat us last year, 15 to 13, on a fluke. She kicked a field-goal that went low until some poor nut jumped up and tipped it and sent it just over the bar. Not one of our bunch would ever own up to doing it, but some one did it, and I've always suspected 'Tub.' He swears he didn't, though. Anyway, whoever he was, he meant well. We had the old game 13 to 12 before that, and we were a pretty sick lot afterwards."

"Where's Melton School, anyway?"

"Melton Academy, sweet one. It's at Melton, strange as it may seem, and Melton's about forty miles over yonder." Stuart nodded across the field in a generally northerly direction. "They've got a nice layout up there, too. Big campus and lots of trees. It's older than this place. Been

there for a million years, I guess, while Nostrand's as new as—as new!"

"How new?"

"This is the twenty-second year. There was a sort of a school here when 'H.P.' bought the place, but it only had about forty fellows, I think. Belleford School for Boys, they called it. I guess it had more day fellows than boarders. All that's left of it now is the Old Barn. Bet you haven't seen that yet. It's where we have our plays and things. The old brown wooden building back of 'H.P.'s' house. Old Barn Society uses it as headquarters. If you behave yourself and grow noble and do big things for the dear old School, Tod, maybe some day a guy will walk up to you and hand you a spear of oats."

"A spear of oats? What for?"

"It's a—a thingumbob—a symbol, so to speak. Gosh, look at Barron sneak through that end! That boy's going to be better than ever this year, son! What was I saying when you interrupted me? Oh, about the oats. Well, when some one hands you that straw it shows which way the wind blows, Tod, and you burst into tears of gratitude. And then they come around and lug you off to the Barn and initiate you into the profound and awful mysteries of O.B. After that you're a made man. Faces take off their hats to you and 'H.P.' asks you to dinner."

“Quit your kidding. What’s the good of it? What sort of a society is it?”

“Dry-matic and lit’ry. They give two plays a year and don’t do so rotten, either. Paint their own scenery and all that, you know. Frohman and Belasco and all the big producers come and sit in the front row.”

“Yes, they do!”

“Well, anyway, last June the man who runs the movie house in the village was up to the play! He didn’t buy it, but he might have. There’s the horn. All over until to-morrow! Let’s go back.”

The next afternoon they went down to the Basin and saw the crews practice. The Basin was about a mile—a rather long mile, however—below Belleford. The Wardall River became tidal there and widened into quite a respectable stream for the matter of a mile and an eighth, flowing fairly straightly through a wide marsh where, in May, vicious mosquitoes laid in wait for the unwary and made rowing for a period of three weeks or so something akin to the Spanish Inquisition. The school owned a commodious boathouse there, reached by following River Road to Falls Road and finally turning southward on a sort of tow-path, a path which in mosquito time led directly through the enemy’s country. Given a breeze, however, one survived the journey. To-day the mosquitoes were not in evidence, but tiny gnats

substituted very effectively and Tod's straw hat gave way under the violent waving he put it to. Stuart, viewing the parting of crown and brim, said he hoped the Prince's hat hadn't served him like that!

The two crews were already in the stream when the boys reached the float, and the coach, Nate McKenna, a small, freckled-faced man with a button nose and sky-blue eyes, was paddling off in a shell to join them. There was a small white launch in the boathouse, but Stuart explained that it wasn't much used in early practice. Half a dozen substitutes sat along the edge of the runway, sweated, and called jokingly to their more fortunate mates. Tom Griffen, the trainer, turned from holding the coach's shell and addressed the idlers.

"Now, then, a couple of you that's handy with a brush can help me varnish some oars," he announced. "Come on! Snap into it!"

"Aw, Tom, have a heart! We're rowing men, not painters!"

"If you was you'd not be sittin' there! The coach would have you out on the river. Now then, who's for it? Two of ye will do."

"Let's draw straws," some one suggested.

"I'll give you a hand, Tom," another said, pulling his long length away from the planks.

"You're not a bad guy."

“Am I not? Well—” Then his eyes happened on Stuart and Tod and he interrupted his sarcasm to ask: “And where’d you fellers come from? Sure, I never seen you when the tide came in.”

“From school,” replied Stuart, amidst appreciative chuckles from the rowers. “We want to see the work-out. Any objection?”

“None at all, my friends. Make yourself at home. Sure, it’s pleased we are to have so distinguished an audience. Come on, strikers! Who’s the other fellow that loves me?”

“Oh, I guess it’s me, Tom. Lead me to it. This crew life is sure killing!”

Meanwhile from out in the stream came the directions of the two coxswains. “Straighten her out, fellows. That’s enough. Back her, port. Hold her.” Then Coach McKenna’s voice: “First crew, take it easy down to the red buoy. Watch the stroke, Knowles, and don’t let ’em get away with murder like they did yesterday. You fellows act like you’d forgotten everything you ever knew. All right. Take ’em away.”

The eight oars went forward, hovered just above the surface and then, at the order of the coxswain, dipped. The long slim shell moved slowly forward, gathered speed and slid down the river. After a moment the second crew followed, the coach sculling easily along in advance, watchful and critical. Long after the shell had passed

around the slow bend of the stream Nate's voice floated back to the landing. "Watch those hands, Number 6! You, too, 5! Steady in the boat! Lengthen that stroke! Watch your crew, Scanlon! Make 'em row!"

Tod had not identified Jack New until the shells had started off, and now he asked in a puzzled tone: "Didn't you say New was a captain, Stu?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Well, but I thought the captain was always in the last seat. New was halfway along the boat!"

"Oh, no, the captain rows where he's put, son; wherever the coach thinks he will do best. Sometimes he is at stroke, of course, but he's just as likely to be at bow or anywhere else in the shell. Want to go down a bit farther? You can see the basin from around that first point."

Going farther was somewhat of a task, since the path practically ended at the boathouse and they had to take to the marsh, here not much higher than the surface of the river. Still, there was a sort of a trail visible, and now and then some enterprising person had laid a strip of board or a rotting log across one of the little winding ribbons of water. But there was plenty of exercise to be had, and once Stuart jumped short and immersed one leg to the knee. Eventually they reached a sort of island in the waste of marsh grass and water on which stood the remains of a duck hunt-

er's cabin. Walls and roof had long since fallen, but a stout floor remained and previous adventurers had improvised benches of planks and beams. They seated themselves on one of these and Stuart took off his shoe and stocking and laid them aside to dry. A few feet away the river washed amongst the sedges, and a half-mile distant the two crews and the coach's frail craft glided through the blue water. To the right the white spire of a church and three tall factory chimneys marked the location of Belleford, and presently, following Stuart's directions, Tod picked out the belfry on Nostrand Hall, somewhat hidden by the tops of the trees. Southeastward the marsh narrowed between rolling hills and the river, a mere shining thread, disappeared toward the sea. Well beyond the point of disappearance the summit of a sand dune glared in the sunlight.

They watched the shells reach the downstream end of the Basin and lie there motionless for several minutes like wearied water-bugs. Finally they turned and came back, this time at a faster clip, the first crew well in the lead, the coach dropping astern gradually. The course was near the opposite bank, but the swaying bodies and flashing oars passed so close that the boys could hear the creaking of a slide, the rasp of oar-locks and the rush of water past the boats. And, too, the sharp voices of the coxswains through the little mega-

phones strapped around their heads. "Pick it up! Row! Row! Row! Seven, you're short; lengthen out! That's better! Row! Row! Row!" Above the scanty white shirts arms and shoulders and necks strained gloriously. Tod was thrilled. More than once he had regretted his lack of size and weight, but now the regret turned to bitter discontent. He wanted desperately to be a crewman!

After they had followed the boats to the landing and watched the crews debark and the shells housed, Tod confessed his ambition to Stuart as they tramped the path back to the road. Stuart was understanding and even sympathetic, but he was not encouraging. "You see, Tod, those fellows are big guys, and they're built for rowing. Why, I dare say Jack New weighs a hundred and seventy! Of course, by the time you're as old as he is you may be pretty hefty yourself, but I wouldn't count on it."

"How old is he?" asked Tod a bit dejectedly.

"Jack? Oh, eighteen, I suppose. He's a senior, of course."

"Is it hard to row, Stu?"

"No, not hard to row, but it's mighty hard to row the way those fellows do. They're at it all the fall, right up to the time the river freezes. Then, after Christmas, they start in on the machines—"

"Rowing machines, eh? I've heard of those."

“Yes. And they keep that up until along in March, I guess, when they get outdoors again. Last spring they were on the river before the ice was all gone, and cold—jimmy Christmas, but it was cold! One thing I haven’t any ambition to be, Toddy, is a crew-man!”

“I wish I was,” sighed Tod. “I’d love it!”

“You think you would, maybe,” said Stuart pessimistically, “but you’d last about a week!”

Tod was inclined to refute that statement, but just then the motor-bus that took the crews back and forth warned them out of the road and he kept his peace. Tom Griffen, seated beside the driver, called to them: “Want a ride?” Stuart shot a questioning look at Tod, but the latter shook his head. Why he couldn’t have told, but at the moment the occupants of the bus were mighty heroes to him and doubtless the thought of mingling with them filled him with awed dismay. The bus took on speed again and went past, but not before Jack New, seated on the side next to the pedestrians, had recognized Tod. A quick smile overspread the captain’s face and he flung a laughing “Hello, Hale!” down to the boy. Tod, looking up, retained sufficient presence of mind to smile back, albeit in somewhat sickly fashion, and to raise a hand in salute. When Stuart looked around at him in surprise Tod was blushing redly. Stuart grunted.

“Hm, you never said you knew Jack. Where’d

you meet him? What you blushing about? Hey, come clean now, you cheater!"

So, with misgivings, Tod recounted the story of his mistake. The misgivings were thoroughly warranted. Stuart laughed all the way back to the bridge.

CHAPTER V

THE "BATTLING BLOODS"

TOD'S ambition to become a member of the crew remained, but he recognized the hopelessness of it and after a day or two could be induced to discuss other subjects than rowing, which was a relief to Stuart! Football got under way with a game against Garrison High School the second Saturday of the term, and for the present at least Tod relegated rowing to the back of his mind. The result of watching that first game of the schedule, which Nostrand won without difficulty, was Tod's subsequent appearance on the scrub gridiron. This happened on a Wednesday afternoon, and he wore the uniform—borrowed by piecemeal—of the Battling Bloods. The Battling Bloods were mostly lower-middle fellows, although a rampageous full-back, Jim Bergold, came from the upper-middle fold and an end, chosen for his height, was a senior. Tod, because any one with half an eye could see that he fitted into the quarter-back position, was appointed one of two "signal-slingers." The other one was a table companion named Pinkham, known, of course, as "Pinky." "Pinky" had had more experience in the position,

and after the third practice Tod became resigned to the rôle of substitute. Stuart, also, was a Battling Blood, and performed heroically if not too skillfully at right tackle. They played their first contest with the Jumping Beans and, by some miracle, downed that aggregation to the tune of 27 to 19 in four ten-minute periods. Much rejoicing ensued. But there still remained another game to be played, and, a fortnight later, after the Hot Dogs had been defeated by the Wandering Willies, the final contest in the Scrub Series was held.

Occurring as it did on a Saturday afternoon when the School Team was off on an invasion of Lawrence Academy, the attendance was flattering, the applause hearty and the excitement intense. It was possible to tell the Battling Bloods from the Wandering Willies only because seven out of the eleven members of the first team wore red stockings and nine of the latter aggregation wore brown. Of course it wasn't always easy, even so, and after the two captains commenced calling in, their reserves you just had to guess! "Pinky" started off at quarter-back for the Bloods and Tod watched from the bench—well, from a seat on the ground near the bench. The game was not scientific, for both teams depended largely on brawn. Given the ball, the Battling Bloods called on the rampageous full-back for gains and the Wandering Willies, in their turn, placed their reliance on

a husky half-back named Moody. Occasionally, as when these dependables were momentarily incapacitated, the pigskin was entrusted to others, and sometimes a team would surprise the enemy and the audience by punting, but in the main the momentous contest was conducted by the Bloods' full-back and the Willies' left-half. And the unfortunate outcome of the game may be traced to the fact that the half-back proved to possess more stamina than the full-back.

Yes, after having personally conducted the ball some twenty-five times and being administered to by Trainer Tom Griffen at least thrice, Full-back Bergold sort of passed out. Naturally his teammates were disappointed in him, so disappointed that it was only with extreme reluctance that two of them finally consented to bear him to the sideline. They felt that Bergold had failed them in their hour of need. That was in the middle of the third period, and Moody, displaying remarkable endurance, didn't acknowledge defeat until well toward the last of the fourth. Then he, too, weakly refused to get up after having been tossed on his head, and it was the Wandering Willies' turn to marvel and mourn over the dereliction of a trusted comrade. Deprived of their stars, both teams were left on fairly even terms, but Moody's longer length of service had already decided the outcome of the game since during the

ten minutes or so by which he had survived Bergold he had twice propelled himself through the weakened ranks of the Battling Bloods and accumulated twelve points.

Of course the Battling Bloods fought nobly to the end, but defeat was to be their portion. Even the presence of Tod at quarter-back position was not sufficient to turn the tide; in fact, it wouldn't be amiss, although it would be unnecessary, to state that Tod's presence on one occasion at least accounted for a considerable loss of ground. That was when he got badly mixed on his signals, called for left half-back through left guard and then tried to pass the ball to the full-back. As the full-back had not expected the honor he was diffident about accepting it, and in the interim some objectionable Wandering Willie came through and, lifting Tod up in his arms, wandered with him far down the field. That wouldn't have been so bad, although naturally degrading to Tod, if Tod hadn't dropped the pigskin at the instant of being picked up. A second enemy secured it and followed in the wake of the first, making fourteen yards before he was persuaded to stop. Probably Tod's captor would have continued right along with him and deposited him behind the goal line if an amused official hadn't overhauled him. The captor's amazement when convinced that the captive had neglected to fetch the ball along with him was great. Along the sides

of the field the onlookers rocked with delight. Well, that about brought the battle to an end. The Wandering Willies tried several forward passes that didn't work and then an exhausted referee sounded the knell of defeat—or of victory if you happened to be a partisan of the Willies. I think the score was 32 to 21. Something like that, anyway.

Tod had had a good deal of fun in the Scrub Series, but he didn't lose his heart to football, and was quite ready to quit when the series was done. He was left, however, with a better knowledge of the game and a fuller appreciation of its intricacies and possibilities, and, during the month that ensued, followed the fortunes of the School Team with rapt interest, thrilling over the hard-fought contest with Fisk that finally ended in a 14 to 7 triumph for the Maroon, tasting the full bitterness of defeat when Hastingsville High School turned the tables on the home team in the last five minutes of play and walked off with the long end of a 17 to 13 score, and watching with extreme satisfaction the progress of the next to the last game of the waning season, when, with the local high school as opponent, Nostrand used every man in her squad and followed field goals with touchdowns and touchdowns with successful tries until a grand total of 36 points showed on the scoreboard. Oh, of course, High School was weak and

none too well coached and made a poor choice of plays, but still credit was due Coach Loferman's charges and Coach Loferman's training, and Nostrand School faced the final contest of the year, against her old rival, Melton, with confidence.

During that increasingly hectic month Jack New came nigh to losing his position of supremacy among school heroes in Tod's estimation, for "Hat" Barron, Captain of the Football Team, became a fine and romantic figure to the younger lad. Barron's full name was Hatchell, and occasionally a facetious friend called him "Satchel," but "Hat" was easier and simpler. As a captain he was acknowledged to be no more than average, but as a hard-running, hard-fighting, shifty half-back he was close to phenomenal, and Tod's admiration increased with every performance of the team. He got to know all the first-string and most of the substitutes by sight and could discuss their merits and faults quite knowingly. Stuart, with less enthusiasm for the rôle of spectator, pretended indifference to the canvas-clad heroes and was extremely "bearish" on the subject of Nostrand's ability to win from Melton. Consequently there was much argument and discussion between the room-mates, argument that occasionally resulted in brief periods of coolness in Number 36 West. Stuart early discovered an infallible way to get Tod's "goat." This was to indulge in inordinate praise of "Tub"

Parrish as a left guard. As a matter of fact, "Tub" was a very uneven performer, fairly good at his best, undeniably bad at his worst. Tod granted the stout left guard a certain ability, but the incident on the steps of Nostrand Hall the day of Tod's arrival had not prejudiced him in "Tub's" favor, and he became impatient when Stuart gravely predicted a wonderful future for that youth and compared him to Lee Johnson, who played right guard. Since Lee was Jack New's room-mate and chum he had acquired much merit in Tod's eyes, and to have him mentioned in the same breath with "Tub" Parrish was more than Tod could stand with equanimity. Taking advantage of that fact, Stuart worked his friend into numerous indignant outbursts before Tod "got wise." An almost equally efficacious method of starting a heated argument was that of belittling Captain Barron.

"'Hat'?" Stuart would drawl. "Shucks, he's just lucky, Tod. Besides, he's got a cinch, anyway. He's captain, and Hemmingway's afraid not to feed him the ball. If you get the ball often enough you're bound to get away with a play now and then. If Kelsey or Mann had the chances 'Hat' has they'd play all around him. It's luck, Tod."

"Luck!" the other would explode. "Yes, I suppose it was just luck that he made two touch-

downs against Hastingsville! And that he got off three runs in the Fisk game for more than eighty yards altogether! Luck, my eye! You're crazy!"

"Anyway," Stuart would reply equably, "'Hat's' a grandstand player if ever I saw one. Why, every time he takes the ball he looks over to see if the crowd's watching him!"

"Oh, shucks!" Tod would look a bit silly then and Stuart would burst into a chortle of malicious triumph; and, if they happened to be in Number 36 at the moment, there was usually a set-to in which the tormenter, being handicapped by laughter, got the worst of the argument.

Captain "Hat" might have wholly succeeded to Captain Jack's place in Tod's esteem during that final exciting week of football had it not been for an incident which, so to speak, refocused the latter's wavering regard on his first idol. It was on the Wednesday preceding the Melton contest. Tod, having struggled through a French recitation, was on his way out of Goodman Hall, one of a stream of fellows released from various classes by the clanging of the five-minute gong. On the steps the congestion was heavy, and Tod had to make his way down a narrow passage between those who had paused there and those who were hastening to the next recitations. He didn't see "Tub" Parrish leaning against the corner of the

entrance. "Tub" was the sort who, even on a ten-acre clover field, would have discovered something to lean against! "Tub" saw Tod, however, and, acting on the moment's impulse, thrust forth a large foot. The result was sudden and spectacular.

An instant before Tod would have said that he couldn't move twelve inches without being brought to a standstill. Yet, by some miracle, he managed to fall six steps and land all-fours on the brick walk! To be sure, he caromed off more than one neighbor on the way down, and created not a little impatient criticism in his flight, but, as though by prearrangement, traffic cleared miraculously from his course and he proceeded practically unimpeded. It isn't probable that "Tub" intended the catastrophe to be as complete as it proved to be. Doubtless he thought Tod would merely bump into the fellow ahead, receive a hard look and, possibly, a cuff and go his way. Seeing the unexpected result of his maneuver, "Tub" proceeded to vanish from the scene by joining the throng that was entering the building.

Meanwhile, suffering more from surprise than from bodily injury, although he later found his hands and knees pretty well scuffed and scratched, Tod gathered himself slowly up and, painfully conscious of the laughter which was now applauding his feat, looked about for his books. It didn't oc-

cur to him that his misadventure had been due to anything but his own awkwardness, although the completeness of it still amazed him; nor would he have ever suspected an extraneous cause if, just at the moment he was about to add his French grammar to his stock of rescued property, "Tub" Parrish hadn't suddenly sat down on it. The force with which "Tub" landed on that inoffending book was only equaled by the unexpectedness of his appearance. Puzzled, Tod gave up present thought of the grammar and looked toward the steps. At the top, Jack New, wearing the virtuous expression of one who has performed a worthy deed, was accepting his books back from a bystander. Having received them, Jack cast a satisfied, pleased look on the lowly "Tub" and passed from sight.

"Tub's" astonishment even exceeded that experienced by Tod at the end of his flight. He looked up at the latter in bewilderment and uncertainty. It had all happened so suddenly that he was as yet unable to wholly divorce Tod, in his thoughts, from the catastrophe. Of course Tod had been down here and he had been up there, and so it wasn't really possible that the former had wreaked unexpected vengeance, but—well, some one had certainly propelled him down the flight of steps by the simple, even crude, expedient of a forceful and perfectly directed kick! If not Tod, then who?

Cumbersomely, he climbed to his feet, felt of himself in an outraged and inquiring manner and cast a heavily malignant glare at Tod. Then he became aware of the amusement of those so fortunate as to have witnessed the episode and faced about belligerently. Courage of a sort was not wanting in "Tub." Had it been, he would never have made the football team. He started back up the steps, demanding threateningly: "Who did that? Who kicked me?"

"Why, did some one kick you, 'Tub'?" asked a solicitous fellow. "I thought you jumped!"

"No, he just fell, didn't you, 'Tub'?"

"You shut up! Where is he? Who was it did that?"

"What are you going to do to him, Parrish?" asked Lee Johnson.

"Never you mind! You tend to your own business, Johnson!"

"All right. Just wanted to know." Lee winked to a friend. "Jack New's the fellow you want, Parrish."

"Huh?" "Tub" showed disconcertion. "He is not!"

"That's right, Tub," others confirmed. "He's inside. If you hurry you can get him before the bell rings." But in denial of that the gong struck at the moment, and the crowd hurried into the

building, still chuckling, followed by a scowling but less warlike "Tub."

Aided by friends, Tod recovered the last of his books, still perplexed by the astonishing sequence of events, and just then Stuart, released from imprisonment at the top of the flight, joined him and supplied a true narration of proceedings. "I didn't see you fall, Tod," he said breathlessly, "because I was just coming out. When I got to the entrance you were sprawled out down there. I was starting down to you when Jack New gave me a shove out of the way and grabbed 'Tub.' He didn't say a word, but just ran 'Tub' to the top of the steps and gave him an awful kick! Gosh, it must have hurt! Then Jack took his books from Larry Bancroft and went inside. What did 'Tub' do to you?"

"Why, nothing!" said Tod. "I never saw 'Tub.' I was coming out and fell over some fellow's foot and went headlong. If there hadn't been so many in the way I guess I'd have got a pretty nasty fall, but I bumped so many fellows on the way that I didn't really get up much speed until the last step, I suppose."

"You're crazy!" snorted Stuart. "What really happened was that 'Tub' tripped you on purpose, and Jack, who was coming up, saw it!"

"Do you think so?" Tod was startled. "Why would he do it, though? I didn't even see him!"

"Well, he must have seen you," grunted Stuart. "He can be pretty dirty when he wants to, I guess. I told you he got fired from Mr. Slawson's team last year for some funny business. I suppose he has a grouch against you because you got fresh with him that time."

"Really? But I've seen him dozens of times since then and he never even looked at me!"

"That's his way, I guess. Anyway, he certainly got what was coming to him just now! Gosh, that was an awful boost Jack gave him, I'm telling you!"

"Do you suppose he will get after Jack?" asked Tod anxiously.

"He?" Stuart laughed contemptuously. "He will like fun! Jack would turn him over and spank him, and 'Tub' knows it. But he will probably have it in for you worse than ever, old son, so watch your step."

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Tod. "I think I could lick him, don't you? He's big, but he's sort of slow."

"Pshaw, you don't think he would give you a chance to fight him, do you? Not 'Tub.' What he's likely to do is something about the same as he did to-day; something he can get away with—or thinks he can! Say, you'd better wash some of the grit out of those scratches or you'll have blood poisoning or hydrophobia or something and die

on my hands. Wait till I fetch the iodine, Tod. That's what'll make you sit up!"

"I don't need any iodine," Tod protested.

"Shut up and don't argue with the doctor! Now put that leg up here. And hold still! There," ended Stuart gloatingly, "how's that feel?"

"It hurts, confound you! I wish— Listen! If you put any more of that on I'll— Ouch! Murder! Aw, Stu, have a heart!"

"No, sir, it's for your own good. And remember that this hurts me more than it does you, Farmer!"

"Gosh, what a lie!" gasped Tod.

CHAPTER VI

FOOTBALL DAYS

TOD met Jack New the next morning on his way across to a recitation and Jack paid no more heed to him than he usually did. Tod's look held admiration and gratitude in about equal portions, but Jack doubtless missed the fact. "Hello, Hale," he said carelessly, and was gone. Tod looked after him, all the former hero worship in his eyes. Since Jack had avenged him Tod had made up many speeches to deliver to the crew captain, speeches designed to express his feeling of gratitude and to elicit from Jack some such reply as "Why, that's all right, Hale. Not worth mentioning. Of course I couldn't let Parrish get away with a thing like that, you know. By the way, drop in and see me some time, won't you? Awfully glad to have you!" And now he had had his opportunity and courage had failed him! He guessed now that none of those speeches ever would be uttered. And, after all, depressing thought though it was, Jack would probably have kicked "Tub" no matter who the latter had tripped up. Why, perhaps Jack hadn't even

recognized him yesterday! Tod groaned in spirit.

More than once during class he lost himself in daydreams in which he rescued Jack New from a variety of perils and later brushed aside the big chap's thanks with a smile and a careless, "Glad to have been of assistance, Jack. It's really not worth mentioning." The details were not always clear, since it was difficult to imagine a situation in which so capable and self-sufficient a fellow as the crew captain would not be more than able to look after himself. But if the first part of the picture was hazy, the last of it stood out sharply enough: Jack New clasping the hand of his young rescuer in a firm grip, his countenance eloquent with gratitude, a note of apology in his voice as he strove to express his gratitude, apology for having remained until the moment blind to Tod's sterling character and winning personality. The dream picture always ended with a "fade-away" in which the two, benefactor and beneficiary, rescuer and rescued, walked off toward the sunset, the latter's arm about the shoulders of his companion. The title, had there been one, would have read "The Beginning of a Wonderful Friendship." Frequently, however, the voice of the instructor recalled Tod to reality before the dream reached its idyllic conclusion.

He was troubled with moments of remorse for

the next day or two. Football had engaged his interest to such an extent of late that he had sadly neglected the crews. In the last month he had been down to the Basin scarcely a half-dozen times. Twice he had made the trip alone, for Stuart had flatly declared there was more fun in watching football practice than in seeing the crews work out. And Tod had been forced to acknowledge the truth of that statement. After all, you can't get much of a thrill from sitting on a worm-eaten timber and observing the progress of two eight-oared shells through the water, especially when the shells are half a mile or more distant. Besides, Tod was too much of a tyro to be able to see wherein Captain New excelled his mates. Of course, Tod was certain that he did excel them, but he had to acknowledge to himself that the various members of the crews performed very much alike so far as he could determine. He found his pleasure in watching rowing somewhat dampened by his inability to appreciate the labors of his hero. But, he promised himself now, as soon as the Melton game was over with he would once again be loyal to the crews.

The Melton game came off on a blustery November afternoon when overcoats or their equivalent were demanded. Melton, bedecked with the gray-and-gold insignia of the school, flocked into Belleford by train and automobile to the number

of close on two hundred and fifty youths and elders. Nostrand had dinner at twelve o'clock instead of at half-past, and at a quarter to one the dining hall was thrown open to the visitors. There was quite a good deal of fraternizing between the enemies, and the corridors during the hour before the game displayed maroon and gray-and-gold mingling congenially. But by two o'clock neutrality was at end. Under lowering skies and in the teeth of a gusty east wind, Leo Mann kicked off for Nostrand and the momentous contest was on.

Tod and Stuart, sweated against the elements, sat side by side high up on the stand and, still a trifle breathless from their vocal contributions to the waves of sound which had swept across the field for a quarter-hour preceding the whistle, settled back and watched the brown oval in its flight. The full-back had sought to combine elevation and distance in just the right proportions, but he had been over-generous with elevation and the wind fairly gathered the pigskin in arms and plumped it down on Melton's twenty-eight yards. Not so good, in the anxious words of Stuart! Not so good, indeed, for the enemy, with that aiding gale to bank on, swept down the field in just seven plays, using long forward passes with appalling dexterity, and before the quarter was quite half gone stood fairly on Nostrand's threshold!

The Maroon dug her cleats, bared her teeth and staved off one attack by capturing a short pass over the line when Melton had failed at rushing. But Mann's kick carried only to the enemy's forty-eight and was so low that the Nostrand ends were left behind and Melton brought her supporters to their feet by a long zigzag run that only ended when the pigskin was back on Nostrand's twenty-two. Disaster loomed large then. The Gray-and-Gold thrust at Parrish and found no opening, essayed a dash off Lumis, at left tackle, and made four yards and then settled as for a try at a goal from the field. Naturally Nostrand was not fooled, and the full-back run which followed was nipped in the bud, and when the kicker next took position he was three yards farther back. But with that wind to help, he had little trouble. Melton's stalwart line held hard, the ball floated upward, met the force of the gale and fairly hurtled over the cross-bar. And that was that!

No more scoring in the quarter, which was soon over. Then it was the Maroon's turn to play with wind on its side, and Kelsey kicked on second down. And, subsequently, Mann punted from his thirty-one. And then, a little later, from his forty-nine. And then, with Kelsey back as if to kick once more, the ball shot to Captain "Hat" and that fleet-footed hero went off around the left of the enemy line, dodging, feinting, whirling, but always

advancing, over two white lines and then a third, and a fourth and—no, they had him at last! But he had reeled off eighteen yards, and the ball was on the opponent's twenty-four, and Tod and Stuart, frantically clasped together, were shouting lustily.

Hemmingway made no effort to cross the line. He maneuvered the ball to a position opposite the enemy goal, losing a half-yard, maybe, in the two plays required, and then called on Kelsey. And, although Melton tried desperately to break through, and actually did tear down a part of the Maroon's left defenses, the pigskin went true and the score was tied at 3 to 3 and Nostrand assaulted the sullen clouds with her triumphant outburst!

There were still eight minutes of the period left, and who could deny the probability of another score, perhaps a touchdown this time, secured in the same manner? Not Tod, feverishly balancing on the edge of his seat, nor Stuart, shivering from sheer excitement. Melton kicked off sadly, the ball, cocked too low, barely traversing the required distance. Lee Johnson draped his body about it and, when the enemy had been pulled from him, lifted the ball from his thirty-four yards and tossed it to an eager quarter-back. And Hemmingway gave it to Tom Greene, the Maroon's sturdy center, and shouted signals in a shrill voice. And then Mann launched himself at the defense

and dug into and through it for five yards. But Kelsey was nailed for no gain and Mann punted. The ball went high and sailed across the goal line, and the cheers from the Nostrand stand died away. Melton used her head then, taking up time with three attacks on the line before returning the punt. Nostrand kicked once more, this time from her forty-two, and the Melton safety man let the wind-tossed ball drop to earth and again trickle over the last mark. Back to the twenty, then, and three more time-consuming plunges that netted but six yards, and then a long, low punt that went past Hemmingway and Captain "Hat," and a wild chase and scramble for the bobbing object. Fortune aided Melton, and a fleet end dropped on the ball and went rolling over and over with it across the side-line close to the Maroon's thirty-yard mark!

Melton triumphed hoarsely. With the Nostrand goal in sight the Gray-and-Gold performed prodigiously. Twice she swept through the home team's left, and suddenly the aspect of that second period had sadly changed. Here, in spite of the advantage of a wind behind her, Nostrand stood on her nineteen yards, no longer the attacker but the attacked! Well, football is filled with sudden shifts of fortune, and one must take the bitter with the sweet. After all, no one could begrudge Melton her triumph, for she played with a desperation

commanding admiration and with a generalship worthy of a Napoleon. Coach Loferman replaced "Tub" Parrish with Minger and Leo Mann with Rollins. "Tub" had played a stubborn defense for a while, but now he was plainly weakening. Mann was removed only that he might be stronger for the second half. On first down, Melton sent her drop-kicker back, swung a running attack off to the left and made three yards. Again faking a kick, she attempted a crisscross and was downed for a scant loss. On third down she advertised a forward and then made a scant two yards on a straight plunge by the left half, placing the pig-skin on Nostrand's fifteen. As though in sympathy with the invaders, the wind lulled perceptibly for a moment. The stands grew almost still as the Melton kicker, a rather slim youth, walked back to the twenty-four, casting his headgear from him as he went. He plucked a few blades of withered grass and loosed them from upheld fingers. They blew leisurely away. The wind was, for the time, no longer a blustering gale but a moderate force which would oppose only slight resistance to the ball. The signals came, loud in the stillness as the stands held their breath, and the ball sped back from center.

Nostrand had already discounted those three points, for it was beyond the realm of possibility that the clever Melton kicker would fail to put the

ball across the bar. Yet he did fail, and for the simple reason that he didn't try! Never, perhaps, was stage better set for a surprise. It was fourth down, the offense had fifteen yards to go, the wind was playing into her hands, a field-goal attempt was as certain as death. And so, having caught the ball and turned it to suit, having let the first force of the enemy's desperate effort to break through expend itself, having, indeed, allowed a frantic tackle to come racing almost to him, the Melton kicker swung calmly about, stepped back and to the right and then sped the ball across the field to where an end, uncovered, awaited. Too late Nostrand saw the trap. Between the waiting receiver and the point where goal and side line met not one maroon-stockinged player barred the path. Oh, plenty of opposition hurled itself thither at last, but by then the ball had sped across, had been caught and was being borne fleetly toward the goal line. Just short of it the runner smashed into the arms of a desperate defender, but momentum took him on, and, although at the last he was fairly buried under panting foes, he had done his work. The ball, revealed by a clawing referee, lay four inches beyond the white-washed streak!

The half ended at that, 9 to 3 in favor of Melton, for a maddened Nostrand team broke through and smothered the try-at-goal. And, as though

glorying in the part it had played in the nice deception, the wind roared out of the east once more harder than ever!

Disconsolate at first, Tod and Stuart recovered their spirits by climbing down from the stand and joining the restless throng that tramped about the field. With the return of warmth to numbed toes and chilled fingers came Hope. The cheering began again, confident from the Melton side, defiant from the other, and gave place to songs. The big Maroon banner whipped and snapped in the blasts until the white N was only a formless design to be guessed at. The spectators talked and shouted, laughed and sang and cheered. Insults disguised as football songs were exchanged by devoted youths who, comprising the rival cheering sections, stood rooted to their places in spite of congealing feet and sang with chattering teeth. And, at last, a horde of gray-and-gold-stockinged youths came trailing back and a cheer went up from the Melton stands and gathered volume and would have reached a terrific intensity if, just then, a second horde of blanketed heroes had not appeared and aroused a counter demonstration! Spectators scurried back to their places, Tod and Stuart amongst them, the teams took the field again, a ball soared aloft and the measured slogan of "Team! *Team!* TEAM!" died into silence.

CHAPTER VII

A NOVEMBER TWILIGHT

“JOEY” had sent three substitutes into the Nostrand line-up; Bannister at quarter, Winkler at left end, Lumis at left tackle. When the third period was some eighty seconds old the first named youth leaped into fame. Fumbles had been few thus far, and what there had been had brought no penalties, but now there was a different tale. A Melton back dropped the ball and somehow Bannister dived through and reached it. Fairly surrounded by the foe, the natural thing to do was to make the capture certain by gluing himself to the earth. But Bannister did the unexpected. By some such miracle as that by which he had squirmed between interlocked legs and reached the pigskin, he now jerked to his feet, threw off detaining hands and, body doubled over his prize, slithered out of the mêlée much in the manner of a snake. Hands grasped at him and missed, or, reaching him, failed to hold. Once he was down, stumbling over a prostrate enemy, but down only on one knee and a saving hand, and before he could be secured he was up again. Now Captain “Hat” was beside him, and an instant later Crans-

ton, an end, had joined the hasty interference. For a long moment he seemed to be running in the center of a confused mass of players. Then he came into sight, Barron no longer there but Cranston speeding a stride behind, watchful, ready for a quick thrust into the path of a pursuer. It was Cranston who put the Melton left tackle out of the race, and after that Bannister had to shift for himself. He was a tallish boy, but he was not a fast runner, and during what was probably ten seconds a thousand watchers lived an hour of suspense. Near the twenty-yard line a Melton end gained to within a scant two strides, but there he hung while the distance lessened. Pursued and pursuer seemed on the verge of collapse, yet their feet still rose and fell and the last smear of lime came slowly toward them. A thousand strained, high-pitched voices rose imploringly. Close to the ten yards the Melton player risked all on a despairing plunge. Had his searching hands reached but one leaden foot of the other he would have triumphed, but fortune favored Bannister. The tackle was missed, and although the next of the enemy, having narrowly escaped entanglement with his mate, was gaining perceptibly on the quarry, the remaining distance was too short for him. Bannister crossed the goal line alone and was well back of the posts before he was pulled down.

Nostrand had tied the score in less than a minute and a half of the quarter!

And presently another point was added and the scoreboard said: Nostrand, 10; Visitor, 9.

Tod and Stuart pummeled each other joyously. No one in the Nostrand stand remembered longer that the wind was cold, that fingers were blue and feet numb. The cheer leaders cast aside their big red megaphones, shook their fists at the stand, waved their arms and leaped. Sound crashed out, Nostrand's "artillery cheer": *Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Boom! Boom! BOOMMM! Nostrand! Nostrand! Nostrand!* And then again; and, finally, breathless, laughing, the stand settled back once more.

Already the teams were in motion. Nostrand had chosen to kick the ball away and it was descending, borne on the wings of that easterly wind, down near the Gray-and-Gold's five. An anxious half-back braced himself, held his hands and caught. But he had no chance to advance, for Winkler's arms wrapped themselves about him and back and end went to the turf together. One fierce thrust at the right of the Nostrand line, and then Melton punted rather hopelessly. The ball went to Bannister on Melton's forty-five and the quarter-back made the best part of ten yards before he was thrown. Nostrand supporters hoarsely demanded another touchdown. Mann

was called on and ripped off four yards; Cranston, coming around from right end, took the pigskin and slipped through inside left tackle for two more; Captain "Hat" added three. Mann went back to the thirty-seven and held out his long arms, but the play proved to be a forward-pass, and Winkler received it a yard over the line, and, although he was promptly nailed, it was once more first down. Again the Nostrand stand swayed and shook. From the opposite side of the field Melton croaked an incessant "*Ho-o-old 'em! Ho-o-old 'em!*"

The ball was on the twenty-seven now. Melton took out time and held a conference. On the side line a bulky youth shook off a blanket and then a gray sweater bearing a big yellow M and seized a ball. Back and forth he trotted, slipping the pigskin from hands to crook of arm, from side to side. "That's Connover," informed Stuart. "He's the fellow got hurt early in the season. Plays right guard. He's a whale, too. Well, they need him. *Come on, Nostrand! Put it over!*"

The whistle piped. Mann went back again, but the ball shot to the Maroon's captain and "Hat" went slamming into the right of the line and through it, ending his excursion with the whole Melton secondary defense sitting on him. Time was called and "Pop" Gary went trotting out, water bucket slopping beside him. Over on the Mel-

ton side Connover knelt in front of the coach, restrained by the latter's hand on a padded shoulder. Then he leaped up and ran on, and Melton cheered to the echo. Captain "Hat" was on his feet now, "Pop's" arm about him; was taking experimental steps, circling about the trainer. "Pop" dropped his arm, gave the player a reassuring thump on the shoulder and picked up his bucket. Nostrand gave the short cheer for Barron. The displaced Melton guard trailed off the gridiron and the whistle shrilled again.

"Third down," chanted the referee, nimbly skipping aside, "and six to go!"

Rather defiantly, Bannister sent Mann at Connover, but, although he yielded a little, the big right guard was master. "Hat" got almost free outside left tackle, but was pulled down for a scant gain. Kelsey, with Mann back in kicking position, found a wide hole on the left and fought to the eighteen yards. Fourth down now and a little more than a yard to go. Bannister and "Hat" walked aside. Then: "*Formation C!*" piped Bannister. "*Signals!*" Kelsey walked back and patted the turf. Bannister followed and sank to a knee. "*Block that kick! Block that kick!*" implored Melton. The ball passed to Bannister, Kelsey stepped forward and swung a leg, the teams became tossed together like meeting waves. Then a sudden roar broke

from the stands. Bannister, the ball tucked tightly, was circling around to the left. Interference cleared his way to the line and through it. From there he ran, dodging astoundingly, past the surprised defenders toward the goal line. Not past them all, though, for short of the last line his advance was abruptly halted. A big Melton lineman crashed into him and Bannister dropped like a log. But he held onto the ball, was still clutching it tenaciously when they rolled him over on his back and sought to restore breath to his suffering lungs. "Pop" again took command, and, after a long minute, Bannister, swaying groggily, was led off and Hemmingway went back in.

There was no let-up of the cheering from the crisp "*Ray, ray, ray, Bannister!*" to the final moment of triumph. Nostrand went across on the fourth down, Mann carrying the ball. That it required four plays to conquer that five yards tells the story of Melton's stubborn defense. Kelsey made a mess of the try-for-point, booting the ball into the line, but the figures had changed once more, and the score-board proclaimed a seven point lead for the home team.

There was no more scoring in the quarter, and when the minute's respite came, a goodly proportion of the chilled spectators, assured of the outcome of the game, made their way out of the stands. But not Tod, not Stuart. With chatter-



But Bannister did the unexpected

ing teeth, hands deep-thrust into pockets, voices that sounded like the croaking of a raven with a severe case of bronchitis, they sat on, unconscious of bodily discomfort. Nostrand was winning, had won! That was enough!

But eight minutes later—fifteen if we regard elapsed time—that Nostrand had won or would win was not so certain. For here, by another of those strange flukes of fortune so typical of the gridiron game, was the striped-stockinged enemy battering at the Nostrand gate! The Maroon team held five second-string players now, the Melton team perhaps as many, and the playing was not so tight. Penalties, of which there had been but few during the first three periods, were being meted out with a lavish if impartial hand. And fumbles had grown far too common for the comfort of either camp. It was a five-yard penalty and a fumble together which spelled disaster to Nostrand. The maroon team was on her forty-two then, the ball in her possession. The penalty set her back to her thirty-seven, the fumble to her twenty-six. And when she lined up on her twenty-six the ball was no longer hers, and the aspects of the game had undergone a disturbing change. In short, Melton was already in position to add another three points to her score, and might, if she disdained small stakes, attain to a touchdown and a goal to follow, and so tie the score as tightly as a

hard knot! The Nostrand supporters, who had already tasted of victory, were dismayed. The Melton cohorts, visioning certain defeat changed swiftly to possible triumph, went wild with joy. The stands emptied, and, heedless of the entreaties of protesting ushers, the spectators thronged to the side lines and massed behind the threatened goal. The sound, no longer that of concerted cheering, was tumultuous. The Melton quarter was forced to move about the backfield and along the line to make his signals heard.

One fierce onslaught against the center of the enemy line yielded a three-yard gain; a second yielded a yard. Melton sent her goal-kicker back and attempted a wide end run behind a slowly moving wall of interference, a desperate, perhaps ill-advised, attempt. Had she failed to make her distance she would have been out of position to try for a field-goal. But she didn't fail. When the runner was thrown, close to the side line, he had reached Nostrand's fourteen. Doubtless the fact that such a play was scarcely to be looked for on third down had helped to Nostrand's undoing. From the fourteen Melton made the eleven through left guard and went to the eight on a trick play in which the quarter-back eventually dashed outside a drawn-in right tackle. The Maroon it was who now intoned a hoarse and prayerful "*Hold, Nostrand!*"

“Third down and about four to go!” called the referee.

Melton formed her backs close to the line and the home team's secondary defense swarmed in. Then, while the lines swayed together, a Melton back, the ball outheld in his right hand, ran fleetly out of the ruck and to left. And then he tossed!

The fate of the game depended on that instant. Close to the goal line, a Melton end, having circled around, stood with upthrust arms. The pigskin arched toward him. Frantic voices warned of the danger. The ball was almost at the end of its brief flight when a slim form hurtled toward its path, the form of a substitute tackle playing his first big game. Somehow, at the very last instant, he swung a despairing arm and barely tipped the ball with his fingers. Yet the glancing impact, as slight as it was, served. The ball went to the receiver, but not squarely into his hands. He juggled it in a frantic attempt to secure it, failed, and the pigskin bounded aside and rolled among trampling feet!

So ended Melton's gallant attempt to retrieve her failing fortunes. Once more, but seemingly without hope now, she faked a try at goal and tried to throw across the line. But, forewarned, Nostrand left no enemy uncovered. After that the game went on in early twilight dimness for another three minutes, but Nostrand fought desperately

on the defensive and, at last, a horn squawked and it was over! Over for another year, when, with renewed faith and abundant courage, to-day's defeated would perhaps taste of victory and doubtless find it as sweet as Nostrand found it now.

Cheers; joyous youths marching about the trampled field in the gathering darkness; the slow measures of Melton's school song struggling against the triumphant pæans of the conquerors; draperies aswirl under the fainter blasts of the decreasing gale; matches making rosy flares in the gray gloom as chilled fingers fumbled above a parental pipe or cigar; the honking of motor horns across the field; Tod and Stuart, capless, dancing along over the sere grass, arms linked with other arms, trying hard to sing and making but strange unmusical croakings; in short, the end.

CHAPTER VIII

WANTED—A BOAT

THE effect of the Melton contest on Tod was to weld him more firmly to the School. Those two hours on the wind-swept stand accomplished more than had the whole preceding six weeks in imbuing him with fealty and loyalty. Only Stuart knew how close he had come to tears that day; once when Melton had threatened the goal in the last minutes of play, again when Nostrand's victory had been assured. Devotion to an ideal is a fine thing, and after that blustery November afternoon, which he never quite forgot, Tod found life suddenly a far bigger experience than he had suspected, discovered a new zest in pleasure and a new poignancy in pain.

The end of the football season leaves one for a while at a loose end. Having lived on thrills and excitement for a space of a fortnight or more, life becomes suddenly very drab and dull, with not much to look forward to save the Christmas recess. Of course, after a few days new interests, or old ones temporarily forgotten, make their claim and one emerges from the doldrums. Tod discovered his relief from boredom in the crews. The old

enthusiasm did not return as readily as he had expected it to, but return it did before very long. At first Stuart was reluctant about encouraging the labors of the rowing crowd with his presence. He spoke disdainfully of the entertainment provided and dwelt on the distance to be walked. Yet, finding his chum determined to patronize Coach McKenna's disciples, he went along. Several days of chill November rain rendered the journey to the Basin less enticing than before. The wet marsh grass slapped their legs, mud clung to their shoes and the little streams and ditches barring their way beyond the ruins of the shooting cabin were wider than ever and presented real difficulties. One or another, if not both, always returned to Nostrand with water *squishing* in his shoes. One day Tod even went full-length into a stream, having trusted too implicitly to an aged plank. Fortunately that was an afternoon of bright sunshine and a brisk breeze, and he was no more than moderately damp when he got back. Stuart possessed a philosophy which held that discomfort was not necessarily incumbent, and so, since he was dissatisfied with their means of reaching the Basin, looked about for a better. Many of the discoveries which have rendered existence easier have resulted from dissatisfaction coupled with inventive genius.

“What we ought to do,” declared Stuart one

day, "is get a boat or a canoe and row down to the Basin. That is, if you still insist on going. Though I'm blessed if I get much of a kick from it!"

"It's better than sitting around waiting for a chance at the tennis courts," answered Tod. "But where could we get a boat?"

"That's it. There are plenty of 'em up at Pine Grove. That's two miles upstream, though. A lot of fellows have canoes there, or you can rent them. Or a skiff, either. But it wouldn't exactly pay to go up to Pine Grove and then come all the way back in order to go a mile in the other direction! What we've got to do is find a boat around here somewhere."

"I've never seen one," said Tod dubiously.

"Nor I. Just the same there ought to be boats. Some of those Polacks who work in the mill may have them. Generally, though, they fish off the wall in their back yards."

"How much does a canoe cost?" inquired Tod.

Stuart grimaced. "A lot more than you and I could afford. More than I could, anyhow. At least until I get my bills paid in the village. Maybe we could borrow one or rent one or something at the Grove and bring it down here. Only, where the dickens could we keep it?"

"Let's see if we can find anything around school first," advised Tod.

The Wire Mills occupied a twelve-acre territory south of the bridge and to the left of Main Street, the old brown wooden buildings and the newer brick structures lying along the river there and shooting tall chimneys and stacks far into the air. This factory was Belleford's one industrial enterprise of importance, and, while the citizens frequently complained of the smoke and fumes wafted down from the chimneys, civic pride induced philosophy. When the wind was right the smoke even reached the school campus. The mill operatives lived in a settlement occupying a similar location on the other side of Main Street, the small two-story drab-painted houses huddled closely for the width of two narrow blocks back from the little river. Between the latter and the nearer row of tenements lay a series of tiny back yards, infrequently disorderly rectangles of bare ground and accumulated rubbish, but generally planted to vegetables and flowers, with sometimes a small grape arbor or a struggling mulberry tree hanging over the old stone retaining wall. On a Sunday the residents of Poland, as it was locally called, worked in the small gardens early and late, and in some instances managed to reap a considerable harvest from them. On a Saturday afternoon in summer, though, one could generally see a dozen or more improvised poles angling out from the yards and as many lines drifting down the

slow current of the stream. Whether fish were ever caught is a question.

However appropriate the name of Poland may have been at one time, now it was somewhat of a misnomer, for many nationalities dwelt there and many tongues were to be heard in the course of a stroll through the streets. As a result brief racial wars occasionally broke out, requiring all the energy of the local police force, consisting of five officers, to quell them. For the most, though, Poland was a well-behaved community, setting an example to the rest of Belleford of industry and domesticity.

Crossing the bridge from school, Poland lay to the right, innumerable gray houses, all alike, flanking both sides of Grattan Street, nearest to and parallel with the river, and one side of Dore Street. Midway between the two, facing Main Street, stood "The Doggery," so called. The Doggery was the nearest thing to a "chuck shop" available to the Nostrand fellows, and, since it lay practically halfway between the center of the village and the campus, it was a convenient port of call. Over the small store—stand would be a better word—was a sign which read "Batt's Lunch—Hot Dogs—Sandwiches—Cigars and Tobacco—Ice Cream—Refreshments, Etc." What "Batt's" real name was was not generally known, but he did a big business, for he not only had the

school trade, but ministered to the wants of the mill hands who passed and repassed each day. He had been long enough from his beloved Sicily to speak English with but little accent, while his nephew, Joe, a fourteen-year-old lad who assisted him when out of school, was assertively American.

It happened that it was Joe and not Batt who was in charge that Saturday afternoon when Tod and Stuart stopped at the Doggery to refresh themselves prior to an exhaustive and possibly exhausting search for a boat. It had been Stuart's suggestion. He had said: "Let's stop at Batt's, eh? He might know of a boat. He knows all the bunch around here, I guess. Anyway, I'm hungry, aren't you?"

Tod was and acknowledged it. Thereupon Stuart had added carelessly: "You'll have to stand treat, though. I'm flat, you know."

While they watched the sausages frizzling on the stove and inhaled the heartening fragrance Stuart broached the subject of boats. At first Joe shook his head. "Naw," he said, "none of these guys around here have boats. Where'd they keep 'em?"

"Why, tie them up in the river," said Stuart.

"You ain't allowed. Hold on a bit, though! Yes, I know where there's a boat. Anyway, it was a boat once. A feller named Pasquale has a

sort of a punt in his back yard. I've seen his kids playing in it. Guess it's no good now, though. Don't know as he'd sell it, either."

"We don't want to buy it," said Stuart. "We want to rent one. Where does he live, Joe?"

Joe told them, and after the refreshments had been eaten they set forth along Grattan Street. Saturdays were no longer half-holidays and only Joe's assertion that he thought there was a Mrs. Pasquale made it worth their while to investigate before the five o'clock whistle blew at the mill. They got into two wrong premises before they found the right one. At last, however, they found the boat and Mrs. Pasquale and three young Pasquales. Mrs. Pasquale was short and broad and evidently an extremely amiable, sunny-natured woman, since she smiled continually and nodded her head and jabbered Italian all through the conversation. It was only through the mediation of the eldest of the three children that they managed to make their business understood to her. When she did understand she was still amiable, still acquiescent, but very vague. The boat on examination proved to be whole, but there was no getting away from the fact that it would require much overhauling before being in a condition to bear them to the Basin and back. And, certainly, a coat of paint—or two—would add to its looks, but

that could wait. Their present problem was to induce Mrs. Pasquale to set a price on the rental of the derelict.

“Yes’m,” Tod said, breaking almost rudely into her flow of eloquence, “that’s all right. Now what we’d like to do is rent the boat from you or your husband, or whoever it is owns it—the boat, you know—for—for, well, say a month or so. Now what we want is for—”

Mrs. Pasquale beamed radiantly, laughed, laid a broad brown hand on the boat and nodded violently. Then she began a torrent of language. Tod waited patiently, somewhat embarrassed by Stuart’s grin and the unflagging regard of the three small Pasquales, until the woman paused for breath. Then he began all over. “Yes’m. Well, what we’d like is to rent it. *Rent* it, ma’am. Er—*hire* it! Now how much would you want for it? Say for a month.”

More fluent Italian, and then the eldest child interpreted: “She says how much you give?”

Tod and Stuart exchanged glances. How much would they give? “Two dollars,” suggested Stuart in a whisper. Tod shook his head violently. “Five,” he hissed. It was Stuart’s turn to look outraged. “For *that*? Nothing doing! Offer her two and see what she says.”

“Well—” Tod gulped. “Would—would two—I mean three dollars be enough?”

Ah, here was English Mrs. Pasquale could comprehend! "Tree doll?" she repeated. "No, no!" Still smiling, however, she explained just why three dollars was not sufficient. The difficulty was that neither of the boys understood her. Stuart shook his head wearily. "She got you there, Farmer! Laugh that off!" Tod frowned. "Well, then, four dollars, ma'am?" he asked.

"No! No!" She became more emphatic now. Stuart leaned against a post and gazed at the sky. Finally Mrs. Pasquale ended and Tod looked a question at the child. "She says it's very fine boat," explained the latter. "She says she sell it for fiva doll."

"*Sell it!*" exploded Stuart. "Doggone it, we aren't trying to buy—"

"Shut up!" cautioned Tod. "All right, kid, you tell her we'll take it. Tell her we'll be around tomorrow—no, Monday—with the money. Understand?"

"Sure!" The child translated and Mrs. Pasquale nodded and smiled harder than ever, hissing an interminable sequence of "*Si, si, si, si's!*" Tod repeated his statement to her, talking very loud and pronouncing each word very distinctly, and nodding his head just as she did. He was still nodding, as though he had contracted the habit and couldn't stop, when Stuart forcibly dragged him from the scene. Out on the street Stuart de-

manded anxiously: "Say, you poor fish, where do you think we're going to get hold of five dollars by Monday? Or did you just say that to get away?"

"Well, five dollars is only two and a half apiece," answered Tod lamely.

"You don't say? Well, two and a half is two and a half more than I've got. And if I'm not mightily mistaken it's at least two more than you've got!"

"Still, it's a bargain at five dollars, Stu. You know blamed well it is. Why, we would have paid her three or four dollars just for the use of it!"

"Speak for yourself. I wouldn't have gone more than two. Anyway, what's the difference? We can't get hold of five dollars by Monday. Nor by a week from Monday, you poor coot. Well, we don't have to go back there, so there's no harm done, I guess."

"You mean look for another one?" asked Tod without much enthusiasm.

"What else can we do if we want a boat? Besides, even if we did manage to raise five dollars and buy that one we'd have to mighty near make it over. The way it is now, it would leak like a sieve!"

"I wouldn't mind that. It would be sort of fun, Stu. And there'd be a lot of sport if we did get it fixed all right, wouldn't there?"

Stuart owned that there would, but instantly re-

verted to the difficulty of financing the enterprise. "What's the use talking 'ifs'?" he demanded. "We aren't millionaires!"

They were back at Batt's emporium now, and Stuart's gaze turned wistfully to it. Five or six boys lined the counter in front of the smoking surface of the stove and watched the viands assume the golden-brown tinge which announces their readiness for consumption. Several of the fellows were known to Stuart and to Tod, and greetings were exchanged, but none of the group invited them to the feast. Stuart shot a hopeful glance at Tod, but Tod's gaze was on the road ahead. There was money in his pocket, and being a normal, healthy chap, he could have paused for another "hot dog" and a bottle of pop without the least struggle, had it not been that he was mindful now of a better use for his wealth. He passed on resolutely, and Stuart sighed and followed.

CHAPTER IX

TOD HALE, PROMOTER

BACK in Number 36, they faced the situation. Tod went through his belongings and laid two nickels and three pennies on the table. Then he emptied his pocket and added fifty-two cents more. Stuart took a ten-cent piece from a small box in his top drawer, put it beside the collection and then subtracted a nickel. He put the nickel in the small box, amongst an assortment of cuff-links, studs and so on, and closed the drawer again. "The contribution box gets only a jitney to-morrow," he announced, "but I'll make it up some day. How much, Tod?"

"Seventy cents."

"And no more allowance until a week from to-day!" Stuart sank onto the window-seat, took his knees in his arms and fell silent.

After a long moment Tod remarked with forced cheerfulness: "Well, that's a start. We only need four dollars and thirty cents more!"

"Only! Say, look here, old chap, why can't we pay by installments? Say a dollar a week? Now there's a scheme!"

“I thought of that,” replied Tod, shaking his head. “But we’d never be able to make that woman understand what we wanted to do. Besides, I don’t believe it would work. They probably wouldn’t trust us.”

“Oh, I don’t know. If you sort of kept in the background maybe they would.”

Tod’s smile was only half-hearted, and he went on drawing strange patterns on the blotter. Twilight gathered in the corners of the room. Stuart eased himself to a more comfortable position and fixed his thoughts on supper. Then Tod broke the silence. “Look here, you’ve got a dollar put away, Whitey,” he said.

“Of course I have, but that’s for Wilkins.”

Wilkins, the village clothier, had grown impatient soon after school had opened and had vaguely threatened Stuart with exposure if he didn’t settle his indebtedness. You were allowed to contract debts to the extent of one dollar, but you were supposed to make settlement the first allowance day, which was Saturday. If faculty learned that Stuart owed the colossal sum of twenty-seven dollars and eighty cents to Wilkins, and that he had been owing it since last term, it would go hard with him. Plenty of fellows did run up bills, in spite of the rules, but they took good care that faculty didn’t learn of it. Stuart received a weekly allowance of a dollar and a quar-

ter, and for more than a month he had been setting aside the dollar and paying it to Wilkins. In consequence he had had little spending money. Precedent insisted that you place a dime in the contribution box on Sunday. Not to do so marked you a "piker," and your neighbors had sharp eyes. Having deducted ten cents from the quarter remaining to him after the sop to Wilkins had been paid, Stuart was always broke by Tuesday. However, Tod drew out two dollars on Saturdays—two dollars was the limit of an allowance—and he was generous with it, and so Stuart hadn't been suffering a bit. But, with two to provide for instead of one, Tod hadn't been able to save much either. This morning he had—unwisely, as he now realized—paid out a dollar and ten cents at the office for a lexicon which he could have got on without very nicely for a while longer. Stuart's copy had a number of pages missing or mutilated, but still he could have worried along with it, a fact which Stuart had mentioned. Now he wished he had allowed himself to be influenced by Stuart's silent but none the less eloquent disapproval of the outlay! Funny he hadn't thought to save that money for the boat!

"Well," said Tod after a moment, "Wilkins could wait another week, couldn't he?"

Stuart shook his head doubtfully. "I promised—that is, sort of promised—to pay him a dollar

a week, Tod. If he got peeved and went to faculty I'd probably get bounced."

"I don't believe he would," said Tod. "He'd have the school down on him hard if he pulled a dirty trick like that."

"Y-yes, maybe, but I don't want to take any chances."

"Looks like you'd taken a good many already," responded the other, dryly. "You took chances when you ran the bill up, didn't you?"

"Yes, only, you see, I thought Aunt Joan—she's my father's sister—was going to fork over some money to me. She sort of half promised to do something handsome if I got good marks in my courses last year."

"And did you?"

"Well, I got an A and a B and a couple of C's and one D. Wouldn't you call that doing pretty well?"

"I might," laughed Tod, "but evidently Aunt Joan didn't!"

"No, she said she was disappointed. Well, she wasn't half as disappointed as I was!"

"You might tell Wilkins you'd pay him two dollars next week. I'd lend you a dollar to put with yours, Stu."

"We-ell, but then we'd both be short!"

"Yes, but, hang it, we'd have the boat. We—

we've got to make some sacrifices, Stu. I'll go with you, if you like."

"That's all right, but how do we get the rest of it? Even if I put in Wilkins' dollar we're still three-thirty shy."

"What of it? A few minutes ago we were four-thirty shy. We're getting on, aren't we?"

"Yes, but— Look here, you haven't saved out your church money!"

"No, because I'm counting on it raining to-morrow. If it does you can put in that other nickel, if it doesn't I'll take out one. A nickel doesn't matter much when we need over three dollars!" Tod switched on the light and started preparations for supper. "I wonder if we can borrow any, Stu."

"I don't believe so. All the fellows I know never have any coin by the middle of the week. They're fearfully extravagant. We might sell something." Stuart's gaze ranged the room. "I wouldn't be surprised if you could get a couple of dollars for that fishing rod of yours."

"I like your cheek! That rod cost seven! Pick out something of your own, you short-sport!"

Conversation lapsed for several minutes. Then Tod uttered a whoop of triumph. "I've got it, Stu!" he shouted. "We'll form a company!"

"How do you mean, company?"

"Why, an Association! No, wait! The Nos-trand Boat Club! Initiation fee, ten cents. Dues

fifteen cents, payable in advance. We'd only have to get—let's see—thirteen members; thirteen new ones. We'd limit membership to fifteen."

"Huh, we'd still be short a nickel."

"Not if it rains to-morrow and we don't go to church! Say, do you suppose we could get thirteen fellows to go into it?"

"No, I don't. They might be willing to, but they wouldn't have the quarters. They'd want to pay a dime down and owe us for the rest, most of them! And that wouldn't do us any good, unless—why, say, Tod, we could put the 'Squally' folks off for a week, couldn't we?"

"I suppose so, but it's almost the last of the month, and if we don't get the boat soon we won't be able to use it much before cold weather. Let's go down to supper. Guess the old bean will work better afterwards."

Perhaps it did, for by nine o'clock—they locked the door to keep out visitors—the scheme had been fully developed. The name was to be the Pastime Boat Club. Second thought had convinced them that the use of the school name might result in complications with the faculty or the athletic body or some one. The membership was to be limited to fifteen active and ten honorary members. Active members were to pay an initiation fee of fifteen cents and monthly dues of five cents; honorary members ten and five cents. Honorary

members were to have all privileges except that of voting. Any active member in arrears with dues would likewise be excluded from having any voice in the club's affairs. Use of the boat was to be procured for one hour at a time by application to the Secretary. The Secretary was, or soon would be, Stuart, just as the President would be Tod. It was carefully provided that a meeting of the Club could be called by either of those officers and two members should constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. All this was properly set forth by Tod in his best writing.

Of course there had been much discussion. At first Stuart hadn't been able to see how the scheme was going to benefit them much. "It won't be our boat, it will belong to the whole bunch, and a swell chance of using it we'll have," he had objected.

"It will be the property of the Club," said Tod. "Just at first I dare say every one will want to use it, but that needn't bother us. We'll take it from three to five in the afternoon. We don't care who has it any other time. All you need to do is put my name down for three o'clock and your name down for four. See?"

Stuart chuckled. "They'll kick like steers, though. From three to five's the time they'll all want it!"

"Oh, we'll let them have it then some days. We won't want it every afternoon, I guess. Especially when it's rainy."

“Suppose they get really peeved and hold a meeting and vote us out of office?”

“They can’t call a meeting. Only you or I can do that. If they should try any funny business, though, all we’d have to do would be to call another meeting and straighten things out. Two’s a quorum, you see, and we needn’t insist on any others coming. About Monday we’ll have a meeting and pass a rule that any fellow not paying his dues within a week after they’re due shall cease to belong. Just so they won’t kick up too much of a fuss we’ll pay ’em back whatever they’ve paid in in dues already.”

“Initiations, too?” asked Stuart dubiously.

“Oh, no, just dues. We’ll need the rest of it!”

Stuart observed his chum admiringly. “Talk about high finance, Tod! You’ve got ’em all beat! Only, look here, are you sure we’ll get enough for the boat?”

“Well, figure it yourself. Say we get thirteen active members. That’s two dollars and sixty cents; fifteen cents initiation and five cents dues. Then we get ten honorary members and have a dollar and a half more. Total, four dollars and ten cents. We’ve already got seventy. So all you’ve got to do is advance twenty cents from the Wilkins money. You can pay him seventy-five cents this week instead of a dollar.”

“That,” pointed out Stuart, “is supposing we

get all those members by Monday. And supposing, too, that they all pay cash.”

“They’ve got to pay cash,” answered Tod decidedly. “Initiation fee and first month’s dues. If they don’t they can’t join.”

“Huh, maybe they won’t want to, anyway! If we could have gone after them this morning instead of Monday we’d have had a better chance. Lots of fellows spend their whole allowance as soon as they get it.”

“We’ve got to find twenty-three fellows who haven’t,” answered Tod cheerfully.

“Well, I don’t believe we can do it. And look, Tod, what’s the good of asking them to pay five cents a month? We won’t need money after we have the boat. That’s going to scare a lot of ’em, I guess.”

“No, it won’t. It sounds kind of shipshape and important to have monthly dues. Folks will agree to pay anything so long as they don’t have to do it now. That’s why book agents manage to make a living. Dad wouldn’t pay ten dollars down for a set of books; couldn’t be made to; but he’ll sign on the dotted line most every time if it’s just a dollar now and sixty-seven cents a month! These chaps will be just the same. You see if they aren’t.”

“But what’s the good of it? If we get enough

Monday to pay for the boat we won't have to bother about any old monthly dues."

"Well, we won't actually need the money, maybe, but I guess we can use it. We've got to fix the boat so she won't leak, and that might cost a bit; and then she ought to have a new coat of paint, although we needn't decide about that until we find out whether we can afford it. Anyway, though, you don't have to worry about those dues, because I don't believe they'll amount to much after this month."

Stuart looked puzzled, and Tod went on to explain. "Fellows will like playing around in the boat while the weather isn't too cold, and won't mind paying for the fun, but it's only about a month to Christmas vacation, and when they get back from that they'll find the river frozen, probably. Just try to collect five cents from them then! They won't be able to use the boat again for a couple of months at the least, and they'll decide that they can get more fun with their nickels in other ways. That's where we win out, Stu. Just as fast as they get behind with their dues we hold a meeting and drop them from membership. Along about the first week in February at the latest you and I will be the only members of the Pastime Boat Club left!"

"Whew! That's pretty slick, Tod, but we'll

have a lot of fellows down on us, I'll bet! They'll raise the dickens when spring comes and they find they can't use the boat! And there are only two of us, and if those others think they've been done they'll take the boat no matter what we say!"

"Pshaw, they won't get together, and as long as they don't we can manage them."

"We-ell, but it sounds sort of—sort of snide to me, Tod. Setting out to do those guys, I mean. Making our own rules and all. It doesn't sound quite fair."

"Fair? Sure, it's fair. It's just business. Folks who organize anything have the right to make the rules. Then if other folks don't like the rules they don't have to come in."

"But that's just it, Tod. This isn't a business, it's just a club. Clubs are different."

"Some of them are, some of them aren't. A lot of them are just got up nowadays so the organizers can make some easy money. I heard my father say that, and he knows. Of course, if you've got a better plan, Stu, let's hear it."

But Stu hadn't, and after a while he allowed himself to be persuaded. He couldn't deny Tod's repeated assertions that what they proposed doing was no whit different from what was being done every day by perfectly reputable and allegedly honest business men. "Why," declared Tod, "if folks were all as finicky as you there wouldn't be

any 'big business' in the country. Nor any trusts, either, I guess!"

Stuart's capitulation brought them to the matter of membership. Fortunately, the school catalogue had appeared by then and they took a copy and listed a number of what Tod referred to as "prospects." When finished the list contained forty-six names, selected mostly from the Lower Middle Class. However, several Upper Middlers were included, being personally known to the organizers. Then Tod took half the list and Stuart the other half, and, as the door had been first tried and then assaulted with blows on numerous occasions during the session, they now unlocked the portal and threw it open. It was, they decided, too late in the evening to start canvassing, but, of course, if a prospect happened in they would do their best.

And a prospect did happen in, almost immediately. And not one prospect, but two, in the persons of "Pinky" Pinkham and his room-mate, Steve Douglas. Tod surreptitiously glanced at his list and Stuart examined his. Steve's name had unwittingly been omitted from either, but Tod's had "Pinky." "Pinky" proved difficult. He appeared to be of a suspicious nature and insisted that there was a trick somewhere. Tod and Stuart had to assure him to the contrary over and over before he abandoned the idea. Tod showed

him the Club Rules and "Pinky" read them, and, if there was a "joker" contained therein, failed to discover it. But he wasn't won yet. He said that he didn't know how to row and that in consequence a row-boat would be just about as much fun to him as a cross-word puzzle to a blind man. Tod looked surprised and even alarmed. "Pinky" didn't know how to row! Unbelievable! "Pinky" was certainly trying to deceive them! Why, every fellow knew how to row nowadays. Why, supposing he found himself alone in a boat miles from shore, what would he do? "Pinky" replied that he'd make himself comfortable and wait for some one to come along and rescue him. Or, if they didn't come, he'd jump overboard and swim.

"Huh," said Tod, "that's a good one! You can swim, but you can't pull an oar! Ever hear anything so silly, Stu? Gee, that's like—like putting on a tie with no collar. What's the use in being able to swim, you poor coot, if you can't row a boat into deep water? How would you get out where you'd have to swim back?"

That was too much for "Pinky." Rather than probe Tod's logic he retired from that position to another. He couldn't afford the expense, he declared. He had gone and spent almost all of his week's money. Pinned down to it, he acknowledged that he still had thirty-five cents. They reminded him that he could become a full-fledged

member of the club in good standing for twenty. He realized that, but fifteen cents wouldn't be enough to get through the week on. Why, he'd have to drop ten cents in the box at church to-morrow!

"No, you won't," said Tod, "because it's going to rain to-morrow. Anyhow, you can always borrow a dime, can't you? Steve will lend you a dime if you run short, won't you, Steve?"

Steve looked doubtful. "If I had it, of course, but I was thinking that I might like to join this thing too."

"Of course! I was going to ask you." Tod shot a scowl at Stuart, who was surreptitiously adding Steve's name to the foot of his list. "Well, if you didn't have it plenty of fellows would. Why, I dare say I could lend it to you myself."

"That's all right," answered "Pinky." "You just trust me for the entrance fee, then. It amounts to the same thing."

"No, it doesn't," countered Tod coldly. "I said a dime, not twenty cents. Besides, I haven't any right to—to transgress the rules. That's different."

"Huh, you made the rules," said "Pinky." "So I guess you can break 'em."

But Tod was adamant. "You pay your twenty cents," he said, "and if you run short of money before Saturday I'll lend you a dime." Stuart

regarded his chum in puzzlement. He wondered where the dime was to come from! "Pinky" hemmed and hawed awhile and finally yielded, handing over a nickel as evidence of good faith, agreeing to pay the remaining fifteen cents on the morrow and signing his name under Stuart's on a sheet of paper headed: "List of Members." Tod wrote "Pd. 5" after it, and then Stuart started on Steve. But Steve was already sold. Anything that "Pinky" did Steve must do likewise, and he was planking his twenty cents on the table and reaching for Tod's fountain pen before Stuart had begun his selling talk!

At the door, on the way out, "Pinky" suffered a recurrence of suspicion. "Say, hold on a minute, you guys," he exclaimed. "Whereabouts is this boat you tell of, anyway? How do I know you've got a boat?"

"We told you about it once," sighed Tod. "If you don't believe us go and see for yourself."

"Well— Just the same, there's a nigger in the woodpile, and you aren't fooling me any, and you needn't think you are! G'night!"

"Gee!" exulted Stuart when the door had closed finally behind the visitors. "We've got two already! That leaves only twenty-one!"

"We'll get them, all right," declared Tod confidently. "But, say, wouldn't 'Pinky' make you tired with his suspicions?"

CHAPTER X

THE PASTIME BOAT CLUB

Tod's reputation as a weather prophet was fully established the next morning, for when they awoke it had been raining for several hours and would, according to all appearances, rain for several more! Stuart went and brought his last nickel and, with a sigh, added it to the fund.

After breakfast, each armed with his list of prospects, the two started forth through the dormitory. Where Tod went the conversation began about as follows. Having gained admittance, Tod would announce cheerfully: "Hello, Billy! I want twenty cents from you!"

"See can you get it!"

"I'm going to, you poor nut. Here, put your name down there and fork over."

"Like fun! What for? What's it all about? If it's anything to do with presenting anything to any one I'm off it. Say, what's the Pastime Boat Club, for gosh sake?"

Then Tod, seated, would explain. They were going to have a corking boat and keep it on the river some place near by. Every one was joining,

of course. Well, not every one because every one wasn't being asked. Just a few of our own crowd, you know. You could take the boat for an hour at a time, two if you went along with another member, and row all around. It only cost you fifteen cents to belong, and after that only five cents a month in dues. Just see the names already down!

Of course he had his failures. Some prospects refused to discern any advantage in being able to slop about in a leaky rowboat at that time of year, and told him to come back in the spring. Others wanted to know, first of all, what hour of the day the boat was to be theirs, and lost interest when it was explained that they would have to make application to the secretary if they wanted to use it. They seemed to think that they should be assured of the boat for an hour every afternoon, preferably between three and five, and weren't a bit impressed by Tod's reminder that, with twenty-three members, it would be impossible to set definite hours for all. Sometimes Tod met only ridicule.

But when he and Stuart reconvened in Number 36 West success was in sight. Tod brought back eight pledges and Stuart six. They needed only five more. The only complication was that of Tod's eight members six were honorary, and of Stuart's six four were! Which meant that the honorary membership was already exhausted and

that from now on they must confine their exertions to twenty-centers! It seemed that the privilege of taking part in the conduct of the Club was not generally attractive enough to warrant the extra five cents. Tod was for changing the rules in some manner so that the honorary members would be still further shorn of privilege. For instance, they could fix it so that honorary members could use the boat only a half-hour instead of an hour! But Stuart pointed out that they couldn't do that at the present stage because the fifteen centers who had already joined wouldn't stand for it. He advised that they tack on a few more names to their lists, have another go at it after dinner and then see where they stood. So Tod laid his pen down and put the rules back in the drawer without amendment.

A momentary coolness succeeded the discovery that some one had short-changed Stuart a nickel and the verdict from Tod that the former would have to make it up from his own pocket. Stuart asked bitterly whereabouts in his pocket he was to find a nickel, or even a penny. Tod reminded him of Mr. Wilkin's dollar. Stuart replied that unless they managed to get five more active members before to-morrow he guessed there wouldn't be any of that dollar left. Besides, he didn't think he ought to use that, anyway. Suppose Mr. Wilkins got mad and went to faculty? The summons

to dinner cleared the atmosphere, however, and the cloud passed.

News always traveled fast at Nostrand, and on a rainy Sunday it traveled faster than ever. By the time dinner was over the Pastime Boat Club had become a subject of much interest throughout the school. Instead of having to set forth again on their campaign, Tod and Stuart speedily discovered that in order to recruit the membership to the desired number they had only to sit at home and pass on applications! The rush, for it amounted to that, began as soon as the noon meal was over. Applicants appeared by ones, by twos and in bunches, asking to be told all about the Club or eagerly demanding admission to it. Had So-and-So joined? Could you pay ten cents now and ten cents next Saturday? And so on.

The difficulty now was not to obtain members but to avoid them! The fact that many of the applicants were neither Lower Middle Class fellows or even known by name to the organizers was something that had to be suffered. As Tod put it, they needed the money, and one fellow's twenty cents was as good as another's. Still, they did choose to some extent, and by one means or another they connived to keep out a number of undesirables. Long before three o'clock, however, the membership was complete and the exchequer showed the satisfactory sum of four dollars and

eighty cents. Tod was for taking in a few more so as to be on the safe side, but Stuart dissuaded him. Some of those who failed to get into the Club were extremely disgruntled, and one boy, who looked as if he could do it without unduly exerting himself, offered to lick Tod and Stuart both! The offer was declined with thanks.

The Christian Association met every Sunday afternoon at four o'clock over in Manster. Both Tod and Stuart were members, but so far their attendance records were not of the best. To-day, though, the meeting offered a welcome diversion from watching the rain pelt against the windows and a refuge from the importunities of would-be members of the Boat Club, and, since the last name had been added to the list well before the hour set for the C. A. meeting, they donned slickers and set forth. For some reason there were always more fellows there on a rainy Sunday than on a Sunday when the sun shone, and to-day the large recitation room was well filled. The faculty member, Mr. Farley, and Billy Keating, the President of the Association, sat on the platform. The proceedings opened with a prayer. After that an Upper Middle Class fellow named Watson was invited to the rostrum. Watson had prepared a very thoughtful article on the Miracles of the New Testament in which he sought to reconcile the testimony of the Bible with the evidences of modern

science. Not an easy task, but Watson had faith and enthusiasm on his side and presented a very convincing argument, and was rewarded by sincere applause. Discussion followed. Tod didn't take part. In fact, his attention had more than once wandered from the subject during Watson's exposition, and now he found himself thinking about Billy Keating.

Billy was, of course, a Senior. He was also captain of this year's Baseball Team. Besides that, however, he was perhaps the most influential fellow in school, and certainly the most respected. He was, in local parlance, "a whale of a first baseman," batted well over three hundred and was the ideal leader. He had refused the Class Presidency on the score that he didn't have time for the duties the office entailed, but not even the President himself was accorded the honor and loyalty that Billy received from his class-mates. And certainly no other fellow at Nostrand was so esteemed by the youngsters of the Junior Class. Billy served as a combined big brother and arbiter for fully half the class. Tod had long been an admirer of Billy Keating, just as practically every fellow was, but he had never come in closer contact with him than he had to-day. To an extent Billy was a revelation to the other. Fellows of Billy's age who professed Christianity and took an active part in religious matters had always left Tod un-

convinced. Too often when concerned in secular affairs their conduct had been far from Christian. But Billy, as Tod well knew, was sincere. He didn't pose as being a bit better than any one else, but he was better, and fellows realized it. Sometimes one heard a sneer at Billy on the score of his being a "goody-goody," but the sneer wasn't deserved. Tradition still recounted the wonderful fight Billy had had with an older fellow in his Lower Middle year. It was said to have lasted twenty minutes, over behind the home stand on the football field, and to have left Billy scarcely recognizable. But he had licked his opponent. Billy's career at Nostrand had nearly ended then, but faculty, after hearing all the facts, had been lenient. The other boy, his existence made intolerable by the contempt of the school—or as much of it as had learned of his offense—disappeared unmourned a fortnight afterwards. In that encounter Billy had scorned consequences and sprung to the defense of a Junior, and he still maintained the rôle of protector over the younger lads.

Tod recalled all this during the half hour's discussion and was aware of an uneasy feeling which for a time he couldn't account for. After a while, though, he discovered the reason for it. What had been subconsciously bothering him was the thought that Billy Keating, if he knew, would far from approve of Tod's plans for the conduct of

the Pastime Boat Club! Realizing it, Tod sought to summon arguments in defense. He wasn't doing anything dishonest. Tricky, yes, if you liked to call it that, but certainly not really dishonest. It wasn't dishonest to take advantage of another fellow's stupidity or lack of foresight. Why, that was done every day. Even Billy himself did it when he played baseball! That was half the game. You tried to do what you weren't expected to do. You sought an advantage by proving yourself smarter and sharper than the opponent. Of course—and here Tod's argument faltered—in the case of baseball the other fellow knew beforehand what you were up to. In the case of the Pastime Boat Club the other fellow didn't. Not so good, reflected Tod, scowling. To his dismay the project began to look decidedly off-color, and he found himself wishing he hadn't come to the meeting and seen Billy Keating! No use talking, Billy would scrap the Boat Club in an instant if it was left to him to decide on its merits!

Well, there was a difference between ethics and morals, Tod told himself. The ethics of the project might be questionable, but the morals were beyond criticism. Anyway, beyond the criticism of the ordinary person. Of course Billy Keating—But, then, Billy was a stickler. A fellow would have a pretty difficult time of it if he tried to measure up to Billy's standards! Anyway, they

couldn't quit now. There'd be a fine laugh if they started in returning money to fellows and acknowledging that the whole thing had been "queer." And it wasn't "queer," either; not what you'd call "queer." Maybe it would be fairer not to try to freeze fellows out too soon. They might, perhaps, have two months instead of one in which to settle arrears of dues. And maybe it wasn't quite square for Stuart and he to keep the three to five hours for themselves. Not every day, anyhow. And maybe—

Tod awoke to the fact that Mr. Farley, who had followed the discussion with a brief address, had again seated himself and that Billy was leading in prayer. Tod leaned forward and joined in. "Do unto others as—" Tod's enunciation became a mumble. Gee, but he wished he hadn't come!

Going back through the rain, which had now lessened to not much more than a drizzle, Tod was very thoughtful and silent. Stuart didn't notice, though, for he had a lot to say himself and wasn't displeased to find opportunity to say it without the usual interruptions and objections. Not until they were back in the room did Stuart observe anything abnormal in Tod's behavior. Then, with the light on, he stared at his chum perplexedly.

"Anything wrong with you?" he demanded anxiously. "Sick or anything?"

"Me? No, of course not."

“Why don’t you say something then?”

“When would I have a chance?”

“Well, you don’t have to look like that, anyway,” muttered Stuart. “Bet you ate too much ice cream. I saw you crook Dabney’s!”

“He gave it to me,” replied Tod listlessly.

“Bet you something was wrong with it then,” Stuart jeered. “Maybe a fly in it or something.” Then, in response to a knock: “Yes? Come in!”

The intruder was “Pinky.” “Say, you guys,” he began, “we’ve been talking things over and we don’t quite savvy how come you fellows are elected President and Treasurer.”

“Who are ‘we’?” asked Tod coldly.

“Huh? Oh, four or five of us. Steve and Tom Connell and Jerry Terrill and—”

“You wouldn’t understand,” said Stuart. “Especially you and Jerry.”

“That’s all right,” answered “Pinky” doggedly, “but we want to know how you guys can elect officers before the Club is formed!”

“Who said we were officers?” asked Tod.

“It said so on that list. You were down as President and Stu—”

“Pro tem,” said Tod wearily.

“Huh?”

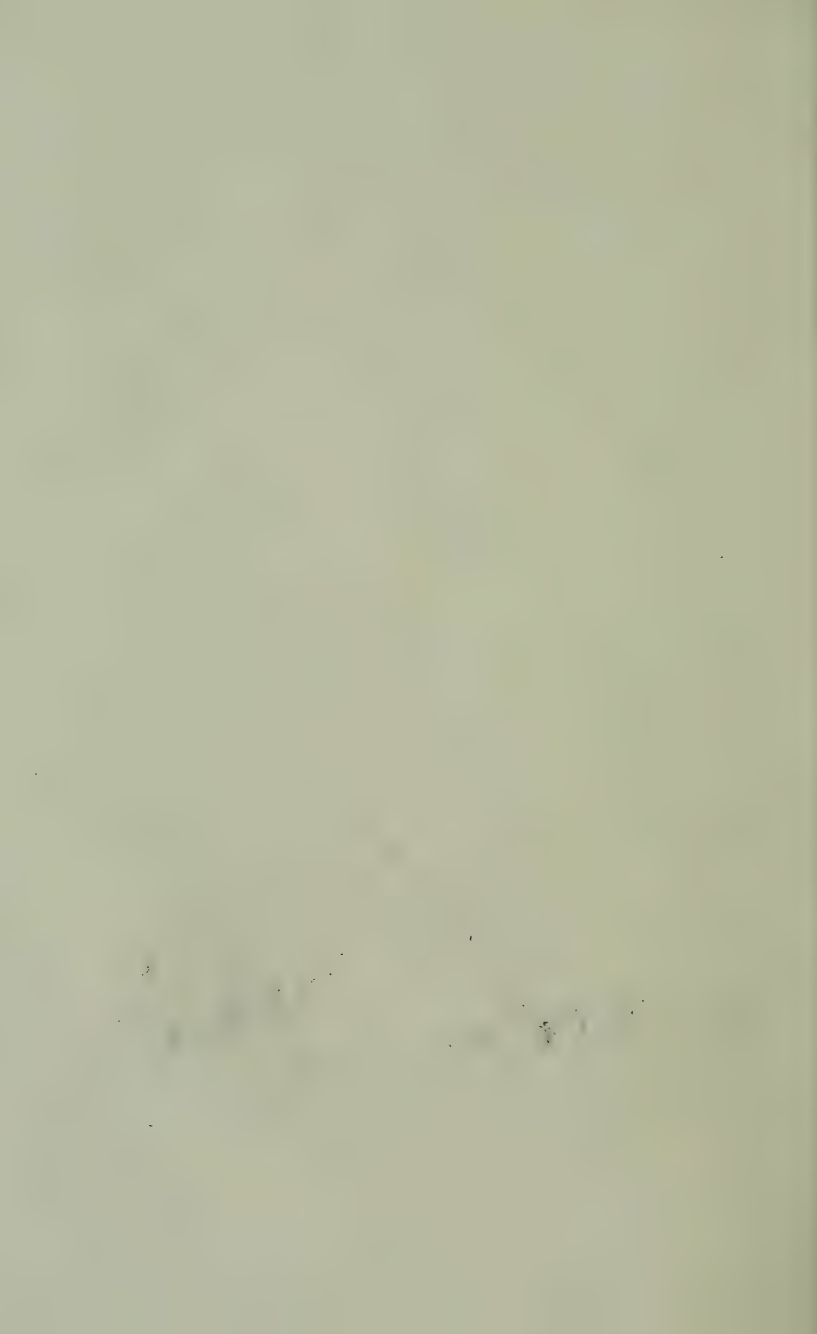
“Pro tem.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Ask ‘Cold Slaw,’” Stuart advised.



“This is no time to get cold feet”



“It means temporarily,” Tod explained. “There’ll be a meeting soon and then regular officers will be chosen.”

“Oh! Well, when’s this meeting going to be?”

“Don’t know yet. Maybe not at all.”

“Not at all! But you just said— Say, I knew all along there was something goofy about this business! Some of the fellows went over to see the boat and they couldn’t find it. I don’t believe you’ve got any boat! Listen, I want my twenty cents back, you robbers!”

“You get it,” answered Tod. “Give it to him, Stu.”

“Give—give—” Stuart stammered.

“Yes, give it to him. If he isn’t satisfied he can have it. Besides, I don’t know—”

But Tod didn’t continue. Stuart brightened and went to his chiffonier. “Sure, he can have it,” he agreed. “Lots of fellows are dying to get in.” He picked out four nickels and held them out to the malcontent. “Here you are, Grouch.”

But “Pinky” backed off. “Well, now, wait a bit. I didn’t say—I mean, I was just fooling, Stu. If you say it’s all right I’m satisfied. If you say there is a boat—even if the fellows couldn’t find it, which looks mighty funny to me, if you want to know—”

“Shut up, will you, ‘Pinky’?” asked Tod plaintively. “Either take your money or leave it. Any-

how, get out. I—I've got a headache." "Pinky," nettled and still muttering, retired without his twenty cents, and Stuart turned to his chum with a frown.

"Why didn't you say you had a headache, you silly coot? I knew you had too much dessert!"

"I haven't," replied Tod. "Anyway, not exactly a headache."

"What did you lie for then?" demanded Stuart severely.

"I didn't; not exactly, anyhow. My head does feel funny. I—I've been thinking."

Stuart nobly restrained from the obvious retort and, instead, asked: "What about?"

"About this business. About the Boat Club. I—I'm not so sure it isn't sort of—sort of snide, Stu."

"Snide? Where do you get that stuff?" Stuart spoke indignantly. Having been yesterday convinced of its reputableness, he was not prepared to yield his conviction at a moment's notice. "How do you mean, snide?" Tod explained what he meant, though somewhat in the manner of one asking refutation, and Stuart told him he was crazy. "Gosh, you don't suppose we're going to go around handing back those initiation fees and dues now, do you? We would look like fools! You said yesterday that there wasn't anything wrong

with the scheme, and if it was all right then it's all right to-day!"

"But maybe I was mistaken, Stu," answered Tod doubtfully.

"Piffle! You've got indigestion, that's your trouble. If you go slow at supper you'll be all right in the morning."

Well, Tod thought, perhaps that was it. Oh, not entirely, but partly. Billy Keating had faded somewhat into the background by now, and Tod wondered if he hadn't exaggerated the questionable phases of the project. "Well, now, honest, Stu, do *you* think it's all right?"

"Of course it is," said Stuart stoutly. "Why not? It's our scheme and we've got a right to fix things like we want 'em. If the others get fooled that's their fault. Gosh, this is no time to get cold feet, just when the whole business has turned out a big success and we've got the money over there in the drawer and everything! Aw, shucks, come to supper!"

Tod went to supper.

CHAPTER XI

SIGNOR PASQUALE

AT a few minutes past ten the next morning they took the money, mostly dimes and nickels, to Mrs. Pasquale. The children were at school and conversation was more difficult than before. However, Mrs. Pasquale understood perfectly what the money was for, nodded fast, talked volubly and was quite evidently entirely satisfied with the transaction. Then Tod and Stuart undertook to put the boat into the water. They had brought a dozen feet of line, and, with this attached to the bow, they hoped to be able to navigate the craft down the stream and under the bridge and around to a place where they could draw it on land and moor it to something. Of course, it might try to sink with them, but if it did they meant to tie it somewhere so that the bow, at least, would remain in evidence. Now, however, they discovered to their surprise that they couldn't lift the boat between them. It was twelve feet long and exceedingly, almost disproportionately, wide. And, after yesterday's rain, it was not only supplied with some two inches of water but was thoroughly

damp all over and correspondingly heavy. Mrs. Pasquale had immediately lost interest in the boat after it had passed from her possession and had retired into the house, and so her assistance was not available. Tod found an empty can without much trouble and set about bailing, Stuart trying desperately and none too successfully to tip the boat for the other's convenience. But even after the water was out the thing was still too much for them, and they sat down on the edge of the boat and considered.

Aid was not in sight, since at this time of day the male population of Poland was at the mills. Finally they sought Mrs. Pasquale once more and by pantomime explained their difficulty. It took a great deal of pantomime, and Tod was quite exhausted ere a gleam of comprehension showed in the woman's eyes. Then she, too, expressed herself in motion; but she also expressed herself in speech, and the latter was so confusing that it was a long time before Stuart, who for some days after took credit for linguistic ability, noted the recurrent phrase "fia cla" and translated it into English.

"I've got it, Tod!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "She says 'five o'clock!' She means we're to wait until her husband comes home, eh? That's it, I'll bet!"

"Five o'clock?" asked Tod, nodding violently.

“Si, si! Fia cla!” replied Mrs. Pasquale, nodding even more violently.

Well, there seemed nothing else to do, and so they did it. That is, they returned to school and just before the hour of five set forth once more for the residence of the “Squallies,” as Stuart called them. All day, however, they were obliged to answer questions regarding the boat: where it was, what it was like, why it couldn’t be seen, when it would be placed in commission. The members of the Pastime Boat Club craved action!

They paused at Batt’s and Stuart recklessly bought two hot dogs and went into debt for them. After a moment’s confab with the amiable proprietor of the Doggery they continued on their way, fortified for the labor confronting them. Mr. Pasquale was home. He proved to be a short, rotund, smiling man, and was affability itself when he emerged from the house. Nevertheless, Tod instantly decided that he didn’t like the man’s looks. For one thing, his brown eyes, set far too close together, were very shifty; and for another thing his cordiality was much too profuse. But he spoke English almost as well as Batt, which was something in his favor. Between them they explained that they wished to get the boat into the river and would be grateful for his assistance.

“You want to buy the boat?” inquired Pasquale genially.

“We have bought it,” answered Tod. “We paid your wife for it this morning. We want to take it away, Mr. Pasquale.”

“You pay my wife?” Mr. Pasquale, still smiling, shook his curly head. “She not own the boat. Me, I own.”

“Well, she’s got the money for it,” said Stuart a bit impatiently. “She sold it to us.”

“Oh, no, she could not sell. The boat it is belong to me. You understand?”

“But,” exclaimed Stuart a trifle wildly, “she took the five dollars. If it wasn’t her boat how could she take our money?”

Mr. Pasquale shrugged and spread his hands wide. “Oh, the old woman,” he laughed. “She not understand. She don’t speak the English. Me, I speak.”

“Well, then, you get the money from her,” replied Tod exasperatedly. “It’s our boat now. We bought it.”

Mr. Pasquale shook his head gently. “No, no, you pay me. I sell the boat for ten dollars. Fine boat. See? Big boat.”

“Say, you’re crazy!” began Stuart, but Tod scowled him into silence and then smiled patiently at the man.

“I guess you don’t understand, Mr. Pasquale. We asked the price of this boat and your wife said

five dollars. We paid her the money. So the boat is ours. You call her out and ask her."

"Me, I understand. It is you who are not understand. This boat it is belong to me. My wife she could not sell because she not own. Me, I own, and I sell very cheap. I sell the fine, big boat for eight dollars."

"We wouldn't pay eight dollars for it, anyway—" began Tod.

"All right, you pay seven."

"But, confound it, I tell you we've already paid for it! Can't you understand that? We paid Mrs. Pasquale!"

The man shrugged once more, smiling deprecatingly. "That I cannot help," he declared. "That is not my business."

"But she has the money! You can get it from her!"

"Ho, ho! You not know her so well as me. That money— Poup!—it is gone!"

"Is that so?" asked Tod angrily. "Well, either we have the boat or she pays us back the five dollars. Where is she?"

Mr. Pasquale shrugged his broad shoulders and again spread his big hands. "She is not here now. Maybe she is gone to the store. I do not know. It does not matter. You like to buy the boat, I sell very cheap."

“We’re not getting anywhere,” growled Stuart, casting a malevolent look at the placid Italian. “Look here, Pasquale, are you going to let us have it or not?”

“Oh, yes, sure! I make you a bargain. Six dollars, fifty cents. You like that, eh? Big, grand boat! And look, Mister, I throw in the rope!”

“Confound your cheek!” yelled Stuart. “That’s our rope anyway! We brought it this morning.”

Again the shrug. This time it signified that he was too much the gentleman to express doubt of the truthfulness of the statement, but that his convictions were his own. Tod showed signs of apoplexy. “Take hold, Stu,” he sputtered. “We’ll get it over somehow!”

But Mr. Pasquale, still smiling, shook his head and sat down. Unfortunately for the boys’ plan, he sat down on the boat!

Five minutes later, defeated, seething with rage, Tod and Stuart strode back to school. Of course, as they stated over and over again during that hurried walk, they weren’t going to let that robber get away with it, but just what to do to keep him from getting away with it wasn’t yet clear. There were, to be sure, the police, but suppose Mrs. Pasquale denied having accepted the money? There had been no witnesses to the transaction. Of course both Tod and Stuart could swear on a stack

of Bibles that they had paid the five dollars over to her, but would the police believe them instead of the woman? As for trying to intimidate Mr. Pasquale by appearing with a policeman, well, something told them that wouldn't work!

"If," argued Tod, "that boat is his she owns it too, doesn't she? And if she owns it she had a right to sell it. It's poppycock to make believe that he isn't responsible for what she does, that he can't make her give the money to him!"

"Well, I don't know," said Stuart. "Maybe the Italians are different. I mean that perhaps there's some law about a husband's property being his alone, and the wife not having—"

"Italian laws aren't any good in this country! This is the United States, by jingo! What goes in his country—"

"I guess we'd ought to ask some one, Tod."

"Yes, but who? How about 'Gus' Borrow?"

"Gosh, he's a fac! I meant one of the fellows, one of the older fellows. I tell you! Ask Jack New. You know him."

"I don't either know him. Not well enough, anyway."

"You don't have to know him well enough. I mean, he's a pretty decent sort and wouldn't mind telling us what to do. Gosh, Tod, I hope the other fellows don't hear about this; the members, you know!"

"So do I," agreed Tod glumly. "I don't see how they can if we don't tell them, though."

"I guess we'll have to tell them pretty soon. They'll want to know where the boat is. We told them we'd have it this afternoon."

"Well, it isn't our fault. I suppose I could ask Jack New, only it looks sort of cheeky. If you went with me, though—"

"Sure, I'll go along. You've got to do the talking, though. You've met him and I haven't."

"Met him!" said Tod bitterly. "Well, all right. We'll go over after supper."

Nevertheless, when the moment arrived Tod required a lot of urging, and by the time he had screwed his courage up to the sticking point it was well after seven o'clock, and just as he was about to rap on the door of Number 36 East it opened from within and Jack confronted them on his way out. Tod fell back in embarrassment, muttered something under his breath and feebly attempted to pretend that he had made a mistake in the room. But Jack wasn't deceived.

"Hello, young Hale! Coming to call, eh?" The host threw the door open again. "Come on in!"

Tod squeezed past and Stuart followed. Lee Johnson was not there. Jack tossed the books he had been carrying onto the table and waved them to chairs. "Sit down, fellows," he invited hos-

pitably. Stuart was nudging Tod desperately, and at last the latter found his voice.

“This is Stuart Younge,” he explained. “He—we’re room-mates.”

“Glad to know you, Younge. So this is the chap you turned us down for, eh?” Jack’s twinkling eyes returned to Tod. “Well, I don’t know that I can blame you.” Then, to Stuart: “I don’t know whether Hale told you that there was a time when he considered sharing these diggings, Younge.”

Stuart grinned and Tod got very red. He had so hoped that the crew captain had forgotten that blunder! Jack chuckled as he went on. “Sort of mean to bring that up again, eh, Hale?”

“It’s all right,” Tod muttered. “I—I made a frightful ass of myself!”

“Pshaw! Not a bit of it. It was a perfectly natural mistake. Too bad of us to rag you as we did. I rather thought you’d come back after you’d stopped blushing and let us be decent to you, but you didn’t. Couldn’t forgive us, I dare say.”

“That wasn’t it,” stammered Tod. “I—I didn’t think—I mean I thought you were just—just fooling.”

“But I wasn’t,” Jack protested. “But never mind. You are back, anyway. We’ll let bygones be bygones. Now, Hale, what’s on your mind? Looking for more subscriptions to that boat club I hear about?”

Well, that presented an opening, and it wasn't such a great length of time before Jack was in possession of the story. Having once got under way, Tod forgot his embarrassment and poured forth his sorrows. Jack showed amusement frequently, but he listened without interrupting and managed to look sympathetic. Indeed, when Tod had ended he really was sympathetic. "I call that a pretty low-down piece of business, fellows," he declared. "Astonishing how quickly foreigners pick up our Yankee traits, isn't it? Well, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. That's why we came to see you. We thought you might advise us."

"So I will, only my advice may not be much good."

"I guess we'll risk that," answered Tod, shyly, admiringly. "You see, we've got to get the boat or our money because they aren't really ours. I mean to say, a lot of fellows went into the thing and of course they'll want to either use the boat or get their coin back. So what we want to know first is, does the boat belong to us or doesn't it?"

"Well, Hale, I'd say offhand that it doesn't."

"But we paid for it!"

"Granted, old chap. But look here. There's an old saying that possession is nine-tenths of the law, and from what I can see that rule is just as good as it ever was. Possession plays a big part

in most controversies. It's a heap easier to hold on to what you have than to get it away from some one else. That's why I say that at the present time the boat does not belong to you."

"Then they've got to give us back our money!"

"Again I disagree with you. They ought to give it back, but I don't believe they've *got* to. Pasquale himself says the boat was not his wife's property and that consequently she had no right to dispose of it. That may be true or not. The point is that you can't show it isn't true. Of course, when he says he can't get the money from Mrs. P. he's very likely lying, because Italians aren't strong believers in woman's rights and all that sort of thing. I'm inclined to think that Signor Pasquale is capable of handing friend wife a clout alongside the ear in case she doesn't deliver. But that's neither here nor there. She has the money and he has the boat and you haven't anything. And there you are!"

"Gosh," said Tod ruefully, "I knew that before."

Jack laughed. "Of course you did, but you asked for advice and I'm giving you the sort of advice you'd get from your lawyer. I rather expect to go in for Law, you know, and so it's a good plan to practice a bit."

"Well," said Tod dolefully, "what do you think we'd better do? Go to the police?"

“As a lawyer—an incipient lawyer, that is—I advise that very thing. Not that I believe it would result in getting the boat, however, or the money either. Mrs. P. would probably pretend she had never seen you before. Still, as a first step it’s very proper. Subsequently you should enter suit against Mrs. P. and seek to recover the money. But—”

“You’re just ragging us,” interrupted Tod sadly. “I guess we aren’t looking for a lawyer’s advice.”

“Oh, well, that’s a different thing! Retire the lawyer! Enter the layman! I’ll tell you what I’d do, Hale, if I was in your boots. Possession being nine points of the law, I’d take possession. Let the Pasquales do the worrying.”

“Take possession! But how can we? I told you he wouldn’t let us have it. He—he sat down on it and grinned, the—the bum!”

“What’s wrong with taking it when he isn’t sitting on it?”

“You mean—” began Tod and Stuart together.

“Yes. It’s like this as I see it, fellows. Legally you haven’t any right to the boat. Morally you have.”

“Law must be awfully funny,” muttered Stuart.

“It is,” Jack assented. “That’s why I mean to go into it. It’s so blamed interesting!”

“How do you think we could get it?” asked Tod.

"It weighs about a ton. We tried to lift it between us and couldn't much more than stir it."

"Here," instructed Jack, "draw me a diagram of the Pasquale premises. Show where the gate is and the front door and the boat and everything." Tod took the pencil and pad of paper and complied. Then he explained.

"The gate's here and you walk around the side of the house by a narrow alley, sort of. The back door's here and the boat's here. That's the river wall."

"Your friends live on this side of the house, then? Is there a front door?"

"Yes, but we didn't go to it. It didn't look as if it was used much, anyway."

"How far is the boat from the bank here?"

"About—" Tod looked questioningly at Stuart.

"About twenty feet, I think," said Stuart. "Maybe not so much, either. I guess the stern of it's about fifteen."

"The stern's toward the wall? How high is the wall? I mean, what's the distance between the water and the level of the yard?"

"Maybe five feet or so."

"How long do you think the boat would keep afloat after it was in the water?"

"Gosh," said Tod, "I don't know. It looks pretty leaky."

“Oars in it?” asked Jack next.

The others exchanged a look of mild consternation. “Gee, we never thought about oars!” replied Stuart. “There aren’t any, either.”

“No matter. Well, fellows, if you have anything to do the present is the best time there is, so let’s get busy. Now then, here’s the idea. Tell me what’s wrong with it.”

There didn’t seem to be anything at all wrong with it. In fact, Tod and Stuart thought it was absolutely brilliant, and said so, and Jack, striving not to look too pleased, arose for action.

“All right then. You fellows know what to do, so you mosey ahead. No hurry, though, because we won’t get there until eight. Let him think you’re sort of easy, Hale. Won’t he please let you have the boat? Well, then what will he do? Will he let you have it for two or three dollars more? That kind of thing, you know. And get Mrs. P. there, too, if you can. Keep them busy for ten minutes, anyway. All right, let’s go!”

CHAPTER XII

CONSPIRATORS

FORTUNATELY for Jack New's plans, the night was dark; so dark that, once off the main traveled street, the conspirators proceeded not only softly but circumspectly. There were four of them: Jack, Lee Johnson, Tony Friel and Ham Bowdoin. Tony rowed bow on the first crew and Hamilton Bowdoin, better known as "Ham-bone," was captain of the second and rowed Number 2. Despite the fact that the evening was decidedly chill, each was clothed very sketchily: trousers, sleeveless shirt or jersey and sneakers being the favorite apparel. Until they left North Street just short of the bridge they had shown themselves in a merry mood, but once on the River Road, unlighted save for the beams that escaped from the windows of the three or four residences there, they maintained a silence broken only by an occasional low-toned word or two. River Road was a fairly narrow thoroughfare running close to the stream and lined with young maples. On one side was a pipe fence set into the top course of the granite retaining wall. Beside it was a strip of grass.

Then came the graveled roadway, a similar ribbon of sod and finally a hedge-row beyond which the few well-separated houses stood on the first rise of the hill. In the manner of the best conspirators, these avoided the gravel and kept to the grass on the river side. It is doubtful if they would have been heard across the stream had they talked aloud, for over there in the well-thronged tenements there was sound enough to have drowned louder voices than theirs, and, since there was a distinct hint of winter in the air, the residents of Poland were not likely to be in the back yards tonight. Some one on the other side was playing an accordion, and some one else, further along in the row, was singing hoarsely. But, for the most part, the dimly lighted windows of the tenements were closed, and between the none too musical sounds of instrument and voice the lap of the water against the walls could be heard.

Against the faint glow of the town the square houses across the river showed plainly enough, and Jack New had no difficulty in determining the fourteenth from North Street. Having located it, he brought the expedition to a halt directly opposite, and four darker forms in the obscurity draped themselves over the railing and, talking in low voices, awaited the signal for the advance.

"Looks blamed cold," murmured Lee Johnson, peering downward.

“How do you know how it looks?” jeered Tony Friel. “You can’t see it.”

“All right, it *sounds* cold.” Lee accepted the amendment with an anticipatory shiver. “How deep is it, Jack?”

“I don’t know. Maybe ten feet. Still got the rope, Ham?”

“Yep. Want it?”

“No, but we’ll want it when we get over there, for Hale says the top of the wall’s five feet or so above water and we’ll have to get the rope around something before we’ll be able to climb out.”

“Bet I can shin up without it,” said Tony. “Those stones have plenty of whatyoucallems, crevices.”

“Better not try it, old dear. If you lose your hold and fall in again you’ll make a deuce of a row! Say, it *must* be eight by now!”

“Maybe,” agreed Ham. “I haven’t my wrist watch, Jack. Wouldn’t it be a joke if the town clock had stopped and we stood here a couple of hours waiting for it to strike?”

“Killing! I’ve known it to stop, too. What time was it when we left?”

“Twenty minutes of. We probably haven’t been more than ten minutes so far. Wish I’d brought my overcoat.” Ham thrust his hands deeper into a pair of old gray trousers and huddled himself into the lee of Jack’s larger bulk.

“And you a crew man,” sneered Lee. “Why, this isn’t cold!”

“Don’t talk so loud,” warned Jack. “I want to hear that clock when it strikes.”

Silence ensued, silence save for the river and the sounds from across it. Then a dog began to bark furiously, a locomotive screeched and a belated delivery truck, speeding along Grattan Street, beyond the first row of tenements, honked loudly. And right in the midst of the seeming bedlam the bell in the tower of the Town Hall began its deliberate sounding of the hour. But there had never been any danger of missing it, for its sonorous peals easily triumphed over all other noises of the night. Ere the first stroke had died away four pairs of trousers lay on the turf and four bodies had surmounted the fence. Then came as many stealthy splashes as the conspirators, hanging from the edge of the wall, let themselves drop into the chilling water. And it really was chilling, for the river here was above the influence of the warmer water of the Basin. There were several gasps, and then, had there been any one there to hear, came the faint sounds of the swimmers.

The river was scarcely more than forty feet in width between the retaining walls, and although at certain times of the year, notably in the spring when melting snow and rains combined to fill the brooks and rills that fed it, it rushed through the

town like a mountain torrent, rising well toward the tops of the walls, now it flowed with a scarcely perceptible current and was probably nowhere more than ten feet deep. The expedition was across almost before they knew it, and, holding to the crevices between the great granite blocks of the wall, they paused while Ham Bowdoin uncoiled a length of rope from around his body. Most of the yards had a fence of sorts along the edge of the river, with a gate or opening through which the residents could reach the stone coping. Formerly, when the stream had been contained between wooden bulkheads, water-stairs had descended from most of the gates and dingy skiffs and punts had been moored to them. But with the building of the stone walls it had become a misdemeanor to keep boats in the "canal," or even to maintain steps. Had the Pasquale premises still retained the ladder which once descended the face of the wall the invaders' task would have been simple. But as it was they found their work cut out for them. In the darkness it was difficult to locate anything overhead to which the rope might be attached. The outer branches of a decrepit tree overhung them, but, even could they have swung the rope over one, they were not to be trusted. Tony it was who finally solved the difficulty by digging fingers and toes into the cracks and getting his head above the edge of the wall.

Then he maintained his precarious position while Jack passed the rope up to him and while he managed to slip it under and around one of the flat stones which topped the wall.

“All right!” he whispered, and Jack, working with one hand and his teeth, made a slip-knot, and Tony drew it up to the top and saw it tight before he descended. Being a bit tired by then, Tony became momentarily careless, there was a muffled exclamation from him, a less muffled ejaculation from Ham and a disturbingly loud splash! Tony, losing his grip, had fallen backward on Ham and together they had disappeared into the black waters. They were up an instant later, choking and snuffling, while Lee, clinging to the rope, strove hard to keep his laughter soundless and Jack hissed for silence. After that misadventure they waited and listened for a long minute, heard nothing to indicate that their presence had been revealed, and then, Jack in advance, climbed upward one by one, wet, chilled but triumphant.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the premises Tod and Stuart were creating a diversion. For a good ten minutes they had hovered in the shadows of the ill-lighted street before the town clock had proclaimed the zero hour. Then they had invaded the shallow vestibule and knocked loudly at Mr. Pasquale’s portal. Now, seated in a small front room which did duty as parlor, living room

and, as they suspected, sleeping apartment for one or more of the children, they were conducting negotiations. The room was very full. Present were Mr. and Mrs. Pasquale, three young Pasquales and a grandmother Pasquale; and, of course, Tod and Stuart. There was also much furniture: a large table, several upholstered chairs of a vivid green, a sofa to match, a cot-bed covered with a very red drapery, an ornamental stand holding the remains of a geranium in a pink bowl, a cheap phonograph, a canary in a gilt cage and many pictures on the walls.

Tod was experiencing a reaction from the wrath with which he had viewed Mr. Pasquale at their last meeting. Mr. Pasquale and Mrs. Pasquale, as well as Grandmother Pasquale and the Pasquale children, were all so amiable, so friendly, that he was almost convinced that he had done them an injustice. A lamp, a very gorgeous affair, hung from the center of the ceiling and threw its rays over six smiling Pasquale countenances. Their welcome had been flattering, and even now they were being treated like honored guests. Well, reflected Tod, hardening his heart, maybe that was the Italian way of cheating a fellow; and, at that, it wasn't a bad way!

Mrs. Pasquale proved strangely forgetful. Charged by Tod with having accepted his money that morning, she could now remember nothing

of the incident. She said so smilingly to Mr. Pasquale and he translated smilingly to the visitors. Mr. Pasquale helpfully suggested that perhaps the latter had left the money at home. Oh, to be sure, they would find it on their return. Mistakes were so easy and money so likely to be mislaid!

Well, Tod didn't think so, and stated as much. But he didn't suggest duplicity on the part of Mrs. Pasquale. He just looked politely puzzled, and asked: "Then you aren't going to let us have the boat, Mr. Pasquale?"

Mr. Pasquale spread his hands, dropped his head toward his right shoulder and raised his eyebrows. It was answer enough, and Tod sighed. He was rather enjoying himself now. Well, then, what would Mr. Pasquale do? Would he let them have the boat if they paid another two dollars? Mr. Pasquale fairly shuddered with horror. Two dollars! For so fine, so big, so grand a boat? The gentleman was certainly making fun. Yes, that was it of course. Mr. Pasquale laughed heartily to show that he could relish a joke as well as the next. Then three dollars? asked Tod. No, no, impossible! Such a fine boat! But they were friends, eh? Yes, very good friends. Well, then, he would say six dollars. There! That was very cheap, wasn't it? Only six dollars for so grand a boat! But Tod shook his head dismally, and Stuart, marking the time as told by the little

tin clock that stood on the little shelf between the windows, moved restively. The ten minutes were already up. But Tod meant to give Jack good measure of opportunity and the negotiations continued, evidently to the pleasure of the entire Pasquale household. Eventually Mr. Pasquale, in a sudden burst of generosity, dropped his price to five dollars, and there he stuck. Tod visibly weakened, but just when it seemed that a bargain was about to be struck he introduced a new phrase. Well, how about oars? Of course there was a pair of oars that went with the boat? Mr. Pasquale became jovially ironic. Oars? Why not, then, an anchor, eh? Or, maybe, a motor engine? But, no, oars there had been, yes, but who knew what had become of them? Even the children, called to account for the articles, protested ignorance. Mr. Pasquale said that new oars could be procured very cheaply, but Tod looked doubtful. By that time fifteen minutes had ticked off on the clock and he arose.

“I guess,” he said, “we wouldn’t want the boat without oars. But I—we’ll think it over.”

“Yes,” Stuart agreed, “we’ll think it over like anything. Maybe we’ll see you again.” He rather hoped they wouldn’t, though!

Mr. Pasquale shrugged, smiled and escorted them to the door. Mrs. Pasquale beamed, Grandmother Pasquale beamed, the children beamed,

too, and followed. Mr. Pasquale never doubted that the boat was as good as sold again, and he acted the perfect host to the last. But he was kind enough to warn of a possible contingency. "If you want it, Mister, better you come soon. Two, three people tell me maybe they want to buy. Maybe you come back and it's not here no more, eh?"

There was a guffaw from Stuart, changed quickly to a cough, and they were outside. Not until they were beyond the next house, however, did they give way to their amusement. Then Tod chuckled aloud.

"Maybe we go back and it's not there, eh? And maybe he's dead right, Stu!"

"I'll say he is! I'll say Old Squally said a mouthful!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAUNCHING

By half-past eight Tod and Stuart were back at Jack's room, but the others were there ahead of them, dried and reclothed and merry over the success of the expedition. They got the story of the evening's adventure in piecemeal, punctuated with a deal of laughter, and realized then that they had missed the real fun. However, they had recovered the boat, which now reposed in some three feet of water at the foot of Bennett Street, a block from the bridge. "I never thought we'd get it that far," said Tony. "It leaks like a sieve. I had to get in it to work it under the bridge, and the water was over the seats then."

They had, it seemed, experienced no trouble in getting it out of the yard, although there had been several false alarms. Once over the wall—it had made a mighty splash, said Ham, when it struck the water!—they had all tumbled into it and paddled it by hands and feet to the farther wall. Then, having donned their trousers again, they had towed it down to the bridge, finding it heavier and more sluggish every minute. Tony

had guided it under the arch, and then, at last, it had foundered and they had tied the end of the painter to one of the uprights of the fence.

“Good thing it sunk, perhaps,” said Jack, “because your friend Pasquale is going to miss it in the morning and go a-hunting. He will never see it where it is, though. By the way, young Hale, where do you intend to keep it?”

“Well, you know, after you turn past the end of Ash Street there’s a sort of truck farm, just beyond the bend in the river. There’s a sort of a beach there. Well, it isn’t exactly a beach, either—”

“I’ll say it isn’t,” chuckled Ham. “It’s just mud.”

“We thought we could pull it up there and put some boards down so we could get to it. But I don’t know, either. I guess Mr. Pasquale would see it if he got around that far.”

“Put a lock and chain on it,” Tony suggested.

“He could bust that if he wanted to,” said Jack. “Why not disguise the thing with a coat of paint?”

“We’d thought of painting it,” said Stuart, “but we haven’t money enough yet. We—we haven’t money enough even to get oars!”

“Well,” laughed Jack, “the Pastime Country Club—no, Rowing Club—what is it you call it, Hale?”

“Pastime Boat Club,” answered Tod.

“Well, I started to say that it doesn’t appear to be in very good financial shape. Why don’t you—”

“Look here, you chaps,” interrupted Lee, “I’ve got an extra pair of oars over at the boat-house at Pine Grove, and I guess they’d be about right for that ark of yours. They’re too long for my boat. You can have them if you like.”

“And I,” announced Ham, “will contribute a gallon of paint, pink, blue or yaller. Only don’t expect me to put it on. And I’ll throw in a brush.”

“Oh, come on, let’s finish the job,” said Tony. “We stole the thing—”

“I object,” Ham protested. “I didn’t steal it. I have Jack’s word for it that the boat was the property of these fellows.”

“All right, but let’s see the thing through. Let’s go back to-morrow, pull it out and give it a good coat of paint. I like to paint.”

“It needs more than paint, though,” said Jack. “It needs a good tarring first, and that’s a day’s job. Still, I’m game if the rest of you are. What’s to-morrow? Tuesday? Nine to eleven, then. Who’s with me?”

“I’ll come along,” said Ham. “What do you tar a boat with?”

“Tar,” said Tony. “I’ve seen it done plenty

of times. We'll all get at it and it won't take long. You in it, Lee?"

"Sure. I do think, though, that the Club ought to put up a bronze tablet to us over the mantel of the living room in the club house!"

"We will," agreed Tod, "when we get the club house. And—and we'll make you all honorary members right now."

"Without dues!" added Stuart, getting a laugh.

Later, Tod tried to thank the older fellows for what they had done, but he made rather a mess of it and was heartily glad when the door was closed and he and Stuart were on the corridor side of it. They hurried back to their room to do some belated studying, but they didn't learn much that night. There was too much to talk about.

As far as they could determine, Mr. Pasquale made no very earnest effort to find and recover the boat. It was raised the next morning, towed around the bend of the river—Stuart sat in the stern and bailed furiously all the way—and beached on the mud flat opposite the extension of Elm Street, about a quarter of a mile from school. Tony arrived a few minutes later with a bucket of tar, and, turning the boat over, they set to work. Already, however, the seams had closed fairly well, and there was less work before them than they had anticipated. To their regret,

Tod and Stuart had a ten-o'clock recitation and so had to leave just when the excitement was at its height. The news having percolated through school, the boat was visited in the afternoon by practically every member of the Club and by a number of non-members. Tod and Stuart, who were also on hand to gloat over the new possession, were forced to listen to many unflattering opinions and to defend the craft against numerous detractors. On Wednesday morning the boat was painted outside, Tony and Jack wielding brushes while Ham encouraged them from an empty box. That morning, not being invited to help at the painting, Tod and Stuart spent most of an hour between classes raiding the surrounding fields and, I regret to say, the vicinity of the truck farm for boards. These they laid end to end from where the town dump-carts had left their last loads on the Elm Street extension to the river edge. As many of the boards were much warped, the journey from street to boat was a precarious one. However, a little mud never hurt any one! They also constructed a kind of platform by the boat. Later Ham and Tony "found" a two-by-four somewhere in the neighborhood and drove it well into the bank. When the Club exchequer was in a more thriving condition a chain and padlock were to secure the boat to the stake, but at present the piece of rope had

to suffice. Finally, on Thursday, the boat was turned right side up and the inside was painted. There wasn't enough blue paint remaining from the outside, so the seats and a strip around the gunwale were done in brown. The effect was not unpleasing, and after Tony had lettered "P. B. C." on each side of the bow and, quite uninvited, printed "SYLPH" on the stern, the job was done. Tod and Stuart didn't approve of the name, but since Tony had labored as hard if not harder than any of the others they didn't feel that they should criticize. Tony explained that there were two reasons for naming the boat "Sylph." One was that it didn't resemble a sylph, and the other was that the word was short and consequently easily put on. Tod and Stuart journeyed to Pine Grove and returned with the oars that Lee had donated, and late Friday afternoon, although the paint was not entirely dry in spots, there was a launching attended by what may be termed a representative gathering.

Having worked the boat to the edge of the water, the toilers pulled their feet from the mud to the platform and Tod was called on to do his part. Jack and the others had gravely insisted that he should deliver a brief speech, but Tod funked that part of the program and, muttering "I christen you 'Sylph'!", struck a bottle of sarsaparilla against the bow. As the bottle re-

sisted the first and second blows the solemnity of the occasion was somewhat marred by laughter. But the bottle dashed to fragments at the third effort and, with a "Heave-ho!" the "Sylph" was thrust from its muddy bed to the sparkling waters of the Wardall River. Every one cheered and laughed, and the "Sylph," left to her own guidance, promptly swung broadside to and grounded on the mud. Then it was discovered that the painter, entrusted to no one remembered who, had followed the boat. Stuart volunteered for the rescue, removed his shoes and stockings, rolled his trousers up and waded out. Then it was deemed fitting that the trial voyage should be made at once, and Jack, Ham, Tony, Tod and Stuart climbed aboard, after the Sylph had been connected with the shore by a number of planks, and, amidst the plaudits of the gathering, set forth down the river, Jack and Ham each pulling a mighty oar. Speedily the boat rounded the next turn and the audience ashore was lost to sight. It was deep twilight by now, but the rowers pulled on and on, Tony enacting the rôle of coxswain, even though he was seated in the bow instead of the stern.

"Pick it up, Stroke!" yelled Tony. "Row! Row! Row! You're gaining on 'em! You're almost lapping! You've got 'em! Ten hard ones now! Come on, gang! One! Two! Three!

Put your backs into it! Five! Six! Only four more! Seven! Eight! Come on, Nostrand! *Nine!* TEN! That did it! We're leaving 'em behind, fellows! Don't weaken! Pull it through. Row! Row! Row! Row! Only another hundred now! We've got 'em! Hard, fellows! Hard! Pull! You can do it! Come on now, hit it up! Here's the line! Row! Row! Steady all! *Let her run!*"

It was only make-believe, but Tony and Jack and Ham made it seem almost real and Tod was thoroughly thrilled. His hands itched for one of those oars, although he knew very well that he couldn't row for a cent. Laughing, the oarsmen trailed their sweeps and the clumsy boat bobbed and sidled toward the bank. Ham pretended utter exhaustion then, toppling forward on Jack's shoulder. But he recovered quickly enough when Tony cried: "Splash him, Hale!" They swung around then and Tony took Ham's oar and back up the river they went at a clip scarcely slower than before. The landing place was deserted when they reached it, and they shoved the "Sylph's" nose onto the mud, disembarked squishily, made fast the painter and, still laughing merrily, hurried across to the embankment and climbed through ashes and cinders in the darkness to the street. They were all in a frightful mess when they reached the first street

light, mud and ashes being caked well above their ankles. But no one cared. They had had loads of fun!

The next day applications for the use of the "Sylph" were so numerous that Stuart had signed up every available hour before ten o'clock and any number of members were disappointed! Tod and Stuart nobly stayed ashore that day and held a meeting. No other members of the Club appeared at it, possibly because they didn't know about it, and there was no opposition when Tod was elected President and Stuart Secretary-Treasurer. The rule empowering the officers to drop a member whose dues were more than two months in arrears was passed without a dissenting vote and the election of Jack, Lee, Ham and Tony to honorary membership was unanimous. In short, the first meeting of the Pastime Boat Club was remarkably harmonious! Stuart kept the minutes carefully, since it was possible that some disgruntled member might question the proceedings.

Well, some disgruntled member did. Or, rather, several did. But there it was, all set down in black and white, and in quite the most secretarial manner. "Moved by Mr. Younge that the Meeting proceed to the Election of Officers. Seconded, Mr. Hale. Mr. Hale was nominated

for President and elected. Number of Votes cast, 2. Mr. Hale 2." It was absolutely convincing, and when "Pinky" irately demanded why he hadn't been informed of the meeting Tod patiently studied the by-laws and announced that he couldn't find anything in them about announcing a meeting beforehand. "Pinky" declared emphatically that there ought to be something then, and Stuart replied that he was at liberty to introduce a motion at the next meeting, and "Pinky" wanted to know how the deuce he was to know when there *was* a meeting, and Stuart couldn't tell him. But "Pinky" calmed down when Stuart entered his name for three o'clock the next afternoon. Diplomacy, Stuart called it. Tod said it might be diplomacy, but what he'd like to know was when they—meaning he and Stuart—were ever going to get to use the "Sylph"!

"I'm sort of wondering about that myself," answered the other ruefully. "But it wouldn't have done to let 'Pinky' get too sore. There's trouble enough already, with five or six fellows all trying to get the boat the same hour. Say, you sure worked me for a greenhorn when you gave me the job of doing the booking! Gosh, you don't have to do a thing, and I'm being chased all over school and getting fellows down

on me all the time because I can't give 'em the hours they want! Say, listen, suppose you do it awhile."

"I'm not fitted for it, Stu. I haven't got the—what you call it—executive ability for that sort of a job. And you have. Anyway, you're doing so well it wouldn't be fair to take it away from you!"

"Is that so?" grumbled Stuart. "Well, all I'm hoping now is that they'll wear the blamed boat out in a couple more days! I'd like to know what good it's doing us. I haven't been out in it since the day it was launched!"

"Nor I," Tod reminded sadly.

CHAPTER XIV

TOD GOES OVERBOARD

SATURDAY saw an improvement of the financial condition of Tod and Stuart. Mr. Wilkins received his weekly installment, plus twenty-five cents due from the preceding week, and Stuart once more had money in pocket, although scarcely enough to jingle. He was awaiting Christmas with some anxiety, for if all went well and various aunts and uncles were as generous as usual he hoped to be able to pay off the final amount of the Wilkins' debt and be able once more to look any faculty in the eye. And Christmas was approaching rapidly. A week after the launching of the "Sylph" the weather turned really cold, so cold that the crews rowed in sweat-shirts more than once and the demand for the "Sylph" slackened perceptibly. Up until Saturday of that week neither Tod nor Stuart had been able to get the boat; or, at any rate, they hadn't had it. When it came to action Tod's high-handed methods were lacking. More than once he weakly gave up his time to some one else, generally to Stuart's expressed disgust.

"Thought," said Stuart, "we were going to

put our names down for three and four o'clock every day! You talked mighty big before we got the boat, and now you're scared to go near it!"

"Oh, well, hang it, Stu, there are so many chops after it. And, after all, they've got as much right to it as we have. In another week or so they'll get tired of it and we can take it whenever we want to, pretty near."

And so it turned out, not so much because the other members of the Club had tired of the boat as because it required a good deal of imagination to get any fun out of rowing up and down a wind-swept river with your hands almost too cold to hold the oars! On this particular Saturday they could have had their choice of nearly any hour, and selected three o'clock. They wore heavy sweaters—which rather interfere with oarsmanship, as they discovered—and in the teeth of a northeast wind set off toward the Basin. They weren't certain that the crews would be on the river to-day, but they might be, and, anyway, the stream offered better navigation below the town than above it. Tod claimed the privilege of rowing the first stretch and made rather a mess of it. He had never done more than paddle a punt around the pond at home, and conditions now were different. The "Sylph" was broad and awkward and the oars long and heavy,

and Tod found that there was more to rowing than he had suspected. If the left oar went deep enough, the right didn't, and t'other way around. And he kept bumping the inboard ends together, and sometimes bumping his knuckles as well. Stuart sat in the stern, hands wrapped in the roll of his sweater, and grinned exasperatingly.

"When are you going to join the crew, Farmer?" he asked finally. Tod stopped rowing and regarded his companion with malevolent gaze. "When you get on the baseball team, you fathead!" he answered. "Maybe before, too. I'll bet you I can row a boat as well as you can catch a ball!" Stuart chuckled. "Sure, you're doing finely! I wouldn't wonder if you rowed stroke in the spring, Tod." Just then the boat decided to go ashore and Tod hurriedly dug the oars again and straightened it out. When the danger of grounding had been averted he said: "I'm going to learn how to row if it takes a year, doggone it! And—and I'm going to try for the crew, too, before I'm out of here. I don't say I'll make it, but I'm going to have a stab at it!"

"Atta boy!" Stuart applauded. "My money's on you, old timer! But, say, let me row now, will you? I'm freezing to death here."

So they changed places, and since Stuart, while he was no expert, was a much better performer with the oars than Tod, they made faster prog-

ress toward the boat house. When they got within sight of it they knew that the crews were out, for several figures were sitting inside the open doorway, out of the wind. Having reached the Basin, that wind became more of a factor, for it blew straight from the ocean and, once past the distant dunes, met small opposition. Stuart had to work hard to keep the "Sylph's" head into it; harder still, when it struck the boat broad-side on, to keep from being blown toward the further shore. Tod suggested that they land at the boathouse for a while, but just then they sighted the two shells coming toward them and decided to wait.

Although well distant the crews were coming fast, for tide and wind were both in their favor. Far behind, Coach McKenna was pulling valiantly in the wake. It was no day for sculling, however, for the wind was kicking up quite a commotion in the Basin, and "Nate" was having about all he could do to keep his slender craft right side up. The eight-oared shells were wearing their "wash-boards," but the canvas strips didn't keep out all the spray by any means. Tod pulled the "Sylph," now well past the boathouse, out of the course and merely paddled enough to keep it headed right. Nearer and nearer came the two shells, the first leading by a short length, sixteen white—rather dirty-white—clad backs

swaying back and forth and sixteen sweeps rising and falling in unison. It was undoubtedly a race, for long before the boys in the "Sylph" could distinguish the first boat from the second the shrill demands of the rival coxswains floated down to them on the wind. The highest pitched voice was that of Art Scanlon, in the stern of the Second. He was scolding like a parrot: "*Get your backs into it! Get your backs into it! . . . Come on! Come on, you quitters! . . . Get your backs into it! . . . You're not rowing, you're paddling! For cat's sake, bite into it! . . . Come on, Second! Let's close it up! . . . Pull through, man! Pull through!*"

And from Sammy Knowles, in the First: "*Row! Row! Row! . . . Four, you're splashing! Watch your hands! . . . Row! Row! Row! . . . Thirty more'll do it! Hit it up now! Let's have it!*"

There was splashing on the port side of each boat by now; indeed, both crews were fairly ragged as they neared the finish line indicated by the downstream wall of the boathouse, but the water was choppy and the rowers had some excuse for lack of smoothness. Knowles was counting now . . . "*Five! . . . Six! . . . Seven! . . .*" The First came on with a rush, rowing a long, hard stroke, well finished out, and put clear water between their stern and the nose of the other shell.

Then Knowles called, "*Let her run!*" and the long sweeps trailed. The Second shot past, ceased rowing too, and the shells drifted on side by side for a minute. Then the First turned gingerly, starboard and port oars digging the water by turns, then stern sweeps tugging, with the rudder well over. For a moment the two shells almost came together, the wind, catching the First broadside, pushing it fast toward the Second. But the latter backed hurriedly and a collision was averted. The First finally straightened out and slanted across to the float, reaching there at about the same time Coach McKenna did.

But the Second found itself in difficulties, for in backing water the stern had swung around into the wind and now a deal of jockeying was required, both to keep the shell away from the shallows on which the little waves were dancing in a ribbon of spume and to bring the bow around for the pull across. Art Scanlon had perhaps never faced just such a job before, and he went at it awkwardly. The Second wasted many motions before it had worked away from the shore and obtained room to turn in. Then Art's desire to get out of his predicament too quickly led to disaster. Just what happened was a problem to the watchers in the "*Sylph*"; or, rather, not what happened but how it happened! The shell seemed to be coming around nicely, with plenty

of room for drift, and then, very suddenly, it turned completely over and the water was spouting heads and arms and red-tipped sweeps!

Tod and Stuart stared in amazement for a long moment, and then the latter seized his oars, brought the rowboat's head around and dug out for the scene of the disaster. Of course the members of the crew were in no danger of drowning, but there was plenty of work to be done, nevertheless, with the shell, bottom-up, drifting toward the muddy bank, where the Basin narrowed to the river and oars to be gathered. By the time the "Sylph" approached, however, the capsized oarsmen had command of the situation. Captain Ham Bowdoin was issuing orders coolly enough. "Ben! You and Garry fend the shell off the bank! The rest of you fellows get the oars and take them ashore! Here's a boat coming. Hello, you fellows! See if you can get a line to the shell, will you? We want to keep her from scraping."

"All right," Tod called, and Stuart directed the "Sylph" toward the overturned craft. And just then Tod saw something startling a few yards to the left. A wet brown head broke slowly from the surface and the white countenance of Art Scanlon was revealed. A white-sweatered arm thrashed feebly at the water, the fingers of the hand spread wide. The cox did not look frightened so much as surprised. The eyes were wide and round and

questioning. Even as Tod stared the head disappeared again and for an instant the upthrust hand remained in sight, the fingers curving finally in a fruitless clutch ere they too went under.

"*He's drowning!*" Tod thought he had shouted it aloud, but he hadn't, and Stuart was still pulling toward the shell. He came to action then. "Stu! Scanlon's drowning!" he cried. "Stop! Swing around! He's over there!"

The events of the next minute or two were strangely confused afterwards. Tod remembered directing Stuart, and kicking off his shoes and wriggling out of a sweater that seemed suddenly to be glued about him at the same time. He was still incredulous to an extent. It seemed impossible that Scanlon was in danger with so many about. The fact was, however, that the others were no longer about. They were yards and yards away, making for shore or the shell, splashing, and laughing, too, now, and with no suspicion of what was happening at the scene of the upset. Tod remembered what an eternity Stuart had taken to get the boat turned and how the wind had pushed and thrust it during the endeavor. And that's about all he could remember until, gasping with the cold of the water, one straining hand closed in a death-like grip on a fold of Scanlon's sweater, he was clutching at the slippery side of a pair-oar. He clung there while Scanlon

was dragged somehow into the tipsy boat, his head going under water again with unpleasant results as the pair-oar canted. There were many voices, close by and distant, and then something banged against his shoulders and there was Stuart staring at him anxiously and saying: "Give me hold, Tod! I'll pull you in! No, no, this boat, Tod! In here with me!"

Then he was lying half across the gunwale of the "Sylph," and Stuart was pulling at a dripping leg, and water was coming in over the side and he was shivering like the dickens. After that everything cleared up. Stuart was making him put his sweater on and talking a streak. "Gosh, I thought you weren't coming up again! Why, I didn't know you'd gone over until I heard the splash! Pull that up around your neck. I'll have you at the boathouse in a couple of seconds. Are you awfully cold?"

"No." To prove it Tod closed his mouth so the other wouldn't hear his teeth chattering.

"Liar!" Stuart grinned and pulled harder than ever at the oars. Tod looked about him. There was a crowd on the boathouse float, and the pair-oar, hurriedly launched in the emergency, was just bumping. Scanlon lay huddled in it, one white-sleeved arm hanging over the side. Then they were lifting him out, were laying him face-down on the planks. Tom Griffen was

astride him and Tod could see the trainer's arms straighten and double as he worked. Back, across the water, the capsized shell had been righted, and now they were putting the oars in it, four of the fellows, waist-high in the water, holding it from drifting. Coach McKenna was over there with them. Then the "Sylph" ran alongside the float and a big, broad-shouldered fellow, whom Tod afterwards learned to know as "Bing" Safford, grinned down and said: "Come on out of that, young feller!" and fairly lifted him from the boat. He was hustled inside then and plumped into a chair and fairly bundled in sweaters until the voice of Tom Griffen came irascibly.

"Hey, what's the matter with you bun-heads in there? Get his clothes off and give him a good rub-down! That's no way to get him warm! Want the poor guy to get pneumonia? Use your beans!"

So Tod had to undress and be rubbed by stranger hands with the roughest towels he had ever felt, rubbed until he felt like a piece of sand-paper! But it was certainly a warming process, and he stopped shivering and felt the blood glowing under his abused skin once more. They didn't do much talking, those attendants of his. They just worked. Most of their remarks consisted of "Turn around, Hale!" "How's that feel?" "Getting warm, eh?" But they viewed him in

very friendly fashion the while, and "Bing," who seemed to be in charge of operations, winked at him and grinned once and said: "Stout lad!"

Afterwards they bundled him in sweaters again, and Stuart insisted on his getting back into the boat until Jack New, overhearing, vetoed it. "Leave the boat here, Younge, and ride back in the bus. Too cold for Hale on the river. We'll be going pretty quick. Art's coming around all right now."

Tod remorsefully realized that he had almost forgotten about Arthur Scanlon, and he would have asked further tidings of him if Jack hadn't gone piling back into the boathouse just then. They had already started off to the road with Scanlon, two oars and a couple of sweaters forming an improvised stretcher on which he lay under many blankets. When Tod and Stuart and most of the first crew fellows reached the end of the path a few minutes later Scanlon had gone. A crew man returning with the oars explained that they had telephoned to town for a car, and that Scanlon and the trainer and Captain New were already on their way to school.

His bath seemed by now to have done Tod a lot of good, for he felt very "peppy" and was enormously hungry in spite of the fact that supper was all of an hour and a half away. No one took especial notice of him in the bus, for which he was

grateful, and no one, you may be sure, called him a hero; for which he would have been even more grateful had the thought occurred to him. Tod didn't consider himself a hero, and probably he wasn't. He knew quite well that any of the others would have jumped into the river to rescue Scanlon as quickly as he had if the chance had come to them. The others knew it, too, and so viewed the happening as quite in the natural order of things, and Tod as deserving no special credit. Still, among themselves, they did observe carelessly that the kid had shown pluck for his years, and that he had done the job rather neatly. There was some talk of the overturning of the shell during the ride back, and Tod gathered that a tiller rope had either broken or become unknotted just as the shell was broadside to the wind. In either case, poor Scanlon had been pulled into the boat with one hand still clutching a length of cord!

Tod never saw Scanlon again, for the latter's immersion sent him into a high fever that evening and he was removed to the hospital at the other side of town. He remained there three weeks with pneumonia and was then taken home, and Nostrand knew him no more. No doubt he sent a message of thanks to Tod, but if so Tod never received it.

The story of the near-drowning and the rescue having percolated through school, Tod became for

a day or two an object of some interest to the younger fellows, and several members of the faculty embarrassed him by shaking his hand and commending the act. Stuart was inclined to resent the general attitude. "Gosh," he protested, "you'd think fellows rescued other fellows from drowning every day here! If a guy tries to drown himself when I'm around he can be blamed well go on and do it for all of me! You don't even get thanked!"

"Maybe they'll put up a tablet to me some day," said Tod reassuringly. "After I'm dead, I mean. You know, Stu, you have to kick-in before folks appreciate your real worth."

And that seemed to be the end of the rescue incident and all its results. But it wasn't. Other results occurred later, one of which was the disbanding of the Pastime Boat Club.

CHAPTER XV

JACK NEW INTERFERES

It was on Tuesday night that Jack New surprised the occupants of 36 West by paying a call on them. Tod was so overcome by embarrassment that Jack would have remained standing in the doorway, perhaps, if Stuart, who held him in no such awe as did his chum, had not invited him in. There was casual conversation for a few minutes. Jack's gaze roved about the room as though he were trying to discover by such evidence as met his eyes what sort of chaps these were. Well, a room may reveal a great deal of its occupants to one who can read the signs, and I wouldn't be surprised if the visitor was doing that very thing. But eventually Jack came to the purpose of his visit.

“What sort of a club are you fellows running?” he asked. “I overheard some talk this afternoon, and I gathered that there are dissensions in the ranks.”

Tod looked startled, even confused, and it was Stuart who answered carelessly: “Oh, just a regular club, New. The fellows pay fifteen cents to join and five cents a month. That is, the active

members do. The honorary members pay less, but they can't vote."

"That's what I'm curious about," said Jack, "this voting business. From what I hear, you two do all of that yourselves."

"Well, yes, we have so far," Stuart admitted. "You see, there's only been one meeting since organization, and none of the others turned up."

"Strange," observed Jack gravely. "Of course they knew about it?"

"Why, no, I don't think they could have," replied Stuart just as gravely. "Seems to me some of them would have attended if they had known."

Jack grinned. "Come clean, you chaps. What's the scheme?"

So Tod took it up then, being now somewhat recovered from his diffidence, and made a perfectly clean breast of it. Jack's amusement was evident, for he chuckled more than once. Nevertheless, when the inner workings of the organization had been made perfectly clear to him, he stopped smiling and shook his head disapprovingly.

"It won't do, fellows," he said. "It's too tricky. I'll acknowledge it's ingenious, but so are a lot of schemes that won't stand washing. Of course, in a way it's none of my business, but as I had a hand in getting hold of that boat for you, sailing sort of close to the wind in doing it,

perhaps, I feel interested. Besides, I believe I'm some sort of a member. Or couldn't you put that through?"

Tod nodded. "Honorary," he murmured.

"Well, then, I'm going to advise you chaps to reorganize. Better think it over. I'm not anxious to make trouble for you, for you're a decent lot, but I tell you frankly that if you don't fix things over fairly for all the members I'll have to take the business up with your Class President."

"You won't need to do that," said Tod. "I'm willing to—to do whatever you say. You see, all we really wanted was to get hold of the boat, and we didn't have enough money, and so we—I mean I—doped out this scheme. And then, so's we'd be able to use the boat ourselves, we fixed it so we could make the rules without—without—"

"Without bothering the others," supplied Stuart gravely.

"I get that part of it," Jack assured them. "But don't you see that it isn't fair to hold meetings, as you call them, without allowing the other members to attend? And to make rules without consulting them? They've paid their money, as little as it is, and have just as much right to have a voice in things as you two. First of all, I'd suggest that you call a meeting, present your resignations as—whatever it is you are, and then hold

a fair and aboveboard election. Then you can all fix up a set of rules or by-laws or whatever you choose to call them that'll have some sense to them. And, see here, you chaps, if you're so keen on getting down to the Basin and watching crew practice—though I don't see why you should be—you can come along in the bus any time you like. I'll fix it up with the Coach."

"That would be corking," exclaimed Tod. "And if we could do that I don't think we'd care so much about the boat. It—it's a pretty hard boat to row, anyway!"

Stuart chuckled as though secretly amused over something. "I'd be mighty glad to get shut of it," he said. "I'm getting gray hairs keeping tabs on who's to have it and when. Look here, Tod, let's resign altogether. What do you say?"

"I'm willing," answered Tod. "Besides, it's getting too cold for rowing!"

Jack seemed to find something to laugh at again, and he got up and made for the door. "All right," he said. "I'll leave it in your hands, fellows. Just see that you make things right one way or another. And come and let me know what you have done, will you? You remember where I hang out, don't you, Hale?"

And the crew captain closed the door on a broadly smiling countenance.

The meeting, duly advertised, was held two

evenings later in Number 17 West, the apartment of two prominent members of the Club, Messrs. Pinkham and Douglas. Tod and Stuart explained their decision to withdraw from membership and suggested an entire reorganization. Mild excitement followed the announcement and "Pinky" and several others tried to get them to change their minds. But the former officials were adamant and, having delivered over to the chairman all documents pertaining to the organization, retired from the meeting. Subsequently they learned that after a far from harmonious session the club had been reorganized as the Nostrand Boating Association, the name subject to faculty approval, and that membership had dwindled to some eight youths who, being financially prosperous, had agreed to return half the paid-in fees of retiring members. The N. B. A. flourished into the spring, but failed to survive the counter attractions of baseball and other sports of the vernal season, and by June the "Sylph" had reverted to adventurous Juniors who, not permitted to use it on the water, sailed imaginary voyages in it while it still remained hard and fast in the mud.

Tod made his report to Jack New, as requested, but it happened that he chose an evening for his visit to 36 East when the crew captain was enter-

taining several friends, and the event to which he had looked forward for several days was disappointing. He had no more than a minute's talk with Jack, and afterwards sat around with very little to say for himself and listened with simulated interest to a conversation on many topics save the one that he might have enjoyed. If the half-dozen fellows in Number 36 had talked rowing—and at least four of the number were crew men—Tod would have sat there all the evening in perfect contentment. But they didn't talk "shop" once, and what they did say seemed to the younger boy vastly uninteresting. But two days later, when he and Stuart accepted a ride on the bus for the first time, he found an opportunity to supplement his first report of their resignation from the club and to win a word of commendation.

"That's all right then," said Jack. "You're well out of it. After all, you know, young Hale, it was a sort of kiddy stunt, wasn't it? How old are you, by the way?" Tod told him, and he whistled. "Almost fifteen? Worse and more of it! Look here, when are you going to grow?"

"Well—well," Tod stammered, "I—I think I have grown some since I came here. I haven't put on much weight, but I guess I'm taller."

Jack smiled. "Oh, well, you're a pretty neatly

built chap, and so I wouldn't worry. I dare say you'll start some day and shoot up like a rocket—or a beanstalk!"

Stuart, listening in, grinned and said: "He will have to, I guess, if he's going to make the crew!"

Tod got very red, rewarded Stuart with a look which promised murder and then laughed deprecatingly. Jack smothered a grin and asked: "So you're thinking of trying for the crew, eh? Well, that's a worthy ambition, Hale. But you will have to put on a bit more weight, you know."

"He's just trying to razz me," muttered Tod.

Stuart expressed surprise. "Why, you did say so, Tod! Just the other day—"

"Oh, shut up, will you?" cried Tod exasperatedly. "You don't need to tell everything you know, do you, you—you poor prune?"

Jack laughed and thumped Tod's shoulder. "Don't let him get your goat, Hale. Of course you want to make the crew! Why not? And who says you won't some day? Size isn't everything, old son."

Jack left them then, and Tod turned a glowering countenance on his chum. "You think you're awfully funny, I suppose," he began. "Well, you just wait, that's all. I'll get funny with you some time and you won't like it. I did say I was going to row, and I am, but you didn't have to spill it to Jack. Now he thinks I'm a—a perfect ninny!"

“We’re none of us perfect,” answered Stuart gently.

“Oh, shut up! That’s as old as Anne!”

“Anyway, you’re all wrong, Tod. I really did you a service. Until a few minutes ago Jack looked on you as just an ordinary guy. Now he knows you for what you are, a fellow of ambition, of determination. Why, he’s already seeing you as a future rival, I dare say, and Jack’s the sort to respect a rival, you know. Son, I’ve handed you a lot of invaluable publicity, and instead of rewarding me with kindness and—er—largess—whatever that is—you treat me with contumacy!”

“The word’s contumily, you precious ass. And if I wasn’t mighty good-natured I’d treat you with a baseball bat! You make me sick!” But he was already grinning, and peace reigned again.

A week of warm weather followed the cold spell and the shells were out on the Basin every afternoon. Tod was usually on the boathouse landing while the crews were about. When they weren’t he might still remain there, although he was quite as likely to be inside with Tom Griffen. There was a work-bench in one corner of the house, with a window looking toward the west at one end of it, and Tod sometimes sat on the bench, where the sunlight warmed his shoulders, and watched Tom potter with glue-pot and var-

nish can. There was always something to be done toward the upkeep of the six crafts, and Tom had picked up enough of the boat builder's and rigger's trades to enable him to handle most repairs. The white launch, however, he shied at. He was proud of the fact that he knew nothing about engines, nothing about any machinery more complicated than an oar-lock. The house held the two cedar shells, a four-oar, a pair-oar and a single scull, besides the launch. It was said that during the winter, what time his services were not demanded by teams engaged in minor sports, Tom could be found at the boathouse, scraping, varnishing, painting, repairing. True it was, anyhow, that when the ice broke in the spring the boats were invariably ready and every oar in the two long racks was shining with fresh paint and varnish.

Tod and Tom were soon friends. The boy's eager interest in all things pertaining to rowing pleased the trainer, and he frequently found some small task for Tod to perform so that the latter would keep him company in the boathouse. Tom was a kind-hearted man, but he had a sharp tongue on occasions, and at first Tod stood a bit in awe of him. However, subsequent to the day when the boy pulled Arthur Scanlon from the bottom of the river Tom never spilled any of his verbal acid on Tod. He liked to talk if he had a

good listener, and Tod was all of that. He had been at Nostrand for six years and, since he had a quite remarkable memory, could be a most interesting talker. Tod liked best, though, to listen to stories of past crews and crew men, to accounts of former victories and defeats. Before cold weather finally put an end to rowing a few days before the beginning of the Christmas vacation Tod was already quite well up in the lore of the river. Or, at least, he possessed a vast and miscellaneous knowledge concerning former rowing heroes, epic races and queer happenings. And he had picked up, likewise, much information which might, he liked to assure himself, be of aid on that far-off day when he took his seat in a tub for his first lesson in rowing. He even learned something, then and later, of the science of building racing shells, of varnishing them and rigging them and caring for them. Useless knowledge, perhaps, but treasured nevertheless.

Sometimes Tod would try to pass some of his newly acquired knowledge on to Stuart, but the latter soon showed symptoms of boredom. Stuart had lost his enthusiasm for the Basin, if he had ever really had any, and during that last week of practice he usually found an excellent excuse for not going down there. So Tod went without him, making acquaintance with many of the first and second eight members and being eventually

accepted as a sort of lay member of the rowing fraternity. The second crew finished out the fall season with a substitute named Barton filling the position of coxswain. As Barton, although one of the lightest men on the squad, weighed all of a hundred and thirty-six, the second boat rode a trifle deep at the stern. Or so Tom McKenna declared; Tod couldn't discern the fact himself.

Riding down in the big motor bus, he tried to get a place somewhere near Jack New. When he succeeded he was quite contented, even if Jack no more than nodded to him. Arrived at the boathouse, after the walk along the path, he watched the shells lifted out, first the second crew's boat and then the first's, the coxswains following with rudders and megaphones and bossing the jobs sternly. Sometimes he carried a couple of the long maroon-bladed oars to the float, laying each one in its place. And once—memorable afternoon!—he took one end of Coach McKenna's single, with Tom at the other, lifted his share of the burden, walked anxiously after the trainer down the runway and across the float and eased it carefully into the water. It just showed that perfectly wonderful things could happen to a fellow almost any time; and usually when least expected!

When the crews were afloat he and Tom, and sometimes one or two substitutes, would stand on the platform outside the boathouse and watch

knowingly until they had lessened to two many-legged water bugs far down the Basin. And sometimes, listening to the terse criticisms of the others, he would nod sagely in agreement, trying desperately hard to discover in what way Sawyer was "rushing" or where Owinwell was "short." In time he learned what the strange phrases that dropped so carelessly and yet so knowingly from the lips of the others meant, but that was when a new year had come in. When the shells sidled back to the float he was always there to lay hold while the coxswains counted the men out of the boat and to watch anxiously while the slender, fragile things were lifted, turned and borne back into the house. Tod was very solicitous about those shells and would have felt horribly if a moment's carelessness had grazed one of them against the door frame. Naturally enough, his intense interest in crew affairs and the time he spent tagging after Jack New or hobnobbing with Tom Griffen in the pleasantly odorous boathouse mitigated against the attainment of high class standing, and it was probably a fortunate thing that, before he could attract too much disapproving attention from his instructors, the Fall Term came suddenly to an end and he went off home for the Christmas vacation.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE ROWING ROOM

TOD got back to school the day after New Year's, making the latter half of the journey from Grovedale in company with Stuart. The reunion took place at a junction where panting, steaming locomotives appeared bewilderingly from all points of the compass—or seemed to, where excited, baggage-laden travelers milled about the platforms of the little three-sided station, churning the snow into a brown slush, and where Tod, having emerged from an overheated parlor car into the frosty, tingling air, sighted a youth in a swagger brown ulster and carrying a painfully new pigskin kit-bag, let out a shrill "*Hi, Stu!*" that startled every one within fifty yards, and then seized the brown-ulstered one by a hand and yanked him up the car steps.

The talk was fast and furious from there on—Stuart, unable to purchase a chair, sitting on the arm of Tod's in defiance of the conductor's half-hearted "*You'll have to go into a day coach, sir.*" Even when they had reached Nostrand Hall by means of a skidding taxi they were still jabber-

ing. There seemed much to tell on both sides, but little of it would interest us. There was, though, one item of information worthy of mention. The uncles and the aunts had, as Stuart announced, come across handsomely, and in corroboration he dug out a small box, opened it and exhibited four gold coins to Tod's admiring gaze. As one of them was a ten-dollar piece and the others were fives, you will understand that Stuart's obligation to Mr. Wilkins was about at an end.

Tod had fared less abundantly as a result of Christmas, but it didn't seem that Stuart's pleasure in his gold coins was a whit greater than Tod's in his possession of two books about rowing which in his estimation were the best of all his gifts. Of course they hadn't been just a happy inspiration on the part of his parents. No, Tod had happened to mention once or twice—possibly three times—in his home letters that a book on rowing, especially one of several whose titles he gave, would be a pretty acceptable addition to the library of a fellow who was about to fit himself for a position on the crew. Somehow Mr. and Mrs. Hale had reached the conclusion that one—or, better, two—of the volumes would make a nice Christmas gift for Tod. Which shows that often merely wishing for a thing will bring it!

The new year had come in with snow and ice, although less of the latter than the former, and

Falls Road, which bounded the school property for a way on the east and sloped steeply down to Maple Street, was the Mecca of most of the younger boys and many of the older. Starting at the top of the hill, you gained a fine speed by the time you passed the end of School Street, went by Elm at even a faster clip and then, if you had luck, swung at a fair angle into Maple and almost reached North before momentum failed. If you didn't succeed in making the corner at Maple—well, you were out of luck! You probably landed in a shallow ditch or, if you negotiated that, came up against a board fence. By that time, however, you weren't going fast enough to hurt anything but the fence. Tod and Stuart bought a second-hand sled in the village—they were both opulent just then—and had some glorious times. Over on the far side of town, on what was known as The Hill, the location of Belleford's newest and smartest residences, there was a fine toboggan slide, and the privilege of using it was extended to the school. But a hard-hearted faculty restricted the privilege to the seniors, so it didn't add much to the joy of the other classes. At least, it shouldn't have, but there was no one at the slide to ask you whether you were a senior or something else, and so it occasionally happened that the rule was transgressed. If you were an upper middler, or even a lower, and could get the loan

of a toboggan, there was nothing save, possibly, your conscience to prevent you from getting a few slides in the convenient darkness before supper time.

Tod and Stuart spoke of the fact several times during the first week of the new term; at first merely speculatively. After all, they didn't possess a toboggan and they didn't know the owner of one well enough to borrow it. So why consider the matter further? Then, however, two things came to pass almost simultaneously; Tod had a birthday and became fifteen years old, and Stuart learned of a junior named Corson who had a toboggan. Becoming fifteen years of age possibly endowed Tod with a false conception of importance. Perhaps he experienced, in the phrase of the psychologists, the delusion of grandeur. At all events, he apparently arrived at the conclusion that the rule prohibiting all but seniors from using the toboggan slide didn't apply to Tod Hale. Stuart was dubious, but was finally persuaded to borrow young Corson's toboggan if he could. He could and did, and one morning, between recitation periods, they took it as far as the village and left it at the store in which they had purchased the sled. The proprietor agreed to keep it for them until they came to get it.

About half-past four they went for it and trudged out to The Hill, a half-mile or so away,

reaching the slide about five. It was not a time of day when the residents cared for the thrill of tobogganing, but there were a good many boys and some girls there, quite a few Nostrand seniors amongst them. Tod and Stuart, caps pulled well down and mufflers pulled well up, avoided publicity as much as possible and waited until the top of the slide was fairly deserted before making their start. It was Stuart's first experience on a toboggan, although not Tod's, and, looking down the sudden declivity, he lost some of his appetite for the sport and was all for delay. But others were trooping back and Tod was impatient to be gone. Perhaps, as it turned out, it might have been better had Tod humored his companion.

The rush down the hill, dark save for an occasional electric bulb hanging beside the narrow, glazed slot between banks of frozen snow, was as thrilling as Tod had described it. Stuart's eyes watered and his breath left him and he clung desperately to the rope and it was all glorious. Once off the slope, they ran on and on, ever slower, through a grove of trees at the foot of the hill, stopping at last where an enterprising merchant had set up a wooden stall for the sale of sandwiches and coffee. Many tobogganers had halted there before starting the long tramp back to the top, and there was a fragrant odor of steaming coffee on the cold air. With one accord, the two

boys moved toward the stall, dragging the toboggan after them. "Give me two ham sandwiches," requested Tod in a rather lordly manner, "and two cups of coffee." After which he glanced into the countenance of the large youth beside him and met the unfriendly gaze of "Tub" Parrish.

Since the incident on the steps of Goodman, Tod had encountered "Tub" many times, but the latter had never seemed to be aware of his existence. On Tod's part animosity had long since faded. But there was no getting around the fact that, if he had to be discovered disobeying school regulations, he would have preferred any one save "Tub" for the discoverer! His enjoyment of the sandwich and coffee was marred by the meeting, although Stuart, unable to recognize "Tub" from his position beyond Tod, ate his refreshments with much relish and chatted animatedly the while. Tod strove to communicate the fact that the stout youth in the big Mackinaw beside him was Parrish, but Stuart failed to get the message of winks and frowns and went right on saying "Tod." Not that that mattered, for "Tub's" recognition had been instantaneous, as Tod knew.

"Tub" presently finished his own coffee and moved off without a word, and then Tod acquainted Stuart with the direful news. But Stuart didn't seem to think much of it. "Shucks,"

he said, "what of it? Lots of fellows sneak over here for a slide. We aren't the first ones. I'll bet there are others here right now who aren't seniors. Why, you silly ass, 'Tub's' only an upper middler himself!" And Stuart laughed loudly.

"Gosh, that's so," said Tod, vastly relieved. "I was thinking he was a senior. He wouldn't dare split on us, would he?"

"Shucks, he wouldn't anyhow. He isn't as much of a cad as that, Tod."

"N-no, but he seems to have it in for me, and the look he gave me just now wasn't exactly kindly! Still, if he's breaking rules too, I guess he can't bother us any."

There was time for one more swift, wonderful rush down the long slide, and then they had to walk fast in order to get back to school before supper time. Being a few minutes late for a meal wasn't usually anything to worry about, since no penalty attached itself, but since their consciences were not clear they deemed it best to avoid notice. They made dining hall before the first influx of hungry youths was over and the incident seemed closed. It had been excellent fun, but half the enjoyment had come from the risk of detection, and since, as Tod said, there wasn't any sense in forcing your luck, they didn't go again.

Winter sports were well under way now. The

hockey men were practicing each afternoon and the basketball players each evening. With the freezing of the river, about the middle of January, skating engaged the attention of most of the school. Tod bought a new pair of skates and joined the throng that flowed back and forth between the bridge and the first bend of the river. Or sometimes, alone or with a company of others, they adventured as far as the Basin. The Basin was forbidden to the students, although town boys used it often when the ice was thick in the river. The influence of the salt water was supposed to make the Basin ice unsafe, but perhaps it was only in the imagination of the Nostrand faculty. In February there was an afternoon of sports on the river, and Tod won second place in the obstacle race against a field of more than two dozen, many of whom were upper-class fellows. Stuart, who entered for the mile event, was less successful, even though Tod nearly yelled himself hoarse in encouraging him. Stuart ended somewhere about seventh, but, by falling and crossing the finish line in a sitting posture, received almost as much applause as the winner!

Long before February, however, Tod had discovered that no one offered any objection when he appeared in the rowing room in the gymnasium. In fact, his presence there occasioned no more comment than it had at the boathouse, and, while

Tom Griffen wasn't on hand to talk to, there was Meeker, the manager, who usually put in a brief appearance each afternoon. Dill Meeker was a tall, thin fellow with a prominent Adam's apple and a positive genius for colliding with things. The fact that he was nearsighted probably had much to do with that. Anyhow, he was forever bumping into doors, chairs, desks, anything bumpable, and was seldom seen without a patch of arnica somewhere in evidence. But he was a good sort, and friendly with Tod, and was eventually the means by which the latter became really and officially connected with the crew.

But that was later. During January and well into February Tod climbed the stairs to the rowing room nearly every afternoon at four o'clock and watched the candidates toil at the machines. The squad still consisted of twenty-two members, and, since there were only twelve rowing machines, they reported in two sections, the first at four and the second at four-forty-five. There were lots of times when Tod's ambition to be a crew man faltered, for it was perfectly apparent to him, as it would have been to any onlooker, that working at the machines was the hardest sort of drudgery. In the shell, with live water swirling about his blade, fresh air in his lungs and the shore sliding past, one might expend the same amount of heart-breaking labor with some meas-

ure of enjoyment. But here, under the insufficient illumination of two ceiling lights and with only the bare brown walls of the room in view, with the air chill enough but holding no sparkle, with the creak of machinery a substitute for the rush of water, the conditions were very different. One had to be earnestly desirous of winning a place in one of the boats to go through this program six days a week!

And no one, it seemed to Tod, ever succeeded in doing just right. Almost every minute Coach McKenna's voice was heard as he walked back and forth between the straining, bending oarsmen. Frequently he would put one of the fellows off a slide, seat himself there and illustrate a point by example. Tod jealously declared to himself, you may be certain, that Nate couldn't row a bit better than Jack New. But Jack came in for a full share of the criticism, nevertheless. Occasionally Nate would absent himself from practice, usually on a Saturday, and then it was Jack who coached. On those occasions it was a lot more fun being in the rowing room, for there was plenty of talk and even laughter, and if the fellows didn't row quite as many strokes during the session Tod was sure they learned quite as much!

More than once Tod heard the matter of a new coxswain discussed between coach and manager and captain. It had long since been learned that

Arthur Scanlon would not be back that year, if ever, and a substitute for the second crew "passenger" was in demand. One afternoon Tod and Dill Meeker walked back from the gymnasium together and the latter, with the subject on his mind, remarked: "I've got to round up a cox for that second boat pretty soon or Nate will scalp me! He's a mean guy to run foul of, that Mr. Coach!"

"I suppose," said Tod, "you have to know a whole lot about rowing to be a coxswain."

"Yes, and you've got to be light enough to sit in the stern without poking the bow out of water, and that's what makes it difficult. Plenty of fellows know enough about rowing to get by, but they weigh too much, and those that have the size don't know port from starboard. There was a fellow trying last fall, fellow named—named—I forget now, and Scanlon beat him out. Saxon, that's his name! Well, I went to see him a couple of days ago, and blamed if he hadn't fattened up like a hog! He was keen for the job and offered to train down to ninety pounds, but, holy mackerel, he couldn't do it in a month; no, nor three months, either! So he's no use."

"Do you have to be a senior?" Tod inquired.

"Yes. Well, no, you don't really have to. This fellow Saxon's an upper middler. Generally the cox is a senior because he has to have had some

rowing experience and a certain amount of sense, and you're not likely to get both much before your senior year. What we ought to do is catch 'em young and train 'em. Well, so long, Tod!" And Dill ran up the steps, collided with the side of the doorway, caromed off some fellow who was coming out and disappeared.

Tod went on along to the front entrance, his shoes crunching crisply in a new fall of snow, and wondered whether by next year, if he didn't grow much more and was very, very careful about his eating, and learned a lot more about rowing, he might become a coxswain. Then the recollection that Jack New wouldn't be here next year depressed him, and after that he concluded that what he really wanted was to pull an oar and not a couple of tiller-ropes.

Upstairs, Stuart reclined, contrary to rules and regulations, on his bed and worked his jaws fast and rhythmically. Tod, closing the door behind him, observed the phenomenon in surprise. "What in time are you doing?" he demanded. "Chewing *gum*?"

"Yes," answered Stuart without missing a stroke.

"Gee, I thought you didn't like it! Thought you said once that chewing gum was a filthy habit!"

"Yes," agreed Stuart. There was something

almost desperate in his expression as he champed on and on.

“Well, what are you doing it for?” asked Tod impatiently, shying his cap at him. “If you say ‘yes’ again I’ll brain you!”

“Five hundred!” exclaimed Stuart triumphantly, and stopped. Then he removed a large wad of gum from his mouth, observed it distastefully and hurled it in the general direction of the wastebasket. After that he felt of his aching jaws solicitously and explained. “Well, you see,” he replied, sitting up, “I’ve got to play baseball, and—”

“How do you mean, got to?” jeered Tod. “Who’s insisting?”

“And,” Stuart went on, “if you play baseball you have to chew gum. Every ball player does, you know. It—it—well, I don’t know just what it does do, but it’s something about keeping the throat moist, I think, and—”

“I’ve seen lots of baseball players who didn’t chew gum,” Tod objected. “They chewed tobacco.”

“Tobacco? That’s so.” Stuart considered a moment. “I suppose I might try that. I’ll bet it wouldn’t be any nastier than that stuff. But faculty would be displeased, eh? No, I guess I’ll have to stick to gum, Tod. And I hate the beastly stuff, too. It makes me feel sort of inflated inside,

like a balloon; and then my jaws ache like all get-out, too. But they're starting indoor practice in a week or so, and I've got to do my duty. The Younges have always been great sticklers for doing their duty, Tod. I bought fifteen cents' worth this afternoon at Batt's; assorted flavors; and I've got to learn the trick if it kills me."

"You're an ass," laughed Tod.

"No, I'm not." Stuart shook his head earnestly. "Asses have too much sense to chew gum. They'll chew fence-posts and leather and thistles and all sorts of odd things, Tod, but you never saw an ass chewing gum."

"Never until to-day," Tod assented. "Are you really going out for baseball, Stu?"

"Of course. I've said all along I should."

"You've said all along you didn't know whether you'd try that or lacrosse or sprinting!"

"Well, maybe, but I've found out that only a lot of queers go in for lacrosse, Tod; thin galoots with retreating chins and hungry eyes. They say you're not allowed to eat anything but asparagus if you go on the lacrosse squad. It makes you tall and thin. As for sprinting, well, there's the costume. I'm innately modest, old chap, and I'd feel horribly—er—undressed if I had to appear before a mob of people in a pair of trousers that stopped just under my shoulders! Besides, although it's quite a second thought, my—er—

nether limbs aren't the sort to remind you of the Grecian athletes."

"I'll say they aren't. You're quite right to keep them covered, Stu. It proves that you've got a sense of—of moral obligation, too."

"Whatever that is. Well, anyway, I'm committed to baseball now. And you'd better come along, too, Farmer. It's all wrong not to do something for your dear old alma mater, even if it's only to chase balls around. Besides that, you're getting positively fat and ought to do something to reduce."

Tod grinned. "That's all right, but I believe I have gained nearly a pound since Christmas. I must remember to weigh myself to-morrow. But I'm not going to play baseball, Stu, because I never was any good at it; and, anyway, what chance would I have? Or you, either? This year, I mean."

"Piffle! A couple of piffles! Of course we won't make the team, but we'll have some fun; and next year we'll be in line for jobs. Oh, you'll change your mind, sonny. Wait till the warm weather comes and you see me hitting the old apple on the nose and pegging 'em across the jolly old infield! You'll wish then you'd joined up."

"You're going to play in the infield, eh?" asked Tod. "All arranged, is it? Any one know it but you?"

“No, not yet. You see, Coach Dexter doesn’t get here for another week, and I thought I ought to tell him first.”

“My, but he’s in for a pleasant surprise! Looks like an easy season for him, now that you’ve decided to help him out. Well, I’ll be watching you, all right, Stu, but I’ll be sitting in the shade, eating peanuts, while you’re chewing your gum out there in the broiling sun and shack-ing for the batters in practice.”

“All right, but I wish you would,” said Stuart. “Think it over, eh? You’ve got a week yet. By the way, how are you as a chum gew—I mean a gum chewer? If you care to practice up—”

“No, thanks, I’ll keep my chewing for supper. Come on, get a move on!”

“Don’t be impatient with me,” Tod pleaded. “I’m utterly exhausted. Five hundred chews! Think of it! And to-morrow it’ll have to be six hundred, I suppose! How are the galley slaves getting on? You and Coach McKenna going to make something out of ’em, you think?”

“You’d never think so to hear him snarl like he did to-day, Stu. Hey, you may not know it, but that’s my tie, you old thief!”

“It can’t be,” replied Stuart convincedly. “If it were yours it wouldn’t be around my neck, would it?”

“Anyhow, it’s got a spot on it!”

“And, anyhow,” responded Stuart, “I’ve tied it so it doesn’t show! All set, young feller? Forward! Twos right! March! Comp’ny halt and open the door! Comp’ny proceed! Company close the door! Forward march!”

CHAPTER XVII

DILL FINDS A COX

SOMEWHAT later that evening Dill Meeker knocked, pushed open the door of 36 East and, stumbling over the edge of the rug, subsided in a Morris chair. "That," observed Lee Johnson, "is what I call a graceful entrée."

"Almost delicate," said Jack New. "How'd you happen to miss the table, Dill?"

"Shut up, please. I'm in no mood for persiflage. I'm hunting a coxswain. Want the job, Lee?"

"I'd like it, but I'm unfortunately subject to sea-sickness. Why don't you advertise?"

"Good plan," applauded Jack. "'Wanted, for second boat, one undersized shrimp to act as coxswain. No brains needed. Must have a loud voice, be nearsighted and thoroughly unacquainted with rowing. Bring your own megaphones and come ready to work.' That's about it, Dill."

"Yes, go on and have your fun. But let me tell you that I've fine-tooth-combed this here institution from cellar to attic, and there ain't no such animule. I'm through."

“Oh, get out! Of course there is! Great Scott, there must be some fellow here able to cox a crew, Dill. You said you talked to Saxon?”

“Yes, though I didn’t need to. He weighs somewhere around a hundred and forty if he weighs an ounce! And I’ve talked to four or five others, and not one of them will have the job. Which is a great relief, for not one of ’em’s good for it. Now you go ahead and find one, Jack.”

“Well, but, gosh, there’s got to be one somewhere! You can’t tell me that in a school of this size, with more than two hundred fellows, there isn’t some one who can sit in the tail end of a shell and shoot his mouth off!”

“Don’t sound natural, does it? True, though. Fact is, Jack, the fellows are all disgustingly big and healthy. I’m afraid the old school is running to beef these days. Look at Lee there. He’s a fair sample. They run about like him. We’re out of small sizes!”

“What’s the second crew need a cox for, anyway?” inquired Lee. “Or the first, either? No one pays any attention to what he says, and you could just as well have a phonograph in the stern, couldn’t you? It oughtn’t to be hard for stroke to steer by tying the ropes to his feet!”

“You might tell it to Nate,” suggested Dill. “Me, I’m fed up with this job. They never told me when I was running for manager that I’d

have to be an employment agency too! I'm going over to the room now and write my resignation."

"You ought to have an assistant, Dill," said Jack sympathetically. "Every manager ought. The football manager has two, and so he doesn't have to do a lick of work himself. You go get yourself an assistant, Dill, and sic him on the coxswains."

Dill looked gloomily at his generous-sized feet for a moment. Then he said: "If this was next year I could put my hands on just the fellow for the job, but it isn't. Why the dickens doesn't Nate train a couple of substitutes so he'll have them when he needs 'em?"

"He ought to, and that's a fact," said Jack. "Who's the fellow you're thinking about?"

"I'm not thinking about him," replied the manager. "He's a lower middle fellow and no use now. By next year, though, we could use him. That is, if he doesn't take on weight. He's about right now; little chap; sort of peppy; clever, too; and doesn't weigh more'n hundred, I suppose."

"And he hasn't any name?" asked Jack sarcastically.

"What? Oh, I thought I told you. You know the kid yourself. Young Hale, I mean."

"Tod Hale? Yes, I know him. I'd ought to. He's got a crush on me, I guess. Decent chap,

though. He's the fellow who pulled Art Scanlon out of the river, Lee."

"I remember," Lee answered. "The incident happened less than two months ago, Jack, and I'm not yet senile. Why the dickens don't you grab him? I'll bet he's got more sense than Sam Knowles!"

"Oh, Sammy's all right," said Jack. "All right for a cox, I mean. Sometimes I suspect that he isn't quite all there. You don't expect much of a coxswain, Lee."

"I'd suggest Hale to Nate," said Dill gloomily, "only I know he'd think I was crazy. I can't make him believe that the coxswain market's in a very depressed condition. He thinks all I've got to do is stand on the steps downstairs and hold my finger up!"

"Why not spring Hale on him, though?" asked Jack. "Of course the kid's young, and he doesn't know a thing about rowing, but he's the sort you can teach. At least, he could learn to steer and time a stroke; and he might be able to see a bridge timber in time to keep away from it, which is more than Hinkley did last spring! Gosh, he steered straight into it! I felt the bow go up and thought it was an earthquake. Then she tilted and we were all in the water. He never even saw the thing, and it was twenty feet long and eight inches across! Still, he wasn't any worse than a cox

that Tom was telling about one day. I don't know what the chap's name was, and it happened in the old days when we raced Melton and Allsop with fours. You know, up at Lake Hastings, Lee, the island sticks out in a point just short of the three-quarters flag. Well, this time Nostrand and Melton and Allsop were coming down hard and all pretty nearly on a line when they got that far. Tom says this cox was screaming his head off, getting redder and redder and more excited and unanswerable every minute, and finally he yells "We're even at the three-quarters, fellows! Now come on! Let's take her out of here!" And right then the shell goes up on a sand-bar, and there they were, every one pulling like sixty, the cox still howling and the old boat as solid as rock! It seems that we had the outside course and the cox had gone goofy in his excitement and was twenty yards off it when the boat grounded! Tom says one of the crew, a big chap from Northern New York, stepped out of the shell, picked up the cox bodily and threw him ten yards away into the lake!"

"At that," said Lee, after he had stopped chuckling, "coxswains aren't any loonier than some oarsmen. I heard once of a fellow who was rowing in the middle of a boat during a time trial when a bee landed on the back of his neck. Well, he stopped rowing and the guy behind him didn't,

and so he went into the fellow ahead, and the boat turned turtle and the time trial went blooey! I never heard whether they drowned him or turned him over to the law."

"Coxswains are queer birds and so are crew men," said Dill. "But the queerest, craziest of all is a manager. He might be doing something else, something blameless and useful, but instead he goes and associates with a lot of bums and has to work like a slave! He's the goofy one, take it from me, fellows!"

"Work," jeered Jack. "Yes, stand around and watch the rest of us sweat! And you can't even round up a cox for us!"

"Heigho," sighed Dill. "Where have I heard that word afore? 'Cox?' It has a familiar sound. Look here, I'm going to see this here Mr. Coach right now and tell him I'm stumped. Unless he's willing to try this Hale fellow, which he won't be, consarn his handsome phiz!"

"Oh, you can't tell," said Jack, reassuringly. "He might welcome the idea. Any port in a storm, you know. And, say, Dill, you can use my name if you like. Tell Nate I heartily approve, and all that."

"And queer myself right at the start?" jeered Dill. "Man, you know you and Nate haven't agreed on a thing since last December! Thanks for the sardines and cake. Good night."

The next morning Dill halted Tod outside the dining room after breakfast. He wore an anxious and a gloomy look. "Coach wants to see you, Tod," he announced. "Some time this morning. Know where he lives?" Tod shook his head, wondering. "Tanty Street, second house from the Square on your right, going east. You don't have to ring. Open the door and knock at the first door on your left."

"What's he want?" asked Tod dubiously.

"He'll tell you." Dill shook his head almost sadly. "If it turns out bad, it's going to be all my fault, and that's an awful thought. Being crew manager's a dreadful thing, anyway. I get blamed for everything that goes wrong. If Melton beats us this year I shall leave school, enlist with the Marines and fall on the field of battle in some distant clime. I say, young Tod, do see me through in this, eh? I mean, vindicate my judgment. You see, it was my idea. Now—"

"But I don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed Tod almost despairingly. "I do wish you'd tell me, Dill!"

"Well, he didn't say not to." Dill observed Tod morosely for a long moment. "You're going to be second crew cox, laddie."

"Oh, *no*, Dill! Listen, I *couldn't!* You tell him—"

"Too late! I told him you could. Bear up,

Tod. It isn't as bad as it sounds. Lots of fellows have lived it down. Well, don't forget; Tanty Street; first house on your right going left. See you later."

Dill turned, bumped into a passer and hurried away with long strides. Tod stared after him in dismay. "You're going to be second crew cox! But perhaps Dill was just fooling! Oh, that must be it! Still, he hadn't somehow seemed to be in fun. No, Tod guessed he had told the truth. But, gosh, he couldn't cox a boat! Not even the second. He didn't want to be a coxswain, either! Perhaps if he didn't see Mr. McKenna, made believe he'd forgotten or something, nothing more would happen. Only, you didn't do that sort of thing with Nate! No, he'd have to go, but he'd be firm. He'd just say that he didn't want to be a coxswain. Yes, but suppose next year or the year after he wanted to try for a place in the boat. The coach might remember and hold it against him! Gosh, it was a terrible predicament!"

He set out to find Stuart. Perhaps Stuart could advise him, or, failing that, at least sympathize. But Stuart wasn't in the room nor in the library nor anywhere around. There was still twenty minutes before the first recitation period and Tod remembered Jack. It would be fearfully cheeky, but—

Jack was in, and so was Lee, and they hailed his appearance with a cordiality that was almost disconcerting. "I—I wanted to ask you," began Tod.

"Ask me," said Lee, from the window seat on which he was perched with a newspaper. "I'm the one to come to for advice, Hale."

"I know," stammered Tod, "but—"

"That's a bit thick," Jack protested, shaking his head.

"I didn't mean that!" Tod laughed nervously. "I wish— Look here, it's like this, New. Dill Meeker says Mr. McKenna says I've got to be a coxswain!"

"Fine! Shake hands, young Hale! Welcome to the gang! Get that, Lee? Nate bit!"

"Sensible guy," approved Lee. "My felicitations, Hale. May you cox long and prosper. I say, where's your doofunny, your megaphone thing?"

Tod smiled weakly. "I haven't any. I haven't seen Mr. McKenna yet. You see, I'm afraid I can't do it. I don't know enough about it. I wondered, New, if maybe you'd tell him so."

"Your modesty is refreshing," replied Jack, "but don't overdo it. In fact, you'd better cultivate conceit. All the coxswains I ever met thought mighty well of themselves. Glad you're

going to be with us, Hale. I fancy you'll make good. I told Dill so last night."

Here, reflected Tod, was a new phase. Jack approved; even, it appeared, wanted him to get the position! If that was so—

"Look here, Jack," Lee was drawling, "as I see it, young Hale is a bit frightened. Evidently has an idea that being a cox requires special ability. Better tell him the truth."

Jack smiled. "Well, the truth is that the principal requirement, Hale, is the ability to steer a straight course."

"Oh," murmured Tod. "But I thought you had to know a lot about rowing; see when any one wasn't doing right, and tell him."

"That part of it," replied Jack, "is included in the higher branches of coxswainship, Hale, and few of our fellows ever advance that far. I'm plumb sure that Sammy Knowles hasn't. Oh, Sammy can see if we splash, and he'd probably notice if one of us fell out of the boat, but beyond that he wouldn't adventure. Better not bite off too much, Hale. Watch the course, learn to time it and keep your crew steady. That's about all. The captain is boss, and the stroke will look after his end of it. One thing more, though. For the love of Mike, don't talk all the time. If there's one thing that sets me crazy it's a chatty cox, one of the kind that's beefing all the way down the

course. When the time comes to talk, *talk*, and talk *loud*! Other times, shut up and don't babble! And don't try to fool 'em, Hale. Don't call for 'ten hard ones' and then keep on counting to fifteen, and don't tell them their gaining when they aren't, or losing when they aren't. They don't like that. They can think and reason for themselves. That's all, I guess."

"Quite enough," grunted Lee. "Sounds as if you're trying to scare him. Don't pay any attention to all that stuff, Hale."

"I'm not scared," answered Tod seriously. "I thought I had to be able to tell when the fellows weren't rowing correctly, and just what the trouble was, and everything like that!"

"If you ever got that far," said Jack, "you'd be a wonder! Of course there are coxswains like that, but they're in the college boats. Here we don't ask it, or expect it. And Nate certainly won't ask much from you, Hale, because he's got enough sense to know that a kid—well, a youngish chap like you hasn't got the bean of an older fellow. There's this, though. If you make fairly good this spring you'll be first crew cox next year. Ought to be, anyway."

Shortly after ten o'clock Tod opened the white portal of the house on Tanty Street, fairly tip-toed along a wide, silent hall to a closed door on the left and, after a moment's hesitation, knocked

on the panel. A faint voice said: "Come in!" and Tod entered. He was in a large room with much white woodwork and walls papered in an ancient pattern of alternating stripes of gold and oyster-white. The furniture was of walnut: a center-table, a couch and a few chairs. There was a small fireplace topped by a marble shelf and the floor was entirely covered by a green-and-brown Brussels carpet. Not so long ago the room had been the parlor or drawing-room, Tod concluded. At the back, folding doors, wide-open at present, gave into a second apartment. There a massive walnut bedstead faced the opening, and a marble-topped bureau stood between two windows through which the winter sunlight was streaming. Mr. McKenna, minus coat and waistcoat, was methodically stropping a razor by the further one.

"Oh, hello, Hale!" he called. "Be with you in a minute. Make yourself comfortable. You'll find some magazines on the table, and there's a morning paper somewhere about. See it anywhere?"

"No, sir, but I don't care to read."

"Ought to be there," grumbled the coach. "Maybe I left it in the dining room, though."

Tod seated himself on one of the plump chairs and waited. There were four framed photographs on the mantel and a few other objects, and the table held magazines, several books and a tray of

smoking materials. He was gathering courage to make a trip to the mantel when Mr. McKenna came in, donning his coat.

“Warm enough here for you?” he asked, frowning at the fireplace, in which the coal fire had long since died out.

“Yes, thanks. It—it really isn’t very cold this morning.”

“No, not bad.” The coach picked up a pipe, peered into it disapprovingly and filled it from a blue jar. “I dare say Meeker told you what I wanted to see you about? Yes. Well, what do you say, Hale?”

“I’m willing to try, Mr. McKenna, but I don’t know very much about rowing.”

“Naturally. But you must have picked up a few tricks, eh? You’ve been hanging around quite a while. If you’ve kept your eyes open you must have learned a bit. Know how to seat a crew?”

“Yes, sir, I know that much.”

“Know which is the port side of the boat?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you know as much as most of ’em! Tell you what I’ll do, Hale. I’ll take you and I’ll teach you what there is to know about coxing. If you can remember what you’re told, all right. If you fizzle I’ll kick you out of the boat. But you’ve got to agree to stick if I want you to. I can’t

waste time on you this spring, right in the busiest season, if I can't count on you for next fall. Everything's in rotten shape this year, and I've got plenty to do without training a cox. Now I don't know a thing about you except what I see, but Meeker seems to think you'll do, and so does New, I understand. You're light, and that's good as far as it goes. You'll have to be careful of your eating, though, and drop a few more pounds. Maybe you'd better come to the training table when it starts so we can keep an eye on you. Well, there you are. I'm offering you a fine chance to make yourself useful to the school, keep yourself fit and get a lot of fun. Plenty of chaps would jump at it. Of course, I'm not going to expect you to make much of a showing this spring. All I do expect is that you'll try to learn, stick close to the job and do what you're told. What do you say?"

"I'll do my best, sir," replied Tod earnestly.

"You mean you intend to do your best just at this moment. Probably you'll forget to in a week or so. But all right. You're on, Hale. Report every day at the gym. There's not much you can do until we get on the river, but you might as well watch things. That's all, I guess." Mr. McKenna strode over from the fireplace, against which he had been leaning, puffing voluminously at his pipe, and shook hands. His straight mouth

didn't change so far as Tod could discern, but the gray eyes, set each in a maze of tiny wrinkles, did seem to soften a bit, and there was a little difference in his tone as he added: "Hope we're going to like each other, Hale. Thanks for coming down."

Tod went back across the bridge and up the hill in an oddly exalted frame of mind. Mr. McKenna hadn't made things sound very attractive; had, in fact, seemed to offer little reward for much labor; but he had somehow made Tod feel that it was partnership rather than employment that was being held out, and that pleased him. And the coach had spoken of being useful to the school. That phase of it had been overlooked by the boy. He dwelt on it now and held his head a little higher and his shoulders a little squarer as he strode on in search of Stuart.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE BASIN

THE ice went out of the river the second week in March, but it was a week later ere the crews took the water for the first time. For Tod that was a memorable day, since he found himself perched on the tiny seat in the stern of the second shell, a small red megaphone strapped to his mouth and a white tiller rope in each gloved hand, while in front of him eight sweated youths lay on their sweeps and awaited his word. It was a chill afternoon, with a flotilla of gray clouds sailing eastward in a brisk March wind and the Basin continually ruffled with little cat's-paws. Sun and shadow alternated on the surface, and the water changed from blue to leaden almost in the moment. Tod wore an ancient white sweater, a pair of long golf hose and a funny little stockinette cap once the property of some former coxswain. Stockings and shorts didn't quite meet, and his small knees were already pink from the cold. Gus Corbey, stroke oar, looked toward the float and muttered impatiently. "Come on, you slow pokes! Let's have some action!" Tod turned for a glance. The first crew was just being

boated. Coach McKenna was already in his splinter-like shell and paddling out. "I suppose," said Tod, "we won't do much to-day."

Gus shook his head. "Not much, I guess. Just some slow work. How's it feel to be boss, Hale?"

Tod smiled. "Guess I'm sort of nervous. This looks like a bigger job than the four-oars!"

"We'll look after you," said Ham Bowdoin, captain and Number Seven. "Ask Gus if you get in a jam. Better straighten out, Hale."

Tod looked about in sudden dismay to find that the westerly breeze was swinging the bow around. "Touch her, Bow!" he said.

"Two," corrected Captain Bowdoin.

"Touch her, Two! That's en—I mean, steady!" Tod met Gus's grin and smiled in brief confusion. Right and left, four maroon blades lapped the water once more. Over by the float Knowles' voice spoke crisply. "Ready all! . . . Forward! . . . Paddle!" Tod wondered if he would ever manage to issue his orders as authoritatively, as crisply! The first boat nosed past, turned and floated. The coach gave directions. "Take it easy, fellows, and keep your sweaters on until you're about halfway down. And put them on the instant you stop rowing. All right, First. Keep it slow and steady, and try to remember some of the things you're supposed to have learned. Same for you, Second. Only about four

of you chaps are at all certain of your places, and if you want to stay where you are you've got to show me that you're better oarsmen than I think you are!"

"That means you, Ham," murmured Gus, without turning his head or seeming to open his lips.

"The trouble with most of you is that you don't pull through. You finish sitting up, with nothing on your blades but the paint. Now let's see if you can't do some rowing. Stroke, it's up to you to show the way. All right, Cox. Keep them slow and steady and see that they put their sweaters on when they stop."

Tod gripped the tiller lines tensely and found his voice. "Ready all! . . . Forward! . . ." The slides went back, the eight blades hovered above the water. "Row!" The blades dipped, swept through slowly, emerged, feathered as the slides came back once more. Tod pulled tentatively at the line in his right hand, and then more strongly. The bow was swinging at last. You had to put more tug on the lines in this shell than in the four-oared in which, for nearly a week, he had been, literally and figuratively, learning the ropes. Gus advanced the stroke a trifle and Tod looked at the watch strapped to his wrist and silently counted. Fifteen seconds, not quite seven strokes. Gus was rowing about twenty-six to the minute, then; and using every inch of his body. Beyond

him, Ham was following the pace perfectly, but there was certainly a break further along. Tod craned and watched. "Four, you're late," he warned. "Watch the stroke."

Gus met his eyes and nodded approval. "You tell 'em, kid," he muttered.

That, at least, he could tell them, Tod reflected. But less evident faults he doubted his ability to discern. The third man on the starboard side was doing something wrong, but what? Sinking his blade, wasn't he? Ending with a jerk and hurrying his recovery? But why? Probably holding his hands too high. At least, he was fairly ragged, and the man beyond was scarcely better. But it took courage to act on so uncertain a diagnosis. Tod wanted so much to preface his criticism with "I beg pardon" or "Excuse me"! It required real nerve to "call down" chaps so much older and bigger than you were! Perhaps Gus, watching, guessed his dilemma, for he nodded vigorously. "Give 'em thunder, Hale," he said. "Your business." Tod took a deep breath, ladened it with words and sent it forth through the little funnel, greatly daring.

"Watch that stroke, Three! Slow through and don't rush your slide! Steady, Bow! Lengthen out! That's better, Three!"

He tried not to meet Gus's eyes, but he had to. Gus, sliding toward him, almost to his knees, again

voiced approval. "That's it, kid. Don't let 'em get away with it."

Tod looked ahead and appraised the distance rowed. "Sweaters off?" he asked. Gus nodded. "That'll do! Let her run!" The oars hung motionless. Well ahead, the first crew were down to shirts and were going on again. The shell slowed. "Take your sweaters off," Tod directed.

"That's better," grunted Carter, Number Three, as his blonde head emerged. "I'll say so," agreed the next man, stowing his sweater. "Now watch our smoke!" "Ready all!" Strong hands wrapped themselves again about the oars. "Forward!" Slides moved in unison with a subdued rasping. "Row! Easy now! Keep it long, fellows, and show the First how to do it!" An approving chuckle came from forward and the murmur of a voice followed. Well, that was one transgression Tod had no hesitancy in protesting, and he managed to make his voice satisfactorily stern as he called: "*No talking in the boat!*"

Another chuckle, this time from nearer at hand, and then silence save for the rasp of the locks, the deep breathing of Gus and the gurgling of water.

So it went. Down to the narrowing end of the Basin, with a rest there, sweaters on and off again, and then, with the coach hanging to their

stern half the way and shouting admonitions, back to the boathouse, a hard finish at a thirty-stroke clip carrying them over the imaginary line. Finally, after a moment for breath, the cautious paddle to the float. Oars were unlocked and one by one the eight slim-waisted, broad-shouldered youths climbed out. Then Tod followed, very stiff of leg, the rudder was unshipped, and: "Pick her up!" was the order. "Over! Steady with her! All right! Walk her in!" Tod followed, megaphone and rudder in hand, and watched the shell set on the horses. The first crew came trailing in then with the other shell and there was noise and laughter, with Tom Griffen's voice sharp above all: "Don't stand around now, you mutt-heads! Off with you, and run it all the way!" And the first day on the river was over, the easiest day of all the many that were to follow.

The cold weather passed as April came in and real work began with long sessions on the Basin; long, slow pulls; short, fast ones; always a few racing starts, with coxswains yelping and water splashing from frenzied oars. The launch followed the shells now, a tow-headed, blue-jeaned man from the village presiding over her engine and Coach McKenna standing in the bow, half-hidden behind a big megaphone. The white launch was small, but she could travel fast. The name on the stern was "Swallow," but the fel-

lows, displaying their usual ingenuity for evolving misnomers, called her the "Gulp."

Tod took his seat each afternoon in the stern of the second shell, learned daily from experience and pleased Dill Meeker by proving to every one's satisfaction that he, Dill, knew a born cox when he saw one. Perhaps, however, it isn't quite truthful to say that Tod was a born coxswain, since that implies instinct, and what ability for his job Tod possessed had resulted from an earnest determination to learn, a strong desire to stand well in the sight of Jack New and a very commendable ambition to be of service to the school. Having been brought up in a country town where the largest body of water within ten miles was a diminutive mill-pond, it is doubtful if instinct had anything to do with his success. But he was a success, and Coach McKenna recognized the fact and acknowledged it, albeit somewhat grudgingly, to Dill. He did not, however, grudge approbation to Tod, although he dealt it sparingly. The second crew were less conservative. They boasted openly, even tauntingly, of having the best coxswain, and, while they teased Tod and made fun of him and called him "Toddy" as often as Tod, they also tried their best to spoil him. But he was too level-headed to be spoiled, and while he liked their fooling and accepted indignities in the spirit in which they were inflicted, he

demanded respect and enforced discipline the instant the shell was put over. And he received the one and had no difficulty in establishing the other. They took his orders and liked doing it. They might joke about it afterwards, and make fun of his palpable imitation of the coach's sharp, incisive tones, but they jumped when he spoke. The fact that his crew praised him, if only behind his back, gave Tod far less pleasure, however, than the few words spoken by Jack New one afternoon when the latter dropped back beside him on the way to the bus.

“Well, young Hale,” said Jack, smiling quizzically but kindly down from his superior height, “they tell me you're a real coxswain. I thought you could do it, and I'm mighty glad.” Unseen of Tod, who was trying to conceal the delight evoked by the praise, Jack started to throw an arm about the younger boy's shoulders. The temptation was natural, for Tod was such a small parcel of a boy and such a kid yet in spite of his efforts to appear grown-up, but Jack thought again and didn't yield to it. Tod might resent the action, he reflected, might consider it an offense against his dignity! So Jack let his arm fall and Tod never knew that his hero had almost hugged him!

May found the baseball candidates hard at work, Stuart among them, and he and Tod saw little of

each other during the daytime. But that didn't affect their friendship. Rather, it seemed almost to increase it. Stuart was trying hard for an infield position, with his hopes centered on third base, and he was making progress. Of course he was only one of a half-dozen fresh candidates with similar desires, but whether or not he could play ball as well as the rest, he certainly exceeded most of them in one thing. He was "scrappy." He didn't take anything sitting down, and if the batsman bested him it wasn't because Stuart hadn't fought him grimly, or if he missed a fielding chance it was only after he had tried harder than most fellows would have tried. And so it seemed that he might in the end win a place on the team if only because he was likely to fight a little harder and a little longer for it than the other aspirants. But the nine was still in the making in the first week of May, although four games had already been played; and two of them lost.

Tod got news of the day's doings on the diamond every evening, and in exchange brought Stuart's knowledge of rowing affairs up to date. Of course Tod pretended that what went on on the ball field was a matter of exceedingly little importance, and Stuart made believe that what happened on the river was of absolutely no moment. But they listened to each other, and sympathized even while they jeered, and neither was deceived in the least.

Nostrand had two races scheduled with outside schools; the first late in May with Fisk, and the other, the big event, with Melton and Allsop three weeks later. Fisk came to Belleford and rowed a mile race on the Basin; for the final event Nostrand journeyed up-state to Lake Hastings, reaching there two days before the race and ending preparations over the course to be rowed, which was a mile and seven-eighths. Allsop, whose buildings looked down over the lake, possessed the advantage of a thorough acquaintance with the water, an advantage which seldom resulted in victory for her. Nostrand and Melton, practically equi-distant from Lake Hastings, entered the event on even terms.

In preparation for the Fisk race, first and second crews fought it out on the Basin every Saturday for three weeks preceding the event; and then, on the Wednesday before, there was a half-mile contest that Tod long remembered. That afternoon the second pulled leisurely down to the half-mile stake, after a half-hour of easy paddling, and rested on their oars until the first came sweeping along on its final time trial. Just before the other shell reached them Tod set the second crew in motion, and by the time the two boats were even each was traveling at nearly top speed. Then they went at it, hammer and tongs, toward the finish.

But the first had left the half-mile mark with

the advantage of attained rhythm, while it was several moments before the second had coördinated and settled down to smooth rowing, and that advantage told. Yet, since the second was doing but a half mile to the first's mile, it was fully expected to win with open water, and would have done so save for an unforeseen happening. Or so, at least, the second, from bow oar to coxswain, ever afterward stoutly maintained.

At the three-quarter mark the second was just lapping the rival shell, but she was gaining at every sweep of the oars. Gus Corbey was stroking a long, clean thirty-six to the first's thirty-four. Tod, inwardly boiling with excitement, held himself as taut as a wooden figure and kept his voice as steady as the shell itself. "Watch the stroke! . . . We're going past! . . . Half course! Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!"

He saw the rival cox, straining forward, hands tense on the lines, come slowly but inevitably back to him across the width of swirling water. Second was gaining steadily, going past! If Gus could keep that stroke up they'd show plenty of open water at the end. And then there was a sharp crack above the rattle of the oarlocks and the *swish* of the slides, Gus slewed back and side-wise and the shell lurched to port. An instant's commotion, and then Gus's panting: "Take it, Ham!" and Tod's swift warning: "Get together!

Never mind that! We can beat 'em with seven oars! Come on, now! *Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!*" Gus crouched forward in his seat, his useless oar held high out of water on the broken outrigger, and muttered wrathfully. Instinctively, Tod had tugged the starboard tiller line, but already the shell had veered slightly to port, and it was three full strokes later ere it was once more straightened out on its course. Number Six toiled heroically to do the work of two men, but only succeeded in slowing his stroke, and Tod found the whole port side out of time. That corrected, the shell traveling against its rudder, second rowed doggedly on. But although at last Tod called on Ham to hit up the stroke again, and although the captain and all the others responded desperately, seven men can't row down eight, and the distance between the stern of the first shell and the nose of the second increased slowly. Knowing the race won, first dropped her stroke a trifle but finished, still traveling fast, nearly two lengths to the good.

Coach McKenna didn't give out the time for the trial, but it was generally understood to have been satisfactory. Still fuming, Gus Corbey pitched into Tom Griffen when, picked up by the launch and towed back, they reached the boathouse. There was quite a glorious row, Gus unjustly holding Tom to blame for a defective brace, Tom re-

torting with: "Why wouldn't it break? It's a wonder you didn't tear it out by the screws, the way you was jerking that oar! Row? You couldn't row a dinky! I seen, didn't I? Wasn't I in the launch?" And so it went, back and forth, to the amusement of the others, until the coach interposed a stern: "Shut your trap, Corbey! Tom can't be blamed for a broken outrigger." Second spent most of the time on the way back telling what they'd have done to the first if it hadn't been for the accident, and first grinned and pretended to be very sympathetic, and winked at each other slyly to the exasperation of second.

Tod's boat didn't receive much attention from the coach during the next two days, for the white launch tagged the first crew up and down the Basin without pause. Even when the two crafts were separated by almost the length of the water Tod could hear Nate's voice directing, correcting and scolding. The second went about its own affairs and, even lacking the incentive of the coach's demands, worked hard under Tod's repeated reminders of Wednesday's fiasco.

"We'll race 'em again next week, I guess," he declared. "There won't be any busted outriggers then, fellows, and we'll show 'em the river. Let's get more drive into that stroke, though. You're rowing pretty nice, but you can't beat first until you put more power into it. Come on now and

show me you're a real crew. Let's have ten hard ones! Come on, Second! One! *Row! . . . Two! Row! . . .*"

Then Gus scowled ferociously at the cox, set his broad mouth in a tight line and rowed!

Not many saw the race with Fisk, partly because there were no convenient points of vantage, but mostly because Nostrand played Hastingsville High at baseball that afternoon and, forced to take advantage of a flood tide, the crews were obliged to do their stunt while proceedings on the diamond were at their height. But a handful of fellows attended and, since the race was rowed up the Basin, saw the finish just below the boat-house. Tod viewed the event from the "Gulp," with Mr. McKenna, the Fisk coach, Dill Meeker and four others from both camps. Three other launches followed behind the "Gulp," and a big broad-beamed boat holding the officials preceded it.

There was a stiff breeze blowing in from the ocean, a dozen miles away, and the surface of the Basin near the lower end was showing whitecaps. There was much difficulty in getting the boats off, and many delays. One of the punts which held the sterns of the shells in place persisted in dragging its insufficient anchor, and whenever it was rowed back to position the Fisk shell drifted away and had to be jockeyed back again. But the pistol

barked at last, sixteen blades churned the water and the race was on.

Tod got plenty of excitement during the next few minutes, but with it was mixed much anxiety and, eventually, a deal of disappointment. Once past the halfway mark, Nostrand's crew, which had got the better of the start and maintained a half-length lead so far, began to fall back. Short of the three-quarters a full length separated the boats. Then the maroon-tipped oars worked faster and the two shells drew almost together again. But Nostrand couldn't hold the enemy, and, although, just at the last, Stroke Crane jumped the stroke to thirty-six and then thirty-eight and actually diminished the Fisk lead by nearly a length, the visiting crew sped across the line ten seconds ahead. It wasn't a bad defeat, but Nostrand had looked for victory, and Captain New's crew took it hard. Many explanations were offered, but those in the "Gulp" knew that the true one was too much weight in the bow of the Nostrand boat for the power delivered. Fisk, several pounds lighter per man, had shown more drive. As Tom Griffen said, had the race been over the Henley distance Nostrand would have won, for she had finished sitting up and unwearied while Fisk presented the appearance of a tired, if victorious, eight. However, what might have been didn't have much bearing on what was, and there was a noticeable at-

mosphere of gloom at the training table that evening. Perhaps the second crew men didn't take defeat very hard in comparison with the first, for a strong, though healthy, rivalry existed between them, and Gus Corbey made no secret of his conviction that if Nate had rowed the second against Fisk the result would have been far different! Gus also declared that no matter how good a crew was it had to have a coxswain. He went no further, leaving his hearers to draw their own conclusions. Well, it had already been whispered about—muttered is the better word—that Coach McKenna hadn't been awfully well satisfied with Sammy Knowles' performance that afternoon; that he didn't approve the cox's failure to increase the initial advantage gained at the start. The first boat had apparently been satisfied with maintaining the half-length lead, confident, perhaps, of its ability to pull away later, and had held to twenty-eight or thirty all the way past the second flags. However, this was merely hearsay. Certainly the coach gave no public expression of dissatisfaction with the coxing.

Stuart was hard to live with that Saturday evening. The Maroon had humbled Hastingsville to the tune of 12 to 4, and Stuart had played third base through four innings. Tod had to hear all about it, with minute details, and to simulate a joy as hearty as Stuart's. Well, of course, he was

pleased. Stuart had performed well in the field and, in two times at bat, had delivered as many hits, his last one, a two-bagger, coming with second and third bases occupied and bringing in two runs. But Tod was still rather depressed by the defeat on the river, and it was a distinct effort to gloat over a baseball triumph against an unimportant adversary. After Stuart had twice illustrated, with the aid of a tennis racket, how he had outwitted the Hastingsville twirler by seeming anxious to hit anything served and then, with the opponent in the hole, smashed the second strike for a two-bagger, he calmed down and lugged Tod off to the village moving picture palace.

CHAPTER XIX
PROMOTION

IT was ten days later when the second had its next official brush with the first. There had been changes in both boats. Rollins had gone from Number Four in the second to Number Two in the first, Hobe Chalmers had taken Owinwell's place at Three and Billy Barton was rowing in Rollins' seat in the second. Joe Purcell, deposed for Rollins, went back to the ranks of the substitutes, those willing but unfortunate youths who kept themselves in readiness for an emergency that never seemed to eventuate. There was no use denying the fact that the altered second wasn't what it had been. On the other hand, it had still to be proved that the substitution of Rollins and Chalmers had bettered the first. She was several pounds lighter in the bow, but whether there was more power there remained to be seen.

Even to-day's race over the mile distance didn't prove much, for, although the first won handily enough by four lengths, the crew that Tod steered wasn't the crew that, barring misfortune, would have beaten the first two weeks before. Tod knew it, and so did Ham Bowdoin and Gus Corbey, and

Gus bewailed the fact and deplored a condition which allowed a coach to spoil a perfectly good second boat to patch up a bum first! "He'll be at it again, too, I dare say," Gus predicted dismally. "Wonder who'll be the next to go."

"Maybe you," said Tod. But Gus shook his head after brightening momentarily.

"No, I'll stick where I am. Only thing that'll get me out is Bob Crane breaking a leg or something. No, Ham may go, though."

"I know who will go out of this boat next," replied Ham, "and it isn't you, old sport, nor me, either."

"Who then? Pete Burns? Hen Carter?"

But Ham shook his head, smiled exasperatingly and kept his own counsel.

Four days later, though, Gus and Tod both knew which of their number Ham had had in mind. The day before, coming back up the Basin in a rain squall, the first had poked her bow into the bank just below the boathouse. No damage had been done and she had been quickly backed off and paddled down to the landing, but Coach McKenna, following at her heels in the "Gulp," had observed and broken into speech. Sam Knowles had presented a good alibi. The rain had blinded him and he hadn't been able to see as far as the waist of the boat, he declared defensively. Whereupon Nate had informed him bitterly that a good cox

should be able to keep his course with his eyes closed tight. "You steered into the bank, Knowles. Otherwise you wouldn't have been there. You don't have to see to keep your rudder straight. You've been over the course often enough to find the float in the dark! Don't let that happen again. These shells cost money!"

Tod, witnessing the scene from the boathouse landing, well within hearing distance, thought the coach much too severe. The squall had been hard, hard enough to send him scurrying under cover, and, looking out the boathouse door, the river beyond the float had been hidden by a gray wall of water. He had felt sorry for Knowles, although Tom Griffen, beside him in the rain, had applauded Nate's criticism.

"Yanked the line, he did," muttered Tom. "Tried to keep himself dry, maybe. That's a fool trick, Tod, my lad, and don't you ever try it. Rain or no rain, sit still and mind your business. Suppose he'd sprung them planks, which maybe he did for all I know yet, though I'm thinking not, where'd we have been? Man, it takes days to repair damage like that; yes, and maybe weeks; and you second crew lads would have had to give your boat to the first and stood around till their own was fixed again. I'm always telling 'em they'd ought to have a spare shell, but they're too mean to buy it!"

That was on Tuesday. When Tod walked into the boathouse on Wednesday Mr. McKenna stopped him at the door. "You're taking the first out to-day, Hale. See if you can make them work for you. They won't do much for me!"

Tod stared an instant, wide-eyed, muttered "Yes, sir," and went on inside. Sammy Knowles, already appraised of his relegation to the second shell, met Tod's embarrassed inquiry with a wink and a grin. "He's socking it to me for running aground yesterday, Tod," he chuckled. "As though I could help it! He wouldn't have done any better himself, the old sore-head! I should worry, though." Sam shrugged and turned away, convinced that the discipline would not extend beyond the afternoon.

The second muttered mutinously. It was bad enough to crook two of their best men without swiping their coxswain! Gus leveled a threatening finger at Knowles. "Look here, Sammy," he growled, "you run *us* into the mud and I'll personally and unaided break you in two! You hear me, son! It's all right to be careless with those guys, but you're in a *good* boat now!"

Of course Tod knew that the change of shells was only for the day, but he couldn't help feeling elated, and, fearing his elation might be guessed, went at the task of getting the boat into the water

with a sternness befitting a general on the eve of battle. His new crowd viewed him smilingly as he appeared with his rudder and megaphone in hand and called gruffly: "Walk her out, First!"

"Gee, ain't he the cross little bear!" marveled Tony Friel, grinning at the new cox. Tod returned his gaze soberly, and Tony chuckled as he went to his place. The shell was set in the water and Tod held while the oars were being locked. Whenever he looked up he found some one grinning at him, and he began to feel embarrassed, although he couldn't have told just why. Perhaps it was because the smiles had something cryptic about them, as though the smilers knew something Tod didn't know. He was speculating a trifle uneasily when Tom knelt beside him.

"I'll hold her, Tod," said the trainer. Puzzled, Tod looked at Tom and saw that same smile reflected the instant before it was wiped off.

"Well," he said, wondering. There was no reason why Tom should occupy himself with the cox's job! Rising, he saw the second crew, already boated, floating just off the end of the landing, and for some reason every man in the shell was looking toward him. Tod wondered if something was wrong with his apparel. Having on only a thin shirt, a light sweater, a pair of shorts, socks and canvas shoes, there didn't seem to be much chance for that! But he took a surreptitious look,

just the same, and it was while he was looking that Crane and Safford lifted him bodily in air!

“New cox! New cox!” “Christen the baby!” Tod struggled for an instant, saw that struggling was useless and resigned himself. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Coach McKenna’s countenance, faintly amused, as he was tossed by his captors to Tony Friel and Ted Mann on his journey to the water. He remembered now having heard of the custom of ducking the coxswain, and he knew what he was in for. The second was cheering loudly. Another short heave landed him between Jack New and Hobe Chalmers, the last into the arms of Jake Rollins and Hugh Kelsey. The water looked awfully cold, he thought!

Number Two and Bow swung him back and forward. “Ready!” chanted the gang.

Another swing, and “Forward!” came the chorus.

A third!

“*Row!*”

Tod shot far out over the water, descended and struck the surface with a mighty splash. Even as he went under he heard the ribald, approving laughter from the audience. Then he was struggling up through the green, sun-barred water, had his head out into the air again and was sputtering and gasping, to the delight of the beholders, having, in spite of earnest intentions, swallowed a

considerable amount of the Basin. He swam unhurriedly to the float, accepted the aid of outstretched hands and climbed back on the planks.

“How’s the water, Hale?” some one shouted above the laughter.

“Fine, you smart Alecks!” He felt no grievance, but he thought a slight show of spirit was encumbent, and he even managed to scowl. But the scowl wasn’t very terrifying, and no one appeared frightened. Jack New gave him a good-natured slap and pushed him toward the boat-house.

“Get some dry things on, son, and work fast,” he directed. “Tom, can you fit him out?”

Tom could and did, and presently Tod emerged once more to supply fresh amusement, for the woolen shirt and long trousers in which he was arrayed had been cut for a person at least six sizes larger!

The first started off at last in exceedingly good spirits and followed the second down the Basin at a good clip, the “Gulp” tossing the spray from her slim nose a length or two astern. Presently the big megaphone was trained on them. “Three, you’re rotten! Put some water on that blade! Stop loafing! . . . Five, you’re slow! Watch the stroke, man! . . . Six, you’re light! Help the boat along! Grab some water! That’s better! . . . Don’t hurry it, Stroke! Pull it through!

And, for Pete's sake, watch your *hands!* How many times have I got—Hale, steady 'em down! They're not rowing together! That'll do!"

"Let her run!"

The launch came nearer, reversed propeller churning noisily. The coach leaned on the blue megaphone and talked sternly. "Some of you weak sisters will be in the four-oars to-morrow if you don't do a lot better than that. Now you listen to me, all of you. There's going to be a race in about a fortnight with a couple of real crews, fellows who know how to pull their weight. You may not have heard of it, but it's coming. Rowing the way you've been rowing so far this spring, you're going to finish about fifteen lengths behind. If that suits you, all right. It's nothing in my life. I get paid my salary whether you win or lose. Remember that. But if you have any faint notion of making a decent showing up at the lake, for Pete's sake get onto yourselves! You've been taught the stroke, you've been well trained; you're fit to row a good race and finish smiling. But you're lazy. You won't work. Some few of you are making an effort, yes, but most of you are just playing, riding your oars! You've got beef and brawn enough to be a perfectly smashing crew, but what are you? You're a lot of sissies, afraid you'll get your hair un-slicked. You haven't had a good honest sweat this

season. But you're going to have one. You're going to have one right now! Cox, take 'em up to the end and make 'em row. I'll be watching, and if I see any more tomfoolery to-day I'll send you back to the float, and you'll stay there. I want you to show me something of what you've been taught. I want every one of you to think what you're doing every time you put your blade in, and keep on thinking until it's out, and then think all over again. You can't handle a sweep and think about something else, and I'm telling you! If you're going to correct your faults, and there isn't one of you who hasn't got 'em, you've got to keep them in mind and try to overcome them. And I'm not going to remind you of them any more. I'm sick of bawling you out. If you can't remember them and correct them you can kick your feet out of the laces and quit. I'm through wasting breath on you. All right, Cox, take 'em up. And, mind you, it's up to you to see that they show some rowing!"

"Ready all!" called Tod soberly.

"Forward!"

"Row!"

After a moment: "Lengthen out, Stroke," he said. "Don't clip, fellows! Let's show him we can do it! Steady, Six, steady! You're rushing your slide a bit! That's fine, fellows! Keep it long and finish through! Nice work, First! Bow,

you're slow! Watch the stroke! Row! . . . Row! . . . Row! . . . Row! . . . Steady down, Two, steady down! . . . Almost up, Gang! Let's have ten good ones! Come on! One! Row! . . . Two! Row! . . ."

"That's a bit better," called the coach grudgingly as the first ceased rowing. "For once you had an even keel, and some of you pulled pretty well. Chalmers, you're still slewing. Try to go back straight. Five, you clipped your stroke now and then, which shows you weren't thinking as I told you to. Watch that man, Cox. He does it right along. You were slow several times, Bow. If you can't get the stroke with your eyes, listen for the locks. Only get it, man! Cox, give them half a dozen racing starts and rest them well between. Then take them back slow and see that every man gets his head into his work. Finish up with a fast quarter and make 'em sweat again."

The "Gulp" swung on her heel and raced off to overtake the second, well up the Basin. Bob Crane shifted in his seat and sighed. "Sometimes I'd like to punch his head," he informed Tod, "and sometimes I'd like to kick him in the shins."

"Touch her, Two! Steady!" Tod smiled sympathetically but soberly. "Which is it to-day?" he asked.

Stroke grinned and shook his head. "Well,

just now I've buried the hatchet, for we did come up pretty decently, didn't we?"

"Yes," said Tod. "That was a mighty pretty half-mile."

"He wouldn't say so, though," grumbled Ted Mann. "He's willing enough to tell you how rotten you are, but he's blamed careful not to give you a good word!"

"Oh, he's all right," said Safford, Number Seven. "You've got to get used to him, that's all. If he devils us into beating Melton you'll be the first one to want to kiss him!"

"If I tried it he'd bite me," laughed Ted. "Say, he's got a roughish tongue, though, what?"

"Like he'd swallowed a rasp," agreed Bob. "But, shucks, we're not half as bad as he says we are, I guess. Gosh, we couldn't be and stay afloat!"

"Let's try a twenty-four or twenty-six, Crew," said Tod. "Every fellow keep his mind on his work and take a good, long swipe, pull it through steady and finish it hard. Exhibition stuff, you know! Just like the movie man was shooting us. Ready, gang? Let's go then."

"What about the starts?" asked Bob Crane.

"We'll take them further up. Ready all!"

Half an hour later the first tore up to the boat house finish line with the shell traveling fast but steady, eight bodies swaying in unison and with

but one sound from the oarlocks. The launch swung to starboard as Tod called, "*Let her run!*", but as it headed away for the float the big blue megaphone came up for the last time and, "Good work, First Crew!" called the coach.

Bert Safford, slumped in his seat, sat up with a start that rocked the shell. "Am I dreaming?" he gasped. "Did you hear what I heard, Bob?"

Stroke nodded and grinned. "I think so," he panted. "First time in history, too!"

"Water! Water!" called Jack Rollins weakly. "I'm fainting! It's t-t-too much!"

"Shut up, you coot," warned the captain. "He'll hear you!"

There was a general chuckling along the boat, and Tod, excitedly happy, schooled his voice as he ordered: "Ready all! . . . Five and Seven, back water! . . . Steady all! . . . Take it up, port side! . . . Steady! . . . Ready all! Paddle!"

When the shell had been eased onto its supports Tod laid his rudder and megaphone underneath and straightened up with a sigh. Beside him was the coach. Mr. McKenna was smiling. "Hale," he said, "how do you do it?"

"Do what, sir?" asked Tod.

"Get your crews together the way you do. That's the first time since last fall those fellows have showed any form."

"Why—why, I guess I didn't have anything to

do with it, sir," stammered Tod. "After you talked to them—"

"No, I've talked to them many's the time, Hale, but it's never done much good. It must be they're afraid of *you!*" The coach chuckled. Then he added soberly: "Anyhow, you seem to be good medicine, Hale. Guess you'd better stick with them."

"You mean—" began Tod incredulously. The coach nodded.

"Yes, you take over the first. Busy this evening? No? Drop around about seven or half-past then. I'd like to talk things over with you. Between us, Hale, and with the help of Providence, we may be able to whip that bunch into shape."

CHAPTER XX

OLD BARN

“LET’S hang around after dinner,” said Stuart a few days later. “Old Barn feeds the oats to-day, you know.”

“Feeds— Oh, yes, I’d forgotten. What do they do, Stu? Where do we go to see them?”

“Just hang around in front of the dormitory. Every one does. Some of the Old Barn crowd walk around and look you over and if they like your looks they hand you a bunch of oats. Well, one oats—one oat—I mean, one straw with a bunch of oats— Oh, shucks, you know!”

“What will you do when you get yours?” laughed Tod.

“Eat it! What are you going to do?”

“Stuff a mattress with it. Know any one who’s going to be picked, though?”

“N-no, but I’ve heard that Mal Beede and ‘Pinky’ are down. Hope ‘Pinky’ makes it, anyway. He’s a good guy, and he can certainly play ball!”

They wandered out front to find the place well thronged already, the middle steps so crowded with spectators that they were forced to push

through and find a post of observation below on the lawn. There was a lot of laughing and guying going on, and the appearance of a lower middler was met with sudden acclaim, applause and advice.

“Hey, Tod! Tod Hale! They’re looking for you. Want you to come right over to the Barn!” “That’s right, Tod, honest! Go get your oats!” “Not a chance, Stu! I did my best for you, but they don’t want ’em blonde.” “Shut up! Younge’s wanted. I saw the list.” “Hey, Beany! Come on out! Don’t be shy, Beany! Stop your blushing and look pretty!” “Oats! Oats! Where’s the oats?” “Old Barn, this way!”

It was a lot of fun, Tod decided, and he shouted and cheered with the rest, but after fully a quarter of an hour had passed he remembered a mathematics recitation and would have fought his way back into Nostrand for a half hour’s study if Stuart hadn’t grabbed him. “Oh, forget it,” he begged. “They’ll be here in a minute, and you don’t want to miss it!”

“I don’t mind missing it one bit,” began Tod, but just then a sudden long-drawn “*A-a-ay!*” arose from the crowd that thronged the steps and he edged forward with Stuart to see what was happening. Well, it wasn’t much; just four seniors pushing their way down the steps, rather grave of face, peering here and there as they descended.

Suddenly one of the quartette paused and shouldered to the left, and the noise which had almost subsided began again. "Who is he?" "Pull him out!" "Let us see him!" "Who, Comstock? A-a-ay, Comstock! Comstock!" "Who's Comstock? I don't know—" "He should worry! Hey, Billy Comstock! Show your ugly phiz!" The other three Old Barners were out of sight now, although Tod and Stuart stood on tiptoe and finally, following the example of others, pushed forward toward the path. Some one else had received his oats, for again the throng was yelling and laughing lustily. "Hey, Beede! Mal Beede!" "They got him," exclaimed Stuart. "Bet you 'Pinky's' next!" "Hope so," said Tod. But "Pinky" wasn't next, for just then some one touched Tod on the arm from behind, and he swung around to face Jack New.

"Hale?" asked Jack gravely.

"What?"

Some one nudged him sharply. "Speak up!" came a hoarse whisper. Tod stared in sudden fascination. In his left hand Jack held several yellow sprays of oats. In his right hand was one.

"Hale?" asked Jack again insistently.

"Yes." Tod's voice sounded very faint in his own ears.

Jack smiled then, holding the single straw toward him. "Come to Old Barn at eight o'clock

this evening." Jack turned away and the throng hid him. Tod stared incredulously at the little straw with its nodding raceme of grain. Then some one smote him mightily between the shoulders and he heard his name being shouted: "Tod Hale! Tod Hale!" And from behind him an unknown but loud voice proclaimed: "They picked a good 'un that time!" Tod got red and, thrusting the oat straw into a pocket, forced his way through congratulating, often envious, school-mates, with Stuart hurrying beside him and babbling nonsense.

"I knew blamed well you'd get it, Tod! I bet Jimmy Livingston you would! What price Number 36 West? Hey, show your oats, Farmer! What did you do with it? In your *pocket*?" Stuart was scandalized. "Put it in your buttonhole, you bean-head! Show the world! Gee, where do I come in? Don't I get any reflected glory out of this? Oh, well, if you're ashamed of it!" He squeezed Tod's arm hard as they went up the now nearly deserted steps. "Gee, I'm glad, Tod!" he said earnestly. "You old bum, you!"

"Wish it had been you," said Tod.

"Me? Shucks, I didn't have a show!"

"Well, what—why—how come—"

"Hear the modest youth! Best little coxswain in years; up from the ranks, too, and all that sort of thing; winning personality; beloved by all,

rich and poor! Aw, go soak your head, dearie! Why wouldn't you get Old Barn? Look at the way I've brought you up, you poor coot!"

What happened at the Old Barn at eight o'clock that evening is not for me to set down here. It was all very secret and terribly mysterious. When, however, Tod returned to Number 36 at about nine-thirty he wore a slightly puzzled expression which challenged Stuart's curiosity. Of course it's extremely bad form to be nosey about a secret society, but Stuart did hazard one question.

"Well, still alive, I see," he said. "How was it?"

Tod laid himself on his bed, put his hands under his head and stared a moment at the ceiling. Finally: "All right," he replied cautiously. Then, after another brief silence, he added in a somewhat perplexed tone: "What I don't see, though, is why they—why they make such a mystery of it!"

"How do you mean?" inquired Stuart, elaborately careless.

But Tod evidently thought he had said quite enough, and only shook his head. Stuart remained with the impression that his chum had been rather disappointed in events. After a minute or so he chuckled and said: "Say, Farmer, I don't suppose you saw 'Tub' Parrish this afternoon when Jack New gave you the oats."

“‘Tub’? No, I didn’t know he was around. Why?”

“Well, you’d have enjoyed the expression on his classic countenance. He was standing right near when Jack got there. He looked—looked—well, like he’d be pleased to commit murder on you or Jack; maybe both. It was a mighty unpleasant expression he wore, and I couldn’t dope it out until I asked Steve Douglas about him. Steve spilled the beans. It seems that ‘Tub’ was all set to get into Old Barn last spring, and missed it. Probably he thought he’d just been overlooked and that he’d be taken this year. Well, he was standing about six feet behind us when Jack got there, and the way I figure it is that he saw Jack coming and got himself all set to accept that bouquet and was horribly disappointed when Jack stopped in front of you! That last part’s just guesswork, but I’ll bet it’s correct.”

“I don’t blame him for being sore,” said Tod soberly. “Gee, I’m sorry, Stu, it had to happen like that.”

“Sorry?” repeated Stu doubtfully. “Well, yes, if you like. But I’d say that when a fellow’s as sure of himself as all that he needs taking down. Maybe I’m prejudiced, though, for I never did like ‘Tub’ much. I saw a good deal of him last year. He was particularly obnoxious to us juniors. We all disliked him. Anyhow”—and Stu-

art grinned widely—"I'm glad I'm not in your shoes, old son."

"Why?" asked Tod.

"Because if ever a fellow looked as if he'd like to do another guy dirt 'Tub' looked that way this afternoon! If I were you I'd avoid going out alone after dark and I'd be pesky careful to taste my food before I ate too heartily!"

Tod laughed. "I'll appoint you official taster, Stu. Didn't some of the old Roman kings have a chap whose duty it was to take a sip of the royal wine before he drank it? Seems to me I've read something like that. Anyhow, it doesn't matter; there's no harm in originating the scheme. And then at night you can follow me at three paces with your sword or rapier—which do you prefer?—loose in its—its thingumbob."

"Scaffold—no, scabbard! All right, Your Majesty, you find the rapier and I'll do the rest. As for the tasting business, I'm for it! Especially when it comes to dessert!"

"The desserts we get at training table wouldn't thrill you much," said Tod. "I put on a pound and six ounces last week, and Tom nearly had a fit. You'd think that if I gained another ounce the crew would get stalled in the middle of the Basin! You would to hear him go on!"

"How's Knowles taking it now?" asked Stuart. "Still sore at you?"

Tod grimaced and nodded. "I wish he'd act sensibly. It's—it's unpleasant, Stu. He knows well enough that it isn't my fault he got chucked from the first boat, but he hates to acknowledge it. Gives me the dirtiest looks!"

"Really? I always thought Knowles quite a decent chap. Not that I know him personally, of course, being as how he's a senior."

"I thought so, too," answered Tod ruefully. "Maybe he is decent when he isn't peeved. Still, I don't know. Seems to me he must have a mean streak in him. Yesterday I dropped my megaphone in the boathouse when he was going past and he kicked it way across the floor and mighty near ruined it. I got sort of hot and called him down, and he just grinned and went on out without answering. If he had talked back I'd have liked him better for it."

Stuart chuckled. "Of course you would, because then you could have handed him a crack in the jaw!"

"I wouldn't have done anything of the sort," replied Tod with dignity. "Not in the boathouse. Nate would have—gosh, I guess he'd have dropped me off the float!"

"Oh, well, don't you let him worry you, Farmer. Knowles, I mean. He's bound to get over it pretty quick. I dare say it does make you sore to get bounced like that. Why, Knowles has been coxing

crews for two years; the second last spring and the first this; and I suppose he got so he thought they couldn't take him out without having the boat fall apart! But he'll smooth down. Give him time."

"If he kicks my things around again I'll give him more than that," said Tod meaningly.

"Glad I haven't got your disposition," murmured Stuart. "How are you getting on with the first crew huskies?"

"All right, I guess. They put up with me, anyhow. You know, Stu, they're really a fine lot of fellows!"

"Finer than the second bunch?" asked Stuart, grinning maliciously.

Tod smiled. "Well, of course they can row better. But then they should, for most of them have been at it two years; Jack and Hobe Chalmers rowed in their lower middle year! I—I was sort of fond of the second, though, Stu. They were so awfully decent to me, you see. Gee, the first time I took the lines in that boat I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels, and I was scared to death that I'd do something frightfully wrong! But they seemed to know what the trouble was, and Ham Bowdoin said I was not to worry, and Gus tipped me off what to do, and I got through all right. Maybe all rowing chaps are fine."

"Huh, that's just your conceit! They're your

crowd, that's why you think that way. Truth is, the best set of chaps in school are on the diamond. Look at Billy Keating and Crauston and 'Pinky'—"

"And Stu Younge," chuckled Tod.

"Shut up! It's a fact, though. Got a nice lot of fellows on the team this year. Every one's awfully white. They all pull together, too, and, believe it or not, Tod we're going to beat Melton hands down. Why, we may not even take the bats out of the bag!"

"I see. You'll stand at the plate and swallow the balls instead of hitting them," said Tod gravely. "Clever scheme. The idea, I suppose, is to bankrupt the opposing team and put them out of business. It's worthy of your gigantic bean, Whitey!"

"I'll 'bean' you," threatened Stuart.

"You and who else?" inquired Tod, undismayed. "Think you're fixed at third, Stu?"

"Gosh, yes! Boy, I've earned that position by the sweat of my brow. Don't put such punk ideas in my head. Any one been throwing off on me? Suggesting that I'm in danger of losing that place?"

"Not a soul, son, that I've heard. I just wanted to know. I'm naturally interested in your career, young feller."

"Oh!" Stuart breathed relievedly. "Thought

you might have heard something. If any one gets that third base away from yours truly he's got to play ball! We've got a grand little infield, if I do say it, and I sort of like the idea of remaining therein!"

"Hope you do," responded Tod, sitting up and yawning. "I guess you're a pretty fair player for a kid."

"Is that so? Well, I'm batting two-sixty-seven, if that means anything to you. And I'm fielding—"

"Spare me the statistics," begged Tod. "It's enough for me to know that your employers are satisfied with you and that you are engaged in healthful exercise that keeps you out of mischief."

"Sit on a tack," begged Stuart earnestly.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. DOLSON QUESTIONS

Tod hadn't exaggerated any in telling Stuart that Sam Knowles had been making himself unpleasant. Sam had been, and he still was some days later. There was no repetition of the incident of the megaphone, nor did Sam have much to say, but he looked a lot and managed to make Tod distinctly uncomfortable while he was in the other boy's presence. While Sam Knowles was taller than Tod he weighed scarcely any more, and the question of physical superiority didn't enter into it, but Tod couldn't help feeling subordinate if only because of the fact that Sam was a venerable senior while he was but a lower middler. That fact handicapped him. If Sam had been nearer his own age, or a classmate, it is likely that Tod would have demanded a show-down, and got it, thereby clearing the atmosphere. But lower class fellows don't call seniors to task for merely scowling or sneering at them. It isn't done in the best society!

The crew men noted the state of affairs and were amused. Most of them considered that Sam was making a perfect ass of himself, and were

willing enough to let him continue. No one, probably, suspected that Tod might find it very wearing after a week or more and react to it unfortunately. Yet that is what Tod did. It was a very little thing, but it finally worried him, and he began to think too much about Sam Knowles and not enough about coxing. In little ways his work fell off, and the first crew noticed it before the coach did. He wasn't keeping his men up to the mark as he had at first. They realized it without guessing the reason. Then, on a Friday afternoon, Tod fell foul of Mr. McKenna for the first time. The coach had directed him to pay especial attention to the matter of reach on the way up the Basin, since several of the men were sacrificing length for speed. Tod missed the fault, with the result that that feature of the stroke was not bettered a mite, and very suddenly there was a command from the pursuing launch to cease rowing and an irate coach was towering above them from the bow of the "Gulp." But this time it was not the unfortunate oarsmen who received Nate's attention. It was the coxswain.

Tod got a fine dressing-down, made no more palatable by the knowledge that he deserved it or by the consciousness of being the object of regard of eight pairs of amused eyes! The storm passed as swiftly as it had gathered, the oars clicked in the locks again and progress up the Basin was re-

sumed. And Tod watched those eight oars as a particular observant cat might watch eight mice! But he felt utterly disgraced, and there was no joy for him the rest of the day. Indeed, it took a deal of effort on Stuart's part to restore him that evening to any sort of spirits. Tod was immeasurably astonished the following afternoon to discover that he was apparently not looked on as pariah by the crew nor held beneath contempt by Mr. McKenna. In fact, the coach was no different from usual, so far as Tod could discern!

Not realizing that discomfort under Sam Knowles' silent hazing was accountable for his lapses as a coxswain, Tod couldn't correct the trouble. He did realize, though, that something was wrong, and he became obsessed for several days by the fear that if he didn't do better mighty quick he would be deposed just as Sam had been! And he was quite certain that if such a thing happened there would remain but one thing for him to do. He would simply have to leave school. Nothing else seemed possible. One might face ordinary disgrace and eventually live it down, but to be kicked out of the coxswain's seat— He shuddered, and felt almost sympathetic toward Sam Knowles! All this affected his efficiency, and for two more days, while he avoided an offense sufficient to awaken a second storm of wrath in the coach, he displayed a listlessness, fortunately spasmodic

rather than continued, that caused Mr. McKenna to observe him more than once with puzzled countenance. I think it was lucky for Tod that before things became any worse for him on the river something happened to create a diversion.

A chance conversation between Sam Knowles and "Tub" Parrish started it. Sam had it in for Tod pretty hard, while "Tub" had regarded that youth with suspicion after their first encounter, with aversion after his playful attention to Tod had resulted in a painful descent of the steps in front of Goodman, and with active dislike subsequent to the other's selection to Old Barn. "Tub" was not especially fond of Sam Knowles, but here was a bond of sympathy. Both were willing, even anxious, to see misfortune overtake Tod Hale. Sam knew just what form he wanted misfortune to take; "Tub" wasn't at all particular as to that. With no great desire to serve Sam, but recognizing an opportunity when he saw it, "Tub" suggested a means of eliminating the interloper from not only the first boat, but from rowing altogether. Sam listened and applauded. Also he chuckled frequently. The plan held elements of humor, and Sam, when not in a dour mood, liked a joke as well as the next.

The summons to the office occasioned Tod no great uneasiness. Save as to the recent performance of his duties to the first crew, his conscience

was untroubled; and it wasn't likely that Mr. Dolson, Assistant Principal, would concern himself with crew matters. Mr. Dolson was known as "Buster." He was a thick-set man of just under fifty years, large of limb, ruddy of face, with—surprisingly—a soft, low-toned voice and a tendency to hesitancy which he overcame by frequent pauses. He was generally liked.

To reach him Tod had to pass through the Secretary's office, where one or another of the two young ladies who wrote busily on typewriters—so long as "Hinkey" was around—took his name, disappeared for an instant beyond the closed portal and then returned with the information that Mr. Dolson would see him. Mr. Dolson sat before a very large and rather empty desk reading a newspaper. At the end of the desk was an armchair into which, by invitation, Tod placed himself. Mr. Dolson, having folded his paper carefully, disengaged one large knee from the other and swung around. His gray eyes were small, but they were pleasant, even kindly, and Tod relaxed a little when he met them. Mr. Dolson placed a large, somewhat pudgy hand on each knee and leaned forward a trifle.

"Hale," he said, "I wonder if your memory is good."

Tod ventured a smile. "Not very, sir, I'm afraid."

“Good enough to . . . to recall where you were between four and . . . and six o’clock on the afternoon of . . . January sixteenth last?”

Tod looked puzzled and shook his head. “No, sir, I don’t remember that date.”

“Well, never mind. There’s an easier way to obtain the . . . the information I’m after. Have you ever been on the toboggan slide on The Hill? You know the place?”

Tod understood then, and he felt decidedly queer for a moment. He had almost forgotten all about that incident, and here it was cropping up to disconcert him at this late day! His hesitation was evident, but finally he nodded.

“Yes, sir, I’ve been there.”

“More than once?”

“No, sir, only the once.”

“Probably on the day I referred to then?”

“Yes, sir, I guess it was about that time.”

“Too bad, Hale.” Mr. Dolson sounded as if he really thought it too bad. “Did you try the slide?”

“Yes, we—I went down once. No, twice!”

“Some one invited you to . . . go down?”

“No, sir, I—one of the fellows had a toboggan and I borrowed it and took it to The Hill and slid—slided—”

“Slid will do. Were you alone?”

“No, sir. There were quite a lot of folks there.

At least thirty or forty." Tod would have elaborated further on the subject, but Mr. Dolson interrupted softly.

"I meant, did you go alone, Hale?"

Tod considered that for quite a few seconds. Then he answered, "No, sir."

Mr. Dolson waited for more, but Tod's lips were very tightly closed. Mr. Dolson nodded slightly as though recognizing that further inquiry along that line would be futile. Then: "Of course you knew that you hadn't any business going there," he said.

"Yes, I knew it was forbidden."

"Would you mind telling me, then . . . why you went? Or don't you know why?"

"I guess I know," replied Tod ruefully. "I guess I went just because I thought it would be fun to have a slide, and—and because I thought I could get away with it!"

"But you didn't!" Mr. Dolson smiled. "I'm glad you didn't tell me you went because you 'sort of forgot,' or because other fellows had done it. I've much more respect for the chap who, if he does the wrong thing, does it with his eyes open and does it courageously. It's better to be wrong than stupid, Hale. If you were . . . stupid I couldn't say that, because you'd misconstrue my . . . meaning. Well, as it happens, you very nearly did 'get away with it,' my boy. I learned

of it . . . only yesterday. Tell me, was there any one there who held a grudge against you? Any fellow . . . with whom you had quarreled?"

Tod thought, remembered "Tub" Parrish and answered hesitantly: "There was—yes, sir, I think—well, there might have been."

"Care to tell me his name?"

"I don't believe I should," replied Tod, doubtfully. "I mean, if it's going to get him into trouble, sir."

"Well, frankly, it might. Here, look at this." Mr. Dolson raised a glass paper weight, released a single sheet of paper and handed it across the end of the desk. "You don't recognize that writing, I suppose?"

The paper held some five or six lines penned in a palpably disguised writing. Not being invited to peruse the communication, Tod only glanced at it hurriedly, but even so he gathered the sense of it. "Dear sir . . . Hale, Lower Middle Class . . . toboggan slide . . . Jan. 16th . . ." There was no signature. He handed it back, shaking his head.

"No, sir, I don't. I don't believe that's his real writing."

"I'm quite certain it isn't," answered the other dryly. He was silent quite a few moments. Then: "Hale," he said, "I hate an anonymous letter like this, and I hate to act on information conveyed

in such a cowardly way. Now I don't . . . don't insist on your telling me any more than you think best. I . . . I have great respect for the code of honor you fellows hold to. . . . But, on the other hand, here's a fellow, doubtless one of our chaps, who is apparently working off a grudge against you by . . . by this . . . despicable means. I think you know who he is. If you can tell me I hope you will."

Tod squirmed in the big armchair and looked rather troubled. If only "Tub" had been a senior he could have told, but he wasn't. He was only an upper middler and had had no more right at the slide than Tod or Stuart. If he was found out he would be punished, and Tod couldn't see that, because "Tub" had informed on him, he had any right to inform on "Tub." Decent fellows didn't do that sort of thing. Besides, "Tub" had refrained from dragging Stu into the mess, and Tod could almost forgive him the rest! After a long silence he met Mr. Dolson's eyes apologetically.

"I don't believe I can, sir," he said.

"Well, that's for you to decide, Hale. And perhaps you . . . perhaps you are right. I'm not going to moralize about this. You did wrong, you knew you were doing it. You deserve punishment. If you do the same sort of thing again you'll prove yourself stupid, and I don't think you are stupid,

my boy. . . . That's all for now. I'll think this over a bit longer. I'm not quite decided . . . By the way, you're one of the crew coxswains, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, that's the hard part of it, Hale. When you go wrong you not only . . . hurt yourself, but you hurt others. Almost invariably. It will be tough luck for the crew, I suppose, if . . . if you fail them just now."

Tod's heart sank and his eyes grew round with apprehension. "Gee," he blurted, "there are plenty of ways you could punish me, sir, without doing that! 'Tisn't their fault, sir; the crew's, I mean. I—"

"But that's the silly part of incurring punishment, Hale. It's just another case of . . . of the 'innocent bystander.' You simply must consider that before you jump the fence. You . . . never know who you're going to land on! That's all for now. You'll hear from me later. Or—" Mr. Dolson paused and pursed his lips. "See me again at . . . three-thirty, Hale. Use this door, please."

He nodded, still kindly, and Tod went out into the corridor. He was thankful he didn't have to pass through the outer room just then.

The rest of the morning passed rather miserably. He wondered what his father would say if he walked into the store in a day or two. He

couldn't see himself staying on there if he failed the crew and Jack New so miserably. There were moments when he wished heartily that he hadn't been so finicky about giving "Tub's" name. After all, "Tub" had just about finished him, and why shouldn't he get back at that fat sneak? Well, he would when he saw Mr. Dolson again!

But he didn't, and afterwards he was very glad he hadn't. He had to wait in the Secretary's room until nearly a quarter to four before he was at last admitted, had to sit and watch the hands of the big clock move on and on toward the moment when he should be at the boathouse ready to take the crew out, wondering what they'd think if he didn't come! Then, at last, Mr. Dolson opened the further door himself, saw Tod and beckoned.

"I won't keep you, my boy," he said when the door had swung shut again. "You're due at the river, I guess. I've thought it over, Hale, and I'm going to turn down the page. You were frank with me, and I liked that. You refused to take a mean revenge on the writer of that scrawl. I'm going . . . to pass this over, but I want you to realize that you've had a narrow squeak. Another time—But there won't be another time, eh? You're not stupid. Let's not be stupid, my boy. Now run along." Mr. Dolson held out his pudgy hand and Tod seized it hard.

"I guess you don't know," he muttered, swallowing to keep his voice steady, "what this means, sir!"

"I think I do, Hale. I was sixteen once myself." He swung open the corridor door, smiling kindly. "And I made plenty of mistakes, too. But, thank God, I was never so stupid as to make the same one twice! You're . . . you're a crew man, Hale, so . . . you'll know what I mean when I tell you to steer a straight course."

The door was closed behind him and Tod was racing along the corridor. There was twelve minutes, the boathouse was a mile away! But he could do it, *would* do it!

Halfway there he recalled something Mr. Dolson had said and thrilled with new pleasure. "I was sixteen once myself!" Mr. Dolson thought him sixteen! Gee, that was great!

He made the boathouse with seconds to spare, arriving breathless to confront a disapproving Mr. McKenna and a jocular crowd of oarsmen. But he didn't stop to answer questions or parry gibes. He hurried inside to change. And there, the rudder of the first boat in hand, was Sam Knowles. Sam's surprise was so great and so evident that Tod knew on the instant why that anonymous note had been written. Sam's mouth fairly dropped open.

"Didn't expect me, did you?" asked Tod

harshly. "You can put that rudder down, Knowles. You won't need it to-day. Nor any other day!" Their eyes clashed. Sam recovered from his astonishment, shrugged and sneered.

"Pretty certain, aren't you? You're a fresh kid, Hale, and some fine day you're going to run into a heap of trouble!"

"Maybe, but you won't be around!"

"You take the second, Knowles," instructed the coach as he came in. "Hustle now, Hale. Get your men out. You're late already. Tom, tell that second to come back in and pick up Knowles."

"All right, First!" bawled Tod, struggling into his shoes. "Let's get her out! Snap into it, gang!"

Five minutes later, the lines in his hands and the slim shell cutting smoothly through the water, Tod knew that everything was all right with him again. You can't fear a person you hold in contempt. The spell cast upon him by Sam Knowles' antagonism had lifted. Why, Sam was just a mean little rotter!

"Come on, Crew! Lift her! Bend your backs, you loafers! Take her up! Take her up! That's the stuff! Steady, Three! Keep in the boat! Swing to it, now! *Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!*"

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE THE RACE

THE last fortnight passed quickly. Finals arrived and sadly interfered with such important affairs as baseball and rowing. One simply couldn't give whole-hearted attention to handling a sweep or swinging a bat when his days were disturbed by examinations! But Coach McKenna didn't appear to realize that, and he showed small mercy to those who, having written what they hoped was the correct answer to the last question on an examination paper twenty minutes before, now allowed their thoughts to revert to that paper with the wish that they had answered some of the questions differently. No, you had to forget everything but rowing, as difficult as that was, or get a fine bawling out from coxswain or coach, or sometimes both. But the work progressed, the first smoothed out the last kinks and rowed to hollow victories over the second and the final test of the year rushed toward them alarmingly. Tod often lay in bed after the light was out and fairly quivered with excitement and apprehension. Suppose they were beaten! The thought absolutely made his heart miss a beat! He dreamed, too; the most disturbing dreams, in which, throughout

some series of weird, wildly impossible circumstances, Nostrand was forever on the point of losing the boat race. One night Stuart awoke to hear Tod sobbing as though broken-hearted, and, after having at last aroused him, learned in answer to his questions that "they made us row in a peanut shell, and it kept sinking, and we had to pick it up all the time, and Bob couldn't run fast enough, and— Oh, gee, I guess I was dreaming!"

"I'll say you were dreaming!" replied Stuart bitterly. "Woke me out of a sound sleep, you poor prune! You and your peanut shells! Gosh, and we play Benson to-morrow—or maybe it's today now!" And Stuart climbed back into bed, still muttering.

Even Stuart was experiencing nerves just then, for he had gone through one perfectly frightful afternoon a few days before when he had not only failed to deliver a safe hit, but had let an easy bouncer go over his head and had subsequently been run down between third base and the plate, an accumulation of misfortunes sufficient to affect the stoutest heart! He was awaiting the Benson Academy game with impatience, determined to make amends. Gee, he just had to, for the first Melton game was less than a week away, and this was no time for slipping!

Tod came through examinations successfully if not brilliantly, and Stuart squeezed through by a

smaller margin. No one had offered him a reward for good marks this year, and perhaps the lack of incentive had its effect. Or perhaps it was the fact that baseball during those last two weeks of school occupied his mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. Anyhow, after an anxious two days, he and Tod learned the results and drew deep breaths of relief. That was on Tuesday, and Stuart went into the first game of the Melton series that afternoon in fine fettle. Tod didn't see that contest on the diamond, for while Nostrand was administering a defeat to the enemy he was steering the first crew up and down the Basin. Those who did see it, though, and that means practically every fellow in school except the members of the rowing squad, found plenty of suspense, plenty of excitement and, in the end, good and sufficient cause for rejoicing. It wasn't until the sixth inning that the Maroon overcame a two-run lead, and not until the ninth that she was able to make the victory certain. Then, after Melton had again gone into a one-run lead, Nostrand made a desperate attack on the opposing pitcher, filled the bases with one out and finally scored two tallies on a long sacrifice fly to right, winning the first of the encounters 8 to 7. Tod heard good words for Stuart's playing on every side that evening. In fact, Stuart himself acknowledged that he had been good!

The second game was scheduled for Friday, at Melton. In case of a tie, Nostrand would remain in the enemy's camp overnight, play the third contest Saturday morning and hurry back to Belleford in time for the Commencement exercises in the afternoon. The boat races were to be on Friday, too, at Lake Hastings, and on Wednesday morning the squad set forth in automobiles; Professor Murray, Coach McKenna, nineteen oarsmen, two coxswains, Manager Meeker and Trainer Griffen. The shells had already been shipped by rail and, since the distance was barely twenty-six miles, were awaiting the crews on their arrival, and by half-past eleven, having been borne from station to lake by the oarsmen, were once more back in their element.

Lake Hastings was a four-and-a-half-mile stretch of blue water winding gently between sloping meadows and woodland. In shape it was roughly an S, the lower loop somewhat elongated and its outer curve flanked by a tiny village whose one real street connected lake and railroad. Although its greatest width was scarcely more than half a mile, the lake provided a very satisfactory mile-and-seven-eighths straightaway, its start close to the northwestern shore and its finish just above the village. The course flags had not yet been set when the Nostrand shells took the water for the first time, but the red buoys at start and

finish were in place. There was no more than an easy paddle that forenoon, and afterwards, in a launch set aside for their use by Allsop, Coach McKenna took the coxswains and several of the crews over the course and explained its character. At the half-mile the lanes closely approached the eastern shore, and the crew having the left-hand course must be careful not to get too far over since there was quite a stretch of pickerel weed and pads there. In case of a brisk to strong westerly wind the boat would show a tendency to bear inshore, and that must be guarded against. Well past the point, however, the water deepened to from fifteen to twenty-eight feet and there were no more shoals; nor, of course, was there any current to consider. Up at the starting line Mr. McKenna pointed out a red silo that stood well up on a hillside beyond the lower curve of the lake. "Keep that over the bow of your shell," he directed, "and you won't get ten feet off your course all the way."

They put up at the Noble House, a small, old-fashioned hostelry beside the railway tracks. Even with three, and sometimes four, in a room, they practically exhausted the accommodations. Professor Murray, who taught physics to the upper classes and was known behind his back as "Mike," shared a fairly sumptuous room on the back of the old three-story building with Coach

McKenna, but the rest of the party—saving the trainer—were packed in closely. Tod had Bob Crane, Hugh Kelsey and “Ad” Sawyer for companions in a tiny compartment whose one window looked down on the roofs of a line of empty freight cars occupying a siding just beneath. Tod was glad he hadn’t drawn Sam Knowles as a roommate, however, for, while he had ceased troubling his mind about Sam, it was quite evident that Sam was still nursing the deepest sort of a grouch. They seldom spoke, and then only when Tod spoke first, and it would have been apparent to the most obtuse observer that Sam’s sentiments toward the rival coxswain were neither of good will nor amity. Not being especially obtuse, Tod didn’t have to be told that Sam Knowles was still unforgiving. But it didn’t trouble him any longer. He even felt just a bit sorry for Sam on occasions. Had he overheard some conversations between Sam and “Tub” Parrish subsequent to the, to them, inexplicable failure of their plot he wouldn’t have been nearly so sympathetic!

The squad had their meals served to them in the parlor, two long trestle tables filling the room from door to windows. The shells were housed in a small shed erected by Nostrand some years before, and Tom Griffen slept between them on a folding cot. Probably there was no necessity for this, but you couldn’t convince Tom of it. That

afternoon Melton arrived and went into quarters further along the street. At four o'clock the two Nostrand shells were out once more and an hour and a half of leisurely rowing, of several racing starts and of a hard swing down the lake, brought them back to supper with ravenous appetites. That evening Nostrand and Melton fraternized, and rather to his surprise Tod discovered that the enemy were apparently a decent lot. There was a decrepit piano in the Noble House, banished from the parlor to the office just now, and about it the fellows gathered for a half-hour before bed time. "Hat" Barron presided at the keys, and, since four of the oarsmen were Glee Club members, and several others should have been, things went very well. Coach McKenna, however, heartlessly drove them to bed at nine-thirty.

Tod missed Stuart that evening, even though so many novel and exciting things were happening, and especially when bed time arrived. He shared a wide but hard mattress with Bob Crane, and not being accustomed to a bedfellow found it difficult to get to sleep. Even when he did get drowsy there was Bob's hearty snoring to disturb him, and once a freight train came through just when he was sinking into unconsciousness and brought him wide awake with a start. For a moment he was certain that the train was entering

the hotel by the front door and running straight through the hall, and he was quite alarmed about the piano. But the freight only went past on the outside, just under the windows. Tod was convinced that there were at least a thousand cars in it, but he fell asleep before the caboose had rolled by.

The first had its first test over the course at half-past nine the next morning, at which hour no shells of the rival schools were about. Somehow the water seemed deader than in the Basin, and Tod was certain that their time must have been awfully slow. But the coach made no comment after they had sprinted over the line, and that was encouraging. Nate was not the sort to keep silent when things displeased him! They met the Allsop first crew on their way back to the boathouse and rested on their oars while they watched the light red sweeps dip and emerge. Allsop pretended that Nostrand wasn't there; scarcely turned eyes toward the stranger shells; but nevertheless Tod thought there was something a bit self-conscious in the bearing of the wisp of a coxswain as the boat swept past.

They didn't see Melton until afternoon. Then her two boats passed them as they headed down to the lower end of the lake for some starts in the secluded water beyond the hill where Allsop School stood. Melton looked tremendously power-

ful as she went slowly by, very finished. Even her second impressed Tod, and once more that vision of defeat troubled him. It was a relief when, back on shore, Captain Jack and Bob Crane and two or three more criticized the Melton crews severely. Tod took heart again. Evidently, if one judged by the talk, Melton didn't know the first thing about rowing! The coach took them for a walk that afternoon, a good "breather" of three miles, and brought them back to the hotel just in time for supper. At eight they took busses and swung around the lower end of the lake and were entertained by Allsop. Melton was also a guest, and it was a very merry evening. The Allsop Musical Clubs held forth for them, the Principal made them a little speech and the three coaches disappeared from sight and smoked much tobacco together.

Nostrand was out again in the morning for a short spin, but there was no more real work before the race. In mid-morning the three captains met and drew for courses, and Jack New won the right-hand course for the second and had to be satisfied with the middle for the first crew. The day was perfect, bright, fairly hot, with a light south-westerly breeze rippling the surface. The town began to take on a gala appearance soon after breakfast time. Cars began to arrive, the one morning train emptied its load and the rival

colors showed on every hand. Street-side refreshment stands had sprung up overnight and the invitations to partake of hot coffee, sandwiches, "hot dogs" and other delicacies mingled loudly with the honk of horns and the babel of the throng which had suddenly descended on the quiet village. The Noble House became the headquarters for the Nostrand supporters, and after the train had arrived you might have thought you were back in Belleford. Most of the school had made the trip and they wanted every one to know it! Pushing his way through the lobby on his way upstairs shortly before the dinner hour, Tod was seized upon and maltreated by so many of his friends and acquaintances that he despaired of reaching the stairway. Even "Tub" Parrish was there, "Tub" who never failed to make plain his contempt for every form of athletics save football!

The second crews were to race at three o'clock and the first at half-past. Prior to the school events several canoe races were scheduled to take place between local rivals. Of course all sorts of rumors were afloat about the hotel and throughout the village that spelled disaster to this crew or that. An immense sensation was created shortly before noon by the news—quite without foundation of fact—that Allsop had challenged the eligibility of the Melton stroke oar, one Candleless, that Nostrand had backed up Allsop and that

unless Melton displaced the objectionable rower there would be no first crew event. Still later, Bob Crane was down with typhoid fever, or some equally malignant disease, for nearly an hour, or until he appeared in the lobby on his way out from a fairly hearty repast. And another rumor, which failed to reach Tod until the evening, was to the effect that Sam Knowles was to cox the first crew in place of Hale! All of which added to the uncertainty, the excitement, the joy of the occasion.

After dinner the squad was allowed to mingle with their friends in the lobby for the most of an hour. Several times Tod encountered the fixed stare of "Tub," and once he saw the latter in earnest discourse with Sam Knowles, their elbows on the little cigar case, their bodies wedged in between the counter and the telephone booth. But Tod had no thoughts to waste on them just then; not with Steve Douglas and "Smithy" and several other of his class-mates clustered about him, questioning and fairly hanging on his words!

Finally the summons came, and Dill Meeker herded them upstairs and subsequently stood guard at the top of the flight to see that none followed unless on official business. The subsequent half-hour on their beds was the hardest task of the whole day. Talk wasn't forbidden, but it was discountenanced, and Tod lay on his back and stared at the cracked ceiling until he knew every

inch of it by heart. Downstairs, the fellows were slowly departing toward the lake to seek vantage points from which to view the races, and they were doing it with much vocal enthusiasm. Gradually the house grew quieter until presently Tod could hear the steady hum of voices from the room at the end of the corridor where Professor Murray and Mr. McKenna were doubtless engaged in an eleventh-hour conference. Bob Crane shifted protestingly beside Tod, muttered and closed his eyes again. A pestiferous fly settled on Tod's chin and buzzed indignantly when banished. The torn shade at the open window flapped maddeningly. Tod drew an arm from under his head and looked at his watch. Twenty minutes past two! It wouldn't be long now!

CHAPTER XXIII

“ARE YOU READY?”

DOWNSTAIRS, one of a score or so of occupants of the lobby, “Tub” Parrish sat tilted back in an armchair in a far corner of the bare room. “Tub” looked a little bit like a rotund spider awaiting his prey. Very still he sat, but his eyes were alert and there was an expression of sly, amused satisfaction on his round countenance. “Tub” was a boy who prided himself on his astuteness and finesse. He liked to match wits against and to outmaneuver others. He was convinced that he was a born conspirator and he spoke sometimes of selecting diplomacy as a career. The mere fact that his scheming was seldom successful made no impression on him. To-day he was in an especially happy frame of mind. Here was a task not only worthy of his best efforts but one which held an element of humor. Personally, he cared little whether Tod Hale or Sammy Knowles piloted the first crew to victory. Sam had a preference, frequently and emphatically expressed, but “Tub” wasn’t greatly interested in Sam’s desires. Just now “Tub” was attending to a little matter of his own. That in

doing it he was pleasing Sam was a matter of slight moment. They had planned it together, but Sam had been too timid to accept an active rôle and the execution of the plot had developed wholly on “Tub.” Which, in the judgment of the latter, was quite as well, since Sam was wholly lacking in the qualities which go to make up the successful conspirator. “Tub” sat and reflected on these things and waited patiently like a spider in his net. He had surveyed his ground and laid his plans. Failure seemed most unlikely. To be sure, he had failed once, but that was all the more reason why he should not fail again. And it was the main incentive for not failing. “Tub’s” reputation as a conspirator was at stake!

Upstairs feet thumped the floor, voices called. The walnut-framed clock above the office desk said twenty-eight minutes to three, but “Tub” knew that it was at least four minutes fast. The Nostrand squad came trickling down the stairway, some hilarious, the most silent and preoccupied. Few saw “Tub” in his shadowed corner. Outside, two busses, recently arrived before the entrance, began to fill. Coach McKenna and “Mike” descended the stairs, with Dill Meeker almost treading on their heels. The occupants of the lobby followed to the front windows or the doorway to watch the departure. “Tub,” too, arose at last and crossed to the hotel’s single bell-

hop, a long-nosed, sandy-haired youth of perhaps seventeen, with a retreating chin melting into the collar of his faded and spotted blue jacket. A whisper, a nod from the bell-hop, the passing into his possession of a fifty-cent piece.

Tod was just about to follow Hobe Chalmers into the last bus when the message came. The bell-hop had hold of his arm. "Is your name Hale? Well, there's a gentleman upstairs wants to see you a minute."

"What? Who is he?" demanded Tod in surprise.

"He didn't give me his name. He's one of the teachers where you come from, though."

Tod thought first of Professor Murray, but he was almost certain that he had seen the Professor getting into the first bus, which was now moving off down the street. Then he thought of "Gus." Mr. Borrow was there, for he had caught a glimpse of him on the street before dinner. Perhaps he wanted a last word before the race, wanted to give advice. Tod's hesitation was brief. "I'll be back in a second," he called to Hobe, who had reached out to pull him into the seat. Then he hurried behind the bell-hop into the lobby, up the stairs, along the corridor to the next flight, up those and down the third-floor hall, past the doors of deserted rooms. The guide went to the last door of all, knocked and threw it open.

Tod stepped inside. Behind him the door swung quickly, almost soundlessly, shut, and the key was turned on the outside, withdrawn and slipped into a pocket of a pair of shiny blue trousers. Then the bell-hop, grinning with self-congratulation, sped back to the lobby to receive the other half of that promised dollar. What it was all about he didn't know. All he did know was that these preparatory school fellows were always playing tricks on each other, and that he was earning two fifty-cent pieces.

In the lobby “Tub” emerged momentarily from obscurity behind the cigar case and looked an inquiry. The bell-hop nodded and “Tub” waved toward the waiting bus. The former returned to the sidewalk. “He says not to wait,” he announced to the impatient occupants at large. “He's coming along in a few minutes.”

“He's crazy,” exclaimed Jake Rollins. “What's he think—”

“Go ahead,” advised another, and Dill Meeker made the advice official. “All right, driver! Say, boy, you tell him to start along inside of two minutes or I'll scalp him!”

The bus jerked into motion, the bell-hop grinned after it and “Tub,” watching from his post inside, smiled in triumph. A minute later he wandered unhurriedly out, mingled with the thin

stream of late spectators and made his way to the scene of action.

Ten minutes past, fifteen. Then one of the town's two taxicabs pulled up in front of the hotel and Dill Meeker leaped forth, collided with an inoffensive commercial traveler who was entering the hostelry and presented himself breathlessly at the desk. "Say," he demanded anxiously, "has that fellow Hale gone yet?"

The clerk, extracting a rusty pen from the half of a raw potato preparatory to handing it to the drummer, looked both surprised and at a loss. But the bell-hop had still a line of his part to recite. "Yes, sir, he left more than ten minutes ago, I guess."

"Did he walk?"

"Well, he started from here walking. Yes, sir."

"My great gosh!" Dill bounded off the corner of the counter, grazed the door and flung himself back into the taxi. "Beat it back!" he shouted. "And step on it, too!"

Back at the boathouse, Dill asked his question for the tenth time. But, no, Hale hadn't been seen! The second shell was already almost up at the starting line and the first, minus its coxswain, hung at the little float. Coach McKenna looked grim as he glanced again at his watch. The crew looked disturbed and anxious. Tom

Griffen, kneeling beside the shell, holding Number Five oar, expressed disgust loudly.

“Cold feet, that’s his trouble,” he declared. “The kid’s got scared. No use waiting for him, Coach. He ain’t coming. Likely he’s on his way back to Belleford by now. Better let ’em go up, sir. And better go on up yourself. It’s twelve minutes to the time, sir.”

The coach nodded. “Hold them here five minutes longer, Tom. If he hasn’t shown up by then let Kent take his place to the start. Keep well over to the right of the course on the way up, Kent, out of the way of the second crews.” Mr. McKenna and Dill swung aboard the launch and that small but speedy craft set off after the second shell.

Left behind, the first discussed the matter volubly but without arriving at a satisfactory decision. Some agreed with Tom’s verdict, but most refused to believe that the coxswain had voluntarily deserted them. “The kid isn’t yellow,” said Jack New stoutly. “He may be sick, but it looks sort of funny to me. You say some one of the faculty called him out of the coach, Hobe?”

“That’s what the bell-boy said. Some one wanted to see him in the hotel. He went in and a minute afterward sent word we weren’t to wait, that he’d be right along.”

“Funny stunt,” muttered Jack, shaking his

head. "Better start us along, Sim. Time's about up."

They did start after another minute or so and paddled away from the float to the cheers of a bunch of Nostrand rooters lining the shore near by. Boats and canoes flocked about the finish line and extended, in thinning ranks, well beyond the middle of the course. Colors were liberally displayed, the red of Allsop predominating, Melton's gray-and-gold and the Nostrand maroon struggling for second place. An official—and officious—cedar launch patrolled the course, warning off too adventurous canoes and winning derisive applause. Across the water, the Allsop first crew was being taken to the start in a big motor boat, the shell trailing astern. Sim Kent hugged the border of the lane, and the eight broad-shouldered, lean-bodied oarsmen in their white shirts and maroon hats went up the lake to an accompaniment of clapping and sporadic cheers. The second crews got away before the first was quite to the halfway flags, and, as they came down, the excitement traveled ahead of them from boat to boat of the anchored craft. Sim Kent steered the shell alongside a big launch and the fellows rested on their oars and watched the oncoming crews.

Allsop was leading as the shells drew abreast, but only by a half length, with Melton next and

Nostrand a good two lengths astern. But the order was changing even then. Melton crept up and up, the oarsmen hitting a stroke that must have been close to forty. Allsop accepted the challenge and increased her stroke as well. For a moment or two the shells ran bow and bow, but then the yellow-tipped oars pushed the nose of the Melton craft ahead and with the next twenty strokes gained a half-length lead. Nostrand, too, had answered the challenge and had decreased the lead of the next boat to not more than a length and three-quarters. It was evident, however, that she was not going to win. Number Five was splashing, and there was a perceptible roll as she went by to the frenzied shouts of the first.

The three shells swept down toward the distant finish line, the launches swirling along behind, the blatant horns of automobiles announcing their approach. Viewing from astern, as the first took up its leisurely journey again, it was impossible to judge of the relative positions of the shells even when the flotilla of pursuing launches allowed sight of them. The first agreed, however, that Melton was sure of the race. Presently a louder pandemonium of sound from down the lake announced the end of the race, but not until the first of the launches had returned to the starting line was the result known.

“Melton won by about a length and three-quar-

ters," shouted some one in the committee boat. "Nostrand was second by half a length over Allsop! Don't know the time yet!"

Well, second place was better than third, and the Nostrand first crew gave a cheer for their mates. One after another, the launches came chugging back, that in which Mr. McKenna sat coming to a pause near the Nostrand shell. The coach's gaze traveled along the boat. "You didn't find him, eh?" he asked. Jack New shook his head. "Didn't turn up, sir." "Well, work up alongside and take Knowles in." The shell jockeyed into position and Sim Kent yielded his seat to Sam. Then they pushed off again and sat there quietly in the sunlight while the coach issued his final admonitions. On shore a small gathering of spectators cheered impartially. The minutes went very slowly to some of the occupants of the three shells. Finally Allsop, having boated, paddled across and worked the stern of her shell to the right-hand stake boat. Nostrand jockeyed into the next position, and Melton, who, like the Maroon, had come up the lake under her own steam, paddled to the left-hand lane. The referee's launch chugged slowly up, reversed and stopped. The official spoke through a small megaphone and the crews listened silently to his instructions. The voice stopped and the shells straightened out, an oar here and there touching

the water gently under the direction of a coxswain. The launches chugged noisily some distance back, ready to be off in the wake of the shells. Then: “*Are you ready?*” called the referee. Slides traveled backward, long oars hung over the water. Then a pistol shot rang out.

CHAPTER XXIV

“ROW!”

TOD gazed in surprise about the room, dimly aware that the door had closed behind him. Before him was a bureau set across the corner of the room, between two windows, a wooden bed and two chairs. A second bed stood at his left and a washstand at his right. The beds had been made, but the room was still untidied, for a newspaper was strewn on the floor by a window and burnt matches littered the stained towel spread on the bureau. But all this interested Tod little. What did interest him, and puzzle him, was that the place was empty save for himself!

After an instant he hurried across to a door and pulled it open. As he had expected it to, it revealed a closet instead of an adjoining room. Even then he didn't suspect the truth. Some one, he thought, had made a mistake. Or perhaps the occupant had tired of waiting and had gone downstairs before he had come up. In any case he must not keep the others waiting. He turned the knob of the door into the corridor and pulled. It resisted his effort, and, in a sudden panic, he tugged frantically but to no avail. The house was old and

the door was thick and solid. He pounded then, and shouted. After a moment he stopped to listen. No sound came to him save through an open window, a sound of distant motor horns.

He realized then that he had been tricked, but he wasted no time in contemplating the fact. He thought of communicating with the office downstairs and recalled that neither telephones nor bells were provided for the convenience of the guests. At the Noble House if you wanted a towel or a pitcher of water you went to the stairwell and shouted. Or you descended and made your wants known more quietly. Tod delivered a few kicks and shouted again as loudly as he knew how. Presently, of course, they'd become impatient of waiting and come in search.

But minutes passed without rescue. Irritation gave place to dismay. It was already twenty-four minutes to three and he knew that it was planned to have the first crew leave the boathouse at a quarter of and paddle slowly to the starting place. Why didn't they come? Panic returned and he assaulted the unyielding panels of the door with fists and feet. Had there been any one else on that floor his clamor would have been heard and, doubtless, investigated, but the rooms were empty. He ceased after a minute, walked to a chair and sat down. If he didn't reach the boathouse within the next few minutes he would be left be-

hind. That would mean that Sam Knowles would cox both crews. Unless, having escaped imprisonment, he could somehow manage to reach the far end of the lake before half-past three. Whether Sam had had a hand in the plot didn't seem at all important just then. What he had to do was find a way out of that room, and quickly!

He went to the side window. Below were the tracks, a line of box-cars strung along the siding. The street was not visible past the tall trees that flanked it save where the two lines of track crossed. Tod watched for a pedestrian, ready to shout if he saw one. But none appeared. The yards of the three houses in the immediate vicinity were likewise deserted save for a dog and an occasional hen. The other window presented even a less hopeful outlook. Below was a space littered with old cases and discarded cans and like débris. No living person met his gaze. However, he shouted lustily several times but got no answering hail. He turned away then and regarded the door darkly. It would be useless to attempt to break through those heavy panels with anything in sight. The chairs would be demolished at the first blow, and nothing else offered as a battering-ram. Unless Tod Hale. Well, that was an idea! He went to the edge of the bed, ran forward and crashed shoulder-first against the door. It didn't even budge! All that happened was a severe sense of affliction in the region of the shoulder!

He stood off, nursing the injury, and racked his brains for a solution. Then he remembered that he had heard of locks being picked with a piece of bent wire. But he had no wire, so that scheme was discarded. It was a quarter of three now. Of course the bus had long since departed without him. He went back to the side window and took up his vigil, shouting "Hallo!" at intervals, varying it with "Help!" and watching the small section of street. The idea of dropping from the sill to the top of the freight car immediately below came to him, but he knew it wasn't practicable to try it. Even if he landed on the roof of the car he would very probably break something important, like an arm or a leg, and be of as little use as a coxswain as he was this minute. And the chances were that he wouldn't land on the car at all, but would fall between it and the wall. He gave that up after some consideration. But he continued to shout at intervals, even though convinced now that shouting was idle. Every one in the town, he concluded, was either asleep or had gone to the lake!

It began to dawn on him about then that he was not destined to steer the first to victory that day, and he felt very badly, so badly that the tears came to his eyes and leaked onto his cheeks before he knew what was happening. He sat down on the bed, applied his handkerchief, sniffed a few times and was a bit ashamed of himself. But

being ashamed didn't help much. The tears continued to threaten. The minutes passed. The screeching of automobile horns became louder than ever. He wondered what the fellows were thinking of him; what Coach McKenna thought; and Jack; especially Jack. Maybe they believed he had deliberately run away; had become frightened or played traitor! But, no, they couldn't think that of him. Probably they had searched for him while there had been time. But if they had why hadn't they found him? Unless—yes, that was it. The bell-hop had been in the plot! He wished he could see that bell-hop for a minute! Anger took the place of self-pity then, and suddenly he was in the midst of a veritable passion of rage, rage against Sam Knowles, against that fat, smirking "Tub," but especially against the bell-hop! Somehow the bell-hop seemed the principal offender, and Tod longed intensely to reach him. He vented his anger in futile kicks at the bed, driving that innocent article of furniture against the wall. Still unappeased, he hurled a pillow across the room, seized a handful of a down-turned sheet and—

And stopped suddenly, open-mouthed, cold and disgusted. All this time the means of escape had been before his eyes and he had never seen it! Muttering self-revilement, he stripped the bed-

ding to the floor, pulled loose the sheets and began feverishly to tie them together at the corners.

The clatter of oarlocks followed so swiftly on the *crack* of the referee's pistol that the sounds almost merged. Sweeps dug into the water, emerged dripping and flashing, the barks of the coxswains vied in shrillness and the three shells leaped forward. Behind, the launches churned the water and started after. Melton had the better of the start, and, after the first frenzied effort had subsided, was a dozen feet ahead of the other boats. "Lengthen out! Steady, Crew!" bawled the cox. "Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!" Turmoil and churning water, and then, as sharp above the confusion of sound as the starting gun, the snap of an oar!

Confusion reigned for an instant in the Allsop shell, where Number Three's oar had broken short above the blade. The coxswain yelped and the sweeps stopped. The referee's pistol barked the recall. Melton and Nostrand, lapping by half their lengths, ceased rowing. Launches, piling down behind the shells, veered right and left, propellers churning in reverse. Disorder had its way, and then the scene was gradually set again. It was, however, ten minutes before the three shells were again backed up to the stake-boats and the Allsop Number Three had been supplied with

a new sweep. Nostrand and Melton muttered disgust, for the latter had got away to a fine start and the former, though she had been slower in leaving the line, had been pulling even when the accident occurred. The referee, pistol in hand, was raising his megaphone once more when the Melton coach drew his attention to a launch chugging up the lake directly in the center of the course.

“Better wait till that fellow gets out of the way, sir! He’s kicking up a good deal of a swell.”

“Where’s the police boat?” demanded the referee irritably. The police boat answered for itself. It dashed into sight below the trespasser and headed after it at full speed. Up at the start they could hear faintly the challenge. But the first launch, although slow, seemed to think she could escape by keeping on, for she neither stopped, slowed nor changed her course. The police launch overtook her with a rush, and the two traveled together for a hundred yards or so. Then, to the surprise of the officials at the starting line, the police boat fell off, turned and disappeared, while the intruder came chugging slowly, stolidly, on. The referee glared and muttered; the crews, dipping an occasional blade, kept their shells straightened and waited impatiently. Slowly the little gray launch approached, the labored *pug-pug* of her exhaust sounding louder and louder. An automobile a

hundred yards below set up a protesting clamor. And then Dill Meeker broke the silence in the Nostrand launch.

“That’s Hale in the bow, Coach!” he exclaimed.

Mr. McKenna looked, nodded and raised his megaphone toward the referee’s craft. “One of our men, Mr. Referee,” he called. “I’ll go down and meet him if I may.”

“Keep your place, Mr. Coach!” bawled the official. “You can’t change your men after a race has started! You ought to know that as well as I!”

“He’s not an oarsman,” replied Mr. McKenna imperturbably. “He’s our regular cox. He was delayed and we had to come up here without him.”

“It’s most irregular,” said the referee grudgingly, “but if there’s no objection from the committee, or from the other crews—”

“All right here, sir,” called the Allsop captain.

“We don’t object,” added Melton.

The Nostrand launch got in motion, skirted the lanes and hurried down to the gray motor-boat. In the Nostrand shell Sam Knowles clenched his fists about the tiller lines and thought perfectly unutterable things of “Tub” Parrish. He kept his emotions from showing, however, or tried to, but Bob Crane wasn’t deceived. “Hard luck,

Sammy," he said, grinning. "Something slipped, eh?"

"I don't know anything," declared Sam indignantly. "Don't blame me if Hale acts the fool!"

Bob winked. "Tell it to Sweeney, kid! You know a lot, I'll bet!"

Sam glared, but his gaze wavered and he set about unstrapping his megaphone. Further down, the two launches met, rubbed rails for a moment, and a slim youth in rowing shirt, shorts and a maroon hat shook hands hastily with the owner of the gray craft and slid into the other boat, his street attire bundled under one arm. The launches parted company and the Nostrand craft sped back toward the line, four heads close together in the bow. What passed between Tom and "Mike," Nate and Dill, in the minute or two while the launch skirted the shells and came nosing up behind, can only be surmised, but the coach looked quite satisfied as he raised his megaphone and spoke quietly through it.

"Work your stern up to the launch, Knowles," he instructed. "Easy now! Take your time! Way enough! Hold her! Snap out of it, Knowles. All right, Hale, take her down and push her in ahead!"

"Wal, what kep yer?" drawled Bert Safford as Tod eased into the tiny seat.

"Circumstances," answered Tod briefly, an-

swering the smiles of the others with a fleeting grin. “Ready all! Paddle!” He laid his megaphone on his knees and held the lines. “Steady! Back water, port side. Steady! Touch her, Seven. Steady! Back water, all! Way enough!”

Once more at the stake boat, he slipped the megaphone into place, shifted his small body a little on the seat, closed his hands firmly on the lines and dropped elbows to body. Jack New was speaking from the waist. “Let’s do a lot better this time, gang. That was a pretty rotten start we made. When you get the pistol, *dig!*”

“Eyes in the boat!” cautioned Tod.

“Are you all ready?” called the referee.

“*Forward!*”

An eternity of suspense, and then—

Crack!

“*Row! Row! Row! Row! Row! Pick her up, Nostrand! Get into it, Ted! Come on, come on!*” The quiet water broke into swirls, splashed from frantic blades. Oarlocks banged and rattled, slides creaked and twenty-four straining sweeps bit savagely, as the three shells dashed away. “Good work, Bob!” applauded Tod. “Let her down a bit! *Five! Five!* Lengthen that stroke! Now, fellows, take her down! Let’s get there! Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!”

Nostrand led by a few feet. Melton, settling into a steady thirty-two, had nearly a half-length

on Allsop. The latter had made a poor get-away. There was no mishap this time. Behind, the launches eased in their clutches and followed, the referee leading, the others strung across the course some thirty yards astern. The first line of flags swept up, fell past, bobbing in the oar swirls. Allsop was making a plucky effort to close the gap, but there was ragged rowing in the red boat and the distance gradually lengthened. Tod, above the steady rattle of oarlocks, could hear the Allsop coxswain imploring: "*Get the time, Crew! Get the time! Four! Six! You're late! Watch the stroke! Don't let 'em get away from you! Oh, steady in the boat!*"

Tod glanced to the left and admired unwillingly. Like so many parts of a smoothly running machine the Melton oarsmen bent and unbent rhythmically, oars went under together, emerged flashing, skimmed the water, disappeared again in perfect unison. There was surely power in that boat, power and skill and brave hearts. Tod's own heart sank a little at the realization. Surely no crew, not even Nostrand's, could row down those fellows! Yet the maroon-tipped oars were holding their own, thirty-two strokes to the minute against thirty-two. He was still in line with the Melton Number Seven; even a little past him. The mile flags were in sight now, though still distant. The coach had said: "You won't have to

worry about Allsop. She'll row herself out before the last half-mile. The race will be between you and Melton, Hale. Watch her. Keep the stroke long and don't let her flurry you. If she hits it up, follow her but don't clip your stroke. The race will come in the last half-mile, maybe the last quarter. Be ready then to shoot the works! Put in everything you've got, son, and remember that no matter how tired your crew is the other fellow's bound to be just as bad. If you can keep your men together and make them pull through clean to the last stroke you'll win the race."

Well, the last half-mile was a long way off yet, he thought. If only Bob Crane could keep the stroke as it was, though, they might go into the final struggle on fairly even terms. But, no, that wasn't so, either, for more than Bob must keep those long sweeps swinging back and forth, in and out. Bob might do his part, but there were seven others to answer him, and if even one failed—

"Bow! Watch the stroke! That's you, Three! You're rushing your slide! Steady forward! We're holding 'em, Crew! Keep it up and keep it long! Make 'em all good, gang! That's rowing!"

But Melton was edging up suddenly. Tod saw her Number Seven creep well into sight and past. What was wrong? The enemy hadn't hit up

her stroke. Was Nostrand failing so early? "They're creeping up, Bob! Can you hold 'em?" Stroke glanced aside and answered with an untroubled glance. Beyond him, Ted Mann was plainly distressed but still pulling a clean oar. Tod watched him anxiously. Ted's lips curled back at each pull as though he were in pain. Melton came even, drew slowly ahead across some forty feet of swirling water. Horns and cheers encouraged from each side of the wide lane now. Allsop had recovered her form to some extent and was nosing the Nostrand stern on the right. The mile flags were just ahead.

It was then that Melton hit it up to thirty-six. "*Take her away! Take her away!*" screamed the coxswain. "*Three! . . . Four! . . . Five! Half a length! . . . Six! . . . Seven! . . . Eight! Row, Melton! . . . Nine! . . . Ten! . . .*"

Tod looked anxiously, almost imploringly, at Bob Crane, but Bob held on at thirty-two, putting, however, just a bit more drive into the long strokes. Tod's gaze traveled ahead to Ted Mann. Ted was himself again, it seemed. The Melton shell worked slowly, almost imperceptibly, past. Tod could see the stroke's lean face now under the gray hat, the knife-like stern of the boat as it edged away. Why, oh, why didn't Bob pick it up? The red distance flags crept by. "*Mile!*" he

called. “*Last lap, fellows! Keep it up! Steady, Five! Keep your hands down!*”

Then: “*Come on!*” gasped Bob, and, “*Hit it up! Hit it up!*” cried Tod. “*Let’s go, Nostrand! Row! . . . Row! . . .*”

Allsop answered the challenge, too, and came on hard, the slender shell rolling badly, however. Melton still held her lead, but she didn’t increase it. Not more than three-quarters, thought Tod hopefully. Bob Crane was up to thirty-six now and the crew were answering gallantly, but the old tendency to shorten under stress of speed showed itself, and Tod had to caution again and again. Kelsey, at Bow, was plainly tuckered, and so was Tony Friel, further back, and the starboard side was being outpulled, but the shell still rowed on an even keel. In the Melton shell the strain was telling, too, for there was splashing on the other side, at the waist, and the cox was scolding stridently. Melton went back to a thirty-four stroke and Nostrand eased a bit, too. About them as they neared the last half-mile of water the din of horns and shouting arose from either side of the lane. Tod watched for the mark; and he watched the rival stroke, as well. Presently Melton would sprint, perhaps at the beginning of the final half, perhaps still later. But why allow her to choose the moment? Why not be the aggressor? It

seemed the height of cruelty to demand more of the crew, but he knew that they must give more before the race was over; and knew that they knew it, too. He spoke softly to the megaphone.

“Here’s the mile and three-eighths, Bob! Only a half more! Let’s dig out of it. It’s got to come. Why not get the jump on ’em?”

Bob went back on his slide, caught, strained until the muscles of arms and neck swelled like great cords, finished, swept his oar forward again. Then: “Right!” he grunted. “But not . . . quite yet. . . . Count . . . ten strokes!”

“*Get together! Give me ten hard ones! Come on! Drive her! One! Row! . . . Two! Row! . . . Three! Row! . . .*”

“*Pick her up!*” barked the Melton cox. Behind, nearly two lengths behind now, the Allsop crew responded to the demands of a frantic voice, and made a last despairing effort to close the widening gap. That was the Red’s final challenge. From then on to the end she fell further and further astern. Rowing still at thirty-four, Bob led his mates through ten hard, well-finished strokes, and the Nostrand boat’s bow crept up to the waist of the Melton shell. And then there was an answering nod from the Stroke to Tod’s silent inquiry, and Tod raised his voice.

“*Now!*” he cried vibrantly. “*Get into it, Nostrand! Let’s go! Steady all and pull it through hard! Hit it up!*”

Up went the stroke to thirty-six, and Melton followed, floundering a moment in her hurry, but soon steadying. Bob's slide traveled faster and faster. Thirty-seven! Thirty-eight! The shell fairly leaped through the water, but Melton was still at least even, though from the coxswain's seat it was hard to judge. The half-mile dwindled fast. They were on the last quarter now. There was splashing in both boats, ragged rowing aplenty, but courage and determination to win had nowhere faltered. Tod was dimly aware of the crowding boats along the course, of the incessant cheering, but his thoughts were on those red flags ahead. He was talking now, encouraging, pleading, scolding in a breath.

“We've got 'em! Keep it up! Almost there! Three! Don't give up! You quitter, you! Four! You're late! Two, pull it through! Don't weaken now! I tell you we've got 'em! We're going past! Come on! Come on, Nostrand! Row! . . . Row! . . .”

They were going past! They were gaining at every stroke! Already the waist of the Melton shell was out of Tod's range of vision. And there, sweeping toward them, was the finish line, the white Judge's boat, the converging flotilla of pleasure craft.

“Ten more!” he yelled. *“Ten hard ones! We're winning! Keep it hard!”*

“Come on!” groaned Jack New.

Bob Crane, faltering now, but still game, made a brave struggle to hit the stroke up another notch, but that was beyond him. His head was rolling and his eyes were half closed. All up and down the shell weary bodies were swaying badly at each recovery. But the Melton oarsmen were in even sorrier plight. Their shell was rolling and the perfect stroke of the beginning of the race was gone. Water fairly geysered along the sides. The nose of the Melton shell dropped back and back. Tod watched it from the corner of his eye, still counting, still straining forward as though his slim legs could push the boat ahead. A moment, a long moment, of suspense, and then the rival shell was gone from sight, and:

“*Eight! . . . Nine! . . . Ten! . . . Row! . . . Row! . . . Row!*” he cried exultantly. “Two more! . . . One! . . .”

A whistle burst shrilly on his ears, and:

“*Let her run!*” he called weakly, and slumped forward on to Bob’s knees.

Cheers, the *toot-toot-tooting* of motor horns, the gasping words of the crew came to him as sounds from a distant world. Then a voice said: “*A length and a quarter!*” and he pulled himself erect, found the lines still in his numbed hands and called sternly: “*Heads up! Don’t let them think you’re tired!*”

“Six to four,” babbled Stuart, some three hours later. “They couldn’t touch Whitmore! And I got two corking hits, and—”

“Listen,” commanded Tod coldly. “Have you heard anything about a boat race that came off this afternoon? Yes? Well, then, why babble of trifles? Boy, *that* was a *victory!*”

“All right,” said Stuart grudgingly. “Two victories then. Let us celebrate!” And so, being only lower middlers and therefore irresponsible and lacking in dignity, they marched out into the corridor and gave three long cheers for Nostrand! *Nostrand!! NOSTRAND!!!*

THE END

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TOM SLADE PICKS A WINNER

TOM SLADE AT BEAR MOUNTAIN

TOM SLADE: FOREST RANGER

TOM SLADE IN THE NORTH WOODS

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK
