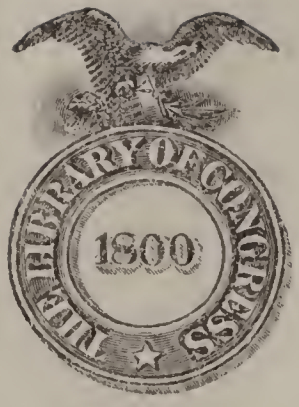
# THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER

WILLIAM HEYLIGER



# THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER

By WILLIAM HEYLIGER

THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER
DAN'S TOMORROW
HIGH BENTON
HIGH BENTON—WORKER

*Fairview Series*

CAPTAIN FAIR AND SQUARE
THE COUNTY PENNANT
FIGHTING FOR FAIRVIEW

*St. Mary's Series*

BARTLEY, FRESHMAN PITCHER
BUCKING THE LINE
STRIKE THREE!
THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE
AGAINST ODDS
OFF SIDE

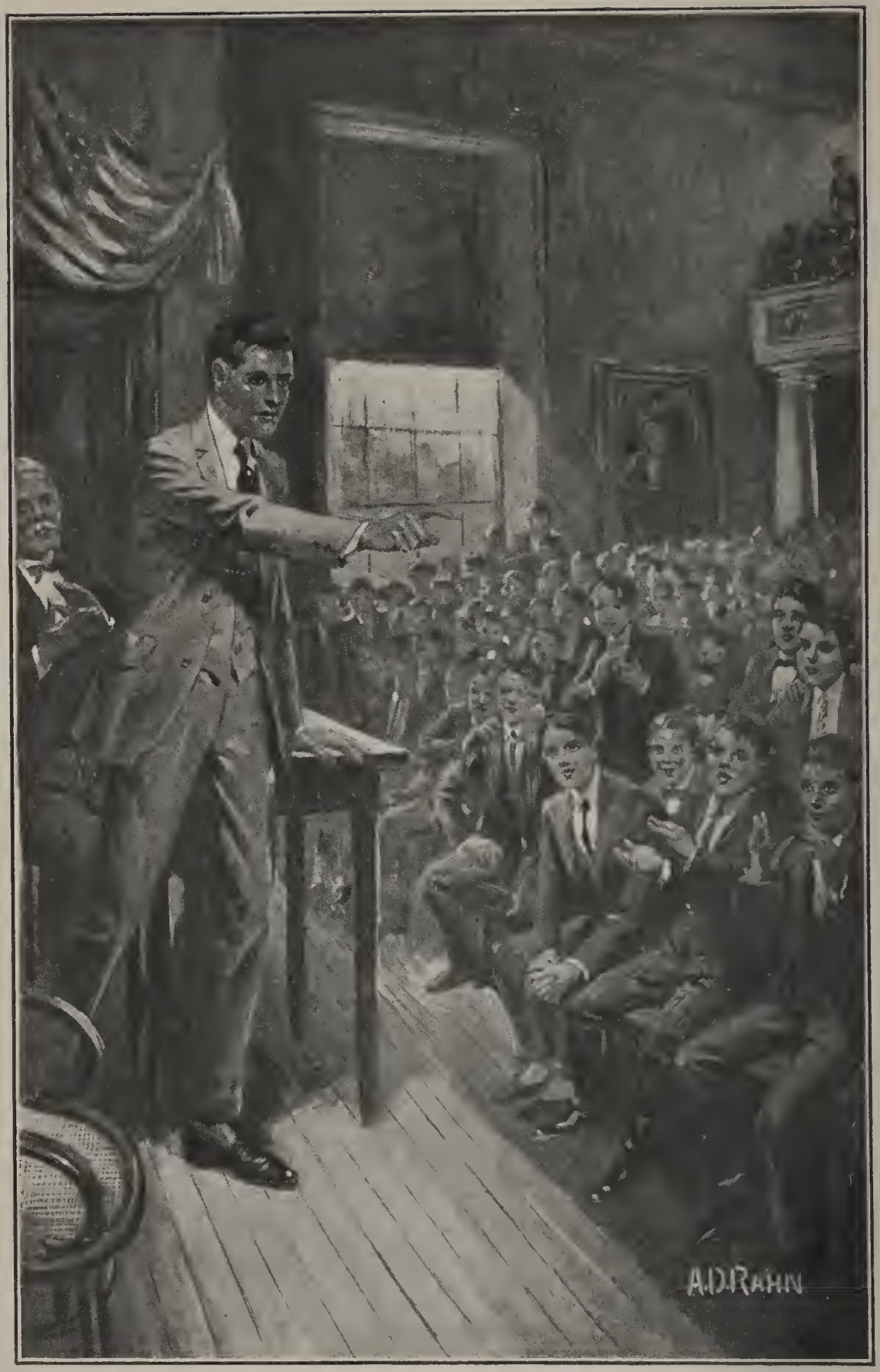
*Boy Scouts Series*

DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL
DON STRONG, PATROL LEADER
DON STRONG, AMERICAN

*Lansing Series*

JOHNSON OF LANSING
BATTER UP
QUARTERBACK RECKLESS
FIVE YARDS TO GO
THE WINNING HIT
FAIR PLAY
STRAIGHT AHEAD

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
New York London




"FELLOW STUDENTS OF NORTHFIELD HIGH—" PRASKA BEGAN.

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# THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER

BY

WILLIAM HEYLIGER

AUTHOR OF "HIGH BENTON," "DAN'S TO-MORROW," "DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL," ETC.


D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK : : 1923 : : LONDON

TO

GORDON K. DICKINSON, M.D.

MY FRIEND

# CONTENTS

# THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER

## CHAPTER I

### HOME ROOM 13

NAMES are peculiar things. Sometimes they fit—sometimes they do not. Sight unseen, one would have suspected that George Praska would be given to turning things over slowly in his mind, seriously and deliberately; a short, stocky youth with something about him of the football build. The speculator would have been right. George's mental processes were dogged, not brilliant. For two years he had played right guard for Northfield High School. Opposing elevens had found him a massive rock that could neither be pushed back nor flanked. Coaches sent their teams out with instructions to "let that Praska alone. It's only wasting a down."

Perry King, on the other hand, belied the

promise of his name. By all the pictures that names suggest he should have been tall, fair-haired, dashing and magnetic. Instead he was thin and dark and funereal of aspect, an ungainly boy running mostly to gangling shanks and given to unexpected, impish outbursts of mischief.

And yet, the two were friends, drawn together by their very contrasts. To George, slow of speech, Perry's wit and flippant tongue were qualities as baffling as they were sometimes alluring. To scrawny Perry, George's solid strength was something to be worshipped as personally unattainable. Perry referred to the football guard as "the Northfield ox." George called Perry "the human string-bean." They got along famously, as opposites sometimes do.

That summer carpenters and plasterers entered the high school, and did not leave until the week before school opened. Perry, who had gone off to a camp immediately after the June examinations, came back to find an added story on the school building.

"What's the idea?" he asked George Praska. "Town been growing while I've been away?"

George gave a slow smile. The thought of rapid growth for Northfield impressed him as a fine example of Perry's humor. "Home rooms," he said.

Now Perry knew something about the home room idea in high schools; but on the moment his impish brain set out upon mischief. Into his face came a well-acted look of incredulity.

"What?" he demanded. "Home runs? How can they teach that in school? Of course, we could stand some home runs. Last spring's nine was awful. But who's going to hit them? How can you teach home run hitting?"

Praska looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, who is?" Perry demanded again. "The nine didn't hit a single home run last season."

George assumed that Perry had made an honest mistake.

"Home r-o-o-m-s," he said patiently. "Everybody in school will be assigned to a room. It will be his room until his days in the school are over. Each room will have something of the motto of the *Three Musketeers*: 'All for one and one for all.' Every fellow will have to be true to his room, and do things for it, and fight for it——"

Perry's look was appealingly innocent. "Where?"

"Where what?"

"Where will the fights be held? In the gym?"

"Fights?" All at once a dry smile wrote itself

unwillingly across the football guard's lips. "Up to your old tricks. Don't you ever take anything seriously? That home room plan is going to be a big thing. You'll like it."

Perry yawned. "I hope so. I've always had an idea that some day I'd find something I could like at Northfield. How's football going to run this fall?"

"We'll be there with a team," Praska said calmly. "But we've got to elect a new manager."

"What happened to Crandall?" Perry demanded.

"Family moved away. Things will be a bit unsettled, I guess, until the new manager is elected."

"When will that be, George?"

"Oh, about a week after school opens."

"Any—any candidates?"

"Not yet."

"Well—" They had been walking and had come to a corner where their ways parted. "You just tell 'em, George, that I'm ready to start managing any time they say the word."

Praska, after a moment, began to laugh. "More of your jokes," he said. "Only I know you so well, you old string-bean, I'd have thought you meant it. Good-night!"

Perry had meant it. All his life he had wor-

shipped strength and brawn as only the thin weakling can. Football, baseball, and basket ball players had been his heroes and his earthly gods.

The first year at Northfield he had turned out for all three sports. Baseball and basketball had given him the routine of a trial; football had not even considered him. The second year he had merely played the part of a loyal rooter. He had studied football rules in the hope that it might be his good fortune to invent a play that would save the bitter end of some disastrous season. He had learned to box-score a ball game in the hope that the gods might smile on him and lead him to the throne of Official Scorer. In his infatuation with all that stood for speed and stamina, skill and endurance, he had called himself blessed if he could be linesman or foul chaser, guardian of an honored sweater or custodian of the water bucket.

And now the place of manager of the eleven was open! Last fall, when Crandall had been selected, Perry was a sophomore and had not given the place a thought. By custom the manager's berth always went to a junior or senior. But now he was eligible—he who had followed the team through two seasons without missing a game; he who had carted sweaters, minded

watches and rings, and sat loyally and dutifully through the halves come wind, or rain, or snow.

His heart gave a queer sort of flutter. Hunger for the associations the manager's place would give him caused him to feel a choking in the throat. After a time he tried to analyze his chances calmly. His record as a rooter was good. He could count on Praska because—because——. He paused right there; the flutter in his heart suddenly turned to pain. Praska had laughed at him.

He tried to tell himself that the football guard had not understood. When Praska, really knew ——. He swallowed a lump in his throat. Nobody had taken him seriously when he had turned out as a football candidate. Nobody had taken him very seriously when he had answered the call for baseball and basketball candidates. It might be, he thought in fright, that nobody would take him seriously even now.

It did not dawn upon him that he himself had created this atmosphere of foolery so fatal to his own consideration. He had elected to play the uproarious joker; and the school had come to accept him at his own valuation. Now, all at once, he began to fear to tell members of the eleven of his candidacy. And the thing he feared was

something he had been courting through two years at Northfield High—laughter.

When school opened he came back to his studies wearing the old air of mockery. But now it was a mask to hide a hurt.

The morning was given over to getting the school settled to a new routine. For the first period of the afternoon Perry was booked for English V. He went there directly from the school cafeteria in the basement. A group of boys stood near the windows discussing home rooms. A sudden imp of perversity moved him to make sport of what all Northfield was taking soberly.

"Did you hear the big things they're going to do?" he asked casually.

He had their interest on the instant. And yet, with true dramatic instinct, he held them on the hooks of suspense. He brushed a crumb from his coat; he whistled a snatch of song; he began to study a paper he took from his pocket.

"Well, what's the big news?" a voice asked impatiently.

"Oh!" Perry folded the paper and put it away. "I thought perhaps you knew. Each room will be a club. We'll give dances, and tournaments, and—and have a clam-bake in the spring."

Mr. Quirk, who taught English V, came down

between two aisles of desks to discover the cause of the commotion that seemed to revolve around a six-foot boy who stood importantly in its midst.

"Perry's been telling us about the home room plans," said a voice; "about the dances, and the tournaments and the clam-bakes."

"And *what?*" the teacher asked.

"Clam-bakes, sir."

"King said that?" Mr. Quirk seemed struggling with something that became a queer sort of strangling cough. "So King said——" Again he was seized with that strange attack and went up the room to his desk holding a handkerchief to his face.

"English teachers," Perry said in a guarded voice, "get that way sometimes. It's a disease of the vocal cords from—from practicing too much reading. It's very hard on them."

Perry's conception of the home room swept joyously through the school. All that afternoon as classes gathered for periods it was the rosy topic of conversation. Perry, chuckling, told himself that he had originated just about the greatest hoax ever.

But the deception was short-lived. The hall bell, instead of ringing for the last period of the day, clanged the brassy summons that meant special assembly. The corridors grew noisy with

the shuffling of feet as the school moved toward the auditorium. The orchestra, brought together for the first time since June, was conscious of the vacant places due to graduation and played a ragged and terrifying march.

"I have called you together to-day," Mr. Rue, the principal, said in his slow, exact way, "to tell you something of the home room plan that is to be used in this school."

Perry looked concerned. He had not expected that his bubble would burst so soon.

"Every student," the principal was saying, "will be assigned to a home room. That will be the student's home room as long as he remains in the school. The student will report there, go there for study periods and make it, in short, his school home. He will give to the room his loyalty, and the room will give him, in return, its consolidated strength. Each room will have a teacher assigned to it, and that teacher will be leader and helper, advisor and companion, captain and friend, to every student in his room. Alphabetical lists have been posted on the bulletin boards. Every student's name has been listed with the room to which he has been assigned."

Something told Perry that boys were staring at him and expressing a whispered and indignant condemnation. The orchestra struck up its rag-

ged march, and Perry lounged out with the tide. In the hall a hand caught his arm.

"Clam-bakes!" a voice said witheringly. "What were you doing, having a good time with us, you match stick?"

"Did you take that stuff seriously?" Perry asked with an air of innocence. He smiled at them raptly. "If the Board of Health had not decided that typhoid germs are sometimes found in clams and oysters——"

Somebody gave a laugh of resignation. "There's no stopping you, Perry, is there? Put it over on us again. Our fault for paying any attention to you. Come on, fellows; let's get at that home room list."

There was a movement toward the stairs. Perry, grinning, suddenly found himself beside George Praska. The football guard's face was grave.

"You shouldn't have done that, Perry."

Perry bristled at the criticism. "Why not? What harm did it do?"

"I—I don't know as I can put it into words," Praska said hesitatingly. "This home room plan is good. When you make fun of it, you weaken it. Sometimes, in politics, good men are beaten because unscrupulous opponents turn a laugh on them and then keep pounding away at that until

the good candidate looks ridiculous. That's bad citizenship for everybody. It's bad citizenship here in the school to get people laughing at the home room. You see that, don't you?"

"I don't see as a laugh hurts anybody," Perry defended.

"But if it weakens something good, something that might be a stimulus——"

"Where do you get that citizenship stuff?" Perry interrupted suspiciously. "From Mr. Banning?"

Praska nodded.

"Oh, that man." Perry snapped his fingers. "He's a pest. If he had only five minutes to live he'd say 'For five minutes we will consider the part that arbitration has played in American politics'."

Perry's voice was a faithful reproduction of the civics teacher's dry tones. Praska laughed and gave up the argument, and together they went down the stairs.

"I hope we're in the same room," said Perry.

They found, after pushing their way through the crowd that surrounded the bulletin board, that they were to be together in Room 13—and that Mr. Banning was to be the leader of the room. Perry gave a grunt of annoyance, and then became absorbed in something else. Care-

fully he checked through the names. Nine of the football squad were in his room.

"I guess," he said with a quick look at the guard, "that Room 13 will be able to select one of its own crowd for football manager."

Praska nodded. "If they want to," he said. Perry walked home wondering what that meant.

Students were distributing circulars as he entered the school the next morning. He read the one that was handed to him:

ARE YOU A CANDIDATE?

The football squad decided yesterday to ask every student who believes that he could act as manager of the football team to file his own nomination. No student should feel self-conscious about asking for the place if he thinks he can fill it. If you are a candidate tell any member of the team that you would like to be considered.

This circular is distributed by

"THE NORTHFIELD BREEZE"

If you want to keep up with the news of your school read your school newspaper. Published thirty-five times during the school year.

5c per copy. $1.50 per year.

The circular was a clever piece of journalistic enterprise, but Perry did not think of that. He had been afraid to mention his ambitions; now, all at once, the fear was gone. They could not celebrate him as an uproarious joke after asking him to declare himself. In a moment all the hot desire to have part in the athletic life of Northfield was rampant in his veins. To come and go with the football crowd, to be one of them in fact and in spirit, to do his part for the team and the school, to go into dressing room and gym with none to stop him at the door! His breath began to quicken.

"Anybody seen Praska?" he demanded hurriedly.

"Just went upstairs," said a voice.

Perry's long, thin legs took the stairs two at a time. On the second floor he overtook the football guard walking toward Room 13.

"George! Wait a minute. Did you know yesterday about this circular?"

"The whole squad knew about it."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"We had promised the *Breeze*. They wanted to catch the school by surprise with a real piece of news—use it to impress the freshmen and get subscriptions."

"Well——" All at once Perry found his

throat gone dry. "I'm a candidate," he said. He meant it to be casual and matter-of-fact. It sounded defiant.

Praska made a noise with his lips. It might have been a subdued whistle of surprise. He kept staring down the corridor, now and then stepping out of the way of hurrying students with a sort of absent-mindedness.

"It's about time to report," he said at last.

Perry caught his arm. "I can count on you, can't I?"

"I—I don't know," the football guard said slowly and uncomfortably. "You're such a queer eel. You might take it into your head that managing the team was some sort of comedy. We've got to do what's best for the team, and you may not be the best. And then there's Room 13. If the manager comes from our room he'll give the room a black eye if he doesn't stand right up to his job. It's like electing somebody to public office just because he's a good fellow. Mr. Banning says that when you do that you usually get a good fellow who isn't up to being a good official."

Perry dropped his arm. "I thought you were a friend of mine," he said bitterly.

"I am." Praska was genuinely distressed. "If you didn't do so many fool things— I've got to

think about the team, and Room 13, and—— Oh, darn it, Perry, if I could only be sure of you."

Perry turned from him and walked away.

Mr. Banning was tall and spare, with hollows in his cheeks and along his neck behind his ears. His frame did not fit well into clothes—there were too many sharp corners to his being. His coat hung baggily from his shoulders; his trousers had a habit of bunching at the bottom where their legs came in contact with his shoes. But looking at his face you forgot his clothes. In his eyes was something that held you. In them was the fire, the vision, the enthusiasm of the dreamer.

There was a rapt look in his eyes this morning. Room 13 was finding that instead of being simply a school room it was a community. Young citizens of the future were having their first taste of participating in their own government. When the idea of the home room had been broached among the teachers, Mr. Banning had been quick to support the plan. He saw in it a chance to make the high school students feel that they were, in fact as well as name, citizens of the American commonwealth.

And so, when Room 13 had filled that morning, he had tried to overcome the strangeness that usually sits on boys face to face with a new venture. He had told them that, in so far as

was possible, they themselves were going to be the rulers of the room deciding its policies and determining its judgments.

"I'll just be the umpire," he said. "I will never interfere unless I am compelled to. When an American citizen gets into trouble away from home his first thought is to appeal to his Government at Washington for help and protection. I want you to carry that same feeling with respect to Room 13. If you get into trouble in school, bring that trouble here. If you're right, the whole room will be behind you; if you're wrong, your friends here will tell you so and counsel as to what you had better do to make amends. Sometimes you may have to take punishment. If you do it will be because your own room thinks you deserve punishment, just as the various States regretfully punish those citizens who break the law. When people rule themselves wisely they have law and order. When law and order are absent the result is anarchy. Here in Northfield High, in Room 13, and in every other home room, we are going to try to be good citizens of our school republic."

The room talked over its problems with sudden seriousness. There was, first of all, the question of the attendance book. Somebody had to be appointed to mark the time when the citizens

of Room 13 reported each morning and afternoon.

"I wonder," said Mr. Banning, "if we want just that? The United States passes laws and so do the several States. But they do not keep count on us individually to see that we obey They presume that good citizens will obey. If there might be some method by which each student would take the responsibility of reporting his own time——." The teacher looked about the room.

"Why," George Praska asked slowly, "why can't each fellow sign his own time as he comes in? It's up to him to be square about it."

They settled it in that way; and Mr. Banning, who had been hoping that they would rise to the occasion of responsibility, felt his spirits soar. What a fine understanding they had brought to Room 13! And then a cloud appeared upon his sky. Back toward the rear of the room a thin boy sprawled in a seat with dejection, bitterness and resentment written in every line of his face.

The hall bells rang for the start of a period. As Room 13 began to empty itself, Mr. Banning walked down toward the door. He was there when the thin boy approached.

"Anything wrong, Perry?" he asked.

Perry shook his head.

"What do you think of our room?"

Perry's rancor found expression in words "The room's all right," he said, "but the crowd in it gives me a pain."

A moment later, out in the hall on his way to a period of French, he was sorry that he had let his tongue run unchecked. It had been, at best, an ungracious reply to a friendly question. But gall and wormwood were thick on his lips. Mr. Banning had spoken of the way the room would stand together; and yet, with a majority of the football squad on its roll, the room was shying away from his candidacy. And he wanted so much to feel that he was part of the athletic life of Northfield!

If you're right, Mr. Banning had said, the whole room will be behind you. If you're wrong —— Perry didn't finish that thought.

"It's just talk," he told himself angrily. "They won't make a fool of me."

And so, between classes and also during the period in the school lunch room at noon, he ridiculed and hooted the home room plan. In every school there are those who are more or less at outs with the rules and who hinder rather than help; around him Perry drew all these unworthy malcontents. All at once, conscious of the exclusive character of his audience, he dropped his tirade. He had not bargained to become a leader

of bad eggs. Fate, he told himself as he left the lunch room, was playing him some shabby and diabolical tricks when the fellows he admired most would have none of him and those that the school viewed as trouble-makers accepted him as a prophet.

George Praska, already arrived in Room 13, called to him a greeting as he entered. Had George appeared to be at all uncomfortable Perry might have experienced a soothing sense of compensation. But the football guard's unchanged friendliness stung. To Perry it was a sign that Praska viewed lightly the happenings of the morning. Scorn he could have met with scorn; but indifference from one he had rated as his friend rankled.

And then came a reckless desire to show them all that he did not care a fig for their opinions. A fresh attendance sheet was on Mr. Banning's desk. There were the A. M. and the P. M. columns. He found his name, moved his pencil out to the afternoon file and wrote:

25c-2-1

The next boy to go up to the desk to register stared, looked down the room at Perry, and stared again. Perry chuckled. Then Hammond, the quarterback, saw it, and called Praska and Littlefield, the right end. This time Perry

looked down at the floor. After a while he saw them move away from the book, walk over to one of the windows, and stand there talking. Once more that day he had acted on impulse, and once more he was sorry. He squirmed in his seat, and would have given much to have known what the three football players were talking about.

It was Littlefield who finally came toward him. "What does that funny stuff on the sheet mean?" he asked.

"Twenty-five cents is a quarter," Perry said gruffly. "It's simple. Quarter to one."

"I see," Littlefield said gravely, and went back and joined the others.

On the way out of the room, for the first period of the afternoon, Perry overtook Praska.

"Did you tell them?" he demanded. He despised himself for asking the question, but something within him would not let him rest until he knew.

"I told them during lunch hour," the guard answered.

They went down the hall together. Apparently, to Praska, there was nothing more to tell. Perry bit his lips.

"What—what did they say?"

Praska's answer was cryptic. "Why did you write that fool thing on the attendance sheet?"

Perry had written his cabalistic sign to show that he cared naught for public opinion in his home room, yet— During the first period his thoughts were far removed from algebra; luckily, he was not called upon. With algebra out of the way came a study period, and he went back to Room 13. The place was silent save for the occasional scratch of a pen or rustle of a page. It bore every evidence of having something to do and being busily engaged with doing it.

Perry got his long body settled into a seat. Mr. Banning gave a seemingly absent glance and went back to some work he was doing. There was work awaiting Perry too; but with his chin cupped in a thin, bony hand he stared at the desk. Boys came in and took places around him, but he did not lift his eyes. Why had he written that fool thing? Praska's question could mean only that by that silly act he had weakened whatever chance he had had.

"Perry!"

He raised his head dully.

"Perry King."

Mr. Banning was calling. He roused himself and went up to the teacher's desk. He saw Littlefield's eyes leave a book and frowningly watch his journey. At that his own eyes became sullen. He had no doubt what the subject of

the interview would be. If Littlefield expected to sit there and gloat at the sight of him offering apology and excuse to Mr. Banning, then Littlefield was doomed to disappointment.

But Mr. Banning's smile was warm. He motioned to a chair drawn close to his own.

"We'll have to keep our voices down," he said, "so as not to disturb the others. I want to talk to a number of the fellows—personally—you among them. Later, each home room is to elect delegates to a central body that will be a sort of school Congress. Some one of these home rooms, as time runs along, is going to develop students with the powers of leadership. That home room is going to become the leading home room. It is going to write its influence into every classroom, every organization, every team in Northfield. We want Room 13 to be that leader. That's the reason why I want to talk to you and some of the others who are going to be the leaders of the room."

Perry sat there in the grip of numbing amazement. To be called in conference as a leader——. His body stiffened. He kept his position in the chair, very still and very straight, as though surprise and wonderment had frozen him to a rigidity of shocked incredulity.

"I wanted a few words with you, Perry, about

leadership. Our leaders in the State Capitol and at Washington are not accidents. They have achieved because they have done definite things; task by task, effort by effort, step by step, they have gone ahead and have grown in reputation. Any man can do to-day what should have been done yesterday. The leader wins his place because he can see ahead, to-morrow from to-day. Lincoln, for instance. He became a leader because he was one of the first to see and to proclaim that this Nation could not continue to exist half slave and half free. You can understand that, Perry?"

Perry nodded. And still he sat in that attitude of frozen astonishment.

"Leadership," Mr. Banning went on, "is wisdom. It carefully considers what it is about to do and sees clearly what result will follow. Most people do things on the spur of the moment without due thought. That's the reason there are so few persons fit to lead. There is one thing that Room 13 must never do—it must never go off half cocked. Often mistakes, once made, can never be remedied. Sometimes they can be retrieved. The true leader always knows when to admit he has been wrong. That's all, Perry. You'll remember it, won't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Perry, and arose from the

chair and started back toward his desk. Sometimes mistakes can be retrieved! The words kept echoing in his mind. Sometimes——. Abruptly he turned about and went back to Mr. Banning's desk.

The attendance sheet lay where it had been left early in the afternoon. The teacher of civics, reading a book and marking it, did not look up to see what Perry might be doing. The boy found a rubber in his pocket. With his long, thin body draped ungracefully over the desk he erased the thing he had written that afternoon and in its place put a matter-of-fact "12:45." Still Mr. Banning did not look up from his book.

With eyes lowered Perry returned to his desk. Had his head been lifted he would have seen Littlefield looking after him at first with a frown and then with a quiet smile. And had he looked back he would have seen that Mr. Banning was covertly surveying him over the top of the book.

More than once, that night, Perry's cheeks flushed at the memory of practical jokes with which he had hocus-pocused the school. At the time he had viewed these deceptions as mere fun; now they taunted him with the fact that they had written his reputation as a trickster. He had let his prankish moods sway him, and had *not* looked ahead. No wonder the football crowd,

seeking to select a leader, passed him by with slight consideration!

He had been bitter at Praska, but that was passing. Praska had been looking ahead. The football guard had been thinking of something bigger than merely pleasing a friend. Secretly Perry had often viewed himself as a brainier chap than the plodding guard; he had even been a little contemptuous as those of his character are apt to be. Now in his chastened mood, he saw that Praska's slow mind moved irresistibly to logical conclusions. Praska was a thinker. Perry felt cheap and insignificant.

However, an awakening was upon him. Mr. Banning, during that short talk in the home room, had opened his mind to many things. Whether or not he was to become a leader of Room 13, it came to him that he owed it to himself, to his school, to be something more than a humbugging jester. His dream of the managership of the football team was gone. He put it from him with a sigh. In the void it left came a resolution to play a part that never again would cause any one to distrust his capabilities because of foolish things he had done.

There had been an understanding in Northfield that the football team would announce the selection of its manager next morning. But no

notice appeared on the bulletin boards as the home rooms gathered and no information was given out as the day wore on. Twice that afternoon, in Room 13, Perry saw Praska and Littlefield studying him and trying to hide their scrutiny. What they might think of him now had ceased to vex him.

After classes he came back to Room 13 to get a notebook. The Dramatic Club had the use of the auditorium for a tryout of candidates for the Christmas play; as he came from the room, a group of the club members were on their way to the stairs.

"Something's going on in the football squad," one of the crowd said wisely. "I heard that they were holding up the ballot and keeping an eye on one of the candidates. Wonder who it can be?"

Perry wondered too—and felt a shaft of envy for the lucky fellow who still had a chance.

That evening, on the street, he met Praska. The friendly greeting he had resented in Room 13 now warmed him. They spoke of many things, but all the while the football guard seemed turning something in his mind in his slow way. Suddenly:

"Did Mr. Banning ask you to change that attendance sheet?"

"No," said Perry.

Praska fell into a silence. Somehow Perry got the idea that, if he spoke again, his words would hold something of moment. And at last he spoke.

"I—I'd watch my step for—the next few days."

Just that—nothing more. Perry was disappointed. Their ways parted. Something that Mr. Banning had said had started Perry on another line of thought and he wanted Ida Tarbell's "Lincoln." He was coming out of the public library, with the book under one arm, when a phrase of Praska's came back to him. For the next few days! He stumbled down the library steps, unconsciously hugging the book, lost for the moment to all else but a great and surging hope. For now he knew the truth. He was the fellow the football squad was considering.

It was hours after he went to bed that night before he fell asleep. His ambitions, called back to life, painted a riotous succession of pleasing pictures. He saw himself as one of the football squad, traveling to games in their bus, a locker-room companion of all who wore the moleskin, sitting in by right at their most sacred conferences. His soul thrilled. Watch his step? He'd watch it as step was never watched before.

The morning sent him to Northfield High

with a buoyant step. But the day was to bring disaster, black and overwhelming. Passing out of Room 13 for the first period, in some unaccountable way he slipped and fell. Instinctively, as he lost his balance, he caught the boy next to him. That boy caught at another. Five of them sprawled in undignified disorder just outside the door.

"What's going on here?" Mr. Banning called.

"I slipped, sir," Perry answered. He found some of the students treating the affair as a prank. "I slipped," he said sharply to those around him.

An hour later, during English V, Mr. Quirk asked some one to open a window. Perry, sitting on an outside aisle, sprang to obey. He threw a window wide; and a sporting September breeze, wafting in, lifted a pile of papers from the teacher's desk and scattered them about the room.

"I asked for air," Mr. Quirk said tartly; "not a cyclone."

Perry retrieved the papers. As he came back to his seat along the aisle students winked at him. His face was dark. If they thought he was up to his old tricks—. He tried to catch a glimpse of Praska, but Praska's head happened to be turned the other way.

At noon, in the cafeteria, he merely picked at the food he got at the long service counter.

He wished that he could talk with Praska. He wanted to assure him that the things that had happened that morning had not been premeditated. But the football guard, with a group of other football players, sat at a table in a corner. After a while Perry brought back his dishes and wandered out into the school hall.

It did not need a great amount of perspicacity to tell him that his chances had probably become precarious. He had accustomed the school to look to him for buffoonery until now the inclination was to view all his actions as jest and banter. It was driven home to him anew how much reputation is shaped by the things done from day to day. Reputation! His reputation—and Praska's! A bitter smile twitched at his lips.

Yet, because Mr. Banning had given him a vision of leadership, he did not fall back into a reckless mood as of old. Leaders, he told himself, must look ahead. And so, after a time, he came back to Room 13. The clock was about to usher in a study period. A few students were already in the room. Mr. Banning, catching his eye as he entered, beckoned him to his desk.

"Perry," he said, handing him a written order, "will you go down to the office and get me a bottle of red ink?"

The boy departed on the errand, and in the

hall met Praska and some of the football fellows on their way to the home room. In the office, what with some scholars presenting excuses for having been absent that morning and others handing in requests to be dismissed before their time that afternoon, there was some delay. The study period had started in Room 13 when Perry returned.

And then, all in an instant, the crowning disaster of the day happened. He was holding out the bottle to Mr. Banning, and the teacher's hand was outstretched to take it. He released the bottle, saw too late that Mr. Banning did not have it, grabbed frantically—and missed. The bottle crashed in pieces on the floor. A pool of red ink spread over the varnish. Some one out in the room among the desks gave an exclamation of despair.

The voice was Praska's.

All through the study period Perry's white face was before Mr. Banning's eyes. At the words of regret that had faltered from the boy's lips the teacher had merely nodded as a sign that he had heard and had sent him back to his seat. But the evidence of that white face could not be denied. Perry had not deliberately slipped the bottle from his grasp. And so, as the period

drew to an end, the man, walking down the aisle, dropped another order at the boy's place.

"Get me another bottle sometime today," he said in an undertone.

Some of the color came back to Perry's face. As the class filed out, Praska crowded over to him.

"What happened, Perry?"

"It was an accident." He could say no more for there was a choke in his throat.

In the hall Littlefield called to the guard. Perry went on alone to his next recitation. The managership and the bottle of ink, he muttered, had slipped inexorably from his fingers at the same moment. Several times he had felt that he was on the crest of success or in the valley of failure. There could be no doubt about this last happening. He was beaten.

It was indicative of the way he had begun to look at things that, even in this bitter moment, his thoughts went to Room 13. The red stain of the ink was before his eyes. So long as that stain stayed there it would be a reproach. The floor of the room would be marred. There would always be some to say that, in one of his silly gay moments, Perry King had——. He winced.

When his last recitation of the day was over, he went down to the office for his ink.

"I broke the other bottle," he said. "I'd like permission to clean up the mess I made."

He came back to Room 13 with the ink; nor did he know that, as he passed up the stairs with the bottle in his hands, Littlefield saw him through an open door of the gym and cried a hurried word over his shoulder to others within the place.

From the home room Perry went down to the manual training department in a basement wing. From the janitor's storeroom he got water in a pail, a brush and some sand. In the wood shop he got varnish stain.

Room 13 was deserted when he came back to it. On his knees, he wet the brush, spread sand over the red splash, and began to rub. It was hard work. The sweat ran down his face, and he took off his collar and opened his shirt at the throat. By and by he mopped up the water and sand and surveyed his labors. The red was fading out.

An hour passed, and then the sand had rubbed off the varnish down to the white boards. His hands and wrists and arms ached. Slowly, carefully, he dried the floor, and then began to fan it with a book. Thirty minutes passed. The floor was dry to his touch. He took the varnish stain and painted over the spot where the ink had been spilled. When he was finished, the floor, save

that one place looked fresher, was all the one color. It was no longer marred.

He stood up, stretched his muscles, and sighed. Suddenly, at a sound, he whirled toward the door. Praska was there, and Littlefield and Hammond, the quarterback, and others of the football squad. Perry's face went white once more.

"You had us guessing for a while," said Hammond. "We knew you had the head, Perry, but ——"

"Why did you bother to clean it?" a voice asked.

"It was a blot on Room 13," said Perry, steadily.

They stood there looking across the room, the football crowd in a group, the lone boy with his collar still unbuttoned. Praska began to chuckle.

"You old bean-pole!" he said affectionately. "We thought we had you figured right. That's the reason we elected you manager of the team."

## CHAPTER II

### THE BALLOT IN ROOM 13

PERRY KING, tall, thin, bony and ungainly, stood beside a pile of tumbled sweaters and tasted an importance that was new, and strange, and intoxicating. Bristow, the editor of the *Northfield Breeze,* had actually asked him to bring back the story of the game for the school paper. And, if that were not glory enough, Hammond, quarterback and captain of the eleven, had asked him to keep check on the time. He caught Hammond's eye and made a signal with his fingers. Seven minutes to play! A great game, with Northfield in the lead 14 to 7; and he, Perry King, with his part in it all.

The stands were bleak and deserted; the crowd was following the game along the side lines. The sky was gray, the ground was damp, a chill wind blew across the field—but Perry did not bother to button his topcoat across his narrow chest. He did not even feel the penetrating rawness of the day. The ambition that had been part of him

for two years, the yearning to have some part in the athletic life of his school, had at last been realized. Overnight, as it were, through his election as manager of the team, he had become a somebody.

He told himself that he had made a good job of this, his first game. He had checked up suit cases in the Northfield gym and had grouped them in a corner so that the start had been without confusion and last-minute frenzy. He had checked up again just before leaving and had found Littlefield, the right end, to be minus his head guard. They had reached the railroad station late, to find a clamoring line of men and women in front of the ticket window; but he had purchased tickets for the team the day before. "Some head," George Praska, the big guard, had commended. The same glow that had run through Perry then ran through him now at the memory.

A cheer broke from the handful of Northfield rooters who had accompanied the team.

"Wasn't it Praska who stopped that play?" a voice asked at Perry's elbow.

"I wasn't watching just then," Perry answered.

The voice was deferential. "I suppose you've got to just close your eyes to the game and give

all your attention to the watch. It's just like being one of the team, isn't it?"

"Well," Perry said carelessly, "it's not exactly that."

This was another thing new to him, having somebody tag along at his elbow. He was not without vanity; he found the experience pleasant. Even if the tagger was only Johnnie Baffin, it showed that already his position was felt and marked.

Baffin was, perhaps, the least of all the Northfield students. Every high school has a few of his kind—good-natured but dull fellows who find the simplest studies hard, who are baffled by problems demanding thought and analysis, and who blunder along in a sort of scared and pathetic helplessness. They have no opinions of their own, follow blindly where the more venturesome lead, and contribute absolutely nothing to the welfare of their schools. How Johnnie Baffin had managed to get through his freshman and sophomore years was the ever-present Northfield mystery. It was a mystery to Johnnie, too. Only the faculty knew how narrow the margin of his escape. Had he dropped out of school his going would have created not even a ripple. The boy in the next seat might not have marked that he had gone. For even in a crowd he was always

on the outskirts, a shrinking, unnoticed, almost apologetic figure.

The Northfield cheer came presumptuously from the few Northfield throats.

"I guess it's our ball, isn't it?" Baffin asked.

Perry surveyed the field. "Of course it's our ball. There's Hammond crouched behind the center ready to take the pass. Where's your eyes?"

"Yes; our ball," Baffin said with more confidence. "Not much chance to score again, I guess."

"Lots of chance," said Perry, "with a corking good team like ours."

"Yes, I guess there is," Baffin agreed. He never argued his opinion, but quickly ran to cover and surrendered. The school—those who observed him at all—called him "Me, too, Johnnie."

The team did score again, Hammond carrying the ball around the end on a quarterback run.

"Didn't I tell you?" Perry cried, and made note of the length of the run on a slip of paper. A minute later the game was over. Even as the team cheered its rivals, even as the players broke and ran for the dressing room, Perry gathered up the sweaters and with full and overflowing arms staggered after.

There was work for him to do in his capacity as manager. First he collected from the manager of the rival school one half the traveling expenses of his team, and gravely signed a receipt for the money. Then sitting on a bench, he drew from his pockets a miscellaneous collection—rings, watches, fobs, a pair of glasses, some greenbacks and a jingling handful of silver. Next, with a memorandum before him, he began to count the money into piles. This was part of the manager's job at Northfield—acting as custodian of those valuables that the players brought to the game.

Littlefield was the first Northfield boy dressed. "Hi, there, Perry; I gave you eighty cents."

Perry consulted the memorandum. Littlefield's name was there with "80R." written next to it. Perry handed him a half a dollar, a quarter and a nickel. "You'll have to pick out your own ring," he said. "Pick a good one."

Littlefield grinned good-naturedly at this ancient joke.

"One dollar and five cents for me," came another voice.

Hammond called from down the room. "Be sure you don't over-pay some of those pirates and run short, Perry. I'm down on your books for thirty-five cents."

Presently the last player had drawn what was coming to him, and Perry's responsibility was ended. At the door he kept shouting, "Ten minutes to train-time, fellows, ten minutes!" One by one, as they filed out, he handed them their return trip tickets. When the last player was accounted for he went stalking after them, a long-legged person pleasingly responsive to the savor of his duties and responsibilities.

When the train came in, the team made the usual scramble for places. Perry found himself in a seat with Praska. The guard was watching him with a quizzical expression in his eyes. Perry, new to his position, grew uneasy.

"What's the matter? Did I do something wrong?"

Praska shook his head. "I was thinking of something else. Why did you make a note of what everybody gave you?"

"I wanted to have it right, of course."

"But if we gave you only four or five dollars, you'd pay back only four or five dollars, wouldn't you?"

"But I wanted to make sure each fellow got back exactly what was coming to him."

Praska nodded. "That's the value of having a thing in black and white. You know just what value to give each one. You don't have to wonder

about this fellow or that fellow. No guessing; you just study what's on the slip."

There was a quality in Praska's voice now that gave Perry pause. He had heard that speculative, slow, thoughtful tone before. Usually it meant that the guard, after his own deliberate fashion, was establishing a point he wanted to make. Perry glanced at him suspiciously.

"Funny, isn't it," the guard went on, "how important things are always set down in writing and not left to chance. The man who buys a house gets a deed. If he puts money in the bank he gets a bank book. If he goes into business he hires a bookkeeper."

"What's funny about that?" Perry wanted to know.

"Nothing." Praska's voice was mild. "If a big business house has a good job open and three men apply, it makes them fill out a statement. With everything before it, it can think things over, decide what man is best qualified, and—"

But Perry waited to hear no more. A light had broken upon him. One movement and he was out of the seat; another, and he was in the aisle of the coach.

"Leading up to another argument about the home room election, aren't you?" he demanded. "Almost caught me, too, didn't you? Getting so a

fellow can't come near you without hearing about ballots, ballots, ballots. You're a fine football player, George, but on this election business you're a three-ringed nuisance. I'm going up front and find a seat in which I can ride in peace."

Praska smiled patiently. "You admitted, Perry, that there was nothing funny about setting things down in writing in banks, and——"

But Perry fled through the aisle up toward the coach ahead.

The smile remained on Praska's face after Perry had disappeared through the car door, but it did not extend to his eyes, nor was there humor running through his mind. The conductor came through, he handed over his ticket absently, and his gaze wandered out of the window. The train was running through rolling country—brown fields stripped bare of their harvest, cows standing in fall-thinned pastures with bovine placidity, white houses seen through the bare trees and tidy, red barns. But the pastoral picture might just as well not have been there. He did not see it.

His mind was back in Room 13. The room had been in operation for only three weeks, but already it had made a deep and telling impression upon him. He had for it the passionate love that the true citizen feels for his country. It was his country—his school country, his repub-

lic in miniature, and his part in it lay over his soul. Once Mr. Banning had said that honor and integrity would be written of Room 13 only as each student brought honor and integrity to it. Praska, pondering that, had never forgotten. He was thinking of Mr. Banning's words now.

In three days the room would elect its officers. Praska's face became grave. To him that election was not a thing of passing moment but an event of epic importance. His studies under Mr. Banning had impressed him with the fact that great causes brought forth great leaders. He viewed his home room—its unity, its ambitions, its loyalty—as a great cause. Would it select a leader who would inspire it to great efforts? For himself he had no ambitions; for the home room he had many aspirations.

Unconsciously he had followed Mr. Banning far. The teacher, an unassuming, apparently commonplace sort of man, influenced much of his thought. One day, in class, Mr. Banning had spoken of the early settlers of the West—of how, though a part of the country, the threads that knit them to the Government at Washington were long and loose. Looking back, Praska told himself that that has been his position in the school. He had been a Northfield man—just that and nothing more. But the home room had

gathered him in with others, had made him feel the depth of his association with them, and out of it had sprung the sentiment that suddenly made the school a background of real life and a tower of inspiration. He had been transformed into Praska of Room 13 of Northfield High. So had the unconfined limitless prairies become the bounded States of a great Union.

In the announcement that Room 13 was to elect its officers, Praska had found a thrill of a kind that had never come to him in the heat of play on the football field. The word itself had a sound of solemnity. He viewed elections as something sacred. Men had frozen, starved and died for the right of free expression. But the home room, judged by its actions, was not awed. Instead of serious thought, Praska found clamor and a confusion of rival claims. Each student had his own idea of who should be elevated to the honors. Debates went on heatedly in the corridors, in the cafeteria, and even in the home room itself. Boys, overcome by the fury of argument, daily deserted their candidates and appeared with strange and bewildering choices. Instead of a calm weighing of candidates there was chaos. Consideration was routed by noise.

And then Praska had proposed a formal ballot; a ballot carefully prepared before the elec-

tion day. "We need something," he said, "that will give a fellow an idea where he's at." But the home room, enjoying the excitement of expansive, spontaneous debate, would not listen. "The trouble with George," Hammond, the quarterback, had said plaintively, "is that he takes things too serious; you'd imagine we were going to elect a President of the United States." But Praska continued to agitate. He broke into arguments that were going on happily and merrily, and won only scowls or sighs. And then he began to find groups scattering at his approach. His eyes clouded at that, but did not lose their determination. There was something of the bulldog about him.

The train came to Northfield, but he sat at the window lost in his thoughts. Hammond called: "Come on, George; here's the place where we vote." Some of the others laughed. He roused himself, and came down the aisle with his suit case banging against his knees. He was the last of the team to reach the platform. The others were already halfway to the street. He called to Perry; but Perry, waving a hand in mock horror, hurried on.

"Good game, wasn't it?" said an apologetic voice at his elbow. Even when stating facts Johnny Baffin did not seem sure of himself.

The guard nodded absently. The game was a thing of the past. "What do you think of a formal ballot?" he asked suddenly.

Johnny squirmed. "It's an awful lot of trouble to go to just for a school election, isn't it? Most of the fellows think——"

"What do *you* think about it?"

"Why, maybe each fellow could just write the names of the fellows he wanted—"

"Now look here!" Praska's muscular forefinger tapped his chest. "You're not thinking straight. That's too much hit and miss. A dozen fellows might be voted for, and one might win just because he happened to get about nine votes. Why didn't Mr. Banning hold this election before? He waited until we got settled and had a chance to size up each other. He wanted us to know what we were doing. And what are we doing? We're running around with everybody talking in a different key. Isn't that so?"

"Why, yes; I guess it is."

"That wouldn't happen if candidates were nominated and their names put on a ballot. We'd know who *were* candidates. Wouldn't that be better?"

"I—I didn't say it wouldn't be; I didn't say anything against it. Yes; I guess it would be." The boy backed away gingerly. "I must hurry

home. I haven't thought much about it, but I guess you're right. I—Well, so long."

Praska shook his head. Even "Me, too, Johnny," made haste to get away from him. Laughing ruefully, he shifted his suit case to the other hand and went his way down the long station platform.

Three mornings later Room 13 assembled to report for a new school day. A contagious restlessness communicated itself along the rows of desks. The long-drawn-out argument over candidates—an argument that solved nothing and got no place—had begun to produce an impatient and nervous uncertainty. Mr. Banning had watched these symptoms develop not without inward anxiety. He knew the danger. At any moment there might be a reaction. Listlessness might take the place of feverish animation, and instead of being interested in candidates the students might become indifferent and languid. He determined to turn their minds into other channels.

"What I have to say," he said, "must be said hurriedly. The first period bell will ring in a moment. To-morrow we are to hold an election of far-reaching importance to this room. Thus far not a word has been said about the machinery by which this election should be carried out."

"He hasn't heard George," said Hammond in an audible undertone.

"Has somebody been discussing the subject?" the teacher asked innocently. "Good! Then you'll be prepared to handle the problem intelligently. Suppose we meet here after classes today and decide how the election shall be conducted? It that agreeable to you? Speak up if it isn't. Fine! This afternoon then. There goes the bell."

Praska's first period took him to the basement for manual training. As he worked at his lathe there were times when his mind wandered far from the pattern before him. On the way out of Room 13 he had caught some of the students looking at him curiously, and some of them had been smiling. Johnny Baffin had worn his characteristic air of baffled indecision.

Praska's mind was suddenly made up. Judging by the sentiment he had found, the plan he would offer would have no chance. But he determined now to offer it. He felt that he was right, and refused to be silenced by the spectre of defeat. This much settled, his attention came back to the work in hand.

During lunch hour in the cafeteria, Perry King approached his table and spoke in a guarded undertone.

"You're not going to talk prepared ballots and all that rot, are you?"

The guard nodded.

"I wouldn't if I were you. You've been a three-ringed pest on this thing, George, but a lot of the fellows are going to vote for you for class president. You'll just about kill your chances if you sing that song again to-day."

Praska ate in silence. Perry, construing this as acceptance of his own logic, was intensely gratified.

"I thought you'd be sensible about it," he said.

"How do you know a lot of the fellows are going to vote for me?"

"How do I know? Now, that's a question, isn't it? Haven't I been campaigning for you? Haven't I lined up about enough votes to put you over? I've done a job on this, I'll have you know."

"Getting to be a regular politician, aren't you?"

Perry swelled out his thin chest. "I'm going to make the talk in favor of having everybody just write his choice."

"I'm afraid I'll have to fight you on that. I'm still for a formal ballot."

The wind of optimism was knocked from Perry in a breath. His eyes, incredulous, searched his

friend's face. There could be no mistaking its single purpose.

"That's a fine way to treat me after what I've been trying to do for you," he cried indignantly, unconscious that his voice had risen above the babble of the diners. "You're making a goat of yourself if you want to know what I think. You'll kill your chances. Everybody'll be saying you're just a pig-headed pirate."

Praska, used to these temperamental outbursts, shook his head patiently. "I haven't been a candidate. Anyway, if I believe ballot is the only way——"

But Perry, after the manner of one whose best efforts had been shamefully flouted, walked away among the tables in dudgeon.

After classes that day the home room gathered. The students brought books with them and carried their hats to their seats. Plainly they felt that they were of one mind, and that the business they were to transact would take but a moment. The meeting moved briskly. In the absence of regular officers, Mr. Banning was delegated to act as chairman. There were whispered calls of "Perry! Perry! Make it snappy." Perry addressed the chair.

"I believe," Perry said easily, "that I express the sentiment of the room when I say that we'd

like a rule giving each student permission simply to write his pick for each office. In that way they will have perfect freedom of choice. If I think John Jones is the best we have for president or secretary, or sergeant-at-arms I simply vote for him for the office I think he ought to have. That is the only way to have the election take the widest and freest range."

Praska, watching Perry, envied him the confident, casual way he spoke. Perry had in him, he thought, the making of an orator. But he shook his head slightly at his friend's reasoning.

"We think," Perry went on, "in a case like this we ought to have a chance to vote for whom we please and not be tied down by tickets. We want an election, not red tape."

His gaze, as he sat down, went over to Praska. Somebody chuckled, and then the sound was lost in a round of applause. Plainly, the room was with Perry. His gaze, going to Praska again in triumph, was stayed by the sight of the big guard rising somewhat ponderously from his seat.

"Mr. Chairman."

A subdued, good-natured groan ran about the room.

"Mr. Praska," Mr. Banning said gravely.

"I, for one, am opposed to the plan that—that has just been offered." Praska was having

trouble with his words. "The United States has been doing business for a good many years, and I think if we try to improve on the Government we're not going to get very far. The trouble with Perry's plan is that it—it—it's too uncertain. Nobody knows who's a candidate. The votes will be scattered all over. A lot of fellows may just vote for friends, and then somebody may walk in as president merely because seven or eight fellows happen to agree on him. That won't be—" Praska was plainly stuck for the right word.

"Representative government," somebody suggested.

"Representative government," Praska accepted earnestly. "It will be minority government. I don't know whether I'm right or not, but I think the United States has the regular printed ballots so that the voters will know just who are seeking the office and can study their qualifications. That's getting right down to real candidates. This thing that Perry wants to do is like shooting in the dark. It's a grab bag. I think we ought to have candidates file petitions, and not to accept petitions unless they have at least five signers."

This last proposal was new to the room. There was a moment of shocked surprise.

"Why five signers?" Hammond asked belligerently.

"Well——" George hesitated. "If a fellow can't get five students to sign his petition he wouldn't get five votes. That means he'd simply clog up the ballot and take strength from the real candidates. This election is a big thing for Room 13 and I'd like to see it go right."

There was no applause as he sat down, but now two or three of the students appeared thoughtful. Perry, not quite so sure of himself as he had been before, asked Mr. Banning to express an opinion, but the teacher smiled and shook his head. His policy, he told them, was to let them handle their own affairs without interference so long as he could. But even as he said it, his glance, with its fire of idealism, went to Praska and lingered.

The football guard had no false conceptions of what was to follow. No one offered another plan, and the matter went to a vote.

"All those who are in favor of the method as outlined by Mr. King——" Mr. Banning began, and there was a clatter and rattle of seats as the students came to their feet. Johnny Baffin hesitated until he saw the overwhelming sway of sentiment, and then joined the crowd.

Nine boys remained seated, stoically unmind-

ful of nudges and whispers from their companions. Praska's heart leaped. Nine who saw it as he did! He had lost his cause, but he had made converts. He had made progress. Next year, as time for the election drew near, there would be ten instead of one to talk in favor of a formal, regular ballot.

"Mr. King's plan carries," said Mr. Banning, "52 to 10."

There were cheers for the result, and some humorous banter for Praska. He sat unmoved. After that the meeting decided to vote next day during the luncheon hour. A committee of three was named to count the votes. Praska was selected as chairman of this committee and scarcely took note of the honor. He was still thinking of those nine recruits.

Out in the street Perry reproached him openly and bitterly. "Didn't I tell you if you stuck up your head you'd get a good licking? Do you think a defeat like that will help your chances for president?"

"I wasn't thinking of president."

"And then, all this talk of grab bags——"

"How many fellows have a chance to-morrow?" Praska interrupted.

"How should I know?"

"Then it will be a grab bag. Nobody knows

what surprises may come out of it. Why, somebody that three-quarters of the fellows have never given a thought may bob up as the winner."

"Rats!" Perry said in disgust. "This thing has gone to your head. Your wheels are loose."

"Possibly," Praska said mildly. He was looking toward the school entrance where "Me, too, Johnny" was just coming out. "Possibly," the guard said again, but this time merely because the word lingered on his tongue. He continued to stare absently after Johnny as that boy walked up the street; the germ of a bewildering and startling idea had begun to turn and twist itself slowly through the recess of his mind.

That night, after much thinking, the germ developed into a plan.

Next morning he came to school subtly and mysteriously changed. The habitual air of seriousness that marked him was gone, and in its stead was a gay, bubbling quality that suggested that he was filled with some inward vision of mirth. To one of deep and sharp penetration, it would have been apparent that the rollicking mood was forced—but Perry, who met him outside the high school building, was neither deep nor sharp.

"Believe me," he said with feeling, "I'm glad to see your old sober-sides looking human. I was

beginning to think you'd keep up that election argument all through the semester. I'm a friend of yours and all that, George, but you are a tiresome old pest when you start reforming and that's flat."

Praska merely glanced at him and smiled contemplatively.

"What are you looking at me that way for? What's the joke?"

Praska looked about him guardedly. Perry's interest was quickened.

"What's it all about, George? Something good? Something in the wind?"

Praska spoke in an undertone. "Want to have a laugh out of this election? Oh, nothing that will spoil it; just something that will get the whole crowd?"

Perry was eager. "What is it?"

"Vote for 'Me, too, Johnny' for president."

"Johnny Baffin!" Perry's voice was incredulous.

"Johnny Baffin," Praska said calmly.

Perry, usually deft with words, was for the moment speechless. But as the thing he was asked to do broke upon him he began to shake his head.

"I'm going to vote for you. Why should I throw away a vote?"

"But nobody is going to win this election by

one vote. You know that. What difference does one vote make?"

Older persons than Perry have been fooled with that same question. He waivered. There might, he thought, be something in what the guard said. And then Praska leaned closer.

"Can't you picture it, Perry? Just one vote in the whole box for Johnny. It will be a scream. The whole room will be flabbergasted. 'Me-too-Johnny' voted for president. *Good night!*"

All at once Perry shook with laughter. Lines that had formed themselves in Praska's forehead —lines of apprehension—began to clear.

"Won't it be rich, though? I'll do it; one vote won't matter. Wait until I tell——"

Praska's hand closed on his arm. "Tell nothing. Do you want to spoil it? You'll tell somebody, and he'll tell somebody else, and then everybody'll know it. Then what's left of our joke? Just you and me, Perry, and we'll sit back and watch the room when the vote is announced. It will be as good as a circus."

"I won't tell a soul," Perry promised. "'Me, too, Johnny'—Boy, I just want to sit back and watch them. Circus? It will be a riot."

In the lower corridor Praska mixed with the crowd, talking and laughing more than he usually did. He set more than one passing group into a

roar by hurling some unexpectedly humorous comment at some one of them. Whenever he stopped to talk to any boy, he left that individual chuckling. Hammond fairly shouted at something Praska had said. "Old George is actually getting funny," the football captain explained. And Praska continued to laugh and joke—with sober eyes.

At noon Miss Quigley, domestic science teacher in charge of the cafeteria, expressed the opinion that there was "Something the matter with those Room 13 boys." They ordered scanty lunches, ate rapidly, and at once departed. Somebody had brought a hat box that morning, and Praska and his assistants had slit a hole in the top and had placed it on Mr. Banning's desk to serve as a ballot box. Perry was the first student to vote. He slipped his ballot through the opening and winked at the football guard. Just at that moment it dawned on him that if Praska merely wanted to see only one vote cast for Johnny Baffin he could have cast the ballot himself. He went back to his seat a bit perplexed.

Then came a deluge of folded papers dropped through the slit in the box. The students, crowding in line, filed past and voted as their names were checked. In fifteen minutes the last ballot had been cast. Mr. Banning looked at his watch.

"We have thirty minutes before the first afternoon period," he said. "It is your desire to have the vote counted now or after classes?"

"Now," came a chorus from the seats.

Praska, as chairman of the tellers, picked up the box; flanked by his two committee members, he walked from the room. The door closed after him. There was a moment of dead silence.

"They ought to be back in about ten minutes," said a voice.

But ten minutes passed, and there was no sign of the committee. Perry, secure in the knowledge of the thunderclap that was soon to come, first smiled and then began to chuckle. A vote for "Me, too, Johnny!" And who would be more surprised than Johnny Baffin himself? He pictured the blank amazement of the others, and began to chuckle again—and then the chuckle stopped. The door had opened, and the tellers were coming in with the result.

One look at their faces, and Perry sat bolt upright in his seat. Two of the tellers were plainly dazed. One of them, catching the eye of a friend, threw up his hand in a tragic gesture of despair. Praska, with the vote tabulation in one hand and the hat box under the other arm, alone of the three seemed placid and serene. Watching him, Perry felt a sudden shaft of icy apprehension.

"Mr. Banning," said Praska, "the committee asks you to announce the result."

Mr. Banning took the tabulation. The room was still. The teacher of civics looked at it, stared, looked again and held the paper a bit closer to his eyes. Then his gaze came up to survey the class. Twice he coughed as though to clear his throat.

"For president of Room 13," he said, "John Baffin received 15 votes, George Praska 13, Frank Hammond 7——"

Perry heard no more. All at once the plan dawned on him. Why, Praska had asked a lot of fellows to vote for "Me, too, Johnny." The stillness had now become a profound and breathless silence.

Mr. Banning was reading the vote for the other offices; but now nobody heard him. The tension was broken by a choking sound. A murmur ran through the room like an unexpected wind rustling through startled reeds. It grew, died, and grew again. Mr. Banning finished reading, folded the paper slowly and laid it on his desk. His glance went to Praska. The football guard looked the other way. And then Mr. Banning understood.

The room was beginning to recover. It was a room athrob with consternation, but it had its

sense of loyalty. A voice cried the summons for a cheer. It started as a weak straggle, gained volume, and finished with a burst of sound. A cry went up for "Speech! Speech!" This was followed by the chant "We want Johnny Baffin! We want Johnny Baffin!"

Johnny stumbled to his feet. If consternation was the portion of the others, stupefaction was his. He looked blank, abashed, almost frightened. The fingers of one hand played nervously with the buttons on his coat.

"I think," he began with trembling voice, "that there must be a mistake——"

"Not a bit of it," roared a voice. Oh, but the room was rising to scratch beautifully.

"There is a mistake," Johnny cried, for once in his life positive. "I don't want to be president. I wouldn't know how to do things. This is all Praska's work. He came to my house last night, and he got to talking about ballots—you know how he is when he starts talking something like that—and he said it was a mistake because anybody might win, and I said I knew I wouldn't win because I wouldn't even vote for myself because I'd mess everything if I were president. And then he said he could go out and get me enough votes to elect me. I didn't know what he would do, and I was afraid he might do something, and I told

him if he got me all the votes I wouldn't be president."

Johnny had run out of breath. The room, leaning forward so as not to miss a word, waited for him to go on.

"Then Praska said 'You don't think you could get a vote. Now, if I got you a lot of votes wouldn't that prove that the way this election is being run, fellows could cook up something and win with a secret candidate?' I said yes, I guessed that would prove it. He said none of us wanted that kind of an election, and I said no, we didn't. And he asked me if he could try to get votes for me just to show how things can happen. I told him he could, but I only told him that because I didn't think he'd get any, and I told him I wouldn't be president if he did get me the votes.

"He went away then, and came back after a while, and said perhaps he ought to drop it because he was going to get votes by making the fellows think they were playing a joke on me and maybe that wouldn't be square to me. I told him I didn't care what he did because he wouldn't get any votes anyway. And then he went away again."

"That was like George," Perry reflected, "going back and trying to tell Johnny just what he meant to say. And I'll bet Johnny was sick and

tired of ballots and wouldn't listen to him. George wouldn't go out and humiliate a fellow just to get a laugh." He stared at the ceiling and called himself a fool.

"I told Praska I wouldn't be president," Johnny went on. "You can ask him. I can't do the things a president would have to do. I must—I must—." He stuttered and paused, unable to find the word.

"You mean you're going to decline?" came from the rear of the room.

"Decline," he said eagerly; "that's it. Yes; I want to decline. I—I'm not the kind of fellow to be president."

They gave Johnny another cheer then—not a cheer of thanksgiving because he would not take the place, but a cheer of appreciation. There was an unexpected manliness about his speech, and it had won them. Praska, watching the room, heaved a breath of relief, and a worry that had tormented him vanished. The fellows would never tell Johnny the real reason they had voted for him. Not one of them would hurt his feelings.

"This," said Mr. Banning, "is rather an unusual state of affairs. It would seem that the next highest candidate for president——"

"Mr. Chairman," said Praska, "I cannot con-

sider myself the choice of the room. I received only thirteen votes. Therefore, I, too, must decline to serve. I think that the only fair way to clear up this situation would be to hold another election. If we are to discuss how that election is to be held——"

"Do you think it necessary?" Mr. Banning asked dryly.

Praska was persistent. "In any event," he said, "I move you that we elect a week from today, that every candidate file a formal petition by next Thursday, and that the room typewrite an official ballot and make it the only ballot that can be voted."

He stood there by the teacher's desk and every eye was on him—eyes that accused, and berated, and threatened, and yet were a bit proud of him. All over the room boys were stampeding noisily to their feet and demanding instant recognition from the chair. But it was Perry King who won the floor.

"I guess," he said, "that we can see the point when somebody sticks it into us. I second the motion."

"It has been moved and seconded," said Mr. Banning—and proceeded to state the motion, very deliberately. There was a quizzical look on his face all the time that threatened to become a

broad smile as he asked "Is there any discussion?"

"He's got a joke on all of us somehow," whispered Littlefield, the end, to Hammond, the captain. "He looks like a cat that's swallowed a canary and is just ready to burst into song."

"Shut up, foolish!" Hammond rebuked him. "Look who's up wanting to talk. Bet it's the first time little Danny Dunn ever talked in meeting in his life."

Hammond was right. Danny had never so far mastered his bashfulness before. But something in Mr. Banning's deliberation and his quizzical smile had struck the boy as a challenge that could not be ignored; and there he was on his feet, forgetting to address the chair, stammering and hesitating, but somehow getting out words that brought a look of keen satisfaction to Mr. Banning's face.

"But, fellows," little Dunn was saying, "you don't have to go to such a lot of work as Praska's prepared ballot just to make elections safe. There's an easier way. You can——"

"Aw, cut it out, Danny," interrupted a voice. "We're kind of fed up on easy ways. I'm for—"

"Order in the room. Mr. Dunn has the floor," came from the Chair.

"There's an easier way," Danny's embarrassed

voice persisted. "I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner, or why some of you didn't. It never came into my head until last night when I was talking to Dad about the election and Praska's wanting a prepared ballot, and Dad reminded me of the easier way and guyed me for being such a bonehead I hadn't thought of it myself."

"We'll all be dead before Danny gets down to telling his easy way," muttered Littlefield to Hammond. "Say, look at Mr. Banning. He's hep right now to what Danny's trying to tell."

"Shut up," growled Hammond again.

Dunn was rushing on. "There aren't so very many of us, only about sixty. Why don't we just have nominations in open meeting, and then when we get enough good men put up, we can close the nominations. That's a lot less trouble than a prepared ballot, and it's almost as good for a small group."

Praska, slow to think, had no immediate answer to this unexpected challenge, but Perry, still standing, bowed imperturbably, and said: "Mr. Chairman!"

"Mr. King!"

"I'm in favor of putting Mr. Praska's motion to the vote. And I hope it will carry, too. I realize that Mr. Dunn has suggested another very safe way of conducting elections, but it isn't quite

so good as Mr. Praska's because it doesn't give you so long to think over candidates, and it doesn't provide against electing a man who doesn't want the job and won't take it. Of course, if the man is at the meeting, he can declare that he won't be a candidate, but suppose he isn't at the meeting? I know that wouldn't happen more than about twice in a lifetime, but now I'm all for the very safest kind of nominations and elections there is on the market as far as Room 13 is concerned."

Perry paused and a hearty round of applause told him that he had the majority in the room with him. Several, however, were grinning at him meaningly. Among those were the nine who had voted with Praska for a prepared ballot.

"All right, grin," Perry snapped at them, forgetful again of time and place. "I'll admit George showed us something about playing safe that we needed to know, but just the same he had to lie to do it—told a whole bunch of us that each was the one to cast just one vote for Baffin, and that only he and the fellow who was to do the job would know anything about the plan."

"So he did," murmured Hammond.

Perry plunged on. "You're some thinker, George Praska; I'll admit that. And you're some liar, too!"

"Mr. Chairman!" Praska was on his feet, flushed, dead earnest. "King got this wrong. I'm no liar. If you call me a liar, then you've got to call all actors liars because what they say on the stage isn't so. All I did was to act a part to make clear an idea that I hadn't been able to get across to the crowd in any other way." He turned to Perry, his eyes hurt. "You'll have to take that back," he said very quietly.

"I sure will." Perry was a quick thinker—he had followed Praska's argument and his response came instantly and with a heartiness that took the hurt out of Praska's eyes.

With sublime indifference to conventional parliamentary procedure the two shook hands warmly.

"George," said Perry, "you're a schemer, and a plotter, and a betrayer, and a conspirator—but you're as straight as a string, and you've got the best bean of any of us. I guess we'll *have* to elect you president."

From the back of the room came the voice of the football captain. "Yes," Hammond boomed, "I'd like to boil you in oil, George, but I guess we'll have to elect you."

## CHAPTER III

### THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

LITTLEFIELD, the right end, sang as he dressed. The alarm clock on the dresser in his bedroom marked the hour of half-past seven. There were dabs and smears of ink upon the crystal; they gave the glass the droll look of a face overcome with surprise. Probably, had the clock been able to speak, it would have expressed amazement. Littlefield, out of bed at half-past seven and combing his blond hair with critical exactness, was a transformation of such recent birth as still to be a matter of wonder.

"For I'm to be Queen of the May," the right end warbled, and grinned at his reflection in the mirror. A final sweep of the brush, a last twirl of the comb, and the job was done. The accomplishment seemed to fill him with a feeling of humor. He broke into satirical song:

Oh, 'twas not like that in the olden days
That are gone beyond recall;
In the rare old, fair old golden days,
It was not like that at all——

No; it had not been. Time was, not so very long ago, when Littlefield's day had started with a last minute scramble from under the bed coverings, had progressed to a feverish toilet, and had reached its climax in a mad scamper to report to his home room at the Northfield High School on time. Somebody had once remarked—it may have been Perry King—that Littlefield usually took a minute to dress and looked it. His trousers ran to baggy knees; shirt, collar and tie were discarded in favor of a faded sweater emblazoned with the purple N of Northfield. The sweater, Littlefield was given to explaining, was his best friend. It saved bother. He stood forth as a lovable, good-natured, careless, untidy young man!

And then the home rooms had each sent a committee to meet as a tentative Congress of the whole school. Littlefield, in his baggy trousers and his sweater, had gone to the gathering as one of the representatives of Room 13. He sat in the Congress among boys neatly and soberly dressed, supremely indifferent to his own attire. His interest was centered on the discussion of the best way to preserve order in the halls. One by one, as the delegates spoke, he abstractedly noted them. Then at last his turn came to express an opinion. He had something definite to say; but

as he arose from his seat, stretching out his tall, athletic figure, he was all at once struck with the contrast of his rumpled sweater and wrinkled trousers. For the first time he saw himself with a truthful, critical eye, and his judgment wrote him down as slouchy.

"What room, please?" the presiding officer asked crisply.

"Room 13," he said, and flushed painfully. He was trying to draw back the sweater at the sides so that the part exposed through his open coat would be smooth. Embarrassment settled over him. He became disconcerted. The words he had been marshaling to score his point fled his recollection. He stumbled, stammered, and was lost. When he at last sat down after two minutes of torture it was with the conviction that he had made a mess of his entire argument.

When the meeting was over, he went quietly from the room. Perry King followed him to the hall. Perry, as usual, was brutally frank.

"What in thunder got into you to-day, Lit? When you stood up I thought I was going to hear something. Before you got through I was ashamed that you and I were there from the same room. I'd have liked to wish you on somebody else. What happened?"

Littlefield shrugged his shoulders.

"Stage fright, I guess," Perry concluded. "They say every speaker gets it sometimes. You always give a good talk when you stand up in our room."

"I guess it was stage fright," said Littlefield. But he knew better. He had been conscious of a shortcoming, and the knowledge had robbed him of the gift of logical debate. On the way home he stopped and surveyed himself in the mirrored window of a clothing store. He looked chunky and hulking. A fine formidable appearance for the football field; but the Congress of Northfield High had met in the science lecture room. He pulled his cap down over his eyes and walked on.

Next day he came to school with his trousers creased. The sweater had been discarded. In its place he wore a soft shirt and a knitted tie.

"What's the matter with the sweater?" Perry King had demanded.

"Getting its annual bath," Littlefield had answered laconically. He never wore the sweater into a classroom again.

He was thinking of all this as he dressed that morning. The grin left his face, and into his eyes came a steady look of contemplation. Somehow, the processes that had given him a sense of the fitness of things had endowed him with some of the traits of maturity. He felt in his veins,

at that moment, the dawning of manhood. It sobered him. Cross currents of thought were at work. Now he would have all the prankishness of a boy; on the instant he would change and be cast in the manner of a man grown serious and thoughtful.

He ate a leisurely breakfast, and had time to walk to school as befitted one who felt so changed, or changing. Reaching the street on which the school stood, he frowned across at the imposing building of brick and stone. The roadway had once been of smooth macadam, but time had wrought decay. There were holes and ruts in the pavement; ridges and patches where the bare earth showed.

"They ought to fix this street," Littlefield reflected; and started across. It had rained hard the night before, and the holes were filled with water; and where the water ended, streaks of mud began. The right end picked his way gingerly. One freshly shined shoe, getting into the mud, was suddenly smeared. One heel, slapping into a pool of water, sprayed the trouser leg. Littlefield, muttering in anger, mounted the other sidewalk and strode, mud-dappled, into the school.

He was early. The corridors were practically deserted. But up in Room 13 he found George

Praska reading. The book was "The Americanization of Edward Bok."

"Look at this," Littlefield cried indignantly.

Praska surveyed the havoc the mud had wrought.

"You're president of this room, aren't you?"

Praska nodded.

"Well, why don't you do something about it? Why isn't that street fixed? It's right in front of our school. We ought to be able to do *something*. It's our street. Why can't we do something?"

"Well—" Praska's slow speech stopped. "Why can't we?"

"That's what I want to know. What's the use of a fellow shining his shoes if he's going to be all muddy when he gets here? Might just as well be muddy when he leaves home. Mr. Banning's always talking about the voice of the people and what power it has. We're people, aren't we? Why can't we have a voice about that street?"

"Maybe we can," said Praska.

"How?"

But the president of Room 13 did not know. A frown of perplexity had settled between his eyes. There must be a way. Mr. Banning had said that in a Republic it was always possible for the people to express their will. But how? Even

as he debated this, Perry and Hammond came into the room expressing their distaste for mud in general and one street of Northfield in particular.

"I was just telling Praska that he ought to do something about it," Littlefield broke in. "Look at me!"

"Look at *me,*" said Hammond in disgust.

"Oh, rats," said Perry. "What can Praska do? What can any of us do? It's up to the City Council, and a fat lot they'd care about what some high school students thought."

"How do you know they wouldn't care?" Praska asked absently. The germ of an idea was in his mind, but even as he tried to grasp it, it fled and left him bewildered. Yet, in that instant, he knew that he had seen the way, had lost it—and would see it again.

At noon he left the school building and stood looking at the street. Here and there some of the pools were dry; but the deep ruts still held water, and the mud had been tracked in every direction. He had never noticed before that the street itself spoiled the imposing appearance of the school. "Sloppy," he said, and went back to the building and up the stairs to Room 13. Presently, at his desk, he began to write. Twice he tore up paper, and began again. At length he

went downstairs with what he had written, and tacked it to the bulletin board just inside the entrance. The notice read:

**MUD!**

Will the students who have been inconvenienced by the condition of Nelson Avenue in front of the school sign their names to this and succeeding sheets?

GEORGE PRASKA,
Pres. Home Room 13.

Afterwards he could not explain why he had placed the notice on the board. He knew, instinctively, that it had something to do with the way that he had glimpsed and had lost.

Littlefield came to him just before afternoon classes started. "I knew you'd think of something, George. What's in the wind?"

"I don't know," Praska confessed frankly.

"You don't know? What's the use of putting up a notice if you don't know what it's for?"

"Just fishing," George answered. And then in an instant, the vision was back again. He knew now why he had written the notice. He turned again to Littlefield; but the end, disgusted, had taken himself off.

From what comment Praska heard in the cor-

ridors between classes he knew that he had caught the interest of the school. Students stopped him and asked him what it was all about; he smiled, and parried, and told them nothing. Mr. Quirk, teacher of English V, had once remarked that the best way to keep suspense alive was to veil a situation with mystery. Even Perry King was repulsed, and stalked off in a temper.

"You're putting on airs," he said angrily. "I'm one of the delegates to the Congress, and yet when I'm asked about this I'm in the dark. It makes me look like a fool."

George sighed. To tell Perry would be akin to shouting the tidings from the manual training rooms in the basement to the auditorium on the top floor. Perry had never quite outgrown an itch to impress others with how much he knew. The president's tone became conciliatory.

"Tell them they'll have to wait until to-morrow."

Perry looked at him suspiciously. "All right," he grumbled. "That will let me save my face, anyway. But if you make a fozzle of this don't think you're going to drag the rest of Room 13 in with you."

"I won't," George promised meekly. It had begun to dawn on him that a petition of protest would mean nothing unless it carried a formid-

able list of names. Suppose only a handful of students signed the notice he had placed on the board.

But when he took the list down at four o'clock that afternoon his heart gave a leap of exultation. As he walked home, he counted the signatures. Two hundred and thirteen. A great hope grew and grew within him. This would be a voice with no faltering note—a voice mighty with the strength of the numbers behind it—the voice of the people of Northfield High. He decided that in the morning he would go to Mr. Banning with the plan. But a fever for instant action was upon him. He would compose the petition at once. Common sense told him that he might only be wasting time, that Mr. Banning would probably write the document himself. Yet the demand to do something, at once, could not be ignored.

It was almost five o'clock when he sat down at the study table in his bedroom to write; the electric light above the table was lighted and his father was home before he penned the last word. With an odd agitation he read what he had written. This was Northfield High School speaking, the voice of its people. Suddenly he stood up. He would tell the story to his father, show him the petition. He picked up the written sheets of paper and bolted for the door.

Downstairs he found his father, busy with wrench and screw driver, repairing a kitchen faucet that had begun to leak. Mail that had come in the evening delivery was scattered about upon the dining-room table. A yellow card of some kind was uppermost. George picked it up. It was an unsigned, unfilled application for membership in the Fifth Ward Improvement Association of Northfield.

George called into the kitchen to his father. "How did you get this improvement association application, Pop?"

"Came in the mail. They want me to join."

"Going to?"

"What's the use? We'll get together, and we'll pass resolutions and we'll send letters to the City Hall, and the gang down there will do about as they please. That's how it always runs. If they feel like doing what you ask them to do they'll do it, and then some association goes around making a fool of itself by thinking that it accomplished something. The politicians run things to suit themselves. These associations are all right for men who have nothing else to do with their evenings. I don't mind becoming a member, but I don't want anybody telling me that we're going to get together and have the politicians give us what we want. We'll get it when they

get ready to give it to us and not before. That's how they play the game, and when you try to stop them you simply butt your head against a stone wall. The Fifth Ward Improvement Association will get just what the politicians are ready to give the Fifth Ward, and nothing else."

George's hot blood had turned to ice. After a while his father came to the doorway drying his hands with a towel.

"What are those papers you have there, son? Something you wanted to show me?"

"No, sir," George said faintly; "just some scribbling," and put the school petition in his pocket.

But the faith that was in him was too deep to be long shaken. For months he had sat with Mr. Banning, daily in Room 13, at stated intervals in the civics classroom. The pure faith of the man had been as a flame, and the light had found its way into the depth of the boy's soul. America had ceased to be a section of the earth; it had become the one land where every man in his own right was king of his country's destiny. "If we have good government," Mr. Banning was wont to say, "it is because the people are vigilant and demand good government and do their part to get it. If we have poor government it is because the people are lax. In a Republic such as ours

the people are supreme." Praska had found a never-ending thrill in this. He did not merely believe that what Mr. Banning said was so. He knew it was true.

And so, as he lay in bed that night, the teacher's words came back to hearten him and warm him through. With an instinctive sense of loyalty, he did not question what his father had told him. He simply felt that his father might feel differently if he had had the good fortune to be thrown in contact with Mr. Banning. He fell asleep at last with his tumult of doubt at rest, with the conviction that Mr. Banning somehow would solve his problem on the morrow.

He reached school early the next morning; but early as he was the teacher was there before him. The man's eyes appraised him swiftly as he came through the doorway of Room 13.

"What's it about, George? That posted notice?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought you'd be around when you got whatever you were fishing for."

Another teacher, Praska reflected, might have demanded to know why he had not been consulted. Somehow, there was never any feeling of restraint in bringing a project to Mr. Banning.

The plan that was to do away with mud outside the school was soon told. Praska laid the names and the petitions on the desk. Mr. Banning did not take up the papers.

"There'd be over two hundred signatures," the boy said.

The teacher looked at him, and looked away.

"You don't like my plan?" Praska was disappointed. "It isn't worth carrying out?"

A hand fell on his knee. "I didn't say that, George. Don't misunderstand me. But a letter, or a petition—— It's so easy that it means nothing. The postman is forever walking into public buildings with letters for elected officials. Mr. Citizen feels a sense of outrage at something that has happened or has not happened. He writes a letter of condemnation. That makes him feel better. He has a virtuous feeling that he's done his duty, and then forgets all about it. It has taken him two minutes to write the letter. You can't build up citizenship on two-minute splurges."

"But this is a petition," Praska said weakly.

"George," Mr. Banning said gently, "good government in this country could be advanced fifty per cent if people would put less faith in petitions and more in personal action. What does a petition amount to, as a usual thing? I could

take out a petition to-morrow for the appointment of an official fly-catcher and get enough signatures to it to make it appear formidable. If the man you approach believes in the idea, he signs it at once. If he's indifferent, he signs it on the feeling that he's doing you a favor. If he thinks it a fool idea and you argue long enough, he'll sign just to get rid of you. Of course, petitioning Congress is a different matter. Most voters live long distances from Washington. But in local affairs a petition is usually worthless. The City Hall knows just how simple a matter it is to get people to sign and values the thing accordingly."

Praska was crushed. After a moment he rose from his chair.

"I've been thinking," Mr. Banning said casually, "about two men back in my home town. One of them, if he wanted some repairs made, would write a letter to the town carpenter and always end up by saying that he wanted the work started at once. Usually the carpenter got around to it in two or three weeks. We had another man who'd go down to see the carpenter personally and impress upon him the need for haste. Usually the carpenter got around to the job in two or three days. Queer that it should work out that way. Don't you think so?"

But George was not interested in the story of

the carpenter. The room was beginning to fill with students, and he went back to his desk; all the high hopes of the night before vanished. Presently he looked up to find Littlefield standing beside him.

"How's the secret?" the end asked. His good humor had returned. The mud of the street in front of the school had dried, the water was gone; and as the condition that had aroused his antagonism was no longer before his eyes his resentment had evaporated. It would not uncover itself again until the next storm, and then it would disappear again with dry weather.

"I was going to ask the school to send a petition to the City Hall," Praska told him, "but it's off."

"Why?" Littlefield was only mildly interested.

"Mr. Banning thinks petitions don't amount to much."

"Well———" Littlefield was moving away. "He usually suggests something better, doesn't he?"

Suddenly Praska sat bolt upright. By and by the discouragement that marked him began to melt away. The first period bell rang, but instead of following the crowd to the door he walked to Mr. Banning's desk.

"We have an assembly period to-morrow," he

began. "Do you think Mr. Rue would give me about five minutes for an announcement?"

"I don't know." The teacher gave him another swift survey. "I must go to the principal's office this morning. I'll ask him. Is it any thing important?"

"Betterment of school conditions," said the boy.

"In what way?"

"Why, I thought—— No; it was your thought. I'd like to sound out the school on going downtown to see the *carpenter*."

"I think it might be arranged," said Mr. Banning.

Next morning the auditorium exercises had reached the point that usually meant dismissal; but Mr. Rue, on the stage, was clearing his throat, and tapping his eye-glasses against the fingers of his left hand, and waiting for them to settle into quiet. The students shifted uneasily.

"Mr. George Praska, of Home Room 13," the principal said, "has an announcement to make that he thinks will be of general interest. I believe it comes under the head of school welfare."

There was a stirring of feet, a volley of applause, as Praska left his seat and came down one of the aisles. A quality of determination was in the set of his shoulders and the measure of his

stride. Inwardly, he was all atremble, but no one would have guessed it from his bearing. He disappeared up the stage steps at the side, was momentarily lost to view, and then emerged from the wings. The applause began again.

"The old bulldog!" Littlefield whispered. A dawn of comprehension had broken upon him. "I might have known he wouldn't let go if——"

"Sssh!" came from Perry King.

"I'll bet," Littlefield went on, "that this has something to do with——"

"Forget it," Perry told him impatiently. "I want to hear what this song and dance is all about."

"I've been trying to tell you," Littlefield said plaintively. He sighed and gave it up. Perry's eyes were riveted on the platform.

"Fellow students of Northfield High——" Praska began.

"Louder, please," cried a voice.

Praska increased the volume of his tone. "I want to say something about the condition of Nelson Avenue outside the school. It isn't a street; it's a mudhole. After every rain, after snow begins to melt, it's a case of slop and squash across. We grumble about it, and then it dries and we forget about it until the next storm. We're proud of this school, and I don't think any

of us want to track mud into it for days at a time. Of course, Nelson Avenue will be repaired some day, but we don't want to wait for some day. We want that street fixed now."

He had them gripped. He could feel their interest. The auditorium was profoundly still.

"We hear a lot in our civics classes about public opinion and the voice of the people. Public opinion is nothing until it expresses itself. The voice of the people isn't a voice unless it says something. We don't want mud in Nelson Avenue. Well, let's say so. We're people. We have voices. Let's use them. Letters won't do. Neither will petitions. It takes only a second to sign a petition. It takes an hour or so to go see the proper person and tell him that something's wrong. You can't get results with seconds; you've got to spend hours. The way to get a thing done is to go and see that it is done. If we want Nelson Avenue repaired, we've got to be the voice of Northfield High—a real voice. Why shouldn't we? It's our street. My father and your father pay for it. My idea is for this school to go down to the City Hall in a body and ask the City Commissioners to fix that street. A petition is only a petition, but going down there looks like business. And we'll mean business."

A murmur ran through the auditorium. The

school was startled, and showed it plainly. On many of the faces that Praska saw, incredulity wrote its mark. And then he came down to the end of the stage to fight for his vision, as leaders, all through the ages, have pleaded and fought for theirs.

"What are you afraid of?" he cried. "The home rooms have been showing us how citizens do their job. It all means something or it means nothing. I think it means something. Anyway, here's a chance for us to find out."

Still the boldness of the thing they were asked to do held them off.

"They'd laugh at us," came a voice.

"For what?" Praska flashed back. "For our public spirit? It is public spirit. We're working for the good of our school and for the good of Northfield."

The silence this time was thoughtful.

"Suppose they don't do what we ask?" It was Littlefield who pressed the question.

"Then we'll keep going there until they do. Where would Northfield have been last Thanksgiving Day if we had stopped line plunges after Harrison High held us for down the first time?"

He had spoken in terms that every student could comprehend. Back under the balcony applause broke out. It spread up and down the

aisles. In a moment the spirit of the auditorium had changed.

"All we'll ask," Praska cried, "is for a decent, clean street. I've given you merely a suggestion. It's up to the home rooms to decide what the school will do. But whatever we do, let's get started. Let's take it up in the home rooms to-day. Let's find out where we are. Let's sound out our own public opinion and let's try out our own voice."

The applause turned to cheering as he walked back to the seat. The school had caught up his battle cry. None expected Mr. Rue to comment on the situation; Northfield students always had opportunity to think for themselves. At a nod from the principal the orchestra struck up the exit march. Once out in the hall, Littlefield caught Praska by the arm.

"George," he said earnestly, "you ought to take me some place and beat me up. I was the first fellow to kick about the mud; and in two days the fight was all out of me. I'm with you now right to the finish."

"You might have let some of us in Room 13 know what was going on," Perry complained.

"I wanted to have the school take hold of it all at one time," Praska explained simply. "If we had begun to debate it in Room 13, the other

rooms would have heard something about it and would have begun to take sides without knowing what it was all about. This way they've got the question right before their eyes."

"I'll say they have," Littlefield announced with conviction.

In the few minutes that remained before the start of the next period Room 13 put through a resolution to take the school's demands to the City Hall. At 11 o'clock came an outburst of cheering from the second floor, to be followed by the announcement that Room 10 had voted to support Praska. At noon Room 12 paraded to the cafeteria carrying a sign reading:

CLEAN STREETS

AND A

CLEAN SCHOOL

Just as the earlier classes resumed for the afternoon Room 8, a girl's home room, threw its strength to Praska's course, and the tide of approval and acclaim became a flood.

That afternoon the Northfield Congress met at short notice. Only two motions were made.

"Mr. Chairman," said Perry King, "I move

you that this school go down to the City Hall tomorrow."

"Mr. Chairman," said Littlefield, "I move you that George Praska be selected as spokesman for the delegation."

The resolutions were passed without debate. Littlefield stood up again.

"Mr. Chairman, it strikes me that some may have the idea that we won't be admitted to the City Hall. I have some notices here I ran off on a typewriter. It might not be a bad idea to post one on every bulletin board."

The notice was short:

> The Constitution of the United States guarantees to citizens the right of peaceful assembly.

Next afternoon eight hundred and fourteen students marched out of Northfield High School, crossed Nelson Avenue, and turned their faces toward the heart of the town. Four abreast, they moved along in a solid, silent, serious column. Women came to the windows of houses and looked after them in wonder. Business men along Main Street, when they reached that thoroughfare, stood in their doorways and asked what it was all about. And corner loafers, always ready to shuffle along with a crowd, trailed

behind to see to what goal the procession would lead.

It led to the City Hall, an imposing building of gray granite, its walls rising from the top of a solid terrace. For a moment the head of the line waivered. The solemnity and majesty that is part of government in a Republic filled them with an instinctive sense of awe. Then Praska saw the words chiseled out of the marble above the entrance: "THE PEOPLE RULE." That gave him courage, and he led the way into the building.

A wide stairway of stone led to the floors above. In front of the stairway was a great open space; but vast as was the foyer, the students filled it as the lines kept crowding in one upon another. Where to go was something of a problem. Praska looked about him helplessly. Now he wished that Mr. Banning or some of the teachers had come along; but Mr. Banning had told them that it would be best for them to carry the ball themselves.

"What do we do now?" Littlefield whispered hoarsely.

The tramp of sixteen hundred feet on the tiled floor had echoed through the building. City employees came crowding from offices marked "City Clerk," "Tax Collector" and "Department of

Weights and Measures." They stood in puzzled groups.

"Who let the kindergarten in?" a voice asked with a laugh.

Praska's face flushed.

A man came down the wide stairway, stared at them, and abruptly quickened his pace.

"What is it?" he asked good-naturedly, "a riot?"

"A delegation," said Praska.

"Oh! Anybody you want to see in particular?"

"We want to see the city commissioners."

"They don't meet to-day. If you want to reach any individual commissioner——"

"We want to see about having a street improved."

The man gave a low whistle of surprise. "The Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements is your oyster. His office is Room 36, third floor. Where are you from?"

"Northfield High."

"The whole school?"

"Yes, sir. More than eight hundred students."

"Caesar's ghost," said the man in a startled voice. Suddenly he made a break up the stairs, only to stop short. "Jim!" he cried and waved toward one of the groups of city employees. "Do me a favor. Call the *Morning Herald* and ask

them to jump a photographer here in a hurry." He caught Praska's eye. "Room 36, third floor," he called, and was gone up the stairs.

"That fellow's a newspaper reporter," Perry King said in excitement.

In the wake of the reporter went the students. The lines had been broken; they mounted the stairway in one packed mass. The door of Room 36 had a glass lintel; behind it a voice cried in amazement, "You don't mean it! Eight hundred of them!" Then a shadow showed on the glass; the door was thrown open, and the Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements stood on the threshold. At sight of the crowd in the corridor his eyes opened wide as though here was something they had never seen before.

"I am Commissioner Hunter," he said doubtfully. "Are you sure I am the man you are looking for?"

"Yes, sir," George answered positively. "We came here as a delegation."

"On public business?"

"Yes, sir."

Some of the incredulity faded from the official's face. The gravity of those who had packed their way into the corridor space outside his office was contagious. He still looked upon them with wonder, but into his gaze was coming the dawn

of comprehending respect. And yet he did not quite gage the mettle of these young visitors.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

There was a moment of silence.

"We come here," Praska said then, "as citizens of the Northfield High School. We come as the voice of the school. We ask for a hearing."

"You shall have it," the Commissioner said promptly. "I would invite you into my office, but the room is too small. You could not all fit into it. If there are no objections we can transact our business out here. Do you come here with a complaint?"

"Yes, sir." Praska's voice was earnest. "We come to protest against the condition of Nelson Avenue in front of the high school. We take pride in our school, but we cannot take pride in our street. It fills with mud and water after every rain, and we have to track through the muck to reach the school. We feel that this condition should be corrected, and we have come today to ask you to correct it. I voice the sentiment of the entire school."

A flurry of handclapping broke out, but was instantly hushed. The delegation, in its sense of dignity, in its self-control, expressed its desires in a way that was even stronger than Praska's words. Behind the Commissioner's back the news-

paper reporter wrote his notes rapidly, one ear cocked so that he would not miss a word of what was said.

Twice Commissioner Hunter cleared his throat, but did not speak. His gaze kept running over the sea of faces turned anxiously toward him. At last:

"Young man, may I ask your name?"

"George Praska, sir."

"I want to congratulate you on the delegation that has accompanied you, and I want to congratulate the high school for possessing such a fine student body. At this moment, I can make no binding promises. We will have to look into the matter. But I will pledge you that your protest will receive the immediate attention of my department and, if possible, what you ask will be done. Is that satisfactory?"

Praska turned to the school. "Is it?"

A roar of approval was their answer.

And then they began to move toward the stairs, and the Commissioner began to shake hands with all those whom he could reach. Praska, the nearest to him, was the last to reach the outdoors. A photographer was on the sidewalk focusing a camera, and the reporter, standing beside him, was crying, "Just a moment, please. We won't detain you but a moment." Then the shutter

clicked, the photographer waved his hands and the students flooded down the terrace steps.

Perry King was strutting a bit with his chest out. "Our pictures in the paper. That's class, I'll tell the world. I hope we'll be able to recognize the faces."

Praska was not thinking of photographs. He had come into contact with government in a free country and had found it all that he had dreamed it to be.

He came down to the dining room in the morning to find his father already at breakfast. Mr. Praska was reading a newspaper as he ate; now and then his eyeglasses came up over the top of the page and surveyed his son. There was, about his eyes, a shadow of perplexity and unaccustomed appraisement.

"Were you at the City Hall yesterday, George?"

"Yes, sir; the whole school. I wanted to tell you about it last night, but Mother said you would not be in until late. I guess I was asleep when you got home."

"There's a story in the *Herald*. Care to see it?"

The boy leaped from his chair. The report of the school's visit was on the first page, coupled with a three column cut of the delegation. He

did not bother to scan the photograph for faces. His interest leaped to the type:

**High School Students**
**Demand Improvement**

TELL COMMISSIONER HUNTER MUD OF NELSON AVENUE LOWERS TONE OF HIGH SCHOOL

Eight hundred students of the Northfield High School, citizens in fact though not yet citizens in name, yesterday marched to the City Hall in a body and protested to Commissioner Hunter against the condition of Nelson Avenue in front of the high school.

The delegation was one of the most orderly bodies that has ever visited the City Hall. Through their spokesman, George Praska, they stressed the fact that they were not boys and girls, but were citizens of the high school on a mission of public business.

They made a strong impression upon Commissioner Hunter, "Your protest," he told them, "will receive the immediate attention of my department."

There was more of it, and the boy read it through to the end. The reporter had written his story seriously and honestly, with no attempt at cheap humor. Slowly Praska put the paper down. Popular government! The voice of the people! These things meant more now than they had ever meant before.

His father had left the table. From the hall, as he put on overcoat and hat, he called a question.

"What do you think of the story?"

"Good! I'm glad he didn't try to poke fun at us."

"Why were you selected as spokesman for the delegation?"

"I don't know; I guess because I was the first one to think of going to the City Hall."

The man drew a breath of relief. He had had a fear that his name in the paper might go to his son's head. For a moment he appeared in the dining room doorway.

"I'd watch myself on speech making, son. It's easy to overdo it. You had a real case yesterday; that's all right. But don't get the habit. I know men who cannot be happy in a gathering unless they have the floor. They become pests. Always wait until you have something to say—then say it."

The boy was glad, for some reason, that his father said nothing about what might be the result of the mission.

When he reached the school, it seemed that almost every student had brought a newspaper. *Morning Heralds* were everywhere. Some of them had been posted on the bulletin boards. The

school, so full of dignity and restraint the day before, was running riot in a tide of spontaneous elation.

Just before the first period bell rang Mr. Banning, who was standing at a window, caught Praska's eye and motioned mysteriously with his hand. The boy walked toward him. Down in the street three men were inspecting Nelson Avenue. One of them was Commissioner Hunter.

Praska gasped. "Do you think——"

The teacher smiled. "The voice of the people is a strong voice when it asks for what is just."

That afternoon, in every home room, the students heard read a letter from Mr. Rue commending the school for the manner in which it had conducted itself. At that the elation died, to be succeeded by a fitting and sober pride of accomplishment. Just before classes ended for the day came another announcement from the principal—this time delivered in person. Commissioner Hunter, he said, had telephoned him that Nelson Avenue had been inspected and found wanting, and that the street would be repaired within a month.

The cheering that broke out then must have been heard at the City Hall. Praska found a lump in his throat. So this was the process of government in free America! He glanced at

Mr. Banning. The teacher's face, at that moment, was transformed.

The closing bell rang, but it was a half hour before the school had emptied and the students had gone their way. Littlefield's attempt to express himself had been incoherent. Perry King's sentiments had found expression in but one sentence, repeated over and over again.

"I'll tell the world I'm an American and darned glad of it."

Praska reached home long past his usual time. A rolled newspaper thrown there by a carrier, was on the front porch. It was the *Evening Star;* he unrolled it and smoothed out its creases. There was nothing in the news columns about Commissioner Hunter's message to Mr. Rue; probably the Commissioner's decision had come too late to be published that day. But on the editorial page was this:

> **Torch Bearers of Democracy**
>
> Government is not the whim or fancy of any group of public officials. American government is the American people. The American people are the American government. But confusion, and misrepresentation, and trouble arise because the people refuse to function in their government. The mere act of voting on election day does not constitute citizenship. True citizen-

> ship functions three hundred and sixty-five days a year; it is alive, active and intelligent; it plays its part and does not shirk; it consults with its elected officials and helps them to formulate policies of wisdom and justice.
>
> The eight hundred boys and girls of the high school who yesterday came to the City Hall and asked Commissioner Hunter to improve a street showed that they are alive to the possibilities of popular government. Instead of wasting time by grumbling, they chose the direct road and put their case frankly before a city official. The citizens of to-day who take their citizenship lightly can learn a needed lesson from the part these high school students have played. They have shown the will and spirit to function as Americans. They are torch-bearers of a true Democracy.

The minutes passed, but Praska remained on the porch. Twice he read the editorial through. Slowly, at last, he came into the house.

"Mother!"

"Yes."

"Will Pop be home early to-day?"

"No; he telephoned a little while ago. There is some business that must be attended to to-night. He thought he'd probably be up on the midnight train."

The boy appeared to be lost in thought. By and by he folded the *Evening Star* so that the

editorial stood face up, and laid it on the small table where his father kept his pipes and some books. Struck by an after-thought he took a pencil from his pocket and wrote a sentence across the newspaper page.

"Commissioner Hunter has promised to fix our street next month."

Hours later, when Mr. Praska reached home, the house was hushed and stilled. Gently he closed the front door. A night light burned in the dining room. He drew out a chair, turned the light higher, and began to read the *Evening Star's* editorial on democracy. He had read it once coming out on the train. "They have shown," he repeated aloud, "the will and the spirit to function as Americans."

After a time he went over to the side table to look for his pipe. At sight of the newspaper that his son had left for him a whimsical smile touched his lips; and then he saw the sentence telling of the Commissioner's promise, and abruptly the smile was gone.

His hand, feeling around for his pipe, sent something falling to the floor. He picked it up. It was a yellow card that he had tossed aside and had not given another thought. Now, as he stared at it, his lips moved. "The will and the spirit to function as Americans," he said.

Abruptly he ceased to search for the pipe and took out his fountain pen. On the card he signed the line that made him a member of the Fifth Ward Improvement Association.

## CHAPTER IV

### "BAWLER OUT" AND "NIMBLE FEET"

THE football season was over—the last game had been played. Basketball had not yet begun the hectic run of its schedule. Perry King, at his desk in Home Room 13 sighed dolefully.

"Might as well be a hermit," he reflected. "There won't be enough excitement for what's left of this semester to muss a fellow's hair."

But Perry was wrong. Life had a way of bobbing up with unexpected surprises. Three days later Frank Baldwin, president of the Northfield Congress—in another school the body might have been termed the Student Council—resigned with the announcement that his family was moving from town. And the school, aroused from its quiet, found itself confronted with the duty of electing some one to fill his place.

"Praska!" cried Perry. "Room 13 wants George Praska. Nothing to it but Praska. Might as well hold the election at once and get it over with! Praska!"

If Perry's plan had been to stampede the school for his candidate, he almost succeeded. The cry was taken up in the halls. Northfield remembered how, under Praska's leadership, the school had marched to the City Hall and had had muddy Nelson Avenue improved. Perry, flushed and excited, buttonholed Littlefield in the doorway of the physics laboratory.

"If we can get that election called at once," he said, "Praska will go over without opposition. And then we'll have a Room 13 fellow bossing the whole show. Room 13 has three votes in the Congress—yours, Praska's and mine. I'll make a motion to hold the election at once. You and Praska will vote for it. We'll pick up enough support from other members of the Congress to jam the motion through. If you ask me, I'll say that it will be pretty work."

But student participation in the government of Northfield High had endowed many of the body with a true sense of values, a gravity of thought, and a perception of real responsibility. Littlefield, instead of giving off sparks of enthusiasm, grew sober. His eyebrows drew down in a frown.

"I don't like that," he said. "And I know Praska wouldn't be a party to it. It's not Praska's style."

"Do you think the school could get anybody better than George Praska?" Perry demanded hotly.

"No. But rushing through an election just to seat our own candidate would make a bad precedent. This year it would give us Praska. But how about next year, or the year after? We've got to think of the school. You and Praska and I will be through here in a year or so, but the school will be here long after we're out. That's what count's—not to-morrow, but a long line of to-morrows."

Perry was silent. "I guess you're right," he said at last. Littlefield flashed him a look of approval. The abrupt manner in which he had surrendered an unsound theory was indication of what Northfield was doing for its young citizen.

But though Perry had surrendered, he could not stifle a secret regret. He had developed an uncanny knack of interpreting popular sentiment. The sharp brain, functioning above his thin, bony body, seemed able to read what a group might be thinking. He knew that, at the moment, Praska was the choice of the school. But the moment would pass. Other candidates would be brought forward—it was in the nature of things that this should happen. And shrewd instinct told him that certainty passed out of an election

once the friends of rival candidates began to run main issues up obscure and unexpected bypaths.

In due time the Northfield Congress met and promulgated its findings. Nominations, the Congress ordered, must be made from the home rooms; and each home room was limited to one choice. The names of candidates, the decree ran, would be placed on the ballot in alphabetical order, and the Congress would supervise the election. Five days were given in which to make nominations.

Room 13 promptly nominated Praska. Three other home rooms promptly indorsed him. Then came a halt. Perry went scouting to learn the reason.

"Opposition," he reported to Littlefield.

Littlefield scowled. "Where?"

"The girls."

Next day one of the girls' home rooms nominated Lee Merritt, who was serving as a member of the Congress.

In Room 13 there were outbursts of mirth. Hammond, the captain of the eleven, was convulsed with laughter.

"You don't mean that they've named old 'Nimble-feet' Merritt?"

Perry nodded.

"Why, all that fellow can do is dance. That's

where he got his nickname. What did he ever do for the school?"

"He was chairman of the committee that gave the Thanksgiving Day Entertainment," said Littlefield.

Hammond snorted. "He had a good live committee. The committee members did the work and saved his bacon. He's a fusser with the girls, and that's the only place he shines."

"Yes," Perry said slowly; "and there are four hundred and fifty girls in Northfield and about three hundred and fifty fellows. He's the best dancer in the school, and the girls crowd each other for a chance to be his partner. He has a way with them. There's no getting away from that. He's popular with them. You can't get away from *that*. And if they really get behind old 'Nimble-feet' they've got the votes."

"Who," said Littlefield, "who sprung his nomination?"

"I don't know. But Betty Lawton is helping his candidacy."

Littlefield gave a low whistle of consternation. Betty Lawton was, without question, the leading spirit in the girls' rooms.

"Confound girls, anyway," Hammond said bitterly.

The following morning two more of the girls'

rooms came out for Merritt. Betty Lawton's influence was showing its strength. In a corner of the cafeteria, Perry, Hammond and Littlefield held a council of gloom.

"If the worst comes to the worst," Littlefield said, "we might try stuffing the ballot boxes."

"No crooked work at Northfield," Perry said sharply.

Littlefield gave him a glance of scorn. "Did you think I meant it? Of course there's nothing crooked at Northfield."

But there was. Just before classes were dismissed that afternoon the news spread through the school that money had been stolen from three clothing lockers on the first floor.

In the auditorium, the following morning, Mr. Rue, the principal, faced the students with unwonted gravity.

"As a rule," he said, "the faculty prefers to have matters of ordinary interest to Northfield announced by duly elected officials of the student body. We like to see Northfield citizens function intelligently for themselves. But the matter that must come before you this morning is of such extraordinary character that I deem it best to handle the matter myself.

"Three of the clothing lockers were rifled yesterday, and money was stolen from all three.

Fortunately, the amounts taken were small; but that does not lessen the seriousness of the occurrence. All of us, alive to the best interests of Northfield, have been asking, in our hearts, one question. Was this thing done by a citizen of Northfield? I can tell you that it was not.

"We have definitely established the fact that some outsider entered the school, committed the thefts, and left. However, there is an aspect to the case that must give us pause. The intruder did not force a door nor break a lock. Each locker that was robbed had been left open. This was, in itself, a frank and careless invitation to loss.

"To this extent Northfield has been guilty of poor citizenship. Good citizenship writes as its cardinal virtue obedience to law. The law calls for clothing lockers to be kept locked. The person who committed the thefts broke the moral law and the law of organized society. The students who left their lockers invitingly open broke the law of the school. No bank leaves its money out on the sidewalk. Such a condition would be akin to tempting people to steal. The giver of a bribe is as guilty as the taker; and he who by carelessness tempts another to commit a theft is as guilty, in the larger meaning, as the one who steals.

"We must have no more of this laxness at Northfield. Last night we got in touch with every member of our Congress. The school day has hardly begun, but the Congress has already met, and is organized to handle the situation. A 'Safety Committee' has been organized with Mr. Lee Merritt as chairman; and it will have Room B-2 in the basement as its headquarters. This committee will patrol all corridors, and will test lockers during the day to see that they are kept locked. If a locker is found open, a warning slip will be left on the knob. A second slip will be for the second offense. But if a locker is found open for the third time, everything in it will be taken to the committee room and the owner will have to identify his property in order to get it back.

"The members of this committee will wear arm bands, and on each band will be two letters—'S' and 'C'. Their authority, where open lockers are found, is to be accepted by the school. I am sorry that the Congress has had to name such a committee. It should not be necessary for us to police ourselves. The Congress asks me to inform you that the committee will be disbanded just as soon as Northfield shows that it is capable of obeying its own laws without supervision."

The school filed soberly from the auditorium;

but once in the corridors the walls echoed a medley of excited debate and speculation. Back in Room 13 Mr. Banning held the boys while waiting for the next period bell.

"I think," he said, "that Room 13 has a representative on the Safety Committee."

Perry King arose. "I'm on the committee. We won't have our arm bands until to-morrow."

"Can't do anything in this school," little Johnny Dunn chortled, "without Room 13 having a finger in the pie."

"Let Room 13 keep its hands clean by not making it necessary to be reported by the Safety Committee," Perry said savagely. Plainly he was chewing some cud of bitter reflection. Mr. Banning looked at him in surprise. Littlefield nudged Hammond.

"Something's gone wrong," he observed wisely. "I'll bet it has something to do with the election."

It did have something to do with the election. Twice, before the period bell rang, Perry tried to catch Praska's eye; later there was no chance to overtake him in the orderly lines out in the hall. During the morning he heard that one more room had declared for Praska. That was good. The information was followed by the announcement that the two remaining rooms—a girls' room and Merritt's own home room—had taken a stand

for the rival candidate whose specialty was dancing. Perry's face grew long. He counted the minutes until noon, and then hastened down to the cafeteria. Praska was eating at a corner table.

"Speed it up," Perry said. "I want to talk to you, and I can't do it here. There's too big a crowd." He got a tray, and brought his own meal back to the table. "I've got an earful for you," he added, "and don't make any mistake about that."

Twenty minutes later, on the quiet landing of a little used rear stairway, the earful was duly delivered.

"Four home rooms have declared for you," Perry said, "and four have declared for Merritt. Of course the fact that a home room indorses a candidate doesn't mean that the other fellow won't get any votes from that room. You'll get everything in your room; Merritt will get everything in his. But in the other rooms that indorsed Merritt, you got some votes, and he got some votes in the rooms that indorsed you. A room indorsement is simply a majority opinion. It doesn't bind the fellow who voted against the majority to swing into line and make the choice unanimous."

Praska smiled his slow smile. "Why get excited about that?"

"Four rooms against four rooms," said Perry. "The girls' rooms have the most votes. They're going to control this election."

"Why shouldn't they, if they have the most votes?"

"But 'Nimble-feet' Merritt is chairman of the Safety Committee."

There was something in the way the sentence was said that brought Praska's brows together in a frown. Plainly his friend was hinting at something queer—but he could not follow him. "What of that?" he asked at last.

"Oh, you ninny," Perry said pityingly. "Can't you see what's going to happen? By and by some of the girls will leave their lockers open for the third time. Their things will be brought down to the committee room. And what will 'Nimble-feet' do? Will he make them toe the mark? He will not. He'll apologize to them for making them come down and they'll go away figuring that he's just the nicest fellow in Northfield. What chance will you have against *that?*"

Praska's face was grave. "You mean Merritt will use the Safety Committee as part of his campaign?"

"No; no." Perry was impatient. "He won't be able to do anything else. It's his way. He always gushes over a girl. And members of the

committee, that the whole school know are for you, will have to play along as he plays or your election is gone."

They looked into each other's eyes as men do who seek to read each other's souls. Praska was the first to speak.

"Let's go back," he said, and started down the stairs.

Perry sighed. The interview had not gone as he had counted. He had come there to warn Praska of the defeat that lay ahead; to tell him——. A chill of doubt stabbed at him and he grew icy with apprehension. As he started to follow, his steps were slow, his feet were heavy.

"Praska stooping to that," he said in a whisper. "I can't believe it."

And then Praska turned and came back up the stairs. In his eyes now was a look of pain as though the thing that brought him back might hurt; but his jaw was squared.

"Perry," he said rapidly, after the fashion of one who seeks to get an unpleasant duty over with, "the presidency of the Congress is the greatest honor that Northfield can give. It's a big temptation, but——. Oh, we got to play the game. If I thought that a single vote came to me because some friend in Room 13 let things slide and winked at——. You know what Mr. Rue

said this morning about open lockers. Bad citizenship! We can't stand for that. I don't care how many votes——"

Perry gave a cry of understanding. "You mean you think I'm going to do 'Nimble-feet's' stunt and play for votes?"

"Isn't that what you were trying to tell me?"

"You poor prune! I wanted you to see what you were up against. I wanted to tell you that I was going to treat everybody who came down to the committee-room without gloves. I was trying to tell you I was just about going to lose you that election."

"And I thought it was the other thing," said Praska.

Perry was going to announce what he had believed, but stifled the words before they were uttered. Somehow, the thought itself seemed to carry a sting of insult. After a moment his lips twisted into a crooked smile.

" 'I would rather be right than be president.' Regular Henry Clay stuff. Remember when we first heard that saying of Clay's? Back in the eighth grade of grammar school. It didn't mean much then; but Mr. Banning said something about it last week. I'll tell the world he drove it home to me."

"It's the spirit of America," Praska said pas-

sionately. And Perry wondered how he could ever have dreamed that Praska would sell his ideals for an honor.

There are, in every school, a shiftless few who cannot be touched by the finer things, and who take their responsibilities lightly. Close on their heels tread the laggards, the thoughtless and indifferent. Northfield was no exception to the common rule. And so it came to pass that before many days lockers were being emptied by the Safety Committee, and uneasy and blustering students were coming down to Room B-2 to claim their temporarily-confiscated belongings.

It was in Room B-2 that Perry's scathing tongue won for him the nickname of the "Bawler-Out."

"Why," said Littlefield in admiration, "you never heard such dressing downs in your life. To hear that long-legged bantam talk you'd think he was the Constitution of the United States and the Supreme Court rolled into one. Half the fellows who go down there could squeeze his ear and make him dance to their music; but they take what he has to say and walk out like tame ducks."

Friend or mere acquaintance—it was all the same to Perry. He had been placed in power to see that a necessary and vital law was obeyed. He

recognized no other creed. Those who came to wheedle grew abashed before his indignant glare. A few came to threaten, only to become silent under his withering indignation. He knew neither fear nor favor, excuse nor extenuation. Northfield had soiled itself through contact with a thief. It was never to happen again. Soft words had no power, friendship no appeal, to turn him from that.

Between times he found occasion to campaign for Praska. One boy whom he had flayed in the morning, he approached for support in the afternoon. The student eyed him coldly.

"You were certainly around when nerve was given out," he commented. "A few hours ago you scalped me; now you're asking for favors."

"What do you want me to be," Perry demanded, "a Northfield fellow or a trimmer?"

The student flushed. "A Northfield fellow," he said after a moment. "I wouldn't promise to vote for Praska; but I haven't promised to vote for Merritt, either."

Merritt, on the other hand, took his duties with light ease. During his periods of patrol, he walked the corridors faithfully; but there were times when Room B-2 did not see him for an entire day and the committee took care of itself. When he would come in, he would always wear

an air of busy importance. He would glance briefly through the record book, sign the reports that others had prepared, and then he was gone.

"Good work," he would say from the doorway. "Somebody had better stay on deck. That stuff we took out of locker 136—Morris will be down looking for that this afternoon. Somebody'll have to be here to give it to him."

Perry regarded him with sour disfavor.

The campaign ran on and grew feverish with the days. Twice the auditorium was given over to political mass meetings—once so that Merritt's friends could plead his case, again so that Praska's adherents could advance his claims. Neither Betty Lawton nor Perry were among the orators. Perry was down in Room B-2 doing work that had to be done. Betty was in the assembly, merely a listener, but she applauded each speaker who said a good word for Merritt. Littlefield, who was watching her narrowly, saw that.

It was after the meeting called to help him that Merritt made one of his brief visits to the headquarters of the Safety Committee. He had been praised for the sharp manner in which the committee was supervising the lockers; his spirit had expanded mellowly under the tide of ap-

proval. No doubt he thought he had earned all the good things that had been said of him. And while he was in the committee room making his perfunctory examination of the records, a girl from the junior class came in to claim several articles that had been removed from her open locker.

Merritt sprang nimbly to his feet. "Miss Hunt! I'm sorry you have had to come down here. Has it inconvenienced you? Really, I could have taken care of this if you had let me know. We had to take them; no way out of it. It's a school order. You'll keep your locker closed hereafter, won't you? Going right upstairs?"

"Yes; Betty Lawton is waiting for me." In fact, Betty stood in the doorway.

"Let me carry them for you," Merritt said quickly, and draped the girl's coat over his arm. Chatting and laughing he led the way from the room.

Perry, who had seen it all, made a bow to an imaginary visitor. "Oh, Miss Dillpickle! What an outrage that your own things should have been taken from your own locker. I am humiliated that this should have happened to you. Of course, the school says you deserve this punishment, but what's good citizenship between friends?" He kicked over the chair that Merritt

had just vacated. "Of all the rot," he said in disgust.

But calling Merritt's methods names did not minimize their danger to Praska. Here was a girl offender who had been treated apologetically, and another girl who had witnessed the deference that she had been shown. They would spread a report of Merritt's consideration through the girls' home rooms. And with Betty Lawton telling it—

Perry waited glumly until another member of the committee came to relieve him. This was Wednesday. The election was to be held Friday. All day to-morrow for the telling of a sympathetic story of what a thoughtful, engaging young man Lee Merritt was. All of Friday, until the hour of the election, for the story to be told and retold. If Merritt had been deliberately seeking votes through his connection with the Safety Committee, Perry might have found a savage joy in counter-plotting; but Merritt, who could find so little time for his committee chairmanships, seemed innocently unaware of the strength he was building up behind his gallantries. Perry shook his head helplessly and went upstairs.

The hour was well on toward four o'clock; yet by rare good luck, he met Praska going out the school door. Perry was nothing if not curious.

"What kept you so late?"

"Room 13 is turning out an election circular tomorrow. They asked me to wait while they got up the copy. Johnnie Baffin owns a small printing press; some of the fellows are going around there to-night and after Johnnie sticks the type they're going to print the job."

"Funny I wasn't told about that," Perry said with a shaft of jealousy.

"One thing at a time," Praska said. "You're making a job of the Safety Committee—and a good job, too."

Perry's face lengthened. He told of what had happened in Room B-2—told it bitterly for he was sore in spirit. Praska looked past him, a far-away stare in his eyes, as though in the distance he saw visions of strength and truth.

"Betty Lawton and every girl in Northfield," he said at last, "is a citizen of Northfield. That's the thing to remember. They're just as proud of Northfield as the rest of us. They're just as much interested in the school as any fellow. Of course, girls expect fellows to be nice to them, but I don't think they look for it, or want it, at the price of something big."

"Big what?" Perry demanded.

"Northfield citizenship," Praska answered. "Not the make-believe kind; the real thing."

Perry sniffed. "You wouldn't say that if you saw the way those two girls acted to-day."

"Maybe they haven't thought of it from the right angle. Maybe they just accepted what Merritt did as the courtesy a fellow would naturally show a girl. Down in my heart I believe they're just as much alive to the real things as any of us are. I think they'd be insulted if they thought the school had one line of treatment for the boy citizens and another for the girl. I think they want to play the big game with us, and that they're ready to play it with us. I think they're eager and willing to take the knocks that go with the big game. They're not asking to be babied. They're citizens; and the fellow who refuses to judge them as citizens belittles them and belittles the school."

Perry had listened with a rising color in his cheeks. At the end he shook his head as though breaking away from a charm of words.

"Wouldn't it be fine for the school if things ran like that?" he asked wistfully.

Praska was disappointed. "You're one of those who think a girl has to be babied?"

"The bulk of 'Nimble-feet' Merritt's support is coming from the girls' home rooms," Perry said practically. It was an argument that admitted of no answer. He trudged off and left

Praska there still staring into the distance as though he still saw a vision.

Next morning the circulars that had been run off on Johnnie Baffin's press made their appearance in the school. Perry read one with interest:

GEORGE PRASKA

ROOM 13 ASKS YOU TO ELECT
HIM ON HIS RECORD

You will vote a prepared ballot for President of the Congress.

*Why?*

Because George Praska fought for a prepared ballot last fall in Room 13 elections. The principle for which he fought was sound. Every home room in Northfield has adopted it.

You won't have to wade across muddy Nelson Avenue hereafter.

*Why?*

Because George Praska led Northfield to the City Hall and had the street improved.

A VOTE FOR PRASKA
IS
A VOTE FOR PROGRESS

"That," said Littlefield over his shoulder, "is what I call a mighty fine campaign document. It ought to swing this election."

"Who wrote it?" Perry asked.

"I did," Littlefield said modestly. "Don't you like it?"

Perry liked it immensely. The more he thought of it, the more its arguments seemed conclusive and sweeping. Coming the day before the election, it would rivet attention on the candidates and their known capabilities. Later, in physics, when his mind should have been dissecting some problems that had to do with the energy of steam, his imagination was captivated by pictures of signs that the school would find on Nelson Avenue next morning. He intended to erect them. He even knew how the signs would look: "Thank Praska for a Clean Street." That, he told himself proudly, would be a knockout, the last straw, the winning hit, the grand finale that would bring home the bacon.

At noon, after eating, he went outdoors to decide just where the signs should go. On the outdoor steps he paused. Merritt was on the sidewalk, the center of a group of eagerly-questioning girls. He held in his hand one of the Praska circulars, and was talking lightly. Some of his audience began to laugh.

"Isn't that perfectly ridiculous," came a clear soprano voice. Perry turned on his heels and re-entered the school. He was in no mood to go back to Room 13. It was not his hour for Safety Committee duty; yet a sort of restlessness led him down to Room B-2. The committee quarters were deserted. Clothing, in neat piles over in a corner, told him that some lockers had been cleaned out that day. He began to look through the slips on his desk. George Hartford, Frank Mason, Elizabeth Lawton——. Even as his eyes opened wide, there was a sound from the hall, a patter of feet on the floor, and then a voice.

"Oh, Perry, won't you please let me have my things? I'm in an awful hurry."

For just a moment Perry hesitated. Temptation to make political capital of the situation touched him—he who had vowed to handle the work with honor. This girl was a leader. She could influence votes. And then the temptation was gone, routed before his feeling for a higher duty and the stern necessity of upholding a Northfield ideal. Slowly he took from the desk the paper that bore her name.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

She looked at him in surprise. "But I'm in a hurry."

"That's twice to-day you've been in a hurry.

The first time when you were so much in a hurry that you forgot to protect your locker. The doctors say that hurry kills people. You don't want to die young, do you?"

She thought for a moment that he was joking; but the look on his face dispelled that theory. A judge, sentencing a prisoner to death, could not have been more serious. His voice carried a solemnity that made her uneasy. She did not mean to do it—and yet she sank into the chair toward which he had motioned.

"Socially, Miss Lawton," he said, "it is always a pleasure to meet you, but I do not care to meet you under the circumstances that prevail to-day. You have left a locker open. Because you and others are careless, one student had to give up part of a study period to patrol your corridor, to take your things out, and to bring them here for safe keeping. I have to stay here, too, to give them back to you when you get ready to come for them. Do you think it fair that your carelessness should make extra work for others? You may be waited on at home; I have nothing to say about that. But you can't expect to have people pick up and carry for you here. It isn't the Northfield spirit."

An angry spot of red had begun to burn in the girl's cheeks.

"I came for my clothing," she said icily; "not to be lectured by you."

"No," Perry said. "You came here convicted of bad citizenship. We can't pass bad citizenship over with a smile. It's too serious. If you object to getting both clothing and the truth at the same time, you can go to Mr. Rue's office and complain."

The girl half arose from her chair, and then dropped back. She bit her lips. This tall, thin monster who stood before her with the austere gravity of an executioner had all the best of it. She could not go to the principal's office without having to explain there how her locker had come to be open. Better a session with Perry than a session with Mr. Rue. She leaned back in the chair, turned her eyes toward the door leading to the hall, and began to hum.

Perry went over to the clothing and brought back one of the piles. "Personal belongings must be identified before surrender," he said.

"One silk handbag."

The girl continued to stare out of the door.

"Not identified," said Perry. "We'll put that aside. It must belong to somebody else."

Betty sprang to her feet. "That's mine. My initials are inside. My mother gave me that last Christmas."

"You must value it," Perry observed, "to throw it in an open locker and leave it there."

The girl's cheeks were burning. "I won't stay here to be insulted."

"You wouldn't be here at all if you obeyed the Northfield laws. One fur hat and one coat trimmed with fur."

"Mine," Betty snapped. "My name's stamped on the hat lining, and one of my notebooks is in the right-hand coat pocket."

"One vanity case, one pair of gloves with a hole in one finger."

"You needn't criticise my gloves," the girl cried angrily.

"I wouldn't know anything about them if they hadn't been brought here," Perry reminded her.

She wanted to walk out, to leave her belongings there, to turn an outraged back upon him and leave him to a hollow triumph. But, somehow, even in her wrath, she felt a compelling, arresting force that would not let her go. He was gathering up the clothing, piling it neatly and she walked toward him tight-lipped, to take what was hers. He did not push it to her across the desk.

"It's worse for a girl to be careless," he said, "than it is for a fellow. People expect a girl to be orderly. If she isn't orderly, what kind of

home will she have after she's married? Everything will be upset. I'd think about that, Miss Lawton," he said gravely, and held the pile toward her.

She snatched it from him. "The 'Bawler out!' " Her voice shook. "No wonder they call you that. Bawler out! They ought to call you a tyrant."

"And a girl like you," said Perry, "who's a leader, ought to stand with the law of Northfield and not against it."

A stamp of her foot, a toss of a raven-black head, something that sounded like a cry of protest, and she was gone. Carefully, methodically, Perry wrote on the slip the date when the things taken from the locker had been claimed. Under this he signed his name with curious deliberation.

Upstairs, in one of the corridors, he met Littlefield. "Seen Praska?" he asked.

Littlefield shook his head.

"If you see him——" Perry paused a moment. "Tell him Betty Lawton came to Room B-2 for her clothing. Tell him he's licked to a frazzle. He'll understand."

Leaving the basement of the school, Betty Lawton did not go directly to her own home room. She had begun to cry, and had then dried her tears with the resolve that nothing Perry King could do or say *would* make her cry. But her

eyes were red, and she did not want to take this tell-tale sign back where others could see it.

She was in one of the rear corridors, between a window and the foot of a side stairway. Two boys began to descend the stairs. She walked to the window, turned her back, and looked outdoors as though absorbed in something she saw. But the first words caught her attention.

"Perry King!" came a voice. "He's nothing but a bag of wind. Likes to hear himself talk."

"I don't think you've got him sized up right," came an answer.

"I didn't know you were in love with him. You wanted to beat him up after that dressing down he gave you in the Safety Committee room."

"Well, I've changed my mind about that. He came to me that same day and began to urge me to consider Praska for President of the Congress. 'You've got a fine nerve,' I told him, 'to ask favors from me after what you said to me to-day.' He came right back at me. 'What do you want me to be,' he asked, 'a trimmer or a Northfield fellow?' There's a whole lot in that. If he had wanted to trim he could have made a lot of votes for Praska; and I'll bet a gold mine he's lost Praska votes by the way he's bawled out fellows. But that's Perry. He's for the

school, and nothing else matters. I'll bet if Praska got nailed with an open locker he'd bawl him out as hard as he'd hand it to you or me."

The footsteps went along the corridor, turned a corner, and were swallowed in a host of other sounds. By and by, across the willful face of Betty Lawton, a new expression began to find its way. He had spoken of the Northfield spirit. "You can't," he had said, "pass bad citizenship over with a smile." And he had added something that gave her pause the longer she thought of it. A leader ought to stand for the law of Northfield and not against it. He had called her a leader—and in the same breath had condemned her. All at once a new and strange respect for this monster, this bawler out, began to run through her veins.

Presently she was stirred to action. Going to her locker, she hung up her clothing and carefully locked the door. As she turned away she saw Merritt. Suddenly she was moved to try a strange conclusion.

"Lee," she called as she reached his side, "my locker was emptied by the committee."

"Gosh," he said. "Isn't that tough luck? You girls who forget to turn a key will get into trouble. When did it happen?"

"This morning some time."

"I wish you had told me sooner. I might have been able to fix it up for you at once. Wait here. I'll go down and get your things."

"You needn't," she said in a voice that baffled him. "I got them a little while ago from Perry King." As she went to her home room with the red now gone from her eyes, her heels seemed to tap out "bad citizenship, bad citizenship" on the floor. Merritt had tried to smooth things for her; Perry had called her strictly to account. As between the two her choice ran to the sturdy, uncompromising viewpoint that gave no favors and asked none.

Yet, after a time, she was conscious of a vague disquietude. Suppose Praska, confronted with complaint of Perry's methods, should try to pour an unctuous oil of insincerity upon the troubled water. Her mouth grew thin-lipped again, as it had done earlier that day down in Room B-2. She had tested Merritt by the light that Perry King had given her. Now she would test Praska.

She did not come upon him until just before school closed for the day. They met outside Mr. Rue's office to which both had gone on errands.

"George," she said boldly, "Perry King is one of your chief lieutenants, isn't he?"

"Yes; he is."

"I had to go to the Safety Committee room

to-day to claim some clothing. You know what the school calls him—the 'Bawler-Out.' Do you think he ought to talk to a girl the same way he talks to a boy?"

"I have nothing to do with the Safety Committee, Betty."

She felt a stirring of regret. In her present mood she wanted to encounter the strength of a leader with the courage to stand for his convictions. Praska she thought was trimming.

"Never mind that," she said. "I know you're not on the committee. But you're running for office, and Perry is one of your chief supporters. You know what he's been doing in Room B-2. The whole school knows. Do you believe in his talking to a girl like that?"

"I believe," Praska said slowly, "that if a girl and a fellow are to be equal in their citizenship, they must be equal in their responsibility. Perry wasn't insulting, was he?"

"N—no, not exactly. He hurt my feelings."

"Perhaps you hurt his feelings by breaking a Northfield law. Did you not leave your locker open?"

"Yes."

"Then Perry did what I would have done had I been in his place."

At that moment the message that Perry had

sent to him ran through Praska's mind—"licked to a frazzle." A wry smile twisted his lips even as he bowed and took a step past the girl.

But she stopped him with a quick little gesture, half imperative, half entreating.

"George," she said, "I've been doing some campaign work for Lee Merritt, but I've seen some things to-day that have changed my mind. You never met my Uncle Bob, did you? He's captain of a steamer that runs to South America. He says that no boat can sail a true course without a strong hand on the tiller. You can count on my support when the Northfield Congress open the polls to-morrow."

# CHAPTER V

## A MATTER OF PROPER SPIRIT

HIS name, written with neat exactness on the paper cover of each of his school-books, had a certain sound of solid dignity—Oliver Morse. Yet there was nothing impressive about his appearance in his junior year at Northfield. He was tall and sallow, with thin, straight, straw-colored hair, and half-squinted, watery, inquiring eyes behind very thick eyeglasses. His shoulders had the stoop that comes from too much study and not enough vigorous exercise. Trudging to school, with his books in a worn brief case that swung at his side and that now and then got caught in between his dangling legs, he looked for all the world like the pictures mischievous boys used to draw of absent-minded professors. Some one once said that, when he stood up to recite, he looked like a scarecrow that had deserted its corn-field and had started out to secure an education. He talked through his nose with his

head thrust to one side as though the ceiling of the classroom was too low for his height. By all the time-honored standards of boyhood he should have been the joke of the school.

Instead few students were held in higher esteem at Northfield. He was an inconspicuous member of Room 13. He did not often take part in debates, but when he did he was sure of his facts. His knowledge of parliamentary law had floored many an uncertain opponent. He supported school athletics to the point of attending all the at-home games, appearing at the field with a book under his arm and reading it during the major part of the contest. There was a widespread rumor that he never knew which side won a game, and was uncertain about the number of players on the nine. The school, taking note of his appearance and his attainments, called him "The Northfield Owl." It was a name of affection.

That March Prof. Banning led a pilgrimage to the County Court House where old Judge Seifert was holding Naturalization Court. Oliver sat in the first row of spectators' seats, and cocked his head to one side, and stared with rapt interest at what went on around him. From the silk flag, draped on the wall behind the bench, his eyes came down to the white-haired judge sitting there in the

fullness of his years and honors to bestow the dignity of American citizenship upon those that had come from other lands. The judge himself, in his youth, had taken out his papers of citizenship and had sworn allegiance to a flag of red, and white, and blue. He had come to the United States in '48 when so many high-spirited young men were leaving Germany to seek a liberty that was denied them in the Fatherland. During the Civil War he had fought for the Union cause under General Franz Siegel, and carried a musket ball in his right hip thereafter. He had sealed his allegiance with his blood. Oliver did not know this; but sitting there, staring at that straight and spare figure on the bench, the boy felt an unaccountable thrill run along his spine.

"One Union," he said to himself, "indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." It seemed a queer thing to be running through his mind.

A brisk little man represented the United States Government at the hearing and questioned the applicants. Italian and French, Turk and Greek, German and Slav—one by one they came forward in answer to their names and were admitted to citizenship or else heard citizenship refused them. Presently the clerk of the court called:

"Antonio Miretto."

A man of swarthy skin arose from one of the

benches and stepped forward. The Government representative had grown a little tired. His voice had become a monotonous fire of questions. How long have you lived in the United States? Who is the President, the Governor of this State, the United States Senators from this State? How does the State make its laws? What is the law-making branch of the United States Government? How is the President elected? Antonio answered the questions with but slight hesitation. The lawyer faced the bench.

"If your Honor please," he said, "I think citizenship should be granted in this case."

The judge did not move. His voice came like the dry rasp of autumn leaves.

"Mr. Miretto," he asked, "how long have you lived in this country?"

"Twelve years," said the man.

"And this is your first attempt to become a citizen?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I did not want to become citizen before."

"Why do you want to become a citizen now?"

"So I can vote for Angelo Introcello. Angelo big boss. Angello got plenty jobs."

"I understand then that this Angello is to be a candidate at the next election?" the judge asked.

"Candidate, yes. Big job City Hall."

"Who told you to come here and apply for citizenship papers?"

"Angelo. Angelo send man; man give lessons. Man say 'Antonio, now you know enough to be citizen. You become citizen and vote for Angelo.' " The man smiled with the triumphant air of one who has made something exceedingly clear.

But there was no answering smile on old Judge Seifert's face. "American citizenship," he said in his dry voice, "is not something at the disposal of any man who desires to run for public office. The privilege of American citizenship is a sacred privilege, open only to those who seek it out of love for the American ideal of liberty and justice. This applicant," he said, turning to the Government representative, "does not come into this court with the proper spirit, and his application for citizenship must be denied. Call the next case."

Antonio Moretto went in bewilderment back to his seat trying to comprehend this calamity that had befallen him. Friends explained the situation in hurried whispers; and once he broke forth in an excited protest that was instantly hushed. Oliver Morse, staring at the judge, felt dimly in his soul the solemnity of human drama. Citizenship, he had thought, was always given if one had the necessary knowledge and had lived

in the United States for at least five years. But here was a man whose application was refused—not because he was ignorant of the things a citizen should know but because he came with none of the sacred fire burning in his veins.

For more than an hour, while other applications were heard, Oliver sat there absorbed, and in that hour he did not move. When Court adjourned for the day, and Judge Seifert left the bench, he sighed, and shook himself, and arose and followed the class from the room. "Speed" Martin, the nine's star shortstop, fell into step with him.

"Frosty old bird wasn't he?" the shortstop asked.

Oliver looked at him blankly. "Old bird?"

"The judge. He certainly hands it out with an ax. Zippo, and off goes somebody's head. Then they bring on the next victim, and he sharpens the ax again."

"Is that your idea of the hearings to-day?" a voice asked behind them. Prof. Banning had spoken. Martin's face reddened.

"You know what I mean, sir."

"I'm afraid I do not," the teacher said. "And I'm afraid you missed the proper spirit of what went on in the court room."

Oliver said nothing, but his eyes blinked

rapidly behind his glasses. At the corner he stopped short for one last look at the Court House. His glance rested a moment on the flag flying above the granite building.

The class would probably have been filled with amazement had some prophet told them that what Oliver Morse had seen in the court room that day was to write its result in the history of the school.

Somebody at Northfield had once said—it may have been Mr. Banning—that Martin did not take school work seriously enough. But this indictment could not be charged against him once he stepped out on the baseball field. Here his body grew intensely alive, his interest quickened, and his eyes flamed with an eager light.

Jennings, physical instructor and coach, stood at the plate to-day, a bat poised in one hand, a ball held in the other.

"Man on first," he called, and then the bat swung out and the ball streaked along the ground to the left of the shortstop.

Martin seemed to move even as the bat was hit. His gloved hand reached out, found the horsehide, held it. His spikes bit into the ground and began to halt him even as he tossed the ball to Chandler, the second baseman with almost the the same motion with which he had fielded it.

The second baseman whipped the ball down to first for what would have been, in a real game, a sparkling double play.

"That's stepping on it," Martin shrilled. "Everybody on his toes."

"Man on first and third," cried the coach, and batted the ball down the third-base line.

Littlefield, the third baseman ran in, took the ball on a bound, and drove it home. Hammond lined the leather down to second base. The throw was high; but a red-stockinged figure seemed to soar miraculously into the air and pluck the ball as it was flying past.

"Pretty work," muttered the coach. Aloud he called: "Martin! What was the matter with you? Why didn't you swing your arm down at the runner?"

"What was the use, Coach? With all the time he had he'd have been curled around the base."

"Didn't you ever hear of a runner oversliding the bag?"

The boy, without another word, went back to his place hitting his right hand viciously into his glove. When the ball came his way again, he was on it like a terrier, and whizzed it across the diamond into the first baseman's mitt.

"If he'd only fight that way on other things," the coach mumbled—and sighed. Later, when

the practice was over, he fell into step with the boy and walked with him toward the school gym.

"Martin," he said without preamble, "do you know you're walking mighty close to the line?"

The boy looked at him with an unworried grin. "Classes?"

"What else? You know what will happen if you drop below a 70 average? No baseball."

The boy's grin widened. "I've been close to the line before. You haven't seen me falling over."

"You can't skate on thin ice forever without breaking through," the coach said sharply.

He was worried. He had a pretty clear conception of Martin's weaknesses and failings. The first time a specific danger presented itself the boy would be moved by a sense of caution to safeguard himself. Then, by degrees, as threat after threat would be sidestepped, he would become presumptuous and contemptuous. "This," he would tell himself, "can never happen to *me*." And then, in an unguarded moment, while lulled by a false feeling of security, disaster might strike him down. The coach had seen it happen to other boys in the past.

From the locker room came the echo of "Speed" Martin's voice, singing:

Sunshine is my middle name,
Worries pass me by——

Jennings gave a wry smile. Instead of going down into the gym, he skirted the edge of the building and came out on the street. Ahead of him, a tall boy with stooped shoulders was shuffling along with his nose almost buried in a book. The coach's steps quickened.

"Oliver!" he called. "Morse!"

The student trudged on.

"Oliver! O you Owl!"

The boy looked up, with a finger marking his line in the book. His head, thrust birdlike to one side, surveyed the oncoming man.

"Were you calling me, Mr. Jennings?"

"Calling you? I was doing everything except throwing bricks at you." He slipped his hand through the crook of the boy's elbow. "Oliver, you're with the school, aren't you, heart and soul?"

"You tell 'em I am, Mr. Jennings."

Coming from the studious Oliver Morse, the sentence was edged with subtle shafts of humor—but the coach did not smile.

"You were at the practice to-day, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I might have known. You miss none of the games and but few of the practice periods. Oliver, to a fellow who knows baseball as well, and follows it as closely, as you do, there is no use

in telling you that 'Speed' Martin is just about thirty-five per cent. of the team. If we lost Martin we'd be pretty well shot. But, of course, you know that."

Strictly speaking, the Middlesex Owl didn't know anything of the kind. But it was rather pleasant to be made the recipient of confidences from the celebrated Mr. Jennings, and the Owl blinked his eyes solemnly and nodded.

"The truth is," the coach went on, "I think Martin's getting into trouble in classes."

This time the Owl's eyes did not have to pretend interest and knowledge. He was thoroughly aware of the shortstop's educational shortcomings. More that once he had wondered, back in the hidden recesses of his own brain, how any person in his right senses could translate French as weirdly as Martin translated it.

"If he gets less than a 70 average," Mr. Jennings said, "he'll be barred from baseball. Then what will happen to the nine? Where will the school be in the Monroe game? It's a question of standing by Northfield, Owl, and I've come to you."

The Owl had a moment of panic. "You're not thinking of asking me to play in Martin's place?"

The coach suppressed a smile. "No; not that. I want to know, if the time comes when Martin

needs it, if you'll tutor him a bit for the good of Northfield."

The Owl promised to lend his aid, but added with brutal candor that it wouldn't be easy to teach Martin from a book. Nevertheless, he was puffed up a bit because he had been singled out as the only man who could save the star shortstop to the nine.

"This is all confidential," Jennings reminded him.

"Confidential," the Owl said seriously, "and a sacred trust. Yes, sir. When Martin is ready, let him come to me." He went on his way, and before walking half a block had his nose into the book again.

Next morning Jennings told Martin of his conversation with the Owl. The shortstop was a bit resentful.

"Isn't this crowding things?" he demanded. "I haven't flunked yet."

"The time to get in some work is before you do flunk," Jennings retorted sharply. "If you take my advice you'll hunt up the Owl and make up some lost ground."

"Well—I'll try to," Martin said after a moment. That afternoon he played against Barringer High. When the game was over his line in the scorebook read:

| | R | H | O | A | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MARTIN | 2 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 0 |

"Ten fielding chances without an error," Jennings murmured, "and three hits out of four times at bat." The game had been played out of town, and when the trolley reached the Bank corner in Northfield the coach swung down to the ground and waited for his star player.

"You won't forget about the Owl, will you?" he asked.

"I may look him up to-night," said Martin.

However, he didn't. His three-base hit in the sixth inning had won the game, and it was pleasant to idle along Main Street after supper and enjoy the adulation of those students he chanced to meet. Trouble at the moment seemed obscure and remote. The taste of triumph dwarfed every other issue.

Jennings came to him four days later. "Did you see the Owl?"

"No." Martin felt the need of justification. "The practice has been running late, and at night I've had to study——"

The coach's smile was disconcerting. "Prof. Matier tells me you're a total loss in French. You haven't been studying French, have you?"

Martin flushed. "I've never been any good at languages."

"Prof. Banning tells me you're down to about 60 this month in history and civics."

"What are you doing?" the shortstop demanded hotly; "checking up on me?"

"Checking up on your classroom average," the coach answered. "Why shouldn't I? Just now it's as important as your fielding or batting averages. When you stand up to recite you're pinch hitting for the nine. You've been doing some rotten pinch hitting—I'll say that for you. You're in a slump. You've got to pull yourself together and come out of it."

Jennings had put the case in the language of baseball. The argument touched Martin where he was weakest. The anger died out of his eyes, slowly, slowly—but it died.

"I never thought of it as pinch-hitting," he said gruffly. "I don't like study: a page of this to-day, a page of that to-morrow, over and over and over again. It's stupid stuff. My father insists that I go through high school and I'm going to go through just as easily as I can. He knows I don't like to pore over lessons."

"Suppose you didn't like balls batted to your left," said the coach. "What would you do in that case?"

"I'd have somebody bat to my left side until I could take anything that came to my left."

"How about applying some of that same spirit to classes?"

"But I don't give a darn about classes and I do like baseball."

The coach shrugged his shoulders. "You're pinch-hitting, remember. You don't particularly like left-handed pitchers; but if I sent you in to pinch-hit against a left-hander you'd go up there with your teeth set."

"You mean I ought to go at lessons with my teeth set."

The coach made no comment.

"All right; I'll take up with the Owl next week. I can't do it this week. There's a couple of pictures coming to the Franklin theatre that I want to see."

But next week was too late. Friday afternoon Martin was called to Dr. Rue's office and told that as his general average had fallen below 70 it would be necessary to bar him from school athletics. There was a game scheduled for that afternoon. He went to the field and sat on the bench out of uniform, and glowered at Post who had been sent out to take his place.

Northfield won, but that did not bring any ease to Martin's soul. A hundred stings of self-reproach arose to taunt him. An hour here and there with his books, an hour here and there with

the Owl, and he could have avoided this. He had expected cutting sarcasm from the coach and bitter speech from Capt. Littlefield. After the first expression of dismay Littlefield had frozen into silence. Jennings had made no comment at all. And Martin had walked out to the bench tortured all at once by the knowledge that neither was surprised. As a pinch-hitter he had failed. They had expected it.

He came back to the gym. After other games he had held his place there by right, elbowing for his turn under the showers, taking part in the good-natured horseplay. To-day he felt as one apart. One by one the players dressed and departed, spoke to him as they went out in a manner forced and constrained. He read in their manner condemnation of his failure, and it rasped along the raw of his wound. Ill at ease he stood up and turned toward the door.

"Martin!" Jennings had spoken. He waited. The coach led him outside and closed the door.

"Where will you be at about nine o'clock to-night?"

"Home."

"Be sure you're there. I'll be along about that time."

Martin had no appetite for supper. Uncertainty as to what the visit might mean made him

ill at ease, and he counted the minutes until the clock drew around toward nine. Going down to the gate he waited, and presently saw the coach swinging down the street. And a clutch of fear seemed to grasp at his throat.

"Martin," Jennings said abruptly; "there's just one chance for you."

The shortstop's heart leaped. "To play?"

"To play. I've been button-holing faculty members since to-day's game ended. If you can make a showing this month that will run you above 70 you can play the June games."

Martin's face fell.

"We play Monroe on June 12," the coach said significantly.

The big game! The game that brought out the crowds, and the glory, and the only real cheering of the year. Even in the soft darkness of the spring night the coach could see the wistful shadow that swiftly passed over the boy's countenance.

"I have spoken to the Owl again," Jennings went on. "Frankly, Martin you've thrown down the nine, but the nine hasn't thrown down you. We want you back for your own sake as much as for anything else. We want you back because it isn't the Northfield idea for a fellow to drop away from the thing he can do best. It means a month

of hard study, but the Owl is willing to give up the time to put you through. Is it a go?"

"Yes," said Martin. "I'll see him in the morning." After the coach was gone he sat on the porch steps with his chin cupped in the palm of one hand. The month of May would not take long to pass. He would go to the field every day and keep in practice. A sudden, disturbing thought frowned his forehead. The Owl would want him in the afternoons. He sat up a bit straighter and tried to arrive at a conclusion dealing with the amount of time it would be *absolutely* necessary to give to shove up his general average to a point that would permit him to go back into the game.

In the morning he waited outside the school for Oliver Morse. And yet, though he had come seeking this interview, it was the Owl who began the conversation.

"We will have to work hard," he said, his head cocked to one side. "We can start to-day—one hour every day after classes, and perhaps two hours on Saturdays. Then, if you'll study about two hours every night——"

Martin broke out in protest. "What do you think I'm after, a Commencement medal?"

"You have a lot of ground to make up," the Owl said bluntly.

"What of it? That doesn't mean I'm out for

a record. Just get me back over 70 and we'll stop all the study periods right there."

The Owl shook his head. "You can't get good passing marks that way."

"Who's asking for good passing marks? Just passing marks will suit me. If it wasn't that I have to get that 70 to play baseball I wouldn't bother with the stuff at all."

"But where would you stand in the June examination?"

"I may not come back. I've been after my father for two years to let me quit. June examinations aren't worrying me. I want baseball."

The Owl stared at him incredulously. Himself a student, taking the best of all the school had to offer, he could not quite understand this other boy. "But Mr. Jennings said——" he began.

"O, Jennings." The shortstop's manner was flippant. "He's talking through his hat. Just get me a 70, that's all."

Behind their thick lenses the Owl eyes grew a trifle stern. "There has been a mistake. I thought you wanted to make up on school work. I didn't think you just wanted to use my time to skin you through. What good will it do to get you a 70 now if you are going to drop right back again? That's cheating the school."

"Doesn't the nine figure in this?" Martin demanded, nettled.

"You wouldn't be going to the nine with the proper spirit," the Owl said. "The 70 per cent. rule for athletics means that a fellow must honestly be entitled to play on the nine. You don't care anything for the marks; you're just thinking about your fun. I can't help you."

"You can't—— Say, what are you trying to do, be funny? What's the matter with me."

"You're not going into this with the proper spirit." The Owl shifted his books under the other arm and abruptly began to walk toward the school entrance. His stooped shoulders straightened a bit as though to throw off an indignity that had been thrust upon him.

Martin sprang forward and caught his arm. "You refuse to go through with this?" he cried. "You mean you'll throw down the nine?"

"You're not interested in marks. Why should I waste time on you?"

In the Owl's sallow face the shortstop read a determination that would not be shaken. Anger flamed through his veins and echoed in his voice.

"All right, you fool; but you'll be sorry. You can't try anything like that and get away with it. I'll tell this all over the school. Before night the whole gang will be on your back. You'll be coming to me to-morrow and begging me to let you help me."

But in that Martin was wrong. Neither the next day nor in the days that immediately followed, did the Owl come forward with overtures. He seemed to have dropped the matter from his mind. He could not have been unaware that his status in the school had changed. Whereas, in his own peculiar way, he had found a peculiarly warm place in the life of Northfield, he now met coldness. Groups broke up and scattered at his approach. But he merely went his way, his absorption in his books apparently more pronounced than before.

More than one baseball nine has gone to pieces under the staggering loss of a star. Chandler, at second base, accustomed to playing alongside Martin, felt a doubt of Post, the new shortstop. Instead of throwing the ball with the superb confidence that Martin would get it, he now took time to look before letting the ball go. Play about the middle bag became slower, and indecision communicated itself to the other infielders. Even Hammond, when he knew that Post was to take the throw, developed streaks of wildness. And Jennings, watching it all with understanding eyes and refusing to deceive himself, muttered under his breath and ran harassed hands through his hair.

Rahway came to Northfield for the first May

game. Northfield had been counted on to win without much trouble, but Rahway was the victor by a score of 8 to 6. Infield errors had accounted for four of her runs. Post had dropped two thrown balls and had been the cause of spoiling what should have been a sure double play.

The school blamed the Owl for the defeat. Campus gossip said that if the nine had had any assurance that Martin would come back, it would have held itself together until June. Post was rated as hopeless. Only Jennings knew that Post, awakening to the fact that the infield doubted him, had begun to doubt himself.

Three days later the nine went to Rawlings and was defeated 5 to 3. This time three wild throws by Post tossed the game away. And the Owl came to school the following Monday morning to find himself publicly ostrasized and condemned. Some one left a card on his desk in his home room. It bore three words:

THE NORTHFIELD JACKASS

The Owl read the card, holding it close to his near-sighted eyes, and then calmly replaced it on the desk where he had found it, leaving it where all who passed in the aisle might see it.

That same morning Jennings faced hard and bitter facts. His nine was demoralized. Panic had seized it and had marked it for slaughter. It was not a crass, selfish itch for material victory that tortured him; the agony that writhed his soul was the pain of a designer, a planner, a general, who sees a smooth, beautiful piece of baseball machinery going to waste and falling into utter decay. Two things were imperative. He had to steady Post and to make an effort to induce the Owl to help. Why the boy had refused to come to Martin's aid he did not know. Martin had told him nothing but the mere fact of refusal. Yet the coach was positive that some vital reason lay behind the course the Owl had taken. Thus far, he had purposely kept his hands off. He did not like to mix in on a question of scholarship. But the time had come when he felt that he was forced to make at least one effort to save the situation.

His first duty—his immediate concern—lay with Post. Post was with the nine. At the best, Martin could not hope to join the lineup until next month. At noon he went to the cafeteria, found Post eating there, and called to him from the doorway.

Two hundred students saw Post thus summoned. An unspoken whisper ran the rounds of

the table: "Jennings is going to throw the hooks into Post." Post thought so himself. He stumbled a bit as he stood up; then he squared himself doggedly and walked out to meet the coach.

"Post," Jennings said, "you're not playing your game. Why?"

The shortstop shook his head. "I don't know." But he did know. Yet he would not say the word that would shift any of the blame to other shoulders.

The coach liked him the better for it. "I do know, Post. The nine's been playing with Martin so long that it cannot see anybody else in his place; and you're letting that throw you out of gear. When I picked you to fill Martin's shoes I knew that you could fill them. I still know it. I believe in you and I know you're going to come through. You've got it in you."

The boy drew a deep breath. There was an interval of silence. Then:

"Whatever comes, Post, you're going to play that position. If you've been thinking of being benched, forget it. You're going to stay right where you are. That's the strength of my faith in you. Now—what are you going to do for me?"

There was another period of silence.

"I'm going to play ball," Post said quietly.

"You can depend on that." He went back to his interrupted meal in the cafeteria with determination written into every line of his bearing.

"That's one thing less to worry about," the coach told himself, and went off in search of Praska.

"Do you know," he demanded, "why the Owl refused to tutor Martin?"

Praska shook his head.

"He's from your home room. I had an idea that a home room that gave Northfield the president of its Congress would be interested in why one of its citizens didn't go through with a promise he made to take Martin in hand. Do you know—have you heard—some of the things the school has said about the Owl and Room 13?"

Praska winced. "One of our fellows labeled him a jackass," he said evenly. "But the room as a whole believes that whatever the Owl did he had a good reason for doing. Littlefield and Hammond are on the nine. Littlefield's captain. He's never asked the Owl for a reason. There are some fellows you can always bank on as acting square. A lot of us feel the Owl is one of them."

"Oh, I know he's square," Jennings said wearily. "I shouldn't have lit into you—but the nine is going to smash. Isn't it just possible that this

rupture between Martin and the Owl may be one of those cases of honest misunderstanding on each side? If it is, we can probably patch it up. You can get at the bottom of this. The Owl will talk to you. Will you ask him?"

"Yes," Praska said slowly, "I'll ask him. It may be a misunderstanding."

That afternoon, after classes, he followed the Owl to the outdoors and walked with him in silence until they were a block from the school.

"Owl," he said suddenly, "Northfield has always said that a good, stiff game, keenly fought, is a fine thing regardless of who wins it. But we want to see our teams give a good account of themselves. It's a matter of school pride that a Northfield team must show the Northfield spirit. Lately the nine's been losing miserably. No fighting spirit, no backbone, no standing up to the job. You've noticed that, haven't you?"

The Owl considered. "I—I noticed we've been losing."

"Have you noticed any change in the nine's play?"

"Why—" The Owl hesitated. "There—there seemed to be something lacking."

"The name of that something is Martin. He was dropped because his scholarship fell below the requirements. Were his averages to go back

above 70 he'd be able to play next month. Jennings came to me to-day. I'm only bringing this up because you and Martin may have had a misunderstanding that can be straightened out."

"We had no misunderstanding," said the Owl. "I understood him and he understood me."

The reply was discouraging, yet Praska went on.

"Jennings says that Martin was anxious to make up those marks and that you refused to help him."

"Martin was not," the Owl said bluntly.

"Martin did not come to you for help?"

"He came to me, but he was not anxious about marks—not in the right way. He didn't want to study for class standing; he wanted to study for baseball. He told me that as soon as he got above 70 he wouldn't bother me any more. I refused to help him through on those conditions. He didn't have the proper spirit. You're not asking me to help him that way, are you?"

"No," Praska said promptly. Yet he was puzzled. "This matter of proper spirit—just what do you mean?"

"Remember the day Mr. Banning took us to the Naturalization Court? Judge Seifert refused a man citizenship. He had answered all the questions; but he wanted naturalization just so that

he could get a job. The judge refused him because he did not come into court with the proper spirit. Where my father works a young man lost his job because he would do only the things he had to do—just enough to get through with his job. That was not the proper spirit, either, so he was discharged. A school is built for study—other things come after that. If Martin had been worried about his studies and had also wanted to play baseball, I would have helped him. That would have been different. But he wasn't interested in anything except baseball, and I told him I wouldn't help him. And—" the Owl's thin body straightened—"and I won't help him and you needn't ask me to!"

"I wouldn't ask you to," Praska said softly. Later he reported the interview to Jennings. The coach bit his lips.

"So that's it," he said, and his eyes met Praska's. "Sometimes," he confessed, "you meet a spirit that makes you a little ashamed of your own. Well, I'll fight it out with the team I have. Perhaps I can give them some of this proper spirit."

Coming away, Jennings met Martin.

"Couldn't you talk the Owl into helping me?" the shortstop asked. "You ought to have some influence over him."

"Have you asked any of the other top-grade students to give you a hand?"

"No."

"Been studying any harder in the hope that you and the Owl would get together later?"

"N—No. What was the use? I didn't know if it would do me any good."

"In other words," the coach said icily, "you figured you didn't have much chance and refused to run out your hit. You're not worth helping. Turn in your uniform and stop coming to the practice."

The boy flushed angrily. "Is that how you stand by me after I've given you my best?"

"That," said the coach, "is how I stand by the player who has given the school his worst."

Next day Martin did not come to the practice. His locker, open and empty, served mute notice that he was through. In the gym, before going out to the field, Jennings faced the squad.

"There was a time," he said, "when my heart warmed to see you in action. I thought I had a ball team; I felt that the school could be proud of you. Now I have my doubts. What's the color of your blood, red or yellow? Are you a bunch of fighters or a collection of quitters? Show me."

They were stung by his words. He had never

talked to them that way before. Aroused by his attack they played the game—for a day or two, anyway. Then Commodore Farragut High School came to Northfield with a team that was notoriously weak, and was barely beaten by a score of 10 to 8. Only one ray of hope stood out at the end of the afternoon. Post had played a game of desperate strength. He had shut off what looked like a winning Farragut rally and had batted in four of Northfield's ten runs.

The coach tried to take heart. "Victory may spur them," he told himself; but in the next game Northfield was beaten by a score of 4 to 1 and sank into a profound slough of despondency.

Post came to Jennings after the game. "If—if you'd rather try some body else at short—" he began with an effort.

The coach silenced him. "You're playing the game."

What followed was a nightmare. Four games in a row what should have been won were lost. Days when the batting was strong, the fielding was wretched; and when the fielding tightened the batting fell off. Jennings himself came to the verge of despair. But because there was that in him that would never bow its head meekly to defeat, he strove desperately to breathe life into his team and to compel it to play the game of

which it was capable. Even the attendance grew slim. The small covered grand stand that once had groaned under the weight of spectators, now showed tier after tier of empty seats.

And thus came the contest with Hastings, the biggest and most important game of the year, aside from the contest with Monroe.

"If there's one team that's made to order for us, if there's one team we can always beat," Jennings said with forced cheer, "it's Hastings."

The nine took the news gloomily.

"We'll beat Hastings and beat her with ease," Capt. Littlefield said fiercely.

None of the players made any comment. The practice was lifeless.

Jennings took to walking the streets of Northfield at night. "Must find a way to arouse them," ran continually in his tortured mind; "must find a way." And then as he shaved, the morning of the game, a plan—a desperate plan—came to him.

The school knew what the Owl had done, but had never been told the reason. Praska had not revealed what he had learned, not even to Littlefield and Hammond. He felt that defense of the Owl, coming from any of the citizens of Room 13, would have lost force. In some quarters there might be a tendency to question it, a sus-

picion that Room 13 was simply trying to wash itself clean. Better, Praska had reasoned, that the Owl's side someday come before the school from some other spokesman.

For that reasoning Jennings now blessed him. If the story, with all its surprise, were now told to the nine—— The lather dried on the coach's face as he debated the plan. In the end his mind was made up. As conditions stood, Northfield was ruined. Nothing that might be said could injure her chances. On the other hand, the shock of a new conception, a new vision, may bring a rush of spirit and an awakening of fighting instinct.

No one, watching Jennings in the locker room as the nine dressed for the game, would have guessed that he was soon to throw dice with Fate. Standing at an open window, he seemed to be watching the crowds filling the stands and straggling out along the first and third base foul lines. Hastings always drew a crowd. He had sent a boy to the stand on an errand, and presently saw him coming across the outfield toward the gym. As the boy drew near, the coach leaned out the window—carelessly.

"Is he there?" he asked.

The boy nodded. "Center aisle. First seat on the left. Seventh row."

Jennings thanked him. Three of the Hastings players appeared and began to throw a ball around. Capt. Littlefield called a "Ready, Coach," and Jennings swung around and faced the squad, and searched their faces for something that was not there.

"You're going out to play Hastings," he said. "Usually the coach talks about how sure victory will be if every man will only play the game. I'm not going to give you any of that; I wouldn't fool you with it if I did. You're going to take a licking to-day, and you know it."

A strangled cry of protest came from the captain to be instantly hushed. The realization came to Littlefield that whatever Jennings was saying was being said for a purpose. Players shuffled their feet and looked away. Only Post's eyes met the coach's, level and clear.

"This nine has been shot for more than a month. Why? Because Martin was dropped. And who was Martin? A good ball player, but never at heart a Northfield fellow. Oh, I know he went to the school; so did Benedict Arnold wear the uniform of the Colonial army. I warned Martin he was heading for trouble. I asked him to see the Owl weeks before he was dropped after the Owl had agreed to tutor him. Did he take my advice? He did not. He sacrificed this nine,

he sacrificed the school, he sacrificed every one of you because he was too lazy to do the job in the classroom that every one of you have had to do. And that's the fellow you've let ruin you and ruin this nine. He left the squad. It was a crisis; I grant you that. The moment he passed out of athletics, it became a question whether you would hold your spirit for the school or let him drag it away with him. And you surrendered it to this whiner who wasn't man enough to stand by the ship and play his part. Aren't you proud of yourself?"

No one answered him.

"There's another student who figures in this—the Owl. He's been held up to the ridicule of the school. Do you know why he refused to tutor Martin? Didn't it ever strike you that he must have had a reason? Martin said to him: 'Get me back to 70; that's as far as I want to go.' The Owl refused. That wasn't his idea of Northfield honor, or of Northfield spirit. He looked upon that as a form of cheating. He thought it was the same as a man seeking to become a citizen just so that he could get a job for his vote. That man wouldn't be interested in citizenship or in the United States—and the Owl felt that a fellow who just wanted a 70 wasn't interested in Northfield. He has been condemned; he has been

jeered; he has been called the Northfield Jackass—and yet there has been more real Northfield spirit in his little finger than there has been in this whole nine. You don't represent the school; you represent Martin. You're his kind."

One of the outfielders, red-faced and angry-eyed, took a step forward. "That's not so, Coach."

"Yes it is, Vance. When Martin was dropped, you fellows quit. The only fellow who held on was the Owl—he shouldn't have coached Martin. He did the right thing. Where's Martin to-day? Is he in the stands? Has he been to our last two games? I doubt it. But you'll find the Owl out there in the first center aisle in the seventh row. Post!"

"Yes, sir." The shortstop elbowed his way forward.

"Go out there and get the Owl. Bring him back with you. He's going to walk out of this place with the squad; he's going to sit on the bench. By Heavens, I want somebody there on whom I can put a hand and say 'This is the Northfield spirit'."

Resentment, beginning as a murmur, grew into a volume of sound. Vance's voice rose above the tumult. "Why didn't you tell us this before?"

"Why?" The agony of unexpected hope was

in the coach's heart, but his voice was cool. "What difference would it have made to you fellows?"

"A lot of difference. We didn't see this thing right. We've got the spirit."

"Have you? What kind of spirit?"

"School spirit."

"Anybody can claim that. Prove it?"

"We've got fighting spirit, too." Vance was shaking his fist above his head.

"Prove that," cried Jennings. His voice rang with the vibrant note that sounds in a bugle call that blows the charge. "Fighting spirit, eh? Then get out there and beat Hastings."

The door of the locker room opened. The Owl, stooped a bit, his mild eyes blinking behind his glasses, peered at the group.

"You want me, Mr. Jennings?"

"Want you?" It was Vance's hand that fell upon his hand. "We've wanted you right along and didn't know it. You're sitting on the bench to-day. Do you know what that means? You're our mascot. We're going to show you what a real Northfield team looks like."

The Northfield students who had come to the game that day had come as a sort of solemn duty. They looked more like mourners assembled to bury a corpse. Even the school band seemed to find something melancholy in the atmosphere, and

by and by its music took on the sound of funeral dirges.

When the Owl, summoned by a player who had apparently been sent by Jennings, began to walk across the field toward the distant gym, a note of interest ran through the crowd. When he disappeared into the building, interest became a buzz of excited comment. But when the gym door opened and the Owl came forth with the players, arm in arm with Capt. Littlefield, the stand sat stunned. Here was something that no stretch of the imagination could explain. The Owl did not come back to his place in the seventh row. On he went to the bench, and dropped down beside Jennings, and stuck out his long legs so that they were a hazard to any catcher who might come running back after a foul.

Hastings had the field, and was practicing with snap and dash. Confidence was reflected in every movement of the players. Jennings smiled a crooked smile. Why shouldn't Hastings be confident, facing a team that had won but two games out of seven? His own nine had come forth from the locker rejuvenated. Would it last? He had started them on the road; would they hold it? Would the old apathy lay hold of them and throttle their zest?

He watched with burning eyes when Northfield

took the field. Post began to snap out a running fire of comment. Littlefield, on third, answered him; Stafford, on first, joined them in a deep, bass voice. The whole infield became talkative, alive, gingery and optimistic. It was a healthy sign—but still Jennings waited.

"They're making more noise than usual," said the Owl.

Jennings smiled. So this queer, serious boy had noticed the miracle, without altogether understanding what it meant. The coach pulled his cap down low over his forehead. Personally, he'd wait until the nine found itself in a tight corner. Then he'd know.

The tight corner came in the very first inning. Morelli, short and dark and serious, was pitching for Northfield, and the first three batters hit him safely for two singles and a double. One tally came over the plate, and runners were left on second and third with none out.

"Everybody walk up and get a hit," shrilled the rooters who had come with the Hastings team.

Jennings crossed and uncrossed his legs. The next batter hit a hot grounder down the third-base line. Littlefield got the ball, held the runner on third, and made a perfect throw to first. One out!

The next boy scratched a hit just over Post's

frantic fingers, and two more runs came in. On the throw to the plate, the batter went down to second. A moment later the next boy bunted. It was a play calculated to demoralize a panicky team; but Stafford raced in, scooped the ball with one hand, and threw to Morelli who had covered first base.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

Jenning's eyes gave a flicker of admiration. This was more like his old fighting, hustling team.

The next batter hit into left field for a single, and the runner on third crossed the plate with the fourth run. Vance, fielding the ball sharply, threw. The batter, expecting that the throw would go to the plate, overran first base and took a few steps toward second, ready to dash for the middle bag should the catcher fumble. A cry of apprehension from the startled Hastings coachers sent him diving back for first base, but before his feet reached the bag Stafford had the ball on his ribs. Vance had thrown to first instead of to the plate, and the batter and the coachers had been caught asleep.

And then the doubt, the worry, left Jennings' mind. This was to be a ball game. His hand dropped on the Owl's knee.

"Son," he said, "you're just about worth your weight in gold to-day."

The Owl cocked his head to one side, but made no comment. All during Hastings' turn at bat he had sat silent. He had been trying to puzzle out the mystery of why he had been brought to the bench. The same intelligence that he devoted to his books had been bent upon the problems. He could not fathom why he had been singled out for attention, but he did arrive at one conclusion. In some fashion he, for some reason, was to be an inspiration for the nine.

The team came in to the bench in no sense depressed. Vance was rattling the bats, looking for the one he wanted. Morelli made no excuses, but buttoned up a sweater and sat down quietly.

A high-pitched, nasal voice suddenly made itself heard. "You fellows said——"

Vance, who had found his bat, looked up. "What's the matter, Owl? Going to coach this team?"

The Owl did not smile. "No; but you fellows said you were going to show me a real Northfield team. Where is it?"

"Will you listen to what's giving us the raspberry?" cried Stafford; and Littlefield broke in with a: "That's the stuff, Owl; make them stand up to their job." "We'll show you something, you slave-driver," Vance vowed, and walked out toward the plate.

Yelps of encouragement broke out from the players he left behind him on the bench. And again the coach's hand rested on the Owl's knee.

"Son," he said in an undertone, "you just keep them fighting for me." Even as he said it a strain of wonder ran through him. Had any other high school team, he speculated, ever been so influenced by a student who probably did not know the difference between an out and a sacrifice hit.

"Yes, sir," the Owl said seriously; "I will."

Vance crashed a long double into right field.

"Here's where we get our four runs," cried Littlefield.

But Northfield scored only once. Vance came home, after taking third on a passed ball, on a long fly to the left fielder.

Morelli shed his sweater and went out to pitch the second. "I'll hold them," he said to Jennings. He did. Not a Hastings runner reached first base.

The game ran on to the fourth inning with neither side scoring again. Then Littlefield tripled, and crossed the plate on Stafford's safe shot to center. The score was now 4 to 2.

"We'll get the runs for you if you'll hold them," Jennings said to Morelli.

"I'll hold them," the pitcher answered grimly. He went out to the rubber—and a Hastings boy

hammered his first pitch to deep right for three bases.

Something like a sigh came from the coach's lips. The Owl, who was interested in this game as he had never before been interested in a game, squirmed along the bench. The stand, used to defeat, now sat in tragic silence.

Morelli's face seemed to have set into stony lines. Twice he pitched, and twice the umpire said "Strike." Once more the pitcher hurled the ball, and the batter swung. The sphere arched up into the air in a high foul, and Hammond was under it when it came down.

"One gone," shrilled Littlefield. "We'll get 'em, Morri; watch your step."

From the stand naught but a feeble cheer.

At the plate a Hastings batter crouched and made short, nervous movements with his bat. Morelli's first offering was wide.

"Ball one!"

The next was better. The batter swung, and the ball rose in the air.

Post turned his back on the diamond and began to run. The hit was one of those tantalizing things known as a Texas Leaguer—too far in for the outfielders, too far out for the infielders. Twice Post looked back over his shoulders. Now the ball was directly overhead; now it was be-

ginning to fall in front of him. He seemed to quicken his speed, seemed to stretch himself, seemed to do the impossible as he reached out and clutch the sphere as it was settling to the ground.

The runner on third bent his head and raced for the plate. Desperately Post dug his spikes into the turf to check his speed. He slowed up, stopped, and in the same instant had swung around and thrown. Straight and true the ball came on a line and settled into the catcher's glove as the Hastings runner began his slide. Through the cloud of dust the umpire's hand was seen to jerk up sharply.

"Out!"

Then, and not until then, did the stand really awaken to the fact that to-day a new Northfield team was in the field. The cheering that, from the start, had been spasmodic, broke out into a roar of acclaim. Post came running into the bench, and the Owl, his long legs prancing, his hat recklessly awry, came forth to meet him and to throw whirlwind arms about his shoulders.

The roar from the stands became bedlam. Through the crowd ran a whisper that the Owl must had had some part in the transformation. Good old Owl! Must have been something about that Martin business that had never been told! Wasn't he the funny geezer, bobbing around out

there with his head cocked to one side like a bird? They began to cheer him then; and the Owl, unused to such demonstrations, fled back to the shelter of the bench.

"I've been thinking——" he began.

"Sure," scoffed Stafford; "that's the best thing you do. What's on your mind? Going to take the coaching job away from Jennings?"

"Oh, no," the Owl said hurriedly; "nothing like that. But in one of Napoleon's battles, when the enemy was on a frozen river, he turned his heavy guns on the river and smashed the ice. That's the time to do something—when the other fellow is at a disadvantage. Couldn't we—couldn't we——" The Owl was searching for a word. "Couldn't we punt?"

Vance let out a roar. "You dill pickle, what do you think this is, football? In baseball you *bunt.*"

"I wonder—" said Jennings, and paused. "Hastings is pretty well shaken. They've lost their swagger, and they're beginning to worry. They're afraid of us. If we couldn't bunt them dizzy and break their ice—"

"That's it," the Owl cried. "Break their ice. Get an icepick—I mean a bat—and—"

Again he had caught their imagination. And again Jennings took advantage of the situation.

"Bunt it is," he ordered; "and the first fellow who fails to run it out goes out of the game. Who's up? You, Peters. See how fast you can get down to first."

Peters bunted the second ball. The Hastings pitcher came in on a wild run and fumbled. Twice he clutched at the sphere and twice it eluded him. When he got it at last the catcher was praying to him to "Hold it" and Peters was panting and gasping safely on first.

The next boy bunted the first pitch. This time the catcher and the third baseman started for the ball, and the third baseman stumbled and fell. The catcher became badly rattled, and though he got his hands on the leather he did not know what to do with it. The shortstop, who had been guarding third, lost his head and came running in to advise the catcher. And Peters, seeing third unguarded, made a wild dash for the deserted bag and made it.

The Hastings infielders began to quarrel among themselves. The Northfield runner on first edged off, found himself unnoticed, and began to walk toward second. He was halfway to his goal when the Hastings first baseman woke up.

"Second, second!" he screamed.

The catcher, startled, threw. There was nobody there to take the throw, and the ball rolled

out to center field. Peters ambled home with Northfield's third run, and the other runner went to third.

The stand was in delirium. The Owl's hat was someplace under the bench, and he did not notice that somebody had stepped on it and had smashed in its crown.

"Another punt," he squealed; "one more and——"

"No," said Jennings; "now is the time to hit it out. They'll be playing in to cut off a run at the plate. Morelli, see if you can hit through them."

Morelli shot a grounder past the third baseman and the score was tied. A minute later Vance hammered a triple into left field, and Northfield went into the lead.

Oh, the roar that came from the stand and echoed up and down the foul lines! The jubilation that broke out on the bench! This, Jennings told himself, was like old times, and his eyes rested affectionately on the boy whose unswerving vision of what was right had brought all this about.

"Well," he said, "we punted them dizzy, didn't we?"

"Yes, sir." The Owl's face grew serious. "I never knew baseball was such fun. I think I made a mistake in not trying to be a player."

The picture of the near-sighted Owl in a baseball uniform was ludicrous—but Jennings did not smile.

For Hastings the game was over. The contest ran on, inning after inning, but the result had already been written. One team had tasted victory and would not be denied; the other had seen the spectre of defeat and had lost heart. When the ninth inning began the scoreboard read Northfield, 9; Opponents, 5. And so it read when the last Hastings batter had been thrown out.

On the bench there was a frenzied scramble for sweaters, bats and gloves. The Owl stood up, rescued his hat, and took a step after the crowd.

"Hey," cried Vance, "where are you going?"

"Home."

"Home? You're coming to the locker room. You were just about the biggest man on this team to-day; and you're going to stay with us to the finish."

"Proper spirit," said Littlefield. "Gosh, what a difference it makes." He was thinking at the moment that this strange boy wrote himself, on the school records, as of Room 13.

To the Owl it was still incomprehensible. But they were plainly sincere, and it had been a long time since Northfield students had singled him out for company. He went along.

Jennings brought up the rear. He saw Praska leave the stand and went on with a new thought in his mind. Praska had approved of what the Owl had done. Praska had not said so in that many words, but it had been apparent during their second interview. Praska had not rushed in to defend the Owl, but had patiently and silently waited for the justification that he knew would have to come. Praska had made it possible for him to stiffen the nine as it had been stiffened that afternoon.

"Proper spirit," the coach said half aloud—and smiled. More than one Northfield boy had brought it to the game that day.

## CHAPTER VI

### A JOB FOR THE PRESS

BRISTOW, the editor of the *Northfield Breeze,* bore physical evidence of the fact that he was of the fighting, two-fisted type. His shoulders were broad, his eyes were gray, his chin was square, and his wiry hair grew close to his head. He was the kind of boy you could count on to have decided opinions and a decided way of expressing them.

Bristow, at the moment, was scowling. He had in his hands a copy of the *Morning Herald.* The scowl grew as he read a story on the first page which bore this heading in big type: "Sloan's Family Fattens on City's Park Pay Roll. Commissioner of Parks and Playgrounds Took Care of Relatives at Public Expense."

Bristow squared his shoulders pugnaciously as he finished reading, and slapped one open hand against the print. "I admit, Praska, that this is good newspaper work. I admit that exposing a man who has used a public position of trust to enrich himself or friends is a useful service. I'm with you on that all the way. I believe that if a news-

paper discovers that a public official is a scoundrel and remains silent, it's a cowardly newspaper. But that has nothing to do with the *Breeze.*"

"Wait a moment." Praska's voice was earnest. "If a newspaper discovers that a public official is a fraud, and keeps silent about it, doesn't it become a party to a fraud?"

Bristow nodded. "I'll say so."

"Then the school paper" . . . Praska's voice rose a bit . . . "then the school paper that knows that a bad condition exists in the school and refuses to fight it, makes itself a party to that condition."

"That," Bristow said hotly, "is a matter of opinion. I feel that a school newspaper ought to keep out of agitations. There's enough of that in the daily newspapers."

"I'm talking about service," Praska said patiently, "not agitations. If it were not for the truth-telling newspapers the public would never know who were the rascals. A school paper should be just as fearless for good government in the school. What's happening at Northfield? Order in the halls has gotten away from us this week. Yesterday there was pushing on the stairs and Joe Clayton fell and sprained his ankle. Do you think any great newspaper would remain silent with a riot going on in its city?"

"Northfield hasn't had a riot."

"We've had disorder."

"Well, why doesn't the faculty suppress it?"

"The faculty will have to, if it keeps up. You know how Dr. Rue feels. He wants the students to learn to control their own affairs. Right now we're falling down. That's where you come in. You sound the call and rally the crowd. Look what a black eye it will be if the faculty has to come in and run this thing for us. It would be the same as though Washington had to step in and run the affairs of a broken-down state."

"And because of that you expect me to pitch into the school with red hot editorials and stir up a smash?"

"I expect the *Breeze* to do its duty toward the school," Praska said sharply.

"The *Breeze* does just that when it refuses to blister every time anything goes wrong," Bristow retorted. "Anyway, what has become of the Safety Committee? Can't the Safety Committee handle order? Isn't Lee Merritt chairman of that committee? Do you want me to attack him?"

From the start Praska had hoped that the Safety Committee would be left to sleep in peace. It was the weak spot in his argument. Now that it had been dragged in he knew that he was beaten.

"I haven't asked you to attack anybody," he said. "I asked you to stand for the best interests of the school."

Bristow flushed. "I'm entitled to my own opinion of how the *Breeze* can serve the best interests of the school. The Safety Committee comes under your Congress. I think if you would pay more attention to that committee, instead of telling me how to run my paper, you'd find that Northfield is staggering along with some dead wood."

Praska knew the name for the dead wood . . . Lee Merritt. Bristow had been right on that. And the editor had been right in saying that the Safety Committee should have made short work of the disorders that had broken out in the halls.

The Safety Committee had been called into power to police the corridors and to report open lockers. When the need arose, it did not have the judgment to extend its police power in another direction. A wise chairman, realizing the fundamental danger of corridor disorders, would have checked them on general principles or at least have made some move to show that he was taking note of the ringleaders. But Merritt was neither strong, nor wise, nor energetic. The opportunity to take charge of the situation passed. What had been, one day, a temporary lapse, became before the week was out a settled habit.

What made the whole situation worse, to one of Praska's mood, was that Merritt had been warned. Perry King, wearing the Safety Committee emblem on his arm, had gone to him immediately the corridor disorders had started.

"A gang out there's been rushing and jostling on the stairs," he had said. "Big Jim Fry's the ringleader. They'll try it out at the next period bell—they always do if they get away with it once. We'll jump in and order them back into line as soon as it starts. That will put a quick bee on funny work in the halls."

Merritt, whose spirit was docile, whose nature was timid, who lacked the iron to dare, grew alarmed at the suggestion. "We haven't any authority to do that."

"Have they any authority to crowd on the stairs and break the lines? Hasn't a citizen the right to stop a crime if he sees it being committed? Didn't we learn that in our civics? What those fellows are doing is a school crime. If somebody's got to take a chance on maybe going a step too far, isn't it better for us to take that step on the right side than for them to take it on the wrong?"

Merritt had been unable to make up his mind.

Perry had shrugged his thin, narrow shoulders and had gone off, to complain bitterly to his friends, in confidence, that what the Safety Com-

mittee needed most was a chairman with convictions and the courage to see them through.

Praska was thinking of all this as he watched Bristow disappear up the stairs, and then turned his own steps toward Room 13. The school day had not yet begun. Mr. Banning caught his eye as he came through the doorway and motioned him forward. The boy came to the desk at which the teacher sat.

"George," said Mr. Banning, "I've been thinking about those hall disorders. Have you had any idea of using the *Breeze?*"

"I've just had a talk with Bristow. He won't touch it. He thinks a school paper ought to leave that stuff alone. He says crusades and agitations should be left for the daily newspapers. The *Breeze* is a mighty good paper, but I don't think it gets any better by refusing to do what ought to be done for Northfield."

Mr. Banning nodded ever so slightly. He recognized in the boy a spirit that put the school and its welfare first, a type of citizenship that later would put the country and its problems first.

"What will you do now?" he asked.

"I've called a meeting of the Congress after school to-day," Praska answered.

But he had no great hopes that much good would come from this. When all was said and

done, the real trouble with the Safety Committee was Lee Merritt's leadership. A word, a hint, and forces could have been set to work in the Congress that would speedily have forced Merritt to resign. Hostile criticism would have engulfed him. Yet Praska had no heart for so ruthless a course. Had the chairman of the Safety Committee been purposely lax, Praska would have fought him without mercy. But Merritt was acting to-day as he would act to-morrow and all through his life—wabbling when he should have been firm, hesitating when every necessity called for prompt action, afraid, even when he was in the right, to touch the quick of fortune and take his chances. Merritt should not have been chairman of anything. He lacked the essential strength. The fault lay with the school itself for ever having signalled him out and given him power.

And so when the Congress, composed of delegates from all the home rooms, met soberly and seriously that afternoon, there was a woeful lack of suggestion, a pitiable attempt to carry an air of faith in what they were doing. Merritt sat there, making notes, wrinkling his forehead in thought, blindly unaware of the glances of doubt and perplexity that were bent on him by boy delegates and by girl delegates. Presently, with the

bright air of one who has struck upon a rare and fortuitous thought, he arose to his feet.

"Mr. Chairman."

"Mr. Merritt," said Praska.

"I believe that this matter should come within the activities of the Safety Committee. As you know, this committee was brought into being to patrol the corridors and guard clothing lockers. We were not told point-blank to preserve order and I did not want to do anything that might arouse criticism and get any member of the committee into trouble."

Perry King gave a groan.

"I beg pardon," said Merritt questioningly, thinking that some one had spoken.

The meeting was silent.

"I move," Merritt went on after a moment, "that the Safety Committee be enlarged and empowered to handle the disorders in the hall."

"Why enlarged?" Betty Lawton asked.

"Why—er—there aren't enough of us to handle the situation. We need a big committee. I think we ought to ask students to volunteer for the work. Get in fresh blood. The more students we have on the committee the greater force we'll have."

Praska, with an effort, kept his face expressionless. Poor Merritt! Mere numbers, the chair-

man knew, never yet made a committee formidable. And yet it might be that fresh blood would work some sort of miracle. It was worth trying because it was the only thing left to try. Praska caught Perry's glance; a signal passed between them. Perry, astounded, sat still. The signal was repeated. Perry arose to his feet.

"I second the motion," he said gruffly, and sat down. After the meeting he waited for Praska and hotly demanded an explanation.

"Let him try it," Praska said patiently. "It can't make things any worse. He's entitled to a try, anyway."

"You watch," was Perry's gloomy return. "Something funny will come out of this."

Something queer did come of it. Next morning Merritt posted a notice asking for volunteers to join the Safety Committee and preserve discipline.

Big Jim Fry was the first student to send in his name.

Three of Northfield's citizens reacted characteristically to Jim Fry's advent into the forces of law and order. Praska took the news with a worried frown between the eyes. Merritt grew flustered and spoke nervously of asking the Congress to rescind the order to increase the committee. Perry openly and bluntly spoke his mind.

"Personally," he said, "this looks to me like

some kind of dodge. This fellow's record has never been any too good. Yet you can never tell. He may come into the committee and do a real job. Sometimes fellows are like that—give them a little responsibility and they stick out their chests and go right to it. We've got to take him in; but I'll tell anybody who likes to know that I haven't much faith in what's running around inside his head."

"We—we don't want any trouble in the committee," Merritt said with a greater show of nervousness. "We'll have to trust that Fry . . ."

"Trust nothing," Perry said grimly. "I'm going to keep an eye on him."

Jim Fry would have been amused in his boisterous way had he been aware of Perry's determination. The idea of Perry—thin, gangling, serious Perry—keeping an eye on him, would have filled him with uproarious mirth. Nature had made Jim Fry burly and belligerent. Physical strength had made him the leader in a certain crowd in the school, physical strength was the only attribute that could draw his respect. Perry's idea of watching him would have sent him off into roars of laughter.

His distorted, mistaken sense of humor had prompted him to start the disorders that had spread through the school corridors. It had

seemed a good lark. A craftier idea moved him to join the Safety Committee. As a member of the committee he would wear a committee arm band. He could, if he so elected, patrol the corridors for a part of each study period—this in addition to his regular periods of patrol. Under school law and school custom he would be immune from questioning as to why he came and went. He would be free to come and go—and the Candy Kitchen, home of sundaes, sodas and delectable sweets, was only a matter of a dozen steps across the street.

From the moment school opened in the morning until it closed in the afternoon, with the exception of the noon hour, the Candy Kitchen was forbidden ground. More than one Northfield boy, hazarding the blockade for the sake of a frosted chocolate or a pineapple frappe, had been discovered in his sin of transgression and had been punished. Twice had Jim Fry suffered penalty. But now he saw before him a safe passport to forbidden delights. As a member of the Safety Committee he could openly cross Nelson Avenue and enter the place. His excuse could always be that he was searching for Northfield defaulters. Not that he ever expected to be questioned; but it was good to have an excuse already prepared should the need for it ever arise.

A day later he received his black arm band with the letters "S. C." standing out in white. The same day he left the school and crossed to the Candy Kitchen. Charlie, the clerk behind the soda fountain, viewed him with surprise.

"You on the committee?"

Jim grinned. "I'll say so. Any of our fellows around? No? Well, I've done my duty and looked for them. Let's have a vanilla, and don't be stingy with the measure."

Charlie scooped out the ice cream. "I thought you committee fellows were the honor boys and couldn't take advantage of things to sneak over here for a drink?"

"Don't make me laugh," said Big Jim. As he drank his soda he glanced down at his arm band and chuckled. The soda finished, he crossed the street casually and entered the school.

Perry King, from an upstairs hall window, happened to see Big Jim go to the Candy Kitchen, and return. He went downstairs and met Fry as he entered the building.

"Anybody over there?" Perry asked.

Big Jim's eyes narrowed. "No. I had a hunch I'd find a certain fellow busy at Charlie's counter. I guess I was too early. Suppose you keep a watch on the place."

Why, Perry reflected, should Big Jim's eyes

have changed? "I guess I won't waste time on it," he said dryly, and walked away.

After that, in some strange fashion trouble seemed to lift its head in whatever part of the school building Big Jim was on duty. If a sudden clamor of boisterousness broke out in a corridor while classes were changing rooms, it was usually a corridor in which he was stationed. If the lines on the stairs suddenly began to race and grow confused and disorganized, it generally happened to the lines over which he was supposed to exercise supervision. With the greatest frankness in the world he would tell Lee Merritt about it.

"It started," he said, "and I hustled right for the middle of it, but by the time I got there it was all over. You couldn't tell what had happened or who had started it. You couldn't pin it on anybody."

Merritt, for all that he had spoken of trusting his first recruit, was beginning to have doubts as to that recruit's probity. "It's funny," he said hesitatingly, "that these things always seem to happen in your territory."

The veins in Big Jim Fry's neck stuck out. His face grew red. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Merritt—easy-going Merritt—shrank from

controversy. "Why, nothing much, only it—it does seem funny."

Big Jim's savage look became a smile. He had seen boys before this falter at the menace of his bulk. The conversation had taken place near the foot of a stairway; he failed to notice that a form had come down the stairs and had stopped one tread from the bottom.

"I'm going over to the Candy Kitchen to see if any Northfield fellows have sneaked over," he said. "I suppose that looks funny, too, doesn't it?"

Merritt did not answer. Big Jim swung around with a swagger, and stopped short. Perry King was on the stairway.

"Got another hunch that a Northfield fellow is going to be there?" Perry asked.

Big Jim was puzzled. He could never quite fathom this boy who surveyed the world so seriously through brooding eyes. Sometimes he thought Perry's questions were asked in good faith; sometimes a jeering irony that he could not decipher seemed to mock him.

"No," he said, after a moment; "I'm just going over on general principles."

That, Perry decided, was honest at any rate. He could have slipped across the street later to see what Big Jim was doing; but that would have

been spying and he revolted against the thought. When he had said that he would keep an eye on him he had meant it in a sense of supervision, not as a threat of espionage. Perry had a strong sense of idealism. To him, the fact that he could go anywhere during the school day without hindrance or question, raised the Safety Committee's work to the heights of sanctity. He might suspect that some member of the committee was playing false, but he would not stalk him for verification. Something within his soul would not permit him to skulk after the shadow of one whom Northfield had raised to a place among a trusted few.

And yet suspicion grew slowly and imperceptibly. Twice, within the next four days, there were renewed disturbances in Big Jim's territory. Merritt, faced with the grim knowledge that a larger Safety Committee had not put an end to disorders, came to Perry.

"I'm taking Big Jim off corridor duty at period time," he said. "Fill in for him, will you?"

Perry nodded. "Have you told him?"

"Yes. I told him he had been on for two weeks and could shift to something softer."

Perry grunted. It was like Merritt to avoid speaking the unpleasant truth. He went down to his place, and was there when the 10:40 bell

sounded. Out into the corridors poured Northfield's eight hundred. The lines, like undulating snakes passed up and down the stairs. All of a sudden there was a rush, a scattering of students who were pushed from behind, confusion, and subdued laughter from those who had engineered the stampede.

Perry's voice rang out. "Lewis! I saw that. Step down here, please."

A boy, wearing the flush of guilt, dropped out of one of the lines. Somebody murmured "Gosh! I thought this was Big Jim's station, what's happened to him today?" The changing classes passed on, but Lewis remained behind, scowling and uncomfortable.

"I'm going to hand in your name," Perry said. "What's your Home Room . . . 11, isn't it? I hope they give you a dressing down that will make you sick."

Lewis shuffled his feet.

"This rough-housing's got to stop. You fellows won't be satisfied until the faculty steps in and suspends student participation in school government. Then, after the student body gets a black eye, you'll be satisfied."

"Why don't you do some reforming in your own committee?" Lewis demanded sulkily. "You yank me out, but just because Big Jim is a mem-

ber of the committee you let him get away with murder."

"No member of the committee gets away with anything," Perry said sharply.

"Except ice cream and sodas at the Candy Kitchen?" Lewis retorted. "What do you think he goes over there for every day? I've heard him telling how he gets away with it."

Perry's hand shook a little as he entered Lewis' name and room number in his memorandum book. Abruptly, after that, he went off to look for Merritt, whom he knew he would find on the second floor. The chairman of the Safety Committee was standing near the head of the stairs, dejection in every line of his figure.

"Where's Jim Fry?" Perry demanded.

"Candy Kitchen," Merritt answered listlessly. "I—I think he's gone there to buy something; his talk of scouting for fellows who have skinned over there is just a blind. I saw him taking money from his pocket as he crossed the street."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do about it?"

"You can go over there and see what he's up to. I don't like this thing of spying on a committee member, but Jim Fry's been carrying his game too far. He's even been boasting of how he gets away with it. I heard that a little while ago.

What he needs is somebody to go over there and tell him that the game is up."

But Merritt's expression showed that the curse of indecision was working its spell upon him. Perry started down the stairs again.

"I'm going after him," he flung back over his shoulder.

Big Jim, leisurely consuming a plate of chocolate ice cream, looked up as Perry pushed open the Candy Kitchen door. He called a startled "Hey, Charlie; get this out of sight."

The soda clerk, busy washing glasses, looked up blankly. "What's that?" he asked.

Then it was too late. Perry was in the store. Big Jim, with an angry shake of his head, helped himself to another spoonful of the chocolate mixture.

"You know the rules," Perry said quietly.

"I know what will happen to you if you try to start anything with me," Big Jim said savagely. The veins were standing out on his neck; but if Perry noticed them he made no sign. Only by the manner in which the nostrils of his thin nose had grown pinched was it evident that he had settled himself to an unswerving purpose.

"You're not worthy of that band on your arm," he said. "I'm going to take it from you."

Nobody heard the door open nor saw Lee

Merritt come in as one on an unhappy errand. Charlie, the clerk, stood with towel in his hands forgetful of the glasses he had started to dry. Perry took a step forward.

"What are you going to do?" Big Jim demanded.

"I'm going to take away your arm band."

"You try it and I'll squash your nose so that it will touch your ears."

Plainly Big Jim expected that threat to settle the matter. As he stood there, his shoulders hunched, his head thrust forward on its thick neck, he looked to be twice the size of the pale, thin boy who confronted him.

Perry came forward another step. Big Jim drew back his arm. "I'll flatten you," he warned.

"Keep your arm that way," said Perry. "It will be easier for me to take out the pins."

Big Jim wanted to drive out with his fist—and couldn't. Some power outside himself, some power he could not explain, some power greater than all his bulge of muscle, would not let him strike. Surprise, amazement, consternation, uneasiness, passed through the shadows of his eyes. He felt the touch of fingers, felt the pins come out, felt the band loosen, saw it pulled away—and stood with his arm drawn back and permitted it to be done.

"If I hit you one——" he began uncertainly.

Perry folded the band and put it in his pocket. "Jim Fry," he said evenly, "I charge you with being a traitor to the ideals of Northfield High. I summon you to stand trial before the Northfield Congress"

The trial was held three days later in an anteroom of the office of Dr. Rue, principal of the school. At the invitation of the Congress, Dr. Rue and Mr. Randolph, the faculty adviser of the Congress, were present; but they took no official part in the proceedings. Praska presided. The other members of the Congress, twenty-odd in number, sat as a jury serious and silent along one side of the room. A boy named Maxwell, a senior, was to present the case against the defendant. Big Jim had been told that he could select a student to represent him. Instead he came in alone, swaggering and insolent.

"I don't need counsel," he told Praska. "I can take care of myself."

"This case is serious," Praska reminded him.

Big Jim's glance, as it swept the jury, was disdainful. "I'm glad you think so," he said, and sat down. At first he had been of a mind not to bother to come to the trial. Then he had decided to put in an appearance and show how little he thought of the proceedings.

Maxwell cleared his throat, consulted some notes, and called Lee Merritt to the stand.

"You are chairman of the Safety Committee of this school?"

"I am."

"Is Jim Fry a member of the committee?"

"Yes; but he has been suspended."

"Did you see Jim Fry go to the Candy Kitchen last Tuesday?"

"Yes. I saw him cross the street and take money from his pocket and that made me think he was going over there to buy something."

"Did you follow him over?"

"I . . . Perry King was the first to go over. When I got there Perry was telling him that he was going to take the band from his arm."

Maxwell then called Perry to the stand.

"Did you go to the Candy Kitchen last Tuesday during school hours?"

"Yes."

"Was Jim Fry there?"

"Yes."

And alternate question and answer continued until the scene in the Candy Kitchen was painted in.

Big Jim sat sprawled back in his chair, taking note of the witness with a bored air. At the end of the testimony, he ignored Praska's invitation

to question Perry, just as he had declined to cross-examine Merritt.

Solemnly, with Praska bringing up the rear, the Congress retired to consider a verdict. Big Jim, with his hands in his pockets, wandered out after them. The main hall was full of students waiting to learn the result of the trial. Two or three of Big Jim's friends came to him and pointed to Perry and Merritt in earnest conversation near the entrance doors.

"Aren't they members of the Congress any more, Jim? They didn't go upstairs with the others."

"They can't vote on the verdict," Big Jim answered. "They were witnesses."

"How did it go—did they rip it into you?"

"It's a joke," said Jim. He believed it, too. Schoolboys like himself going through the motions of a solemn trial, just as though what they did amounted to something. A grin touched his lips.

After a time Praska came down the stairs and led the Congress back to the trial room. Students in the hall made a silent path for them, awed by something in the bearing of these representatives who held so much of the school's destiny in their hands. Big Jim shambled after them, suddenly ill at ease in spite of himself.

There was a scraping of chairs as the Congress settled into its seats. Ott, one of the members, a commercial student, took a stenographer's notebook from his pocket, opened it, and held it ready on his knee. Still the same silence that had been with the Congress as it came down the stairs! Praska stood up at his place.

"James Fry," he said, "arise and hear the sentence of the Northfield Congress."

Big Jim remained in his seat.

"Stand!" Praska cried. His lips were set in a thin line. The indignant flame of an outraged loyalty burned in his eyes. He was very stiff, very straight, the very figure of Justice inexorably dealing out its decrees.

Slowly—slowly—Big Jim came to his feet. A force he could not comprehend compelled him to obey. He was witnessing a moral victory, and did not know it.

"James Fry," Praska began, "you have been duly found guilty of the charges brought against you. Judging by the way you have behaved yourself to-day, you are either unaware of the seriousness of what you have done or else you are totally unable to realize the Northfield spirit. In either case you are to be pitied.

"But pity cannot blind us to the fact that conduct such as yours is dangerous. You deserted

the duty you were given to do. Northfield called upon you to stand by her, and you promised that you would, and then stole away. You are as bad as the sentry who, in time of war, sells out his company to the enemy.

"How could you do it? Have you no sense of pride in what this school has done? Do you ever feel the thrill of American history—the struggle of the weak and scattered Colonies, the sufferings at Valley Forge, the day of victory at Yorktown, the growth of a nation? But the young American army had its Benedict Arnold, and Northfield has you. Knowing what was at stake, knowing that there was talk of the faculty's stepping in and telling the students that they had failed, you sold us out. Arnold sold out for money and for revenge. You were cheaper than that. You, a Northfield fellow, sold out Northfield for a plate of ice cream. Jim Fry, how could you do it?"

A twitching spasm ran through Big Jim's nerves. Had he and Praska been alone he would have laughed this off; but every member of the Congress was listening to this arraignment. A dull red stained his cheeks, and his gaze held itself fixedly upon a far corner of the room.

"A wrong as great as yours," Praska went on after a silence, "demands a great atonement. Will you apologize to Northfield in the auditorium?"

Big Jim's head went back. "Before the whole school?"

"Yes."

"If you think you can get away with anything like that on me, you're crazy."

"Then the sentence of the Northfield Congress," Praska said clearly, "is that you be dishonorably dismissed from the Safety Committee and that the verdict of the Congress be published in the next number of the *Northfield Breeze.*"

The case was closed. Big Jim's eyes had to come away from the corner then, and as he swung around he faced his jury.

"I guess I can get along without the Safety Committee," he said. "I never thought much of that bunch, anyway. As for the *Breeze,* that's a laugh."

He swaggered off; and out in the corridor the waiting students clustered about him to learn what had happened. By and by, when Praska and Perry came out, the crowd had dwindled to a handful. The two boys went upstairs to the editorial room of the *Breeze,* and were lucky enough to find Bristow reading a batch of poems that some ambitious student had dropped into the contribution box. Praska explained that the Congress wanted the verdict in the Fry case published in full.

Bristow frowned and tapped an impatient pencil against his desk. "You know I don't believe in that sort of stuff, Praska. We talked it over a couple of weeks ago. Now you come in here to fight it out all over again."

"No," Praska shook his head. "I didn't come here to argue anything. I came here to ask you to do what the Congress, every member of it, thinks ought to be done."

"The whole Congress?" Bristow asked thoughtfully, and got up from his chair and began to pace the room. After a time he halted in the center of the floor.

"What right," he demanded, "has the Congress to tell me what I ought to publish?"

"The Congress is the voice of Northfield," said Praska.

Bristow sighed. "That's what has got me licked," he said after a moment. "When you and I had it out downstairs it was my opinion against yours. This is different. This is the combined opinion of the Congress against me. In America the majority rules. That's democracy. That's fair. Bring me that verdict and I'll put it in."

Bristow published the Fry story in the next issue of the school paper, under a single-column head on page one:

*DISMISSED AND CENSURED*

Big Jim bought a copy on the outdoor steps of the school, saw the story, and began to grin. But the grin faded as he read. Back there in the trial room, Praska's denunciation had been momentarily disturbing—that and nothing more. Reading the verdict now in cold type seemed to make it deadly effective. Phrases that had glanced off his callousness began to sear him. He had been able to walk out of the trial room and forget what Praska had said, but this could not be forgotten. Praska's voice had been of the moment; this thing, printed from type, had a solid and enduring quality. It would be read by eight hundred students, to-day, to-morrow, all through the week. A copy of it would be preserved in the bound file in the library.

That day was the most uncomfortable that Big Jim had ever lived. Every time he saw students reading the paper he thought they were reading the verdict in his case. If he saw three or four talking, he was sure they were talking about him, —and in many cases they were. Every eye that met his seemed to reflect the question that Praska had asked: "How could you do it?"

No one flung him a cordial or casual word; some cut him dead; two or three—Hammond, the football captain, among them—parked scathing disapproval into a short sentence.

Big Jim's boisterousness departed. He became quiet. His manner grew subdued. The same force that has controlled men of all ages, in all walks of life had been brought to bear upon him in the sheltered confines of his school. It was the pressure of public opinion, then, as always, so largely shaped by the press.

And another was to feel that pressure on that day. At noon Merritt came to Praska, where the president of the Congress sat alone in a corner of the cafeteria.

"George," Merritt said, "I'm going to resign as chairman of the Safety Committee. I should have done it long ago. I didn't realize what a rotten job I was doing until that story came out in the *Breeze* about Big Jim. There's been talk since then. Some of the fellows have been asking why I didn't go over to the Candy Kitchen after Big Jim—why Perry had to do it? Well, why did he have to do it? Because I fell down on the job. I guess I've been falling down right along, only I didn't look at it in that way. Anyway, I'm out, and the Congress can name some fellow who'll make a better chairman than I have made."

During the last period of the day Mr. Banning, in the civics classroom, had to call Big Jim three times before he could arouse him from his thought. At the end of the period the teacher

stopped the boy at the door and drew him to one side.

"What's the matter, Fry?" he asked.

Big Jim did not answer.

Mr. Banning made a shrewd guess. "That story in the *Breeze* get under your skin?"

The boy nodded. "I deserved it, I guess. I'm not kicking. Only . . . only . . ."

"Only it seems cruel to publish it where everybody can read it, and carry it around with them, and read it again. Jim, there was never a man with a bad record made public who didn't feel the same way. The *Breeze* couldn't harm you if you had not first harmed the school. What you're thinking now is that this thing may hang over you all through high school. It may—it may not. It all depends upon you. There's a way to live it down."

"How?" The boy was eager.

"By playing the game the Northfield way and with the Northfield spirit."

Big Jim squared his shoulders; then, with no further words, walked out of the civics classroom with his head up.

## CHAPTER VII

### NORTHFIELD HELPS ITSELF

THE EDITORIAL home of the *Northfield Breeze* was a corner room on the top floor of the Northfield High School. The room, tucked into an out-of-the-way wing of the building, had the remote appearance of an architectural afterthought. A stranger, strolling through the corridors, might have passed the doorway with the impression that the threshold probably led to a storage chamber for janitor's supplies. It was a dull and uninviting doorway.

But once inside the room one would have recognized the calling of the place. Three scarred tables held implements that possessed an editorial look—ancient type-shears loose on their hinges, and disordered piles of school papers and magazines. Drawings that had had their day of renown in the school weekly hung framed upon the walls; and there was also a well-preserved letter of advice that a famed novelist had once written to a *Breeze* staff. That letter was each succeeding editor's heirloom, to be duly pondered and

handed down, in time, to his successor. A dictionary on a stand was near the tables, a filled bookcase stood against one wall, and between two windows was a rack holding newspapers to which the school had subscribed. Four newspapers hung suspended from rods—the *New York Times,* the *Chicago Daily News,* the *Kansas City Star* and the *Philadelphia Ledger.*

At one of the windows Bristow and Praska stood staring out at a stretch of vacant building lots that lay parallel with the rear of the school building. Praska was the first to speak.

"If something isn't done," he said, "it will be the same story that it was three years ago. Northfield won't have a chance."

Bristow pursed his lips. "Three years ago the election came right after that outbreak of typhoid fever. Everybody was taking sides on the question of pure water. Nobody was thinking about an athletic field for the high school. Scarcely anybody bothered to vote yes or no on the question of buying the lots back there."

"It will be the same this year," said Praska. "This time everybody is interested in Commissioner Sloan. His side is saying that the parks and public improvements were never kept up better than he has kept them. The other side is saying that he's done nothing but make a lot of

soft jobs for his family at public expense. Every night there are street corner meetings. Nobody says a word about the referendum on the high school field. It's just a side issue. It's up to us to see that it stops being a side issue."

Bristow, his lips still pursed, whistled a preoccupied, aimless, almost silent tune.

"We've been to the editor of the *Morning Herald,*" Praska went on, "and we've had a talk with the editor of the *Evening Star.* We asked them to get behind the athletic field and boost it. But both papers are attacking Commissioner Sloan. They won't go off on any side issues, either. What's the result? They've each given us one little item buried on an inside page—a couple of inches in each paper. That won't get us any place. There's only one road left. We've got to make our fight in the *Breeze.*"

"We won't reach much of the public," said Bristow.

"We'll reach the parents of our eight hundred students. Less than eight hundred voters bothered to say either yes or no three years ago."

Bristow, still whistling that almost soundless tune, walked to the middle table of the three, and stood there toying with the clipping shears.

"If the *Breeze* goes into this," he said abruptly, "it's going to be mighty hard work."

"Everything's hard," said Praska seriously, "until it's done."

Abruptly Bristow dropped the shears.

"There was a time," he said, "when I didn't believe in a school paper's going into this sort of thing—but I've changed my mind. You can count on the *Breeze* to go with you all the way. Something Mr. Banning said in civics last week has started me thinking. He said that half the fellows in the senior class would cast a vote in the next election for Governor of this State. It gave me a jolt to think how close a lot of us were—you and me, for instance—to American citizenship. Then he said we don't keep in touch with the people who have graduated from this school. I think I know what he meant by that. He meant that whenever the school had a fight on it ought to call on its graduates for help. It's going to be a fight for that athletic field, and we're going to call on ours. First crack out of the box we ought to call on Carlos Dix."

"Fine!" cried Praska.

Bristow grinned. "I thought that would get you. You've been a Carlos Dix worshipper ever since we were in the sixth grade. I'll bet there was a time you dreamed of him at night."

"I'm still for him," Praska said honestly. "He was the best quarterback Northfield ever had,

and he made a record on the State University team."

"Oh, he had a good head."

"He had something more," Praska said sharply "Not many high school letter fellows ever took the trouble to coach a grammar school team as he coached ours. After he went to the University he wrote us a couple of times and suggested plays. He's kept in touch with us ever since he came back and opened his law office. He's come out to the high school games when he could and——"

"Gag yourself," Bristow cut in, half in good humor, half in earnest. "When I said Dix had a good head I wasn't slamming him. What's your objection to his having a good head?"

Praska subsided. Bristow, he knew, was twisting words around. At that Bristow excelled him. He had never developed the knack of deft, quick speech. Yet his mental picture of Carlos Dix was as clear and as strong as it had ever been in grammar school days—a keen, alert man, generous, public-spirited, and straight as a string; and he remembered that years ago Bristow had twitted him about Carlos Dix even as he twitted him now.

"Let's get back on the main line," the editor said imperturbably. "We ought to get Carlos Dix to use his head in this athletic business. He

knows a lot about managing public affairs. My father says that in another year or so he'll be in the State Legislature, young as he is. Last fall he made political speeches all over the State. He's just the man to help us."

"He may be too busy," Praska suggested doubtfully. "He may not have the time for a campaign like this."

"Do your years at Northfield mean anything to you?" Bristow demanded sharply.

"Yes," Praska answered simply.

"Then if Carlos Dix is the man you say he is, the four years he spent at Northfield mean something to him. Somebody ought to go to him."

"I'll go," said Praska.

At five o'clock the next afternoon the elevator of the Union Trust Building dropped him off at the seventh floor. Carlos Dix's office was down at the end of a corridor—the type of office that would naturally be rented by a man whose future was bright but whose present demanded economy. A girl, sitting at a typewriter desk, disappeared into an inner room after Praska had given her his name. A moment later Carlos Dix came out.

"Hello, Praska," he said with a cordial handclasp. "Come in." He led the way into his private office and motioned the boy to a chair. "Just give me a minute to pick up these papers." With

swift fingers he fell to banding legal looking documents into neat packets that he arranged orderly on his desk.

Praska had a momentary chance to study once more this man to whom he had long given a boy's half-hidden allegiance. Carlos Dix's build was still as rangy as when he had shrilled his signals to the Northfield eleven. His forehead was high, his hair was crisp and brown, his gray eyes looked at you openly and directly, and the ghost of a smile seemed to tug constantly at one corner of his wide, generous mouth. He had that vague something that men call magnetism. Lincoln had it. So, too, had Roosevelt.

The young lawyer snapped on the last rubber band and turned to Praska with friendly alertness. "Well, what is it?"

"It's about the election," said Praska. "We're going to try to put through the referendum for an athletic field, and we've come to you for help. Northfield hasn't forgotten you."

"I haven't forgotten Northfield," said Carlos Dix.

He walked to the wall, and stood looking at the framed picture of a football team. When he came back to his desk, it was plain from the expression on his face that his thoughts were in the past. Abruptly he aroused himself.

"What you want from me," he said, "is principally advice—right?"

"Right," said Praska.

"You've got two ways to reach people, word of mouth and the printed word. You must use the *Breeze*."

"We're going to. That's all been planned."

"Good. That reaches the parents of eight hundred students. You want to hammer away on two things, why the school should have an athletic field, and what it will cost. You can easily figure the cost. Go down to the Tax Assessor's office in the City Hall. Find out what figure the city puts on those lots in back of the high school for taxing purposes. Taxing value is always less than market value. In this town, add about forty per cent. to the taxing value and you'll have a fair market selling price. Then keep yelling about how little it will cost each taxpayer."

Praska had drawn pencil and paper from his pockets and was making notes.

"Now for your word of mouth campaign. Every Northfield student must do missionary work at home and with the next door neighbors. Each student must centralize on just that—his own family and the families next door. Don't spread your fire; center it on the people who know you. The athletic field is a side issue in this

campaign. The whole town is caught by the ear by just one thing—will Commissioner Sloan be defeated or re-elected? Half of the people won't even bother to vote on the athletic field. If you get out a crowd who will vote 'yes,' you'll win."

Carlos Dix's voice, vibrant, sure, confident, warmed Praska through and through. As he shook hands with the lawyer in leaving, he was struck anew with the thought that only a few short years ago this man of affairs had seen little of the world except what went on in a high school classroom.

"I'm glad you came in," Carlos Dix said, "for many reasons," and Praska left with a feeling of deep inward satisfaction.

The campaign would succeed—he was sure of that. But of even greater moment to him was the fine way in which the lawyer had responded to the call of his old school.

Next morning he told Bristow the success of his errand. "Carlos Dix," he said enthusiastically, "didn't hesitate a minute. You can always count on him. Remember the first year we were in high school, the time the football team was swamped in its first game——"

"O, bother Carlos Dix!" Bristow said with irritation. "Let's attend to this election. You get

those tax figures and we'll begin to stir the pot. I'll do my bit. You get the rest of the school to campaign at home and among the neighbors. Just get me some figures, and I'll use them as a peg to hang up some snappy articles."

Praska got the figures that afternoon. The gray-haired chief clerk in the Tax Assessor's office took him back among the assessment books and speedily gave him the information he sought.

"I think I know what you're after," the man said. "If you high school fellows are going to try to get that athletic field, I'd buzz around and see the lawyers and the real estate men."

"Why?" Praska asked eagerly.

"Some of the people who own these lots do business through lawyers and real estate brokers. If a real estate man has a client who owns any of that property he'll help you put it over for the sake of his client. If a lawyer has a client who owns some of that property he'll lend a hand to help you put it over, too. There may be a little commission money in it for them."

Praska thanked the man and walked out into the rotunda of the City Hall. The list he had in his pocket showed that B. B. Ballinger, Northfield's leading real estate broker, owned six of the lots in the rear of the high school. There would be at least one real estate man, he thought,

who would quickly join in the school's campaign.

But when he told this to Bristow, the editor looked at him with a sudden, speculative smile. "Ballinger! Carlos Dix is his lawyer. I wonder if Carlos is in this with us to get *his* little commission money."

"Carlos Dix is in this," Praska said indignantly, "to help Northfield. Anyway, there wouldn't be anything wrong in it if he wanted to help Mr. Ballinger sell some lots to the town."

Bristow grinned. "Stirred you up, didn't I? Thought I'd get you with that. But just between you and me, George, if Carlos jumped right into this because he wanted to help Mr. Ballinger it would be a whole lot more honest if he'd come out in the open and say so."

"Well—" Praska began weakly, and stopped. There was nothing he could think of to say.

Bristow opened his campaign in the next issue of the *Breeze*:

### Northfield's Opportunity

Every person, every community, every school is judged by two standards—the things done and the things left undone. In the coming election Northfield has an opportunity to supply a need of Northfield High School. The town had the opportunity once before, but did not see it. It must not

be said again that Northfield was blind to its chance.

It will cost, it is estimated, about $25,000 for an athletic field. Is this too much? It all depends upon what the town will get for its $25,000. A sick man is usually willing to give all his money to regain his health. Doctors say that it is cheaper to stay well than to spend money for cures. Northfield speaks of that field as an athletic field, but it would be better, perhaps, to call it a "health field."

The old Greeks had a saying, "A sound mind in a sound body." The class-room provides a mental training field, but a basement gym is a poor body builder. Exercise should be taken in the open air. When it is taken on a school field it becomes as much a part of a school duty as study. Health marks are as important as examination marks.

Why did the Greeks insist upon a sound mind in a sound body? For the same reason that one would not store precious oil in a cracked bottle. The crack would allow the oil to leak away, and a weak body is a crack through which energy is lost. The best brains have usually gone with rugged bodies.

Northfield doesn't ask $25,000 merely for an athletic field. It asks for an athletic field plus—and the plus is health.

"That," Bristow said confidently, "is something that ought to strike home."

Praska was sure that it would bring results.

And yet, before two days were gone, it was apparent that the article had created scarcely a ripple. The school itself, the party most vitally interested, was not impressed. Bristow was disappointed.

"You ought to go down and see Carlos Dix again," he told Praska. "We're slipping up some place. We're not getting the most out of what we're doing. Dix may be able to put us on the right track. He'll try hard enough if he's in this to sell lots for Mr. Ballinger."

Praska went again to the office on the seventh floor of the Union Trust building, carrying with him a memory of Bristow's teasing, exasperating grin. But all doubts fled as he sat again beside the lawyer's desk. It did not seem possible that those candid eyes, that frank smile, could mask a purpose other than absolute school loyalty.

"I gave you the right road," the lawyer said frankly, "but I sent you up the wrong side. The first thing to do is to convince the school itself. The students cannot campaign at home unless they believe in what they're doing. Try this. Pack together your best arguments for voting for an athletic field. Word them concisely and forcefully. Give, also, brief, logical answers to any objections that have been raised. Keep the whole thing short and have it printed on small

slips of paper. See to it that there is one on every student's desk. Then send out speakers from the Northfield Congress to visit each home room and discuss these arguments with the students. Let them ask questions and answer them. Hammer the arguments home. Sell them to the citizens of the school community. Then print a short article on the same lines in the next issue of the *Breeze,* and get the students to take the paper home, with the article marked, and sell their dads and mothers."

The solution was so simple that Praska was astounded that neither he nor Bristow had thought of it. He stood up to go.

"Keep in touch with me," Carlos Dix said. "I'm interested in this campaign for more reasons than you think."

Praska winced. What the lawyer had said might mean nothing, yet Bristow had planted the seed of a disquieting thought. There *would* be nothing wrong in Carlos Dix working for the school and at the same time doing service for a client. Nevertheless, the boy had built up a fine-spirited, wholly unselfish ideal of the man, and the mere thought of commission money in some way soiled the beauty of the picture.

Within the next two days, the argument-selling campaign went through as Carlos Dix had planned

it. Perry, Lee Merritt, Hammond, Littlefield, Betty Lawton, Praska, and others went forth as a speakers' committee from the Congress to inspire the school and to rouse it to concerted action.

"The athletic field is yours," they cried, "if you'll get out and work. Take the *Breeze* home! See that that article is read! Try to find out if your parents will vote for the field on Election Day. Northfield is depending on you. If you fail her, she's lost. You are her soldiers and we're here to-day, on behalf of the Congress, sounding the battle cry and the charge."

The home rooms caught the enthusiasm—there could be no doubt of that. Yet two days later only seventy-two students had reported votes in favor of the field. The results were almost as disappointing as they had been before. By that time another issue of the *Breeze* was out with a third article, but Bristow made no boasts.

"My father," little Johnny Dunn told him, "says we have too many things now to take our minds off our studies."

"Has he read my articles?" the editor demanded.

Johnny Dunn nodded. Bristow looked crestfallen.

At noon a girl came to the cafeteria, where Praska was eating, and told him that Carlos Dix

had telephoned the principal's office and had asked that he be summoned. The boy went upstairs at once.

"How are things shaping up?" the lawyer asked.

"We can find only seventy-two sure votes."

"And the election only eight days away. Son, we've got to hustle. Can you meet me at my office to-night at eight o'clock? Perhaps it will be better if you bring a couple of other fellows with you. Eight sharp."

At eight o'clock Praska was there with Bristow and with Perry King. "Sorry," said Carlos Dix. "I thought we'd be able to talk things over here, but we've got to go elsewhere."

They followed him, and Praska was conscious of how much they had come to rely upon this man's judgment and leadership.

Presently they turned in at a walk outlined with trim hedge. Bristow dug his elbow into Praska's ribs, and the president of the Northfield Congress looked at the editor inquiringly. Bristow merely smiled. And then, as Praska recognized his surroundings, an electric tingle shot him through and through. They had come to B. B. Ballinger's home.

Mr. Ballinger himself opened the door. Carlos Dix was the last one to enter the house.

"How does it look?" the real estate man asked in an undertone.

"I think we'll put it over," the lawyer answered in the same low voice.

Ordinarily Praska would not have heard either the question or the answer; but to-night every sense was sharp and alert. In the living room, where the conference was held, he was conscious of Bristow, his head tilted a little to one side, smiling inscrutably over the heads of the gathering.

"Mr. Ballinger," Carlos Dix said, "is a graduate of Northfield High. I don't think any of you knew that. He graduated years ago before the present high school was built. But his heart is still with Northfield."

"So much so," said Mr. Ballinger, "that I want to organize a committee, get after every graduate who is in town, and send him out to influence his friends to vote for the athletic field. I thought it best, though, to talk to some of the students and see how they felt about it."

"I think that's great," Perry King said at once. Bristow said not a word. Praska nodded—slowly—and saw Carlos Dix give him a sharp glance.

The discussion lasted more than an hour. In all that time Bristow did not speak. Perry was

keen and animated. Praska, confused by the clashing faith and despair with which he viewed Carlos Dix, found it hard to fix his attentions on the conversation. It is agony to see a cherished ideal die!

But in the end he responded to the bright hope of the plan. Northfield's graduates would push a quiet, insistent campaign. And in the school itself the work would go on. Speeches would continue to be made in the home rooms.

"If we could only get the auditorium for a night meeting for parents of students," Perry cried suddenly. "The night before the election; just parents, no outsiders. The students making all the speeches. A meeting of those interested in the school to talk about a school need. Wouldn't that be one grand, final hurrah?"

"If you can do that," said Carlos Dix, "it would be almost a winning move."

"We can see Mr. Rue in the morning. If the Northfield Congress will back this——" He looked at Praska, and Praska nodded.

The boys departed, but the lawyer remained behind. There were some personal matters, he said, that he wished to talk over with Mr. Ballinger. Praska swallowed a queer lump in his throat.

At the first corner Perry turned off and went

his way whistling. Bristow and Praska walked on together in silence.

"Mr. Ballinger's lawyer," Bristow observed at last.

Praska said nothing.

"Did you hear Carlos Dix tell him he thought they'd put it over?"

Praska nodded.

"They held their voices down; they didn't think anybody'd catch what they said. It would be a nice thing for Mr. Ballinger if he could get rid of all those lots in a lump, wouldn't it? What kind of Northfield man is Carlos Dix anyway?"

Praska wet his lips. "You aren't sure——"

"Oh, rats! I'm not stupid. I can smell something cheesy when it's right under my nose. What's Carlos Dix doing, talking big about his love for the school and then using us to pull Mr. Ballinger's chestnuts from the fire?"

"I don't know," Praska answered with an effort. Then, in a voice of misery he added, "I wish I did know."

"You always did make too much of a hero of him," said Bristow.

"I believe," was the report that came from Mr. Rue, "that it is entirely proper for the students to use the auditorium for a meeting to tell the needs of the school to the public."

And then came a time of activity such as Northfield had not known before. A sign, built and painted in the manual training shops, went up in the corridor facing the entrance:

*BRING AN ATHLETIC FIELD TO NORTHFIELD*

Speeches! Day after day they were heard in the home rooms. The great Northfield question became "How are those at home going to vote?" "Ask dad and mother; they know," cried the Northfield Congress. It became the rallying cry of the school. During the last auditorium period of the week a student sprang from his seat as the dismissal signal was given and as the leader of the school orchestra stood ready to start the exit march.

"Everybody in on this," he yelled. "Make it snappy. Are we going to get that field?"

"Ask dad and mother!" roared eight hundred throats; "they know!"

Praska felt that one spontaneous outburst was worth a dozen speeches in the home rooms. The steady record of progress was beginning to show itself in the reports that came in. The seventy-two sure votes had become one hundred and eighty-nine, and more than two hundred parents

had promised to come to the auditorium meeting. Added to that, Northfield's graduates, urged on by Mr. Ballinger and by Carlos Dix, were waging their own particular campaign. When the lawyer telephoned again that afternoon, Praska reported that the situation showed a distinct and decided improvement.

And yet, it was Betty Lawton who called to his attention an angle that had been overlooked.

"We're forgetting," she said thoughtfully, "the men and women who will be undecided about coming to the meeting until the last minute."

"You mean that we ought to have some way of reaching them right at the end?" Praska demanded. "How?"

"What do the political parties do on election day when they're trying hard to get out the vote? Don't they rush around in automobiles and bring voters to the polls?"

Praska's hands came together with a crack. "Betty, that's an idea. We ought to be able to find a few fellows who could use their father's cars that night. Now we *are* on the road."

A hurried call went to home rooms to prepare new lists. What students' folks would surely come to the meeting? Who were doubtful? Saturday Praska, Perry, Hammond and Betty Lawton came to the school and checked up in a

silence that was broken only by the clatter of brooms and pans as the janitor and his assistants scoured the building. When the job was done they had one final collection of names—those on whom last minute pressure would have to be brought.

Monday afternoon, after classes, members of the Congress began to telephone to doubtful parents. "We need you to-night," each message ran; "you must come." At six o'clock this special pleading was at an end. Some of the parents had promised. Some were hopeless. Sixty-five homes were still doubtful—one hundred and thirty fathers and mothers controlling one hundred and thirty votes.

Praska wrote out sixty-five names and addresses for those students who had promised to report at the school at seven o'clock with cars. This done he was conscious of a dragging weariness and a gnawing doubt. He began to tremble with an acute fear that they were doomed to failure. At home he ate a hurried supper, and when he left the house his father and mother were making ready to follow him. A church tower clock was striking half-past seven when he got back to the school.

"Did the automobiles go out for their people?" he demanded of Perry King.

Perry nodded.

"How many?"

"Five. None of them has come back yet."

"Anybody—anybody here?"

Perry shook his head. Praska told himself that it was too early—told it over and over again as though forcing himself to believe in the impossible.

At twenty minutes of eight one car rolled up to the curb with three people, and promptly went off for more. Praska saw them comfortably seated in the auditorium. The place was half-filled with students. The three adults seemed pitifully out of place—only three!

Five minutes later a trickle of parents began to come through the entrance doors. Boys and girls, wearing the arm bands of the Safety Committee, took charge of them as soon as they entered the building. Praska remained out on the sidewalk, watching with fearful eyes the approaches to the school.

"If they'll only come," he said in a whisper; "if they'll only come."

And then the tide set in. From the four corners of the town they came, men and women whose interest had been aroused, whose attention had been caught, by an unexpected, insistent, compelling campaign. Some were there out of curi-

osity, some because their sense of appreciation and admiration had been touched. They passed Praska in ones, and twos, and half-dozens. Exultation rioted in his blood. His weariness was gone.

Perry King, panting, rushed out of the school and touched him on the arm. "George! Some of our crowd is beginning to go away. The students have more than half the seats and the crowd can't find places."

Praska made a dash for the building. "Send the Safety Committee through the aisles. Get the students into the rear of the hall. Tell them they're freezing out our guests. Hurry it." At the door of the school he met the first of those coming away. "Please stay," he cried. "There'll be seats for everybody in a moment. This is our first public meeting and I guess we're a little green at it."

"Shure, lad," said a voice, "'tis all right. We've all o' us got t' learn our tricks. Back we go."

And back they went. The ousted students, crowding toward the rear of the auditorium, made progress confusing for a moment. Just then the school orchestra struck up a patriotic air. Once more the situation was saved. Praska came to the wings at the side of the stage, con-

scious all at once that his collar was wilted and hopelessly out of shape.

It had been agreed that Mr. Banning should call the meeting to order. At a quarter past eight o'clock he stepped out from the wings. A cheer came from the students packed like canned fish behind the last row of seats. He raised his hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you have come here to-night at the invitation of the eight hundred students of Northfield to hear Northfield plead her case. My duty will be to introduce the speakers. The students will tell their own story. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Perry King, a member of the Northfield Congress and chairman of the Safety Committee."

Hammond said later that, from his part of the auditorium floor, Perry looked like a pinched and hungry undertaker who had come out to hang crepe. But there was nothing melancholy about Perry's address. He had decided to approach the subject from the angle of civic pride. He had a list of all the high schools of the state that possessed athletic fields, and before long he began to read them. Now and then he would pause to say, quietly: "That town is smaller than Northfield."

"Do you think," he cried at last, "that all these communities have bought athletic fields as a fad? If Northfield wanted a place for the exclusive use of the Northfield football team, or the Northfield baseball team, I wouldn't be out here to-night asking for your help. There would be no reason for the town to spend more than $20,000 just to provide a playing field for a few teams. But this field will be the home of general class athletics. Every student will exercise here and build up a reserve force of vitality. To-morrow this town decides whether Northfield High School joins the march of progress or else be known as a community that does not understand."

Praska's heart swelled. Perry, he thought, could always be counted on to come to scratch in an emergency. And then Mr. Banning was introducing Betty Lawton.

"I appeal to you to-night," she said, "on behalf of every girl who is a Northfield student. We do not ask you merely for ground on which to play; we ask you for a laboratory where sunshine and fresh air will develop alertness and vigor. The things that spell health and strength spell them the same way for the girl as they do for the boy. Have you heard about the flapper slouch?"

A laugh ran through the audience.

"The doctors," Betty said wisely, "are of the

opinion that a slouching way of standing and walking is bad for the health. The girl who enjoys vigorous, outdoor exercise does not slouch. So to-morrow we ask you to vote for our field. Here in Northfield we want you to be proud of the girl who gets the sort of red in her cheeks that is supplied by nature and not by the kind that is bought in the drug stores."

There was no doubt that Betty had struck a human and a humorous note. The audience had warmed up noticeably. Perry, in the wings, was poking one of his long fingers into Mr. Banning's ribs, all unconscious of what he was doing.

"We have them now, sir," he was saying. "Oh, but that hooked them beautifully. Now it's up to old sober-face George to go out and finish it."

The teacher of civics looked at Praska. "Nervous?" he asked. The boy shook his head. "Why should I be? I'm only going to tell them facts." He said it soberly, with no attempt at boasting. After all, that was how it seemed to him—merely telling Northfield's needs to the parents of those who came to Northfield High. It was like saying what he had to say to Northfield's family.

And yet when he walked out on the stage, his breath caught momentarily in his throat. He

had not dreamed that so many people were there. Row upon row, aisle upon aisle, they filled the floor and the balcony. Voters, American citizens —and yet they had come out to-night to harken to the appeal of youth. Some were there who had been in high school when he came to Northfield with his freshman class. It made him feel anew how short was the distance from the classroom to the voting booth.

"Men and women of Northfield," he said, "the students of Northfield appeal to you for your help. This is your school as much as ours; that is why you are here to-night. We ask for this athletic field for the same reason that you wouldn't go into a shoe-store and buy one shoe. One shoe wouldn't be enough; there'd be something lacking. And a school without a field that the students can feel is theirs is lacking, too. Such a school trains the mind, but it does not train the body that contains the mind.

"The World War brought a lesson to America. Thousands of men were rejected for army service because they were physically unfit. It is a duty of citizenship for one to be ready to serve his country. A country that gives as much as the United States gives, has the right to ask something in return. It asks, in times of peace, a citizenship that is 100 per cent. active. There

can be no 100 per cent. activity in a person whose body is not 100 per cent. fit. That is what we at Northfield ask—a place where we can build up and create the stamina and strength necessary for all the emergencies of American life.

"We want you to see, before you go, some of the spirit of Northfield. And so I ask the students to sing our school hymn, 'Northfield Forever.' "

The orchestra struck up the opening bars, and the strains of the song swept through the auditorium in a mighty chorus. It was good to hear —stirring, heart-warming. Praska, when it was done, stepped forward again.

"Without the fathers and mothers of Northfield behind us," he cried, "Northfield could not be what it is. I want a big cheer for mother and for dad."

A cheer leader came running down the aisle. "Are you ready? Everybody in on this. Make it good. Yip yip!"

The cheer crashed out probably as no Northfield cheer had ever crashed before. A storm of applause burst from the audience. Seized with the inspiration of the moment, Praska raised his hands.

"Won't you," he asked the people, "sing

'Northfield Forever' with us? We want it to be your song as well as ours."

Many there scarcely knew the words—but they had caught the spirit. The deep voices of the men, the clear, rising notes of the women, sent a thrill of emotion through Praska's veins. Then it was over, and the audience was out of the seats and flowing down the aisles toward the doors. Northfield had told its story. The campaign was over. It rested for the morrow to write a verdict of victory—or defeat.

Election day brought to Praska a restless spirit and a profound depression. Now that there was nothing to do but to wait and hope, a dozen doubts and fears assailed his mind. After all, the arguments that had been so bravely given in the auditorium were but the opinions of boys and girls. Last night they had seemed logical and all-sufficient; to-day they seemed hollowly futile and lifeless. Boys and girls attempting to influence the opinions of mature men and women! From the bleak outlook of to-day the whole campaign took on the mask of brazen madness, a youthful, impetuous, but impotent masquerade.

And yet even in his darkest moments, the thrill that had come to him on the stage ran through him anew. Then and there, some sixth sense

told him, Northfield had won the sympathy of its hearers. But would it last? Had it not been merely the triumph of the moment? To-day, away from the cheers, and the songs, and the enthusiasm, would not men and women lose the glamour and view the whole scene lightly? He did not know—but he feared. Boys and girls trying to sway the judgment of their elders! It wore the torturing garments of a gross impossibility.

He walked with his father and mother to the polling place, and waited outside while they voted. In spite of his discouragement his pulse quickened at the sight of the party workers patrolling the sidewalk, the watchers inside, the election clerks, and the ballot box on the plain pine table.

"Well," said his father as they walked home, "there are two votes for the athletic field."

Two, and Northfield with 10,000 voters registered. Two votes seemed so meagre.

The afternoon ran to its close. Daylight faded. The clock struck six, and then seven. A tremor shook his body. The polls had closed. The result was written. He was in a fever to go to the City Hall in the hope of learning the verdict, but shrank from arriving too early and having to wait in an agony of apprehension. At nine o'clock running feet pattering through the

street; a knock sounded on the door. Perry King and Bristow clamored for admittance.

"The first ballot box has just been turned in to the City Clerk," Perry panted. "Fourth election district of the second ward. The vote was sixty-eight for the field and fifty against. What do you think of that?"

"We've started something," Bristow cried excitedly.

Hope—wild hope—came to Praska. Only about half of the voters were bothering to mark their ballots on the referendum; but of those who had voted, a majority had thrown their support to the school. If the same ratio held throughout the town—

"I'll go back with you," he said.

When they reached the City Hall, the City Clerk's office was crowded, and it was impossible for them to worm their way past the doorway. They stood in the rotunda, among excited men who spoke only of the vote on Commissioner Sloan. He was, on the early returns, running behind. Out in the street horns began to blow, and a procession wormed its way into the building. The marchers were the supporters of the man who was running against the Commissioner. From time to time election boards, having finished their count, came in with their tally-

sheets and their ballot boxes and surrendered both to the City Clerk.

By half-past ten Commissioner Sloan's defeat was a certainty. The horn blowing had become a raucous din. Above the heads of the press of people Praska saw the tall form of Carlos Dix.

"Mr. Dix!" he shouted. "Mr. Dix!"

The lawyer looked about him, doubtfully.

"Mr. Dix!" Praska waved a frantic hand.

The lawyer saw them then, and forced his way through the crowd. One look at his face, and Praska read the story of victory.

"The field will win by six or seven hundred votes," Carlos Dix said. "Your meeting last night just about put it through. Praska, I'm proud of you. I look upon this as a big thing."

"It's certainly a big thing for Northfield," said Perry.

"It's a big thing in many ways," Carlos Dix said gravely.

Bristow flashed Praska a wise, knowing look. And at that moment Praska's taste of triumph slowly turned to a taste of ashes.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NORTHFIELD TO NORTHFIELD

FOR eight innings Northfield had been pecking away, only to have rally after rally die just when it seemed that runs were about to be scored. The score-board, fastened to one wall of the shack that served as a dressing house, read: Monroe, 5; Northfield, 3. And so when Northfield came in to take her ninth inning turn at bat, a dozen or more students began to worm their way out through the crowd. One stopped for a moment to call back over his shoulder:

"Coming, Praska?"

"I think I'll wait," George Praska answered calmly, "and see Northfield win."

The student went off grumbling. "That's the worst of being president of the Northfield Student Congress," he complained. "Even if the team hasn't a chance you're expected to stick around to the finish."

But Praska was not staying there as a matter

of duty. He expected the Northfield nine to win. He had a faith in the school as certain as it was sublime. Northfield was never beaten, he told himself, until the last man was out—and usually not then.

Out on the diamond the Northfield coachers were entreating the boy at the plate for a hit. The pitcher, superbly confident, floated a slow curve toward the plate.

"Strike one!" ruled the umpire.

"Take your time," barked the coacher at first base. "Only takes one to give it a ride. Use your eye, old man."

The batter's eye ordered him to offer at the next pitch. He met the ball, and it rose weakly in the air. The pitcher was under it when it came down.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

Another Northfield boy was at the plate. The pitcher, studying him, decided to try an inshoot. The ball broke in too far, and plunked into the batter's ribs. A din of sudden hope broke from the Northfield rooters as he trotted down to first, rubbing his side.

"We're off," cried Praska. "Now there, Littlefield, show us an old-time hit. Come on. Lit. Right into it."

Littlefield hitting savagely, drove the first ball

far into right field. The boy on first raced all the way to third, and when the outfielder threw home to cut him off should he try to score, Littlefield romped down to second.

Praska had grown hoarse. "Now we're got this game where we want it. Here's your chance, Chan. Crack into one and make Northfield happy."

Chanler, the little second baseman, was crouched at the plate, nervously fidgeting the toe of his left shoe along the ground. The pitcher, so confident a moment before, now looked worried. Twice he shook his head in answer to the catcher's signals, and when he did hurl the ball the pitch was wild.

"Look out!" shrilled the coachers.

Chanler dropped to the ground. But his bat, trailing back over his shoulder, got in the way of the ball. The unexpected shock of the meeting twisted the bat from his hand. The ball popped into the air and fell gently a few feet in front of the plate.

The coachers had become madmen. "Up Chan! Run it out. Fair ball. Come to *life!*"

Chanler scrambled to his feet and dashed for first. The Monroe infield, momentarily upset, shrilled orders, pleas and advice. The catcher, stumbling as he jumped forward, went off balance

and was out of the play. The pitcher, racing in, snapped up the ball with one hand and had a vision, out of the corner of his eyes, of the Northfield runner on third trying to score. He wasted a precious moment deciding that the runner on third was only trying to rattle him and had already swung about and run back to the bag.

"First!" roared the catcher. "Great Scott, throw it. *Throw it!*"

The pitcher threw, and the throw was high over the first baseman's frantic hands.

A yell of triumph came from Praska. "O-o-o-o-h! Look at *that!*"

The boy on third had scored, Littlefield had romped to third, and Chanler, rising out of a cloud of dust, was brushing his uniform at second. The score was now 5-4, with the tying run and the winning run waiting to come over the plate.

"Tuttle's up," someone shouted. Slowly—slowly—the crowd became silent. Tuttle was the weakest hitter on the team. Yet, as he strode out swinging two bats, the cheering broke out again as though the students fully expected him to win the game. It was Northfield spirit!

Something, though, was happening on the bench. A boy sprang out and called aloud. Tuttle paused and came back. And now another boy stepped out, bent heavy football shoulders

and found a bat, and then came limping to the plate. Even before the umpire could cry "Hammond now batting for Tuttle" the spectators were in an uproar. Boys were telling each other that Hammond hadn't played since he twisted his ankle in a practice game five days ago sliding home on a home run hit. "Home Run Hammond" they called him now, and called it in a swelling chorus that had the fervor of a prayer—just as in the fall they called him "Thunderbolt Hammond."

Hammond, at the plate, was easing himself into position.

"He's favoring that bad leg," Praska thought in a panic. "If the leg should pain him when he goes for the ball, if the pain should throw him off on his swing—"

"They only want Ham to send a fly to the outfielders," a voice said behind Praska, "so that the tying run can score. He'd never be able to run out an infield hit."

"If he does hit to the infield and if Lit is thrown out at the plate——" another voice began.

"Sure, Ham will be doubled at first and the game will be over."

Praska's hands began to sweat. The pitcher threw the ball. Hammond hopped away on one leg.

"Strike!" ruled the umpire.

"Fooled on an out curve," muttered Praska.

The pitcher threw again. The catcher put up his mitt for the ball—but the ball never reached the glove.

Hammond swung. It seemed that bat and ball met on a line. There was a whistling sound, a streak of white, hopeless outfielders running with their backs to the diamond, and a pitcher standing with drooping shoulders, crushed. Littlefield and Chanler scored. Hammond, limping and hopping, went down the first-base path. One of the fielders had overtaken the ball; but even as he turned to throw it one of Hammond's feet touched the first-base bag and a shriek of jubilation broke from Northfield throats.

Ten minutes later victory still was in the air. It was in the bearing of the wave upon wave of students who poured up from the ball field. It was in the cheers that sounded from the diamond where part of the crowd waited for the team to emerge from the dressing house. It was in the set of Praska's shoulders as he fell into step beside a man and walked with him back toward the heart of the town.

"Quite a game, wasn't it?" Mr. Banning asked. "I was watching you. I thought, at one time, that you were going to throw away your hat."

"I felt like throwing something," Praska laughed. "That was a finish, wasn't it?"

"There's always a thrill to a good finish," said the man.

"It takes fighting spirit to make a good finish," the boy said gravely, and with a feeling of pride. After all, it was his school that had made it.

The man walked on in silence, as though some phrase the boy had used had plunged him into contemplation. And yet, when Praska looked up at him questioningly, his eyes seemed to reflect a gentle smile.

"The fighting spirit for a good finish," he repeated. "I'm glad you said that, George. Does it mean that you've changed your mind about the State University?"

Praska flushed. "No, sir. I—I don't think it's a question of fighting spirit. Other fellows have worked two-thirds of their way through; I could do that. But there's so much to be done in the world. I want to get out and begin to do my share. I don't have to go to the University to make a good finish."

He said it with conviction; and yet, somehow, it sounded like a question and not a statement of fact.

"It all depends," Mr. Banning said slowly, "upon what the good finish is to be a part of.

You'll graduate from high school late this month. Your job, thus far, has been education. If you want to make a good job of that, your road leads straight to the University."

The boy's chin became stubborn. "That's one kind of good finish. I'm thinking of another kind. I mean a good finish to the job of doing something. I want to get out and tackle the things that are waiting to be done. Four years more of study seems like four years more on the sidelines."

"And yet," said Mr. Banning, "I knew a man who waited three years on the sidelines, and then went out and won the biggest game of the year. It really wasn't three years on the sidelines—it was three years of studying, and watching, and thinking, and learning how."

The boy shook his head. His mental processes were slow. He felt that he was being entangled in a labyrinth of words, worsted not by logic but by language. Mr. Banning understood his silence. "You can't quite see it, can you?"

"No," the boy said honestly.

"I didn't expect you to—right away. Go back to the campaign the school made for the athletic field. The school wanted advice. It needed somebody to show it the way to success. Out of all its graduates you went to Carlos Dix. Why?"

"Carlos Dix had done things."

"Right! Carlos Dix *had* done things. Carlos Dix had gone through the State University."

"He had done more than that, sir. His campaign speeches, his trials in the law courts——"

"Yes; after the University had prepared him by putting him on the track of accomplishment."

They were in the heart of Northfield now, and before them was the bank building in which the lawyer had his office. Suddenly Mr. Banning put his hand on Praska's shoulder.

"George, whatever decision you come to finally, you want to make sure it's the right one. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ought to talk this over with Carlos Dix. Won't you do that?"

The boy hesitated, and in his indecision there was something of confusion.

"There isn't any reason why you wouldn't want to talk this over with him, is there?" the teacher asked in surprise.

"I'll talk with him," said Praska. In view of the question, it's nearness to the truth, he felt that there was nothing for him to do but to promise.

But days passed, and he did not go to the bank building that housed the lawyer's office. He

meant to make the visit, and yet he found slight and obscure reasons to put it off. In the end it was Carlos Dix who called the school and had him summoned to the telephone.

"I've been expecting you," the lawyer said. "Mr. Banning told me you were headed this way for a debate. When will you be along?"

Praska's reply was vague.

"Make it this afternoon. I'll be out of town all next week. I'll be waiting for you about four o'clock."

Four o'clock found Praska walking listlessly into the bank building. Yes, the school had called upon Carlos Dix and the lawyer had responded—but out of that response had come to the boy only anguish of soul. Once Praska had carried the lawyer enshrined in his heart. The things he did had seemed to be the promptings of a loyalty that was still, after many years, true to Northfield High. But the shrine of late, had become a tottering ruin.

In a dull, numbing sort of way Praska had grown used to the thought that Carlos Dix was not the fine, unselfish Carlos Dix he had thought him. But yet another thought ate and ate at all the ideals of faith and service his deep and sensitive nature had built up. The dull numbness was for Carlos Dix, the man; the ever-present ache

was for Carlos Dix, the Northfield graduate. The boy had built a picture of Northfield alumni holding to their school as citizens held to their country. One line of the school hymn ran: "Thy stalwart sons forever true"—and to him the words stood for something real and vital. With a boy's ardor for passionate devotion he gave of his soul to Northfield High. He reasoned now, as he had reasoned before, that there was nothing wrong in Carlos Dix working for Mr. Ballinger *and* for Northfield; but Bristow had driven home the belief that to Carlos Dix, Mr. Ballinger's interests had come first. And, to Praska, that was akin to sacrilege.

The lawyer's hand gripped his with a pressure that was firm and sincere. "Where have you been keeping yourself? Fine thing, isn't it, for one veteran of Northfield's fight for a field to drop out of touch with another? What's bothering you? Final exams?"

Praska shook his head. "I want to go to work and Mr. Banning thinks I ought to go to the State University."

Twice the lawyer stole a glance at the boy. "If I get too personal, George, why just head me off. I want to dig into this thing. Is it finances?"

"No, sir. I'd have to work only part of my way; I could do that."

"Tired of study?"

"No. I——" His face flushed. "I want to play a man's part, and a man's part is out in the world. A college man is just an older schoolboy. Big things are happening all around, and there he is in college out of it all, just like one of the audience at a play."

"And yet," Carlos Dix said gently, "about eighty per cent. of the leaders in America to-day are college men. College years can't be wasted years, George, if they turn out leaders."

All that lay behind that thought slowly worked its way through Praska's mind. For the first time his own assurance was shaken.

"You're like a sprinter," the lawyer went on, "who's trying to beat the starter's gun. It can't be done. It brings a penalty, and the penalized sprinter is handicapped."

Praska's face had sobered. The telephone on Carlos Dix's desk rang, and the lawyer took the receiver from the hook. The boy paid no attention to the conversation that followed. A sprinter trying to beat the gun! He could understand that. He sat staring at the desk, at its legal looking envelopes, a few scattered papers, a brownish slip of paper— His eyes grew round and wide. He had not meant to read anything there, but unconsciously his gaze had photo-

graphed that brownish slip. It was a check. He swung his head away, but the photographic vision persisted. It was a check made payable to Carlos Dix for $1500—and the name signed to it in a heavy, easy-read hand was that of Mr. B. B. Ballinger.

The interruption of the telephone had broken the thread of discussion. When the lawyer presently swung around to the boy, Praska's chin was again squared and set. The man seemed to feel a vague hostility. Somehow, to go on arguing now seemed futile. There was a period of constrained silence.

"Well," the lawyer said, "we don't have to settle this to-day. There's another point, though: when you go out from Northfield, you'll wear the Northfield stamp. Your success or your failure will be, in some respects, a Northfield success or failure. You owe it to yourself to equip yourself for success, and you owe it to Northfield. If you won't think of yourself, George, think of the school. Northfield demands your best. Northfield will be satisfied with nothing less."

And in Praska's mind, as he listened, was a satiric picture of that $1500 check. B. B. Ballinger's money—for what? Was that Carlos Dix's idea of giving Northfield one's best—or one's second best! To the boy, at that moment, all this

talk of school loyalty seemed a string of empty, shallow words.

He brooded the matter all the way home. The evening newspaper lay on the front porch flung there by the carrier as he passed. Praska carefully strove to undo it without tearing, from the mysterious, tight-binding fold which carriers somehow achieve; then he smoothed out the front page, his hands moving absently. And there, for the second time that afternoon, his eyes were caught by words for which he had not looked. One quick survey of the headlines, and he started feverishly to read the story:

> According to rumors, graduates of the Northfield High School are raising a fund that will be used in some way for student advancement. According to one report the graduates, in celebration of the athletic field victory, will donate the money to the school as a fund for the support of athletics.
>
> B. B. Ballinger, the real estate man, is said to be the largest contributor. His profits on the land he owns which the town will buy as part of the athletic field site, will run about $1500. It is reported that Mr. Ballinger has already turned this sum over to Carlos Dix, who is acting as treasurer of the fund. Mr. Dix declined to-day to deny or affirm the rumors.

Praska lowered the newspaper and leaned

weakly against the door; his little world had suddenly gone topsy-turvy with conflicting emotions.

Next morning he found Bristow waiting for him outside the school. The editor had lost his aggressive self-confidence and was frankly troubled and ill at ease.

"Did you read that story in last night's paper?" he demanded.

Praska nodded.

"I—I've made a mess of things, I guess. I've thought some rotten things about Carlos Dix and Mr. Ballinger. I was sure they were working together just to sell those lots to the city, and all the while they were Northfield graduates working for Northfield."

"We both thought it," Praska said quietly.

"No." Bristow, honest in denunciation of himself, would not have it so. "You believed in Carlos Dix. I kept hammering away at you until I got the idea of double dealing planted in your mind. Remember that night we heard him and Mr. Ballinger whisper something about 'putting it over?' Something tells me he wasn't talking about the lots; he was talking about the fund. That's what he and Carlos Dix were putting over. I feel as though I ought to go down to his office, tell him I've been a fool, and eat dirt."

"Not that," Praska cried in alarm.

"No," Bristow said after a silence. "He doesn't know what we've been thinking, and he'd only be hurt. Once I had though of taking a little dig at him in the *Breeze*. Gosh, doesn't it make you feel good to know that Northfield has graduates like that!"

" 'Thy stalwart sons forever true,' " Praska's thoughts ran, and he smiled as he walked with the editor into the building. The shrine again stood clean and whole. Carlos Dix *was* the Carlos Dix he had thought him. Some day he, too, might be able to come back to Northfield and offer service. The vision thrilled him.

The corridors and stairways hummed with excited speculation. Praska, as he entered the main doorway, was besieged by eager questioners. Did the Northfield Congress know anything about this fund? He shook his head, and pushed his way past them, and went up to Room 13.

There fresh clamor greeted him. All attempts to wheedle information from Mr. Banning, Perry King said, had failed.

"There's something in the wind, though," Perry told him excitedly. "Mr. Banning won't deny that Northfield graduates have started a fund, but he won't say a word about what the fund is for. What do you make of that?"

Praska didn't know what to make of it.

"Quick! Mr. Banning's trying to attract your attention. Maybe he's going to tell you something."

But when Praska went forward to the teacher's desk, Mr. Banning asked: "Have you seen Carlos Dix?"

"Yes, sir."

The teacher's eyes asked a question. Slowly Praska shook his head; and the teacher sighed under his breath.

"I'm sorry," was all he said. "I suppose that's your final verdict?"

Praska nodded. The same tenacity, the same doggedness, the same deliberate finality that made him slow to form opinions, made him slow to change them. Carlos Dix was rehabilitated in his estimation . . . and instead of that fact's driving home harder what the lawyer had said, it served only to strengthen the course on which he had decided. Work itself had at first lured him; now it was work with Carlos Dix that beckoned him with glamour and promise. Carlos Dix might advise college; and yet, if he asked it, if if he waved college away, he thought that Carlos Dix would take him into his office. Twice he had heard the man say that he would soon have to get a clerk. The salary, of course, would be very small, but that struck the boy as of slight

moment. He would read law with a zealousness that would win approval. In the glow of Carlos Dix's companionship he would drink in legal knowledge. Eventually he would pass his bar examinations. Other men had done it who had not passed years at college—Lincoln, for instance. In the rapture of the bright pictures his fancy created, the State University became something hazy and remote.

He welcomed the start of final examinations. They marked the last step that need be taken before he progressed to the great outside world. Hammond and Littlefield moaned over the "stiffness" of the papers, Perry King breezily set them down as "easy stuff," but Praska slowly plowed his way through them prepared to do the best he could. Thursday afternoon the ordeal was over. He left the school and debated on the sidewalk whether to go down at once and ask Carlos Dix about that job. In the end he decided to wait until the examination marks were announced. If he stood as high as he hoped it would be that much easier to induce the lawyer to take him in.

Next day, with examinations over, the school fell into a backwater of relaxation. Praska spent a good part of the morning reading "Moby Dick," Herman Melville's absorbing story of the sea and the search for the white whale. At noon, as

he prepared to go to the cafeteria, he noticed a new leather traveling bag under Mr. Banning's desk.

"All ready for vacation, sir?" he asked.

The teacher smiled. "A different sort of vacation; no bass fishing this time. I'm going down to New York for a summer extension course at Columbia University—a series of lectures on world politics. You know, George, there was a time when a man could be born in the back woods, study law in a prairie law office, and rise to a place of power. Lincoln did it. But that day is past. For one thing, what affects Europe affects us. Steam and electricity, submarines and aeroplanes, have made the Atlantic Ocean little more than a mighty river. Some people will want us to try some of Europe's theories. If they're sound we want them. But we can't afford to make mistakes, because mistakes in government are too costly. I'm going down to New York to get a line on questions that every real American ought to know something about."

"I see, sir," said the boy, soberly.

In the cafeteria he ate with a preoccupied air. Mr. Banning, with all his knowledge, going down to New York to study problems that America might some day have to face! The wonder of it grew upon him—and then the wonder ceased.

He knew the man . . . If one wanted to exercise wisely and carefully his duties as a citizen—— He forgot his food and stared with unseeing eyes across the room.

By and by he left the cafeteria. On the stairs an excited figure halted him.

"Something's happening upstairs about the fund," Perry King said hoarsely.

"Fund?" Praska's mind was on something else.

"You know—the fund that the graduates are raising. There's a meeting of some kind in the principal's office. Carlos Dix is there, and Mr. Ballinger, and a dozen others. Gosh! I'd like to know what's going on to-day."

Praska wasn't interested even in that. Two words ran through his mind—carefully and wisely. He went upstairs without taking thought of where his steps led him. Suddenly voices roused him from his abstraction. He was outside Mr. Rue's office. He saw Carlos Dix; and at that moment the lawyer saw him and came out to the hall.

"George," the man demanded abruptly, "how about that talk we had? Have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, sir." The boy spoke slowly. "I'm going to the State University. If I don't go I can't be the kind of American citizen I want to be."

There was a moment of silence. Then;

"I'm glad you saw it in time," Carlos Dix said. The men in the principal's office were beginning to find seats around a long library table. Abruptly the lawyer walked into the meeting room and closed the door behind him.

The graduation exercises were held on one of those hot, hushed humid nights that sometimes find their way into the last week of June. The ushers, tip-toeing up and down the side aisles, had long ago opened the auditorium windows to their full. In front of the platform the school orchestra waited patiently for the signal that would sound the school hymn as an exit march. On the stage, near the center of the first row of graduates, Praska held his diploma in one hand and tried hard not to screw up his face as a maddening, tickling drop of perspiration rolled slowly down his nose.

"I feel," Perry King groaned, sotto voice, "as though my collar were melting and running down my back. Mr. Rue is going to speak. I guess this is the end."

But the principal merely introduced Carlos Dix who, he said, would speak for "the Northfield Alumni."

"The influence of a good school," began Carlos Dix, plunging directly into what he had to say,

"does not end with graduation. Northfield has written something unforgettable into the lives of those of us who have gone forth from its doors—something that brings us back with a keen desire to serve and to inspire service."

He paused for a moment. Praska drew a quick, short breath and leaned forward.

Carlos Dix went on, speaking with a simple boyishness that somehow carried him close to his listeners: "I haven't felt so important," he said, with a sudden flashing grin, "since my brothers used to send me to call the other kids to come and help. The Northfield Alumni have sent me to-night to call to the students of Northfield to come and help-out in the world.

"To pave the way for your coming, we offer you the newly established Northfield Alumni Public Service Scholarship. Every graduate in town and all whom we could reach out of town have contributed to the fund that makes this scholarship possible—and they have contributed gladly. In some cases, the young fellow who gave five dollars was giving far more than the older man who gave five hundred, but they both wanted to give."

Again Praska drew a quick, short breath. This was Northfield spirit.

"There is $7,000 in this scholarship fund," Car-

los Dix continued. "It will yield between four and five hundred dollars a year. And that income is to go annually toward paying the freshman college expenses of that Northfield graduate of the current year who has given the most outstanding service to his school community—who has proved himself Northfield's cleanest, hardest-fighting politician.

"The fellow, or girl, who has been such a politician in school is the one most likely to develop into that kind in later life. That is why each year we shall start such a graduate in training. America needs politicians of the right type."

A hush had fallen on the crowd. Perry's hand came over and clutched Praska's arm.

"Remember that the Public Service Scholarship is a permanent institution," Carlos Dix was saying. "The announcement of the winner is to become a regular part of the commencement program. This year, of course, only the faculty has known about it in advance," he interpolated apologetically. "We alumni are rather like kids; we wanted the fun of springing it on the students tonight."

A ripple of laughter ran over the audience, and there was a spatter of hand-clapping.

Carlos Dix stopped it with a quick gesture. "One minute!" he said. "I have been instructed

to announce the name of the member of this graduating class who has won the scholarship for the coming college year."

Again the hush fell. Praska's brain was racing. It would be Perry, of course. Perry, by his work on the Safety Committee, had ended the laxness about open lockers. Perry, by his courage, had faced down Big Jim Fry's rowdyism and had ended disorders in the corridors. Yes, it would be Perry.

Carlos Dix's voice rang out clear in the silence as he turned to the class on the platform: "The Alumni Committee on Scholarship, assisted consciously by the faculty and unconsciously by many different members of the student body, has made a careful study of the service that you have given to Northfield. We have come to the unanimous decision that the Northfield Alumni Public Service Scholarship should go this year to one whom all declare Northfield's cleanest, hardest-fighting politician—George Praska."

A storm of applause broke out. Praska shook himself. His mind had slipped. He was sure of that. He was imagining things. He—— And then Perry's elbow was in his ribs.

"It's you, you nut," Perry was saying hoarsely. "Wake up. Who else would get it but you?" He saw Carlos Dix coming across the stage toward

him with outstretched hand, the first to offer him congratulations.

The next five minutes were the minutes of a dream. Never thereafter was he able to tell all that happened or what he did. One picture alone survived in his memory: his father's face back there in the audience flushed and working with emotion, and his mother smiling and wiping her eyes.

And then he was off the stage, with Perry pounding his back, and Bristow clinging to one arm, and Betty Lawton telling him breathlessly how glad she was. One by one, after a time, the class departed and the clamor died away. There was opportunity for a quiet moment with Mr. Rue.

"Many men have gone out from Northfield," the principal said, "but none has left here marked with greater promise. Live up to it, my boy; live up to it."

"I'll try to," Praska said humbly. He went to the cloakroom. Mr. Banning and Carlos Dix stood there talking.

"You had a majority of the committee with you from the start," the lawyer told him. "A few held off. They thought that your attitude toward college discounted much that you had done. When I informed them you had decided

to work through the State University because you thought good citizenship demanded it, they all came over to you at once. Have you any plan—got any idea as to what you'd like to be?"

"I'm going to study law."

"Will you come into my office when you're ready?"

"Yes, sir. I intended to ask you to take me in." He reached for his coat. Mr. Banning's voice halted him.

"George, how did you come to change your mind about college?"

"You changed it for me."

"I? I thought I had failed in that."

"I guess everybody failed for a while. But when you told me why you were going to New York this summer, I began to see things straight. If all the education you had would not make you the kind of American you want to be, then a high school course would not make me the kind I want to be."

A spark, a flame, leaped to Mr. Banning's eyes. Some day, in the future, the boy would come to understand it. He would know it for the joy of the dreamer who had made another see the dream—the rapture of the apostle who had led a human soul to the light.

(1)

THE END

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