



The Young Baden-Powell

ARTHUR CATHERALL

*Illustrated by
William Randell*

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Editor's Note:

The reader is reminded that these texts have been written a long time ago. Consequently, they may use some terms or express sentiments which were current at the time, regardless of what we may think of them at the beginning of the 21st century. For reasons of historical accuracy they have been preserved in their original form.

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1

A Boy Meets Adventure

In the big bedroom at 1 Hyde Park Gate it was very quiet. Although the house was quite close to a main road, and not far from the heart of London, there was no sound of bustling traffic. The year was 1861 and there were no motor cars. Even electric trams had not come to disturb the peace of the London streets.

Lying in bed, and for some reason unable to drop off to sleep, Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell turned restlessly from side to side. When he lay on his right side he could just see the faint line of light under the bedroom door. That told him the gas lamp on the landing was still burning.

From away downstairs he thought he heard the occasional murmur of voices, and twice he heard the clippety-clop of horses' hoofs, and the jingle of harness as a cab drew up at their front door. Finally, unable to lie in bed any longer, the four year old boy, 'Ste' to his family, but one day to be known throughout the world as 'B-P', slid out of bed.

Very quietly he tiptoed across to the window and carefully drew back the heavy curtains. Peering down he saw a man paying the driver. A few moments later he heard the cabby chirrup to his horse, then call:

'C'mon, Rosie, come on, then.'

There was a hesitant clip-clop of hoofs as the horse slowly turned the cab round. A bell jangled somewhere in the house, followed by the sound of the front door opening and closing as the visitor entered. Then the clip-clop of hoofs speeded up as the cab drove away.

For a moment Ste had a glimpse of the twin oil lamps on each side of the driver. The single street lamp below lit up the slow moving vehicle, showing the cabby's tall hat and the whip standing upright in its socket. Then he was lost to sight and the clip-clop of hoofs died away.

About to allow the curtain to drop into place again Ste paused as he saw a light flash for a moment on a basement. Then the light went out as the policeman switched the cover over his bulls-eye oil lamp. Ste watched the policeman walk slowly past the street lamp, step down to a basement door and try the handle. His light shone on the woodwork for a moment, then was gone again.

A moment later Ste allowed the curtain to drop into place, and felt his way back to his bed. He paused there. It was unusual for him not to drop off to sleep; but he did feel completely wide awake. Then the sound of a distant laugh turned his thoughts to what was happening downstairs.

His mother was having visitors to dinner. Ste could hardly remember his father, who had died earlier. He wondered who the visitors were, and what they did at a 'dinner'. Finally he moved across to the door and very gently turned the handle.

The shaft of pale light from the small gas lamp seemed tremendously bright after the darkness of the bedroom, and Ste hesitated. He was wearing nothing more than his nightgown, which came just below his knees. About to turn back he was stopped by a deep laugh.

He recognised the voice immediately. That was Grand-father Smyth, the Admiral! Like the rest of the Baden-Powell family, Ste loved his grandfather, and reckoned a visit to Langton House, near Tunbridge Wells, one of the glories of life.

'If Grandfather is down there, he won't be annoyed with me,' Ste decided, and on the spur of the moment stepped out into the landing. From there he could see down the stairway. A shaft of light from the drawing room partly lit up the passage leading to the kitchen, and also lit up the stairs.

Again Ste hesitated. He had never done anything like this before. Yet he knew a strange excitement at the thought of creeping downstairs, just to see what grownups did when the children had gone to bed. There was a good smell which he recognised as oxtail soup.

There was a murmur of voices, but no sign of anyone, as Ste went down the stairs, keeping close to the bannisters so that he could huddle down and perhaps hide against them if someone should come in sight. Six stairs from the bottom he halted, and now his heart was pounding a little. He was not afraid. It was just that his heart usually began to pound when they were playing games of hide-and-seek, and he knew someone was near.

Yet there was no sign of anyone.

He went down the next three steps, and then a fourth, and sank down too late as a man came out of the drawing room. He looked towards the stairs, for Ste's light blue nightdress had caught his eyes immediately.

One of the celebrities of the literary world at that time was William Makepeace Thackeray, and he it was who 'caught' the young B-P in time to prevent him walking into the drawing room where a number of eminent men and women were chatting as they waited for dinner to be served.

'Well,' Mr Thackeray said quietly, coming over and taking one of Ste's hands in his, 'what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be fast asleep?'

'Yes, Mr Thackeray,' Ste said soberly, looking the great man full in the face. 'But I could not sleep, so I thought I would come down to see what happened when Mama gave a dinner.'

'So you know me,' Thackeray said, rather pleased at the thought. 'And which of the Powell children are you?'

'I'm Ste!'

'Ste! Hm! Ah, yes-er-now let me see. Ste-Ste. Yes, I have it. You are Robert Stephenson Baden-Powell – Robert Stephenson after your well known godfather, the engineer and bridge builder.'

'Yes, Mr Thackeray.' Ste's eyes lit up, for Robert Stephenson was his idol just then, and he had already decided that when he was a man he, too, would be a famous engineer.

A moment later Thackeray was pressing a shilling into his palm.

'Here is a little present for you, Ste, and I want you to slip quietly back to bed, for I'm sure your mother would not like to see you just now. You are not quite dressed for visitors, are you?'

Ste whispered his thanks and tiptoed quickly back to the bedroom landing. He looked down for a moment, and the novelist waved a hand then turned to the drawing room.

Sitting up in bed, with the shilling pressed between his two hands, Ste pondered for a moment what he should do with it. Pocket money was not abundant in the family, and each member kept accounts rigidly. There were several things Ste would have liked, not least of which was a pocket knife.

Then, as he thought of the dark haired, smiling Thackeray, he decided to keep the shilling. In a vague sort of way he knew Mr Thackeray was a famous man. A shilling from a man like that was not to be spent. The coin went under the pillow, and was just a treasured memento until some months later when it was lost; then it became a key which unlocked for young B-P a door to a magic world of adventure.



'Here is a little present for you, Ste'

The winter passed happily enough. Though she had so recently lost her husband, and had a large family to bring up on modest means, Henrietta Powell was a woman of great courage. She possessed the most cheerful of dispositions, and from her learned and talented father, Admiral William H. Smyth, had inherited many gifts.

She had her own ideas on how children should be taught, and was educating the younger members of her family at home with the help of a governess. Part of that education consisted of walks through nearby Hyde Park, and the many interesting streets and roads in the neighbourhood.

When the walk for the day ended she would ask the children what they had seen. Had they noticed that the muffin man had a new bell. Or that the flower 'girl' who sold violets, and with whom they got on quite friendly terms, had at long last lost her loose front tooth.

Sometimes the children went out into the park alone, and came back to crowd excitedly round her to tell her what they had seen. Perhaps some strange ducks on the pond; riders whom they recognised; perhaps the first hint of spring in the tips of crocus pushing through the brown earth.

It was all part of a training which was to make not only the future B-P an acute observer, and a man with a wonderful memory for detail, but his sister and brothers too.

It was in the following summer, however, that for young B-P it seemed as if the sun had suddenly gone out of the sky. The family had moved to the home of their grandparents at Langton House, always a wonderful occasion, and the first morning had been spent as usual exploring the gardens.

Then, just before lunch, B-P's face suddenly clouded. He had dropped his hand into the pocket where he kept his precious Thackeray shilling, and it was no longer there. Agnes, his younger sister, turned back to see what was delaying her brother – the youngest member of the family, Baden Fletcher, protesting at being dragged back.

'What's the matter, Ste? Are you ill? You've gone quite pale. Shall I tell Mama?'

'No-no, I'm not feeling ill.' For a moment B-P hesitated, wondering whether he ought to confess that he had very foolishly brought his most precious coin along with him. Then, because in the Powell family the children had few secrets from one another, he broke the news.

'Oh, poor Ste,' and Agnes looked as if she might burst into tears. It was that which stiffened the boy.

'Don't worry, Agnes,' he said. 'I think I know where it must be. I think it will be on the "Quarterdeck." I'm sure it will be there.'

‘Well, Ste, you can’t go now,’ Agnes protested. ‘Mama said that we had to keep away from the “Quarterdeck” until after lunch. Grandfather is busy there.’

‘Yes,’ B-P agreed. The ‘Quarterdeck’ was actually a terrace overlooking the sunken part of the garden, and it was there that the Admiral paced back and forth when he was working out some problem associated with the books he wrote.

‘You could look after lunch,’ Agnes suggested. ‘No one will find it. If the gardener picked it up –’

‘I must go *now*,’ B-P said firmly. ‘I know Grandfather will understand. After all – it is very important, very.’ He turned and began to walk back towards the terrace, while Agnes and young Baden Fletcher watched in silence. Grandfather Smyth was a wonderful man, but she had heard that he could be angry if his orders were disobeyed.

B-P walked on until he was looking across at the ‘Quarterdeck’ from the shelter of a flowering currant. The Admiral was pacing to and fro, hands clasped behind his back, his face lifted as if he might be studying the summer sky. The look of intense concentration on his face made him appear to be almost scowling, and B-P watched and wondered if he dare go across. The thought of his precious shilling finally forced him to step out into the open.

Whistling to keep up his courage he walked slowly but steadily across to the terrace, hoping that his grandfather would hear the whistle and look round; but the old man’s thoughts were on other things than grandsons. Back and forth, back and forth, busy marshalling his thoughts until suddenly there was a tug at one of his coat tails. Jerked back to the present he stopped and stared down at Ste, perhaps his favourite grandson.

‘Here, what – oh ho, I thought you were off to the house with Agnes and young Baden.’

‘Yes, I was – we were; but I had to come back. I have lost something, something very important,’ and the boy looked up anxiously. He was much too perturbed to notice the sudden twinkle in the old man’s eyes, and went on: ‘I am sure I had it when we were here with you – and now I can’t find it. Grandfather, have you – you haven’t seen a shilling, have you?’

‘A shilling! Hm!’ And Admiral Smyth stroked his chin. ‘Now tell me what you mean exactly. First you say “Have you” and then “You haven’t” seen a shilling.’

Young Ste gulped, and his grandfather taking pity on him thrust a hand into his trousers’ pocket, brought out some change, and picking out a shilling gave it to the boy.

‘Yes, I *did* find your shilling, Ste. There it is. You must be more careful with your pocket money, or one day – Well, what’s the matter?’ and he took back the coin the boy was holding out to him.

‘That isn’t my shilling, Grandfather.’

‘But it is a shilling, isn’t it? ‘Pon my word, what is the difference?’

‘Mine was a special shilling,’ Ste said earnestly. ‘It – you see it was given to me by Mr Thackeray – the great Mr Thackeray.’

‘The writer Thackeray. Hm!’ Again the Admiral rubbed his chin, then fished in his pocket once more to bring out all the small change he had. He was shaking his head a little dubiously as he mused: ‘Well, Ste, I don’t know what we can do. There are four more shillings. Here. It could be any of them.’

He removed the other coins, leaving Ste to look at the four shillings left there. After a moment the anxiety vanished from the small boy’s face and he picked out the coin he wanted.

‘And that is the one?’ his grandfather asked. ‘How do you know? Come on, we’ll sit on the wall. How can you be sure that you’ve got the right one? Mind you, sir, I know you have – but I want to know how you can be sure?’

Young Ste placed the coin in his grandfather’s hand, then turned his head away.

‘Two of the little nicks on the edge of the shilling have been broken,’ he said. ‘As if something sharp had hit it.’

The Admiral studied the shilling for a moment, then nodded:

‘Hm! Yes, that’s right. But almost any shilling might have that,’ he pointed out.

‘There is also the date,’ and Ste told him the date on the coin. ‘And there’s a small scratch on the head – on the bridge of the nose.’

Again the Admiral studied the coin. The boy was right, absolutely right. As he handed over the coin, he said jokingly:

‘I see you are very observant, Ste. Now tell me, on the back of which of my fingers is there a scar?’

‘A scar? But there are no scars on your fingers. At least I have never seen one.’

The reply came without hesitation, much to the old man’s astonishment.

‘How can you be sure?’ he asked.

‘Oh, that’s easy,’ Ste said, laughing. ‘Haven’t I held your hands many a time when we’ve been walking in the garden? If there had been a scar I would have seen it.’

At this Admiral Smyth’s bushy eyebrows went up a little.

‘Tell me,’ he said after a moment, ‘did Mr Thackeray give the others a shilling? He must have been in generous mood.’

Ste laughed.

‘No, I was the only one there, when he gave me this. You see – and this is a secret.’ He paused and looked up expectantly.

His grandfather nodded.

‘I can keep secrets, Ste. Go on.’

‘Well, one night when Mother was having guests to dinner I could not go to sleep. I could hear the hansom cabs and the broughams coming to the door. And I could just hear people talking. I wondered what they did when we were fast asleep. Agnes and Baden were asleep, so I got up and opened the door. I could hear the gaslight hissing on the landing. It seemed to be saying: Sssssh! Sssssh!’ and Ste’s voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. ‘It made it exciting.’

‘I can see it would be,’ his grandfather whispered. ‘Just like being a spy!’

‘That’s what I thought,’ Ste agreed. ‘I tiptoed down the stairs. I could hear the voices more clearly, and I thought I could hear the sound of plates in the kitchen. No one was about, but through the partly open door of the drawing room I could see a man’s legs. He had his hands clasped behind his back. Grandfather – it was you.’

‘It was, was it? Are you sure?’

‘Yes. You see, when you have your hands clasped behind you always stand with your feet apart, but your left foot keeps coming up a little and you tap with your heel.’

Admiral Smyth’s lips twitched in a suppressed chuckle. The boy was right. He had been told more than once by his wife about that little habit of his.

‘Go on, Ste, and what did you do after you got downstairs?’

‘When I got almost to the last stair Mr Thackeray suddenly appeared. I don’t know where from. He stared at me and I stared at him. He asked me if I knew him, and when I said I did, he put his hand in his pocket and gave me this shilling. He said: “Here’s a shilling. Off you go back to bed before your mama sees you. Off you go and I won’t say a word.”’

‘And you did?’

‘Yes,’ Ste confessed, with a hint of regret in his voice. ‘Being a spy is not very much fun when you’ve been caught, is it?’

‘No, it isn’t,’ his grandfather confessed. ‘Still, I shouldn’t worry. Spies don’t usually begin their careers as young as you. And even grown up spies get caught. Do you know, Ste, one of your great great grandfathers was a sort of spy. He was a wonderful man, but he was caught, and by Red Indians-real Red Indians.’

‘A spy! My great great grandfather!’ Young Ste’s eyes were round as saucers as he gazed up at the Admiral. Not for one moment did he doubt the old man’s words. That was one thing about Grandfather Smyth, he always talked to his grandchildren as if they were his equals.

‘Yes, and – oh, dear, they’re calling us for lunch.’ Admiral Smyth took the boy’s arm and turned him towards the house. ‘Look, Ste, this afternoon we’ll come back here, and I’ll tell you about Captain John Smith.’

*

That afternoon Ste listened for the first time to the story of Captain John Smith, one of the great Elizabethan adventurers; a man who helped to colonize Virginia.

Completely enthralled he heard the story of the soldier-sailor-explorer adventurer, who captured French ships, and fighting against the Turks took on, in single-handed combat, three Turkish champions, and defeated each one in turn.

It was the story of Captain John Smith’s adventures with the Indians which really held the future B-P spellbound. Time after time he would ask his grandfather to repeat the story of how Captain John Smith, while out exploring the wild country of the Chickahominy, was captured by Indians and brought captive before Powhatan their chief.

Bound, so that he could move neither hand nor foot, the Elizabethan adventurer faced the red men with the same cool bravery with which he had met other foes. Nor did he show any sign of fear when Powhatan decided he must die. He would be clubbed to death by the young braves.

It was then that Powhatan’s young daughter Pocohantas, having pleaded for the life of the white man, and having her plea refused, took John Smith’s head in her arms. Laying her head on the head of the white prisoner she calmly told her father to give the order to the waiting braves. The Admiral paused, and for a few moments the eyes of the young and the old met in a steady, searching gaze. Young Ste, however, was not seeing his grandfather. In imagination he was with that circle of Redskins. Hideously daubed with paint they were waiting for a command which would mean not only the death of the white man, but also the death of Pocohantas.

In the eyes of Ste the white man standing in the Virginian glade was exactly like Grandfather Smyth. He stood there with head erect, his eyes steady and his lips firm. There was not a sign of fear about him as he faced the threat of a hideous death. The freckle-faced boy was so taken out of himself by the mental picture that he was startled when his grandfather said:

‘Pocohantas won, and Captain John Smith’s life was saved. Two years later the Indian girl saved him a second time when her father was plotting an ambush which would have led to a massacre of settlers, and the captain’s death as well.’

‘He could have gone away, couldn’t he?’ Ste suggested. ‘He had his ship –’

‘Oh, but Captain John Smith was not a man like that,’ the old Admiral said warmly. ‘He had determined to try and make Virginia safe for settlers, so someone had to explore the place. He knew there was danger, but he had faced danger before, many a time. When he began a job he saw it through. He was that kind of man.’

And Ste used to lie and think about ‘that kind of man’ before he went to sleep at night. Earlier his ambition had been to become a great engineer like his godfather Robert Stephenson, but now he wanted to be another John Smith. It thrilled him to think how the Elizabethan adventurer had

taught himself woodcraft, and become so clever that he could even outwit the Indians. He had learned how **to** read trail signs, how to distinguish between the calls of real birds and the bird-calls the Indians made as signals to one another.

Grandfather Smyth had made it clear in his stories about Captain John Smith that the great man owed his safety many times to the fact that he was always one jump ahead of his enemies. He taught himself to think as they did, so he could imagine what they would do next.

Interest in plants, animals and birds was part of the Baden-Powell scheme of education, and Ste's mother used to take her family out into the nearby Hyde Park as often as possible so that they could learn about Nature.

The story of Captain John Smith spurred Ste on even more. In the park he used to pretend that he was in Redskin country, and concentrated on learning the songs of birds, to note the different kinds of barks that different breeds of dogs made.

It was all training for the days later on when his own life would depend on quick thinking, memory of little things seen – which few others saw, and the ability to be 'one jump ahead' of the other side. One day, he was sure, he would be another Captain John Smith.

*

There was quietness in the house in Hyde Park Gate when Mr John Ruskin's cab pulled up at the door, and the great man was amazed when Mrs Henrietta Baden-Powell smiled and shook her head when asked if the children were not at home.

'You would not have asked that, Mr Ruskin,' she said, 'if you had been here half an hour ago. One of the things which always delights me is their return from a walk. If they were not so courteous to one another I could almost imagine them fighting to have first turn at telling me what they have been doing and what they have seen.'



Sitting at a small table he was busy painting

'But where are they now?' Mr Ruskin asked. 'It is not often one enters a house where there are children without hearing something.'

'Come upstairs,' and Mrs Baden-Powell led the way to the room where her children played and worked. Very quietly she opened the door, and led her guest in.

Still carrying his top hat, the great art critic looked from one child to another. The youngest, Baden Fletcher Powell was only three years old, and as was the custom in those days he still wore a frock so it was hard to decide whether he was a boy or a girl. Agnes, who was five, was seated with

her younger brother patiently showing him how to make a daisy chain. John, who was eleven, was immersed in a book on astronomy.

Ruskin's interest was immediately taken by the other boy, seven year old Ste. Sitting at a small table he was busy painting. With Mrs Baden-Powell at his elbow Ruskin tiptoed across, and they stood behind the painter for a few moments before he became aware of them.

Ruskin, with a wave of his hand, and raised eyebrows, indicated how the boy was painting with the brush in his left hand. Yet he had scarcely indicated that Ste was left handed than the brush was transferred to the right hand, the work going on just as easily and as smoothly as before.

It was then that Ste became aware of the two scrutineers, and he rose to his feet at once, giving Mr Ruskin a little bow; a courtesy which brought a smile and an approving nod from the great man.

'Do you think he shows any promise, Mr Ruskin?' Ste's mother asked, pointing to the painting. 'I should greatly value any hint you might be able to give me.' She knew well enough that her visitor was perhaps the greatest art critic of the day, and any advice from him would certainly be well worth having.

'I think he is at least worth a lesson, Ma'am,' Ruskin said, and laying his top hat on the table he bent over to take a sheet of drawing paper from the folder by the boy's paints. 'What is his name?'

'We call him Ste,' was the quick retort, and with a smile added: 'In honour of his godfather, the renowned Mr Robert Stephenson. You will, of course, have met him.'

'I have indeed,' Ruskin said, taking a clean brush and beginning to paint over the drawing paper with clean water. 'So you are Robert Stephenson Baden-Powell, eh? And you want to learn to paint?'

'Yes, sir,' Ste agreed, 'but my full name is Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell.'

'Ah yes, of course,' Ruskin agreed, smiling. 'Smyth is your famous grandfather's name, isn't it?'

'And my great great great-' there Ste hesitated, not quite knowing how far removed was the late Captain John Smith. His mother helped him out, a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

'Mr Ruskin, I am afraid we do not really know how many "greats" there should be to the name of Captain John Smith, but we do claim to have that great *Elizabethan* adventurer in our lineage. It is to him Ste is referring. I am afraid his grandfather's stories of the great Captain John Smith have made Ste decide to become an adventurer like him.'

Ruskin shook his head as he washed the drawing paper with more clean water.

'I think it will have to be some other kind of adventurous life for you, Ste,' he said. 'By the time you go out into the world all the Redskins will have been civilised. The day will come when there will be railways stretching right across the continent of America, and where the railway goes civilisation swamps everything else.'

He sat silent for a few moments then dipped his clean brush into one of the paints, and within a matter of minutes had outlined a vase and coloured it.

'You see how the paint spreads evenly,' he said. 'That is because the paper is damp. When the paper is dry it soaks up the water-colour paint at once, and we get little patches of colour which we cannot shade exactly right with the next piece.'

He went on to shade the painting, and when he finally rose had produced a quite beautiful painting of a vase. Laying the brush down he took up his top hat, and holding it towards the boy so that he could remove the sheet of paper lying on it, said,

'Perhaps you will be able to paint some flowers in the vase. And if you can remember that the paper must be damp when you are using water colours, you will find painting much easier.'

‘Thank you, sir,’ and Ste stood spellbound by Mr Ruskin’s work until that man had left the room. Then Agnes came across and even his elder brother John. Young Baden Fletcher sitting on a rug, was too engrossed in daisy-chain making to bother about what the famous Mr Ruskin had been doing.

Downstairs, Ste’s mother was confiding to her visitor a little worry she had over the boy.

‘You noticed that he painted first with his right hand, then with his left. I am afraid I do not know what to do about that. When his father was alive he tried to break Ste of the habit. It seems so unnatural for him to want to use his left hand when he is just as good as any other person with his right hand. I wonder if you have any views on the matter?’

‘I should certainly not worry about it, Ma’am,’ Ruskin urged. ‘I can see no harm or danger in it at all. In fact, quite the reverse. At the least it could become quite an amusing parlour trick. How many of us, for instance, but would rather watch a two-handed artist, drawing with both hands at once, than listen to some pigeon-chested young man who fancies himself as a baritone - when in fact he has no tone at all.’

They both laughed, and it was decided there and then that Ste’s habit of drawing with either hand should not be discouraged. It was a ‘parlour trick’ he kept to the end of his days, and passed on to his own son Peter.

2

Head Cook and Dish Washer

‘Now you’ll take care of Ste, won’t you?’ Mrs Baden-Powell said, looking across at the smallest of the four brothers who were ready for the first weekend outing of the holidays. ‘He has been living for this day – and you know he thinks there is no one quite like you, Warrington.’

Ten years older than Ste, Warrington was already a husky young man, with valuable sailing experience gained aboard the training ship *Conway*. He, too, had inherited a love for the open air, and in addition to being a good sailor was also an expert in the woods. He had taken his brothers George and Frank on a number of outings, but until now Ste had been considered too young.

With knapsacks on their backs, containing waterproofs, some bread and butter, a few simple cooking utensils, and home made snares, they were bound for a weekend in the open.

Throughout the day Ste tried to behave as if this was something he was well accustomed to. When they stopped in a secluded wood he could hardly contain his excitement when his three elder brothers prepared to catch something for supper. They had eaten a light meal of bread and butter, washed down by water from a spring, but now it was time for the meal of the day and Ste was agog with excitement.

‘You go with George and catch some fish,’ Warrington ordered, as if catching fish was as simple as telling Hawksworth, the grocer, to deliver a pound of sugar. ‘Frank and I will see if we can bag a rabbit, or a pheasant.’

The sun was beginning to sink towards the west as Ste and George found what seemed a likely spot on the banks of a quiet flowing stream. Alders shaded the water. Gnats danced in smoky looking columns, and somewhere a late cuckoo was calling like a lost soul.

George baited two lines and they made their casts. The floats sat quietly on the water, watched by Ste with anxious eyes. He was hungry, and there was a lurking anxiety at the back of his mind that they might not catch anything. That would be a double misfortune, for then there

would be no supper, or if there was, it would be a supper provided by Warington and Frank. Ste was desperately anxious to show his eldest brother that he was a fit person to take out on a weekend jaunt.

Suddenly a float bobbed.

‘Strike, Ste,’ George said swiftly, but the command was not necessary. The first movement of the little white and red painted float had been like the triggering-off of a gun. Eyes flashing with excitement the younger boy ‘struck’, and within thirty seconds the first of nearly a dozen fish was on the bank.

Before they finally coiled their lines they had eleven fish on the grass, and Ste could hardly wait to get back to their chosen camping spot. He had decided he would not say anything, but would leave it to his elder brother George to recount the fact that of the eleven fish he had caught seven!

Back in the little glade, with the rays of the setting sun throwing long shadows, George put down his knapsack and turning to Ste said:

‘You’d better gut the fish. Bury the heads and the rest of the stuff – we don’t want to burn them, they make too much smell. I’ll light a fire. After-well, what are you waiting for?’

‘Nothing,’ Ste said, and slipping his hand into his pocket he brought out the magnificent pocket knife Warington had given him as a present. It was so beautiful that Ste pulled a wry face at the thought of cutting into the fish with it.

As George moved off into the undergrowth to collect dead twigs, and thicker branches blown down in the previous winter, Ste knelt down and gingerly picked up the first fish. In the past he had listened enthralled when his three brothers had returned from such a weekend as this, and had recounted to their mother, and the rest of the family, how they had caught fish, or birds, or rabbits, and after skinning and gutting them, had roasted them over a campfire.

To Ste the interesting things had been the catching and the cooking. He had never given much thought to the preparation of fish, fowl or animals for the pot.

He pushed back his cap and the reddening light of the sun lit up his freckled, slightly sunburned face. He could hear George humming softly as he gathered sticks. In a matter of minutes his brother would be back to begin laying the fire. It would never do to let him think that their new recruit could not do such a simple thing as prepare fish for supper.

In went the beautiful shining blade of the knife, and Ste momentarily closed his eyes. He wondered for a second if he was going to be sick. The fish he had seen many times on the slab in their kitchen had always been cleaned and ready for the pan.

When George returned a few minutes later, to cast only a momentary glance at his younger brother, he never guessed what courage it had needed to start preparing the eleven fish. So far as he could see Ste was doing just what any experienced camper would be doing – methodically cleaning the fish, laying the heads and the offal on a sheet of old newspaper so that they would not soil the grass.

By the time Ste had cleaned the fish, and washed them with water from a tiny spring bubbling out of mosses on some higher ground, George had a splendid little fire burning. In Ste’s estimation the fire was far too tiny. There was so much dead wood about that they could have had quite a bonfire. As casually as possible he hinted that cooking might be quicker on a bigger fire, but George shook his head:

‘You must have a small fire, Ste. A small *red* fire which is so hot that it doesn’t smoke. You don’t want to spoil the flavour of the fish with smoke, do you?’

‘No,’ Ste agreed, and stood watching while George spitted each fish in turn on sharp pointed sticks. One end was thrust into the turf and at an angle so that the fish could cook without fear of the ‘spit’ burning and dropping part of their supper into the fire.

‘What have you cut turf out for, George?’ Ste asked, pointing to a piece of turf some eighteen inches square. The fire had been laid on the earth exposed when the turf was cut out.

George looked up with a grin.

‘Oh, Ste, come on, you can do better than that. Think!’

But this was Ste’s first venture into the lore of the backwoodsman, and think how he would he could not find the answer. George gave him three vital reasons.

‘First of all, Ste, the ground is dry. If we laid our fire on the grass, we might start a fire which could spread and burn down the wood. You had not thought of that, had you? You must think of these things. The second reason is – when we move off tomorrow we do not want to leave an ugly pile of dead ashes behind us. After all, this little glade was very nice and quite unspoiled when Warrington brought us here.’

‘Yes, it was,’ Ste nodded agreement.

‘And we should leave it unspoiled,’ George pointed out. ‘So when we have finished, we’ll simply pour water on the ashes of the fire, and when they are completely dead, we spread the ashes, lay the turf back in place, and in a few days no one will know that there has been a fire here. Except, of course, that the grass will later on be even greener. It will grow greener, because there is nitrogen in the wood ash – or something like that – and nitrogen is a fertiliser.’

The smaller boy’s eyes were round in astonishment as he took in these things. Then, as George busied himself turning the fish, which were now beginning to give off a pleasant smell, Ste said:

‘You said there were three reasons, George, why we should cut out the turf before we built a fire.’

‘Yes, there are three,’ George agreed, sucking the end of his thumb, now stinging a little from the heat of one of the pieces of fish. ‘Suppose you were in enemy country. You would not want to leave signs behind to let them know there was a party scouting behind their lines, would you?’

Ste’s eyes shone at the thought, and his mind went back to the ‘Quarterdeck’, and his grandfather. He seemed to hear again old Admiral Smyth telling stories of Captain John Smith, who explored the Indian territory.

Unaware of what his younger brother was thinking, George went on:

‘When you can cover up your fireplace – and leave no trace of it, no one is going to know you have been. You halt at dusk, you are gone in the morning, and only the night prowlers know where you slept.’

‘Night prowlers!’ Young Ste had yet to be introduced to the denizens of the woods, the rabbits, the fox, sometimes even a clumsy looking badger, sometimes, if they were very fortunate, a red-eyed weasel moving with hardly a rustle on the trail of some unfortunate rabbit, or maybe going up the bark of a tree in pursuit of a shrieking squirrel.

‘Wait till Warrington and Frank come back,’ George promised. ‘When you come out with us, you have got to be able to stand on your own feet – so Warrington is going to try you out tonight.’ Then he laughed, and with a grin added: ‘There’s nothing to be scared about. We mean to show you some of the things you can see in the woods after sundown.’

‘I wasn’t scared,’ Ste insisted, and he was telling the truth. He had accidentally discovered a watervole a year or so previously near the watercress bed at grandfather Smyth’s home, Langton House, and had spent many an hour during that holiday, sitting quietly near the spot in the

hopes of seeing it again. Agnes had come once, and that time the vole had not been seen; but sitting so very quiet as Ste had insisted they must, they had seen many little things.

One was a cricket on a strong grass stalk. By staring intently they had been able to see how he produced his 'singing', by drawing one leg across the other, or maybe it was a wing, just as if he was a violinist.

The thought that he might now spend the night hours watching even larger wild things sent a shiver of delight through him, and his eyes were shining in anticipation when Warington and Frank returned, empty handed. They had set some snares, but the rabbits would not be out until the hour before darkness fell.

It was a disappointment to Ste that neither Warington nor Frank asked who had caught the fish. Nor did George think to tell them that it was Ste who had got the first bite, and had been the most successful fisherman. Ste admired Warington very much, and would have been tremendously thrilled if his elder brother had been told about the fish, and had nodded his approval.

When the meal was over the fire was replenished. It was not cold, but the day was ending, and the glow of a brightly burning fire made the little glade much cosier.

They had drunk tea, and were settling down nicely when Warington looked across at the youngest member, and jerking a thumb towards the cups and enamel plates said:

'Your job, Ste. The youngest is always the "skivvy" – head cook and bottle washer. You'll get the grease off the plates by rubbing them with the earthy side of a piece of turf – or some sand if there is any at the stream. Off you scoot, there's a boy.'

An hour later they moved off to take up the positions Warington and Frank had chosen. Ste was to be with Warington, and they crouched in the shelter of a larch, whose wide sweeping branches gave wonderful cover. The ground was soft with the accumulation of years of 'needles', and quite warm to the touch.

From their hide-out they could look across an open space, beyond which Warington said there were a number of rabbit burrows. To the left the stream flowed placidly, its bank a grassy carpet almost as smooth as a lawn.

The sky to the north was the brightest, for it was almost midsummer and there would be only a few hours of darkness. Warington insisted that Ste make himself completely comfortable, for once they were in position they would have to remain absolutely still and silent if they were to see anything at all.

Ste had never been out in the country so late, and he was amazed how many sounds could be heard once they had settled in position. Above all others they heard a cow lowing continuously.

'It's either ill,' Warington murmured, 'or maybe it is going to give birth to a calf.'

A dog barked, and was silent. Then after a few minutes they heard the peculiar 'chirr-irring' of a nightjar as it swept through the warm air, collecting its supper from the night-flying insects.

Warington laid a restraining hand on Ste's arm and whispered:

'The scout! Come to see if the coast is clear.'

Ste could see nothing for a moment, then he made out the rabbit. It had hopped out from one of the burrows and was sitting a yard from the bank, looking this way and that. For perhaps two minutes it sat quietly, then thumped with its hind feet. Within a minute it was joined by a score of rabbits. There were bucks and does hopping here and there, nibbling the close cropped grass, while the youngsters darted about like children just out from school.

It was a scene of peace, until right in among the rabbits dropped a flat stone. Ste scarcely heard the faint thud as the stone hit the turf, but the effect on the rabbits was immediate. It was as if

they had all been petrified. And Ste had just time to notice that the ears of every rabbit were up, and turned to face where the stone lay.

Then the first rabbit, a big buck, which Warington had called the 'scout', thumped twice with his hind feet. That signal obviously meant 'Get under cover', for at once there was a panic-stricken dash for the burrows. Some seemed to dart from hole to hole in their eagerness to get out of sight, and within a minute they were all gone.

'Who threw the stone?' Ste whispered.

'Either George or Frank,' Warington replied. 'It would have been as effective if one of them had clapped his hands. Anyway, I see we've got a couple – oh, no, three rabbits. See them?' And he pointed to three holes in the bank, above which three rabbits dangled by the neck.

'Snares?' Ste asked, and for a moment knew *a little* pang of pity that the rabbits which had been playing so harmlessly a few moments before were now just something for the pot.

'Go on,' Warington said, smiling. 'Ask me why they didn't get snared when they first came out?'

'Yes, I was wondering,' Ste admitted.

'Well, tomorrow I'll show you. In a bank like this there are always what we call bolt holes. A sort of extra door to cover. They lead down into the burrows, but the rabbits do not normally use them. George and I put our snares in the entrance to those bolt holes. The three lop-ears we've got dashed in, pulled the loops tight, and triggered off the bent saplings – and so they were jerked out of the bolt hole as you see them now.'

'Oh!' Young Ste rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then said: 'But how do you know which are the bolt holes? From here the holes all look the same.'

Warington laughed softly.

'You've got to notice the little signs,' he explained. 'You can tell a rabbit-run through grass, because they always seem to put their paws in exactly the same place, and they wear off the grass. In front of their burrows there is a sign, too. You'll often find earth scraped away, whereas the bolt holes are just holes, with not much sign that they are ever used. Oh, they're coming across. I suppose as long as we have enough for breakfast we may as well get ready for some sleep. Are you tired, Ste?'

'Not very,' Ste said, hoping there was something else of interest to be seen.

'Good.' Warington crept out from beneath the shelter of the larch as George and Frank took the three rabbits from the snares, and then removed any sign that snares had been set. 'Well, as long as you are not tired, and as you are head cook, Ste, you'd better get these rabbits skinned, and we'll set them to roast for morning.'

Back by their camp fire Warington showed his younger brother how to skin and clean one of the rabbits, and when Ste, trying not to show that the task made him feel a little queasy, had skinned and cleaned the other two, he was shown how to roast them gypsy fashion.

While George and Frank built up the fire with dry material from under the trees, Ste was taken down to the stream and instructed how to make clay packs for the rabbits. Completely cased in with wet clay, the three rabbits were then laid on the glowing fire, more tinder dry material was laid on top of them, and then, on Warington's instructions, Ste cut turf from the bank of the stream and carefully laid it on top of the fire, until every little flame had been obscured.

It was just possible to see a red glow between the crevices where the pieces of turf met. To Ste it all seemed very odd. He could not imagine what the three rabbits would be like next day; certainly breakfast for the morrow did not promise to be appetising. He had a feeling that the

fire would soon be smothered, and if it was not then the three rabbits must certainly be burned to a cinder.

He lay down under a larch, and the deep bed of needles, accumulated over the years, felt almost as comfortable as bed at home. Warrington showed him how to wrap himself securely in his waterproof against the dew. He crept over later to make sure that his 'tenderfoot' brother was all right. He was! Ste was sound asleep, and breathing as quietly as a babe.

They were wakened by the dawn chorus of the birds, and though Ste had enjoyed many a family picnic in the country, for his mother was very keen on the outdoor life, he had never before been in a wood so early, nor had he known a morning quite like this.

The sun was coming up, and because there was a little cloud in the east, the lemon yellow rays as the sun first pushed above the horizon seemed to streak across the sky like wonderful banners. It was all changed in a matter of minutes. The sun came up, its colour deepened, then the four brothers stripped and had a swim in the stream.

Warrington was the last to get down to the water, for he had stayed behind to disturb the little pile of turf which masked their fire and the three clay-covered rabbits.

A little puff of grey dust shot into the air when he moved the first turf, and then the merest suggestion of smoke. Their 'banked' fire was still alive, and when he waded into the stream the suggestion of smoke had grown to a thin column of pale blue, and what had looked like a pile of dead ashes about the three clay-wrapped rabbits was beginning to glow pink.

Ten minutes of racing about to dry themselves and get the blood racing through their veins, then back to the fireside to dress. It was then that Ste realised how much could be done with the minimum of tools. With thin string they had constructed rabbit snares. With clay they had covered their catch, and when Warrington told him to break off the baked clay with a stone, three beautifully cooked rabbits were revealed.

'You need never starve, even in this country,' Warrington said as he laid a rabbit on three plates – his own, and those of George and Frank. 'God has provided us with firewood, with flesh, with water. What more could we want?'

He gently pulled off a leg and began to munch. George and Frank did the same, while Ste watched them.

'The cook gets what is left,' Frank said, and then at a nod from Warrington he gently cut off a hind leg from his rabbit and passed it to Ste. George did the same, and Warrington contributed his share.

'We wouldn't let you starve,' George chuckled, munching. 'After all – we need somebody to be dogsbody. As a matter of fact, Ste, if ever you go to boarding school you'll thank us for making you do the dirty work, won't he, Warrington?'

Warrington nodded.

'Yes, at school you start at the bottom – and, if you survive, there will come a wonderful day when *you* will be a Fifth, maybe even a Sixth Former. Then you will have a fag. You can order him about –'

'Or twist his arm up his back if he gets you up late for First School,' George said, grinning.

'Don't worry, Ste,' Warrington said, feeling in his knapsack and bringing out a piece of loaf. 'If *we* managed to survive, you will. Who's for a piece of bread? Catch!'

3

The Collapsible Boat

The building of the collapsible boat amazed the Baden-Powell family. Warington had drawn up the plans, and by post had given instructions to George and Frank at Balliol College, Oxford, about the parts they had to make. Young Ste, who was now twelve and had been at his father's old school, Rose Hill, Tunbridge Wells, had merely been advised to learn how to look after a glue pot, and how to keep tools sharp.

When the four brothers assembled at their home in Hyde Park Gate at the beginning of the long holiday, Warington, George and Frank brought with them mysterious and oddly shaped packages. From those packages was to come the boat, if Warington's plans had been well made.

Early next morning Ste was out in the garden with the tool chest and the glue pot. His fire was like their outdoor cooking fires, small, with little smoke, but providing the maximum heat. Soon the water was boiling briskly, and the fish glue changed from a solid, dark brown mass to a not very pleasant smelling liquid.

Warington, George and Frank unwrapped their mysterious parcels, and Ste, not daring to leave his fire in case the glue pot boiled over, stared in fascination at the slender pieces of wood which were to form the skeleton of their collapsible boat.

In his eyes they looked far too thin for the work they had to do, but when they were sorted out, and laid on the grass his excitement grew. Some of the wooden strips had holes drilled in them, some had their ends socketed. Soon, while the summer sun lit up the scene, the outlines of the boat began to take shape. It was amazing. It was like watching a queer, outsize jigsaw puzzle grow, each piece falling neatly into shape, although everything had been made by three separate pairs of hands, merely from written instructions.

Mrs Baden-Powell came out to watch for a minute or so, and with her was Agnes and young Baden Fletcher. They screwed up their faces at the smell from the glue pot, and B-P showed a flash of that wit which was with him to the end of his days.

'You can pull faces,' he said, 'but the chap who looks after the glue pot just has to *stick* to the job – or else.'

'It had better be good glue, young 'un,' Warington said, starting to pull the framework apart. 'We've done our job well, but if the glue is poor we'll find ourselves swimming instead of sailing.'

'What about taking Ste along with us?' George asked, winking at his elder brother. 'Then if the glue doesn't do its job – he'll get a wet shirt into the bargain.'

'Oh, but you weren't thinking of taking Ste, were you?' their mother asked, at which young B-P rose from his crouching position by the glue pot, alarm on his freckled face.

'But I *am* going, Mother,' he protested. 'Warington promised.'

He looked at Warington pleadingly, and George, who enjoyed pulling his younger brother's leg, said:

'I think he'd better travel to Llandogo with you by train. He likes looking out of the train window, don't you, Ste?'

'Warington's the captain,' Ste said firmly. 'And he promised.'

'Ste will be all right, Mother,' Warington said, then briskly: 'Come on, young 'un, bring the glue pot over here. I'd rather be enjoying the sunshine somewhere up the Thames than here. The sooner she's launched and sailing the better I'll be pleased.'

Throughout the day the sections of the collapsible boat were glued and pinned. The metal fittings which held some of the parts together were screwed in place, and tried time after time, for ease of fitting and for rigidity. Finally the framework was ready.

Ste would have gone without his afternoon tea if Warington would have given the word, so that they could fit on the canvas outer covering which would change the framework to a watertight boat.

They stretched the canvas 'jacket' over the framework, then worked the frame sockets into place. When that was done the canvas was tightened to perfection; but instead of taking their boat to try it on water as Ste was longing for, they dismantled it again.

Not until they had dismantled and packed up the boat several times was Warington satisfied that it would be a success. Each bundle of parts was weighed, for along the route from London to the house at Llandogo on the Wye which their mother had taken for the holidays, there would be a number of portages to be made, and even Ste, youngest and smallest, would have some weight to carry.

At dusk, with few people to see them, they tried the boat on a quiet stretch of water. Warington was the first to use the oars; short, light ones specially made for the purpose. When their craft was taken out of the water there was hardly a 'weep' on the inside of the canvas.

'Once it gets really wet, and the canvas swells, she'll be as watertight as a duck's feather,' Warington announced. 'We'll try her again tomorrow, and if she's all right then – we'll launch her on the Thames the day after, and begin the maiden voyage at once.'

The collapsible boat *was* watertight, and though Mrs Baden-Powell was anxious about her four sons, she hid her fears and busied herself collecting the few things they were to take with them. They were few indeed; one or two cooking utensils, light blankets, the barest necessities of tea and sugar, and a day's supply of sandwiches. Once they were away from London Warington planned to buy what they could not catch from farms.

Ste was awake soon after dawn, and his first move was to the window to see what the weather was like. The sky was clear; the starlings were busy combing the lawn like an army of litter collectors. It was going to be a fine day.

When they laid their packages on what should have been a quiet spot on the Thames Embankment and began to lay out the framework of their boat a small crowd gathered in an amazingly short time. A wag among them nudged a neighbour as he asked:

'Going to clean the drains, guv'nor? Sw'elp me, but I dunno as them sticks'll be long enough, will they? You won't get very far, will you?'

'Just to Oxford,' Ste said, a twinkle in his eyes, 'then we'll have to pack them up again.'

'Garn, them's no use even for a drain,' was the quick retort. 'They wouldn't go up any sort o' drain.'

'They'll go up the Thames,' Ste retorted. 'You wait and see.'

The crowd increased as the shape of the boat became evident, but when the canvas was drawn over the framework and forced taut by the stretchers, a policeman who had joined the crowd was constrained to say:

'I hope you are not thinking of going on the river in that, sir. It doesn't look safe to me.'

'Oh, we can all swim, constable,' Warington assured him, and turning to his brothers went on: 'George, will you take the stern? Frank, you and Ste take the midships.'

A silent crowd watched them carry the frail looking craft down the steps and place it on the water. George remained with it, holding the painter while the other three returned to the Embankment to collect their equipment.

The crowd was silent until the laden boat was pushed off and the short oars were dipped in earnest for the first time. The tide was ebbing, and the current threatened to take control for a few moments. Then the bows pointed upstream, and with the oars dipping and flashing in the sunlight the voyage began.

‘Good luck, guv’nor,’ the man who had joked about them cleaning the drains yelled, and it sparked off cries of encouragement from the rest of the small crowd. Mrs Baden-Powell, who had watched from a distance, was aware that some of her anxieties had faded. Warington was certainly a very capable sailor, while both George and Frank were athletic young men who were quite able to look after themselves.

‘It’s young Ste,’ she murmured as she watched the boat grow smaller and smaller. She frowned as she saw a red sailed Thames barge rushing downriver with the last of the outgoing tide to help it. But when she saw how Warington turned his boat’s bows to face the wash, she gave a little shrug, and felt reassured. Warington would take care of the ‘young ‘un’ as he called Ste.

What she did not realise was that the gift for mimicry which young Ste was developing was to hold him in good stead before her four sons finally hauled their home-made boat up to the house at Llandogo. There were to be a few minutes when the success or failure of the whole trip was to depend on the ‘young ‘un’.

*

For the four brothers the days which followed were all that anyone could wish for. They left London behind, and the hurly-burly of the river changed to one of peace. Places now built over were, in those days, pleasant fields.

In the hot days cattle stood knee deep in the quietly flowing water to drink and cool off. Herons stalked long-legged in the shallows to spear minnows, ignoring the boat with all the dignity of aristocratic old gentlemen unless it came too close.

Warington chose the camping places. They had no money to spare for fancy foods, and preferred to get their ‘meat’ courses from the countryside itself. They would halt near a wood, and while one unloaded the boat and set up the tent, if there was a threat of rain, one of the others would begin to prepare a fire while the remaining two went off to see what they were to have for the evening meal; fish or fowl, rabbit or even hedgehog.

Ste was the official cook and washer-up of pots. He brought the water and did all the odd jobs. It was the accepted thing, and he never grumbled. Later on, at Charterhouse, when he was fagging for a Sixth Former, he found it quite easy. To ‘do’ for one person was nothing when compared with fagging for three brothers.

One of Ste’s delights, when his odd jobs were done, was to sit down with pencil and paper. He enjoyed sketching. Sometimes it was merely a tree, perhaps a birch whose brown and white trunk, with the paper-thin bark curling off, was not easy to bring to life on paper.

Sometimes it would be a sun-dappled glade, when he tried to capture the old trees, with boles like cathedral pillars, moss on their north sides and roots which splayed out for a yard or so from the base of the trunk before disappearing below the ground.

They had halted one late afternoon not far from a small town, and his three brothers had decided to have a shopping expedition. They were running short of flour and sugar, as well as one or two other necessities. As a special treat they had decided to purchase something for the evening meal, instead of trying to get a rabbit or two.

Ste had pitched the tent, cut out the turf for the fire and collected sufficient wood to keep their fire going for the evening meal and for the next day’s breakfast. It was stacked under cover, for the sky was dark with the threat of a possible summer thunderstorm.

Fascinated by the rolling slate blue clouds, Ste moved away from the tent to try his hand at a sketch which would include not only the tent, and the river, with one or two pollarded trees on the bank, but also the massing thunder clouds.

He rapidly outlined the scene, and then with the pad perched on a tree stump was working two-handed to fill in the detail. With his left-hand pencil he was trying to get an impression of the river water as it rolled sullenly on, no sky sheen to light up its surface. With his right-hand pencil he was shading in the thunder clouds.

Kneeling behind the tree stump he must have merged completely with his background, for the man who came up to the camp quite obviously thought he was alone.

The intruder stood for a few moments near the tent, looking from side to side. Then, satisfied there was no one about, he ducked inside the tent and within a minute had dragged out the three knapsacks. The fourth had been taken along by Warrington to hold the food they had gone to buy.

Absorbed though he was in his sketching, Ste had seen the man approach. He had shrunk down a little, watching from the side of the rotten stump. He did not suspect the man of any harm; but he was so keen on woodcraft that he wanted to see if he could remain hidden from the unexpected visitor.

The moment it became obvious that the man was a thief, taking advantage of what must have appeared to him a deserted camp, Ste laid down his pencils. His heart was thumping a little, for he realised he was far too small to tackle the thief face to face.

‘I must do something,’ Ste decided. ‘If he takes our stuff – we won’t be able to go on. I wish Warrington would come. He’d know how –’ and there he stopped. Warrington would *not* come. Together with George and Frank he would be in the little town now, and they had said they intended to look round the place. They might well be another hour.

Then Ste had an idea. Creeping away as quickly and quietly as he could, he reached the fringe of the trees, then got to his feet. Facing the little camp, with the thief busy pawing over the contents of the knapsacks, Ste gave evidence that even now he possessed acting ability.

Raising his voice he shouted to the tramp:

‘Hi, what are you doing?’ Then, as the man looked up, startled, Ste turned and running back into the shelter of the trees yelled: ‘Uncle-Uncle, there’s a man taking our things. Hurry!’



The man quite obviously thought he was alone

A second later there came the sharp ‘yap-yap’ of a small dog, followed a moment later by the deeper ‘woof-woof’ of a much bigger dog. Then Ste cupped his hands about his mouth and with his back to the thief shouted:

‘Come on, Rover – hi, Rover, come on. Come on Floss. Quick. Sic him – sic him.’

The would-be thief was on his feet now, hesitating whether to beat a quick retreat or snatch at some of the things he had already put into a little pile.

The deep threatening barking of what sounded like a big dog decided him. Then the yap-yap of a terrier, obviously much nearer, lent speed to his actions. He did not run back the way he had come, but plunged down to the river bank, and splashed across, while the chorus of barking grew louder and louder.

If he had not been panicked he might have wondered at the fact that the two ‘dogs’ did not bark at the same time. Either the terrier was yapping almost hysterically, or the bigger dog’s deeper toned bark was heard. Not even Ste, who seemed to have been born with the power to mimic, could produce the barking of two dogs at the same time.

Ste ran down to the river bank, and as the tramp scrambled up into the bushes on the far side he yelled:

‘Come back, you thief. Come back.’

The man did not even look round, but plunging deeper into the bushes was lost to sight. Ste, well aware that the man might stop and look round, turned and scampered back towards the trees, barking first in a high note and then in the deeper gruff tones of a bigger dog.

As he got into the masking fringe of the nearer trees he shouted loudly:

‘It’s all right, Uncle, he’s gone, and he hasn’t taken anything. Down-down, Rover. Down, Flossie.’ Then in the warm, soothing tones one uses to excited dogs, he went on: ‘All right, all right-everything is all right. He’s gone. Yes, he’s gone. There’s a good dog – sit down. That’s it.’

For several minutes after that he occasionally barked, first imitating a terrier type dog, then imitating the deeper notes of a much larger dog. He wanted to impress the would-be thief, if he was still in earshot, that it would not be healthy for him to return.

The next hour was an anxious one. Ste kept out of sight, but talked loudly, and even tried to imitate the gruffer tones of a man – not a very easy thing for him to do, for he had a pure falsetto voice which was later to earn him a place in the school choir.

Occasionally he walked down to the tent and built up the fire, then replaced the kits which had been strewn on the grass. All the time he was on the alert for a return of the thief, but he had won his first battle by strategy, and convinced the would-be thief that far from being deserted the little camp was held by a man, a boy, and two dogs.

His account of the attempt to steal from the camp was so light-hearted that his brothers hardly realised just what Ste had managed to do. Later, however, Warrington did decide that it might not be a good thing to leave ‘the young ‘un’ alone in camp.

Their trip took them over the Mendips, a portage which involved each one carrying some of the equipment and part of the boat. It proved hard, hot work, but finally they reached the Avon. Reassembling their boat they sailed down to Avonmouth. It was there they faced either a long row upriver on the south bank, or a risky seven-mile crossing of the Severn, with its rather dangerous tidal waters.

Warrington, a sailor born, and well trained in the *Conway*, decided the risk was worth it. They rowed out, and though they had some anxious moments, they reached the northern shore in safety, and from there went up the Wye to journey’s end at Llandogo.

Wanting to surprise their mother they secretly carried their folding boat into the shed at the back of the house, spruced themselves up and then presented themselves at the front door. They had lots to tell their mother of their adventures, but there was one adventure which was told in private. Warrington, George and Frank frowned upon any suggestion of boasting, and it was because of this that young Ste had not made his tale of the would-be thief as serious as it was. Like the rest of the family he told his mother everything, so Ste gave her the full story of his first victory by strategy, a hint if she had not already guessed, that in this red-haired son was a boy unusual even in such an unusual family as hers.

4

Fagging at Charterhouse

Within sixty seconds of the porter ringing his bell in the doorway of the small dormitory, a score of youngsters were hurriedly dressing. It was 7 a.m. and the morning was bleak, the air chilly. There was no such thing as central heating at Charterhouse in the year 1870.

Without even a pretence of washing, the ‘fags’ hurried out to make sure their ‘uppers’, members of the Sixth and Upper Fifth forms for whom they fagged, were out in good time for First School at 8 a.m. Out in good time and in good humour, if possible.

At least one great man who went to Charterhouse, W. M. Thackeray, remembered his schooldays with hatred because of the bullying he had to endure as a small boy. Among those who rose this particular morning was B-P, who at thirteen years of age had just become a scholar at Charterhouse. He was a Gownboy, which meant that he was there as a scholarship winner.

Having learned to serve his three elder brothers during weekend camps, and jaunts in the country, B-P fagged with cheerfulness, accepting the kicks with the very infrequent ha’pence which came his way. He knocked on the door of the room where his lordly upper slept, and when there was no answer he knocked again, then entered, whistling softly.

His whistle grew louder as the upper showed no sign of moving. B-P continued to whistle as he bustled about the room; but he kept an eye cocked at the boy on the bed. He saw the eyelids move a little, and his wariness increased. He wiped round the wash basin, took down the towel which he had hung up to dry the previous evening, and ducked easily as the hand which had slid from beneath the bedclothes to pick up a slipper, sent that piece of footwear whistling across the room in his direction.

‘Ten past seven, and cool,’ B-P announced as he laughingly dodged the second slipper. ‘Would you like some hot water?’

He watched his upper’s hand feel tentatively at a chin which was showing evidence of the need for shaving in the form of a slight yellow down.

‘I always want hot water – on a cold morning,’ was the growl. ‘And be quick or I’ll slipper you.’

B-P whisked the water jug out of the room, hared along the corridor and was back in a few minutes with a gallon of hot water. He poured it into the bowl, though his upper still huddled beneath the clothes, his eyes shut. He laid out the towel, wiped some dirty soap-sud marks off the soap, then announced:

‘Everything ready, now. The water will go cold pretty quick, I’m afraid, and I shan’t be able to get any –’ Then he was gone, for the bedclothes heaved up.

Whistling, for he had made a good start to the day, B-P hurried back to the dormitory. He stopped just inside the room at sight of another boy of his own age who was crying.

‘Hello, what’s the matter?’

‘It’s that bounder Jenkins,’ the boy sniffled, wiping at his eyes with the back of his hand. ‘He just lies as if he’s dead. I’ve shaken him; I’ve done everything – and if he should be late for First School – it’s the slipper for me, and he’s a great hulking bully.’

‘He whacked you yesterday, didn’t he?’ B-P suggested, and the boy nodded miserably, his eyes filling with tears again.

‘He just lies as if he was dead.’

B-P stood thinking for a moment, then ran across to his locker. When he returned he had a tin whistle in his hands. There was a puckish grin on his face as he said:

‘Come on, I’ll waken him.’

‘He won’t like it,’ the other groaned. ‘He’s the most bad-tempered beast I’ve ever met. I’m getting to be just scared of morning coming.’

‘Come on,’ and the boy reluctantly followed B-P.

The corridor was a scene of bustling activity, with fags carrying water jugs, or running errands, or even standing at the door of the fagmaster, hopefully knocking on the door.

‘Here it is,’ the boy with B-P said, and a few moments later the scene in the corridor was changed. Up came the tin whistle and heads turned and faces which had been serious with the immensity of the task of getting an upper awake in a good mood, changed to grins.

The tune was one which had been all the rage of London the previous winter. It was bright, perky, and had a lilt to it guaranteed to set anyone’s feet tapping.

B-P played with gusto and proved that in addition to his ability with a violin, or at the piano keys, he could also produce music from such a humble instrument as the tin whistle.

Within thirty seconds there came a bad-tempered roar from within the study. B-P continued to play while the boy whose upper was showing unmistakable signs of bad-tempered wakefulness, went pale.

Ceasing to play, B-P opened the door and thrusting his head in called out:

‘Hot or cold?’

Thud! A slipper hit the door, making a panel creak. B-P began to play again, while the boy whom he was trying to help stood quaking at his side. There was laughter in the corridor now, and one or two of the uppers, Fifth and Sixth form men, were peering out to see who was providing the music.

B-P was enjoying it when, suddenly, the door swung wide open and a hand swept out to snatch the whistle from his lips.

‘No, don’t, Jenkins,’ an authoritative voice called from across the corridor. ‘Let him play. It’s a pleasant change to the morning.’

‘I’ll teach you to –’

Jenkins, a scowl on his face, hesitated. He had been about to bend the tin whistle in two, but the Sixth Former who had called to him was not a man to be lightly ignored. Turning to B-P, while the corridor’s occupants stood still, waiting and watching, Jenkins asked:

‘What’s your name? You are not my fag?’

‘I was just helping,’ was the cool reply, and B-P smiled perkily. ‘My name is Baden-Powell.’

‘What?’

‘Baden-Powell!’

Jenkins stared for a moment, then he grinned at a sudden thought.

‘Bathing Towel. That’s an odd name – Bathing Towel, eh? Are you one of the Bath Towels?’ at which fags from one end of the corridor to the other yelped joyously. It was always a good thing to get a laugh from an upper at this time of the morning.

For a moment B-P hesitated, then, getting ready to jump back out of the way, he said:

‘No, sir. Our family comes from the Lincolnshire *Wash!*’ and even Jenkins had to laugh.

Back in the dormitory B-P was the hero of the hour. To have got one in over Jenkins, and made that heavy sleeper laugh, was something to talk about. The boy whom B-P had helped could only stand in silent admiration.

That evening during Banco, which was the name for a rest period between 8 and 9 p.m., the boy ventured an apology to his new idol.

‘I say, Baden-Powell, I’m sorry about this morning. It looks as if you’ve been given a rotten sort of nickname now. I’ve heard one or two talking about you as Bathing Towel. It’s my fault.’

‘Don’t worry,’ B-P said, clapping his friend on the arm and grinning. ‘What does it matter? I’d rather have somebody call me Bathing Towel, and grin, than call me by my real name and cuff me across the ears.’

Hardly had he spoken than from a little group in one corner came a demand that B-P should give them a tune on his whistle, and for the rest of the evening Old Bathing Towel, as he was to be known from now to the end of his schooldays, played to an enraptured audience of fags.

A week or so later he won loud praise from his fag-master when school for the day was over by producing a new dish, a welcome change from the eternal toasted bread, butter and tea. The Fifth and Sixth Formers often augmented their rations with supplies either brought in, or bought specially for the occasion. This time there was an egg to be fried and laid on the slice of toast.

With memories of campfire meals B-P decided to offer his fagmaster a change. Breaking the egg into a cup he added a little of the milk for the tea, then whipping the egg and the milk together, he poured the concoction into a pan. He had a small piece of cheese, which he had meant to have for his own supper. This he cut into small pieces, and dropping them into the pan, kept the egg, milk and cheese on the move with a fork until the creamy yellow liquid had turned into an easily spread smoking hot mass.

He garnished it with salt and pepper, poured just a little hot water on to the toast, in lieu of the butter he had used to fry his mixture, then hurried to the study to ‘serve’ his first out-of-the-ordinary meal.

With the scrambled egg-and-cheese spread over the toast, and with the water he had added to the toast giving it just that suggestion of sogginess which comes from a liberal spreading of butter, the ‘dish’ was an unqualified success. As a reward for his enterprise, and for using some of his own cheese, B-P was given a portion of the mixture for himself.

It was the beginning of a new relationship between fag and Sixth Former which made B-P’s fagging days far happier than they might have been.

*

In those early days Charterhouse was in the heart of London. It was a relic of the Order of Carthusian Monks founded at Chartreuse by St Bruno in the eleventh century. The London Charterhouse Order was suppressed by Henry VIII, and after being in the hands of various noblemen the buildings were bought by a London businessman in 1611. It was opened in 1613 as a hospital for impoverished gentlemen, and the donor, Thomas Sutton, added a school for forty sons of ‘poore men’. In those days they were called Gown boys, because of the picturesque gowns they wore. Later the sons of wealthy parents attended Charterhouse, but there were always a number of places for Gown boys, and of these sons of ‘poore men’, B-P was one.

The early days of Charterhouse, with its spaciousness, had gone by 1870. Buildings were springing up on every hand, while Smithfield market provided a growing worry for the headmaster Dr Haig Brown, for intermittent war raged between school boys and butcher boys. One unusual 'battle' brought in the headmaster as C-in-C and B-P as a Corps Commander. It was midday, and all was quiet. Boys were strolling about the grounds, cut off from the busy world outside by the school walls. Suddenly the head and shoulders of a boy appeared on top of the wall.

'Yah, Gownies,' he yelled, and threw a brickbat at the small group of boys who had turned in surprise to look. Someone on the other side of the wall handed a second stone to the butcher boy, and the Charterhouse lads had to scatter to avoid being hit.

This brought a yell of derision, and then a second head and shoulders topped the wall, and the barrage of brickbats increased as more ammunition was passed up.

In less than five minutes a pitched battle was in progress. The two who had started it had been forced to drop out of sight, but stones and half bricks were flying across the wall. There was ample ammunition out on the Smithfield market side, but in the school grounds the Charterhouse warriors had to wait for their ammunition as it came sailing through the air to bounce on the lawn.

It was an unwritten law that the smaller boys should take no part in these battles, and B-P was standing with a group of boys his own age at one side, cheering on the Fifth Formers, and a few Upper Fifth who were lobbing half bricks and cobble stones back at the unseen enemy.

Suddenly someone whispered:

'Cave – cave – Old Bill.' The little group of small boys looked round and gaped. Dr Haig Brown himself had come through a door in the wall which divided this particular lawn from another part of the grounds. What was more he was strolling right for the hottest part of the battle.

'He'll have to watch out,' B-P murmured, then in sudden excitement, 'I say, chaps, I wonder if he's going to take a hand?'

No one expected that the great man would, but he did. Instead of continuing to stroll to the area where the stones and brickbats were bouncing on the sun-dried turf, 'Old Bill', as he was generally known through Charterhouse, turned and walked across to the group of youngsters.

'I think,' he said, 'if you boys went through that door in the side wall you might attack the cads in the flank.'

For a moment there was a stunned silence among the little group. It was so completely unexpected. Then someone said:

'But the door is locked, sir, and we haven't got a key.'

'Perhaps we can remedy that,' Old Bill said, suppressing a smile, and a moment later was handing over his own key. Then, as if nothing had passed between him and his young pupils, Dr Haig Brown strolled back the way he had come.

'Don't open it yet,' B-P ordered. 'We've got to collect lots of ammunition first. Not less than four brickbats each. When you've got them, stand by the gate.'

Dodging the stones hurtling almost continuously over the wall from the wildly excited Smithfield boys, the reinforcements gathered their stones. One by one they went down to the side gate. The key was turned in the lock and the out-flanking party slipped through.

A score or more butcher boys in ages from eleven to eighteen were having a wonderful time, and sending an almost continuous barrage of stones into the school grounds.

‘Now!’ B-P yelled, and yelling at the very limit of their voices the small boys launched their attack. A volley of stones took the Smithfield boys in the flank. Many missed, but some found a target, and the jeers and catcalls changed to yells of alarm.

Without realising how small was the outflanking party the besiegers turned and fled, scattered by this unexpected flanking movement. Before the smallness of their party could be realised, B-P and his little band withdrew again. The battle was over and won. That side door, from then on, was a perpetual threat to the butcher boys, who never quite got over the surprise attack.

For B-P it was a lesson in battle strategy he never forgot, and the value of an outflanking movement was to stand him in good stead during some of the hottest engagements of the siege of Mafeking.

*

‘You may think this is just an ordinary Monday evening,’ B-P said solemnly to the boys sitting around in the Common Room, enjoying their one hour of rest known as Banco. ‘Alas, that you should be so innocent. You know what the old gladiators used to yell to Caesar – *Morituri morituros salutant?*’

Brows were wrinkled as his hearers tried to remember that little bit of Latin.

‘For the benefit of the ill-informed,’ B-P said, his eyes twinkling, ‘it means “Those who are about to die salute those who are about to die. And that’s us. You new chaps – *mortis causa!* You don’t know that? Hrrmpy!’



A volley of stones took the Smithfield boys in the flank

He gave a shrug and pulled a face which was a perfect imitation of the Latin master’s expression of disapproval. It dissolved the frowns on the faces of his listeners into grins immediately.

‘For the benefit of those whose Latin is a little weak,’ B-P went on, ‘*Mortis causa* means “In view of impending death” – remember that phrase; for tomorrow is the Lemon Peel Fight. And few there are who leave that field of battle unscarred.’

He looked around the faces, all of them a-twitch, for they knew that when Old Bathing Towel was in this mood they could expect some fun. Stabbing a finger dramatically towards each of the boys who had not yet seen a Charterhouse Shrove Tuesday he went on:

‘Tomorrow, I intend to make Charterhouse history. For one brief moment – perhaps sixty seconds, I shall hold the warriors-to-be spellbound. I shall step between the serried ranks and none will dare begin the battle.’

‘You couldn’t,’ one of the boys who had entered Charterhouse with B-P said. ‘Do you mean to say that when they’re ready to start Lemon Peel you can stop it?’

‘Tomorrow, my dear Chepstow, I shall do just that. I, without a single word, will hold the whole School in the hollow of my hands. They will gaze at *me* with goggling eyes and –’

‘Bathing Towel,’ from somewhere in the house came a bellow, and B-P rose.

‘Someone in authority calls,’ he said, his face calm, his manner dignified. ‘Tomorrow, you will remember my words. If I fail to do as I have said – then –’

‘Bath-ing Tow-el!’

‘Coming,’ B-P yelled, and pausing at the door of the Common Room said to the small circle of boys. ‘If I don’t hold up the battle, you can share my next tuck box, and I won’t eat a thing. That’s a promise.’

It was a promise few of them remembered next day as, after the traditional Shrove Tuesday pancakes, for which each member of the school was issued with a lemon, they all hurried out on to the large lawn.

When the custom began no one could remember, but it was a tradition that Charterhouse boys should each be issued with a lemon on Shrove Tuesday, supposedly to eat with his pancakes. No one ever dared cut his lemon for the pancakes, for immediately the meal was over the whole School, from the youngest boys to the most dignified Sixth Formers, went out to do battle.

Once it had been Gown *v.* School – the poor boys versus those whose parents could afford to pay the not inconsiderable Charterhouse fees. Now it had changed to Town *v.* Country. London and boys from other cities faced the boys who came from country homes.

There was the usual tremendous excitement as the boys hurriedly found their sides. With lemons at the ready they waited until the last straggler who had gone to the Town side when he should have been with the Country, had been hurriedly sent over to his own side.

There was a breathless moment as the hands gripped lemons tightly, and all waited for the first lemon to be thrown. Then, while whispers and words of advice could be heard up and down the two lines there was a sudden cry:

‘Hi – look!’

A few heads turned. Then there were murmurs of amazement, and those who stood with backs to the house, turned to discover why all the others were pointing and staring.

The murmurs died away, for framed in the doorway of the house was a figure. He was not large enough to be either one of the masters or one of the school servants. He was a medium-sized boy, and he was swathed in bandages, as if he had had the most terrible accident.

The impending battle was forgotten. Then the bandaged figure rushed across to the lawn. There was a complete and mystified silence until he sat down between the two lines of boys. Then, with one hand upraised, he announced in the voice they all knew –

‘Let the battle commence.’ It was, as a score of voices testified, Old Bathing Towel! As promised to his fellow fags, he had silenced over a hundred boys for more than a minute. Shrieks of laughter broke the tension and lemons criss-crossed the lawn as the battle did begin, while Old Bathing Towel, protected by his innumerable bandages, stalked majestically across to the Town side before hurling his lemon, then joining in the general scramble for the lemons thrown by the other side.

It was as a result of a further conversation in the Common Room that B-P conducted an experiment which startled one of the masters, and made this high-spirited boy a point for discussion among the masters of Charterhouse.

B-P was busy drawing when another boy asked:

‘Why are you always messing about with a pencil in your left hand? You are a queer chap. You should be either left-handed or right-handed. You are neither.’

‘He’s both,’ came a contradiction from another boy. ‘Go on, Bathing Towel, show him how you can do it. My father has some pictures at home of a Hindu goddess called Shiva, or Shriva. She has about six arms. Bet she could do a lot of things if she could draw with them all at the same time.’

‘Yes, but why do *you* do it?’ the first questioner asked, as B-P changed his pencil from his right hand to his left and continued drawing with the same easy skill. ‘I don’t see the use of it.’

‘Suppose I want to sketch while I’m eating an orange,’ B-P explained, a grin on his face. ‘All right, anybody can do that, but if I get tired of holding the orange in my left hand, I just change over – and I can keep on drawing *and* sucking the orange.’

‘Oh, that’s just rot. I think it’s just a show-off.’

‘It isn’t,’ B-P asserted. ‘Suppose I had an accident, and could no longer use my right hand. Well, I could carry on by using my left hand.’

‘Oh, well, if you want to say things like that,’ the first speaker jeered, ‘you might as well say we ought all to learn to use our feet for drawing. If you had an accident you might lose both hands – then what would you do?’

‘I’d learn to draw with my feet.’

‘Hm! Yes, I daresay you might be able to do that,’ the other conceded, then added with a sudden grin: ‘But I’d like to see you trying to play a tin whistle. Bet you couldn’t even hold it to your mouth,’ and doubling himself up to see how near to his mouth he could get his feet the speaker rolled off his chair, producing shrieks of laughter from the onlookers.

‘Well, that saves me trying,’ B-P said, chuckling. ‘Anyway, if I did lose both my hands I wouldn’t even bother trying to play a tin whistle. I’d go for the piano instead.’

That novel idea brought a momentary silence until one of the boys who was a pianist shook his head and with a scoffing laugh pointed out:

‘Not even you could span an octave with your toes. In fact I don’t think anyone could – except perhaps a monkey.’

All eyes turned to B-P who moving towards the door said loftily:

‘Well, man is supposed to be superior to the monkey; so if you think *they* could play a piano with their feet – who knows, I might be able to.’

*

It was a week or so afterwards before B-P’s secret was discovered. It was a period of beautifully fine weather, and the school grounds were bright with sunshine. Every fit boy was outside on the lawns, and a master walking near the music room was very surprised to hear the piano.

Pausing in the corridor the master listened, his brows knit in a frown. He had never heard anyone play a piano in such a fashion. The melody was right, but so slow as to suggest the pianist was having to look at each key before depressing it.

As the unseen player finished a correct rendering of ‘God Save the Queen’, and then began a simple hymn tune, the master’s curiosity got the better of him and he opened the music room door.

The scene which met his startled gaze was the strangest he had ever known, and there had been some strange scenes in Charterhouse from time to time, for many high spirited boys had passed through the old school.

Sitting on a very wobbly-looking form, which was balanced on another form, was a boy. His hands were on his hips to help him keep his balance. His boots and stockings were on the form, while his bare feet were moving slowly to and fro across the piano keys. Little wonder the playing was slow, more amazing still was the fact that so few wrong notes were struck.

Afraid that if he called out he might cause the boy to sway backwards and fall the master stood for a full minute, then slowly walked into the room. B-P, his eyes on the piano keyboard, was so engrossed in his practice he did not see the intruder until a cough made him look up.

‘What in heaven’s name do you think you are doing?’ and the master came round to the front of the piano to see whether any damage had been done to the keys. ‘Get down at once and put on your boots and stockings.’

‘Yes, sir,’ B-P agreed, gently picking up his stockings and beginning to draw them on to his feet, left and right hand working independently, but with equal skill. ‘I am playing the piano with my toes, sir.’

‘I can see that, of course; but what is the idea? Aren’t you content to play with your hands?’

‘No, sir,’ and as the master blinked B-P hurried to add: ‘You see, sir, suppose I had an accident – people do have accidents.’

‘They do, I agree,’ was the tart retort. ‘And if you are not careful you will have an accident. You will certainly lose your balance and down you will come with both forms on top of you.’

‘No, sir, I tied the forms together.’ B-P reached for his boots and pulled them both on at the same time with a celerity which made the master blink. Later on, in the privacy of his own room the same master tried pulling on both boots at the same time and found himself far too clumsy to manage it.

No further questions were asked until B-P was standing on the floor and quickly undoing the knots which fastened the two forms together. When that was done the master said:

‘You were practising playing the piano with your feet, Powell – in case you had an accident. I am afraid I do not quite follow you.’

‘I am not expecting to have an accident and lose the use of both hands, sir,’ B-P said earnestly, ‘but if I did, it would be useful. When there are friends in the house one plays the piano to amuse them. So, if I can play with my feet as well as my hands, I am prepared for anything, don’t you think?’

‘Hm! Yes! But I think you would be better employed playing football or rackets. This summery weather may not last. You should get all the fresh air you can.’

‘Yes, sir.’

*

In the Master’s room, later that day, B-P’s piano playing was the subject of a short discussion.

‘I don’t know what the boy will get up to next,’ said the man who had discovered B-P’s experiment. ‘I sometimes think I’ll go cross-eyed when I see him drawing, doing the outline with a pencil in one hand while he shades the drawing with a pencil held in his other hand.’

Mr Girdlestone, into whose House B-P had recently been moved, nodded and smiled.

‘You know he was in a very low form when he came to us – very low; and though I would be the last to describe him as clever, he somehow seems to get through the work. One gets the

impression he likes it. Yet he is quite unlike the usual run of studious pupil. He's already a Fourth Former as you know.'

'He is out of the ordinary, there's no doubt,' another master agreed. 'It is not often you get such a mixture as Bathing Towel is. Oh, I know, we are not supposed to hear nicknames, but we all know what they call him. As I was saying – a mixture of high spirits, love of fun, and with it an ability to make steady progress in school. These attributes do not often go together. I find him quite an engaging personality, quite engaging.'

There was a sudden splutter of laughter from one of the others who was just tapping out his pipe. At the looks of enquiry this master said:

'It just reminded me of something. You know that Jack here has recently persuaded a very charming lady to become his wife. It has all been kept very quiet, and only a favoured few were supposed to know.'

The master referred to was chewing at his lower lip, his face beginning to flush. He was a shy man, with a habit when boys approached him of putting them off with the phrase: 'Don't you see I'm engaged.'

'I happened to be near when young Bathing Towel came up. There was a group of youngsters innocently standing close by. I heard the rascal say: "Excuse me sir, can I –" and there Jack interrupted with his usual: "Don't you see I'm engaged, sir." The master laughed and added: 'Well, of course that was apparently what young Bathing Towel wanted, for with a startled expression on his face he looked up and said: "O-o-oh, sir!" And it was quite obvious that he and the rest of the little gang had planned the whole thing, to let him know they had heard of the forthcoming wedding. Poor Jack –'

'Oh, yes, yes I know,' the harassed Jack said hurriedly. 'I expect my face went red as a sunset. I could have booted him the length of the corridor. Except, of course, that on the face of it I had no reason to touch him. But it was the expression he put into his voice. Deliberately misunderstanding what I meant.'

There were chuckles around the Masters' room as gowns were donned ready for the last phase of the day's work.

It was left to Mr Girdlestone to make a prophetic remark.

'I don't know what the boy is cut out for,' he admitted. 'He is a good pianist, he plays the violin very well –'

'Don't forget the mouth organ, Girdlestone,' one of the others put in.

'All right then, the mouth organ as well,' Girdlestone agreed, smiling. 'He has a flair for dramatics, and he shows every sign of being a born leader. If his family had money I have no doubt he would become a prince of commerce.'

'As they haven't any money, Girdlestone, what?'

'I would not like to prophecy, except that whatever he takes up he will make a success of it.'

5

A Move to Godalming

‘Don’t forget, you men, it could have been raining for our move down here,’ B-P said, addressing the glum little crowd in the room which was to be their new dormitory now Charterhouse had left London for the little market town of Godalming. ‘Think how we’d have felt if we had arrived here soaked to the skin.’

‘I suppose it could be worse,’ Bertie Pollock agreed, but added: ‘Still it doesn’t look so pleasant, does it? Look at the beds.’

‘Yes, they should have made proper arrangements,’ another boy put in heatedly. ‘Who wanted to leave London, anyway? And now look what we’ve come to. Six beds, and there are eighteen of us. Where are we going to sleep?’

The big room, still smelling of paint, but with the sun shining pleasantly through the as yet uncurtained windows, looked very large and very bare.

Though London was only a mere 34 miles away the task of transferring a school of 120 boys, lock, stock and barrel, was not to be accomplished without some hitches. Some of the beds and bedding had arrived, some had not. Some of the boys’ boxes had been delivered, some were either still at Godalming railway station, or had not yet even arrived there. In 1872 the railways were slow and far from comfortable, so that even a comparatively short ride of less than forty miles on a hot June day could be something of an ordeal.

The party of which B-P was a member had been shown up to the room which was to be their dormitory, and left there. Workmen moved about, carrying boxes and items of furniture. The smooth transition planned by Dr Haig Brown had developed a definite hitch, and it seemed obvious that some days might elapse before the school, as a school, could even begin to settle down.

A scratch meal did not improve matters for some of the grumblers who had not liked the idea of leaving London in the first instance. Dr Haig Brown had called on everyone to be patient, and try to look on the bright side of the business, but there were growls as the boys who were to sleep in the room with B-P walked slowly up the stairs.

‘Tell you what,’ B-P said. ‘There are two things we can do. We can draw lots for beds and bedding, or we could share them.’

‘Share them,’ somebody snapped disgustedly. ‘How do you share six beds among eighteen of us?’

‘We could try putting two beds together and sleep from side to side,’ B-P suggested, grinning. ‘Or we could put the six beds close to one another and see how many we could crowd in that way. Here, Parrish, you are hot on maths. The beds are three feet wide. If we put six together how much does it allow us each?’

‘Funny, eh?’ Parrish said sourly. ‘Even you ought to be able to divide eighteen into eighteen and get the right answer.’

‘We could pretend we were camping,’ B-P suggested. ‘It won’t be cold, and we could each take a blanket and lie on the floor.’

‘What!’ There was a chorus of exclamations of dismay at the very thought, even though the rooms at the new Charterhouse had all been most meticulously scrubbed before the school moved in.

They were still undecided when Dr Haig Brown himself came into the dormitory. He sensed the hostility in the air immediately, and guessed the reason. Too many boys, too few beds. He made a pretence of counting the beds.

‘Six beds, eh, and eighteen boys. Is it going to be a case of three into one won’t go?’ and his smile was successful in bringing an answering smile but from only half a dozen faces. ‘I’m very sorry about this, but it appears that a wagon load of our beds has gone on to the next station-or the next station but one. We are all having to make do with less than we usually have; but it will be better tomorrow. I wonder if I can leave you to make the best of the position for this one night? Try and imagine that you are soldiers occupying a piece of enemy territory. Soldiers have to make the best of what there is. Can I depend on you to do that? It will help me greatly.’

‘Yes, sir,’ it was B-P, and his cheery grin did help the harassed Doctor Brown to go on with his task of pacifying others, older than these boys, who were facing what promised to be a comfortless night.

The moment the door had closed B-P said:

‘Come on, men, let’s get the beds side by side across room. The first bed against the wall, so that whoever is there can’t fall out. The rest of us can push up against him. Eighteen into six beds should go.’

When the six beds were placed so as to make one long bed eighteen feet wide, however, eighteen boys simply refused to ‘go’ into that space, push up though they did. B-P and three others were left standing outside the bed space.

‘What do we do, now?’ one of the other three asked.

B-P scratched at his curly red hair and going across to one of the windows looked out and down. Below was the courtyard, with the stables. That gave him an idea. Where there were stables, there was usually straw.

Taking his three doubting companions with him he crept down to the ground floor and out into the yard. There was plenty of evidence on the cobbles that a ‘removal’ had been taking place, with bits of straw everywhere from the boxes which had contained crockery and the kitchen utensils.

They drew a blank in the stables, which had not held horses for months. In one of the outhouses, however, straw was almost a foot deep. This was where the unpacking had been taking place.

With their arms crammed with straw the four made their way back to the dormitory, and fourteen not very comfortable boys in the long bed looked up as the door opened and what appeared to be a mass of straw on legs stumbled into the room. Half the fourteen boys sat up, wondering. Then one in the middle of the bed flung back his blanket and scrambled on to the floor.

‘If there’s straw I’m game to sleep on the floor,’ he said, ‘You can’t sleep in that bed. It’s far too hot. Where do we get the straw?’

He was followed by others in a matter of seconds. It was already apparent to all in the makeshift long bed that a hot June night was no time to be crammed together like herrings.

‘Wait,’ B-P cautioned. ‘There is more straw, but we mustn’t rush the job. If we make a noise somebody else is going to see what we are doing, and then they’ll be down to share the spoils of war. You stay here. We four will go and get the rest of the straw. Everybody be quiet.’

In twenty minutes the dormitory’s appearance had been changed completely. The beds were now in pairs and holding three would-be sleepers across their width. The other nine boys were wriggling themselves into comfortable positions on a mass of straw covered with blankets.

About half-past ten footsteps in the corridor suggested a rather tired Dr Haig Brown making a final personal inspection of his hundred and twenty boys to make sure they were all as comfortable as the circumstances allowed.

‘Cave,’ someone whispered, and those who had been sitting up lay down. When the door opened gently eighteen pairs of eyes seemed to all intents and purposes as if they were closed in sleep.

A tired little smile crossed Dr Haig Brown’s face as he gently pulled the door shut again. He had noted the straw, and thought he could guess who had been behind that idea.

‘I shall compliment them in the morning,’ he decided. ‘Though I must also insist that they clean up everywhere.’

A minute or so later whispered ‘Good-nights’ were being called softly across the dormitory, and before eleven o’clock struck, despite the wide open windows, allowing the smell of new mown hay to come into the room, eighteen boys were fast asleep.

The dawn chorus of birds wakened them; for it was something entirely new, and a thing to which they were not accustomed. There had never been a dawn chorus like that in the London Charterhouse.

‘Now listen, chaps,’ B-P said as the eighteen began to sort out their rather crumpled clothes. ‘We’ve got to get this straw back to the outhouse before anybody is up and about.’

‘Why?’

‘Because we may need it again tonight, and if the enemy—that’s the fellows in the other houses—see it they’ll try and bag it. So, we’ve got to cover our trail.’ B-P looked around his men, an air of mock severity on his freckled face. ‘When Old Bill comes in here he’ll expect to see a lot of bad-tempered, tired Fourth Formers. But we’ve all slept well, and we want to sleep well tomorrow. Now – stuff the straw on to blankets and we’ll carry it back that way.’

He superintended the clearing away, and used half his seventeen men to sweep up every last little scrap of straw. Then when the room was clear he cleaned the passage, then the stairway, his keen eye making sure not one wisp of straw was left to give away their secret.

They had washed when Dr Haig Brown, himself looking rather pouchy about the eyes, came in to see how they had fared.

‘We slept wonderfully, sir,’ B-P assured him.

‘So three into one did go?’ the great man suggested, indicating the six beds, now standing in what was to be their proper places spaced along one wall. ‘Three boys to each bed, eh, Powell?’

‘No, sir. Some of us slept – as if we were in camp,’ and B-P pointed towards the floor. It was then that Dr. Haig Brown revealed a side of his character which had endeared him to hundreds of boys who passed through Charterhouse. There was a knowing twinkle in his eyes as he said:

‘After I visited you last evening something made me remember the fact that there was a certain amount of dean straw in one of the outhouses where the staff had been unpacking crockery and kitchenware. It was, of course, too late for me to do anything.’ Here the twinkle in his eyes grew more pronounced. ‘However, it is a point worth remembering, should you ever be placed in such an uncomfortable position again – that in certain circumstances outhouses are places worth exploring. You may have thought of this, but most likely you put the matter out of your thoughts because you knew the rules against leaving the dormitories after nine o’clock.’

He looked round the freshly scrubbed faces, smiled at them, then turned and left them.

‘What do you make of that?’ Pollock asked, after a breathless silence. ‘Do you think he knew?’

‘How could he?’ someone else asked. ‘There was no sign of straw anywhere.’

‘If Old Bill had thought about the straw *before we did*’ B-P said, ‘he would have got the staff to bring it round. I bet he knows we used it, but he won’t say anything because he knows that to get the straw we broke out of school.’

Everybody agreed that B-P was right when, at the scripture reading that morning, the chosen verses were from the Old Testament, and dealt with the Israelites in bondage in Egypt being forced to make bricks without straw. For at least eighteen boys at the new Charterhouse, Old Bill's stock went even higher than before.

6

The Stationmaster's Bell

The station staff at Godalming heaved sighs of relief when the London train finally pulled out. There had been a bedlam of noise for two hours while the pupils of Charterhouse were packed into the carriages of several trains on their way home for summer holiday.

With the windows wide open the boys leaned out, shouting to friends in other compartments, for these were the days before corridor coaches, and the days before express trains. This train stopped at every station between Godalming and London.

At Guildford it seemed as if the Charterhouse boys were leaving the train en masse, and within thirty seconds of the coaches jerking to a stop the platform was crowded with a shouting throng. Many of the boys were crossing over to pick up a connection for Farnham and the south west.

The stationmaster and his porters good-humouredly hustled as many as possible back into the coaches, and among them were B-P and his younger brother, Baden Fletcher Powell.

From their compartment the two leaned out to watch proceedings, and B-P finally said:

'I wonder what would happen if the stationmaster lost his bell? He wouldn't be able to start the train.'

'Course he would,' Baden insisted. 'I expect he would whistle to the driver, or send a porter.'

'The driver would never start simply because somebody whistled to him, my lad,' B-P insisted. 'Why, if he did, anybody could start a train by just whistling. See!' He put two fingers into his mouth and sent a piercing whistle to add to the tumult.

A few boys looked round and a lady gave a little nervous start, but the train showed no sign of starting.

'See! Nothing happened.'

'Well, why should it?' Baden demanded a little crossly. 'The stationmaster has his bell.'

'Hm!' B-P's eyes took on a faraway look, and slowly a smile creased his face. Then, grinning broadly, he said: 'I say, wouldn't it be a lark if we took his bell? He wouldn't know what to do.'

'Took his bell!' For a moment Baden looked at his elder brother in amazement, then he too began to smile. 'Yes, it would be a lark. But how could we do it? He wouldn't have to know, or there would be the dickens of a row. I don't want to get into a scrape right at the start of the hols.'

B-P said nothing, but stroked his chin. Then, as the plan which had been hatching in his fertile brain came fully to life he explained to Baden exactly what he had to do.

By now the throng of boys and their baggage was beginning to clear a little, and there was no time to lose. B-P jumped down on to the platform and raced up to the perspiring stationmaster, whose bell was under his right arm. He had just put away a book out of which he had been giving details of train changes to a lady with her maid and two dogs.

‘Sir,’ and B-P managed to put so much horror into his voice that the stationmaster turned at once. ‘What will happen if a box has fallen from the platform on to the line?’

‘What will – here, where is it?’ and brushing aside another anxious enquirer for trains he followed B-P at a trot down towards the end of the train.

By now a small crowd had gathered about Baden, who was kneeling on the edge of the platform and staring down at a cardboard box on the track. The stationmaster had to literally heave the boys away while he himself looked to see what was wrong. When he saw the box he put his bell down on the platform.

This was the moment B-P was waiting for. The shiny brass bell was by the stationmaster’s left arm, its clapper still and silent.

While the stationmaster twisted his ample figure so that he could get an arm over the platform’s edge to the cardboard box on the line, B-P gently removed the bell, holding the clapper so that it could not give the least alarm ‘tonk’. Then, easing himself out of the growing crowd, he hid the bell under his jacket and went quietly down to where Baden was waiting for him in their own compartment.

‘Did he take a good look at you?’ B-P asked, and his younger brother grinned as he shook his head.

‘I was kneeling down when he came, and there were several other boys all peering alongside me,’ Baden chuckled. ‘As soon as he knelt down I got up and moved away. I wonder what he’ll say when he misses his bell?’

They leaned from the compartment window, looking like two mildly interested spectators who did not wish to join the growing throng now completely hiding the stationmaster.

The train guard arrived, followed by a fat porter who began to heave the boys back. A minute later the stationmaster got to his feet, the box in his grasp. It was a carton similar to at least a hundred others, for the sandwiches for the homeward journey had been issued in such boxes by the cooking staff at Charterhouse. There were no restaurant buffet cars in the trains of the 1870’s.

‘Now, boy, I don’t know what you were doing to drop it off the platform.’ The stationmaster growled, his face red with his exertions, as he held the box aloft and looked for its owner. Then, as no one claimed it he said angrily: ‘Well, whose is it? Where is that boy who dropped it?’

Heads turned from left to right and from right to left. The crowd was still growing as more and more boys came to see what was happening. The porter and the guard added their appeals for the owner of the box to come forward, and then someone began to giggle. The giggles became a roar of glee when the stationmaster, opening the box to see if there might be a name inside the lid, discovered the box was empty.

In a sudden fury he threw it down and stalked through the crowd, giving the porter an angry command to: ‘Get the brats into the train; we’re already late.’

The platform was cleared, doors were slammed, and then the stationmaster began to look for his bell. He might have ordered a search of the train, for he had a shrewd suspicion that he had been fooled, but the waiting engine suddenly began to blow steam from its safety valve. It was a reminder that too much time had already been spent here at Guildford.

He shot a glance down to the guard who had his green flag ready, and groaned. That man was waiting for the stationmaster’s bell to ring, giving him the ‘all clear’, and there was no bell!

In sudden desperation the stationmaster put two fingers into his mouth just as B-P had done earlier, and blew two shrill blasts; then as the guard still appeared doubtful he bellowed:

‘All right, guard, take her away. I’ve mislaid my bell.’



'We'll leave it on the company's land'

There was a waving of a green flag, a loud chuff-chuff-chuff, cheers from the thronged compartments, and the London train was on its way again. In their compartment, with the bell hidden behind B-P's case, the two boys wisely remained seated until the station had been left behind. B-P was not unmindful of the fact that he had red hair, a not very common colour among the Charterhouse crowd.

'What are we going to do with it?' Baden asked, when they were once more travelling across country. 'Will you show it to Mother?' and there was a mischievous smile on his face as he asked that question.

B-P's grin faded. They had been brought up to be polite and courteous. He had a vague feeling that perhaps his mother would not approve of a trick played on an anxious and overworked stationmaster.

They look at the bell. Stamped on the metal was the inscription – *Guildford Station* – with the letters denoting the railway company. If it were found there would be no mistaking to whom it belonged.

'Er – we'll leave it on the company's land,' B-P said, his smile returning. 'I read once that in order to make sure there are no accidents the railway track is examined at frequent intervals by linesmen.'

The moment the train slowed down while the driver whistled to a distant signal box for a signal to be changed from danger, B-P lowered the bell by means of a looped length of string to the gravel between the up and the down line. He released one end of the string, and had the satisfaction of seeing his trophy sitting upright.

The bell remained there for several weeks, and when it was finally found and returned to the stationmaster's office at Guildford it entailed some letter writing by the irate stationmaster. To the station staff the disappearance of the bell was a mystery; but the stationmaster was no fool. He had an idea that the boy who had panicked him with the story of a box on the line was the culprit, and he kept a wary eye on Charterhouse boys for a long time after that. As for B-P, he never got out at Guildford either on his way to school, or on his way home for holidays. He had an idea that any boy with a head of red hair might bring unhappy memories to someone in authority.

6

A Landlubber Goes to Sea

‘All right, young ‘un, less standing and staring, or we’ll never get off. If you are going to have a place in the yacht, you’ll have to work.’

‘Yes, Warington, sorry,’ and B-P reluctantly tore his gaze away from the waters of the Solent. The brothers had saved and scraped for a long time for their five-ton yacht, and though it had been out a few times before, this was the first occasion that B-P had been reckoned old enough to try his sea legs.

There had been vigorous protests from B-P’s younger brother Baden, who felt that he, too, ought to be allowed **to** go along. Warington, the captain, and the only one with a real knowledge of sailing, had firmly refused another ‘landlubber’. His theory was that one learner aboard at a time was as much as he and his other brothers could cope with.

As the smart little craft edged her way out into the main flrcam of shipping, B-P stood goggle-eyed. The whole panorama of shipping fascinated him. The age of steam had not yet really got under way, and even the newest dreadnoughts of Her Majesty’s Navy still carried tall masts and yardarms, though they were beginning to rely more and more on their ponderous engines, and the screws which were now beginning to take the place of paddles.

A Dutch tug, her tall thin funnel belching great clouds of black smoke, half hid the five-tonner, and flakes of soot marred the yacht’s creamy deck planking. Warington growled in disgust, but could do little about it, since for the time being they were sheltered from the breeze which was blowing out at sea, and must rely on the gentlest of catpaws to get them under way.

Not until they had Cowes on their port bow did they begin to get a good sailing breeze, and then the five-tonner lay over and began to scud through the waves.

B-P watched his three brothers, Warington, George and Frank with envy and admiration. They seemed to know exactly what to do, and did it without a word of command. The sun was shining, the salt air was heady, and for three quarters of an hour the latest of the Baden-Powell family to go to sea, would not have changed places with an emperor.

It was when they had Hurst Castle on their starboard, with Sconce Point to port that there was a drastic change. Here there was a distinct chop on the water. The five-tonner began to lift and crash down with her bows on to yard high waves which sent spray hissing high and wide on either side and sometimes in stinging sheets as far back as B-P himself.

That young man was not feeling quite so happy. He had been rather hungry earlier; now he had a queer, queasy feeling, and had completely lost his appetite. Nor was he quite as observant as usual, for the approaching squall which provoked his three older brothers to sudden, intense activity, went unnoticed by him until it struck.

For the next few minutes B-P was white and shaken. The yacht was behaving like a mad thing. She had lain well over, even though Warington and his two helpers had shortened sail as much as possible before the squall.

Clinging desperately to the mast B-P was pale faced and frightened. The water which had looked blue a few minutes before now had an ominous deep green about it. Mighty waves were racing past, some of them white topped. Water was sluicing over the decks, and the whole craft shuddered from time to time as the wind was shaken out of her canvas and waves threw the vessel about.



He flung himself down to grab the boathook

Warrington, casting a quick glance at the 'young 'un', realised that B-P was very frightened. It was the sort of moment when a boy could begin to fear the sea, and fear of the sea is not easily banished.

'Here, you fool,' he roared, and his voice was deep and penetrating. 'Get hold of that boathook before it goes over the side.'

The Baden-Powell family had never possessed enough pocket money to allow them to lose anything without a pang of regret. The thought of losing their boathook stung B-P to action. Forgetting his growing fear he flung himself down to make a last-moment, but successful, grab at the boathook which was in the act of being washed over the side.

Cold water swirled about B-P, for the yacht was heeling hard under the press of the short-lived squall. B-P spat out a mouthful of acrid salt water, then forced himself backwards, his grip on the boathook as frenzied as that of a drowning man on a would-be rescuer.

Back at the mast he eased himself upright again, and steadied himself with the butt of the boathook he had just saved.

'Good work, young 'un,' Warrington yelled, and George, despite the fact that he had just broken two ringer nails on the wet, stiff canvas, also turned to give a quick wave of the hand.

In that moment mind conquered matter. B-P's fears fled, and somehow he lost the queasiness in his stomach. He squared his shoulders, and though he still clung to the mast like a limpet and though the spray still swept over at intervals for the next ten minutes, he was smiling. To have earned a commendation from Warrington, and even a handwave from George was something.

Later that day, unable to beat back up the Solent, they anchored in a sheltered spot, and while the three older members of the crew checked rigging for wear, B-P prepared a meal.

They had not expected to have to stay out, and so there was little food aboard. B-P had been told to make a good rich soup, and it was something he had not done before. There was a bottle of meat essence, flour and water, salt, pepper, and to B-P's eye precious little else.

'Oh, well, I suppose if I put them all together in a pan and boil them up I'll get soup,' he decided, and having made his decision pumped enough water to three-quarters fill a pan, then he dropped in the meat essence, added a generous handful of flour, salted it, then peppered it. He knew from experience that salt was essential, and remembering the amount he used when boiling potatoes, he salted the soup-to-be with a generous hand. Pepper was an unknown

quantity, but he decided to make the soup good and rich, so a generous shaking of pepper went into the mixture.

The oil stove was burning steadily, and B-P stirred the concoction with a wooden spoon. It was a tricky job getting rid of the lumps of flour. They seemed determined to remain as small, rapidly hardening balls of brownly-white.

‘I expect they’ll smooth off when the water boils,’ and with that comforting thought B-P turned to the wet clothes he had taken off an hour before.

He wrung as much water out of them as possible, smoothed the creases from the trousers, and hung them to one side of the stove. There they ought to get some heat, and perhaps even dry out for morning.

The generous handful of flour he had dumped into the pan settled down to the bottom. As B-P worked away, tidying up the cabin, and whistling cheerfully, the stove heated the bottom of the pan, and the wet flour might easily have been persuaded to thicken the ‘soup’ if B-P had only thought to use his wooden spoon.

His cheerful whistle went on in the lamplit gloom of the cramped cabin, and eventually the pan of liquid began to bubble a little. B-P hardly noticed the smell, for he was there from the moment when it began to fill the air.

It was not the mouth-watering smell which comes from the best of kitchens. There was an ominous sharpness to this smell, the smell of something burning.

After a while B-P did realise that there was a smell, other than the smell of wet clothes. He looked at his soup. It was now bubbling cheerfully, and he spent a few minutes trying to break down the brown lumps of soggy flour which sailed to the surface, rolled slowly along the top of the mixture, then slid out of sight again.

It was when he decided to stir the mixture from the bottom that he had his first awful forebodings. His spoon stuck down there in the same way that a piece of wood will stick when first dipped into a can of paint which has been standing so long that the colouring has all settled to the bottom.

‘Oh!’ Even B-P’s usual cheerful outlook was darkened a little when he lifted the spoon out of the soup. Sticking to the bottom of the spoon was a horrid looking black-brown mess. It reminded him, somehow, of fish glue just as it begins to melt.

He had just dipped the spoon in again when he heard Warrington call to George and Frank to ‘knock off’.

A few moments later the three older brothers were in the cabin, their faces screwed up as they caught the horrible smell of burnt something.

‘What have you got there?’ Warrington demanded, pointing to the bubbling pan.

Hiding his misgivings behind a smile B-P announced that it was soup.

‘I thought as there wasn’t much else I’d better make about a pint each, and make it thick – and rich,’ he added, his voice faltering a little.

Without a word Warrington took the wooden spoon. His nose wrinkled even more when he saw the gluey fragment of soggy, burnt flour sticking to the bottom.

Handing the spoon back to B-P he reached for a soup spoon, and gravely tasted what was to have been their evening meal.

‘And that’s soup, is it, young ‘un?’ he said grimly, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. ‘Well, if you are like us you must be very hungry. So – as a lesson I hope you will not forget, you can sit down and eat that muck yourself.’

B-P looked at George and Frank.

‘I – I made enough for four,’ he finally said, smiling wanly. ‘Don’t you want – No?’ Three heads were shaking. Warrington turned to Frank and George.

‘Go ashore and get something,’ he said. ‘I’ll stay here and see that our cook learns his lesson. Now – get that spoon. Pour yourself a full bowl. In the Navy you would have had it ladled down your throat. We are kinder than that – you can eat with the usual spoon.’

‘It’s too bad on the kid,’ Frank said as he and George got into the little dinghy to row ashore. ‘I expect he was doing his best.’

‘Oh, well, Warrington is captain,’ George said. ‘And he doesn’t often make a mistake, does he? I expect it will teach young Ste a lesson.’

That bowl of burned horror which B-P had given the name of soup was a lesson never forgotten. Somehow every last spoonful was swallowed, and somehow B-P managed not to be sick.

*

When they were back home he sought the first opportunity to have a word with the cook. As casually as possible, and trying to give the impression that it was just curiosity, he went into the kitchen.

‘Emma, if you were asked to make soup, how would you do it?’

‘If I were asked to make soup, master Ste?’ Emma said, frowning. ‘I *am* asked, every day, to make soup. And I do it the way I always do it. Why, have you some complaint about the soup?’

B-P studied her for a moment, then grinned.

‘Cross your fingers and keep this a secret, Emma,’ he said, and gave her the whole story of his unhappy exploit aboard the yacht with the soup pan.

‘Weren’t there any vegetables to put in?’ Emma asked.

‘Oh yes, but they wanted soup,’ B-P said, surprised.

‘You stand and watch me,’ Emma said, and for the next hour B-P had a course of instruction on how to make various kinds of vegetable and meat soups. He made notes, and afterwards decided to see the baker from whom they got their bread and pastries, for advice on bread-making. He was not going to swallow any more burnt offerings, and when next he went to sea he was armed with a notebook containing instructions on how to make not only soups, but also how to bake bread even, in the cribbed confines of a yacht’s cabin.

6

The Copse

‘I don’t see why we shouldn’t be allowed to go in, do you?’ B-P asked one sunny Saturday afternoon. ‘It looks as if nobody has been in there since the last Stone Age man died.’

Baden Fletcher looked at his brother and digging him on the shoulder said:

‘The Copse is out of bounds, and you’re a fool if you go in there. You are sure to be caught. Whenever I have passed I’ve seen one or two of the masters either in or going in. I think Old Bill must have got out a sort of sentry roster, just to make sure none of the school breaks bounds. If you go in there you are just asking for trouble.’

B-P grinned.

‘I’ll see you later,’ he said, and climbing the fence slipped away into the undergrowth. Baden Fletcher shrugged and turned back towards the school. He was horror-stricken a minute

or so later to see two of the masters, one leisurely filling his pipe, obviously making for the Copse, but he could do nothing to warn his brother.

Inside the patch of woodland B-P seemed to change immediately. He was back in the days about which old Grandfather Smyth had spun so many yarns. Here the fierce Redskins were lying in ambush for anyone fool-hardy enough to try to cross their territory, and B-P moved with stealth.

He found an admirable spot in which to sit, hidden by bushes at the rear and fronds of bracken in front. He had noticed that when he entered the wood most sounds ceased.

'They're watching me,' he murmured, and settling himself into a comfortable position decided to remain still and completely quiet until the natural occupants of the wood had once more started to go about their everyday business.

There was a low hum of insect life, and after a minute or so a bird began to chirp. B-P's sharp eyes caught a slight movement through the screen of bracken, and as he stared he made out the shape of a rabbit. It had come out of a burrow which he had not seen, and was now crouched there, almost invisible against a background into which its body blended perfectly.

Then there was a startled blackbird call, and the bird, its yellow beak like gold as it passed through a patch of sunshine, fled, shrieking. B-P frowned. Something had startled the bird, but what?

He had his answer within a minute, for down to him on the gentle breeze came the smell of tobacco smoke. Remembering his brother's warning that masters came here, not only to patrol the Copse, but also to enjoy a quiet pipe, he resisted the temptation to slap at an insect walking across his cheek.

The tickle on his cheek grew almost unbearable, but the low murmur of conversation warned him that the masters were coming steadily nearer. The least sound would draw their attention, and he dare not try to get away.

While he sat there he heard the sound of a match being drawn across the sandpaper of the box, and was surprised how loud the splutter of the match coming to life sounded.

The two masters resumed their walk, and B-P noted not only the sounds they made as they walked across the sun-dried grass, but also the sharp cracking noises produced when one stepped on a dead twig. All other sounds in the wood had ceased. Not only was B-P in hiding, but every other wild creature as well. The rabbit which had come out of its burrow had slipped back, and was no doubt listening while the sounds of the invaders slowly died away.

For twenty minutes B-P had to endure insects crawling over his face and his neck, for the vigilantes patrolling the wood were in no hurry to leave. The master smoking his pipe finally knocked out the dottle and a few moments later B-P rose.

His first move, when he had rubbed his cheeks and neck to get some relief from the irritation of the many minute feet which had walked across his skin, was to go over to where the pipe-dottle lay. A thin pencil of smoke was rising from it.

B-P watched it and finally put his foot on it when some yellow strands of long dead grass began to smoke. It was a lesson he never forgot – never to leave even a small fire burning, not even dying embers.

There was little time left for him to explore now, for he would have to be in for tea and then call-over; but he did make a note of one or two trees which would be easy to climb, and whose leafy lower boughs would offer good cover if he happened to be in the Copse again when one or more masters came in to patrol.

The following Saturday B-P went again to the Copse. He went early and this time he had string, matches, and a small mug. Again there was silence for a few minutes after he entered,

and then the life of the Copse was resumed. The rabbits came out, the birds began to sing, and some came down to look for worms near the roots of the trees.

It was then he noticed for the first time that around most of the trees no grass grew, and especially on the north side there was a green mildew of moss. He wondered why it should be only on the north side, and it was some time before he realised it was because on that side there was never any sunshine.

‘H’m! That would be useful if one got lost, and had no compass,’ he decided. ‘You would always know which side was to the north.’

After watching the rabbits playing for a time he made a snare, setting the loop an inch or so above the ground, and having it dangling from a long, springy stick he had cut from a willow tree. The willow was kept bent by another twig, delicately balanced, so that the least pull on the bent willow would release it and allow it to spring upright.

Half an hour passed with B-P watching in silence. He had a great thrill at the end of that time, for he saw a weasel. It appeared to lollop along in a sort of rolling motion, and its body seemed to be like a cigar, and all rubber. For quite a long time it stood within five yards of the watching boy, its little black nose twitching as if it were actually sieving the many smells which the warm, sunny air carried.

Then, as if it had made up its mind, it made straight for a burrow entrance which was hidden from B-P by an overhang of dead grass. One moment the weasel was there, and the next it was gone. Immediately it vanished a squirrel which B-P had seen several times while he had been sitting still, broke out into a furious scolding. It came down to within a few feet of the ground, as if determined to see what the weasel was up to. Then, as if suddenly afraid, it went up the tree trunk again almost faster than the eye could follow it. Its angry chatter seemed like a danger signal to all the other occupants of the wood, and a blackbird exploded out of a tree giving its flute-like alarm notes.

A few moments later three rabbits burst out of the burrow in front of which B-P had set his snare. Down below ground the dreaded scent of the weasel had reached the family, and they were scuttling for the open as fast as they could run.

The first of the three ran straight into the noose. The delicately balanced ‘spring’ stick was released, and as the noose tightened about the rabbit’s neck it straightened. The noose, already tightening as the rabbit sped onwards, cut off the frightened squeal. A moment later B-P had snared his first Copse rabbit.

The weasel came up from the burrow a minute or so later. He was licking his lips, and there was a bright sheen in his eyes. Unlike most animals which live by hunting, the weasel merely tastes the blood of his victim, and it seemed to fill him with an insatiable hunger for more killings.

He went off, looking even more like a long cigar, and was gone for that afternoon. B-P skinned his rabbit, cleaned it, and then made a very small hunter’s fire in a spot screened from every eye. He was sure not even the most curious of masters would come here, for it would mean forcing a way through a bed of nettles on one side, and a thick growth of blackberry bushes on the other side.

Kneeling by his tiny fire, so small and so hot that when a dry twig was put on it flamed with hardly a suggestion of smoke, B-P roasted his rabbit. He had roasted rabbits before, but always it had been one of his elder brothers who had set the snare. B-P felt that he was growing up.

‘And the next time we go camping I shall set my own snares.’ He grinned at the thought of how he could thus prove to Warrington, George and Frank that he really could look after himself.

He was testing a rabbit leg when the watchman of the wood shrilled his sweet warning notes. B-P had already decided that when the blackbird which was sitting on her second clutch of eggs shot away, calling so desperately, it was a sign of intruders.

Sitting quite still, B-P listened. This time there was no smell of pipe tobacco to tell him that the intruders were masters from Charterhouse. He looked for a moment at the pieces of turf he had so carefully cut out to make a fireplace. Dare he blanket the fire? He decided he dare not. The fire was an ideal one for roasting; a bed of very hot embers, burning with the heat and the lack of smoke of charcoal. If he smothered it with turf there would certainly be a pungent smell for a minute or two.

The voices drew nearer, and then he heard:

‘I say, can you smell anything?’ followed by an audible sniff.

B-P did not wait. Like a hunted fox he slithered through a gap he had made in the blackberry bushes, reached a tree he had already noted as being easy to climb, and was a dozen feet from the ground when the crackling of bushes told him that the men who ruled Charterhouse were quite capable of breasting a way through blackberry thorns if they felt the matter of sufficient urgency.

From fifteen feet up B-P looked down on his little camp fire. Two men had found it. One had taken a risk by walking through the knee-high nettles, and was wishing he had gone the other way. The second master had gingerly brushed aside the clinging branches of blackberry as he made his way through to where the rabbit, looking very small and nicely brown now, hung in its separate parts over the glowing fire.



From his hide-out in the tree, B-P watched

‘Well, I’m dashed,’ B-P heard one of the masters say. ‘What do you make of this, Weekes? No wonder we thought there was an appetising odour. Part of a rabbit.’

Weekes, releasing a blackberry branch fastened to his left sleeve stared down at the fire and the rabbit.

‘Think it is a poacher? I mean an ordinary poacher – a man?’

Weekes pondered for a moment then shook his head.

‘No, I don’t think so. If it was a man why should he bother to cook a rabbit here? He could take it home and have it by his own fireside. If it was a passing tramp – he wouldn’t have taken precautions like this. You see – this spot has been well chosen.’

‘I can see that,’ the other master agreed. ‘Are you thinking it might be a Charterhouse boy?’

‘Why not? There are a number of country boys in the school.’

‘Couldn’t it be a town boy. What about young Bathing Towel, as the boys call him? The red-haired boy. He always seems to be up to some caper or other, and I think this is probably just the kind of thing he would enjoy.’

‘But why him in particular?’ Weekes asked.

‘Well –’ and the other pondered for a moment. ‘I don’t know, really. In some ways, he’s a kind of lone wolf. He doesn’t seem to have any particular friend.’

‘You surprise me. I thought he was quite popular. He always seems to be in the thick of things.’

‘He is, and I agree he seems to be popular; but you take notice, if you get the opportunity – he never seems to be with any one particular crony. He doesn’t go out much with his younger brother.’

‘Still, I don’t think it could *be* him,’ Weekes murmured, shaking his head. ‘You see, he’s a Londoner, born and bred. Now – catching a rabbit, and lighting a fire like this isn’t the work of a town boy. A town boy just wouldn’t know how to begin. If this is the work of a boy, he is a boy who has been born to country ways.’

‘What are we going to do? Take the rabbit?’

‘No, no, no; my goodness, no. If you do that you’ll frighten him off. He’ll realise we’ve looked at his little hide-out. No, we’ll creep – no, we’ll walk out of the wood as if we are not worried about anything at all. One of us will not go the whole way out, but will stay where he can watch. Then if anyone comes along – we have him.’

Weekes had lowered his voice so that strain his ears how he would B-P caught no hint of the plan. From his leafy hide-out in the tree he watched Weekes and his fellow master struggle out of the circle of blackberry bushes and nettles, then walk on a little way into the wood, turn about, still talking animatedly, and so on out of sight. B-P listened to the murmur of conversation.

That conversation, however, was being carried on by one man. Weekes was no fool, and when he left his friend in hiding he walked on talking fairly loudly, and altering his voice to answer his own questions. It was a piece of acting which did credit to a man who loved boys, and knew a great deal about their ways. He believed that whoever had caught the rabbit and left it so silently when the ‘enemy’ drew near, would be hiding somewhere, just waiting until the coast was clear.

Ten minutes later Weekes returned silently to the place in the Copse where he had left his friend.

‘Has he returned?’

‘No, Weekes, I have listened so hard that I don’t think a mouse could have changed its socks without me hearing it. There hasn’t been a sound.’

‘All right, then I think we’ll put the fire out – the boy may have taken fright, and we don’t want to leave a fire burning. They spread so easily in a dry wood. It’s all right. I’ll go in. I think my trousers are perhaps more nettle-proof than yours. I’d get a handful of dock leaves if I were you. Rub them on the stings. It takes the fire out of them.’ And with that Weekes plunged boldly into the nettle bed, rounded a hush, and stopped in his tracks.

For a moment he thought he had come to the wrong place. There was no sign of the rabbit, and no sign of the fire. What was even more astonishing, there was not a hint on the turf that there had ever been a fire there *at all*.

‘What’s the matter, Weekes?’ the other master asked, having heard what he thought was a startled exclamation. ‘Something wrong?’

‘Come here.’

A minute later the second master was standing with Weekes, staring down in equal amazement. Then, bending down and placing his hands on the turf where they had earlier seen a fire, he began feeling about. A moment later he looked up.

‘Yes, Weekes, old man, I agree with you. This is definately not the work of a town-bred boy.’ He began to feel about until his probing fingers found a cut in the ground. A few moments later he had lifted first one then a second neatly cut piece of turf. In the four inch deep trench exposed to view were the hot ashes of a dying fire which, even as they looked, began to glow again now that it was getting air, the loss of which had almost choked it out.

The pieces of turf were carefully replaced and the two masters stood for a moment peering this way and that through the fringe of blackberry bushes.

‘I don’t know how he did it, Weekes,’ the master who had watched said, ‘I could have taken my oath that no one forced their way through the blackberry bushes, and certainly no one walked through the nettles.’

‘Shall we go?’ Weekes suggested, and with a smile added: ‘If the fellow who so neatly made fools of us *is* a Charterhouse boy – I would be quite willing to predict a brilliant future for him – especially if he took up poaching.’

From his hide-out up in the tree, where he had been munching happily at the hind leg of his rabbit, B-P watched through the foliage while the two masters left the Copse.

‘I wonder why they didn’t look up?’ he murmured when he was once more the only human in the Copse.

‘Perhaps people don’t look up when they are in a wood. Lucky for me these two didn’t,’ and he grinned. As he slid down the tree and reluctantly buried what was left of his cooked rabbit a thought struck him.

‘I’ll bet old Weekes will be on the prowl again, next half day, looking for me. And I could have ambushed the pair of them as easy as falling out of the tree.’ He chuckled at the idea, but decided such an ‘ambush’ would not be a good thing. What did make him smile was the thought that for the future his trips to the Copse would be more exciting, since the masters would obviously be on the lookout for poachers.

Creeping out of the shelter of the trees he made his way back to school on the Godalming side of the playing fields, alternately walking and trotting, and was actually walking in for tea when Weekes and his colleague arrived. He had watched for their arrival so that they would be sure to see him, and he would have been delighted had he been able to overhear the snatch of conversation which followed, for Weekes said:

‘I say, there you are. Isn’t that the boy you thought might have been in die Copse? Obviously he could not have been the poacher. He could not have got here in time, could he?’

‘No, you are right,’ the second master admitted. ‘But I can’t think who else would have been there. Young Powell is the most likely fellow to do a thing like that. Still, as you say, it could not have been him.’

9

The Druids

‘Look, fellows, I have had an idea,’ B-P said as he finished arranging his books on their shelves.’ Now that we are in the Sixth we ought to start a society of some kind.’

The suggestion brought an immediate protest from his two companions.

‘My dear Bathing Towel,’ one groaned, ‘there are more societies than boys in this school. And you must belong to practically every one Old Bill has thought up.’

‘Yes, you should be satisfied,’ the other Sixth Former agreed. ‘After all you have only been at Charterhouse three years, haven’t you? Yet you’ve come up from the lowest form to the Sixth, you are on the Sports Committee, House Committee, you are a bugler in the School Cadet Corps, you are in the Rifle team –’

‘But this is something different,’ B-P broke in. ‘We four are younger than most of the Sixth Form men. That being so, why not form a secret society? I think it’s a good idea. I doubt if there has been a society like the one I have in mind. I propose we revive a name that was once all powerful in Britain. A name that could strike terror and awe into the masses. A name that –’

‘All right, all right,’ one of his friends hastily agreed, and to his companion said: ‘We might as well let him have his say. You know what he’s like when he gets a bee in his bonnet. Go on, but break the news gently for my sake. My nervous system isn’t what it was.’

‘And when you are breaking the news,’ said the other, ‘just bear this in mind – if it involves paying out vast sums of money you will have me on your hands as a non-paying member. This is the extent of my exchequer until the next month arrives,’ and delving his hand into his trousers’ pocket he brought out three pennies, two halfpennies and a farthing.

‘Money may come into it,’ B-P agreed, ‘but the first thing is a name for the society. I think I have a good one. What about The Druids? How does it sound?’

‘Sounds pretty ghastly to me,’ was the immediate retort from the Sixth Former holding the copper coins.

‘Like Salisbury plain at dawn,’ the other chuckled. ‘I never hear the word Druids without being reminded of a shocking story I read somewhere about a fellow with white whiskers standing facing the rising sun in the middle of Stonehenge. Lying on a slab was a young girl who was going to have her lily white throat cut, and –’

‘We shan’t ask you to do anything like that,’ B-P assured him, grinning. ‘I chose the name Druids simply because I don’t think there is another society in the country with that name.’

‘Well, if we become Druids, what do we do?’

‘Dress up in white, wear white whiskers, and go out to Stonehenge at dawn, of course,’ was another mocking suggestion. ‘Come on, Bathing Towel, what does the Society of Druids do? You must have some idea!’

‘Of course I have,’ B-P assured him. ‘I have even drawn up some sample rules. But the idea of the Druids is that we have sessions when we try to shake ourselves out of the ordinary rut of the school. Y’know, keep one another alert, on our toes. Sharpen our wits.’

‘Oh, lor, I thought that was what Charterhouse set out to do from the moment a chap set foot in the old place. What are we doing all day long but sharpen our wits?’

‘We’re in a groove,’ B-P insisted. ‘We go to French, and we know just what to expect. We go to Maths – all right, we know what we shall do there. My idea is that when the Druids meet in secret conclave –’

‘Here it comes,’ one of his friends murmured, raising his hands in anguish, ‘Secret conclave! Go on – sorry for interrupting.’

‘Take the first rule, for instance,’ B-P said, looking at a slip of paper. ‘It reads: “Any brother not producing a song or speech (within five minutes after being called on), the latter not less than five minutes –’

‘Or one yard!’

B-P grinned at the interruption, but putting pencil to paper he added something, then began again:

“Any brother not producing a song or speech (within five minutes of being called on), the latter not less than five minutes or one yard, shall be fined a bottle of lemonade.” You see what I mean about sharpening our wits? I might say to you: “Brother, address the Druids on the manufacture of – er – leather,” for instance. That would test your wits, wouldn’t it?”

‘It would not. It would empty the last few coppers from my pocket. But I mean, dash it all, who could talk for five minutes on the manufacture of leather? Here, I’ll soon show you the impossibility of the thing. Brother Bathing Towel, give to the assembled company of thy knowledge of making leather,’ and he fished in his waistcoat pocket for his watch, saying: ‘It is now three minutes and thirty-five seconds past six o’clock. The floor is yours, sir. Proceed, while the rest of the Druids-to-be recline in comfort and wait with anticipation the forthcoming bottle of lemonade.’

They sat down while B-P, a twinkle in his eyes, stroked his chin. Then clearing his throat, began:

‘In the long ago, before cloth was invented, people dressed themselves in woad, which was a blue dye made from a plant named – er – *Isatis tinctoria*. Daubed with this, the body changed from white, or pale pink depending on the kind of summer it had been, to a deep blue. This was pleasing to those who were leaders of fashion, but in winter it did not give a great deal of comfort when the weather was cold and the winds blew strong.’

‘He’s filling in time,’ one of the listeners said in a mocking whisper. ‘No mention yet of leather. How is the watch finger going?’

‘He’s had a minute and five seconds.’

‘You interrupt me, fellow Druids,’ B-P reproved, his eyes twinkling. ‘To continue. In those rude days the tailor’s shop was unknown, and men brought home the groceries across the shoulder-usually in the form of a sirloin of beef hacked from some animal they had caught and slaughtered. The unlucky animal would be divested of its skin, and the skin left on the ground. Experience has shown that within a matter of days the said skin would be so hard that it was useless for anything, save as a curtain across the entrance to the family cave.’

‘Leather, leather, my dear Bathing Towel,’ came the warning, and the watch was held up.

‘One day a hunter – name, I imagine, Tan – killed a beast, skinned it and dropped the hide against an old oak tree. There it lay for some weeks during a spell of very wet weather. The hide lay there while water ran down the bark of the oak, and on to the skin. One day our long dead friend Tan chanced to pass that way again. He saw the hide, and thought it looked odd. When he poked it with his foot, behold it was soft, even as the best leather of today is soft.’

‘A little fairy had been –’

‘Wrong,’ B-P said, not giving the interrupter a chance to develop his wit.’ The rain had washed something from the bark of the tree on to the hide, and turned it to leather. For a long time Tan did not know just why skins became soft when he left them at the foot of the oak tree, but finally he realised that in dry weather the skins remained hard, but when there was rain then the skins became soft.’

‘And so friend Tan became the tanner!’ one of his listeners said.

‘Exactly,’ B-P agreed, smiling. ‘Even to this day the bark of oak trees is widely used in the tanning of leather.’

‘Is this true?’ his friends were really interested now, their banter gone. And when B-P nodded to assure them it was true, they wanted to know how he had got this information.

‘I didn’t know there was anyone in your family dealt in leather, Bathing Towel.’

‘We *walk* on it,’ B-P agreed, chuckling. ‘Anyway, I think I have proved my point. I did speak for five minutes – off the cuff, if one may borrow a term I heard a man in Hyde Park use when someone asked him who prepared his speeches. He said he got them “off the cuff”, and shooting the cuff of his right hand displayed a cuff on which he had written a few notes.’

‘But you are not wearing cuffs, old man,’ one of his friends pointed out. ‘You must have got the facts in your head to begin with. How? That’s what we want to know.’

‘It was during the holidays,’ B-P confessed. ‘I go with my three brothers, Warington, George and Frank. Warington is a great fellow for finding out about things. We go walking, you know. And when we come to a town Warington usually finds some businessman who will show us over his works. It’s great fun I’ll tell you. That is how I came to learn about tanning.’

‘It’s a deucedly good idea,’ the others agreed, then one said: ‘But just suppose I had suggested you talk to us about – er – ant eggs, for instance. Or goldfish.’

‘That’s where you have to be on your toes,’ B-P said. ‘You’ve got to think quick, invent something if need be. After all, five minutes isn’t a long time to talk, is it?’

‘I think I’ll practice a few songs,’ one decided. ‘Singing will be a lot easier than inventing some wild, unlikely tale.’

‘That’s up to you. Now, as we are a secret society we must have secret names.’

‘Why secret names?’

‘Simple. Suppose I want to call a meeting of the Druids,’ B-P explained. ‘I simply say to you as I am passing – er – “Captain Perriwinkle” and you know at once that there is a meeting of the society in my study.’

‘Captain Perriwinkle. I say I like that,’ the newly christened ‘Captain’ chuckled. ‘Yes, it’s a good idea. What do we call Richards?’

‘Oh, I think his name is ready-made,’ and B-P began to laugh. ‘I think “Professor Sheepskin” would be just right, don’t you?’

For a moment there was silence and frowns, then they got the joke. The Sixth Former who was to be known until he left Charterhouse as Professor Sheepskin had a habit of saying ‘Bah!’ when he disagreed with anything. To many he was known as ‘Bah’, but in the Druids he remained Professor Sheepskin even after schooldays were over.

‘I know what your name will be,’ the newly christened Sheepskin said, grinning. ‘What else could it be but Lord Bathing Towel. Just made for you, old man – er – your Lordship.’

‘Now, what about the other rules?’

‘Oh, yes, I made a few notes, and if we –’ he broke off at a knock on the door and called: ‘Come in.’

It was B-P’s fag who said:

‘You asked me to remind you that the meeting to choose people for the parts in the Lower School play starts at half past six o’clock. It is now nearly twenty past six, and the Lower School is going in.’

‘Oh, yes. Thanks, Gharris. Off you go.’

‘We’d better scoot,’ B-P said, when the boy had gone. ‘We can finish drafting the rules for the Druids some other time.’

Professor Sheepskin stood aside and with a mock bow said:

‘After you, Lord Bathing Towel, and you Captain Perriwinkle. The nobility and the Army always lead the van. Aristocracy and Ignorance are always followed by men of learning.’

As they drew near the Common Room, where the aspirants to stage honours were waiting to be tried out, B-P suddenly halted. Eyes twinkling, he turned to Professor Sheepskin and said:

‘I say, keep them quiet for a few minutes, will you? I have just had an idea. Come on, Captain Perriwinkle, I want you to help me.’

Professor Sheepskin hesitated for a moment, then hurried along to the Common Room to try to bring some semblance of quiet among the Lower School members who saw in this choosing of actors for the forthcoming play a chance for a rag.

A quarter of an hour later, when Professor Sheepskin was beginning to show signs of losing his temper, Captain Perriwinkle strode in and in an imperious bellow called:

‘Quiet-quiet-quiet! We have a distinguished visitor. Let us try and show him that Charterhouse can produce people who can be orderly.’

In a matter of moments there was order and quiet. Then Captain Perriwinkle went out into the corridor, and came back a few moments later with a man whose bristling beard, shaggy eyebrows and fierce moustaches suggested some military man of great eminence.

Not bothering to remove his hat the visitor swept across to the little rostrum and stood by the side of Professor Sheepskin. Without waiting to be introduced he began to address the audience, and from his first words it was obvious that he must be French for his accent was abominable.

‘So, you boys weel be actors, eh? You will strut ze stage. You weel make people laugh and cry as you weesh. Zat iss what a great actor must be able to do. He must be able to make ze people who listen theenk he is anozzer person altogether. You agree, wiz me? No? You are silent! If you theenk an actor should do as I said – put up ze hands. Aaah, zat iss mouch better, yes. Now, I gif you a lesson. You – weel you step up here, plees?’

There was a little buzz of comment as the boy addressed rose and walked obediently to the rostrum. It was uncanny how the visitor had picked out the one boy who really prided himself on his ability as an actor.

‘We shall now haf a leetle play,’ the visitor said, after vigorously shaking the youth by the hand. ‘I shall pretend I am ze French master. You shall pretend you are a schoolboy answering questions. You weel pretend you are not very good at ze French language, eh?’

There was a round of subdued titters from the audience. To pretend they were not very good at French would have been fairly easy for most of them.

‘Now, I am ze French master. We shall begin. You shall tell me something in French about a bottle sheep.’

With a wan smile on his face the boy stared at his questioner and then scratched at the back of his head with a probing ringer.

‘Bottle *sheep*, sir?’ he queried.

‘Of course, of course. You know what a bottle sheep is.’

‘Do you mean a dreadnought, sir?’

‘Dread naught. Of course I dread naught. What iss there to be afraid of? I dread no one. Now, tell me some-theeng of a bottle sheep – you know what a sheep does, surely.’

‘It goes baa!’

‘A sheep goes baaa!’ the visitor shrieked, and seemed to lose his temper completely. ‘Baa-baa-baa. A sheep goes baa!’

The gust of laughter which had started at the back of the room and was sweeping to the very front forms was suddenly checked, for the door had opened and Old Bill himself had come in. He closed the door quietly, looked across at the man on the rostrum, then motioned to the unhappy-looking Professor Sheepskin to come to him.

The sudden silence in the room had its effect on the two left on the rostrum. The visitor looked up and became calm. Patting the blushing boy on the head he ordered him back to his place, then walked across to meet the august head of Charterhouse, Dr Haig Brown.

‘I have not had the pleasure of meeting you, sir,’ the Doctor said, but before he could introduce himself the visitor leaned forward and in a whisper said:



He patted the blushing boy on the head

‘Powell, sir; Baden-Powell. I am just giving them a lesson on the art of acting.’

For a moment Dr Haig Brown’s forehead creased in what looked like the beginning of a thunderous frown. Then the storm signals vanished as B-P hurriedly went on:

‘I told them that the art of acting was to make the audience think the actor was someone quite different. Hence the – er – make-up.’

‘I am delighted to meet you, m’sieur,’ Dr Haig Brown said solemnly, and shook B-P by the hand. ‘I am sure the lesson will go home. Return to your pupils.’

‘Yes, sir. I think perhaps I have proved my point now. Shall I tell them you wish to speak to them?’

‘Thank you.’

The visitor went back to the rostrum, and now there was complete silence, the audience dividing its gaze between him and Old Bill standing near the door.

‘I haf given you a lesson in acting,’ B-P said. ‘It iss that you must be able to make your audience believe you are someone else. I theenk I may haf been successful,’ and with a quick gesture he whipped off the beard, moustache and the craggy eyebrows. Then he took off his Gallic looking hat to expose the head of red hair they all knew so well.

For a moment there was a stupefied silence, then a roar went up which did not subside until Dr Haig Brown himself ascended the rostrum. B-P’s reputation as an actor was made so far as Charterhouse was concerned, and when casting was going on for future plays, his name was always well up on the list of candidates for major roles.

10

The *Koh-i-noor* off Harwich

‘They think there are some of the crew still left aboard,’ Warington said, wiping the water from his eyebrows, then pulling the scarf tighter about his neck to keep the rain from dripping down.

‘Aren’t they going out again?’ B-P asked, looking across from the yacht anchorage to where the Harwich lifeboat was bobbing uneasily against the wall of the Parkeston quay. ‘Surely they – oh, here’s Frank, he’ll know something for sure.’

Frank Baden-Powell stepped on to the rocking ten-ton cutter *Koh-i-noor* and blew out a great breath. He, too, wiped his face of the rain which was lashing across the water, driven by an easterly gale.

‘Are they not going out again?’ B-P put in anxiously. ‘Surely they can’t leave the ship – if there’s someone aboard.’

‘You didn’t *see* the lifeboat,’ Frank said grimly, and stalking past his brothers he went below to get a towel. ‘She must have hit the distressed vessel a terrific whack. Her port bow planking is stove in as if it was matchwood, and she’s leaking like a sieve. They would be mad to even think of going out again in this stuff.’

Warington rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Going out on deck he looked at the leaden clouds racing in from the North Sea. The wind was screaming across from the Low Countries, and had whipped up the waves into a typical nasty North Sea chop.

‘I think the wind will go down soon,’ he finally decided. ‘When you get rain like this it usually means a falling wind.’ He turned and looked at his younger brother, a critical expression in his eyes. He was wondering if he dare take the ten-tonner out into the open sea. The *Koh-i-noor* was staunch enough, but she would need all hands when they were in the open, and Warington was wondering if the youngest member of her crew would be able to stand up to it all.

B-P helped him make up his mind by saying:

‘Couldn’t we take a chance, Warington? The weather is no worse than when we were off the Norwegian coast, and we do know this coastline, don’t we?’

‘We’ll see what the others say,’ and Warington ducked below deck, followed by B-P, whose eyes were grave now as he thought about the plight of the ship out there in the murk, and the men who might still be aboard her.

As the scuttle dropped into place the moan of the wind was shut out and the only sounds came from the cutter herself as her timbers creaked and groaned. The grumbling on the port side came from the fenders as they held the *Koh-i-noor* away from the quay wall.

For a moment the four brothers did not speak. Three of them were looking up at Warington. George was on his haunches stirring a jug of coffee he had just made. Frank was wringing water from the neck and back of his shirt. B-P stood behind his eldest brother, waiting and hoping that Warington would decide to take the cutter out to sea.

It was one of several occasions when the four brothers seemed to know exactly what the others were thinking without a word being said. George dropped a generous helping of sugar into the jug, stirred it briskly and reaching for four mugs laid them on the small table.

‘We’d better have a drink now,’ he said quietly, ‘there won’t be much chance later, will there?’

As they drank their coffee, Frank put on his wet shirt again. Grinning wryly, he said there was no point in putting a dry one on, since they would all be wet to the skin before they returned. Warington began giving B-P instructions on lashing down everything that was moveable in the cabin.

‘And don’t forget to put the stove out, young un,’ George cautioned.

‘And when you come up,’ Warington concluded, ‘fasten a life-line round your waist. We don’t want the trouble of fishing anybody out of the sea when we get round Landguard Point.’

B-P was left below, securing everything while his brothers went up to tackle the job of getting the *Koh-i-noor* out where she could get some wind into her sails without the risk of being driven hard against the quay wall.

Extinguishing the stove, B-P carefully emptied the paraffin into a can and screwed on the top. The bedding was bundled swiftly into an oilskin sheet and stowed into a locker. Up above he could hear feet on the decks, then the grumbling and bumping of the fenders died away, and he felt the cutter heel a little.

A minute later she was clear of the high protecting wall, and heeled as if she would lie flat on the water. Though Warington had hoisted only a rag of sail the gusts were so fierce that despite the ballast she carried in her bilges it was touch and go for nearly a minute as to whether she would capsize.

B-P heard the first suggestion of a rumble from the bilges, telling him that some of the cast-iron pigs used as ballast were moving. Then the *Koh-i-noor* showed what manner of a vessel she was. Heaving herself into a more upright position she began to scud across the water, throwing sheets of spray on either bow as she drove on a starboard tack towards the Parkeston quay.

It took half an hour to get out into Harwich harbour mouth, and then there was a fierce twenty minutes while she reeled due south at a rate of knots B-P could not remember her ever doing before. Down in the cabin he could only imagine where they were, and hurried on with his work of securing all moveable objects. The small lamp swinging from the cabin ceiling seemed at times as if it was trying to heave itself off its gimbals and crash to the floor.

When he was finally satisfied that he had done all that could be done to ensure nothing could come adrift and be damaged, he went to the scuttle and banged on it with both fists; but there was no answer. After waiting for a minute, which seemed much longer than a mere sixty seconds, he banged again. Still, there was no answer, and the cutter seemed to be throwing herself about as if caught in a vortex.

For a moment B-P almost panicked. Had something gone wrong on top? Had a freak wave swept his three brothers off into the sea? If it had, then he was a prisoner below until the cutter either sank at sea, or was driven ashore on to the merciless shingle beaches north of Harwich.

He banged again and again until there was a single ‘thump’ on the scuttle top. It was not opened for another ten minutes, but B-P did not bang again. He knew that he had been heard, but that the crew had too much to do for the time being to set him free.

Finally the scuttle was whipped open, and as B-P scurried towards the blessed daylight, and the keen stinging salt air, a dollop of water sloshed down on him, almost throwing him on his back.

‘Come on, come on,’ Warington yelled, ‘you can’t hang about down there all day.’

The words ought to have made B-P angry, especially as he had been waiting impatiently to come up, but he knew Warington, and merely winced as another sea swept the *Koh-i-noor*. It gave him another ducking, despite the oilskins he wore, and the thick scarf about his neck which was supposed to keep all except the heaviest splash from wetting his shirt.

When he scrambled on deck, the scuttle slamming into place behind him under the strong hand of Warington, the picture which met his gaze ought to have sent a quiver of fear through him.

They had rounded Landguard Point, and were driving north-east at a speed which made the cutter shudder when she thrust her bows into one of the dark green rollers hurrying

shorewards. It was the height of these waves which made the task of the *Koh-i-noor* so dangerous. She could drive into them, with no worse damage than wet shirts for her crew. The trouble would be when Warington tried to bring her round to come alongside the distressed vessel, a Dutch fishing boat perhaps twice the tonnage of the cutter.

B-P looked shorewards only once. As Warington predicted the wind was already beginning to drop, and in consequence the seas were rising. The violence of the wind had flattened the seas somewhat. Now the crew of the cutter were exchanging one hazard for another – less wind but steeper seas.

That one glance shorewards for B-P was sufficient. The coastline here was banked with shingle, and he could see the spray rising dozens of feet into the air as the waves broke on the shingle banks. It looked bad enough from the sea. On shore it would seem worse, for the waves sucked tons and tons of shingle back with each undertow, only to pick it up again with the next wave and throw it with a crunching thunder on to the bank once more.

With a seamanship which made B-P envious of his brother's skill, Warington brought the *Koh-i-noor* round to the east of the Dutchman, while the one sail they were carrying flapped for a moment with a noise like thunder. The whole ship trembled, and B-P had a momentary fear that their mast was going to snap off. Then the danger was past, and the cutter was bearing down at an angle on the distressed fishing boat.

It was the moment they had waited for, and it needed courage, skill, and coolness of the highest order. George and Frank were to bring the sail down with a rush. B-P had gone into the bows with a bag of oil a few minutes earlier. There was a small hole in the bag, allowing oil to leak out and spread in a thin film. This oil' slick' on the water was smoothing off the tops of the waves.

Twice they missed contact with the fishing boat by a matter of yards. They came round a third time. B-P stood in the starboard bows, with a life-jacket of cork fastened securely about his chest and back, and a light line tied about his waist.

Frank was to have attempted to board the Dutchman, but the last time he and George had 'scandalised' the sail (brought it down in a heap in a great hurry), he had sprained his wrist. George already had a bandage about his right ankle, making a leap from one craft to the other impossible. There was only B-P left to attempt the jump. No one would have agreed to Warington boarding the distressed ship. He alone had the necessary skill to keep the *Koh-i-noor* out of trouble.

The cutter ran down towards the Dutchman again, and B-P had widened the cut in the oil bag over their bows. More oil was going on to the water and the waves looked deceptively smooth as they moved onwards.

A bellow from Warington, and for the third time the sail came down with a rush, to be smothered before the wind could get into its folds and balloon it all over the deck.

B-P poised for the leap. His heart was thumping. He had to get aboard, haul in his line, to which was attached a stouter hawser, and then, if all went well, the *Koh-i-noor* would try to sail south, and keep their prize off the shore long enough for them to reach the wide entrance to Harwich harbour.

With her sail down the *Koh-i-noor's* speed dropped, and she seemed to drift almost gently towards the Dutchman. The distance grew less and less. B-P held on to a mast shroud with his left hand, while he tried to gauge the distance. He must not make a mistake. A short jump would see him in the water, and if the two vessels closed in near enough to touch he might easily be crushed to death.

'When I shout!' Warington bellowed, his voice ringing out even above the crash of waves, and the wail of the wind. 'Not before.'

B-P waited. They were near enough, yet Warington did not shout. B-P almost turned to look towards the stern where his brother was at the tiller, but checked the impulse. It was a matter of split-second timing and if he turned away the shout might come at that moment.

‘Now!’

B-P jumped, and when he alighted on the deck of the soggily heeling Dutchman it seemed too easy, and for a moment he wondered why his heart had been thumping so.

Swiftly he hauled in the light line, the heavier hawser came aboard, the loop ready for slipping over a convenient bollard. B-P did not have to look for the bollard. Warington had noted it the first time they sailed past. He was a lesson in coolness, and he seldom made a mistake.

The two vessels were drifting eastwards towards the shore, the *Koh-i-noor* moving slightly faster than the Dutchman, and kept from touching by the united efforts of George and Frank who, with boathooks, were pushing mightily.

B-P slipped the hawser loop over a bollard, then rushed below. He had to make sure whether there were any Dutch seamen still aboard. The cabin door was open, one of its hinges ripped off. A foot of water swilled about below, but there was no sign of anyone.

Up on deck he was in time to hear Warington’s yell of:

‘Ste! Ste!’

Then George and Frank in chorus yelled:

‘Jump for it, Ste!’

A quirk of wind or tide was drawing the cutter away from the Dutchman, and the gap between the two was beginning to widen perilously. There was no time for thinking. B-P ran back across the Dutchman’s deck, then raced to the port rail, a low wooden one of less than a foot. Without even thinking of the risk he made his leap.

Had he jumped like that in the Charterhouse sports there is no doubt he would have been remembered as an athlete of more than ordinary accomplishments.

George steadied him, and Warington’s bellow of:

‘Splendid, young ‘un, splendid,’ made a youthful pair of shoulders go back squarely, and a chin lift in pride.



The leap was a matter of split-second timing

George and Frank were ready to hoist their small sail the moment Warington gave the command. All four watched the hawser connecting the two vessels. It was the stoutest aboard the *Koh-i-noor*, but it looked very thin now.

The cutter was lively, lifting high as each wave passed under her, then dropping giddily into the trough before the next green 'un came along. The Dutch vessel was soggy in her movement, telling the experienced eyes of Warington that she was heavy with water.

They would be fortunate to get their prize into calm waters. On the other hand, of course, they might well be lucky, and damaged though she was, the Dutchman would be a salvage prize worth collecting.

There was the merest suggestion of a jerk as the tow-line tightened. It slackened, tightened again, and then Warington decided to take a chance. He waved a hand in signal to George and Frank who ran up the small sail in a matter of moments.

Slowly the *Koh-i-noor* began to gather way. The tow-line was lengthened now to take some of the strain off it when it tightened. For ten minutes, with many an anxious moment as the towline tightened again and again with an ominous 'twang', all went well, then the Dutchman seemed to slip sideways.

For a moment not even Warington guessed what was happening. She had heeled before, and wallowed back again. This time she did not recover. For a second or so she seemed to be taking a last look at the stormy sky, then quietly slid under.

'The tow!' Warington yelled, but there was no need to reach for the knife. There was a crack. The *Koh-i-noor* seemed to stagger forward, dipping her bows deep and scooping a great mass of water over her decks. Then she was scudding south-west, lively as a racer again now that she was freed from the weight of the ill-fated Dutchman.

That evening, with the storm blowing itself out, they sat below with the clothing drying and the remains of the meal on the cabin table. It was George who said:

'You'll be coming up to Balliol soon, won't you, Ste? Hasn't Doctor Haig Brown arranged for you to see Doctor Jowett about entering next term?'

B-P nodded, and Warington smiled as he said:

'I wonder what difference it makes Doctor Jowett being an old friend of the family? It shouldn't do, I know; but I have a sneaking feeling that it does. Look at Ste now; I cannot for the life of me see Doctor Jowett turning him down, even if he wasn't up to standard.'

'There won't be any question of that, anyway,' Frank said hotly. 'Ste's done quite normally at Charterhouse. You're not down on any subjects, are you?'

B-P grinned and shrugged.

'I suppose I'm pretty average. I wouldn't say that I would set the Thames on fire.'

'Well, if you are average at Charterhouse, Ste, you'll be in Balliol for the autumn term,' Warmington prophesied. 'Then there's only Baden, isn't there. Has he decided what he is going to do? Does anybody know?'

'Army, I think,' Frank suggested. 'What are you going to do, Ste?'

'I don't really know,' B-P confessed. 'I suppose I should be making up my mind. I'd like a post where I could travel.'

'What about the Navy?' George suggested. 'You'd travel then, wouldn't you?'

'Oh, I mean travel through countries, not across oceans. Anyway, I suppose everything depends on how I go in my interview with godfather Jowett. I suppose he *could* turn me down.'

'He won't,' Warington insisted. 'After all you *are* his godson, and he is a friend of the family! Don't worry, Ste, you'll be all right. Mind you, don't neglect your work at school.'

11

B-P's Failure!

There was a note on B-P's study table when he returned from his visit to Balliol College. It was a request that he see Dr Haig Brown at the earliest opportunity on his return to school.

There was no twinkle in B-P's eyes as he fingered the note. There had been no twinkle in his eyes from the moment he left Balliol. Now, instead of going to meet Dr Haig Brown he slipped out of school and walked slowly across the playing fields towards the Copse.

It was May, and the countryside was at its best. The trees still held their first fresh greenery, vivid and bright. The grass was waving in the distant fields under the influence of a gentle breeze. If the weather kept so good, occasional showers with lots of sunshine in between, the farmers would be cutting their grass for hay earlier than usual.

The Copse was busy, for many birds were nesting, and there was a constant hurrying to and fro. There were many small beaks to fill, and the parent birds had little time for rest.

B-P sat down and looked about him. The dell, with the mossy, wet banks, and the deceptively narrow-looking stream was still bridged with the four-inch branch he had trimmed so neatly. His tree-top hide was still there, though now it was even harder than usual to see with the trees in full leaf.

Here he had spent some of his happiest hours. Now he sat and tried to digest a bitter pill. Dr Jowett, the famous Master of Balliol, had been as gentle as he could when he turned his godson down. He did not think B-P was 'quite up to Balliol form'. The blow was the bitterer because not only had George and Frank got into Balliol without the least trouble, but this year George had won the Chancellor's Prize.

There was no bitterness against the decision of Dr Jowett. The smile had vanished, temporarily, from B-P's face because he had a feeling that he had let the side down. He knew his mother wanted him to follow his two elder brothers. She would have been delighted if he had been able to return home to give her the news that he would be going up to Oxford next term, and to Balliol.

Gradually, as he sat there, with the sunshine throwing dappled patches of yellow on the grass, some of the disappointment left him. There were *other* things. Warrington had suggested the Army.

'And if one is lucky in the Army one is sure to travel,' B-P told himself. 'I'll go for the Army. I think I'd like that.'

He rose and his step was brisker as he left the Copse. He gave the news to Dr Haig Brown, and saw that man's eyes open a little wider at the phrase Dr Jowett had used: 'Not quite up to Balliol form'; but Old Bill did not tell the slim, straight-backed youngster of nineteen that he thought the Master of Balliol had made a grave mistake. He laid a hand on B-P's shoulder, and his smile was warm and affectionate as he said:

'In this world, no matter how clever we are, we cannot look into the future. So, we never know whether a disappointment of the moment may not be a signpost turning us on another, and perhaps a much better, path. Take it that way, Bathing Towel,' and his smile deepened. 'I know you will.'

*

That night there was a meeting of the Druids. Of the original members there were now only Captain Perriwinkle and Professor Sheepskin left to keep Lord Bathing Towel company. When Captain Perriwinkle burst into B-P's study he carried a large bottle of lemonade and a small carton of pastries. Professor Sheepskin carried other refreshments. They were to have a small party to celebrate B-P's entry to Balliol.

‘Well, my Lord,’ Captain Perriwinkle cried, dumping bottle and box on the table. ‘Hast left yon gay city of Oxford rejoicing that the great Lord Bathing Towel is soon to walk her fair streets, while the halls and fair greens of Charterhouse will mourn for a son who has left them?’

‘Prithee, tell us the news, brother,’ Professor Sheepskin urged, and then in normal voice: ‘Everything went as planned, I presume.’

There was a queer little smile on B-P’s lips as he slowly shook his head.

‘Brothers,’ he said, beginning to unscrew the top of the lemonade bottle, ‘behold a man stripped of his pride – I am *not* going to Balliol.’

There was a shocked silence, broken only by the hiss as the bottle of lemonade was opened. Captain Perriwinkle and Professor Sheepskin looked at one another for a moment, then both burst out laughing.

‘Go on, we’ll buy the joke.’

‘It isn’t a joke,’ B-P said, and taking three cups from his drawer he poured lemonade. ‘Doctor Jowett simply decided, after we had talked for some time, that perhaps I was not quite up to Balliol form.’

‘But he can’t do that, old man,’ Captain Perriwinkle burst out. ‘You told me he was your godfather.’

‘He is!’

‘And you mean – oh, you’re joking! Even if he weren’t your godfather you ought to get into Balliol standing on your head; but with your godfather Master of Balliol – I just don’t believe he *has* turned you down.’

‘In a way I am glad, now, that he did turn me down,’ B-P said, handing his astonished friends a brimming cup of lemonade. ‘Drink with me to the future. I am going to try to get into the Army.’

They sipped their lemonade, then Captain Perriwinkle put down his cup and there was sudden enthusiasm in his voice as he said:

‘I say, Bathing Towel, that’s wonderful. Do you know there’s an Army examination in July. I’m sitting. If we get through we do two years at Sandhurst then, goodbye to the barrack square, and heigho for the vast places of Empire. Just imagine us, cantering down the main street of Cairo or Alexandria, or perhaps into the courtyard of some mighty prince of India, at the head of a column.’

‘There is an examination, first,’ Professor Sheepskin pointed out, and to B-P, ‘Have you seen the subjects?’ and there was something in the Professor’s tone which made B-P wonder.

‘Not your line of country at all, I’m afraid,’ Professor Sheepskin said, picking up the nearest box of pastries and holding them out to his fellow Druids: ‘I know these exams and the questions cover several books of Euclid’s geometry.’

B-P paused with the tips of his fingers touching a square of delicious French pastry. Euclid’s geometry! That was one of his weaknesses. He never had been able to grasp the mystery of Euclid’s problems with their figures, angles and lines.

He picked up the piece of pastry and took a bite, then with a grin he said:

‘From now on, Brothers, I shall be a missing member at the meetings of the Druids. If there is to be Euclid in this examination I shall just have to learn the stuff piecemeal.’

‘You can’t do that,’ Captain Perriwinkle protested. ‘Nobody could do it. Why it –’

‘I can try,’ B-P interrupted. ‘Anyway, if Balliol won’t have me, the Army shall, and if I can only get into the Army by learning Euclid – then Euclid it shall be.’

He went to his bookcase and took down the volumes which were in almost mint condition. B-P had never been interested in the subjects dear to the heart of that fifth-century wizard, whose works on the science of measuring lines and angles of figures are the basis of many of the textbooks of the twentieth century. Now, as B-P turned over the clean, unthumbed pages he had a feeling that for the next few weeks – for the examination was in July – the way was going to be hard, very hard.

By the time he had taken the examination he was ready for a complete change and wiping out of his thoughts everything that had to do with study he accepted an invitation to spend a short yachting holiday with Dr Acland who had been an old friend of his father.

One sunny morning, with the yacht in port, B-P went with several of the younger members of the party to fish for bass. Their luck was excellent and they were in the best of spirits when they climbed aboard the yacht again, holding up their 'bag' for the other guests to see.



Dean Liddell greeted B-P as he came aboard with his catch

Dean Liddell of Christ Church, Oxford, had already made arrangements for B-P to begin his studies there in October, but as the fishing party came aboard he called out:

'You took the Army examinations, didn't you, Ste? The list is here,' and he held up a paper. 'I see that a namesake of yours has done remarkably well; he is one of the top six. Like to have a look. I haven't seen your name – but of course there are the usual hundreds in the list. Seven hundred – yes, seven hundred and eighteen. I hope your name is among them.'

There was a curious silence as B-P took the paper. That someone else should be a Baden-Powell struck him as odd, but he did not for a moment doubt that it was someone else. After all, Dean Liddell had said the fellow was one of the top six. B-P would be happy if he had gained sufficient marks to pass for Sandhurst.

All eyes were on him as he stood on the sunlit deck, perusing the list of names. They seemed never-ending, and the nearer he got to the bottom the lower his hopes fell. Eventually he came to that part of the list where the candidates had gained just sufficient marks to qualify, and the last of these names was not R. S. S. Baden-Powell. For a moment he was stunned.

Then a new and almost ludicrous thought occurred to him. Could he be the one near the top? For a moment he hardly dared begin reading the names again. Then he braced himself and started right at the head:

INFANTRY LIST

Number in order of merit	Name	Marks
1	Onslow: Richard Cranley	6,611
2	Wallace: Alexander	5,970
3	Hand: William Hudson	5,367
4	Widdicombe: William Sutherland	5,363
5	Baden-Powell: Robert Stephenson Smyth	5,350

CAVALRY LIST

1	Dressner: Charles John Barnard Hough	6,225
2	Baden-Powell: Robert Stephenson Smyth	5,350

He blinked and forced himself to read the two items again. No, there was no mistake. There it was in black and white!

‘Have you found your name, Ste?’ It was Dean Liddell, who felt rather sorry for this slim, nineteen year old youth of whom he was so fond. He had noted the change of colour in B-P’s face, and felt sure that the initials R.S.S. were not included in the list.

B-P turned and holding out the paper said:

‘Thank you, sir. Yes, I have found my name. I have passed for both branches, Cavalry and Infantry.’

‘Well, bless my soul,’ Dean Liddell rose to offer his congratulations, while other guests crowded round to get a peep at the paper. In less than a minute the news was out. B-P was fifth in the Infantry list and second in the Cavalry.

‘You know what this means, don’t you?’ one of the more knowledgeable ones pointed out. ‘You will be excused your two years at Sandhurst, and your commission will be antedated two years. Well, well; I think this calls for a celebration.’

On September nth the *London Gazette* carried the item that Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell was now a sub-lieutenant in the 13th Hussars. This cavalry regiment was then stationed in India, and on October 30th the new subaltern was to board the troopship *Serapis* at Portsmouth and sail for India.

*

The cab was waiting outside 1 Hyde Park Gate, and B-P’s baggage was aboard. The horse shook its head, making its bit and bridle rattle, as if to remind the young man in the uniform of the ‘Lilywhites’, the nickname then in vogue for the 13th Hussars, that he was going out to be a member of a cavalry regiment that had a long and glorious history. It had taken part in the Heavy Brigade charge at Balaclava, among other notable events.

Henriette Grace Baden-Powell was not thinking of the great deeds of armies. This was a moment of parting. Up to now Ste had always been a boy. True he had grown taller, stronger, less dependent on her with the passing years. When he left her now it would be like the turning over of a page in his life. He would be a man.

‘When you were eight, Ste,’ she said, opening a small drawer in the dark oak escritoire, ‘you wrote something which I have kept. Do you remember?’

B-P’s thoughts were on the cab, and the train which would soon be taking him down to the docks at Portsmouth. He pondered for a moment, and then smiled.

‘Yes, I remember.’

‘I’m not going to give it to you, because little things like this are so easily lost – on board ship, or in a barracks. I have looked after it for eleven years, Ste. You don’t mind me keeping it a little longer, do you?’

‘Keep it always, if you wish, Mother darling,’ B-P said.

‘I want to read it to you. Perhaps you have altered your way of thinking since you wrote this; but you may like to be reminded of it. I thought it was wonderful then, and I still think it is. When you wrote it you meant every word of it.’ She cleared her throat and began to read:

‘Laws for me when I grow old:

‘I will have the poor people to be as rich as we are, and they ought by rights to be happy as we are, and all who go across the crossings shall give the poor crossing sweeper some money and you ought to thank God for what He has given us and He made the poor people to be poor and the rich people to be rich and I can tell you how to be good. Now I will tell you. You must pray to God whenever you can but you cannot be good with only praying but you must try very hard to be good.

By R. S. S. Baden-Powell, Feb. 26th, 1865

Robert Stephenson Smyth Powell.’

‘I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever read, Ste. I still think it is wonderful. It is beautiful and wise – a child’s way of life.’ She paused for a moment, then went on: ‘You know we have never preached in our family. We have just tried to live proper lives. When you are far away across the sea I know you won’t forget what you had in mind when you wrote those “Laws for living”.’

For a moment Ste looked at his mother. There was a little pricking at the back of his eyes, and a tiny lump in his throat.

‘I shall write to you as often as I can, Mother darling: I’ll try and give you an idea of the things I have seen by means of sketches. You will be able to tell from my letters – whether I have moved away from my eight year old idea of how to live. Goodbye.’

A few moments later he was climbing into the cab, and from an upstairs room his mother watched the cab clatter off to join the stream of traffic moving south.

Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell had ceased to be a boy. In the eyes of the world he was now a man.

12

What Happened Next

B-P’s first years in India proved extremely strenuous ones. Without the benefit of the traditional two years at Sandhurst, where officers normally learned the ‘trade’ of soldiering, B-P had to be on the alert all the time. He had to learn drills and commands, and perhaps most important, how to handle the professional ‘Tommy Atkins’ of those days.

At that time, too, a great many Army officers were wealthy men. B-P was far from wealthy, and had somehow to try to manage on his pay of £120 a year. Yet he contrived to turn that disadvantage to advantage, for later on he began to use his pen and his skill as an artist to earn extra money by contributing to papers at home.

Two years in India saw him en route for home on sick leave, after recurring bouts of fever, and some kidney trouble. While back in Britain he took a course in musketry, passing with a first class and an ‘extra’ certificate. He was also able to indulge his love for acting, and looked ahead to the time when he would be back in some distant land, where entertainments would often

be of their own making. He sketched many costumes and the scenery for a number of plays, so that when he returned to Lucknow in 1880 he was able to design not only the costumes for plays, but paint the scenery too.

Life was not all barrack room and parade ground, however, and he saw service in the North-West frontier region of India, gaining valuable experience in tracking, and moving troops across difficult terrain.

Some of his leaves he spent in the beautiful hill country of Kashmir, and about this time he was introduced to the sport of pig-sticking. He revelled in this, for it was a sport which not only demanded a perfect seat in the saddle, strong nerves, a good eye and a steady hand with the lance, but was a real sport, since the odds were not always on the side of the hunter. The wild boar was both cunning and brave. What was more he possessed two formidable weapons in his strong, curved tusks, and many a pony had been downed by an upward thrust as the boar turned at bay.

When B-P won the Kadir Cup in 1883, using three ponies he had trained himself, the boar led him into a deep pool where B-P was unhorsed. It was from these experiences he later wrote *Pig-sticking, or Hog-hunting*, a book which made him something of an authority on the subject.

It was in 1883 he wrote the first of his publications. This was a folded card entitled *On Vedette*, and was described as an easy Aide-Memoire. A year later, when the 13th were due to leave India for home, he published *Reconnaissance and Scouting*. In that year he landed for the first period of his service in South Africa. Trouble was threatening and the ship docked at Port Natal to disembark the men who were to stand by as reinforcements in case the trouble developed.

Later, in some ways emulating his old hero, Captain John Smith, he tried his hand at spying in the Balkans, his pose as a naturalist even leading to him being entertained by officers actually on manoeuvres. Then came the period which was to culminate in his name becoming known throughout the world – he went to Africa again.

From Chief Dinizulu in Swaziland he took as a souvenir a string of curiously carved wooden beads, replicas of which are worn on a leather thong around the neck of Scout officers throughout the world, as a sign that they have been specially trained for work in the Scout movement.

Ashanti followed service in Swaziland, then came the Matabele rebellion and at long last the smouldering fires between Boer and Britisher fanned to flame. By then B-P had again been sent to Africa to train a special command, and very soon he was besieged in the little town of Mafeking.

It almost seems, now that historians can look back, that everything B-P had done had been an essential part of his training for just this occasion. The war which was to ‘be over by Christmas’ quickly began going the wrong way. Gatacre suffered defeat at Stormberg, Methuen at Magersfontein, Buller at Colenso. Kimberly, Ladysmith and Mafeking were under siege.

Britain and the Empire waited with bated breath for news of these three outposts. Mafeking was the worst off. Yet with only a handful of trained men, and the minimum of arms, B-P continued to hold out. An extract from his instructions shows the mettle of the man in command. To his officers he said: ‘Bluff the enemy with show of force as much as you can.’ Yet at one time 9000 Boers surrounded the little town.

During this period B-P did not forget his mother, and writing on the thinnest paper to hand, he somehow contrived to get eighteen letters to her during the 217 days’ siege, native runners creeping through the Boer lines at night to deliver them to Bulawayo.

It was during the siege that Lord Edward Cecil organised the Cadet Corps, whose members tackled many tasks which relieved able bodied men for more dangerous duties. It was the

Mafeking Cadet Corps which gave B-P the idea that he might do something for the youth of Britain when the war was over.

When the siege was finally raised, with B-P's brother Baden marching into Mafeking and waking him at 3 a.m., Britain went almost mad with joy, and the Commander-in-Chief, Wolseley, wrote to Queen Victoria suggesting that Colonel R. S. S. Baden-Powell be promoted to the rank of Major General. At the age of 43 B-P was the youngest Major General in the British Army.

After Mafeking came a period when he organised the South African Constabulary. In the years which followed, the picture of the Mafeking Cadet Corps remained with him and he decided to try to do something to help the boys of his own country to a happier life.

After consultation with other men interested in young people he decided to hold an experimental camp in which boys from all shades of society should live together on Brownsea Island for a short period. It was the planting of a seed – B-P later likened it to an acorn – which was to grow into the biggest tree the world has ever known.

Encouraged by the success of the 1907 experimental camp, and doubly encouraged by his mother, B-P decided to go ahead with his ideas, and write something to give a lead. He did not visualise starting a new movement for boys, but rather hoped it would help the Boys Brigade to branch out into wider activities.

The book was to be called *Scouting for Boys*, and was published in six fortnightly parts, the first being on the bookstalls in January 1908. Its price was 4d, and because of its cheapness the 64 pages were on rather poor paper. The first complete edition of the six parts was published in May 1908 at 2s, and was reprinted five times that year and another five times in 1909.

Ever since Mafeking B-P had been the hero of the youth of Britain. Hundreds of thousands of buttonhole badges had been sold, showing the man of the hour wearing his famous 'cowboy' hat. Within weeks of the first issue of *Scouting for Boys*, the first Scout troops were started. The movement sprang up spontaneously all over the country, boys finding their own scoutmasters, and even girls insisting that there was a place for 'girl scouts'.

It was unexpected, but B-P soon saw that this flood of enthusiasm must be governed. The late F. Haydn Dimmock, for more than 30 years editor of the weekly paper *The Scout*, prized a slip of paper on which B-P had calculated the cost of a central London headquarters from which the new movement could be run. There would be a clerk, an office, and together with expenses of stationery and stamps, the sum would be about £1000 a year. Fifty years later the members of the movement were to contribute some £50,000 each year from their Bob-a-Job week efforts in order to help forward the work of the movement, with its training and camp sites.

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Before B-P died on January 8th 1941, Scouting had spread throughout the world. There were few countries where the Chief Scout had not set foot and talked of the new 'game' for boys. The word *jamboree* which B-P coined to denote a joyful gathering of boys, had found its place in the dictionaries, and international gatherings of scouts from many countries had become an accepted part of scouting. In addition, the acorn planted in 1907 had thrown up many new branches. On the Scout side there was a junior section, the Wolf Cubs, and there were Rover Scouts for the young man. On the 'Girl Scout' side recognition had been given early and the Girl Guides, with their junior section the Brownies and their Rangers (the Rover Scout equivalent) were in full swing.

Despite the two world wars Scouting has continued to thrive. Recent census figures reveal that in Great Britain over half a million boys are members, while throughout the world the total has risen to the staggering figure of 8,000,000.

The boy who caught his rabbits in the Copse at Charterhouse, and dodged vigilant masters, had introduced a new way of life for young people throughout the world. Well did he earn the love and respect which is epitomised in some countries by the erection of massive statues in public places.

In Great Britain the Scout and Guide memorial to his memory was unveiled on St George's Day, 1947, in Westminster Abbey. The simple inscription reads: IN MEMORY OF ROBERT BADEN-POWELL CHIEF SCOUT OF THE WORLD 1857-1941.

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The boy who wrote his 'Laws for me when I grow up' at the age of eight had been showered with honours at home and by many foreign powers. When 'Ste' died the world knew immediately who was meant when they saw the initials B-P, though his title then was Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell. Perhaps, deep down in his heart, the tide of which he must have been most proud was – Chief Scout of the World.

Records of the boyhood of B-P are sketchy in the extreme, and I am indebted for much material garnered from W. Francis Aitken's *Baden-Powell* published in 1900; *Baden-Powell* by R. H. Kiernan published in 1939; *The life of Baden-Powell* by M. E. Carter, M.B.E., M.A., published in 1956, and E. E. Reynold's *Baden-Powell* whose revised and monumental second edition was published in 1957 to mark the centenary of B-P's birth. Much I learned also from the late F. Haydn Dimmock, who printed B-P's weekly articles in the *Scout* for many years, and whose knowledge of him was vast. Without all this help, and a little imaginative writing to round off some of the incidents in B-P's boyhood, it would not have been possible to write this book.

