

## CHAPTER XIX

### MIKE GOES TO SLEEP AGAIN

Mike was a stout supporter of the view that sleep in large quantities is good for one. He belonged to the school of thought which holds that a man becomes plain and pasty if deprived of his full spell in bed. He aimed at the peach-bloom complexion.

To be routed out of bed a clear hour before the proper time, even on a summer morning, was not, therefore, a prospect that appealed to him.

When he woke it seemed even less attractive than it had done when he went to sleep. He had banged his head on the pillow six times over-night, and this silent alarm proved effective, as it always does. Reaching out a hand for his watch, he found that it was five minutes past six.

This was to the good. He could manage another quarter of an hour between the sheets. It would only take him ten minutes to wash and get into his flannels.

He took his quarter of an hour, and a little more. He woke from a sort of doze to find that it was twenty-five past.

Man's inability to get out of bed in the morning is a curious thing. One may reason with oneself clearly and forcibly without the slightest effect. One knows that delay means inconvenience. Perhaps it may spoil one's whole day. And one also knows that a single resolute heave will do the trick. But logic is of no use. One simply lies there.

Mike thought he would take another minute.

And during that minute there floated into his mind the question, Who was Firby-Smith? That was the point. Who was he, after all?

This started quite a new train of thought. Previously Mike had firmly intended to get up--some time. Now he began to waver.

The more he considered the Gazeka's insignificance and futility and his own magnificence, the more outrageous did it seem that he should be dragged out of bed to please Firby-Smith's vapid mind. Here was he, about to receive his first eleven colours on this very day probably, being ordered about, inconvenienced--in short, put upon by a worm who had only just scraped into the third.

Was this right, he asked himself. Was this proper?

And the hands of the watch moved round to twenty to.

What was the matter with his fielding? It was all right. Make

the rest of the team fag about, yes. But not a chap who, dash it all, had got his first for fielding!

It was with almost a feeling of self-righteousness that Mike turned over on his side and went to sleep again.

And outside in the cricket-field, the massive mind of the Gazeka was filled with rage, as it was gradually borne in upon him that this was not a question of mere lateness--which, he felt, would be bad enough, for when he said six-thirty he meant six-thirty--but of actual desertion. It was time, he said to himself, that the foot of Authority was set firmly down, and the strong right hand of Justice allowed to put in some energetic work. His comments on the team's fielding that morning were bitter and sarcastic. His eyes gleamed behind their pince-nez.

The painful interview took place after breakfast. The head of the house despatched his fag in search of Mike, and waited. He paced up and down the room like a hungry lion, adjusting his pince-nez (a thing, by the way, which lions seldom do) and behaving in other respects like a monarch of the desert. One would have felt, looking at him, that Mike, in coming to his den, was doing a deed which would make the achievement of Daniel seem in comparison like the tentative effort of some timid novice.

And certainly Mike was not without qualms as he knocked at the door,

and went in in response to the hoarse roar from the other side of it.

Firby-Smith straightened his tie, and glared.

"Young Jackson," he said, "look here, I want to know what it all means, and jolly quick. You weren't at house-fielding this morning. Didn't you see the notice?"

Mike admitted that he had seen the notice.

"Then you frightful kid, what do you mean by it? What?"

Mike hesitated. Awfully embarrassing, this. His real reason for not turning up to house-fielding was that he considered himself above such things, and Firby-Smith a toothy weed. Could he give this excuse? He had not his Book of Etiquette by him at the moment, but he rather fancied not. There was no arguing against the fact that the head of the house was a toothy weed; but he felt a firm conviction that it would not be politic to say so.

Happy thought: over-slept himself.

He mentioned this.

"Over-slept yourself! You must jolly well not over-sleep yourself.

What do you mean by over-sleeping yourself?"

Very trying this sort of thing.

"What time did you wake up?"

"Six," said Mike.

It was not according to his complicated, yet intelligible code of morality to tell lies to save himself. When others were concerned he could suppress the true and suggest the false with a face of brass.

"Six!"

"Five past."

"Why didn't you get up then?"

"I went to sleep again."

"Oh, you went to sleep again, did you? Well, just listen to me. I've had my eye on you for some time, and I've seen it coming on. You've got swelled head, young man. That's what you've got. Frightful swelled head. You think the place belongs to you."

"I don't," said Mike indignantly.

"Yes, you do," said the Gazeka shrilly. "You think the whole frightful place belongs to you. You go siding about as if you'd bought it. Just because you've got your second, you think you can do what you like; turn up or not, as you please. It doesn't matter whether I'm only in the third and you're in the first. That's got nothing to do with it. The point is that you're one of the house team, and I'm captain of it, so you've jolly well got to turn out for fielding with the others when I think it necessary. See?"

Mike said nothing.

"Do--you--see, you frightful kid?"

[Illustration: "DO--YOU--SEE, YOU FRIGHTFUL KID?"]

Mike remained stonily silent. The rather large grain of truth in what Firby-Smith had said had gone home, as the unpleasant truth about ourselves is apt to do; and his feelings were hurt. He was determined not to give in and say that he saw even if the head of the house invoked all the majesty of the prefects' room to help him, as he had nearly done once before. He set his teeth, and stared at a photograph on the wall.

Firby-Smith's manner became ominously calm. He produced a swagger-stick from a corner.

"Do you see?" he asked again.

Mike's jaw set more tightly.

What one really wants here is a row of stars.

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Mike was still full of his injuries when Wyatt came back. Wyatt was worn out, but cheerful. The school had finished sixth for the Ashburton, which was an improvement of eight places on their last year's form, and he himself had scored thirty at the two hundred and twenty-seven at the five hundred totals, which had put him in a very good humour with the world.

"Me ancient skill has not deserted me," he said, "That's the cats. The man who can wing a cat by moonlight can put a bullet where he likes on a target. I didn't hit the bull every time, but that was to give the other fellows a chance. My fatal modesty has always been a hindrance to me in life, and I suppose it always will be. Well, well! And what of the old homestead? Anything happened since I went away? Me old father, is he well? Has the lost will been discovered, or is there a mortgage on the family estates? By Jove, I could do with a stoup of Malvoisie. I wonder if the moke's gone to bed yet. I'll go down and look. A jug of water drawn from the well in the old courtyard where my ancestors have played as children for centuries back would just about

save my life."

He left the dormitory, and Mike began to brood over his wrongs once more.

Wyatt came back, brandishing a jug of water and a glass.

"Oh, for a beaker full of the warm south, full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene! Have you ever tasted Hippocrene, young Jackson? Rather like ginger-beer, with a dash of raspberry-vinegar. Very heady. Failing that, water will do. A-ah!"

He put down the glass, and surveyed Mike, who had maintained a moody silence throughout this speech.

"What's your trouble?" he asked. "For pains in the back try Ju-jar. If it's a broken heart, Zam-buk's what you want. Who's been quarrelling with you?"

"It's only that ass Firby-Smith."

"Again! I never saw such chaps as you two. Always at it. What was the trouble this time? Call him a grinning ape again? Your passion for the truth'll be getting you into trouble one of these days."

"He said I stuck on side."



"Why?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, did he buttonhole you on your way to school, and say, 'Jackson, a word in your ear. You stick on side.' Or did he lead up to it in any way? Did he say, 'Talking of side, you stick it on.' What had you been doing to him?"

"It was the house-fielding."

"But you can't stick on side at house-fielding. I defy any one to. It's too early in the morning."

"I didn't turn up."

"What! Why?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"No, but, look here, really. Did you simply bunk it?"

"Yes."

Wyatt leaned on the end of Mike's bed, and, having observed its

occupant thoughtfully for a moment, proceeded to speak wisdom for the good of his soul.

"I say, I don't want to jaw--I'm one of those quiet chaps with strong, silent natures; you may have noticed it--but I must put in a well-chosen word at this juncture. Don't pretend to be dropping off to sleep. Sit up and listen to what your kind old uncle's got to say to you about manners and deportment. Otherwise, blood as you are at cricket, you'll have a rotten time here. There are some things you simply can't do; and one of them is bunking a thing when you're put down for it. It doesn't matter who it is puts you down. If he's captain, you've got to obey him. That's discipline, that 'ere is. The speaker then paused, and took a sip of water from the carafe which stood at his elbow. Cheers from the audience, and a voice 'Hear! Hear!'"

Mike rolled over in bed and glared up at the orator. Most of his face was covered by the water-jug, but his eyes stared fixedly from above it. He winked in a friendly way, and, putting down the jug, drew a deep breath.

"Nothing like this old '87 water," he said. "Such body."

"I like you jawing about discipline," said Mike morosely.

"And why, my gentle che-ild, should I not talk about discipline?"

"Considering you break out of the house nearly every night."

"In passing, rather rum when you think that a burglar would get it hot for breaking in, while I get dropped on if I break out. Why should there be one law for the burglar and one for me? But you were saying--just so. I thank you. About my breaking out. When you're a white-haired old man like me, young Jackson, you'll see that there are two sorts of discipline at school. One you can break if you feel like taking the risks; the other you mustn't ever break. I don't know why, but it isn't done. Until you learn that, you can never hope to become the Perfect Wrykynian like," he concluded modestly, "me."

Mike made no reply. He would have perished rather than admit it, but Wyatt's words had sunk in. That moment marked a distinct epoch in his career. His feelings were curiously mixed. He was still furious with Firby-Smith, yet at the same time he could not help acknowledging to himself that the latter had had the right on his side. He saw and approved of Wyatt's point of view, which was the more impressive to him from his knowledge of his friend's contempt for, or, rather, cheerful disregard of, most forms of law and order. If Wyatt, reckless though he was as regarded written school rules, held so rigid a respect for those that were unwritten, these last must be things which could not be treated lightly. That night, for the first time in his life, Mike went to sleep with a clear idea of what the public school spirit, of which so much is talked and written, really meant.