

## CHAPTER XXII

### WYATT IS REMINDED OF AN ENGAGEMENT

There are situations in life which are beyond one. The sensible man realises this, and slides out of such situations, admitting himself beaten. Others try to grapple with them, but it never does any good. When affairs get into a real tangle, it is best to sit still and let them straighten themselves out. Or, if one does not do that, simply to think no more about them. This is Philosophy. The true philosopher is the man who says "All right," and goes to sleep in his arm-chair. One's attitude towards Life's Little Difficulties should be that of the gentleman in the fable, who sat down on an acorn one day, and happened to doze. The warmth of his body caused the acorn to germinate, and it grew so rapidly that, when he awoke, he found himself sitting in the fork of an oak, sixty feet from the ground. He thought he would go home, but, finding this impossible, he altered his plans. "Well, well," he said, "if I cannot compel circumstances to my will, I can at least adapt my will to circumstances. I decide to remain here." Which he did, and had a not unpleasant time. The oak lacked some of the comforts of home, but the air was splendid and the view excellent.

To-day's Great Thought for Young Readers. Imitate this man.

Bob should have done so, but he had not the necessary amount of philosophy. He still clung to the idea that he and Burgess, in council, might find some way of making things right for everybody. Though, at the moment, he did not see how eleven caps were to be divided amongst twelve candidates in such a way that each should have one.

And Burgess, consulted on the point, confessed to the same inability to solve the problem. It took Bob at least a quarter of an hour to get the facts of the case into the captain's head, but at last Burgess grasped the idea of the thing. At which period he remarked that it was a rum business.

"Very rum," Bob agreed. "Still, what you say doesn't help us out much, seeing that the point is, what's to be done?"

"Why do anything?"

Burgess was a philosopher, and took the line of least resistance, like the man in the oak-tree.

"But I must do something," said Bob. "Can't you see how rotten it is for me?"

"I don't see why. It's not your fault. Very sporting of your brother and all that, of course, though I'm blowed if I'd have done it myself;

but why should you do anything? You're all right. Your brother stood out of the team to let you in it, and here you are, in it.

What's he got to grumble about?"

"He's not grumbling. It's me."

"What's the matter with you? Don't you want your first?"

"Not like this. Can't you see what a rotten position it is for me?"

"Don't you worry. You simply keep on saying you're all right. Besides, what do you want me to do? Alter the list?"

But for the thought of those unspeakable outsiders, Lionel Tremayne and his headmaster, Bob might have answered this question in the affirmative; but he had the public-school boy's terror of seeming to pose or do anything theatrical. He would have done a good deal to put matters right, but he could not do the self-sacrificing young hero business. It would not be in the picture. These things, if they are to be done at school, have to be carried through stealthily, after Mike's fashion.

"I suppose you can't very well, now it's up. Tell you what, though, I don't see why I shouldn't stand out of the team for the Ripton match. I could easily fake up some excuse."

"I do. I don't know if it's occurred to you, but the idea is rather to win the Ripton match, if possible. So that I'm a lot keen on putting the best team into the field. Sorry if it upsets your arrangements in any way."

"You know perfectly well Mike's every bit as good as me."

"He isn't so keen."

"What do you mean?"

"Fielding. He's a young slacker."

When Burgess had once labelled a man as that, he did not readily let the idea out of his mind.

"Slacker? What rot! He's as keen as anything."

"Anyhow, his keenness isn't enough to make him turn out for house-fielding. If you really want to know, that's why you've got your first instead of him. You sweated away, and improved your fielding twenty per cent.; and I happened to be talking to Firby-Smith and found that young Mike had been shirking his, so out he went. A bad field's bad enough, but a slack field wants skinning."

"Smith oughtn't to have told you."

"Well, he did tell me. So you see how it is. There won't be any changes from the team I've put up on the board."

"Oh, all right," said Bob. "I was afraid you mightn't be able to do anything. So long."

"Mind the step," said Burgess.

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At about the time when this conversation was in progress, Wyatt, crossing the cricket-field towards the school shop in search of something fizzy that might correct a burning thirst acquired at the nets, espied on the horizon a suit of cricket flannels surmounted by a huge, expansive grin. As the distance between them lessened, he discovered that inside the flannels was Neville-Smith's body and behind the grin the rest of Neville-Smith's face. Their visit to the nets not having coincided in point of time, as the Greek exercise books say, Wyatt had not seen his friend since the list of the team had been posted on the board, so he proceeded to congratulate him on his colours.

"Thanks," said Neville-Smith, with a brilliant display of front teeth.

"Feeling good?"

"Not the word for it. I feel like--I don't know what."

"I'll tell you what you look like, if that's any good to you. That slight smile of yours will meet behind, if you don't look out, and then the top of your head'll come off."

"I don't care. I've got my first, whatever happens. Little Willie's going to buy a nice new cap and a pretty striped jacket all for his own self! I say, thanks for reminding me. Not that you did, but supposing you had. At any rate, I remember what it was I wanted to say to you. You know what I was saying to you about the bust I meant to have at home in honour of my getting my first, if I did, which I have--well, anyhow it's to-night. You can roll up, can't you?"

"Delighted. Anything for a free feed in these hard times. What time did you say it was?"

"Eleven. Make it a bit earlier, if you like."

"No, eleven'll do me all right."

"How are you going to get out?"

"'Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.' That's what

the man said who wrote the libretto for the last set of Latin Verses we had to do. I shall manage it."

"They ought to allow you a latch-key."

"Yes, I've often thought of asking my pater for one. Still, I get on very well. Who are coming besides me?"

"No boarders. They all funk'd it."

"The race is degenerating."

"Said it wasn't good enough."

"The school is going to the dogs. Who did you ask?"

"Clowes was one. Said he didn't want to miss his beauty-sleep. And Henfrey backed out because he thought the risk of being sacked wasn't good enough."

"That's an aspect of the thing that might occur to some people. I don't blame him--I might feel like that myself if I'd got another couple of years at school."

"But one or two day-boys are coming. Clephane is, for one. And Beverley. We shall have rather a rag. I'm going to get the things

now."

"When I get to your place--I don't believe I know the way, now I come to think of it--what do I do? Ring the bell and send in my card? or smash the nearest window and climb in?"

"Don't make too much row, for goodness sake. All the servants'll have gone to bed. You'll see the window of my room. It's just above the porch. It'll be the only one lighted up. Heave a pebble at it, and I'll come down."

"So will the glass--with a run, I expect. Still, I'll try to do as little damage as possible. After all, I needn't throw a brick."

"You will turn up, won't you?"

"Nothing shall stop me."

"Good man."

As Wyatt was turning away, a sudden compunction seized upon Neville-Smith. He called him back.

"I say, you don't think it's too risky, do you? I mean, you always are breaking out at night, aren't you? I don't want to get you into a row."



"Oh, that's all right," said Wyatt. "Don't you worry about me. I should have gone out anyhow to-night."