## CHAPTER XLI

## THE SINGULAR BEHAVIOUR OF JELLICOE

Outwood's rollicked considerably that night. Mike, if he had cared to take the part, could have been the Petted Hero. But a cordial invitation from the senior day-room to be the guest of the evening at about the biggest rag of the century had been refused on the plea of fatigue. One does not make two hundred and seventy-seven runs on a hot day without feeling the effects, even if one has scored mainly by the medium of boundaries; and Mike, as he lay back in Psmith's deck-chair, felt that all he wanted was to go to bed and stay there for a week. His hands and arms burned as if they were red-hot, and his eyes were so tired that he could not keep them open.

Psmith, leaning against the mantelpiece, discoursed in a desultory way on the day's happenings--the score off Mr. Downing, the undeniable annoyance of that battered bowler, and the probability of his venting his annoyance on Mike next day.

"In theory," said he, "the manly what-d'you-call-it of cricket and all that sort of thing ought to make him fall on your neck to-morrow and weep over you as a foeman worthy of his steel. But I am prepared to bet a reasonable sum that he will give no Jiu-jitsu exhibition of this kind. In fact, from what I have seen of our bright little friend, I

should say that, in a small way, he will do his best to make it distinctly hot for you, here and there."

"I don't care," murmured Mike, shifting his aching limbs in the chair.

"In an ordinary way, I suppose, a man can put up with having his bowling hit a little. But your performance was cruelty to animals. Twenty-eight off one over, not to mention three wides, would have made Job foam at the mouth. You will probably get sacked. On the other hand, it's worth it. You have lit a candle this day which can never be blown out. You have shown the lads of the village how Comrade Downing's bowling ought to be treated. I don't suppose he'll ever take another wicket."

"He doesn't deserve to."

Psmith smoothed his hair at the glass and turned round again.

"The only blot on this day of mirth and good-will is," he said, "the singular conduct of our friend Jellicoe. When all the place was ringing with song and merriment, Comrade Jellicoe crept to my side, and, slipping his little hand in mine, touched me for three quid."

This interested Mike, fagged as he was.

"What! Three quid!"

"Three jingling, clinking sovereigns. He wanted four."

"But the man must be living at the rate of I don't know what. It was only yesterday that he borrowed a quid from me!"

"He must be saving money fast. There appear to be the makings of a financier about Comrade Jellicoe. Well, I hope, when he's collected enough for his needs, he'll pay me back a bit. I'm pretty well cleaned out."

"I got some from my brother at Oxford."

"Perhaps he's saving up to get married. We may be helping towards furnishing the home. There was a Siamese prince fellow at my dame's at Eton who had four wives when he arrived, and gathered in a fifth during his first summer holidays. It was done on the correspondence system. His Prime Minister fixed it up at the other end, and sent him the glad news on a picture post-card. I think an eye ought to be kept on Comrade Jellicoe."

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Mike tumbled into bed that night like a log, but he could not sleep. He ached all over. Psmith chatted for a time on human affairs in general, and then dropped gently off. Jellicoe, who appeared to be

wrapped in gloom, contributed nothing to the conversation.

After Psmith had gone to sleep, Mike lay for some time running over in his mind, as the best substitute for sleep, the various points of his innings that day. He felt very hot and uncomfortable.

Just as he was wondering whether it would not be a good idea to get up and have a cold bath, a voice spoke from the darkness at his side.

"Are you asleep, Jackson?"

"Who's that?"

"Me--Jellicoe. I can't get to sleep."

"Nor can I. I'm stiff all over."

"I'll come over and sit on your bed."

There was a creaking, and then a weight descended in the neighbourhood of Mike's toes.

Jellicoe was apparently not in conversational mood. He uttered no word for quite three minutes. At the end of which time he gave a sound midway between a snort and a sigh.

"I say, Jackson!" he said.

"Yes?"

"Have you--oh, nothing."

Silence again.

"Jackson."

"Hullo?"

"I say, what would your people say if you got sacked?"

"All sorts of things. Especially my pater. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. So would mine."

"Everybody's would, I expect."

"Yes."

The bed creaked, as Jellicoe digested these great thoughts. Then he spoke again.

"It would be a jolly beastly thing to get sacked."

Mike was too tired to give his mind to the subject. He was not really listening. Jellicoe droned on in a depressed sort of way.

"You'd get home in the middle of the afternoon, I suppose, and you'd drive up to the house, and the servant would open the door, and you'd go in. They might all be out, and then you'd have to hang about, and wait; and presently you'd hear them come in, and you'd go out into the passage, and they'd say 'Hullo!'"

Jellicoe, in order to give verisimilitude, as it were, to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative, flung so much agitated surprise into the last word that it woke Mike from a troubled doze into which he had fallen.

"Hullo?" he said. "What's up?"

"Then you'd say. 'Hullo!' And then they'd say, 'What are you doing here? 'And you'd say----"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"About what would happen."

"Happen when?"

"When you got home. After being sacked, you know."

"Who's been sacked?" Mike's mind was still under a cloud.

"Nobody. But if you were, I meant. And then I suppose there'd be an awful row and general sickness, and all that. And then you'd be sent into a bank, or to Australia, or something."

Mike dozed off again.

"My pater would be frightfully sick. My mater would be sick. My sister would be jolly sick, too. Have you got any sisters, Jackson? I say, Jackson!"

"Hullo! What's the matter? Who's that?"

"Me--Jellicoe."

"What's up?"

"I asked you if you'd got any sisters."

"Any what?"

"Sisters."

"Whose sisters?"

"Yours. I asked if you'd got any."

"Any what?"

"Sisters."

"What about them?"

The conversation was becoming too intricate for Jellicoe. He changed the subject.

"I say, Jackson!"

"Well?"

"I say, you don't know any one who could lend me a pound, do you?"

"What!" cried Mike, sitting up in bed and staring through the darkness in the direction whence the numismatist's voice was proceeding. "Do what?"

"I say, look out. You'll wake Smith."

"Did you say you wanted some one to lend you a quid?"

"Yes," said Jellicoe eagerly. "Do you know any one?"

Mike's head throbbed. This thing was too much. The human brain could not be expected to cope with it. Here was a youth who had borrowed a pound from one friend the day before, and three pounds from another friend that very afternoon, already looking about him for further loans. Was it a hobby, or was he saving up to buy an aeroplane?

"What on earth do you want a pound for?"

"I don't want to tell anybody. But it's jolly serious. I shall get sacked if I don't get it."

Mike pondered.

Those who have followed Mike's career as set forth by the present historian will have realised by this time that he was a good long way from being perfect. As the Blue-Eyed Hero he would have been a rank failure. Except on the cricket field, where he was a natural genius, he was just ordinary. He resembled ninety per cent. of other members of English public schools. He had some virtues and a good many defects. He was as obstinate as a mule, though people whom he liked could do as they pleased with him. He was good-natured as a general thing, but on occasion his temper could be of the worst, and had, in his childhood, been the subject of much adverse comment among his

aunts. He was rigidly truthful, where the issue concerned only himself. Where it was a case of saving a friend, he was prepared to act in a manner reminiscent of an American expert witness.

He had, in addition, one good quality without any defect to balance it. He was always ready to help people. And when he set himself to do this, he was never put off by discomfort or risk. He went at the thing with a singleness of purpose that asked no questions.

Bob's postal order, which had arrived that evening, was reposing in the breast-pocket of his coat.

It was a wrench, but, if the situation was so serious with Jellicoe, it had to be done.

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Two minutes later the night was being made hideous by Jellicoe's almost tearful protestations of gratitude, and the postal order had moved from one side of the dormitory to the other.