

by Thomas Hughes, published 1879, [written 1861]
 ROWING EXCERPTS

*Excerpts connected with the river and rowing and the Commemoration at Oxford.
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CHAPTER II

*[In which our hero takes a skiff out alone for the first time and discovers that there is more to it than first meets the eye.
 He is swept over Sandford Lasher (Weir) and has to be rescued.]*

WITHIN a day or two of the penning of this celebrated epistle, which created quite a sensation in the sixth-form room as it went the round after tea, Tom realized one of the objects of his young Oxford ambition, and succeeded in embarking on the river in a skiff by himself, with such results as are now to be described. He had already been down several times in pair-oar and four-oar boats, with an old oar to pull stroke, and another to steer and coach the young idea, but he was not satisfied with these essays. He could not believe that he was such a bad oar as the old hands made him out to be, and thought that it must be the fault of the other freshmen who were learning with him that the boat made so little way and rolled so much. He had been such a proficient in all the Rugby games, that he couldn't realize the fact of his unreadiness in a boat. Pulling looked a simple thing enough - much easier than tennis; and he had made a capital start at the latter game, and been highly complimented by the marker after his first hour in the little court. He forgot that cricket and fives are capital training for tennis, but that rowing is a speciality, of the rudiments of which he was wholly ignorant. And so, in full confidence that, if he could only have a turn or two alone, he should not only satisfy himself, but everybody else, that he was a heaven-born oar, he refused all offers of companionship, and started on the afternoon of a fine February day down to the boats for his trial trip. He had watched his regular companions well out of college, and gave them enough start to make sure that they would be off before he himself could arrive at the St. Ambrose's dressing-room at Halls, and chuckled, as he came within sight of the river, to see the freshmen's boat in which he generally performed, go plunging away past the University barge, keeping three different times with four oars, and otherwise demeaning itself so as to become an object of mirthful admiration to all beholders.

Tom was punted across to Halls in a state of great content, which increased when, in answer to his casual inquiry, the managing man informed him that not a man of his college was about the place. So he ordered a skiff with as much dignity and coolness as he could command, and hastened up stairs to dress. He appeared again, carrying his boating coat and cap. They were quite new, so he would not wear them: nothing about him should betray the freshman on this day if he could help it.

"Is my skiff ready?"

"All right, sir; this way, sir;" said the manager, conducting him to a good, safe-looking craft.

"Any gentleman going to steer, sir?"

"No," said Tom, superciliously; "You may take out the rudder."

"Going quite alone, sir? Better take one of our boys - find you a very light one. Here, Bill!" and he turned to summon a juvenile waterman to take charge of our hero.

"Take out the rudder, do you hear?" interrupted Tom.

"I won't have a steerer."

"Well, sir, as you please," said the manager, proceeding to remove the degrading appendage.

"The river's rather high please to remember, sir. You must mind the mill-stream at Iffley Lock. I suppose you can swim?"

> "Yes, of course," said Tom, settling himself on his cushion

"Now, shove her off."

The next moment he was well out in the stream, and left to his own resources. He got his sculls out successfully enough, and, though feeling by no means easy on his seat, proceeded to pull very deliberately past the barges, stopping his sculls in the air to feather accurately, in the hopes of deceiving spectators into the belief that he was an old hand just going out for a gentle, paddle. The manager watched him for a minute, and turned to his work with

an aspiration that he might not come to grief

But no thought of grief was on Tom's mind as he dropped gently down, impatient for the time when he should pass the mouth of the Cherwell, and so, having no longer critical eyes to fear, might put out his whole strength, and give himself at least, if not the world, assurance of a waterman.

The day was a very fine one, a bright sun shining, and a nice fresh breeze blowing across the stream, but not enough to ruffle the water seriously. Some heavy storms up Gloucestershire way had cleared the air, and swollen the stream at the same time; in fact, the river was as full as it could be without overflowing its banks - a state in which, of all others, it is the least safe for boating experiments. Fortunately, in those days there were no outriggers. Even the racing skiffs were comparatively safe craft, and would now be characterized as tubs; while the real tubs (in one of the safest of which the prudent manager had embarked our hero) were of such build that it required considerable ingenuity actually to upset them.

If any ordinary amount of bungling could have done it, Tom's voyage would have terminated within a hundred yards of the Cherwell. While he had been sitting quiet and merely paddling, and almost letting the stream carry him down, the boat had trimmed well enough; but now, taking a long breath, he leaned forward, and dug his sculls into the water pulling them through with all his strength. The consequence of this feat was that the handles of the sculls came into violent collision in the middle of the boat, the knuckles of his right hand were barked, his left scull unshipped, and the head of his skiff almost blown round by the wind before he could restore order on board.

"Never mind; try again," thought he, after the first sensation of disgust had passed off, and a glance at the shore showed him that there were no witnesses.

"Of course, I forgot, one hand must go over the other. It might have happened to any one. Let me see, which hand shall I keep uppermost: the left, that's the weakest."

And away he went again, keeping his newly-acquired fact painfully in mind, and so avoiding further collision amidships for four or five strokes. But, as in other sciences, the giving of undue prominence to one fact brings others inexorably on the head of the student to avenge his neglect of them, so it happened with Tom in his practical study of the science of rowing, that by thinking of his hands, he forgot his seat, and the necessity of trimming properly. Whereupon the old tub began to rock fearfully and the next moment he missed the water altogether with his right scull and subsided backwards, not without struggles, into the bottom of the boat; while the half stroke which he had pulled with his left hand sent her head well into the bank.

Tom picked himself up, and settled himself on his bench again, a sadder and a wiser man, as the truth began to dawn upon him that pulling, especially sculling does not, like reading and writing, come by nature. However he addressed himself manfully to his task; savage indeed, and longing to drive a hole in the bottom of the old tub, but as resolved as ever to get to Sandford and back before hall time, or perish in the attempt.

He shoved himself off the bank, and, warned by his last mishap, got out into mid stream, and there, moderating his ardour, and contenting himself with a slow and steady stroke, was progressing satisfactorily, and beginning to recover his temper, when a loud shout startled him; and, looking over his shoulder at the imminent risk of an upset, he beheld the fast sailer the Dart, close hauled on a wind, and almost aboard of him. Utterly ignorant of what was the right thing to do, he held on his course, and passed close under the bows of the miniature cutter, the steersman having jammed his helm hard down, shaking her in the wind, to prevent running over the skiff, and solacing himself with pouring maledictions on Tom and his craft, in which the man who had hold of the sheets, and the third, who was lounging in the bows, heartily joined. Tom was out of ear-shot before he had collected vituperation enough to hurl back at them, and was, moreover, already in the difficult navigation of the Gut, where, notwithstanding all his efforts, he again ran aground; but, with this exception, he arrived without other mishap at Iffley, where he lay on his sculls with much satisfaction, and shouted,

"Lock - lock!"

The lock-keeper appeared to the summons, but instead of opening the gates seized a long boat-hook, and rushed towards our hero calling on him to mind the mill-stream, and pull his right hand scull; notwithstanding which warning, Tom was within an ace of drifting past the entrance to the lock, in which case assuredly his boat, if not he, had never returned whole. However, the lock-keeper managed to catch the stern of his skiff with the boat-hook, and drag him back into the proper channel, and then opened the lock-gates for him. Tom congratulated himself as he entered the lock that there were no other boats going through with him; but his evil star was in the ascendant, and all things, animate and inanimate, seemed to be leagued together to humiliate him. As the water began to fall rapidly, he lost his hold of the chain, and the tub instantly drifted across the lock, and was in imminent danger of sticking and breaking her back, when the lock-keeper again came to the rescue with his boat-hook; and, guessing the state of the case, did not quit him until he had safely shoved him and his boat well out into the pool below, with an exhortation to mind and go outside of the barge which was coming up.

Tom started on the latter half of his outward voyage with the sort of look which Cato must have worn when he elected the losing side, and all the gods went over to the winning one. But his previous struggles had not been

thrown away, and he managed to keep the right side of the barge, turn the corner without going aground, and zigzag down Kennington reach, slowly indeed, and with much labour, but at any rate safely. Rejoicing in this feat, he stopped at the island, and recreated himself with a glass of beer, looking now hopefully towards Sandford, which lay within easy distance, now upwards again along the reach which he had just overcome, and solacing himself with the remembrance of a dictum, which he had heard from a great authority, that it was always easier to steer up stream than down, from which he argued that the worst part of his trial trip was now over.

Presently he saw a skiff turn the corner at the top of the Kennington reach, and, resolving in his mind to get to Sandford before the new comer paid for his beer, and betook himself again to his tub. He got pretty well off, and, the island shutting out his unconscious rival from his view, worked away at first under the pleasing delusion that he was holding his own. But he was soon undeceived, for in monstrously short time the pursuing skiff showed round the corner, and bore down on him. He never relaxed his efforts, but could not help watching the enemy as he came up with him hand over hand, and envying the perfect ease with which he seemed to be pulling his long steady stroke, and the precision with which he steered, scarcely ever casting a look over his shoulder. He was hugging the Berkshire side himself, as the other skill passed him, and thought he heard the sculler say something about keeping out, and minding the small lasher; but the noise of waters and his own desperate efforts prevented his heeding, or, indeed, hearing the warning plainly. In another minute, however he heard plainly enough most energetic shouts behind him and, turning his head over his right shoulder, saw the man who had just passed him backing his skiff rapidly up stream towards him. The next moment he felt the bows of his boat whirl round, the old tub grounded for a moment, and then, turning over on her side, shot him out on to the planking of the steep descent into the small lasher. He grasped at the boards, but they were too slippery to hold, and the rush of water was too strong for him, and, rolling him over and over, like a piece of drift wood, plunged him into the pool below.

After the first moment of astonishment and fright was over, Tom left himself to the stream, holding his breath hard, and paddling gently with his hands, feeling sure that, if he could only hold on, he should come to the surface sooner or later; which accordingly happened after a somewhat lengthy submersion. His first impulse on rising to the surface, after catching his breath, was to strike out for the shore, but, in the act of doing so, he caught sight of the other skiff coming stern foremost down the descent after him, and he trod the water and drew in his breath to watch. Down she came, as straight as an arrow, into the tumult below; the sculler sitting upright, and holding his sculls steadily in the water. For a moment she seemed to be going under, but righted herself, and glided swiftly into the still water; and then the sculler cast a hasty and anxious glance round, till his eyes rested on our hero's half-drowned head.

"Oh, there you are" he said, looking much relieved;

"All right, I hope. Not hurt, eh!"

"No, thankee; all right, I believe," answered Tom.

"What shall I do??"

"Swim ashore; I'll look after your boat."

So Tom took the advice, swam ashore, and there stood dripping and watching the other as he righted the old tub, which was floating quietly bottom upwards, little the worse for the mishap, and no doubt, if boats can wish, earnestly desiring in her wooden mind to be allowed to go quietly to pieces then and there, sooner than be rescued to be again entrusted to the guidance of freshmen.

The tub having been brought to the bank, the stranger started again and collected the sculls and bottom boards, which were floating about here and there in the pool, and also in making salvage of Tom's coat, the pockets of which held his watch, purse, and cigar case. These he brought to the bank, and, delivering them over, inquired whether there was anything else to look after.

"Thank you, no; nothing but my cap. Never mind it.

It's luck enough not to have lost the coat" said Tom, holding up the dripping garment to let the water run out of the arms and pocket-holes, and then wringing it as well as he could.

"At any rate," thought he, "I needn't be afraid of its looking too new any more."

The stranger put off again, and made one more round, searching for the cap and anything else which he might have overlooked, but without success. While he was doing so, Tom had time to look him well over, and see what sort of man had come to his rescue. He hardly knew at the time the full extent of his obligation - at least if this sort of obligation is to be reckoned not so much by the service actually rendered, as by the risk encountered to be able to render it. There were probably not three men in the University who would have dared to shoot the lasher in a skiff in its then state, for it was in those times a really dangerous place; and Tom himself had had an extraordinary escape, for, as Miller, the St. Ambrose coxswain, remarked on hearing the story,

"No one who wasn't born to be hung could have rolled down it without knocking his head against something hard, and going down like lead when he got to the bottom."

He was very well satisfied with his inspection. The other man was evidently a year or two older than himself, his figure was more set, and he had stronger whiskers than are generally grown at twenty. He was somewhere about five feet ten in height, very deep-chested, and with long powerful arms and hands. There was no denying, however,

that at the first glance he was an ugly man; he was marked with small-pox, had large features, high cheek-bones, deeply set eyes, and a very long chin: and had got the trick which many underhung men have of compressing his upper lip. Nevertheless, there was that in his face which hit Tom's fancy, and made him anxious to know his rescuer better. He had an instinct that good was to be gotten out of him. So he was very glad when the search was ended, and the stranger came to the bank, shipped his sculls, and jumped out with the painter of his skiff in his hand, which he proceeded to fasten to an old stump, while he remarked -

"I'm afraid the cap's lost."

"It doesn't matter the least. Thank you for coming to help me; it was very kind indeed, and more than I expected. Don't they say that one Oxford man will never save another from drowning unless they have been introduced?"

"I don't know," replied the other; are you sure you're not hurt?"

"Yes, quite," said Tom, foiled in what he considered an artful plan to get the stranger to introduce himself.

"Then we're very well out of it," said the other, looking at the steep descent into the lasher, and the rolling tumbling rush of the water below.

"Indeed we are," said Tom; "but how in the world did you manage not to upset?"

"I hardly know myself - I have shipped a good deal of water, you see. Perhaps I ought to have jumped out on the bank and come across to you, leaving my skiff in the river, for if I had upset I couldn't have helped you much.

However, I followed my instinct, which was to come the quickest way. I thought, too, that if I could manage to get down in the boat I should be of more use. I'm very glad I did it," he added after a moment's pause; "I'm really proud of having come down that place."

"So ain't I," said Tom with a laugh, in which the other joined.

"But now you're getting chilled," and he turned from the lasher and looked at Tom's chattering jaws.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'm used to being wet."

But you may just as well be comfortable if you can. Here's this rough jersey which I use instead of a coat; pull off that wet cotton affair, and put it on, and then we'll get to work, for we have plenty to do."

After a little persuasion Tom did as he was bid, and got into the great woollen garment, which was very comforting; and then the two set about getting their skiffs back into the main stream. This was comparatively easy as to the lighter skiff which was soon baled out and hauled by main force on to the bank, carried across and launched again. The tub gave them much more trouble, for she was quite full of water and very heavy; but after twenty minutes or so of hard work, during which the mutual respect of the labourers for the strength and willingness of each other was much increased, she also lay in the main stream leaking considerably, but otherwise not much the worse for her adventure.

"Now what do you mean to do?" said the stranger. "I don't think you can pull home in her. One doesn't know how much she may be damaged. She may sink in the lock, or play any prank."

"But what am I to do with her?"

"Oh, you can leave her at Sandford and walk up, and send one of Hall's boys for her. Or, if you like, I will tow her up behind my skiff."

Won't your skiff carry two?"

"Yes; if you like to come I'll take you, but you must sit, very quiet."

"Can't we go down to Sandford first and have a glass of ale? What time is it? - the water has stopped my watch."

"A quarter-past three. I have about twenty minutes to spare."

"Come along then", said Tom; "but will you let me pull your skiff down to Sandford? I resolved to pull to Sandford to-day, and don't like to give it up."

"By all means, if you like," said the other, with a smile; "jump in, and I'll walk along the bank."

"I Thank you," said Tom, hurrying into the skiff, in which he completed the remaining quarter of a mile, while the owner walked by the side, watching him.

They met on the bank at the little inn by Sandford lock, and had a glass of ale, over which Tom confessed that it was the first time he had ever navigated a skiff by himself, and gave a detailed account of his adventures, to the great amusement of his companion. And by the time they rose to go, it was settled, at Tom's earnest request, that he should pull the sound skiff up, while his companion sat in the stern and coached him. The other consented very kindly, merely stipulating that he himself should take the sculls, if it should prove that Tom could not pull them up in time for hall dinner. So they started, and took the tub in tow when they came up to it. Tom got on famously under his new tutor, who taught him to get forward, and open his knees properly, and throw his weight on to the sculls at the beginning of the stroke. He managed even to get into Iffley lock on the way up without fouling the gates, and was then and there complimented on his progress. Whereupon, as they sat, while the lock filled, Tom poured out his thanks to his tutor for his instruction, which had been given so judiciously that, while he was conscious of improving at every stroke, he did not feel that the other was asserting any superiority over him; and so, though more humble than at the most disastrous period of his downward voyage, he was getting into a better temper every minute.

It is a great pity that some of our instructors in more important matters than sculling will not take a leaf out of the same book. Of course, it is more satisfactory to one's own self-love, to make every one who comes to one to learn, feel that he is a fool, and we wise men; but, if our object is to teach well and usefully what we know ourselves there cannot be a worse method. No man, however, is likely to adopt it, so long as he is conscious that he has anything himself to learn from his pupils; and as soon as he has arrived at the conviction that they can teach him nothing - that it is henceforth to be all give and no take - the sooner he throws up his office of teacher the better it will be for himself, his pupils, and his country whose sons he is misguiding.

On their way up, so intent were they on their own work that, it, was not until shouts of "Hullo, Brown! how did you get there? Why, you said you were not going down to-day," greeted them just above the Gut, that they were aware of the presence of the freshmen's four-oar of St. Ambrose College, which had with some trouble succeeded in overtaking them.

"I said I wasn't going down with you," shouted Tom, grinding away harder than ever, that they might witness and wonder at his prowess.

"Oh, I dare say! Whose skiff are you towing up? I believe you've been upset."

Tom made no reply, and the four-oar floundered on ahead.

"Are you at St. Ambrose's?" asked his sitter, after a minute.

"Yes; that's my treadmill, that four-oar. I've been down it almost every day since I came up, and very poor fun it is. So I thought today I would go on my own hook, and couldn't make a butter hand of it. And I have too, I know, thanks to you."

The other made no remark but a little shade came over his face. He had had no chance of making out Tom's college, as the new cap which would have betrayed him had disappeared in the lasher. He himself wore a glazed straw hat, which was of no college; so that up to this time neither of them had known to what college the other the other belonged.

When they landed at Hall's Tom was at once involved in a wrangle with the manager as to the amount of damage done to the tub; which the latter refused to assess before he knew what had happened to it; while our hero vigorously and with reason maintained that if he knew his business it could not matter what had happened to the boat. There she was, and he must say whether she was better or worse than when she started. In the middle of which dialogue his new acquaintance touching his arm, said,

"You can leave my jersey with your own things; I shall get it tomorrow," and then disappeared.

Tom, when he had come to terms with his adversary, ran upstairs expecting to find the other, and meaning to tell his name, and find out who it was that had played the good Samaritan by him. He was much annoyed when he found the coast clear, and dressed in a grumbling humour.

"I wonder why he should have gone off so quick. He might just as well have stayed and walked up with me," thought he. "Let me see, though; didn't he say I was to leave his jersey in our room, with my own things? Why, perhaps he is a St. Ambrose man himself. But then he would have told me so, surely. I don't remember to have seen his face in chapel or hall; but then there are such a lot of new faces, and he may not sit near me. However, I mean to find him out before long, whoever he may be."

With which resolve Tom crossed in the punt into Christ's Church meadow, and strolled college-wards, feeling that he had had a good hard afternoon's exercise, and was much the better for it. He might have satisfied his curiosity at once by simply asking the manager who it was that had arrived with him; and this occurred to him before he got home, whereat he felt satisfied, but would not go back then, as it was so near hall time. He would be sure to remember it the first thing to-morrow.

As it happened, however, he had not so long to wait for the information which he needed; for scarcely had he sat down in hall and ordered his dinner, when he caught sight of his boating acquaintance, who walked in habited in a gown which Tom took for a scholar's. He took his seat at a little table in the middle of the hall, near the bachelors' table, but quite away from the rest of the undergraduates, at which sat four or five other men in similar gowns. He either did not or would not notice the looks of recognition which Tom kept firing at him until he, had taken his seat.

"Who is that man that has just come in, do you know?" said Tom to his next neighbour, a second-term man.

"Which?" said the other, looking up.

"That one over at the little table in the middle of the hall, with the dark whiskers. There, he has just turned rather from us, and put his arm on the table."

"Oh, his name is Hardy."

"Do you know him?"

"No; I don't think anybody does. They say he is a clever fellow, but a very queer one."

"Why does he sit at that table?"

"He is one of our servitors, they all sit there together."

"Oh," said Tom, not much wiser for the information, but resolved to waylay Hardy as soon as the hall was over,

and highly delighted to find that they, were after all of the same college; for he had already begun to find out, that however friendly you may be with out-college men, you must live chiefly with those of your own. But now his scout brought his dinner, and he fell to with the appetite of a freshman on ample commons.

CHAPTER XIII

[In which our hero first takes part in a bumping race and makes his mark]

"What's the time, Smith?"

"Half-past three, old fellow," answered Diogenes, looking at his watch.

"I never knew a day go so slowly," said Tom; "isn't it time to go down to the boats?"

"Not by two hours and more, old fellow - can't you take a book, or something to keep you quiet? You won't be fit for anything by six o'clock, if you go on worrying like this."

And so Diogenes turned himself to his flute, and blew away to all appearances as composedly as if it had been the first week of term though, if the truth must be told, it was all he could do not to get up and wander about in a feverish and distracted state, for Tom's restlessness infected him.

Diogenes's whole heart was in the college boat: and so, though he had pulled dozens of races in his time, he was almost as nervous as a freshman on this the first day of the races. Tom, all unconscious of the secret discomposure of the other, threw himself into a chair and looked at him with wonder and envy. The flute went "toot, toot, toot," till he could stand it no longer. So he got up and went to the window, and, leaning out, looked up and down the street for some minutes in a purposeless sort of fashion, staring hard at everybody and everything, but unconscious all the time that he was doing so. He would not have been able, in fact, to answer Diogenes a word, had that worthy inquired of him what he had seen, when he presently drew in his head and returned to his fidgety ramblings about the room.

"How hot the sun is! but there's a stiff breeze from the south-east, I hope it will go down before the evening, don't you?"

"Yes, this wind will make it very rough below the Gut. Mind you feather high now at starting."

"I hope to goodness I sha'n't catch a crab," said Tom.

"Don't think about it, old fellow; that's your best plan."

"But I can't think of anything else," said Tom.

"What the deuce is the good of telling a fellow not to think about it?"

Diogenes apparently had nothing particular to reply, for he put his flute to his mouth again; and at the sound of the "toot, toot," Tom caught up his gown, and fled away into the quadrangle.

The crew had had their early dinner of steaks and chops, stale bread, and a glass and a half of old beer a piece at two o'clock, in the Captain's rooms. The current theory of training at that time was - as much meat as you could eat, the more underdone the better, and the smallest amount of drink upon which you could manage to live. Two pints in the twenty-four hours was all that most boats' crews that pretended to train at all were allowed, and for the last fortnight it had been the nominal allowance of the St. Ambrose crew. The discomfort of such a diet in the hot summer months, when you were at the same time taking regular and violent exercise, was something very serious. Outraged human nature rebelled against it; and though they did not admit it in public, there were very few men who did not rush to their water-bottles for relief, more or less often, according to the development of their bumps of conscientiousness and obstinacy. To keep to the diet at all strictly, involved a very respectable amount of physical endurance. Our successors have found out the un wisdom of this, as of other old superstitions; and that in order to get a man into training for a boat-race now-a-days, it is not of the first importance to keep him in a constant state of consuming thirst, and the restlessness of body and sharpness of temper which thirst generally induces. Tom appreciated the honour of being in the boat in his first year so keenly, that he had almost managed to keep to his training allowance, and consequently, now that the eventful day had arrived, was in a most uncomfortable frame of body and disagreeable frame of mind. He fled away from Diogenes' flute, but found no rest. He tried Drysdale. That hero was lying on his back on his sofa playing with Jack, and only increased Tom's thirst and soured his temper by the viciousness of his remarks on boating, and everything and person connected therewith; above all, on Miller, who had just come up, had steered them the day and pronounced the crew generally, and Drysdale in "not half trained."

Blake's oak was sported, as usual. Tom looked in at the door, but found him hard at work reading, and so carried himself off; and, after a vain hunt after others of the crew, and even trying to sit down and read, first a novel, then a play of Shakespeare, with no success whatever, wandered away out of the college, and found himself in five minutes, by a natural and irresistible attraction, on the university barge.

There were half-a-dozen men or so reading the papers, and a group or two discussing the coming races. Amongst other things, the chances of St. Ambrose's making a bump the first night were weighed. Every one joined in praising the stroke, but there were great doubts whether the crew could live up to it. Tom carried himself on to the top of the barge to get out of hearing, for listening made his heart beat and his throat drier than ever. He stood on the top and looked right away down to the Gut, the strong wind blowing his gown about. Not even a pair oar was to be seen; the great event of the evening made the river a solitude at this time of day. Only one or two skiffs were coming home, impelled by reading men, who took their constitutionals on the water, and were coming in to be in time for afternoon chapel. The fastest and best of these soon came near enough for Tom to recognise Hardy's stroke; so he left the barge and went down to meet the servitor at his landing, and accompanied him to the St. Ambrose dressing-room.

"Well, how do you feel for the race tonight?" said Hardy, as he dried his neck and face, which he had been sluicing with cold water, looking as hard and bright as a racer on Derby day.

"Oh, wretched! I'm afraid I shall break down," said Tom, and poured out some of his doubts and miseries.

Hardy soon comforted him greatly; and by the time they were half across Christchurch meadow he was quite in heart again. For he knew how well Hardy understood rowing, and what a sound judge he was; and it was therefore cheering to hear that he thought they were certainly the second best, if not the best boat on the river; and that they would be sure to make some bumps unless they had accidents.

"But that's just what I fear so," said Tom. "I'm afraid I shall make some awful blunder."

"Not you!" said Hardy; "only remember. Don't you fancy you can pull the boat by yourself, and go trying to do it. That's where young oars fail. If you keep thorough good time you'll be pretty sure to be doing your share of work. Time is everything, almost."

"I'll be sure to think of that," said Tom; and they entered St. Ambrose just as the chapel bell was going down; and he went to chapel and then to hall, sitting by and talking for companionship while the rest dined.

And so at last the time slipped away, and the Captain and Miller mustered them at the gates and walked off to the boats. A dozen other crews were making their way in the same direction, and half the undergraduates of Oxford streamed along with them. The banks of the river were crowded; and the punts plied rapidly backwards and forwards, carrying loads of men over to the Berkshire side. The university barge, and all the other barges, were decked with flags, and the band was playing lively airs as the St. Ambrose crew reached the scene of action. No time was lost in the dressing-room, and in two minutes they were all standing in flannel trousers and silk jerseys at the landing-place.

"You had better keep your jackets on," said the Captain; "we sha'n't be off yet."

"There goes Brazen-nose!"

"They look like work, don't they!"

"The black and yellow seems to slip along so fast. They're no end of good colours. I wish our new boat was black!"

"Hang her colours, if she's only stiff in the back, and don't dip!"

"Well, she didn't dip yesterday; at least, the men on the bank said so."

"There go Baliol, and Oriel, and University."

"By Jove, we shall be late! Where's Miller?"

"In the shed, getting the boat out.

Look, here's Exeter!" The talk of the crew was silenced for the moment as every man looked eagerly at the Exeter boat. The Captain nodded to Jervis with a grim smile as they paddled gently by.

Then the talk began again.

"How do you think she goes?"

"Not so badly. They're very strong in the middle of the boat!"

"Not a bit of it: it's all lumber."

"You'll see. They're better trained than we are. They look as fine as stars."

"So they ought. They've pulled seven miles to our five for the last month, I'm sure."

"Then we shan't bump them."

"Why not?"

"Don't you know that the value of products consists in the quantity of labour which goes to produce them? Product pace over course from Iffley up. Labour expended, Exeter, 7; St. Ambrose, 5. You see it is not in the nature of things that we should bump them - Q.E.D."

"What moonshine! as if ten miles behind their stroke are worth two behind Jervis!"

"My dear fellow, it isn't my moonshine; you must settle the matter with the philosophers. I only apply a universal law to a particular case."

Tom, unconscious of the pearls of economic lore which were being poured out for the benefit of the crew, was watching the Exeter eight as it glided away towards the Cherwell. He thought they seemed to keep horribly good time.

"Halloa, Drysdale! look, there's Jack going across in one of the punts."

"Of course he is. You don't suppose he wouldn't go down to see the race."

"Why won't Miller let us start? Almost all the boats are off."

"There's plenty of time. We may just as well be up here as dawdling about the bank at Iffley."

"We sha'n't go down till the last; Miller never lets us get out down below."

"Well, come; here's the boat, at last."

The new boat now emerged from its shed, guided steadily to where they were standing by Miller and a waterman.

Then the coxswain got out and called for bow, who stepped forward.

"Mind how you step now, there are no bottom boards, remember," said Miller.

"Shall I take my jacket?"

"Yes; you had better all go down in jackets in this wind. I've sent a man down to bring them back.

Now, two."

"Aye, aye!" said Drysdale, stepping forward.

Then came Tom's turn, and soon the boat was manned.

"Now," said Miller, taking his place, "are all your stretchers right?"

"I should like a little more grease for my rollocks."

"I'm taking some down; we'll put it on down below. Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"Then push her off - gently."

The St. Ambrose boat was almost the last, so there were no punts in the way, or other obstructions; and they swung steadily down past the university barge, the top of which was already covered with spectators. Every man in the boat felt as if the eyes of Europe were on him, and pulled in his very best form. Small groups of gownsmen were scattered along the bank in Christchurch meadow, chiefly dons, who were, really interested in the races, but, at that time of day, seldom liked to display enthusiasm enough to cross the water and go down to the starting place. These sombre groups were lighted up here and there by the dresses of a few ladies, who were walking up and down, and watching the boats. At the mouth of the Cherwell were moored two punts, in which reclined at their ease some dozen young gentlemen, smoking; several of these were friends of Drysdale's, and hailed him as the boat, passed them.

"What a fool I am to be here!" he, grumbled, in an under tone, casting an envious glance at the punts in their comfortable berth, up under the banks, and out of the wind.

"I say, Brown, don't you wish we were well past this on the way up?"

"Silence in the bows!" shouted Miller.

"You devil, how I hate you!" growled Drysdale, half in jest and half in earnest, as they sped along under the willows.

Tom got more comfortable at every stroke, and by the time they reached the Gut began to hope that he should not have a fit, or lose all his strength just at the start, or cut a crab, or come to some other unutterable grief, the fear of which had been haunting him all day.

"Here they are at last! - come along now - keep up with them," said Hardy to Grey, as the boat neared the Gut; and the two trotted along downwards, Hardy watching the crew, and Grey watching him.

"Hardy, how eager you look!"

"I'd give twenty pounds to be going to pull in the race."

Grey shambled on in silence by the side of his big friend, and wished he could understand what it was that moved him so.

As the boat shot into the Gut from under the cover of the Oxfordshire bank, the wind caught the bows.

"Feather high, now," shouted Miller;

and then added in a low voice to the Captain, "It will be ticklish work, starting in this wind."

"Just as bad for all the other boats," answered the Captain.

"Well said, old philosopher!" said Miller. "It's a comfort to steer you; you never make a fellow nervous. I wonder if you ever felt nervous yourself, now?"

"Can't say," said the Captain. "Here's our post; we may as well turn."

"Easy, bow side - now two and four, pull her round - back water, seven and five!" shouted the coxswain; and the boat's head swung round, and two or three strokes took her into the bank.

Jack instantly made a convulsive attempt to board, but was sternly repulsed, and tumbled backwards into the water.

Hark! - the first gun.

The report sent Tom's heart into his mouth again. Several of the boats pushed off at once into the stream; and the crowds of men on the bank began to be agitated, as it were, by the shadow of the coming excitement. The St. Ambrose crew fingered their oars, put a last dash of grease on their rollocks, and settled their feet against the

stretchers.

"Shall we push her off?" asked bow.

"No, I can give you another minute," said Miller, who was sitting, watch in hand, in the stern, "only be smart when I give the word."

The Captain turned on his seat, and looked up the boat, His face was quiet, but full of confidence, which seemed to pass from him into the crew. Tom felt calmer and stronger, as he met his eye.

"Now mind, boys, don't quicken," he said, cheerily; "four short strokes, to get way on her, and then steady.

Here, pass up the lemon."

And he took a sliced lemon out of his pocket, put a small piece into his own mouth, and then handed it to Blake, who followed his example, and passed it on. Each man took a piece; and just as bow had secured the end, Miller called out -

"Now, jackets off, and get her head out steadily."

The jackets were thrown on shore, and gathered up by the boatmen in attendance. The crew poised their oars, No. 2 pushing out her head, and the Captain doing the same for the stern.

Miller took the starting-rope in his hand.

"How the wind catches her stern," he said;

"here, pay out the rope one of you.

No, not you - some fellow with a strong hand.

Yes, you'll do," he went on, as Hardy stepped down the bank and took hold of the rope;

"let me have it foot by foot as I want it. Not too quick; make the most of it - that'll do.

Two and three just dip your oars in to give her way."

The rope paid out steadily, and the boat settled to her place. But now the wind rose again, and the stern drifted towards the bank.

"You must back her a bit, Miller, and keep her a little further out, or our oars on stroke side will catch the bank."

"So I see; curse the wind. Back her, one stroke all. Back her, I say!" shouted Miller.

It is no easy matter to get a crew to back her an inch just now, particularly as there are in her two men who have never rowed a race before, except in the Torpids, and one who has never rowed a race, in his life.

However, back she comes; the starting rope slackens in Miller's left hand, and the stroke, unshipping his oar, pushes the stern gently out.

There goes the second gun!

One short minute more, and we are off.

Short minute, indeed! You wouldn't say so if you were in the boat, with your heart in your mouth, and trembling all over like a man with the palsy.

Those sixty seconds before the starting gun in your first race - why, they are like a life time.

"By Jove, we are drifting in again," said Miller, in horror.

The Captain looked grim, but said nothing; it was too late now for him to be unshipping again.

"Here, catch hold of the long boat-hook, and fend her off."

Hardy, to whom this was addressed, seized the boat-hook, and, standing with one foot in the water, pressed the end of the boat-hook against the gunwhale, at the full stretch of his arm, and so, by main force, kept the stern out.

There was just room for stroke oars to dip, and that was all.

The starting rope was as taut as a harp-string; will Miller's left hand hold out?

It is an awful moment.

But the coxswain, though almost dragged backwards off his seat, is equal to the occasion.

He holds his watch in his right hand with the tiller rope.

"Eight seconds more only.

Look out for the flash. Remember, all eyes in the boat."



*The start for "The Eights" at Iffley. Hardy to the rescue.
[The story given applied to 1842, but 1845 was the first year in which Oriel used outriggers.]*

There it comes, at last – the flash of the starting gun.

Long before the sound of the report can roll up the river, the whole pent-up life and energy which has been held in leash, as it were, for the last six minutes, is let loose, and breaks away with a bound and a dash which he who has felt it will remember for his life, but the like of which, will he ever feel again?

The starting ropes drop from the coxswain's hands, the oars flash into the water, and gleam on the feather, the spray flies from them, and the boats leap forward.

The crowds on the bank scatter, and rush along, each keeping as near as it may be to its own boat.

Some of the men on the towing path, some on the very edge of it, often in, the water – some slightly in advance, as if they could help to drag their boat forward – some behind, where they can see the pulling better – but all at full speed, in wild excitement, and shouting at the top of their voices to those on whom the honour of the college is laid.

"Well pulled all!"

"Pick her up there, five!"

"You're gaining every stroke!"

"Time in the bows!"

"Bravo, St. Ambrose!"

On they rushed by the side of the boats, jostling one another, stumbling, struggling, and panting along.

For a quarter of a mile along the bank the glorious maddening hurly-burly extends, and rolls up the side of the stream.

For the first ten strokes Tom was in too great fear of making a mistake to feel or hear or see.

His whole soul was glued to the back of the man before him, his one thought to keep time, and get his strength into the stroke.

But as the crew settled down into the well-known long sweep, what we may call consciousness returned; and while every muscle in his body was straining, and his chest heaved, and his heart leapt, every nerve seemed to be gathering new life, and his senses to wake into unwonted acuteness.

He caught the scent of the wild thyme in the air, and found room in his brain to wonder how it could have got there, as he had never seen the plant near the river, or smelt it before.

Though his eye never wondered from the back of Diogenes, he seemed to see all things at once.

The boat behind, which seemed to be gaining – it was all he could do to prevent himself from quickening on the stroke as he fancied that – the eager face of Miller, with his compressed lips, and eyes fixed so earnestly ahead that Tom could almost feel the glance passing over his right shoulder; the flying banks and the shouting crowd; see them with his bodily eyes he could not, but he knew nevertheless that Grey had been upset and nearly rolled down the bank into the water in the first hundred yards, that Jack was bounding and scrambling and barking along by the very edge of the stream; above all, he was just as well aware as if he had been looking at it, of a stalwart form

in cap and gown, bounding along, brandishing the long boat-hook, and always keeping just opposite the boat; and amid all the Babel of voices, and the dash and pulse of the stroke, and the labouring of his own breathing, he heard Hardy's voice coming to him again and again, and clear as if there had been no other sound in the air, "Steady, two! Steady! Steady! Steady!" The voice seemed to give him strength and keep him to his work. And what work it was! He had had many a hard pull in the last six weeks, but "never aught like this".

But it can't last for ever; men's muscles are not steel, or their lung's bull's hide, and hearts can't go on pumping a hundred miles an hour long without bursting. The St. Ambrose's boat is well away from the boat behind, there is a great gap between the accompanying crowds; and now, as they near the Gut, she hangs for a moment or two in hand, though the roar from the bank grows louder and louder, and Tom is already aware that the St. Ambrose crowd is melting into the one ahead of them. "We must be close to Exeter!"

The thought flashes into him, and it would seem into the rest of the crew at the same moment. For, all at once, the strain seems taken off their arms again; there is no more drag; she springs to the stroke as she did at the start; and Miller's face, which had darkened for a few seconds, lightens up again. Miller's face and attitude are a study. Coiled up into the smallest possible space, his chin almost resting on his knees, his hands close to his sides, firmly but lightly feeling the rudder, as a good horseman handles the mouth of a free-going hunter, - if a coxswain could make a bump by his own exertions, surely he would do it. No sudden jerks of the St. Ambrose rudder will you see, watch as you will from the bank; the boat never hangs through fault of his, but easily and gracefully rounds every point. "You're gaining! You're gaining!" he now and then mutters to the Captain, who responds with a wink, keeping his breath for other matters.

Isn't he grand, the Captain, as he comes forward like lightning, stroke after stroke, his back flat, his teeth set, his whole frame working from the hips with the regularity of a machine? As the space still narrows, the eyes of the fiery little coxswain flash with excitement, but he is far too good a judge to hurry the final effort before the victory is safe in his grasp.

The two crowds are mingled now, and no mistake; and the shouts come all in a heap over the water.

"Now, St Ambrose, six strokes more."

"Now, Exeter, you're gaining; pick her up."

"Mind the Gut, Exeter."

"Bravo, St Ambrose."

The water rushes by, still eddying from the strokes of the boat ahead. Tom fancies now he can hear their oars and the workings of their rudder, and the voice of their coxswain.

In another moment both boats are in the Gut, and a perfect storm of shouts reaches them from the crowd, as it rushes madly off to the left to the foot-bridge, amidst which

"Oh, well steered, well steered, St. Ambrose!" is the prevailing cry.

Then Miller, motionless as a statue till now, lifts his right hand and whirls the tassel round his head;

"Give it her now, boys; six strokes and we are into them."

Old Jervis lays down that great broad back, and lashes his oar through the water with the might of a giant, the crew catch him up in another stroke, the tight new boat answers to the spurt, and Tom feels a little shock behind him and then a grating sound, as Miller shouts,

"Unship oars bow and three,"

and the nose of the St. Ambrose boat glides quietly up the side of the Exeter, till it touches their stroke oar.

"Take care where you're coming to." It is the coxswain of the bumped boat who speaks.

Tom, looking round, finds himself within a foot or two of him; and, being utterly unable to contain his joy, and yet unwilling to exhibit it before the eyes of a gallant rival, turns away towards the shore, and begins telegraphing to Hardy.

"Now then, what are you at there in the bows? Cast her off quick. Come, look alive! Push across at once out of the way of the other boats."

"I congratulate you, Jervis," says the Exeter stroke, as the St. Ambrose boat shoots past him.

"Do it again next race and I sha'n't care."

"We were within three lengths of Brazen-nose when we bumped," says the all-observant Miller in a low voice.

"All right," answers the Captain; "Brazen-nose isn't so strong as usual. We sha'n't have much trouble there, but a tough job up above, I take it."

"Brazen-nose was better steered than Exeter."

"They muffed it in the Gut, eh?" said the Captain. "I thought so by the shouts."

"Yes, we were pressing them a little down below, and their coxswain kept looking over his shoulder. He was in the Gut before he knew it, and had to pull his left hand hard or they would have fouled the Oxfordshire corner. That

stopped their way, and in we went."

"Bravo; and how well we started too."

"Yes, thanks to that Hardy. It was touch and go though; I couldn't have held the rope two seconds more."

"How did our fellows work; she dragged a good deal below the Gut."

Miller looks somewhat serious, but even he cannot be finding fault just now. For the first step is gained, the first victory won; and, as Homer sometimes nods, so Miller relaxes the sternness of his rule. The crew, as soon as they have found their voices again, laugh and talk, and answer the congratulations of their friends, as the boat slips along close to the towing-path on the Berks side,

"easy all,"

almost keeping pace nevertheless with the lower boats, which are racing up under the willows on the Oxfordshire side.

Jack, after one or two feints, makes a frantic bound into the water, and is hauled dripping into the boat by Drysdale, unchid by Miller, but to the intense disgust of Diogenes, whose pantaloons and principles are alike outraged by the proceeding. He - the Cato of the oar - scorns to relax the strictness of his code even after victory won. Neither word nor look does he cast to the exulting St. Ambrosians on the bank; a twinkle in his eye, and a subdued chuckle or two, alone betray that though an oarsman he is mortal. Already he revolves in his mind the project of an early walk under a few pea-coats, not being quite satisfied (conscientious old boy) that he tried his stretcher enough in that final spurt, and thinking that there must be an extra pound of flesh on him somewhere or other which did the mischief.

"I say, Brown," said Drysdale, "how do you feel?"

"All right," said Tom; "I never felt jollier in my life."

"By Jove, though, it was an awful grind; didn't you wish yourself well out of it below the Gut?"

"No, nor you either."

"Didn't I? I was awfully baked, my throat is like a limekiln yet. What did you think about?"

"Well, about keeping time, I think," said Tom, laughing, "but I can't remember much!"

"I only kept on by thinking how I hated those devils in the Exeter boat, and how done up they must be, and hoping their No. 2 felt like having a fit."

At this moment they came opposite the Cherwell. The leading boat was just passing the winning-post, off the university barge, and the band struck up the "Conquering Hero," with a crash. And while a mighty sound of shouts, murmurs, and music went up into the evening sky, Miller shook the tiller-ropes again, the Captain shouted, "Now then, pick her up," and the St. Ambrose boat shot up, between the swarming banks at racing pace to her landing-place, the lion of the evening.

Dear readers of the gentler sex! you, I know, will pardon the enthusiasm which stirs our pulses, now in sober middle age, as we call up again the memories of this the most exciting sport of our boyhood (for we were but boys then, after all). You will pardon, though I fear hopelessly unable to understand, the above sketch; your sons and brothers will tell you, it could not have been made less technical.

For you, male readers, who have never handled an oar, - what shall I say to you? You at least, I hope, in some way - in other contests of one kind or another - have felt as we felt, and have striven as we strove. You ought to understand and sympathize with us in all our boating memories. Oh, how fresh and sweet they are! Above all, that one of the gay little Henley town, the carriage-crowded bridge, the noble river reach, the giant poplars, which mark the critical point of the course - the roaring column of "undergrads," light blue and dark purple, Cantab and Oxonian, alike and yet how different, - hurling along together, and hiding the towing path - the clang of Henley church-bells - the cheering, the waving of embroidered handkerchiefs, and glancing of bright eyes, the ill-concealed pride of fathers, the open delight and exultation of mothers and sisters - the levée in the town-hall when the race was rowed, the great cup full of champagne (inn-champagne, but we were not critical) - the chops, the steaks, the bitter beer - but we run into anti-climax - remember, we were boys then, and bear with us if you cannot sympathize.

And you, old companions, *thranitai*, benchers (of the gallant eight-oar), now seldom met, but never-forgotten, lairds, squires, soldiers, merchants, lawyers, grave J.P.'s, graver clergymen, gravest bishops (for of two bishops at least does our brotherhood boast), I turn for a moment, from my task, to reach to you the right hand of fellowship from these pages, and empty the solemn pewter-trophy of hard-won victory - to your health and happiness. Surely none the worse Christians and citizens are ye for your involuntary failing of muscularity!

CHAPTER XIV

A CHANGE IN THE CREW AND WHAT CAME OF IT

It was on a Saturday that the St. Ambrose boat made the first bump, described in our last chapter.

On the next Saturday, the day-week after the first success, at nine o'clock in the evening, our hero was at the door of Hardy's rooms. He just stopped for one moment outside, with his hand on the lock, looking a little puzzled, but withal pleased, and then opened the door and entered. The little estrangement which there had been between them for some weeks, had passed away since the races had begun. Hardy had thrown himself into the spirit of them so thoroughly, that he had not only regained all his hold on Tom, but had warmed up the whole crew in his favour, and had mollified the martinet Miller himself. It was he who had managed the starting-rope in every race, and his voice from the towing-path had come to be looked upon as a safe guide for clapping on or rowing steady. Even Miller, autocrat as he was, had come to listen for it, in confirmation of his own judgment, before calling on the crew for the final effort.

So Tom had recovered his old footing in the servitor's rooms; and when he entered on the night in question did so with the bearing of an intimate friend. Hardy's tea commons were on one end of the table as usual, and he was sitting at the other poring over a book. Tom marched straight up to him, and leant over his shoulder.

"What, here you are at the perpetual grind," he said. "Come, shut up, and give me some tea; I want to talk to you."

Hardy looked up with a grim smile.

"Are you up to a cup of tea?" he said; "look here, I was just reminded of you fellows, Shall I construe for you?"

He pointed with his finger to the open page of the book he was reading. It was the *Knights of Aristophanes*, and Tom, leaning over his shoulder, read, -

"chata chathixion malachoz ina meh tribehz tehn en Salamint, etc."

After meditating a moment, he burst out,

"You hard-hearted old ruffian! I come here for sympathy, and the first thing you do is to poke fun at me out of your wretched classics. I've a good mind to clear out and not do my errand."

"What's a man to do?" said Hardy. "I hold that it's always better to laugh at fortune. What's the use of repining? You have done famously, and second is a capital place on the river!"

"Second be hanged!" said Tom. "We mean to be first."

"Well, I hope we may!" said Hardy. "I can tell you nobody felt it more than I - not even old Diogenes - when you didn't make your bump to-night."

"Now you talk like a man, and a Saint Ambrosian," said Tom. "But what do you think? Shall we ever catch them?" and, so saying, he retired to a chair opposite the tea-things.

"No," said Hardy "I don't think we ever shall. I'm very sorry to say it, but they are an uncommonly strong lot, and we have a weak place or two in our crew. I don't think we can do more than we did to-night-at least with the present crew."

"But if we could get a little more strength we might?"

"Yes, I think so. Jervis's stroke is worth two of theirs. A very little more powder would do it."

"Then we must have a little more powder."

"Ay, but how are we to get it? Who can you put in?"

"You!" said Tom, sitting up. "There, now, that's just what I am come about. Drysdale is to go out, Will you pull next race? They all want you to row."

"Do they?" said Hardy, quietly (but Tom could see that his eye sparkled at the notion, though he was too proud to show how much he was pleased); "then they had better come and ask me themselves".

"Well, you cantankerous old party, they're coming, I can tell you!" said Tom, in great delight.

"The Captain just sent me on to break ground, and will be here directly himself. I say now, Hardy," he went on, "don't you say no. I've set my heart upon it. I'm sure we shall bump them if you pull."

"I don't know that," said Hardy, getting up, and beginning to make tea, to conceal the excitement he was in at the idea of rowing; "you see I'm not in training."

"Gammon," said Tom, "you're always in training, and you know it."

"Well," said Hardy, "I can't be in worse than Drysdale. He has been of no use above the Gut this last three nights."

"That's just what Miller says" said Tom, "and here comes the Captain."

There was a knock at the door while he spoke, and Jervis and Miller entered. Tom was in a dreadful fidget for the next twenty minutes, and may best be compared to an enthusiastic envoy negotiating a treaty, and suddenly finding his action impeded by the arrival of his principals.

Miller was very civil, but not pressing; he seemed to have come more with a view of talking over the present state of things, and consulting upon them, than of enlisting a recruit.

Hardy met him more than halfway, and speculated on all sorts of possible issues, without a hint of volunteering himself, But presently Jervis, who did not understand finessing, broke in, and asked Hardy, point blank, to pull in the next race; and when he pleaded want of training, overruled him at once by saying that there was no better training than sculling.

So in half an hour all was settled. Hardy was to pull five in the next race, Diogenes was to take Blake's place, at No.

7, and Blake to take Drysdale's oar at No. 2. The whole crew were to go for a long training walk the next day, Sunday, in the afternoon; to go down to Abingdon on Monday, just to get into swing in their new places, and then on Tuesday to abide the fate of war.

They had half an hour's pleasant talk over Hardy's tea, and then separated. "I always told you he was our man," said the Captain to Miller, as they walked together to the gates; "we want strength, and he is as strong as a horse. You must have seen him sculling yourself. There isn't his match on the river to my mind!"

"Yes, I think he'll do," replied Miller; "at any rate he can't be worse than Drysdale."

As for Tom and Hardy, it may safely be said that no two men in Oxford went to bed in better spirits that Saturday night than they two.

And now to explain how it came about that Hardy was wanted. Fortune had smiled upon the St. Ambrosians in the two races which succeeded the one in which they had bumped Exeter. They had risen two more places without any very great trouble. Of course, the constituencies on the bank magnified their powers and doings. There never was such a crew, they were quite safe to be head of the river, nothing could live against their pace. So the young oars in the boat swallowed all they heard, thought themselves the finest fellows going, took less and less pains to keep up their condition, and when they got out of ear-shot of Jervis and Diogenes, were ready to bet two to one that they would bump Oriel the next night, and keep easily head of the river for the rest of the races. Saturday night came, and brought with it a most useful though unpalatable lesson to the St. Ambrosians. The Oriel boat was manned chiefly by old oars, seasoned in many a race, and not liable to panic when hard pressed. They had a fair though not a first-rate stroke, and a good coxswain; experts remarked that they were rather too heavy for their boat, and that she dipped a little when they put on anything like a severe spurt; but on the whole they were by no means the sort of crew you could just run into hand over hand. So Miller and Diogenes preached, and so the Ambrosians found out to their cost.

They had the pace of the other boat, and gained as usual a boat's length before the Gut; but, first those two fatal corners were passed, and then other well-remembered spots where former bumps had been made, and still Miller made no sign; on the contrary, he looked gloomy and savage. The St. Ambrosian shouts from the shore too changed from the usual exultant peals into something like a quaver of consternation, while the air was rent with the name and laudations of "little Oriel."

Long before the Cherwell Drysdale was completely baked (he had played truant the day before and dined at the Weirs, where he had imbibed much dubious hock), but he from old habit managed to keep time. Tom and the other young oars got flurried, and quickened; the boat dragged, there was no life left in her, and, though they managed just to hold their first advantage, could not put her a foot nearer the stern of the Oriel boat, which glided past the winning-post a clear boat's length ahead of her pursuers, and with a crew much less distressed.

Such races must tell on strokes; and even Jervis, who had pulled magnificently throughout, was very much done at the close, and leant over his oar with a swimming in his head, and an approach to faintness, and was scarcely able to see for a minute or so.

Miller's indignation knew no bounds, but he bottled it up till he had manœuvred the crew into their dressing-room by themselves, Jervis having stopped below. Then he let out, and did not spare, them.

"They would kill their captain, whose little finger was worth the whole of them; they were disgracing the college; three or four of them had neither heart, head, nor pluck."

They all felt that this was unjust, for after all had they not brought the boat up to the second place? Poor Diogenes sat in a corner and groaned; he forgot to prefix "old fellow" to the few observations he made. Blake had great difficulty in adjusting his necktie before the glass; he merely remarked in a pause of the objurgation,

"In faith, coxswain, these be very bitter words."

Tom and most of the others were too much out of heart to resist; but at last Drysdale fired up.

"You've no right to be so savage that I can see," he said, suddenly stopping the low whistle in which he was indulging, as he sat on the corner of the table; "you seem to think No. 2 the weakest out of several weak places in the boat."

"Yes, I do," said Miller.

"Then this honourable member," said Drysdale, getting off the table, "seeing that his humble efforts are unappreciated, thinks it best for the public service to place his resignation in the hands of your coxswainship."

"Which my coxswainship is graciously pleased to accept," replied Miller.

"Hurrah for a roomy punt and a soft cushion next racing night - it's almost worth while to have been, rowing all this time, to realize the sensations I shall feel when I see you fellows passing the Cherwell on Tuesday."

"*Suave est*, it's what I'm partial to, *mari magno*, in the last reach, *a terra*, from the towing path, *alterius magnum spectare laborem*, to witness the tortures of you wretched beggars in the boat. I'm obliged to translate for Drysdale, who never learned Latin," said Blake, finishing his tie before the glass.

There was an awkward silence. Miller was chafing inwardly and running over in his mind what was to be done; and nobody else seemed quite to know what ought to happen next, when the door opened and Jervis came in.

"Congratulate me, my Captain," said Drysdale: "I'm well out of it at last."

Jervis "pished and pshaw'd" a little at hearing what had happened, but his presence acted like oil on the waters.

The moment that the resignation was named, Tom's thoughts had turned to Hardy. Now was the time - he had such confidence in the man, that the idea of getting him in for next race entirely changed the aspect of affairs to him, and made him feel as "bumptious" again as he had done in the morning. So with this idea in his head, he hung about till the Captain had made his toilet, and joined himself to him and Miller as they walked up.

"Well, what are we to do now?" said the Captain.

"That's just what you have to settle," said Miller; "you have been up all the term, and know the men's pulling better than I."

"I suppose we must press somebody from the torpid - let me see, there's Burton."

"He rolls like a porpoise," interrupted Miller, "positively impossible."

"Stewart might do, then."

"Never kept time for three strokes in his life," said Miller.

"Well, there are no better men," said the Captain.

"Then we may lay our account to stopping where we are, if we don't even lose a place," said Miller.

"Dust unto dust, what must be, must;

If you can't get crumb, you'd best eat crust" said the Captain.

"It's all very well talking coolly now," said Miller, "but you'll kill yourself trying to bump, and there are three more nights!"

"Hardy would row if you asked him, I'm sure," said Tom.

The Captain looked at Miller, who shook his head.

"I don't think it," he said; "I take him to be a shy bird that won't come to everybody's whistle. We might have had him two years ago, I believe - I wish we had."

"I always told you so," said Jervis; "at any rate let's try him. He can but say no, and I don't think he will, for you see he has been at the starting-place every night, and as keen as a freshman all the time."

"I'm sure he won't," said Tom; "I know he would give anything to pull."

"You had better go to his rooms and sound him," said the Captain; "Miller and I will follow in half an hour."

We have already heard how Tom's mission prospered.

The next day, at a few minutes before two o'clock, the St. Ambrose crew, including Hardy, with Miller (who was a desperate and indefatigable pedestrian) for leader, crossed Magdalen Bridge.

At five they returned to college, having done a little over fifteen miles fair heel and toe walking in the interval. The afternoon had been very hot, and Miller chuckled to the Captain,

"I don't think there will be much trash left in any one of them after that. That fellow Hardy is as fine as a race-horse, and, did you see, he never turned a hair all the way."

The crew dispersed to their rooms, delighted with the performance now that it was over, and feeling that they were much the better for it, though they all declared it had been harder work than any race they had yet pulled. It would have done a trainer's heart good to have seen them, some twenty minutes afterwards, dropping into hall (where they were allowed to dine on Sundays on the joint), fresh from cold baths, and looking ruddy and clear, and hard enough for anything.

Again on Monday, not a chance was lost. The St. Ambrose boat started soon after one o'clock for Abingdon. They swung steadily down the whole way, and back again to Sandford without a single spurt; Miller generally standing in the stem, and preaching above all things steadiness and time. From Sandford up, they were accompanied by half a dozen men or so, who ran up the bank watching them. The struggle for the first place on the river was creating great excitement in the rowing world, and these were some of the most keen connoisseurs, who, having heard that St. Ambrose had changed a man, were on the look-out to satisfy themselves as to how it would work. The general opinion was veering round in favour of Oriel; changes so late in the races, and at such a critical moment, were looked upon as very damaging.

Foremost amongst the runners on the bank was a wiry dark man, with sanguine complexion, who went with a peculiar long, low stride, keeping his keen eye well on the boat. Just above Kennington Island, Jervis, noticing this particular spectator for the first time, called on the crew, and, quickening his stroke, took them up the reach at racing pace. As they lay in Iffley Lock the dark man appeared above them, and exchanged a few words and a good deal of dumb show, with the Captain and Miller, and then disappeared.

From Iffley up they went steadily again. On the whole Miller seemed to be in very good spirits in the dressing-room; he thought the boat trimmed better, and went better than she had ever done before, and complimented Blake particularly for the ease with which he had changed sides.

They all went up in high spirits, calling on their way at "The Choughs" for one glass of old ale round, which Miller was graciously pleased to allow. Tom never remembered till after they were out again that Hardy had never been there before, and felt embarrassed for a moment, but it soon passed off. A moderate dinner and early to bed finished the day, and Miller was justified in his parting remark to the Captain,

"Well, if we don't win, we can comfort ourselves that we hav'n't dropped a stitch this last two days, at any rate."

Then the eventful day arose which Tom, and many another man, felt was to make or mar St. Ambrose. It was a

glorious early-summer day, without a cloud, scarcely a breath of air stirring.
 "We shall have a fair start at any rate," was the general feeling.

We have already seen what a throat-drying, nervous business, the morning of a race-day is, and must not go over the same ground more than we can help; so we will imagine the St. Ambrose boat down at the starting-place, lying close to the towing-path, just before the first gun.

There is a much greater crowd than usual opposite the two first boats. By this time most of the other boats have found their places, for there is not much chance of anything very exciting down below; so, besides the men of Oriel and St. Ambrose (who muster to-night of all sorts, the fastest of the fast and the slowest of the slow having been by this time shamed into something like enthusiasm), many of other colleges, whose boats have no chance of bumping or being bumped, flock to the point of attraction.

"Do you make out what the change is?" says a backer of Oriel to his friend in the like predicament.

"Yes, they've got a new No. 5, don't you see, and, by George, I don't like his looks," answered his friend; "awfully long and strong in the arm, and well-ribbed up. A devilish awkward customer. I shall go and try to get a hedge."

"Pooh," says the other, "did you ever know one man win a race?"

"Ay, that I have," says his friend, and walks off towards the Oriel crowd to take five to four on Oriel in half-sovereigns, if he can get it.

Now their dark friend of yesterday comes up at a trot, and pulls up close to the Captain, with whom he is evidently dear friends. He is worth looking at, being coxswain of the O.U.B. the best steerer, runner, and swimmer, in Oxford; amphibious himself and sprung from an amphibious race. His own boat is in no danger, so he has left her to take care of herself.

He is on the look-out for recruiting for the University crew, and no recruiting sergeant has a sharper eye for tile sort of stuff he requires.

"What's his name?" he says in a low tone to Jervis, giving a jerk with his head towards Hardy. "Where did you get him?"

"Hardy," answers the Captain, in the same tone, "it's his first night in the boat."

"I know that," replies the coxswain; "I never saw him row before yesterday. He's the fellow who sculls in that brown skiff, isn't he?"

"Yes, and I think he'll do; keep your eye on him."

The coxswain nods as if he were somewhat of the same mind, and examines Hardy with the eye of a connoisseur, pretty much as the judge at an agricultural show looks at the prize bull. Hardy is tightening the strap of his stretcher, and all-unconscious of the compliments which are being paid him. The great authority seems satisfied with his inspection, grins, rubs his hands, and trots off to the Oriel boat to make comparisons.

Just as the first gun is heard, Grey sidles nervously to the front of the crowd as if he wore doing something very audacious, and draws Hardy's attention, exchanging sympathizing nods with him, but saying nothing, for he knows not what to say, and then disappearing again in the crowd.

"Hallo, Drysdale, is that you?" says Blake, as they push off from the shore. "I thought you were going to take it easy in a punt."

"So I thought," said Drysdale, but I couldn't keep away, and here I am. I shall run up and mind if I see you within ten feet, and cocksure to win, I'll give a view holloa. I'll be bound you shall hear it."

"May it come speedily," said Blake, and then settled himself in his seat.

"Eyes in the boat - mind now, steady all, watch the stroke and don't quicken."

These are Miller's last words; every faculty of himself and the crew being now devoted to getting a good start This is no difficult matter, as the water is like glass, and the boat lies lightly on it, obeying the slightest dip of the oars of bow and two, who just feel the water twice or thrice in the last minute. Then, after a few moments of breathless hush on the bank the last gun is fired, and they are off.

The same scene of mad excitement ensues, only tenfold more intense, as almost the whole interest of the races is tonight concentrated on the two head boats and their fate. At every gate there is a jam, and the weaker vessels are shoved into the ditches, upset, and left unnoticed. The most active men, including the O.U.B. coxswain, shun the gates altogether, and take the big ditches in their stride, making for the long bridges, that they may get quietly over these and be safe for the best part of the race. They know that the critical point of the struggle will be near the finish.

Both boats made a beautiful start, and again as before in the first dash the St. Ambrose pace tells, and they gain their boat's length before first winds fail; then they settle down for a long steady effort. Both crews are rowing comparatively steady reserving themselves for the tug of war up above. Thus they pass the Gut, and those two treacherous corners, the scene of countless bumps, into the wider water beyond, up under the willows.

Miller's face is decidedly hopeful; he shows no sign, indeed, but you can see that he is not the same man as he was at this place in the last race. He feels that to-day the boat is full of life, and that he can call on his crew with hopes of an answer. His well-trained eye also detects that, while both crews are at full stretch, his own, instead of losing, as it did on the last night, is now gaining inch by inch on Oriel. The gain is scarcely perceptible to him; even from

the bank it is quite imperceptible; but there it is; he is surer and surer of it, as one after another the willows are left behind.

And now comes the pinch. The Oriel captain is beginning to be conscious of the fact which has been dawning on Miller, but will not acknowledge it to himself, and as his coxswain turns the boat's head gently across the stream, and makes for the Berkshire side and the goal, now full in view, he smiles grimly as he quickens his stroke; he will shake off these light-heeled gentry yet, as he did before.

Miller sees the move in a moment, and signals his captain, and the next stroke St. Ambrose has quickened also; and now there is no mistake about it, St. Ambrose is creeping up slowly but surely. The boat's length lessens to forty feet, thirty feet; surely and steadily lessens. But the race is not lost, yet; thirty feet is a short space enough to look at on the water but a good bit to pick up foot by foot in the last two or three hundred yards of a desperate struggle.

They are over, under the Berkshire side now, and there stands up the winning-post, close ahead, all but won. The distance lessens, and lessens still, but the Oriel crew stick steadily and gallantly to their work, and will fight every inch of distance to the last. The Oriel men on the bank, who are rushing along sometimes in the water, sometimes out, hoarse, furious, madly alternating between hope and despair, have no reason to be ashamed of a man in the crew.

Off the mouth of the Cherwell there is still twenty feet between them. Another minute, and it will be over one way or another. Every man in both crews is now doing his best, and no mistake; tell me which boat holds the most men who can do better than their best at a pinch, who will risk a broken blood-vessel, and I will tell you how it will end. "Hard pounding, gentlemen; let's see who will pound longest," the Duke is reported to have said at Waterloo, and won.

"Now, Tummy, lad, 'tis thou or I," Big Ben said as he came up to the last round of his hardest fight, and won.

Is there a man of that temper in either crew to-night? If so, now's his time. For both coxswains have called on their men for the last effort; Miller is whirling the tassel of his right-hand tiller rope round his head, like a wiry little lunatic; from the towing path, from Christchurch meadow, from the row of punts, from the clustered tops of the barges, comes a roar of encouragement and applause, and the band, unable to resist the impulse, breaks with a crash into the "Jolly Young Waterman," playing two bars to the second.

A bump in the Gut is nothing - a few partisans on the towing-path to cheer you, already out of breath; but up here at the very finish, with all Oxford looking on, when the prize is the headship of the river - once in a generation only do men get such a chance.

Who ever saw Jervis not up to his work? The St. Ambrose stroke is glorious. Tom had an atom of go still left in the very back of his head, and at this moment he heard Drysdale's view holloa above all the din; it seemed to give him a lift, and other men besides in the boat, for in another six strokes the gap is lessened and St. Ambrose has crept up to ten feet, and now to five from the stern of Oriel.

Weeks afterwards Hardy confided to Tom that when he heard that view holloa he seemed to feel the muscles of his arms and legs turn into steel, and did more work in the last twenty strokes than in any other forty in the earlier part of the race.

Another fifty yards and Oriel is safe, but the look on the Captain's face is so ominous that their coxswain glances over his shoulder. The bow of St. Ambrose is within two feet of their rudder. It is a moment for desperate expedients. He pulls his left tiller rope suddenly, thereby carrying the stern of his own boat out of the line of the St. Ambrose, and calls on his crew once more; they respond gallantly yet, but the rudder is against them for a moment, and the boat drags.

St. Ambrose overlaps.

"A bump, a bump," shout the St. Ambrosians on shore.

"Row on, row on," - screams Miller. He has not yet felt the electric shock, and knows he will miss his bump if the young ones slacken for a moment, A young coxswain would have gone on making shots at the stern of the Oriel boat, and so have lost.

A bump now and no mistake; the bow of the St. Ambrose boat jams the oar of the Oriel stroke, and the two boats pass the winning-post with the way that was on them when the bump was made. So near a shave was it.

Who can describe the scene on the bank? It was a hurly burly of delirious joy, in the midst of which took place a terrific combat between Jack and the Oriel dog, - a noble black bull terrier belonging to the college in general, and no one in particular - who always attended the races and felt the misfortune keenly. Luckily they were parted without worse things happening; for though the Oriel men were savage, and not disinclined for a jostle, the milk of human kindness was too strong for the moment in their adversaries. So Jack was choked off with some trouble, and the Oriel men extricated themselves from the crowd, carrying off Crib, their dog, and looking straight before them into vacancy.

"Well rowed, boys," says Jervis, turning round to his crew as they lay panting on their oars.

"Well rowed, five," says Miller, who even in the hour of such a triumph is not inclined to be general in laudation.

"Well rowed, five," is echoed from the bank; it is that cunning man, the recruiting-sergeant.

"Fatally well rowed," he adds to a comrade, with whom he gets into one of the punts to cross to Christchurch meadow; we must have him in the University crew."

"I don't think you'll get him to row, from what I hear," answers the other.

"Then he must be handcuffed and carried into the boat by force," says the O.U.B. coxswain; "why is not the press gang an institution in this university?"

CHAPTER XXVII

[Commemoration Day]

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On the whole, however, making allowances for all drawbacks, those Commemoration days were the pleasantest days Tom had ever known at Oxford. He was with his uncle and cousins early and late, devising all sorts of pleasant entertainments and excursions for them, introducing all the pleasantest men of his acquaintance and taxing the resources of the college, which at such times were available for undergraduates as well as their betters, to minister to their comfort and enjoyment. And he was well repaid. There was something perfectly new to the ladies, and very piquant in the life and habits of the place. They found it very diverting to be receiving in Tom's rooms, presiding over his breakfasts and luncheons, altering the position of his furniture, and making the place look as pretty as circumstances would allow. Then there was pleasant occupation for every spare hour, and the fetes and amusements were all unlike everything but themselves. Of course the ladies at once became enthusiastic St. Ambrosians, and managed in spite of all distractions to find time for making up rosettes and bows of blue and white, in which to appear at the procession of the boats, which was the great event of the Monday. Fortunately Mr. Winter had been a good oar in his day, and had pulled in one of the first four-oars in which the University races had commenced some thirty-five years before; and Tom, who had set his mind on managing his uncle, worked him up almost into enthusiasm and forgetfulness of his maladies, so that he raised no objection to a five o'clock dinner, and an adjournment to the river almost immediately afterwards. Jervis, who was all-powerful on the river, at Tom's instigation got an arm-chair for him in the best part of the University barge, while the ladies, after walking along the bank with Tom and others of the crew, and being instructed in the colors of the different boats, and the meaning of the ceremony, took their places in the front row on the top of the barge, beneath the awning and the flags, and looked down with hundreds of other fair strangers on the scene, which certainly merited all that Tom had said of it on faith.

The barges above and below the University barge, which occupied the post of honor, were also covered with ladies, and Christchurch Meadow swarmed with gay dresses and caps and gowns. On the opposite side the bank was lined with a crowd in holiday clothes, and the punts plied across without intermission loaded with people, till the groups stretched away down the towing path in an almost continuous line to the starting place. Then one after another of the racing-boats, all painted and polished up for the occasion, with the college flags drooping at their sterns, put out and passed down to their stations, and the bands played, and the sun shone his best. And then, after a short pause of expectation, the distant bank became all alive, and the groups all turned one way, and came up the towing path again, and the foremost boat with the blue and white flag shot through the Gut and came up the reach, followed by another, and another, and another, till they were tired of counting, and the leading boat was already close to them before the last had come within sight. And the bands played up all together, and the crowd on both sides cheered as the St. Ambrose boat spurted from the Cherwell, and took the place of honor at the winning-post, opposite the University barge, and close under where they were sitting.

"Oh, look, Katie dear; here they are. There's Tom, and Mr. Hardy, and Mr. Jervis;" and Mary waved her handkerchief and clapped her hands, and was in an ecstasy of enthusiasm, in which her cousin was no whit behind her.

The gallant crew of St. Ambrose were by no means unconscious of, and fully appreciated, the compliment. Then the boats passed up one by one; and, as each came opposite to the St. Ambrose boat, the crews tossed their oars and cheered, and the St. Ambrose crew tossed their oars and cheered in return; and the whole ceremony went off in triumph, notwithstanding the casualty which occurred to one of the torpids.

The torpids, being filled with the refuse of the rowing men - generally awkward or very young oarsmen - find some difficulty in the act of tossing - no safe operation for an unsteady crew. Accordingly, the torpid in question, having sustained her crew gallantly till the saluting point, and allowed them to get their oars fairly into the air, proceeded gravely to turn over on her side, and shoot them out into the stream.

A thrill ran along the top of the barges, and a little scream or two might have been heard even through the notes of "Annie Laurie", which were filling the air at the moment; but the band played on, and the crew swam ashore, and

two of the punt-men laid hold of the boat and collected the oars, and nobody seemed to think anything of it. Katie drew a long breath.

"Are they all out, dear?" she said; "can you see? I can only count eight."

"Oh, I was too frightened to look. Let me see; yes, there are nine; there's one by himself, the little man pulling the weeds off his trousers."

And so they regained their equanimity, and soon after left the barge, and were escorted to the hall of St. Ambrose by the crew, who gave an entertainment there to celebrate the occasion, which Mr. Winter was induced to attend and pleased to approve, and which lasted till it was time to dress for the ball, for which a proper chaperone had been providentially found. And so they passed the days and nights of Commemoration.

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