

ШКОЛА БАКАНОВА ОБЪЯВЛЯЕТ О НАЧАЛЕ 28 КОНКУРСА ПЕРЕВОДОВ

The first quarter of an hour after getting back to school is always a curious experience. One's friends seem strangers at first, strangers with remarkably familiar manners. The voice is the voice of Jones, and the smack on the back is the smack of Smith, but somehow we feel at first that they are not the Jones and Smith we knew last term. Then the unreal feeling passes off, and we find it hard to believe that we have not been back at school for a month instead of a quarter of an hour.

Jimmy felt particularly bewildered at first, for he plunged straight into the middle of what seemed to be a sort of indignation meeting. Everyone in the big common-room of the house—there were two houses at Marleigh, the headmaster's and Haviland's: Jimmy was in Haviland's—was talking at the same time. Nobody seemed to be doing any listening at all.

So occupied was everyone in the business of the moment that Jimmy's arrival passed unnoticed. He turned to Tommy in bewilderment.

"What's it all about?"

Tommy, putting his mouth close to Jimmy's ear, explained in a shout.

"Forgot to tell you—indignation meeting. About the food Spinder gives us."

"What's Spinder got to do with it?"

"New housemaster. Instead of Haviland, who's ill. Don't know what's the matter with him. Scarlet fever or something. Won't be back for a good time."

He jumped on a table.

"Chuck it, you chaps," he yelled. "Give us a chance. Here's Jimmy Stewart come back."

After about five minutes, having become slightly purple in the face, he managed to make himself heard. Jimmy was observed, and effusively welcomed. The interruption served to divert the meeting's attention. There was a gradual slackening of the noise, and finally comparative quiet reigned.

Then a curious-looking youth got on to the table to address the meeting. He was small, and round, and dark-skinned. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and a mild, benevolent expression. Cries of "Good old Ram!" greeted him. He was evidently a popular person.

"Who's that?" asked Jimmy.

"New chap," said Tommy. "Comes from Calcutta. He's no end of a lark. Always trying to reform everything. He's on to this food business like a ton of bricks. Jaws nineteen to the dozen. Nobody knows his full name. It's about a mile long. It ends in Ram, so that's what he's always called. He's going to be a lawyer some day, he says. Look out. He's off!"

"Misters and fellow-sufferers," said Ram, including all his audience in a bland wave of the hand, "permit me to offer a few obiter dicta on unhappy situation in re lamentable foodstuffs supplied to poor schoolboy by Hon'ble Spinder." (Cheers; and a voice, "Good old Ram!")

"I have not long been inmate in your delightful Alma Mater, and perhaps you will say that I am a presumptuous for addressing this meeting ("No, no"). Permit me to say, misters, that we groan beneath iron-shod boots of Hon'ble Spinder. We are mere toads beneath deplorable harrow of his malignancy. (Groans). How long is this to last, misters? Are we the slaves that we should be so treated? Is Hon'ble Spinder autocratic despot that he should be allowed to oppress us? Is—"

Here he broke off on making the discovery that he had lost the attention of his audience. In default of answering the conundrums he had asked, the meeting had begun to talk again on other subjects. In one corner of the room the twins, Bob and Dick Tooth, "the Teeth," as they were known in the school, had started their usual fight. It was seldom that a day passed without some sort of a scuffle between them. A ring had gathered round, shouting advice and encouragement. In another corner, Binns and Sloper, the inseparables, had begun to sing a duet. It was their firm conviction that they were designed by nature for operatic stars. They sang often and loudly, and the members of their dormitory had spent hours of their valuable time in endeavouring to kick them into silence. After lights-out, when conversation had stopped and the dormitory was trying to get to sleep, one would hear a hoarse murmur from Binns's bed, "Oi'll-er-sing thee saw-ongs of Arabee"; to which a hoarser murmur from Sloper's bed at the other end of the room would reply, to be a bird answering its mate, "Ahnd ta-ales of far Cashmeerer." Upon which the outraged occupants of the other beds would arise in their wrath, and the night would be made hideous by the thudding of pillows upon the songsters' heads.

A babel of other noises blended with these. Bellamy, the most silent boy in the school, who was reputed to be able to eat his weight, which was considerable, in any kind of food you liked to name, had retired to his locker, bored by the discussion, in which he took no interest, for food was food to Bellamy, simply that and nothing more, whatever its quality. He could have eaten cake with relish, and consequently saw nothing to complain of in the meals served to the house by Mr. Spinder. He was now engaged on a particularly nerve-breaking piece of fret-sawing, which set everyone's teeth on edge. Catford and Browning were arguing hotly about a pot of jam, which Catford was alleged to have borrowed during the previous term. Catford maintained that the jam had been full and just payment for a French exercise which he had written for Browning, and that anyhow he had lent Browning a bag of biscuits during the last term but one, Browning denying both statements, and giving it as his opinion that Catford was a bloodsucker. Messrs. Barr, Roberts, Halliday, and Chutwell had enlisted themselves on Browning's side, and were all talking at the same time; while Messrs. Jameson, Ricketts, Coates, Harrison, and Pridbury had espoused the cause of Catford. They too, were giving their opinion of the affair all together.

Ram looked round the room pathetically, plaintively clapping his hands every now and then for silence. He might just as well have saved himself the trouble. The noise continued, unabated.

"Go it, Bob!"

"Use your left, Dick!"

"Buck up, Bob! Why don't you guard, you silly ass?"

"Dick!"

"Bob!"

"Com in-to the gar-den, Maud!"

"For the black bat-ter nah-ett hath-er-florn!"

"Com in-to the gar-den, Maud!"

"I am he-ar at ther gate alorn!"

"Well, look here, I'll take a bob for the beastly jam, if you like."

"I've told you a dozen times——"

"Give the man his jam, Catford, you cad."

"Don't you do it, Catford."

"Misters, misters——!"