

## CHAPTER 12

So he stayed on at Brookfield, having as little to do with Ralston as possible. And in 1911 Ralston left, "to better himself", he was offered the headship of one of the greater public schools. His successor was a man named Chatteris, whom Chips liked; he was even younger than Ralston had been – thirty-four. He was supposed to be very brilliant; at any rate, he was modern (Natural sciences Tripos), friendly, and sympathetic. Recognising in Chips a Brookfield institution, he courteously and wisely accepted the situation.

In 1913 Chips had bronchitis and was off duty for nearly the whole of the winter term. It was that which made him decide to resign that summer, when he was sixty-five. After all, it was a good, ripe age: and Ralston's straight words had, in some ways, had an effect. He felt that it would not be fair to hang on if he could not decently do his job. Besides, he would not sever himself completely. He would take rooms across the road, with the excellent Mrs. Wickett who had once been linen room maid; he could visit the School whenever he wanted, and could still, in a sense, remain a part of it.

At that final end-of-term dinner, in July, 1913, Chips received his farewell presentations and made a speech. It was not a very long speech, but it had a good many jokes in it, and was made twice as long, perhaps, by the laughter that impeded its progress. There were several Latin quotations in it, as well as a reference to the Captain of the School who, Chips said, had been guilty of exaggeration in speaking of his (Chips's) services to Brookfield. "But then – umph – he comes of an – umph – exaggerating family. I – um – remember – once – having to thrash his father for it. (Laughter) I gave him one mark – umph – for a Latin translation, and – he – umph – exaggerated the one into a seven! Umph – umph!" Roars of laughter and tumultuous cheers! A typical Chips remark, everyone thought.

And then he mentioned that he had been at Brookfield for forty-two years, and that he had been very happy there. "It has been my life," he said simply. "*O mihi praeteritos referat si Jupiter annos...* Umph – I need not – of course – translate...." (Much laughter.) "I remember lots of changes at Brookfield. I remember the – um – first bicycle. I remember when there was no gas or electric light and we used to have a member of the domestic staff called a Lamp-boy – he did nothing else but clean and trim and light lamps throughout the School. I remember when there was a hard frost that lasted for seven weeks in the winter term – there were no games, and the whole School learned to skate on the fens. Eighteen-eighty-something, that was. I remember when two-thirds of the School went down with German measles and Big Hall was turned into a hospital ward. I remember the great bonfire we had on Mafeking night. It was lit too near the pavilion, and we had to send for the fire brigade to put it out. And

the firemen were having their own celebrations and most of them were – umph – in a regrettable condition. (Laughter.) I remember Mrs. Brool, whose photograph is still in the tuck-shop; she served there until an uncle in Australia left her a lot of money. In fact, I remember so much that I often think I ought to write a book. Now, what should I call it? Memories of Rod and Lines' – eh? (Cheers and laughter. That was a good one, people thought – one of Chips's best.) Well, well, perhaps I shall write it, some day. But I'd rather tell you about it, really. I remember.... I remember..... but chiefly I remember all your faces. I never forget them. I have thousands of faces in my mind – the faces of boys. If you come and see me again in years to come – as I hope you all will – I shall try to remember those older faces of yours, but it's just possible I shan't be able to – and then some day you'll see me somewhere and I shan't recognize you and you'll say to yourself – 'The old boy doesn't remember me.' (Laughter.) But I do remember you – as you are now. That's the point. In my mind you never grow up at all. Never. Sometimes, for instance, when people talk to me about our respected Chairman of the Governors, I think to myself – 'Ah, yes, a jolly little chap with hair that sticks up on top – and absolutely no idea whatever about the difference between a Gerund and a Gerundive.' (Loud laughter.) Well, I mustn't go on – umph – all night. Think of me sometimes as I shall certainly think of you. '*Hoec olim meminisse juvabit...* again I need not translate....' (Much laughter and shouting and prolonged cheers.)

August, 1913. Chips went for a cure to Wiesbaden, where he lodged at the home of the German master at Brookfield, Herr Staefel, with whom he had become friendly. Staefel was thirty years his junior, but the two men got on excellently. In September, when term began, Chips returned and took up residence at Mrs. Wickett's. He felt a great deal stronger and fitter after his holiday, and almost wished he had not retired. Nevertheless, he found plenty to do. He had all the new boys to tea. He watched all the important matches on the Brookfield ground. Once a term he dined with the Head, and once also with the masters. He took on the preparation and editing of a new Brookfieldian Directory. He accepted presidency of the Old Boys' Club and went to dinners in London. He wrote occasional articles, full of jokes and Latin quotations, for the Brookfield terminal magazine. He read his *Times* every morning – very thoroughly; and he also began to read detective stories – he had been keen on them ever since the first thrills of Sherlock. Yes, he was quite busy, and quite happy, too.

A year later, in 1914, he again attended the end-of-term dinner. There was a lot of war talk – civil war in Ulster, and trouble between Austria and Serbia. Herr Staefel, who was leaving for Germany the next day, told Chips he thought the Balkan business wouldn't come to anything.