

The Last Laugh!



An Amusing Story of
Rookwood School—
Narrated by Teddy Grace.

TUBBY MUFFIN, the plump Falstaff of the Classical Fourth, awoke with a start, wondering vaguely what had wakened him.

Tubby yawned long and deeply, and he was for turning over and going to sleep again, when suddenly he made the discovery that the Fourth-Form dormitory was empty save for himself.

He blinked in bewilderment at the rows of beds—all of them unoccupied. Then his glance wandered to the watch which was suspended from his bed-rail, and he stared at it as if transfixed.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin, in alarm. "It's half-past seven! Rising-bell went half an hour ago, and all the fellows are dressed and downstairs! How jolly mean of them not to give me a call!"

Tubby was wide awake now. He bounded out of bed with surprising alacrity, and started to scramble into his clothes. Tubby had visions of being late for breakfast—perhaps missing it altogether—and that would be a dire calamity. Some fellows might miss a meal quite cheerfully, and feel none the worse for it; but Tubby Muffin was not of their number. Tubby believed in fortifying himself against the cares of the day by eating substantial quantities of eggs and bacon, and sausages, and toast and marmalade. The prospect of missing his breakfast was appalling. It made him go cold all over.

"The beasts!" he muttered, snatching up a jug and splashing water into a bowl.

"Fancy letting me sleep on after rising-bell! I'll tell Jimmy Silver, and Lovell, and the other beasts exactly what I think of them as soon as I see them!"

So saying, Tubby performed a hasty "cat-lick." Soap and water were his natural enemies, and Tubby's ablutions grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less, so to speak. On this occasion, he merely sprayed his features, and then dabbed them hurriedly with a towel. In a twinkling he adjusted his collar and tie, and ran a comb through his unruly mop of hair, and literally flung himself into his waistcoat. Then he dashed from the dormitory and down the stairs, putting on his Eton jacket as he went.

Tubby seemed fairly to bounce down the stairs, and on reaching the foot of them he sprinted away in the direction of the dining-hall, like a champion of the cinder-path.

He expected, as he drew near the dining-hall, to hear the clatter of knives and forks. But all was silent. And when he arrived breathlessly at his destination and flung open the door, Tubby received his second shock that morning.

The dining-hall was deserted!

Apparently breakfast was over, for the tables were bare.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby Muffin, in dismay. "What frightful luck!"

"As he stood there, blinking into the deserted hall, Tubby fancied he heard a faint titter behind him. He spun round

swiftly. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that, but there was no man.

"I could have sworn I heard some fellow chuckling," muttered Tubby. "Must have been my fancy. But where is everybody? Surely morning lessons haven't started?"

But that was the only explanation of the deserted dining-hall and corridors. It must be frightfully late—later even than Tubby's watch indicated. Not only was

for lessons, he got a severe wiggling. If he was ten minutes late, it was a case for "handlers." If he was later still, his punishment was increased in proportion. And Tubby Muffin, not knowing exactly how late he was, had visions of something lingering, with boiling oil in it!

He fairly flew round to the Form-room. And as he rushed helter-skelter round the



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breakfast over, but morning school was in progress. Tubby had overslept with a vengeance!

"This is awful!" groaned the fat junior. "Dicky Dalton will come down on me like a thousand of bricks!"

Mr. "Dicky" Dalton, the master of the Classical Fourth, was a stickler for punctuality. If a pupil was five minutes late

corridors, he wondered what excuse he could offer for his belated arrival.

Tubby paused outside the Form-room door, pumping in breath. Then he nerved himself for the coming ordeal, and turned the door-handle. But the door refused to open; it was locked on the inside.

"Who is there?" came a stern, gruff voice from within—the voice, apparently, of Mr. Dalton. "Is that you, Muffin?"

"Y-e-e-s, sir," faltered Tubby.

"You are locked out!" continued the voice sternly. "You are hopelessly late for lessons, Muffin!"

"I know, sir. I—I'm awfully sorry, but it isn't my fault, really. You see, I overslept, and those beasts——"

"Enough!" came the stern interruption. "You will go and report yourself to the headmaster immediately, and tell him why I sent you. You are an incurably lazy boy, Muffin, and Dr. Chisholm will probably give you a severe flogging!"

"Ow!" yelled the hapless Tubby. And at the prospect of a birching from the Head, cold shivers chased each other down his spine.

"I—I say, Mr. Dalton," he stammered appealingly, "if you will unlock this door, and let me come in and explain——"

"Go!" thundered the deep voice from within. "Do not dare to try to temporise with me, Muffin! Report yourself to the headmaster at once!"

Tubby Muffin rolled away, feeling very disconsolate. Everything seemed to be going wrong this morning. Quite obviously it was not Tubby's lucky day!

It was in fear and trembling that he made his way to the Head's study. His knees were wobbling under him, and he had not felt such awful apprehension since his last visit to the dentist in Coombe. He shivered all over, like a fat table jelly, as he rolled into the Head's corridor.

And then came the third big shock of the morning—a shock so staggering that Tubby Muffin stood petrified.

On the door of the Head's study a placard had been pinned, and the inscription, in large capital letters, danced before Tubby's bewildered eyes:

APRIL FOOL.

For a moment Tubby Muffin stood spell-bound. He was an obtuse fellow, and the revelation that he had been hoaxed did not come to him all at once. But when the loud clang of the rising-bell smote upon his ears, Tubby began to realise what had happened.

"Spoofed!" he yelled. "Those awful



On the door of the Head's study a placard had been pinned, and the inscription, in large capital letters, danced before Tubby's bewildered eyes: "APRIL FOOL!" (See this page.)

beasts have played an April-Fool joke on me! They must have been hiding under their beds when I woke up, and they put my watch on to half-past seven to make me think rising-bell had gone. One of the rotters must have gone down to the Form-room and imitated Dicky Dalton's voice. Oh, the beasts! Why didn't I remember it was April the First?"

Tubby Muffin wrenched at the placard and tore it to shreds. Then, with fury in his face, he made his way to the Fourth-Form dormitory.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the act of rising. George Raby was already dressed. Everybody was laughing, and when Tubby

Muffin rolled into the dormitory the laughter rose to a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"April Fool!"

"Ever been had, Tubby?"

Tubby Muffin shook his fist at the grinning faces around him. Tubby was not a fighting man, but he felt really warlike at that moment, and it was only the terrific odds against him that prevented him from rushing at the merry japers and hitting out right and left.

"You—you—you——" Words almost failed Tubby Muffin. "You've robbed me of an hour's sleep, you grinning gargoyles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose it was you, Raby, who imitated Dicky Dalton's voice?"

"Guilty!" said George Raby, with a grin.

"And who put the placard on the Head's door?"

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You must admit we've made a very complete April Fool of you, Tubby! Hear us smile!"

And a fresh peal of laughter rang out. Indeed, the "smile" might have been heard all over Rookwood.

Naturally, Tubby Muffin was feeling very sore as he went down to breakfast with the others. His fat leg had been pulled, and he was the object of mirth and ridicule all round.

But there was consolation in store for Tubby. On taking his seat at the breakfast-table, he found a note on his plate. It was addressed to him in the scholarly handwriting of Mr. Dalton, and Tubby ripped open the envelope in wonder. His wonder increased, and his face beamed like a full moon, on read-

ing what appeared to be a message from the Form-master:

"Mr. Dalton is giving a little celebration in his study this afternoon, at five o'clock. The pleasure of Reginald Muffin's company is cordially requested.

"Do not trouble to acknowledge this invitation, unless for some reason you are unable to accept."

Tubby Muffin was delighted. It was very unusual for a Form-master to invite a junior to tea; still, it was not unheard-of, and Mr. Dalton had a way of unbending occasionally and inviting some of his chosen pupils to a study repast. Hitherto, Tubby Muffin had not been among the chosen, but evidently Tubby's turn had come at last!

Tubby thrust the note into his pocket, and pitched into his breakfast with cheerful zest. He was all eagerness for the little celebration in Mr. Dalton's study. It engrossed Tubby's mind to the exclusion of all else. During morning lessons he was constantly called over the coals by Mr. Dalton for inattention; and on one occasion Mr. Dalton

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rapped him sharply on the knuckles with his pointer—which was rather a queer way to treat a prospective guest.

After what seemed an eternity, five o'clock came. And Tubby Muffin, looking very smart and spruce, and having taken infinite pains with his toilet for once, presented himself at Mr. Dalton's study.

"Come in!" called out the Form-master, in response to Tubby's knock.

The fat junior rolled in with alacrity. He was rather disappointed, on blinking round the study, to find the table laid very sparsely for tea. There was a plate of thin bread-and-butter and a pot of tea; merely that, and nothing more. Such a frugal snack scarcely savoured of a celebration, and Tubby Muffin frowned a little as he drew a chair up to the table and sat down.

Mr. Dalton glared at him in amazement and anger.

"Muffin!" The Form-master's voice was like a thunderclap. "How dare you take such an unwarrantable liberty? Stand up at once!"

"Oh, really, sir——"

"At once!" thundered Mr. Dalton. "I have a good mind to cane you, Muffin, for this impertinence!"

"M-m-my hat!"

Tubby Muffin rose to his feet, blinking at Mr. Dalton in perplexity.

"Really, sir, I don't see where the impertinence comes in. You invited me to tea——"

"What?"

"And a guest naturally expects to be allowed to sit down, sir. I can't take my meals standing up, like a horse!"

Mr. Dalton frowned darkly.



At Mr. Dalton's bidding, Tubby sat down and made himself at home, and the good things rapidly disappeared into his capacious interior. (See page 97.)

"Boy, your impertinence passes all bounds! You are no guest of mine, nor have I invited you to come and take tea with me. I should hardly be likely to issue such an invitation to the most backward pupil in my Form."

Tubby Muffin stared blankly at the Form-master, whose hand was straying towards a cane. Then, urged by the instinct of self-preservation, Tubby hastily pulled from his pocket the invitation he had received that morning and handed it to Mr. Dalton. That gentleman perused it with a puzzled frown; then his face relaxed into a smile.

"Muffin, you stupid boy, you have been the victim of a hoax—an April-Fool joke, apparently. This invitation did not emanate from me, though the writer has cleverly imitated my handwriting."

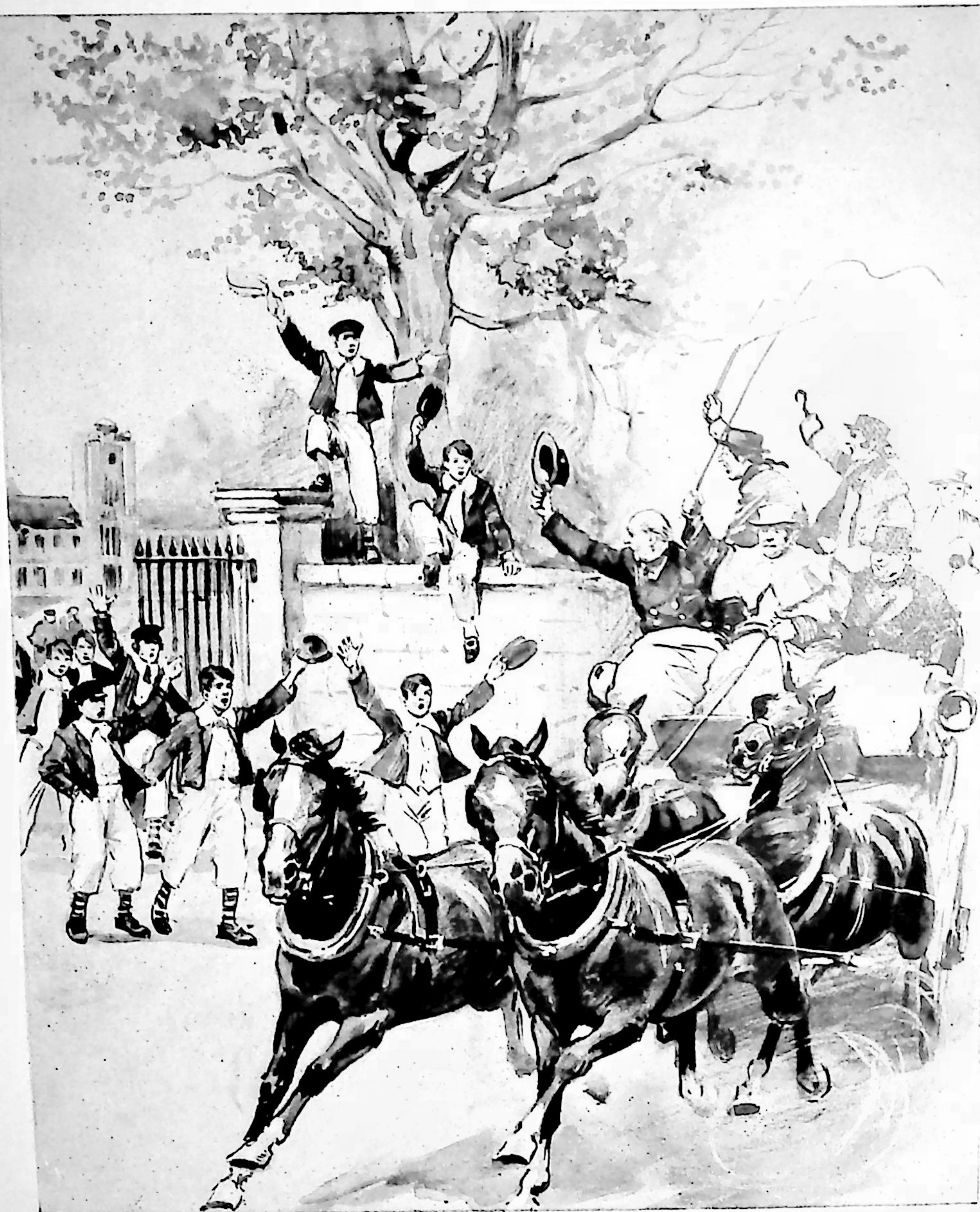
"Oh, crumbs!"

Tubby Muffin's face fell. He realised that once again he had been spoofed by his schoolfellows, and he could have blubbed with vexation and disappointment. Indeed, he was very near to tears, and Mr. Dalton noted the fact.

"Come, cheer up, Muffin!" he said kindly. "You shall have the last laugh, after all! You may stay and have tea with me."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Tubby, brightening up.

Tidings Of Victory!



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How the News of Trafalgar Came to Rookwood School!

"Before you sit down," said Mr. Dalton, "take a peep in my cupboard. You may possibly find something more appetising than bread-and-butter."

And Tubby did. He discovered a really handsome plum cake, and a dish of jam tarts, and another dish of assorted pastries. And then, at Mr. Dalton's bidding, Tubby sat down and made himself at home, and the good things rapidly disappeared into his capacious interior. It was a glorious spread, and Tubby Muffin enjoyed it to the last crumb, while Mr. Dalton chatted away quite pleasantly on a variety of topics.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting outside in the corridor, waiting for Tubby Muffin to emerge. Perhaps Mr. Dalton heard the impatient fidgeting of their feet, for they were made to wait a very long time.

"I wonder what's keeping the fat ass all this time," remarked Lovell.

"Well, as we haven't heard any noise, he's not getting handers," said Jimmy Silver.

"Probably old Dalton's telling him what a naughty boy he is," laughed Raby.

But when Tubby Muffin appeared at last, however, beaming all over his face, the japers got a shock.

"Thanks so much for the invitation, you fellows!" he said cheerily. "I've had the finest feed ever!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared.

"You—you mean to say that you've had tea with Dalton?" gasped Jimmy.

"Rather! Old Dalton's a brick. I say, you fellows, your April-Fool joke rather missed fire—what? He laughs loudest who laughs last! He, he, he!"

And Tubby Muffin's loud and unmusical giggle echoed along the corridor, while Jimmy Silver & Co. ruefully agreed that the laugh was with Tubby.

THE END

H.A.

TIDINGS of VICTORY!

DURING the early years of the nineteenth century, when England was at war with France and Spain, the mother country had cause to bless the meteoric rise of one of her sailor sons, who was destined to overthrow the might of Napoleon Buonaparte on the high seas. The name of Lord Nelson was on every patriotic Britisher's lips. Here was a born leader of men, frail physically and seemingly unfitted for the arduous life of a sailor, but with a courage and a confidence in his destiny that was unquenchable and inspiring to all who came in contact with him. At Rookwood School, in the heart of Hampshire, masters, seniors, and juniors alike idolised Lord Nelson as the greatest admiral the world had known.

His last memorable battle, on October 21st, 1805, at Trafalgar, where, with twenty-seven men-o'-war and four frigates, he engaged Admiral Villeneuve's thirty-three men-o'-war and seven frigates—the pick of the combined French and Spanish navies—in a fierce fight to the death, will live in the annals of naval history for all time.

The might of Buonaparte had been broken, and England was now safe from the threatened invasion which the all-conquering Frenchman had contemplated.

The victory of Trafalgar was carried back to England as fast as human means could devise, and from Portsmouth a stage coach at once set off for London and the Admiralty offices. With its passengers cheering and shouting, the news of Nelson's great victory spread from hamlet to village and village to town, and when the coach tore past the walls of Rookwood a crowd of scholars had collected. The joyous news went from mouth to mouth, and loud and thunderous cheers floated after the coach as it rattled on to London town.

The Head of Rookwood held a special thanksgiving service in the school chapel, and then, in honour of the occasion, gave the boys in his charge a full day's holiday, of which, needless to say, they made the most.