



CRAWFORD'S STRATAGEM.

BY

M. I. R. POLKINGHORNE, B.A.,

Author of

"The affair of the Ghost of St. Dunstan's,"
"A Summer's Afternoon," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE four o'clock bell at St. Dunstan's was clanging noisily, and the banging of doors and shuffling of footsteps indicated clearly that the welcome relief from class had come.

The members of the Fifth had strolled off with an important air along the corridor, and past the groups of small boys, who eyed them with much curiosity.

"I say, they're going to have it," whispered young Raggles, eagerly, as he watched the elder boys mount the little narrow flight of stairs at the end of the corridor which led to the "Green Room."

"What?" asked a new youngster.

"Look at the notice board, ass," shouted Master Raggles, as he bounded downstairs to have a game of "punt-about" with his chief cronies.

Being of a curious disposition, the new boy wended his way to the notice board, where amid football and other announcements, he read the following:—

"NOTICE.—Meeting of the Rambricht Musical and Dramatic Society to be held in the Green Room, at 4 p.m. to-day. First rehearsal for annual concert to take place. Members kindly bring their instruments.

By Order,

(Signed)

A. CLAVEL, Stage Manager.

R. DIGBY, Secretary.

S. RICKET, Treasurer.

Membership of above Society is exclusively confined to the Fifth. Application for joining to be made to the Secretary."

Meanwhile, the members of the Rambricht Society were rapidly collecting in the Green Room, and the deafening strumming of the various instruments showed that "tuning up" was in full progress. It was some time before Clavel's voice could make itself heard above the din, and even when the uproar had subsided, the silence was still broken by the irritating "tum-tum" of some anxious individual who had not got the *E* of his violin to the right pitch.

"If you fellows can't shut up that strumming, we'll adjourn the meeting," cried Clavel, in righteous wrath, and this threat had the desired effect, so that his next words could be heard in comfort. "Look here, you chaps," he began, coming at once to the point. "We want our annual concert this year to be a success. It always has been, and I don't see why it shouldn't now. Of course I know some of our best singers are gone this term, but the new members may be as good, and they'll be a jolly sight better if they don't talk, as I have heard some old ones doing, namely, that it is an awful bore to have to practise so soon, and that they lose too much football. Well, if they think so, let them give it up, and the Rambricht can get along without them; but let them understand one thing, if they don't practise they'll have no choice, but just be kicked out. They are welcome to go and make fools of themselves on any platform, but not as members of the R.M.D.S. (laughter and cries of "hear, hear.") We've decided to have Christy Minstrels this year, as you know, and we can't do anything