



.. THE ..
**CONVERSION
 OF DICKINSON
 MINOR!**

A Magnificent Long
 Complete Story of JIMMY
 SILVER & CO., the Chums
 of Rookwood.

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Looking After Dickinson Minor.

“WHERE'S Dickinson minor?” Jimmy Silver asked the question. And Arthur Edward Lovell replied emphatically: “Blow Dickinson minor! Let's get down to the footer!”

Jimmy Silver granted, “I want Dickinson minor!” “Bless Dickinson minor!” growled Raby. “He's stuck somewhere with a Yankee gore-book! Let's get down to the footer!”

“Dickinson's coming down to the footer, too,” explained Jimmy.

“Oh, he won't come!” said Newcome. “He don't care for footer. Come on! We're waiting for you; fatead!”

But Jimmy Silver did not go. “It's because he doesn't like footer that he's coming,” he said. “He's going to take up footer, whether he likes it or not. See?”

Whereupon Lovell and Raby and Newcome exclaimed in chorus:

“Blow — blow — blow Dickinson minor!”

But Jimmy Silver did not heed. Jimmy had made up his mind. And when Jimmy had made up his mind wild Huns could not have dragged him away from his purpose. Jimmy had determined to befriend Dickinson minor, the new boy in the Fourth, whether the said Dickinson liked it or not. The chances were that he wouldn't like it, but that could not be helped.

“Seen Dickinson minor, Oswald?” he called out, as Dick Oswald came down with a coat and muffler on over his footer things.

Oswald grinned. “He's in the dorm,” he replied.

“Changing?” asked Jimmy.

“No jolly fear! Sprawling and slack-
 ing!” said Oswald.

“Come on!” said Jimmy.

He started for the stairs. Lovell and Raby and Newcome growled, and followed. They were growing fed up with Dickinson minor.

The Fistical Four entered the Fourth Form dormitory. Two or three fellows

were there changing for the footer. Dickinson minor also was there. He was sprawling on his bed, resting on an elbow, and intently engaged upon a book with a lurid cover, which represented, in many colours, a trapper being burned at the stake by Red Indians. He did not look up as the chums of the Fourth came towards him. He was deep in the adventures of the Black Chief of the Red Raiders.

Jimmy Silver sniffed as he looked at him. Dickinson minor's taste for lurid American literature was the joke of the Form, but Dickinson did not mind. Chaff and chipping could not lure him from “Deadshot Bill” and “Blood-stained Dave.” Dickinson's dreams were of the time when he would scour the prairie on a coal-black mustang, or rove the ocean in a rakish schooner.

Dickinson major of the Sixth had bestowed brotherly lickings upon him without avail. Jimmy Silver & Co. had raided his library of lurid volumes, and burned them to the last page out of sheer friendship, and they had thought that that would be the end of it. But lo and behold! in a week, or less, Dickinson minor had accumulated a fresh stock of gory volumes, and was wallowing in them as of old. Nearly all Dickinson's pocket-money went in that direction.

He would go into class with “Dead-hot Bill” hidden under his waistcoat, to be snatched out and enjoyed when Mr. Bootles' back was turned. Even at calling-over he would sometimes forget to answer to his name, being deep in the adventures of the “Boy Pirate of the Southern Seas,” or “Nobby Nick of New York.”

“Dickinson!” roared Jimmy Silver. The new junior did not look up.

“Go away!” he said, without taking his eyes from his volume.

“Get up!”

“Oh, go away!”

“Do you hear?”

“Rats!”

“You're coming down to the footer!”

“Go and eat coke!”

“Get into your togs—quick!”

“Oh, leave me alone!”

“Let the silly idiot alone!” growled Lovell. “He can't play footer! He can't do anything except read Yankee bosh! Leave the pasty-faced chump alone!”

“He's going to play footer,” said Jimmy Silver. “I've told Dickinson major that I'll make him play footer.”

“I won't play footer!” roared Dickinson minor. “Hang the footer! Look here! I'll lend you a book if you like! I've got ‘Buffalo Bob, the Black Burglar,’ here—”

“Oh, you ass!”

“And here's ‘Gold George, the Cool Cutthroat!’ or the ‘Forty Raiders of the Rockies!’”

“You silly chump! Gerrup!”

“Bah!”

Jimmy Silver wasted no more time in words. He had promised Dickinson major that he would do his best for his extraordinary minor. He meant to keep his word. He grasped the new boy, and rolled him off the bed with a bump.

Dickinson roared.

“Yow-ow-ow! You silly ass! Unhand me!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Dickinson sat up and glared.

“If I had a trusty rifle—” he gasped.

“Or a rakish schooner!” grinned Raby.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Get into your footer things!” said Jimmy Silver, frowning. “I'll trusty rifle you, you burbling duffer! Get into your things, and come down to the footer—sharp!”

“I won't!”

“Take his feet, Lovell!”

“Right-ho!”

Bump, bump, bump!

Dickinson minor smote the floor of the dormitory hard. He roared and wriggled in the grasp of Jimmy Silver and Lovell. He might as well have struggled in the hug of a grizzly bear. He knew all about scaping-knives, trusty rifles, and rakish schooners, but very little about scrapping.

“Now are you going to change?” demanded Jimmy.

“Bah!” howled Dickinson.

Dickinson always said “Bah!” because it was the favourite reply of Deadshot

Bill, his chief hero.

"I'll bah you, you bleating baa-lamb!" growled Jimmy. "Three more!"
 "Bump, bump, bump!"
 "Yaroooh! Help! Yowp!"
 "Now are you going to change?"
 "Yow-ow-ow! Yes!"
 "Buck up, then!"
 Dickinson minor rose somewhat painfully, with a black brow. If he had possessed such a thing as a trusty rifle, he would certainly have been tempted to use it then. But trusty rifles were off. The new junior suddenly changed into footer attire.

"Now come on!" said Jimmy, taking his arm.
 "Bah!"
 "Ha ha, ha!"
 Dickinson minor was marched out of the dormitory, wriggling. Lovell and Raby and Newcome brought up the rear, grinning, and occasionally helping the new boy with their footer-boots when he lagged.

"Look here, you catiffs!" said Dickinson. Dickinson had a weird language all his own, which he had learned from his favourite volumes. "Look here, you hoodlums! I've got an important appointment this afternoon, and I've no time for silly games."

"Going to meet Deadshot Bill?" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Or is the blood-headed buccancer waiting for you round by the bandstand?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"P'ysaps that ain't so far from the truth as you suppose!" snorted Dickinson.

Jimmy Silver halted, and stared at him. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Bah! You little know!"
 "We—we little know!" gasped Lovell. "Oh dear! Is the chap really going right off his silly rocker?"

"It looks to me as if he is," said Jimmy Silver quite soberly. "What he wants is open-air exercise—plenty of footer. This way, you born idiot!"
 "Unhand me!"
 "Bow-wow!"

Dickinson minor was marched out of the School House. In the quadrangle he made an effort to tear himself away.

"Carry him!" said Jimmy.
 Dickinson minor was whirled off his feet, and, with his arms and legs wildly flying, he was rushed down to Little Side.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Dickinson is Mysterious.

"GREAT SCOTT!"
 "What's the little game?"
 There were a good many of the Fourth on Little Side at practice. They stared at Dickinson minor as he was plumped down on the ground.

He lay there gasping.
 "All serene!" said Jimmy Silver. "Dickinson didn't want to come down to practice. But he's come!"

"Bah! I won't play!" roared Dickinson. "Don't I keep on telling you I've got an appointment this afternoon?"

"Deadshot Bill can wait," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Now, I'm going to keep an eye on you. Get up!"

"Bah!"
 "Jump on him, Lovell—you've got the biggest feet!"

Dickinson minor jumped up.
 "Now," said Jimmy, "there's the ball. That's called a football—see? You've got to kick that ball through those posts. Those posts are called a goal—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Every time you don't kick I shall kick you—see?"

"Bah! I won't! Yarooop!"
 "Better wire in!"

"Yow-ow-ow! All right!"

Dickinson minor submitted to the inevitable.

It seemed to him a wicked waste of time to be punting a leather ball about when he did not yet know whether Trapper Bill had escaped from the torture-stake to which he had been bound by the Black Chief of the Red Raiders. But there was no help for it. Jimmy Silver didn't care twopence for Trapper Bill or Black Chief either, and Jimmy's word was law.

For a quarter of an hour Dickinson minor was kept at goal practice, and there was always a friendly boot at hand to help him when he slacked. Dickinson began to feel sore in body as well as in mind, and he wired in at last with something like energy.

Had he not been in an exasperated frame of mind he would have realised that the healthy exercise in the keen winter air was making him feel better than slacking indoors.

But as it was Dickinson minor was only waiting for an opportunity of escape.

His chance came at last.
 "You're improving," Jimmy Silver told him. "Now, let's see what you can do. We're going to play seven a-side."

"Bah!" mumbled Dickinson.

But he took his place in the impromptu match. Although it was only practice, Jimmy Silver & Co. were keen enough about it, and they soon forgot Dickinson in the excitement of the game.

Oswald was captaining the opposite seven, and Jimmy Silver led an attack on Oswald's goal. He put the ball in, and then, remembering his protege, looked round for him.

The youthful disciple of Deadshot Bill had vanished!

"Where's Dickinson?" roared Jimmy Silver.

Lovell pointed to a fleeing figure that was just dodging into the School House in the distance.

"He's gone! Blow him!"
 Jimmy Silver gave a snort like an angry war-horse.

"He's got to stick to it, ass! I've told his major I'll look after him. I'll fetch him back by his ears."

And Jimmy Silver started for the House.

But he sought in vain for Dickinson minor.

In the dormitory of the Classical Fourth he found the new boy's footer-things thrown carelessly on the floor.

Jimmy Silver grunted angrily.
 The junior must have left again by a back door.

Jimmy Silver descended to the quadrangle again and looked towards the gates.

There was Dickinson minor, just going out, but he was too far off for recapture. "Dickinson!" bawled Jimmy Silver.

The new junior did not look back. He ran out of the gates and disappeared.

Jimmy, in a decidedly wrathful mood, returned to the footer-ground.

Dickinson minor had finished with football for that afternoon. After all the trouble the captain of the Fourth had taken on his account, it was very ungrateful, and Jimmy mentally promised him a thick ear when he came back from his mysterious excursion.

After the footer the Fistical Four went to the end study for tea. They were busy with that well-earned meal when Tommy Dodd of the Modern side looked in.

Lovell picked up the loaf for use as a missile, but Tommy Dodd held up his hand in sign of pax.

"I've seen your tame lunatic," he remarked.

"He's here!" growled Lovell, with a nod towards Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd laughed.
 "I mean the other one—that new Classical ass Dickinson. The chap with the Yankee gore-books."

"Oh, bother him!" said Raby. "This study is fed up with him, only that fat-head Jimmy will take the duffer under his silly wing!"

"That's why I've looked in," said Tommy Dodd. "Tain't my business, of course, but if the silly ass has a friend here, I want to give that friend the tip to look after him a bit. I don't know whether I ought to mention it to his major, really, only—well, his major's a prefect, and a chap can't tell a prefect things."

"What the dickens has he been doing?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I've passed him on the footpath from Coombe. He was talking to a slouching ruffian—a regular peaky bouncer," said Tommy Dodd. "Chap who looked like a born criminal. I spoke to him, and he said 'Avaunt!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If we had him on the Modern side," continued Tommy Dodd, "we'd soon knock the fatheadedness out of him. But I suppose on this side one silly ass more or less isn't noticed!"

"You cheeky Modern worm!"

"Well, I thought I'd give you the tip, as I hear you've taken the howling ass under your wing," said Tommy Dodd. "That acquaintance won't do young cheerful any good, and you'd better talk to him. If Bootles saw him talking to such an awful-looking character there would be a shindy. Ta, ta!"

And Tommy Dodd walked off, slamming the door to show his contempt for Classics generally.

"Cheeky ass!" said Newcome.
 Jimmy Silver looked worried.

"I say, this is rotten!" he said. "The howling duffer said he had an appointment this afternoon. What on earth can he want with such a fellow as Dobby described? He's dotty enough to get himself into trouble."

"Let him rip!" grunted Lovell.
 "I'll talk to him when he comes in," said Jimmy. "He isn't a bad sort if he wasn't such a silly ass. Why don't the Government prohibit the importation of Yankee gore-books—what!"

Jimmy Silver said no more, but he was thinking very seriously. The new junior was so extremely peculiar in his ways that there was really no telling what mischief he might get into. And the good-natured Jimmy was concerned about him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jimmy Keeps an Eye Open.

JIMMY SILVER did not see the new boy again till the evening, when he found him in the Common-room.

Dickinson minor was lolling in a chair, reading, of course, a volume with a lurid cover. He had started reading by candle-light in the Dormitory when he first came to Rookwood, but hurtling boots and pillows had put a stop to that. He was reading in the Common-room now, under difficulties, the thread of his perusal being interrupted by chipping remarks.

Fellows asked how Deadshot Bill was getting on, and whether he had made arrangements for the purchase of a rakish schooner, and whether he would begin his piratical career by making old Bootles walk the plank.

Dickinson's ambition to become a pirate when he grew up was well-known, and was the subject of great merriment in the Fourth, though Dickinson's mind wavered sometimes between the attractions of a piratical career and those of

the life of a scap-hunter of the Far West. But whatever his future career might be, it was settled that he was going to have a trusty rifle and a faithful band. Indeed, in a confidential moment Dickinson had offered to make Jimmy Silver second-in-command of his trusty band—an offer that was received with a yell of laughter by the ungrateful Jimmy.

Dickinson's eyes were glued upon his book as the captain of the Fourth came up to him in the common-room. The Black Chief of the Red Raiders was putting Trapper Bill to the torture, and the heroic William was hurling defiance in his teeth.

Jimmy jerked the book away, and there was a yell from Dickinson that would have done credit to the Black Chief himself.

"Yah! Gimme my book, you beast!" "Tain't a book; it's a black-pudding!" said Jimmy Silver. "I want to speak to you, young Dickinson."

"Well I don't want you to. I want my book! Beware!"

"Don't be a silly ass, old chap! Why can't you talk sense?" urged Jimmy.

"Bah!"

Dickinson's dramatic "Bah!" always made Jimmy Silver grin. It was not much use being angry with such a duffer.

"Who was that chap you met to-day, Dickinson?" asked Jimmy, in a low voice.

"You little know!" replied Dickinson.

"Well, that's why I'm asking you, kid."

"My lips are sealed."

"Can't you talk English?" booted Jimmy Silver.

"Bah!"

"Look here, you born idiot, will you tell me who that chap was?"

"Never!"

"Was it Deadshot Bill?" chuckled Lovell.

Dickinson sneered.

"It may have been a rover, and it may not," he said disdainfully.

"A—a—a what?"

"A rover," said Dickinson.

"A rover!" said Jimmy Silver faintly.

"Oh, my hat! You silly cuckoo, don't you know that there aren't such things as rovers outside Yankee gore-books?"

"You little know!" sneered Dickinson.

"No one understands me here. But the day will come! You will see. What will you say when the fame of Deadshot Dickinson rings far and wide?"

"Have you ever fired a firearm of any sort?" asked Jimmy Silver, controlling his merriment.

"Not yet. I'm going to learn, though. Mysterious Jim is going to teach me."

"Who? Which? Who's that?"

"Never mind!"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell exchanged glances. The thought had come into both their minds at once that the duffer of the Fourth was really and actually "potty."

"Dickinson, old chap," said Jimmy Silver gently, "don't jaw like that. You make me feel creepy!"

"Ha, ha!" said Dickinson.

He said "Ha, ha!" because the Boy Pirate of his favourite fiction said "Ha, ha!" It was supposed to be a sardonic laugh.

"Mad as a hatter!" murmured Lovell.

"Wait!" said Dickinson. "At midnight's hour we meet!"

"Eh?"

"While all are sleeping Mysterious Jim will come with stealthy tread."

"Will he, by gum?" said Lovell.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, we ought to tell Booties about this silly idiot! He ought to be seen by a doctor."

Jimmy Silver was silent. He said no more to Dickinson, but he was very

thoughtful during the remainder of the evening.

When the Classical Fourth went up to their dormitory, Jimmy kept an eye on Dickinson minor.

He noted that the new boy did not fully undress before he turned in. He removed only his outer garments before he slipped on his pyjamas. Under his bed a pair of rubber shoes had been placed.

"That silly ass is going to get up again to-night, Teddy," he said, in a low voice.

"Eh—how do you know?"

"It's plain enough. Look here, you remember his idiotic gas about Mysterious Jim?"

"Yes. He's dotty!"

"Pretty nearly, I think; but there's something in it," said Jimmy quietly.

"You know Tommy Dodd saw him talking to a ruffianly fellow, and he's been talking about Mysterious Jim, and meeting him at midnight's hour, and the rest—"

"Only his silly piffle!" yawned Lovell.

"I tell you there's something in it! It looks to me as if some rascal has found out what a dummy he is, and is taking him in. He's dotty enough for anything!"

"But what—"

"What could anybody want to meet the babbling idiot at midnight for?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"There's something on—something afoot, as the ass would say himself, in his queer lingo. Don't go to sleep, kid!"

"Look here, I'm jolly well not going to stay awake till midnight's hour, or any other blessed hour, on account of that dummy!"

"Well, I am! I'll call you, then."

"Suppose we give him a hiding now?" suggested Lovell.

"Fathead! We've got to find out what's on. He may be letting a burglar into the school for all we know."

"Oh, my giddy Aunt Selina! He wouldn't!"

"He would if the man called himself Mysterious Jim, and said he was a pirate."

Lovell exploded. He could not help it. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shurrup, you ass! Don't say a word to the fathead, but keep mum, and keep your eyes open."

Lovell turned in, chuckling. But he determined to stay awake. Jimmy Silver did not close his eyes after Bulkeley of the Sixth had turned the lights out. He was really alarmed for the duffer of the Fourth.

It was not easy to keep awake, but Jimmy Silver was determined.

Lovell soon dropped off, but Jimmy's eyes did not close.

In the glimmer of starlight in the dormitory, too, he could see that Dickinson minor was sitting up in bed, evidently for the purpose of remaining awake.

Twelve tolled out from the clock-tower on the Modern side of Rookwood at last.

Before the last stroke had died away Dickinson minor had slipped out of bed, and he began dressing hastily.

Jimmy Silver's heart beat a little faster.

He slipped from his bed, and moved towards the dormitory door.

Dickinson minor did not observe him. He finished dressing, and put on the rubber shoes, and stole towards the door.

Jimmy was standing with his back to the door. As the new boy came up, Jimmy's hand dropped on his shoulder with a grip like iron.

Dickinson uttered a shrill, terrified cry.

"Yow!"

"Stop, you fool!" said Jimmy grimly.

"Oh, it's you, you ass!" panted Dickinson. "I—I thought—"

"Hallo! What's the row?" yawned Lovell, waking up.

"Let me pass!" hissed Dickinson.

"Not just now," said Jimmy. "You're not going out, my pippin!"

"You fool! Let me pass! He's waiting!"

"Who's waiting?"

"Never mind whom! Let me go!"

Instead of letting him go, Jimmy Silver compressed his grip, and marched the new boy back to his bed.

The weedy disciple of Deadshot Dave was as an infant in Jimmy's powerful grasp.

"Sit down!"

"Bah! I won't—I—Yooop!" Dickinson minor sat down forcibly.

"Get a light, Lovell!" said Jimmy quietly.

A match flickered in the gloom of the dormitory.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Mysterious Jim.

LOVELL stepped out of bed and lighted a candle-end. Raby and Newcome and Oswald were awake now, and several more of the Classical Fourth. They sat up in bed and stared at the strange scene.

"What's the trouble?" yawned Raby.

"What's the duffer dressed for?" exclaimed Topham. "Goin' out on the tiles, Dickinson? My hat!"

Dickinson minor wriggled in Jimmy's grip. But there was no escape for him.

"Now, Dickinson," said Jimmy Silver, very quietly but very firmly, "you're going to tell me where you were going, and why?"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll take you down to Mr. Booties at once!"

"Wha-at!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy, with deadly determination. "You're not quite safe, you dotty duffer! I'm going to take you to Mr. Booties!"

"I—I—I— Don't!" yelled Dickinson. "I—I say, I'll tell you, if you like!"

"Buck up, then!"

"I'm going to meet a comrade," said Dickinson sulkily.

"Not a pal!" snorted Lovell. "A giddy comrade!"

"Who is it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Mysterious Jim!"

There was a cackle of laughter from the juniors sitting up in bed. But Dickinson's face in the candle-light was quite serious.

"Who is Mysterious Jim?" asked the captain of the Fourth quietly.

"A—a—a pirate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell us all about him," said Jimmy patiently.

"Well, I don't mind," said Dickinson. "Swear to keep the deadly secret—"

"Don't be a silly ass! Go on!"

"Well, it's really a deadly secret," said Dickinson. "I came to know the chap last week. I was reading 'The Boy Pirate' on the stile when he spoke to me. I—I thought he was a footpad at first, but—he asked me about that story, and I told him, and then I told him a lot of things, you know, about my wanting to be a pirate when I grew up, and so on, and he—"

"Laughed?" said Raby.

"No, he didn't!" said Dickinson indignantly. "He said it was a ripping thing, and that I was just the build of a boy pirate."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"He told me that he ran away from school when he was my age, and became a pirate," went on Dickinson. "Then he asked me to meet him again, and I've met him twice, and he's given me a lot of tips about being a pirate."

"Great Scott!"

"What was he pulling the silly duffer's leg for?" said Oswald, in wonder.

"He wasn't pulling my leg," said Dickinson. "He told me he was a pirate, and had sailed the Spanish Main for years and years. He said what he's been wanting to meet was a lad of spirit like—like me!"

"Like you! Oh, Julius Caesar!"

"And he's asked you to meet him to-night!" said Jimmy.

"Yes. He said he'd like to see those books I've told him about. I've got a lot in the box-room, and he asked me to let him in to-night. Of course, it's a dead secret. Bootles would cut up rusty if he knew."

"I fancy he would!" assented Jimmy Silver. "So you were going out to let that man into the house? Who is he?"

"He's known as Mysterious Jim, he told me."

"I don't suppose he's very mysterious to the police. I dare say they know him quite well?" said Jimmy. "And he wasn't going to do anything but look at your precious Yankee gore-books, when you let him in?"

"He's going to bring me a revolver, too. He said he would!"

Jimmy looked fixedly at the duffer of the Fourth. Dickinson's faith in his piratical acquaintance was evidently complete.

"Jolly lucky I was keeping an optic on you. I think," said Jimmy Silver.

"Where are you to meet him?"

"I'm going to help him over the school wall under the old beech."

"And he's there now?"

"He was to be there at midnight."

"Good! So he's expecting you?"

"Yes. The password is 'Blood and Bones'!"

"Oh! There's a password, is there?"

"Yes. I've got to whisper 'Blood and Bones,' so that he'll know it's me. And now you can let me go, Jimmy Silver. I'm not going to keep Mysterious Jim waiting to please you!"

"Stay where you are, you burbling idiot!" Jimmy Silver pushed the new boy back on the bed. "I'm going to explain to you. In the first place, your Mysterious Jim is what you took him for—a footpad. He's found out from your silly babble that you're half-mad, and he's fooled you with those yarns, because he wants to be let into the school, and the only thing he can want here is to rob the place. Do you understand now?"

Dickinson gasped for a moment.

"Bah!" he said at last.

"If you'd let him in," resumed Jimmy Silver, "most likely the first thing he'd have done would have been to knock you on the head, so that you couldn't give the alarm."

"Oh, I say!"

"And then he'd have robbed the place, and taken everything he could lay his hands on, and you'd have had to explain to the Head in the morning!"

"Oh dear!"

"Do you understand now, you crass idiot?"

"I—I don't believe it!"

Lovell was slipping on his clothes.

"I'm jolly well going to wake Bootles," he said. "If that scoundrel's hanging about the school, the police ought to be telephoned for."

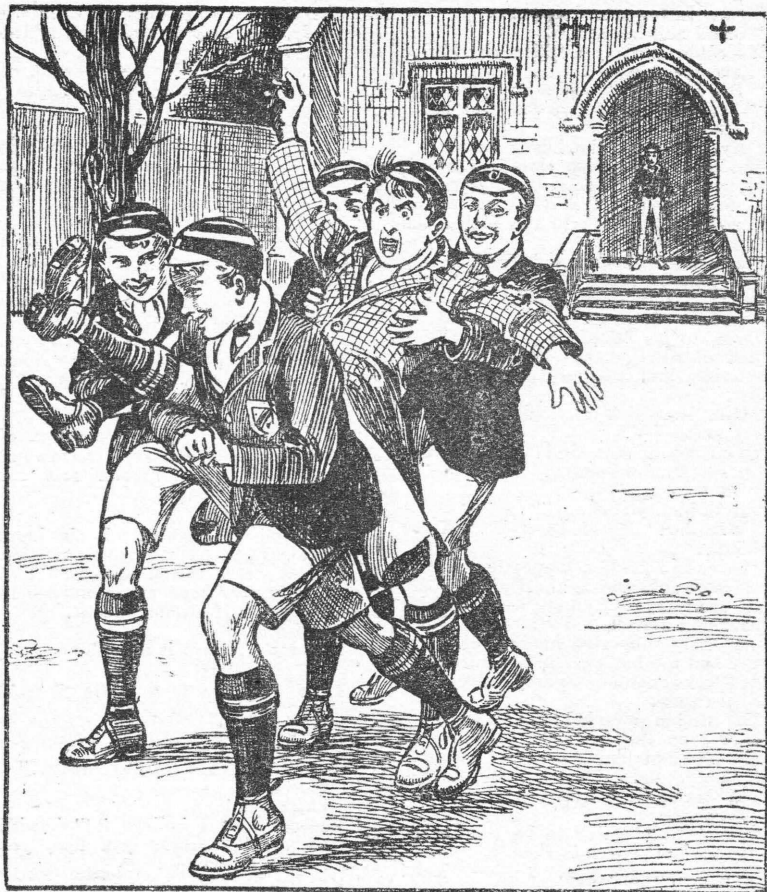
"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, Jimmy, you don't want the house to be burgled, I suppose?"

"I don't want Dickinson minor sacked for being a silly idiot. As for that rotter, we can deal with him. We know where he is, and we can tackle him. We four can do it!"

"But—but—"

"We'll get a cricket-bat each, and give



Dickinson minor was whirled off his feet, and, with his arms and legs wildly flying, he was rushed down to Little Side. (See page 9.)

him the password, and then bash him on the cocoon!" said Jimmy. "He will be fed up with Rookwood then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't!" yelled Dickinson. "I won't let you! I tell you—"

"You look after this burbling chump, Oswald. If he makes a row, take him by the neck and march him down to Mr. Bootles' room, and explain!"

"You bet!" said Oswald.

Dickinson minor collapsed. Whether his mysterious friend was burglarious, or only piratical, he knew what view the Form-master would take of the matter.

The Fistical Four dressed themselves quickly, and quitted the dormitory. All Rookwood was sleeping and silent. The four juniors, with their hearts beating a little faster than usual, crept silently down to their study.

But for the consequences to Dickinson minor, Jimmy Silver would have called the Form-master at once. But the inevitable result would have been the "sack" for the duffer of the Fourth. Jimmy naturally shrank from that.

And the Fistical Four had no doubt about being able to deal with the ruffian, who had taken advantage of the new boy's simplicity. They were quite assured that when they had done with him, Mysterious Jim would not want to hang about Rookwood any longer. He was evidently not a professional burglar, or he would not have needed the assistance of the new junior. He was undoubtedly a footpad, who had seen in Dickinson's folly a chance of getting into the house, there to steal all that he could lay his greedy hands upon.

In the end study, Jimmy struck a match, and sorted out his cricket-bat. Raby and Newcome took a stump each, and Lovell the poker.

"If Mysterious Jim gets this little lot on his napper, he will feel like chucking up the business of a pirate," grinned Lovell.

"What-ho! Follow your leader!" said Jimmy Silver.

The match went out. The Fistical Four stole silently from the study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Ragging a Rascal!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. were soon outside the house, dropping silently from a back window. As a matter of absolute fact, they had left the house in a similar manner before, though never on such an errand. This time it was not a "rag"; it was grim earnest. They scudded quickly across the shadowy quadrangle.

It was well past midnight now, and if the footpad had kept his appointment, he was undoubtedly lurking outside the school wall at that moment.

Quietly, the four juniors drew themselves up the wall in the shadow of the overhanging beech. At that spot under the tree the darkness was dense.

But the light sounds they made in climbing evidently caught a pair of sharp ears, for they heard a movement in the road.

A dark figure was lurking close to the school wall.

Jimmy Silver peered down.
 "Blood and bones!"
 He could scarcely avoid a chuckle as he gave the password.
 "Ere I am, sir!" said a husky voice.
 "Come on, then; give me your hand, and I'll pull you up."

"Ay, ay!" said the husky voice.
 The dark figure drew close to the wall just under Jimmy Silver. The ruffian had no suspicion that the whispering voice did not belong to the foolish lad he had duped.

He reached up his hands, and Jimmy Silver grasped them. With the junior's aid, the ruffian scrambled up the wall, and got his elbows on it.

Then, to his astonishment and alarm, a pair of strong hands grasped each of his wrists, and another fastened on his collar.

"Ow!" gasped Mysterious Jim. "Wot the thunder—"

"You rotten scoundrel!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're caught!"

"Oh, my heye!"

"Hold him, you chaps!"

"What ho!" chuckled Lovell. "We've got him!"

The ruffian made a desperate effort to drop back into the road. But he could not. He was held by both wrists and his collar, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome easily supported his weight. The poker and the bat were not required. It was a cricket-stump Jimmy Silver proceeded to use.

The ruffian was held with his chest grinding on the top of the wall. He could not climb higher without the use of his hands, and he could not escape. Jimmy Silver sat astride of the wall, and leaned over.

"Now you're going to have a lesson, you scoundrel!" he remarked.

"I'll smash you yet! I'll— Yah! Oh!"

Whack, whack, whack!
 "Yaroooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Jimmy Silver laid on the cricket-stump across the ruffian's back and shoulders, with all the strength of his muscular arm.

Mysterious Jim wriggled and struggled and gurgled and yelled.

"Yaroooh! 'Eip! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Pile in, Jimmy!"

"I'm piling in, ain't I?" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I'm giving him jip! I'll Mysterious Jim him! Take that, you rotter, and that—and that—and that!"

"Oh—ow—yow—yoooop!"

The rascal struggled desperately, yelling with anguish. But Jimmy Silver did not cease till his arm was aching.

"Now drop the beast!" he panted.

Crash!

The ruffian went down in the road with a terrific concussion. He rolled over, gasping and yelling. He scrambled to his feet, a torrent of curses pouring from his lips.

"Better call the porter now to help him to the lock-up!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

The groaning ruffian heard that remark, and he was on his feet in a moment, and running down the road.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mysterious Jim vanished into the shadows, his piratical designs on Rookwood completely frustrated.

The Fistical Four dropped from the wall.

"I fancy he won't come hanging round Rookwood again!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Now for the dorm! I wonder if anybody heard him; he made row enough. Come on!"

Chuckling over their success, the Fistical Four scudded back to the house.

In a few minutes they were inside it.

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and the weapons were disposed of in the end study, and they tiptoed back to the dormitory.

"Well, what luck?" asked Oswald, as they came in, and Jimmy Silver carefully closed the door.

Jimmy chuckled.

"Lots!" he said cheerily. "He was there, and he's had the licking of his life. I fancy he's got more bumps on him than he could count in a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you rotters!" said Dickinson minor.

"And he's gone—at record speed!" chuckled Lovell. "You won't see Mysterious Jim any more, Dickinson!"

"Better give him a wide berth if you do," said Raby. "He's bound to think you planted this on him, my pippin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bah!"

"Now let's give Dickinson some of the same," suggested Lovell. "He's not going to spoil our night's rest for nothing!"

"Good egg!"

"Hold on a minute! Look here, Dickinson, do you understand now that that fellow was a rotten thief, and that you've jolly near been an accomplice in a burglary?" said Jimmy Silver.

"No, I don't!"

"You don't believe it now?"

"No!"

"Then you want a hiding," said Jimmy. "Spreadeagle him!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Spank, spank, spank, spank!

"Do you believe it now, Dickinson?"

"Grooooh!"

Spank, spank!

"Yaroooh! I—I believe it!" howled Dickinson. "Anything you like, you beast! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And remember there's some more of the same to come when you chum up with any more Mysterious Jims!" said Lovell warningly.

"Yow-ow-ow! Grooooh!"

Dickinson minor turned in, mumbling, but still probably unconvinced, in spite of Jimmy Silver's drastic methods of carrying conviction. But, at all events, he was not inclined for any more piratical adventures that night.

The Fistical Four returned to bed, feeling that they deserved well of Rookwood and their country generally, and slumber at last reigned in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy's Idea.

DICKINSON minor was in a sulky temper the following day.

He scowled at the Fistical Four when he met them, without

diminishing in the slightest degree the cheery spirits of those merry young gentlemen.

Some of the Classical Fourth looked upon him now as really "cracked"; and, indeed, probably he was not far off it, owing to the influence over his foolish mind of the pernicious American trash he was constantly devouring.

He was caned that morning in the Form-room for reading "The Black Chief" under his desk, and Mr. Bootles warned him seriously that if he found such papers in his hands again he would report the matter to the Head.

He refused savagely to come down to the footer after lessons. He took himself off to the box-room, where he had a fresh supply of lurid books concealed.

Jimmy Silver watched him go with a thoughtful brow, but with a glimmer in his eyes.

"He ain't cured yet," he remarked to his chums.

"Bother him!" said Lovell. "I'm done with him!"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I'm not done with him. He's not a bad sort, really—only fatheaded.

Besides, his major is very decent, and it simply makes old Dickinson wriggle for his minor to be the butt of the Lower School. It's rough on Dickinson major!"

"He doesn't lick him enough," said Raby.

"He licks him nearly every day," said Jimmy.

"It makes him simply raged when the young ass talks about a trusty rifle. A fellow would have thought that what happened last night would have cured him."

"Well, it hasn't. He won't be cured till he's sent to a home for idiots!"

"I've got a wheeze."

"Oh, blow! What about the footer?"

"Never mind the footer now, my sons," said Jimmy Silver mysteriously.

"I've got a wheeze for really curing Dickinson minor!"

"Oh, rot! He's past cure!"

"You see, he's got all that Yankee bosh about scalp-hunters and deadshot desperadoes fairly grained into him," said Jimmy. "He doesn't realise that a pirate is a dirty thief, like any other thief. He wants to be a pirate, but he wouldn't steal anything—you know that."

"I don't see how he's going to be a pirate without stealing anything!" grinned Raby. "You don't get paid by the hour as a pirate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, he hasn't reasoned it out; I suppose he hasn't brains enough," said Jimmy. "It's all just gas, you know, and he doesn't understand it. He wants to be a blood-stained scalp-hunter, but he wouldn't hurt a mouse really. He wants to be a buccaneer, but you could trust him with your watch. It seems to me that if he could be made to realise what an idiot he is, it would cure him!"

"But how—"

Jimmy lowered his voice.

"Suppose a masked robber chief asked him to join his band—"

"Eh?"

"And made it a condition that he should prove his quality by committing a few murders to start with—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Then I believe Dickinson would understand that he ain't built to become a blood-bedabbled buccaneer," said Jimmy, with conviction.

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "It can't happen, can it, when there ain't such a thing as a robber chief?"

"Dickinson believes there is."

"But there ain't, all the same."

"My dear chap, it's as easy as anything to manufacture a robber chief. It only needs a black cloak and a mask."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"At midnight's hour," said Jimmy Silver, in a thrilling whisper, "Black Jack the Scalp-Hunter will appear in the dorm. He will awaken Dickinson minor, and call on him to follow the black flag. He will demand a few murders as an earnest of good intentions, and will plunge a deadly knife into a chap to show how easily it is done. When he sees Jimmy Silver—that's me—murdered before his eyes, Dickinson minor will understand that it isn't all lavender to be blood-bedabbled. He won't know till afterwards that the robber chief is me, and that the murdered Jimmy Silver is only a bolster and red ink. What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Co. were almost doubled up at the idea."

"If that don't cure him, nothing will."

grinned Jimmy. "We'll try it, anyway. And we shall have to let the other chaps into it, of course—everybody except Dickinson minor. He will know afterwards!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That evening it might have been observed that there was an amazing amount of whispering and chuckling among the Classical Fourth.

Dickinson minor did not observe it. He was deeply immersed in the gory adventures of Black Bill, the Terror of the Rockies.

Before bedtime all the Classical Fourth were in the secret, and chuckling over it. When the Robber Chief made his appearance in the dormitory, all the Fourth would be asleep—at least, would appear so. Dickinson minor would be left to deal with that dread apparition on his own.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Dickinson Minor's Chance.

"AWAKEN!"

Dickinson minor started, and opened his eyes.

It was close on midnight.

Dickinson had been fast asleep, dreaming that he was chasing Red Indians on the boundless prairies.

A shake of the shoulder had awakened him, and he started up in bed, his eyes growing wide and round, and blinking in the light of a candle.

Beside his bed stood a form draped in a black cloak, the face concealed by a mask of jetty blackness.

Through the eyeholes of the mask the eyes of the mysterious figure gleamed down at him.

"Grooh!" gasped Dickinson, in dire terror.

"Awaken!" said a deep, thrilling voice. "The hour has come!"

"Help!" shrieked Dickinson.

"Silence, on your life!"

"Oh dear!"

"Utter not a sound!" went on the deep voice, growing more thrilling. "Would you awaken the youths who sleep here? Would you give the alarm and betray into the hands of the police Black Jack, the Robber Chief?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"The hour has come! Arise, Dickinson minor, and follow me!"

Dickinson sat in bed and quaked.

From the other beds in the dormitory came no sound. All the Classical Fourth, apparently, were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Only Dickinson minor sat up in bed, his staring eyes fixed upon that dread figure.

It was not much taller than Dickinson himself, but to the new boy's startled eyes it looked almost gigantic.

On the washstand close by the bed a candle burned. Dickinson was too dazed to realise that it was a curious proceeding on the part of the midnight marauder to light a candle in the dormitory. Perhaps the masked Robber Chief had not wished to frighten him too much.

The candle-light flickered on the cloaked figure, the masked face, and the gleaming eyes. Dickinson minor quaked.

"Who—who—who are you?" he stammered through his chattering teeth.

"Have you never heard of Black Jack, the Midnight Marauder of the Mask?"

"Ye-es; but—but—"

"But what, craven?"

"I—I didn't know he was—was real!" gasped Dickinson. "I—I say— Oh dear! Lemme alone! Go away! Oh—ow!"

"Bah!"

Dickinson started. So like to his own disdainful "Bah!" was that contemptu-

ous "Bah!" from Black Jack the Marauder.

"Craven!" hissed the Robber Chief. "Hearken! From my trusty lieutenant, Mysterious Jim, I have heard of you. Listen! One of my band has fallen. He has been hanged—"

"Grooh!"

"But not," hissed the Robber Chief—"not till he had slain seventeen minions of the law, and seen them rolling and wallowing in mud and blood."

"Wow!"

"Daredevil Dick has fallen. His place must be filled. Hence am I come. His place shall be taken by Daredevil Dickinson."

"Wow-wow!"

Dickinson minor did not look much like a daredevil at that moment. He was shaking like a jelly, and his face was like chalk, and his eyes almost bursting out of their sockets.

"Hearken!" pursued the masked robber. "Without, my horses wait. They paw the ground, ready for the wild ride through the lowering midnight. Rise, Dickinson minor, and follow your chief! Ere long your hands shall be as red with blood as mine own!"

"Grooh!"

"Do you shrink, Dickinson minor? What mean, then, the bold words uttered to my trusty lieutenant, Mysterious Jim? Are you not prepared to rove the boundless ocean, to ride the midnight through the moaning forest, to tear the scalps from heads that shriek in vain for mercy? Are you not prepared to wade in crimson blood and scarlet gore?"

"Oh dear—oh dear! G-g-g-go away!" mumbled Dickinson minor. "I d-d-don't want to e-c-come!"

"A-ha! You tremble! But the order has gone forth, and you must come! Think, Daredevil Dickinson—think! In a few hours we join my trusty band, and you shall share in a raid! Blood will be spilt by the pint—the gallon! Treasure shall be ours, reeking with gore! Do you hesitate now?"

"Oh! Ow-wow!"

Dickinson minor not only hesitated; he was glued to his bed.

Why did he not jump up with alacrity to accept that flattering offer of the Robber Chief? It was the hour of which he had dreamed, for which he had longed—the hour when he, Dickinson minor, should no longer be a fag at school, but a bold rider and a reckless marauder. His dream had come true. Here was the Robber Chief summoning him to a life of lawless freedom. Dickinson minor ought to have jumped at the chance.

But he didn't. He shivered in bed.

"Pi-pip-p-please go away!" he murmured faintly. "Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha!" It was the sardonic laugh of which Dickinson had read so often, which he had often pictured himself uttering upon the deck of a rakish schooner. "Ha, ha! You flinch from the test, Daredevil Dickinson! But it is too late! To gain admittance here, I have slain the porter—"

"G-g-goodness gracious!"

"Behold the trusty blade that has drawn his blood!"

From under the black cloak a carving-knife was thrust, and, to Dickinson's horror, he could see red drops glistening on it.

He shrank back to the other side of the bed.

"Arise, Dickinson minor! Dickinson minor no longer, but Daredevil Dickinson, of the Black Band!"

"Grooh!"

"The hour is come! Follow me, or this trusty blade—"

"I—I—I'll get up!" panted Dickinson.

"Look sharp, then—I mean, tumble up, you swab!"

Dickinson crawled out of bed on the further side. He was trembling in every limb. If only the other fellows would have awakened! It was curious that they had heard nothing! But not a fellow moved, and from several of the beds snores proceeded. Dickinson minor had the Robber Chief all to himself.

"Hither, Daredevil Dickinson!"

"If—if you please—"

"Hither!" hissed the Robber Chief in so terrifying a voice that Dickinson fairly scuttled round the bed to him.

"Last night," hissed Black Jack, "at midnight's stilly hour, my faithful lieutenant, Mysterious Jim, was beaten like a dog."

"I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—"

"By whose hand was the fell deed done? Give me the name of the catiff!"

"It—it was Jimmy Silver; b-b-but—"

"Then he dies!"

Dickinson shrieked.

"I—I say—don't! I say, wake up, you fellows!" yelled Dickinson desperately.

"Ha, ha!" Again that fiendish laugh from the Robber Chief. "They cannot wake. They are drugged!"

"Dud-dud-drugged!" gasped Dickinson, in dismay.

"Ay, ay! By the orders of Black Jack the potion was administered. They sleep. They cannot wake!"

Dickinson minor blinked along the row of white beds in the flickering candle-light. Certainly the Robber Chief's statement seemed to be correct, for his yell had failed to awaken a single fellow in the dormitory.

"Take this trusty blade and drive it to his heart as he sleeps!"

"I c-c-can't!"

"Listen! No member is admitted to the Black Band who has not proved his faith by dyeing his hands deep with gore."

"I c-c-can't!"

"Trembling wretch! You are not worthy of a place in the Black Band! You shall see how easy it is. Behold!"

The Robber Chief strode towards Jimmy Silver's bed. Dickinson minor watched him in horror. The outlines of a sleeper could be seen under the bed-clothes, and the wretched junior almost fainted as the carving-knife was raised. "Behold! He dies!"

Up went the carving-knife!

But at that moment the Robber Chief met with the surprise of his life. Dickinson minor, hardly knowing what he did, grabbed a pillow from his bed, and hurled it. He had forgotten his desire to become a robber and a pirate—quite forgotten that only that evening he had longed to be mounted upon a coal-black horse, stained with blood for preference. He hurled the pillow fairly at the masked face of the Robber Chief.

Taken completely by surprise, the Robber Chief staggered back, and sat down on the dormitory floor with a bump.

And his next remark was an extraordinary one for a Robber Chief and a Masked Midnight Marauder.

"Oh, scissors! You silly ass! Yow-wow-wow!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Quite Cured.

"HA, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers were all awake now.

They sat up in bed, chortling with delight.

Dickinson minor gazed at them with

distended eyes. He could not understand how the Classical juniors had so suddenly recovered from the supposed drug, or why they laughed at that tragic moment.

"Help, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's going to kill Jimmy Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" shouted the Robber Chief, scrambling to his feet. "You've spoiled the whole game with your blessed cackling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dickinson minor wondered if he was dreaming. How on earth was it that Jimmy Silver's voice was proceeding from under the black mask of the Robber Chief?

Black Jack jerked off the mask. Dickinson minor gave a yell.

"Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy grinned.

"Yes, you fathead!"

"Oh, dear!"

It was evident that the figure in Jimmy's bed, which had so nearly received the fatal blow, was only a bolster and pillows.

Dickinson minor understood.

He realised that his leg had been pulled by the cheerful Jimmy, and his face became crimson.

"You—you silly ass!" he stammered.

"You—you're not Black Jack at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not quite!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"No more than you are Daredevil Dickinson!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't make such a blessed row, you chaps—you'll have Bootles here!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's all right, Dickinson, you won't have to ride a coal-black horse to-night, and old Mack is still in his lodge safe and sound."

"There—there—there was blood on the knife—" stammered Dickinson.

"Yes—from a red-ink bottle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you spoofing beast!" said Dickinson. "Of course, I—I wasn't afraid—"

"Not at all," chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Only trembling like a jelly. But you've got more pluck than I supposed, or you wouldn't have bunged that pillow at Black Jack, and saved the life of this bolster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver threw off the black cloak. He was in his pyjamas underneath it. He blew out the candle and turned in, chuckling. The Fourth Form dormitory was in a cackle from end to end.

Dickinson minor was glad for the darkness to hide his blushes as he crept back to bed. He felt—as indeed he was—the most ridiculous idiot imaginable. It was a long time before Dickinson minor slept

again. He had food for thought—deep thought. And he was not thinking about robber bands and pirate schooners.

The next day Dickinson minor was observed to be unusually thoughtful.

Jimmy Silver & Co. eyed him curiously that day, wondering whether the "jape" in the dormitory had had its effect. After his ludicrous refusal to follow the lead of the Masked Marauder, even Dickinson minor couldn't go on believing that he really wanted to be a robber chief, Jimmy considered. After dinner, Dickinson minor sneaked away to the box-room as usual. But he reappeared soon, with traces of soot on his fingers and smoke on his face. He came up to the Fistical Four in the quadrangle, looking very sheepish.

"I—I say, you chaps—" he said hesitatingly.

"Go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver tersely. "You're torn yourself away from your lurid tosh quick to-day."

"I—I've burned the lot!" stammered Dickinson.

"Oh!"

"I—I've been thinking a bit," said

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Dickinson. "I—I've been a silly idiot, Jimmy Silver—I can see it now—"

"Time you did!" agreed Lovell.

"I—I'm never going to read any more of that rot," said Dickinson. "And—and I don't want to be a pirate. I—I—I'd like you to teach me how to play footer."

The captain of the Fourth grinned, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Right you are, fathead! You're sure you don't want to ride a coal-black horse?"

"I—I say, look here! If you're going to chip me—"

"Well, I won't," chuckled Jimmy.

"Come down to the footer, and I'll show you how to take a goal-kick."

It was several days before Dickinson of the Sixth observed the change that had come over his minor. But he observed it at last, and was rejoiced accordingly. And he roared over the story of how Jimmy Silver cured the Duffer.

THE END.

READERS' NOTICES.

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