

★ LEGGETT'S LOOT! ★

A Splendid Long Complete School Tale, dealing with the Adventures of JIMMY SILVER & Co., at Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Uncle James is Puzzled.

"IT'S jolly odd!" said Jimmy Silver. Jimmy made that remark at the tea-table in the end study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked at him inquiringly.

"Very odd indeed!" added Jimmy. "What's the trouble now?" yawned Lovell. "If you don't want the last egg, pass it this way!"

"I've been thinking——"

"Well, I admit that's rather odd!" assented Lovell. "What made you do it?"

Raby and Newcome grinned, and Jimmy Silver frowned.

"Don't be a funny ass, Lovell, old chap! I've been thinking. There's something on—something jolly queer. Haven't you noticed it?"

"Blest if I have!" said Lovell. "If you mean the way Leggett plays footer, that's queer. Bulkeley made him come down to practice this afternoon, and he was looking like a demon in a pantomime!"

"Blow Leggett!"

"Certainly! Blow all the Modern bounders at Rookwood!" assented Lovell. "Blow 'em all, from Leggett to Tommy Dodd! If you haven't got any designs on that egg——"

"Look here——"

Lovell reached over, and fielded the egg. "Go ahead!" he said. "We're listening! What's odd and what's queer besides your going in for thinking, Jimmy?"

"There's something going on that I can't quite catch on to—something fishy!" said Jimmy Silver, knitting his brow. "I've noticed it for some time. Haven't you noticed that a lot of fellows have taken to clearing off in the evening somewhere? They can't go out of gates after locking-up. Where do they go?"

"Blest if I know, or care twopence!" said Lovell. "Why shouldn't they clear off if they want to?"

"There's another thing. Lots of the chaps have been uncommonly hard up lately. Money seems to have run out on all sides."

"Yes, I've noticed that," said Raby. "Three or four chaps have been trying to borrow of me to-day. They hadn't any luck, though."

"That's so," said Newcome. "Higgs and Muffin and Towny and Topham all tackled me to-day for loans. Towny and Topham generally have plenty of tin. But they're stony now, and trying to raise the wind."

"Same with Gower and Peele and a lot of others," said Jimmy. "All the merry Nuts of the Fourth are stony, and a lot of other fellows, too. Tubby Muffin was looking the picture of misery last night, and he only groaned, when I asked him what was the matter."

"Not our bizney," suggested Lovell. Jimmy shook his head.

"Perhaps it is our bizney," he replied. "This study is head of the Fourth——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And if there's some fishy rot going on, it's up to us to look into it."

"But——"

A tap at the door interrupted Lovell. Flynn was one of the juniors who had fallen into the mysterious habit of disappearing from sight at a time when the juniors were supposed to be doing their prep in their studies in the evening.

Flynn of the Fourth generally looked merry and careless, one of the cheeriest juniors in the Classical Fourth.

But he was not looking cheery now. His honest, frank face was clouded, and there was a curiously furtive expression in his

eyes that the chums of the Fourth had never noticed about Flynn before.

The Irish junior coloured under their gaze. "Hallo, Paddy!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Sure I've looked in to ask ye something," said Flynn. "Can any of ye lend me half-a-quad?"

"Half-a-crown, more likely," said Jimmy Silver. "Half-quids have gone out of fashion in this study."

"Sure, half-a-crown is better than nothing!" said Flynn. "Much obliged to ye, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy handed over the half-crown, and Flynn departed. The Fistical Four looked at one another oddly. Little borrowings of that kind were usual enough among the juniors, but Flynn's manner was not at all usual.

Flynn had scarcely left the study when Tubby Muffin came in. The fattest junior at Rookwood did not look so rosy as usual. His podgy face was pale and worried.

"Well?" said Jimmy grimly.

"Could you lend me a few pounds?" asked Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The modest request made the end study roar.

"Not a few hundred?" asked Raby. "Or a few thousand?" grinned Raby.

"Or a few million?" chuckled Lovell.

"A few bob would do," said Tuby, with a look of distress. "I'll let you have it back to-morrow. I shall have plenty of dibs to-morrow."

"What do you want a few pounds for, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver quietly. "You don't want to spend a few pounds in tuck, I suppose—even you?"

"Oh, no! It's something else."

"What else?"

Tubby Muffin crimsoned, but he did not reply.

"Get it off your chest!" said Jimmy. "There aren't any quids in this study, but we can manage a few bob, if it's important. But our last bobs are not going to the tuckshop, my fat tulip!"

"It isn't the tuckshop!" stammered Tubby.

"Then what is it?"

"I—I can't tell you, Jimmy Silver! Leggett specially told me not to let you know anything about it! I—I—I mean——"

"Leggett did?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Nunno!" stammered Tubby. "Nothing of the sort! It's nothing to do with Leggett, of course!"

"Don't tell whoppers, Tuby! Do you owe Leggett money?"

"Oh, no!"

"That rotter Leggett lends money among the kids at a penny a bob interest!" said Lovell. "Awful outsider!"

"He hasn't lent me any money," said Tubby. "I've asked him, and he won't."

"Then what do you want it for?"

"I—I'm not going to tell you!"

"Something you can't tell us—what?"

"Well, you fellows won't understand," said the fat Classical. "You're not sporting chaps!"

"Sporting chaps!" repeated Jimmy. "Yes. You're not the sort to have a flutter!" said Tubby loftily. "You haven't any go in you, Leggett says!"

"Oh, he does, does he?"

"N-no! I—I mean, Leggett never said anything of the sort!" said Tubby, in alarm. "Look here, you're not going to pump me! Can you lend me some tin?"

"Not for a little flutter, you duffer!"

"Then you can go and eat coke!" said Tubby independently; and he sniffed, and rolled out of the study.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. "What do you think of that?" he exclaimed.

"There's something going on that's awfully fishy, and that cad Leggett is mixed up with it. Moreover, it's something that wants looking into, and Uncle James is going to look into it! Come on!"

And the Fistical Four left the study in an unusually thoughtful mood. It was only too clear that something of a mysterious nature was going on in the Fourth Form at Rookwood—something from which they were being carefully excluded. And the captain of the Fourth was quite convinced that it was high time for "Uncle James" to look into it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Plot Thickens.

HOOKER and Jones minor were chatting in the quad as the Fistical Four came by. The chums of the Fourth caught a remark from Jones:

"I've got an idea for to-night, though. What about backing red all the time, and then——"

Jones minor caught sight of Jimmy Silver & Co., and ceased speaking.

"Go on!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Don't leave us out of the little secret, Jonesy."

Jones minor turned red.

"Oh, rot!" he said uneasily.

"What the thunder do you mean by backing red?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing!"

"Is it a game?" asked Lovell, mystified.

"Come on, Hooker!" said Jones. "We sha'n't get our prep done in time if we stay here jawing!"

The two juniors walked away quickly. The Fistical Four were left blinking in astonishment.

"Backing red!" said Newcome. "Is he potty? If he isn't, what the merry deuce did he mean?"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Blest if I know! It beats me hollow!"

"Lots of the fellows are in the secret," said Lovell. "They're leaving us out on purpose. They can't treat the end study like that, by Jove!"

"They've got a reason," said Jimmy Silver drily. "It's a secret they can't tell us—a jolly shady one, that's clear enough!"

"Because we're such good little boys!" chuckled Raby.

"Fathead! Because we should be down on it!"

"But it isn't our bizney."

"Who's captain of the Fourth?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Who's Uncle James—kind Uncle James—to all Rookwood? I tell you this is jolly fishy, and it's got to be inquired into! There's some rotten game going on, and all the Nuts are in it—that isn't surprising. But Flynn is a first-rate chap, and he's in it, and he won't let on what it is. And Jones and Hooker, too—what are they keeping secrets for?"

"It doesn't seem much good asking them."

"The plot thickens!" grinned Raby.

"I've been thinking, too," announced Lovell.

"Well, what is it?"

"I've been thinking that if we don't get on with our prep we shall have trouble with Bootles in the morning."

"Ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver crossly.

"Well, you see, prep's got to be done. Bootles has been waxy lately owing to some of the chaps shirking prep. We don't want lines or detention, fathead; we've got the

footer to think of! Do you want Greyfriars to beat us?"

Jimmy Silver grunted, but he acknowledged that prep had to be done. Prep, accordingly, was done in the end study.

That night Jimmy Silver went to bed in a decidedly thoughtful mood. It was not agreeable to the captain of the Fourth to be left out in this way of something in which, at least, half the Form were concerned. But that was not all. Whatever was going on was of a "shady" nature; there was no need to be secretive otherwise. Uncle James felt that it was his business. But at present Uncle James was quite in the dark.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Getting Serious!

"WOW-OW-OW! Leggo!"

Jimmy Silver stopped. The voice was the voice of Tubby Muffin, and it was raised in anguish. Jimmy Silver heard it as he was passing the old stone archway that led into Little Quad. And then he heard the angry voice of Higgs, the bully of the Fourth.

"Shut up, you little beast!"

"Yow-yow! I'll tell Jimmy Silver!"

"Look here—"

Jimmy strode through the archway, and came on the scene.

"Rescue!" yelled Tubby, as he caught sight of the captain of the Fourth.

The fat junior was wriggling in Higgs' grasp.

"Let Tubby alone, Higgs!" said Jimmy curtly.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Higgs angrily.

"I won't shell out!" howled Tubby Muffin. "He wants my half-quad, and I'm not going to let him have it!"

Jimmy Silver's brow darkened.

"Higgs, you rotter—"

Higgs released the fat Classical, his rugged face growing red.

Tubby Muffin promptly dodged behind Jimmy Silver.

"Keep him off, Jimmy! He's not going to have my half-quad! I got the postal-order only this morning, too!"

"Look here," said Higgs savagely, "you needn't meddle here, Jimmy Silver! I'm going to borrow a half-sovereign of this little beast, that's all! I suppose you don't think I want to steal the money, do you?"

"Well, borrowing it against his will isn't much different from stealing," said Jimmy.

"And you're jolly well not going to do it!"

"Who's going to stop me?" roared Higgs.

"Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

Higgs clenched his big fists. The burly bully of the Fourth had tried conclusions with Jimmy Silver before, in vain. But he was not averse from trying conclusions again.

Tubby Muffin cut off through the archway, and Higgs made a rush in pursuit. Jimmy Silver promptly joined in, and collared Higgs by the back of the neck. The bully of the Fourth turned on him, and in a moment they were fighting hammer and tongs. Tubby, quite content to leave Higgs to be dealt with by his champion, scudded away across the quadrangle and vanished.

"Boys!"

Mr. Bootles came across Little Quad from the library.

"Silver—Higgs—"

The combatants, flushed and excited, separated at the Form-master's voice. Mr. Bootles gave them a severe look.

"Take a hundred lines each, Higgs and Silver, and let there be no more of this!" rapped out Mr. Bootles.

"Ye-es, sir."

Mr. Bootles passed on, and Jimmy Silver and Higgs went different ways, looking grim.

Jimmy looked for Tubby Muffin. He looked in the tuckshop first, fully expecting to find Tubby there, as he was in funds. Most of Tubby's funds went over Sergeant Kettle's counter for refreshments, liquid and solid. But the fat Classical was not there, and the sergeant had not seen him.

"Seen Tubby?" asked Jimmy, meeting his chums in the doorway of the schoolhouse.

"Yes; he's gone in," said Lovell. "Anything the matter?"

Jimmy explained about the scene in Little Quad. Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked serious.

"My hat, it's coming to something!" said Lovell, with a whistle. "Higgs is a beastly bully; but bullying a chap into lending him money is rather the limit."

"It's serious," said Jimmy. "And Tubby's

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in funds, and hasn't been guzzling. That's jolly odd. What is he keeping his money for, eh?"

"Because—"

"Because of what goes on in the evening, when they sneak out after prep," said Jimmy.

"Wherever it is the fellows go, they lose money there, that's plain."

"But—but—I can't understand—"

"I can't either; but I'm going to. Let's go and see Tubby."

The Fistical Four went up to Tubby's study. They found the door locked, and Jimmy rapped sharply with his knuckles.

"Go away!" came the fat Classical's voice from within. "You're not going to have my half-quad, Higgs!"

"It isn't Higgs," said Jimmy. "It's us."

"Oh! Sorry! I'm busy."

"Open the door!"

"Can't! I'm working!"

"Don't tell whoopers, you fat Prussian," exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "Look here, Tubby, what did Higgs want your money for?"

"Because he's a beast."

"Why haven't you blued it in tuck as usual?"

No reply.

"What is it you are going to do with your money to-night, Tubby?"

Silence.

"Will you tell me what's on, you fat idiot?"

Still no reply. Tubby Muffin was evidently not to be drawn. Jimmy Silver bestowed an angry kick on the door, and the chums retired.

"Whither bound?" asked Raby, as Jimmy went downstairs.

"I'm going to see Leggett. He's got a hand in this, and I'm going to know what it is," said Jimmy savagely. "It's as plain as the nose on your face that it's gambling of some sort."

"Phew!"

"And Leggett is making a profit out of it," said Jimmy. "And every silly ass of the lot would be flogged, sacked perhaps, if it came out. And it must come out sooner or later. Come on."

The Fistical Four met the three Tommies on the Modern side. Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle lined up in the doorway of Mr. Manders' house. But Jimmy held up his hand in sign of pax.

"No rags now," he said gruffly. "We've come over to see Leggett, and you may as well come with us. It's jolly serious."

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Leggett's a worm," he said. "But we don't allow you to rag, Moderns, you Classical ass!"

"It isn't a ragging, fathead! We only want to talk to the cad, and you can come. I tell you it's serious."

"Oh, all right," said Tommy Dodd.

"He's in his study," remarked Tommy Cook.

"I heard him lock the door."

"We'll jolly soon make him open it."

The seven juniors proceeded to Leggett's study, and they found the door locked.

Tommy Dodd knocked.

"Let us in, Leggett."

"I'm busy! What do you want?" came the thin, acid tones of the cad of the Fourth.

"Let us in, or we'll burst the lock," said Jimmy in concentrated tones. "I give you one minute!"

"You fool! You'll have Manders up!"

"Let him come. Then you can explain to him your precious little game," said Jimmy Silver. "Manders will be interested."

The juniors heard a startled exclamation in the study. The minute was enough for Leggett. He opened the door. Jimmy glanced round the study as he entered. Whatever "work" Leggett had been engaged upon he had put it out of sight.

"Counting up your gains—what?" said Jimmy Silver.

Leggett stared.

"I—I was looking over some papers," he stammered.

"Let's see your pocket-book."

"My—my pocket-book?"

"Yes."

"I'm not going to!" said Leggett sullenly.

"Mind your own business!"

"Look here, what do you want to see Leggett's pocket-book for, Silver?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"I'll explain. There's something going on in the school; you know that as well as I do. You're not in the secret, and I'm not. Lots of the fellows clear off somewhere in

the evening, where they lose money. One silly ass has been babbling about backing red, another silly ass mentioned that he'd had good luck, another admitted he'd promised Leggett to say nothing about what was going on. I was puzzled at first, but I can see it now. There's some kind of gambling going on, and Leggett is at the bottom of it. He's got some dodge for winning the other fellows' money, and I want to see his pocket-book for proof."

"What rot!" said Tommy Dodd incredulously.

"Look at his face!" said Lovell caustically. Leggett's face had turned almost yellow.

Tommy Dodd gave him a startled look, and his brows knitted.

"Is it true, Leggett?" he demanded.

Leggett recovered himself a little.

"No, it isn't! It's a Classical yarn, of course!"

"Well, show us your pocket-book," said Tommy Dodd decidedly. "If you've got a lot of money, as Jimmy Silver says, we shall know what to think. Out with it, or we'll collar you and make you! Sharp's the word!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Rookwood Reformers Mean Business.

THE juniors gathered round Leggett with grim looks. There was no doubt that the cad of the Fourth had to obey.

He shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I don't mind showing you my pocket-book, Tommy Dodd. I'm not going to be ordered about by Classical cads!"

"Well, that's all right," said Tommy.

"It doesn't matter so long as you show it."

"And buck up!" said Jimmy Silver.

Leggett thrust his hand into his jacket and took out his pocket-book. He opened it for the juniors to see.

It contained several letters and a currency note for ten shillings and some stamps. Nothing more.

Tommy Dodd looked relieved.

"I thought it was all rot," he remarked.

"You're off-side, Jimmy Silver. Better go home and think again."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I thought the cad had the money about him" he said. "I suppose he was putting it away somewhere. That's why he had the door locked."

"You can search the study if you like!" sneered Leggett.

"That means that you've shoved your loot into a safe place where we couldn't find it," retorted Jimmy Silver.

"You can think so if you like."

"Oh, draw it mild, Jimmy Silver, ye gosssoon!" growled Tommy Doyle. "You're barkin' up the wrong trees. Moderns don't play that kind of game. The giddy sports are all on the Classical side."

"I'm going to ask Leggett some questions. What did Jones minor mean by talking about backing red, Leggett?"

"How should I know? Better ask Jones minor."

"Why do a crowd of fellows get off somewhere out of sight every evening?"

"Ask them."

"Why did Tubby Muffin promise you to tell me nothing about it?"

"Probably he was dreaming."

"How is it that the fellows are all hard up after their mysterious excursion in the evening?"

"Why not ask them?"

"It's no good asking them. It seems that you've made them all promise not to say anything about what's going on. You know that we should be down on it."

"Have they made you Head of Rookwood?" inquired Leggett sarcastically. "I don't see that it's your business."

"It is my business, as captain of the Fourth and Uncle James of Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "My belief is that you've got up some kind of gambling, and that you're welshing all the fellows."

Leggett gave a shrug. He was quite master of himself now, and it was clear that he did not mean to make any revelations—if he had any to make.

"That sounds awfully thick," said Tommy Dodd. "And I don't see that you've got any proof, Jimmy Silver."

"Not so far," said Jimmy quietly. "I'm going to have some, though."

"Can't you mind your own business?" asked Leggett.

"I don't believe it," said Tommy Dodd. "You've been dreaming, Jimmy. Leggett is

a bit of a waster, but he's not such a rotter as that."

"Well, I believe it!"
"It's about time for you to clear out!" said Leggett insolently.

Jimmy clenched his hand, but he unclenched it again. It was not much use beginning a scuffle of Classicals and Moderns. The matter was too serious to be settled by the punching of noses.

Jimmy left the study without another word, and his chums followed him. Leggett's scoffing laugh was heard as they went down the passage. The three Tommies lingered.

"Look here, Leggett, I suppose there's nothing in what Silver says?" asked Tommy Dodd, scanning Leggett's narrow, foxy face.

"Nothing at all!"
"Because if you did anything of the kind, and we spotted it, we'd simply smash you!" said Tommy Dodd grimly.

"I tell you there's nothing in it!"
"Well, you're a bit of a Prussian, but I suppose I must take your word," said Tommy.

And the Modern chums left the study. Leggett scowled when they were gone. He had succeeded in bluffing the inquirers, but he was by no means easy in his mind. The curious game he was playing was attended by many risks.

Jimmy Silver's face was glum at tea in the end study. He was more than ever convinced that Leggett of the Fourth was playing an underhand game by which he succeeded in relieving his Forn-fellows of their spare cash. And sooner or later, Jimmy thought, there must be a discovery, and then the disgrace would be terrible. For if the truth was as Jimmy suspected, there would be floggings, and perhaps expulsions, all round. And foolish and reckless fellows who had been tempted by the cunning Leggett would suffer as much as the young rascal himself—perhaps more.

"I don't see that there's anything to be done," said Lovell, breaking the silence. "I suppose we can't start watching the fellows about?"

"No jolly fear!" said Raby. Jimmy shook his head.

"We can't do that," he said. "But we've got to put a stop to this. It must come out sooner or later. A pretty disgrace for the school then!"

"But—but you're not sure, you know," said Newcome doubtfully.

"I'm sure enough. There's nothing else to account for what we know. It's gambling, and Leggett has got the fellows into it. Towny & Co. would jump at anything of the sort, of course. But he's got other fellows into it—thoughtless asses!—Flynn and Jones and Hooker and Tubby Muffin, for instance. I dare say they look on it as a sort of lark. It won't seem much like a lark if they're hauled up before the Head for it."

"There would be an awful row," said Lovell uneasily.

"We've got to put a stop to it!" said Jimmy angrily. "This study resolves itself into a Committee of Reform."

"Oh crumbs!"
"We could find out where the fellows go, and spot the whole game, only—only we can't play the rotten spy!" said Jimmy, colouring. "Mustn't do evil that good may come of it," said Raby sagely.

"But that doesn't apply to Leggett. My firm belief is that Leggett's getting the fellows to gamble, and winning their money—most likely welching them, too. Why, it's breaking the law, and the blessed police would be watching Leggett if they knew.

If what I suspect is true, Leggett is liable to be arrested and charged at a police-court."

"Oh crumbs!"
"Of course, it wouldn't come to that. He knows that. But as Leggett is breaking the law, it's justifiable to shadow him and stop him. You fellows can please yourselves, but I'm going to keep an eye on Leggett this evening."

"We'll help you," said Lovell.
"He's a downy bird," said Raby dubiously. "If he's really up to something of that kind he will be on his guard."

"We shall spot him sooner or later. It will be dark, and we can hang round the Modern side and look for Leggett. Whoever spots him is to shadow him and see where he goes and what he does. Then, if it's as I think, we can deal with him."

And the Co. nodded assent. After tea the Fistical Four hurried through

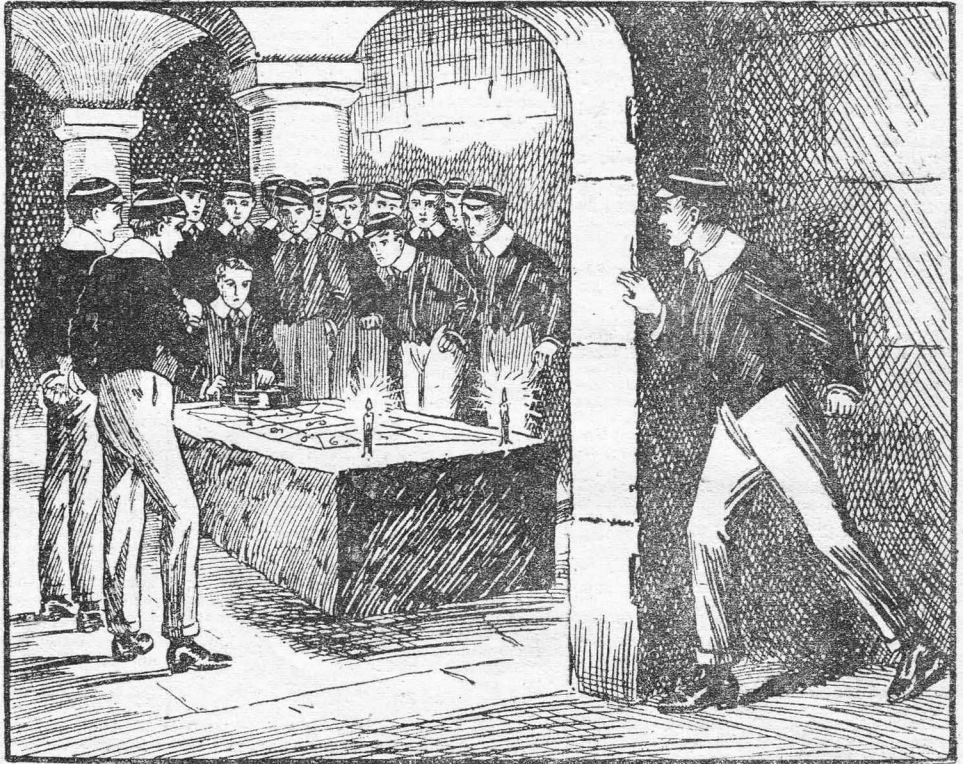
Leggett was simply sauntering about to throw any possible watcher off the track. The Modern junior sauntered round the old clock-tower, and then, apparently satisfied that he was not watched, he started for the abbey ruins.

The ruins of the ancient abbey, though within the grounds of Rookwood, were at some distance from the school. Leggett vanished into the ruins, and Jimmy lost him. Jimmy followed on cautiously.

He had no doubt that Leggett had reached his destination now. If he was playing some nefarious game, the abbey ruins were exactly the spot he would choose. The old abbey was seldom visited by day, and never by night.

Under the dark sky the old ruins were silent and shadowed. Leggett had vanished, and there was no sound, no movement, amid the old masses of tumbled masonry.

Jimmy, without making a sound, moved to and fro, looking for a trace of the vanished



Jimmy Silver halted at the fifth vault and looked in. But he was not prepared for what he saw. He could only rub his eyes and look again (See this page).

their preparation. And when darkness had fallen upon Rookwood they slipped out quietly into the quadrangle.

The Rookwood Reformers were on the track!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Jimmy Silver's Discovery.

LEGGETT of the Fourth came out of Mr. Manders' House, and strolled into the dusk of the quadrangle.

He glanced to and fro as he passed under the old beeches.

From there he sauntered away into Little Quad.

And Jimmy Silver, who had spotted him at once, followed softly in the darkness.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were on the watch at different points, but they had not seen the cad of the Fourth.

Leggett strolled round Little Quad idly, with his hands in his pockets, keeping his eyes well about him. The cad of the Modern Fourth was on his guard, and, after his interview with Jimmy Silver, he suspected that he might be watched. But he did not discern Jimmy. The captain of the Fourth was a practised scout, and it was not difficult for him to shadow Leggett without giving himself away.

From Little Quad Leggett sauntered into the quadrangle again, still with Jimmy Silver on his track. It was plain to Jimmy that

Leggett. The sound of footfalls fell upon his ears, and he stopped, peering about him. There was a murmur of whispering voices.

"The beast wanted my ten bob—he lost all his tin last night, you know." It was Tubby Muffin's voice. "He won't be here to-night."

"Not much good coming without any tin." Jimmy recognised Jones minor's voice. "I sold my pocket-knife to Leggett. He gave me five bob—it's worth ten, the rotter!"

The two Fourth-Formers passed on towards the steps of the vaults under the old abbey. They disappeared into the opening.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. "So it's there!" he muttered.

Quietly and cautiously, Jimmy Silver descended the stone stairs. At the bottom was a strong oak door, generally shut. It was open now, and Jimmy groped his way through.

He stood at the first vault, and looked about him.

Ahead, some distance down the series of dusky vaults, was a glimmer of light. Keeping close to the wall, Jimmy Silver tiptoed along.

The light grew stronger. It came from three or four candles burning in the sixth vault.

Jimmy Silver halted in the fifth vault, and, keeping close to the old stone arch, he looked in.

The scene that met his eyes made him rub them and look again.

That Leggett had started some gambling game, into which he had inveigled fellows better than himself, Jimmy already suspected. But he was hardly prepared for what now met his eyes.

The candles were burning upon a great slab of stone in the vault.

At the side of the slab, which served as a table, Leggett was seated on a camp-stool. The candle-light gleamed and flickered upon his sallow, greedy face.

The vault was crowded with juniors, mostly Classics.

There were at least fifteen fellows there, all gathered round the slab. They were standing. Leggett's camp-stool was the only seat in the place.

Jimmy recognised Smythe and Howard and Tracy and Selwyn of the Shell. Townsend and Topham and Gower and Peele were there with them. All the Nuts of Rookwood had gathered for the "little flutter."

But there were others, too. Tubby Muffin and Jones minor and Hooker and Towle and Flynn and Evans—fellows whom Jimmy knew not to be vicious, but who had evidently been unable to resist the temptation.

Before Leggett on the slab was what looked like a box at the first glance.

But as Jimmy looked more carefully he saw that it was a wooden wheel set in a wooden bowl.

Jimmy had never seen one before, but he had read descriptions of such things, and he knew what it was.

It was a roulette-wheel.

Roulette!

Jimmy had read of that fascinating game, which is played in Continental casinos for the purpose of swindling foolish tourists.

His teeth came together hard.

It was a roulette-wheel, such as is used at Monte Carlo, though not on the same scale. Leggett had probably picked it up second-hand for a pound or so. Jimmy remembered now having heard someone remark that there was such an article for sale at the second-hand shop at Rookham. It was merely a toy, but it answered the same purpose as the real article.

Evidently Leggett had seen it at the second-hand shop, and it had put into his cunning brain the idea of fleecing his schoolfellows, as richer victims are fleeced by older rascals on a larger scale on the Riviera.

The mystery was a mystery no longer.

Jimmy Silver watched in almost stunned silence.

On the stone slab a shabby green cloth was spread, marked in yellow with numbers and spaces.

The numbers corresponded with those marked on the margin of the roulette-wheel. On the wheel each number had a small compartment below it. The game was played by a marble rolling round the wheel. It fell, sooner or later, into a numbered compartment and that number was the winning number.

The young rascals in the vault had evidently learned the game probably under Leggett's instructions.

They were "making their game"—placing coins on the numbers they fancied or backing black or red, the numbers on the wheel being coloured black and red alternately.

Leggett, evidently acting as croupier, began turning the wheel.

"Make your game," he said.

The wheel turned in one direction, the ball was thrown round in the other.

Wheel and ball revolved in opposite directions till both slowed down and the little ball clicked into one of the numbered holes.

All eyes were turned anxiously on the wheel as it sped.

The ball stopped at last.

"Six, black," said Leggett.

There was a grunt from Jones minor. He had carried out his intention of backing red with disastrous results.

But Smythe of the Shell gave a chirrup of triumph.

"By gad, I'm on six!"

Smythe was the only winner. Leggett was not provided with a croupier's rake. He gathered in the stakes with greedy hands.

Smythe of the Shell had a sixpence on six. Leggett had to pay him thirty-five sixpences, according to the rules of the game.

But as he had raked in thirty shillings at least, he could well afford to do so.

All the same, Jimmy observed a disconcerted frown on Leggett's greedy face.

Like the real professional gambler, he dis-

liked paying out. Gathering in was what he liked.

However, he paid out to Smythe, and the great Adolphus grinned gleefully over his fistful of small silver.

"By gad, you have all the luck!" said Howard enviously. "I'm goin' on six this time. Six repeated before."

"I'm puttin' half-a-crown on six," said Tracy loftily.

"A bob for me," said Townsend.

"Go it," said Leggett. "Make your game!"

Jimmy was silent. He was curious to see how that spin would result. Smythe's having won on the number six encouraged the others to follow his example. The number was fairly plastered with coins, from sixpence up to half-a-crown. Leggett's game was on a much humbler scale than that at Monte Carlo, where the minimum stake is five francs. But if "six" turned up this time, the cad of the Fourth would have to pay out something like twenty pounds.

Jimmy doubted whether Leggett had as much as twenty pounds at his disposal for the precious game.

He watched Leggett's face in the candle-light. It is proverbial that the looker-on sees most of the game, and certainly Jimmy could see what was not visible to the eager punters. The cunning gleam in Leggett's eyes did not escape him.

If the number six came up, Leggett would be cleared out of his money, and the rascally proceedings would come to an end.

As it was perfectly certain that Leggett did not intend anything of the sort to happen, it was easy for Jimmy to guess that he had practised assiduously with the roulette-wheel and learned the trick of it.

Jimmy would have been willing to stake his best football that number six would not turn up that time.

In other words, it was clear enough that Leggett was not only gambling, but he was cheating as well, after the fashion of the Continental croupiers, whose manners and customs he was imitating.

Eager, greedy glances were fixed on Leggett as he turned the wheel and spun the ball.

The spirit of gaming was in every heart, and the boyish faces were hard and eager and greedy.

"Ten, black!" announced Leggett, as the wheel stopped.

Jimmy Silver smiled grimly.

On the wheel the numbers were not consecutive. Ten was the eighth number from six. Leggett had run no risk of tumbling into that heavily-backed number by chance.

There was a general groan from the punters. "What rotten luck!"

"By gad!"

"That does me!"

"Oh, rotten!"

Leggett raked in the stakes sedately. There had not been a single winner, and the stakes were very considerable.

"Make your game!" said Leggett once more. But Jimmy Silver was not listening.

He was treading away through the vaults with glinting eyes. He had discovered all he needed to know, and it was time for the Rookwood Reformers to appear on the scene.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Running the Gauntlet.

"**W**HERE on earth have you been, Jimmy?"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome met Jimmy Silver as he came into the School House.

"I've been bowling out that scoundrel, Leggett," said Jimmy. "No time for jaw. We've got to get to work. Call the fellows together in the Common-room. All the decent chaps you can find indoors. I'm going over to call Tommy Dodd!"

"But what—" began Lovell.

"Buck up, I tell you!"

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver cut away to the Modern side. The Co. proceeded to call the meeting in the junior Common-room.

With great surprise, the Fourth-Formers gathered to the meeting. Van Ryn and Oswald and Rawson and several more were there with the Co. when Jimmy Silver came in with the three Tommies and several more Moderns. There were nearly twenty juniors in the meeting, and there was a general howl for Jimmy Silver to explain.

Jimmy Silver closed the door, and proceeded to explain.

He was listened to with blank astonishment. "Roulette!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "You're dreaming!"

"I've seen it with my own eyes," said Jimmy quietly.

"But—but—" stammered Lovell. "Why, Leggett would be sacked like a shot if it came out! He could be arrested!"

"That's why he has taken jolly good care to keep it dark!" said Jimmy. "It's clear that every fellow who's been let into the game has given a promise to say nothing about it. And the howling cad has got decent fellows into it, too, as well as the rotters. Silly asses! This is where the Rookwood Reformers chip in!"

"By George, yes!" said Tommy Dodd. "Why, every silly ass of them would be flogged if it came out! And Leggett, at least, would be expelled!"

"Some of the others, too!" remarked Rawson.

"Perhaps the lot," said Oswald. "Nice for their people. And a nosey prefect might have got on to it."

"They're at it now," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to join them, and help in the little game. Come on! But mind nobody spots you! We don't want prefects on in this scene. Come separately to the ruins, and meet at the vault steps."

"Right-ho!"

There was need for caution. The Rookwood Reformers meant to make a clean sweep of Leggett and his precious game; but they naturally did not want to betray the foolish juniors to severe punishment. Nobody would have been sorry to see the rascally Leggett expelled from the school; but they did not want to have a hand in it.

But there was punishment to be meted out all the same. Jimmy Silver would see to that.

The party met in the old ruins, and Jimmy Silver led the way down the stone stairs into the vaults.

Quietly they trod through the vaults towards the glimmering candle-light ahead.

They reached the arch of the sixth vault, and looked in.

All the eyes of the punters round the roulette-table were fixed on the game, and not one thought of looking round; though some were facing the newcomers, not an eye was raised to them.

Leggett was turning the wheel once more. "Make your game!" he was saying.

Coins were being placed on the numbers and on red and black. Some of the players stood idly apart, evidently out of money, but looking on with undiminished eagerness.

"Make your game!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver.

He strode into the vault.

Leggett sprang to his feet, his face turning white. The punters round the slab stared at the new arrivals.

"Hallo! You goin' to have a hand in the game, Jimmy Silver?" yawned Adolphus Smythe.

Jimmy nodded grimly.

"Yes; I'm going to take a hand," he said. "Line up there, you fellows, and see that nobody gets away!"

"What-ho!"

"Look here, you're not goin' to interfere, Jimmy Silver!" blustered Townsend. "Go on with the game, Leggett!"

"Get away from that wheel, Leggett!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

Leggett hesitated.

Tommy Dodd took him by the hair.

Then Leggett left the wheel, with a yell of anguish.

"Keep him there!" said Jimmy. "We've not done with Leggett yet!"

"I've got him!" grinned Tommy. "He won't get away in a hurry!"

"Yo-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"Look here, you cads, clear off!" shouted Smythe. "I'm winnin', and I'm not goin' to be meddled with!"

"Would you rather we fetched Bulkeley?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"You—you rotter!"

"If I'd wanted to sneak, I'd have brought Bulkeley with me," said Jimmy quietly. "But I advise you not to make a row, or somebody may hear!"

"Sure, it's a baste ye are, Jimmy!" mumbled Flynn. "Faith, I've lost nearly all me money, and I was going to win it back!"

"It would take you all your time, you fat-head! Haven't you sense enough to see that Leggett was cheating you?"

"Howly Moses!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Sure, I am ashamed of myself!" confessed Flynn ingenuously. "I know it's a dirty blagardly game, but, sure, it does draw ye on, you know, and—"

"And it's the first and last time it's going to be played at Rookwood!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Here, yank that fool back!"

Topham was sidling away to escape. Lovell took him by the collar and spun him back, and Topsy sprawled on the stone flags with a yell.

"Listen to me!" said Jimmy Silver. "We are the Rookwood Reformers, and we mean business. Leggett is a scoundrel, and you fellows are all fools! We're going to give Leggett a lesson he won't forget! You rotters are going to run the gauntlet, and then you can go!"

"Look here—"

"Line up!"

A dozen of the Rookwood Reformers lined up for the gauntlet, the rest keeping guard in the archway to stop a rush to escape.

"You first, Smythe!" said Jimmy.

"By gad! I won't!"

Jimmy Silver clenched his fists, and advanced upon the dandy of the Shell. And Adolphus, though he had said he wouldn't, decided hurriedly that he would.

He made a rush between the lines of of waiting juniors, and blows came down on him on all sides.

Adolphus was yelling with anguish when he escaped into the next vault. He did not linger there. He fled.

"Now, Howard—"

"I—I say—"

Jimmy Silver's boot helped Howard to make up his mind, and he ran the gauntlet.

The other Nuts followed his example, one by one, and they were pretty severely punished by the time they escaped.

"Go a bit easy with the rest," said Jimmy Silver. "They're silly fools, and I suppose they can't help it!"

"Sure I—"

"Buck up!" said Jimmy.

There was no help for it. Flynn and the rest ran the gauntlet in turn, but they were let down lightly. When the last of them had gone, the Rookwood Reformers gathered round Leggett with grim looks.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. The Way of the Transgressor.

LEGGETT was wriggling in the grasp of Tommy Dodd.

He was not to escape so lightly as the others.

His sallow face was almost yellow with apprehension.

"Look here!" he mumbled. "Hands off, you rotters! I—I—I'll complain to Bootles if you—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Yes, you'll be glad to tell Bootles about this—I don't think!" he remarked. "Take up all that money from the table, Leggett!"

Leggett, in wonder, obeyed the command.

Jimmy Silver stripped the green cloth from the slab, gashed it with his pocket-knife, and tore it into fragments.

Leggett watched him with burning eyes. Then Jimmy took the roulette-wheel, and dashed it against the stone slab with a force that smashed it to pieces.

"You rotter!" shrieked Leggett. "I gave a pound for that!"

Jimmy Silver did not reply. He stamped on the fragments of the roulette-wheel till they were reduced to atoms.

"Now bring the cad along!" he said.

"We're going to rag him, surely?" exclaimed Oswald.

"Bump him, bedad!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle indignantly.

"Later," said Jimmy cheerfully. "He's got to disgorge the plunder first—what he's got about him, and what he's got hidden in his study."

"Oh, good!"

"I—I won't!" gasped Leggett, in furious dismay.

"We'll see whether you won't! Bring him along!"

Jimmy Silver took one of Leggett's arms and Tommy Dodd the other. The cad of the Fourth was walked off between the two juniors.

Lovell blew out the candles, and the Rookwood Reformers followed.

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The party broke up in the quadrangle. The Fistical Four and the three Tommies accompanied Leggett to the Modern side.

The wretched trickster did not venture to resist.

Leggett's study was reached, and the shivering young rascal was marched in in the midst of the seven.

Tommy Cook closed the door and turned the key.

"Shell out!" said Jimmy Silver concisely. Leggett, grinding his teeth, turned out his pockets on the table. He turned out four pounds.

"My hat! The worm has been making money, and no mistake," said Lovell, with a whistle.

"It's mine!" hissed Leggett.

"Now turn out what you've got hidden in the study!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Bump him till he shells out!"

"Let me alone!" snarled Leggett. "I—I—I'll get the money."

With a groan the unhappy swindler turned back a corner of the study carpet, and removed a loose board. He took out a cardboard box.

"There it is, hang you!"

Jimmy opened the box and examined the contents. Currency-notes and silver lay inside.

"Total, nearly twenty guids," commented Jimmy Silver.

"Some of that's mine!" howled Leggett.

"I—I had five pounds of my own."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I dare say some of it was yours," he assented. "You must have started with some of your own, I suppose. But I don't know how much, and I'm not going to take your word. All this cash is going to be confiscated."

"Why, you—you rotter—"

"If you lose any of your own, as well as what you've stolen, you can consider it a fine for swindling," explained Jimmy, and the juniors chuckled.

Leggett's face was a study.

"You—you've got all my money; you're leaving me stony!" he panted.

"Why not? You've made lots of other fellows stony," said Jimmy coolly. "Don't fancy we're going to keep this—we're not quite down to your level. Tommy Dodd is going to take it down and put it in the mission collecting-box in the Hall. Go it, Tommy!"

"What a ripping idea!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "It will do some good that way. Leggett, old chap, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you've done some good for once."

Leggett ground his teeth. Apparently he failed to derive any satisfaction from that circumstance.

Tommy Dodd gathered up the money and left the study. Leggett sank into a chair, white and collapsing.

—Lovell and Raby went with Tommy Dodd. The three returned in a few minutes.

"All serene!" said Lovell. "It's in the collecting-box—every blessed bob! They'll be pleased when they open that box for the mission."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up, Leggett!"

"What do you want, hang you?" groaned Leggett, eyeing Jimmy Silver apprehensively.

Jimmy had taken a cricket-stump from the cupboard.

"You haven't been flogged yet."

"Flogged!" yelled Leggett.

"Certainly. If the Head found you out he would flog you and sack you. We can't sack you, unfortunately; but we can flog you, and we're going to!"

The shivering rascal was thrown face down on the table. Then Jimmy Silver commenced operations with the stump.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Leggett shrieked and gasped and uttered suppressed howls; but, painful as the infliction was, he dared not yell aloud. Jimmy's arm was a little tired when he had finished, but he did not leave off till twenty terrific whacks had been administered.

Leggett rolled off the table, quivering and groaning. Jimmy tossed the stump into a corner.

"That job's jobbed!" he remarked. "Leggett, if ever you want to start again, go ahead, and keep your weather-eye open for the Rookwood Reformers."

The juniors crowded out of the study. Their prompt and drastic action had put an end to the scandal of Leggett's Loot!

(Another story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next week.)

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR.

Address all letters to:
The Editor, The "POPULAR,"
The Fleetway House, Farringdon
Street, London, E.C. 4.

FOR NEXT WEEK:

A fine array of features is on the programme for next Friday, and the issue of the POPULAR booked to appear on that day is of an altogether attractive nature.

The first of the features is a magnificent long complete story of the Chums of Greyfriars, entitled,

"THE BOXING BOOM AT GREYFRIARS!"

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This powerful boxing tale is thrilling to the last line, and no one can read it without being gripped by its intense interest.

The school gets the boxing fever badly. Friendly bouts are the order of the day. The individual responsible for this extraordinary state of affairs is Sir Timothy Topham, one of the directors of the school, who arranges for a tournament to be held at Greyfriars, and offers a gold medal to the best boxer in each Form, and the excitement can well be imagined.

Be sure that you do not miss this grand yarn.

The second of the stories is a further and last instalment of the great romantic adventure serial,

"THE SWORD OF THE TEMPLES!"

By Edmund Burton.

The mystery surrounding the strange rapier belonging to Harry Temple culminates in a most unlooked-for fashion. The concluding chapters will provide both thrilling and interesting reading, and should not be missed on any account.

Also, another instalment of

"THE EXPLOITS OF FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE!"

wherein the great criminal investigator brings the strange case of the dead Mr. Shields to an astonishing close, and the Scotland Yard officials have to admit that but for the help of Locke there would have been another grave miscarriage of justice.

A splendid long complete school story of Jimmy Silver & Co., at Rookwood, entitled,

"THE TWO GUYS!"

By Owen Conquest,

will be next on the list of good things for next week, and will delight the loyal friends of that select circle of chums known as the Fistical Five. In this story Owen Conquest has a great chance to write a splendid story, and he makes the most of it!

The last item on the programme will be the further amazing adventures which befell Eddie Polo when

"FIGHTING FOR FAME!"

In this instalment Edie is very much to the fore, and his exploits of skill and daring will leave the reader with a longing for the next issue of the POPULAR, to follow up this wonderful life story.

Don't forget! To avoid disappointment, order your next week's copy of the POPULAR well in advance!

Your Editor