

TOO CLEVER BY HALF!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST (Author of the Splendid School Stories appearing each week in the "Boys' Friend").

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Uncle James Takes a Hand!

"WHAT'S the trouble, kid?" Flynn of the Fourth was coming away from Bulkeley's study when Jimmy Silver stopped him in the passage with that question. Patrick O'Donovan Flynn was looking down in the mouth.

Flynn of the Fourth was generally one of the cheeriest juniors in Rookwood. Now he looked as if all the troubles within the school walls had been piled upon his youthful shoulders.

Hence Jimmy Silver's kind question. "Sure, he's a baste!" said Flynn lugubriously.

"Who?" "Bulkeley!" growled Flynn. "Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Bulkeley isn't a beast. What's the row?"

"He is a baste!" "Licked?" asked Jimmy. "No, ye omadhaun!" "Lines?" "Nunno!"

"Then what are you grouching about?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Get it off your chest. Confide in your Uncle James."

"The baste won't give me a pass out of gates!" grunted Flynn.

Jimmy Silver stared. As it was seven o'clock, on a foggy winter evening, it was not surprising that the captain of Rookwood had refused a pass out of gates to a junior in the Fourth Form.

"Like your cheek to ask for one," said Jimmy.

"Oh, rats to you, Jimmy Silver! I'm going out all the same."

Flynn, with a dogged look, tramped down the passage. Jimmy Silver hurried after him. As captain of the Fourth and benevolent Uncle James, it was up to Jimmy Silver to chip in. He linked his arm in that of Patrick O'Donovan Flynn.

"Come up to the study, old chap," he said. "Chuck it!"

"Lovell's roasting chestnuts—" "Go and help him scuff them, then. I'm going down to Coombe, and blow Bulkeley and all the prefects!"

"No, you're not; you're coming up to the study to scuff chestnuts," said Jimmy Silver.

"Let go, you gossoon!" "Raby, old chap—"

"Hallo!" said Raby.

"Take Flynn's arm, will you? He wants to be helped up to the study."

"I don't!" roared Flynn.

"Yes, you do," said Jimmy Silver. "Hang on, Raby! Now, then, march!"

Raby grinned and hung on. Flynn struggled. But his arms were safely held, and he had to go. There was a struggle on the stairs, and Newcome of the Fourth kindly came and lent a hand. He bunked Flynn up from behind, and the Irish junior was propelled upstairs at a great rate.

"Ye silly asses!" roared Flynn, as he was bumped along the Fourth Form passage. "Will ye let go?"

"Not this evening," said Jimmy Silver. "Kim on!"

"Look here—"

"This way!"

With a rush Flynn of the Fourth was brought along the passage to the end study. Jimmy Silver kicked the door open, and Flynn was rushed in. Arthur Edward Lovell, at the fire, was baking chestnuts, and he turned a ruddy face round.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?"

"No trouble at all," said Jimmy Silver.

"Flynn's going to help us scuff the chestnuts. He's a guest of honour; but he's so modest

he took a lot of persuading to come. Sit down, Flynn, old son!"

"I won't sit down!" roared Flynn.

"Your mistake. You will."

Bump! Flynn sat down in the armchair with considerable force.

"Ye howlin' omadhauns!" he yelled. "Will you lemme go?"

"No fear!"

"What the dickens is the little game?" demanded Lovell, in astonishment. "What's Flynn going to scuff chestnuts for if he don't want to?"

"For his good," explained Jimmy Silver. "Flynn's thinking of breaking bounds after dark. Very naughty! Flynn's looking for a licking, and his Uncle James isn't going to let him find it!"

"Ye burblin' ass—"

"Sh!" chided Jimmy Silver. "You duffer, you'll be spotted, as safe as houses, if you break bounds. Now, what's the trouble? You can tell your kind uncles. What do you want to go down to Coombe for? If it's tuck, you can feed in this study."

"Tain't tuck!"

"Then what is it, you ass?" asked Raby.

"Lemme go!"

"Rats!"

The door was pushed open, and an eyeglass gleamed in. It belonged to Smythe of the Shell. Adolphus Smythe looked surprised at the sight of Flynn seated in the armchair, with three juniors holding him there.

"By gad!" said Adolphus.

"Buzz off, Smythe!" yelled Flynn.

Smythe of the Shell hesitated. He had no desire whatever to tackle the Fistical Four of the Fourth.

"Ahem! Oswald said you were here, Flynn," he said. "I've been lookin' for you. Have you got that evenin' paper?"

"No; these silly asses won't let me go, and Bulkeley wouldn't give me a pass out," growled Flynn.

"Oh, gad! Look here, you fags, you mind your own business, and let Flynn do as he likes!" said Smythe.

"Gentlemen," said Jimmy Silver, "you hear Adolphus. The fiat has gone forth. To hear is to obey—I don't think! Now the fiat has gone forth, it's time for Adolphus to go forth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver picked up a cushion and made a rush at the dandy of the Shell. Adolphus jumped back into the passage, just eluding the cushion.

"Oh, gad! You cheeky fag! Yaroooh!"

The cushion flew through the air. It caught Adolphus under the chin. Adolphus sat down.

"Yowp!" roared Smythe of the Shell. "I—I'll slaughter you! I'll— Yaroooh!"

Jimmy Silver fielded the cushion, and it smote the elegant Adolphus on his well-fitting Eton jacket. Smythe scrambled to his feet and fled. Jimmy Silver smiled serenely as he returned to the study.

"So much for Adolphus!" he remarked.

"Here, hold that duffer!"

Flynn was on his feet, struggling. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were grasping him. Jimmy Silver lent a hand, and Flynn was plumped into the chair again, gasping for breath.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Also Ran!

Flynn gasped, and the Fistical Four grinned. They were saving Flynn from playing the "giddy ox" and getting severe punishment for a breach of the school rules. They felt that it was kind of them to take the trouble. But Flynn did not

look in the least appreciative of their kindness. He looked daggers.

"So it's an evening paper you were going for, kid?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so, fathead? I suppose it's the football news you're after?"

"Tain't the football news!"

Jimmy Silver's face became very grave.

"If it isn't the footer news, what can you possibly want an evening paper for in such a hurry?" he asked.

Flynn did not answer.

"Smythe was interested in your evening paper," went on Jimmy. "We know Smythe; he backs gee-gees, and he sneaks evening papers into the school to see the Newmarket results. Flynn, old kid, you haven't been ass enough to let Smythe get you into that kind of thing, have you?"

Flynn's face was crimson now. It was clear enough that Jimmy Silver had hit the mark.

"Dash it all, Flynn," said Lovell warmly, "you might leave that kind of thing to Smythe! I never thought you were that kind of chap!"

"Sure, I wish I had let it alone," mumbled Flynn. "But—but Smythe told me it was a dead cert, and—and he said it was sporting, and—and—"

"And you've been betting on horses?" said Raby.

"Only this once—just for a little flutter!" said Flynn. "You—you see, I—I wouldn't have betted with a bookmaker. I told Smythe I wouldn't see Joey Hook. I drew the line at that. But—but just among ourselves, you know. Howard was willing to make a bet against Eye-opener, and—and it was a dead cert, too. But—but the paper this morning said that Eye-opener wasn't in good form, and—and I think perhaps she has been beaten."

"Well, you'll see the morning paper, and you'll know then."

"I—I can't wait till the morning!" gasped Flynn. "You don't understand! Sure, I've been on tenterhooks all day! I've laid three to one on Eye-opener in quids—"

"Three quids!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"Yis!"

"You've got to pay Howard three quids if Eye-opener's beaten?"

"Yis!" groaned Flynn.

"And Smythe put you up to it?"

"Nunno! Smythe said it was the chance of a lifetime!"

"Oh, you fathead!" said Lovell. "You can bet your Sunday socks that your precious gee-gee is beaten, and that Howard will share the plunder with Smythe!"

"Howly Moses!" ejaculated Flynn, in dismay.

"And that's what you want the evening paper for?" said Jimmy Silver. "You young ass! You can't even wait till the morning to know that you've lost your money!"

"I—I can't have lost it! Smythe said Eye-opener was a dead cert for the Two Hundred Sovs! But—but look here, let me go!"

shouted Flynn. "I tell ye I'm goin' out to get that paper! I shan't slape to-night if I don't know! If—if I've lost, I don't know how I shall settle up with Howard! I shall have to borrow off the chaps, and hand 'em my allowance for the next month! I've only got to pay Howard if I've lost! And I've got to know!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver. "You ought to be jolly well ragged, as well as losing your money! But I can see well enough that that rotter Smythe talked you over and fooled you! I shouldn't wonder if it's a put-up job between him and Howard to welsh you! They're capable of it!"

"Let me go!"
 "You're not going to break bounds, my infant! No good getting a licking and a gating as well as losing your quids!"

"I tell you I've got to know!" wailed Flynn. "I sha'n't slape to-night—"

"Serve you right!" growled Lovell.

"Well, it would serve him right!" said Jimmy Silver. "But Flynn's only an ass, and we'll put him out of his misery! I can get you an evening paper, you duffer, without breaking bounds for it."

"You can!" gasped Flynn.

"Yes. Mr. Bootles has one. Wait here while I get it."

Flynn gasped with relief.

"Sure, it's a broth of a bhoj ye are, Jimmy Silver! Hurry up!"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy.

He quitted the study and hurried downstairs. Jimmy Silver was feeling wrathful; but his wrath was directed against Smythe of the Shell, not Flynn. Flynn was a careless and thoughtless fellow, too good-natured to say "No" to anybody; and the cad of the Shell had found an easy victim for the happy-go-lucky Irish junior, and to see him caught in Adolphus' unscrupulous clutches in this way made him furious.

He inwardly resolved that Adolphus should hear more about it shortly. Meanwhile, he hurried for the evening paper, to put the unhappy Flynn out of his misery, as he expressed it.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, always had an evening paper sent to the school. He kindly consented to let Jimmy Silver borrow it.

Jimmy Silver hurried back to the end study with the paper. Flynn jumped up eagerly as he came in, and almost snatched it from him. He was trembling with eagerness, between hope and fear. Flynn was experiencing for the first time some of the joys—or otherwise—of a gambler.

He tore the paper open, and blinked at the racing reports in the stop-press column.

"Oh!"

That was all Flynn said as he saw the report. The paper fluttered from his hand, and he sank into the armchair, his face white as a sheet.

Jimmy Silver picked up the paper silently. Lovell and Raby and Newcome glanced compassionately at Flynn. Jimmy glanced at the report:

"Plate of 200 Sovs.—Hercules, Mammon II., Quicksilver.

"Also Ran: Pumpkin, Walker's Pride, Eye-opener."

That was the report. Eye-opener, the "dead cert" upon which the unfortunate Flynn had staked three pounds, was not even "placed."

"Also ran!" groaned Flynn. "Also ran!"

He staggered to his feet.

"I—I've got to pay Howard!" he mumbled.

"I—I've got a quid! Oswald will lend me another—I know he will! Can you fellows lend me a pound? I—I'll settle in a fortnight!"

If anybody had told Jimmy Silver an hour before that he would be lending anybody a pound to pay a gambling debt he would have laughed. But the misery and dismay in Flynn's face were too much for him. Silently he glanced at his chums, and went through his pockets. Lovell and Raby and Newcome followed his example, also in silence.

A pound, made up of shillings and half-crowns and sixpences and a few coppers, was handed to Flynn. He mumbled incoherent thanks, and stumbled from the study.

"Who wouldn't be a sporting blade?" said Raby, with a faint grin. "Flynn looks as if he enjoys it, doesn't he? Poor beggar!"

Jimmy Silver's brows contracted grimly.

"Flynn's been an ass!" he said. "He oughtn't really to pay Howard, but he feels bound to. Let him rip! But this is where we chip in!"

"I don't quite see—"

Jimmy Silver made a fierce gesture.

"So long as Smythe keeps his blackguardism among his own set, it's no business of ours. But he's not going to spring it on our friends! It would serve him right if we told Bulkeley. But the cad knows we can't sneak about him! Well, we're not going to sneak. We're going to take the matter into our own hands, and by the time we've done with Smythe he'll be fed-up with getting kids in the Fourth to gamble with him!"

To which the Co. responded heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rough Justice!

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE was in high feather.

He reclined gracefully in the easy-chair in his study, with one elegantly-trousered leg crossed over the other, puffing lazily at a cigarette.

Howard of the Shell was sitting on the table lighting a cigarette.

The two Shell fellows looked particularly "chippy." They were the richer by three pounds that did not belong to them.

Acting on Smythe's kind advice, Flynn of the Fourth had made his bet with Howard. But there was a complete understanding between the two young rascals of the Shell.

Flynn had paid up his loss, and the precious pair had halved it. Each of them jingled thirty shillings in his pocket, and the fact that it was not their own money did not trouble them in the least.

The money, too, came in very useful, for Smythe had had back luck lately on the "gees."

Smythe had plenty of pocket-money, but he had so many roads for it that he was sometimes "stony." Joey Hook, the seedy bookmaker, who was generally to be found at the Bird-in-Hand, in Coombe, accounted for a good deal of Adolphus' spare cash.

"This sets us up again a bit!" Smythe remarked. "I was down to my last half-quid, by gad! What's your fancy for tomorrow, old sport?"

Before Howard could reply the study door opened, without a knock. Smythe glanced round quickly, concealing his cigarette in the palm of his hand. But his visitors were only juniors, and the cigarette came into view again at once. Jimmy Silver & Co. marched into the study.

"You tags always come into a room without knockin'!" yawned Smythe.

"Shut the door!" said Jimmy Silver.

Raby closed the door.

Smythe rose to his feet.

He was on the worst of terms with the Fistical Four, and that visit and their grim looks alarmed him a little.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "You know I don't want you in my study, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy nodded.

"We're here on business," he explained. "You've been swindling young Flynn, and getting him to gamble on gees-gees."

"Flynn made a bet with Howard," said Smythe. "It's his own business, I suppose."

"Ours, too," said Jimmy Silver.

"You meddlin' cad—"

"You can play the giddy ox in this study as much as you like," said Jimmy Silver.

"We're not out as censors of morals. You can keep on your precious blackguardism till you're found out and sacked, for anything we care. But you're not going to rope in innocent kids, Smythe, and put them up to backing gees-gees!"

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

"And more than that, you're not going to swindle the kids you tempt away from the giddy paths of virtue."

"You dare to insinuate—," began Smythe hotly.

Jimmy Silver interrupted him without ceremony.

"I don't insinuate anything. You talked and fooled Flynn into making a bet with Howard, knowing he would lose. I haven't the least doubt you've shared the loot; you're dishonourable enough."

The Co. chuckled; they enjoyed Jimmy Silver's plain speaking. Jimmy always called a spade a spade.

"Get out of my study, you insultin' hound!" shouted Smythe.

"But it isn't only the swindling, it's the gambling I object to," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Keep it in your own set, and we keep off the grass. But you're not going to rope in any of our pals, Smythe."

"I suppose Flynn can look after himself, without you chippin' in!" said Howard sarcastically.

"Never mind that. We're chipping in."

"If you don't get out of this study sharp, you'll be put out," said Smythe.

"Flynn's paid you three quids," said Jimmy, unheeding. "You're not going to keep his money."

"What!"

"Flynn's paid up. It serves him right to lose the money, as far as that goes, and he doesn't want it back. But you rotters are not going to make a penny profit out of it!"

"Who's going to stop us?" sneered Smythe.

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver. "Downstairs there's a hospital collecting-box. You are going to put three pounds in it."

"What!" gasped Smythe.

"The three quids you've swindled out of Flynn," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to see that you do it!"

Smythe of the Shell burst into a laugh.

"Yaas, I can see us doing it," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't!"

"No!"

Jimmy Silver raised his hand.

"Go for 'em!" he commanded.

"Why—what— You young ruffian! Yaroo!"

"Keep off!" shrieked Howard. "Oh, my hat! Yah!"

Bump! Bump!

The Fistical Four were fairly on the war-path. They collared the two sportsmen of the Shell, and Smythe and Howard came down on the floor.

The Nuts of the Shell were not fighting-men. But they put up a fight now.

For several minutes the scene in the study was terrific.

The table went over with a crash. Chairs were knocked right and left; the mantelpiece was swept clean. Smythe and Howard were fighting to escape, but there was no escape for them.

The door opened, and Selwyn of the Shell looked in.

"What's the thumpin' row?" he exclaimed. "You'll have the prefects here! Why—what— Grooh!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door. He did not speak to Selwyn; he shoved him out of the doorway, and Selwyn staggered along the passage and fell. Jimmy Silver slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Smythe of the Shell was down on the hearthrug now, and Lovell was sitting on his chest and Raby was standing on his legs—with direful results to Adolphus' elegant trousers. Howard was still struggling with Newcome; but Jimmy Silver joined in again, and Howard bumped on the floor. Newcome promptly planted a knee on his chest.

"Groo-hoo!" mumbled Smythe. "Ow-wow-yow! I'll slaughter you! Yoo-hoo! Oh crumbs!"

"Keep 'em pinned!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Are you going to put that tin in the hospital box, Smythe?"

"Ow! Yaas!" groaned Smythe. "Anything you like! Oh dear! Oh!"

"What about you, Howard?"

"Yow-ow! Yes."

"Let the rotters get up!"

Smythe and Howard, dusty, dishevelled, and furious, staggered to their feet. They gave the chums of the Fourth almost homicidal looks. But all the fight had been taken out of them.

"Come on," said Jimmy Silver. "No time like the present."

"I—I'll put it in presently!" stammered Smythe.

"You'll put it in now," said Lovell, with a chuckle. "Lay 'em across the table."

"Stoppit!" shrieked Smythe. "We're comin'!"

"Come on, then!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby took an arm each of Smythe. Lovell and Newcome performed the same office for Howard. The door was unlocked, and the six marched out of the study. There was a buzzing crowd outside.

"What the merry dickens is the game?" shouted Chesney of the Shell.

Smythe thought of calling upon the Shell fellows for rescue. Jimmy Silver easily divined his thought.

"We're sticking to you, Smythe!" he said pleasantly. "If you want another rough-and-tumble on the stairs, you're welcome!"

Smythe ground his teeth with helpless rage. He dared not begin a struggle on the stairs. He was in too mortal a terror of the whole transaction coming to light.

Down the stairs went the two Nuts, escorted by the Fistical Four, leaving the amazed crowd in a buzz of excitement. In the lower hall was the collecting-box clamped to the wall. The juniors halted before it.

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. Smythe, with a suppressed groan, extracted thirty shillings from his pocket, and the money clinked into the box, counted as it went in by Jimmy Silver's sharp eyes. Howard hesitated, looked round wildly, and he spotted Mr. Bootles at the end of the passage.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Like another scrap, with Bootles as a witness?" he asked.

Howard gritted his teeth, and clinked the ill-gotten money into the collecting-box. Mr. Bootles was approaching the spot, and he looked on as the last coins clinked in.

"Dear me! You look very untidy, Smythe and Howard," he said chidingly. "You should

not go about in so extremely slovenly a state. What are you doing here?"

"They came down in rather a hurry, sir, to put in some money for the hospital," said Jimmy Silver blandly. "They're standing thirty shillings each!"

"What—what!" said Mr. Bootles, in surprise. "That is a great deal of money for juniors to contribute! I must say that this is very right and proper, and very unselfish—very! But pray go and make yourselves more tidy, my dear boys. I am sure your Form-

master would be displeased to see you looking so very slovenly!"

Smythe and Howard, with feelings too deep for words, limped back to their study. The profit on their precious transaction was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream. It had gone for a good purpose, but that was no comfort to the disappointed and furious Nuts. What they felt towards Jimmy Silver could not be expressed in mere words.

The Fistical Four went to their study for prep in cheery spirits. They felt that they deserved well of Rookwood and of their country.

"I fancy," Jimmy Silver remarked, "that Smythe won't be in a hurry to get kids in the Fourth to gamble with him again. I fancy we've put a spoke in his wheel—what!"

"You bet!" chuckled Lovell.

In the end study complete satisfaction reigned, but in Adolphus Smythe's study there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jobson is not Taking Any!

THE next day there were three fellows in Rookwood School who looked as if they were not enjoying life.

One was Patrick O'Donovan Flynn, of the Fourth, whose usual good spirits were dashed by the fact that he was stony, and that his pocket-money for several weeks to come was booked to repay the two "quids" he had borrowed.

The other two were Smythe and Howard of the Shell.

They were feeling sore in mind and body.

The noble Adolphus had a solitary half-quid in his pocket; and that afternoon he was meeting Mr. Hook, the bookmaker, and how far would a miserable half-quid go in tempting Fortune?

But, as a matter of fact, the great Adolphus was thinking more of vengeance than of playing the "giddy goat" just now.

Licking Jimmy Silver for his high-handed interference was out of the question.

Adolphus had tried that once. Once was enough. He would as soon have tried to lick Sergeant O'Leary as Jimmy Silver of the Fourth.

But to take that ragging and the loss of his ill-gotten gains lying down was not to be thought of. Adolphus brooded over it gloomily.

Then a sudden and illuminating idea flashed into Adolphus' powerful brain as he discussed the matter with Howard over a cigarette.

"Jobson!" he ejaculated.

"Jobson!" repeated Howard.

"Yes, Jobson of the Fifth!"

"What the dickens—"

"You know Jobby doesn't like those cheeky fags," said Smythe, his eyes gleaming. "He

thinks the end study ought to be licked regularly every day! I've heard him say so."

"Jobby won't fight our battles for us, you ass!" said Howard sourly.

"He's as poor as a church mouse," said Smythe. "He's always borrowing tin, and getting fellows to stand him feeds and things. He never has any money. I'll make it a half-quid if Jobson thrashes that young scoundrel within an inch of his life!"

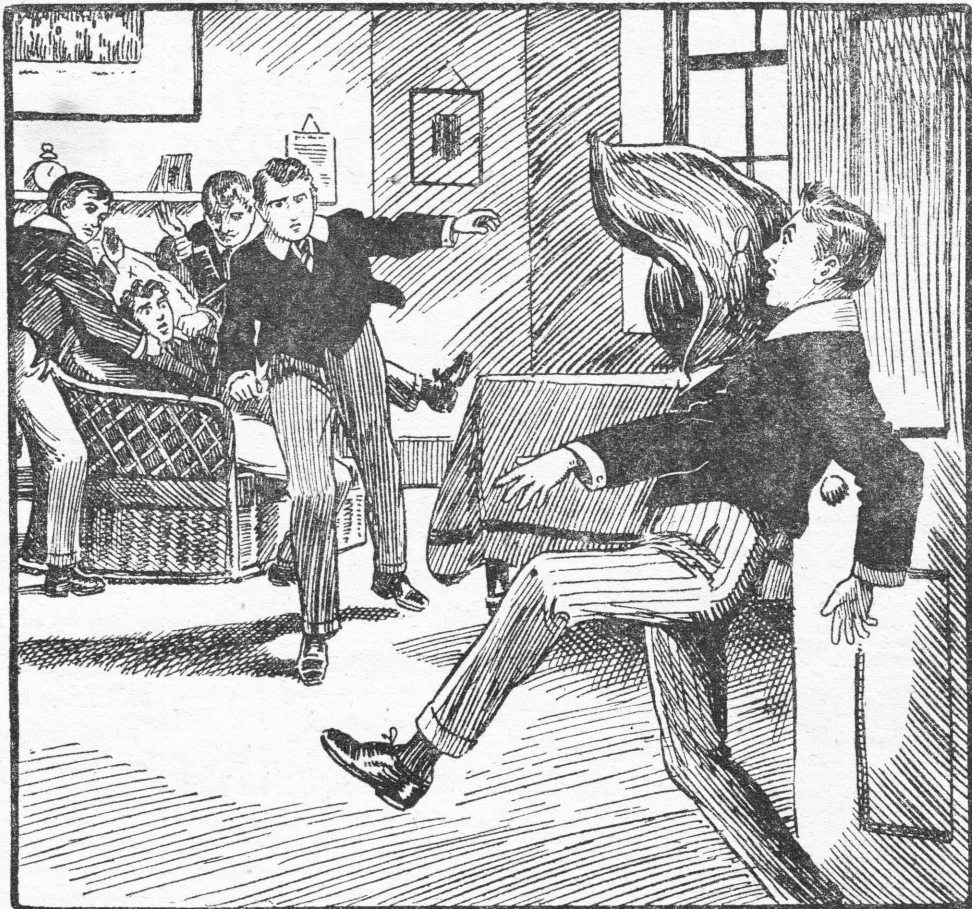
"They'd all pile on him. Jobby can't handle the four of them!"

"I wondered whether a little loan would be any good to you?" he remarked.

Jobson was genial at once. Jobby even borrowed of juniors—a dreadfully undignified thing for a senior to do. But all the Rookwood fellows agreed that poor old Jobby hadn't an atom of dignity.

"Right-ho!" he said. "As it happens, I want a half-crown particularly this afternoon. I'll settle out of the Governor's Prize. I'm sure to get that!"

"Settle when you like," said Smythe,



The cushion flew through the air and caught Smythe under the chin. "Ow! yowp!" he roared. "You cheeky fag—I'll slaughter you! Yow!" (See page 9.)

"He'd have to catch Silver alone, of course. Easy enough. I know he's going over to Latcham to-morrow afternoon; it's a half-holiday. He's got some relation or other there, and he's chucking the footer for the afternoon. Lovell and Raby and Newcome are playing, so Jobby can follow Silver out and wallop him!"

"Good egg! Let's go and see Jobby."

Somewhat cheered up by the prospect of heavy punishment falling upon the iniquitous Jimmy Silver, the two badly-used Nuts made their way to the Fifth-Form passage to interview the great Jobson.

They found the Fifth-Former at home. Jobson of the Fifth was a tall, lanky, powerful fellow, generally supposed to be every sort of an ass, but a dreadfully hard hitter in a "scrap."

He was poor, and did not dress so well as the other fellows—a fact that was much remarked on in the Classical side of Rookwood. Classicals prided themselves on dressing better than the Moderns; but Jobson out-Moderned the Moderns, so to speak, by his general slovenliness.

Jobson was lounging by the window. He turned and looked at the Nuts of the Shell as they came in.

"Hallo! What do you fags want?" was his greeting.

Smythe coughed.

"Only the fact is, I want you to lick Jimmy Silver!"

"What!"

"He's a cheeky little beast, you know, and he wants it. Give him the licking of his life," said Smythe eagerly. "Pile into him! Whack him black and blue, so that the young cad'll crawl home, and the half-quid's yours! What do you say?"

Jobson did not say anything.

He stared at Adolphus Smythe for some moments, as if dwelling on the meaning of his words. Then he made a sudden rush at the two Nuts.

"Here, I say—" gasped Smythe.

"Hands off, you shabby idiot!" roared Howard.

"You young rascals!"

Jobson of the Fifth grasped Smythe by the collar and Howard by his carefully parted hair, and the heads of the two Nuts came together with a resounding concussion.

Crack!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Yah!"

"You cheeky young scoundrels!" said Jobson. "Offering me money to lick a kid you're afraid of yourselves, though you're bigger than he is! What do you take me for, you blessed young hooligans?"

Crack!

"Ow! Yow! Oh!"
"Help!"

"Out you go! Get out, you miserable little cads!"

Jobson swung the two unhappy Nuts out of his study. Smythe sprawled along the passage, roaring, and Howard went spinning across him, and bumped down. But Jobson was not finished yet. He started on the two juniors with his boots. They were shabby boots, not at all like the elegant footwear of Adolphus Smythe, but they were quite useful for kicking purposes.

Biff—biff—biff!

"Oh crumbs! Run for it!" gasped Howard. Smythe did not speak; he was already running. The two Shell fellows disappeared down the passage at record speed. Jobson went back into his study grinning.

Adolphus and his chum did not stop running till they reached their study. There they sank down, gasping for breath.

"Ow-ow-ow!" moaned Adolphus. "The low beast!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" groaned Howard. "The shabby ruffian! Wow-ow!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Jobson of the Fifth was not troubled by any more calls from Adolphus. Adolphus was fed up with him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Very Clever Scheme!

"**E**RE you are, Master Smythe!"

Afternoon lessons were over at Rookwood, and the winter dusk was falling as Adolphus Smythe stopped at the stile in the lane. A fat and greasy gentleman was leaning on the stile, smoking a rank cigar. He touched his shabby bowler-hat to the dandy of the Shell. Joey Hook was always very civil to Adolphus Smythe. He could afford to be, as he made a regular income out of the sportive Adolphus.

Adolphus nodded to him.

"Wot's the business, Master Smythe?" said Mr. Hook. "If you've got a fancy for to-morrow's races—"

"It isn't that, Joey," said Smythe. "I want you to help me in quite another matter. I've been done out of three quids I was going to lay with you."

"That's 'ard lines, Master Smythe!"

Adolphus gritted his teeth.

"I want to pay out the cad who's done me. You've seen Jimmy Silver?"

"I've seen the young 'ound."

Adolphus glanced cautiously round, and lowered his voice.

"I want him thrashed, Joey."

"Eh?"

Joey Hook had performed many little services for Adolphus. But this came as a surprise to him.

"The young cad has interfered with me, and spoiled my game!" muttered Adolphus. "I'm not going to lick him myself; it's beneath my dignity to enter into a scuffle with a grubby fag."

"Course it is, Master Smythe!" said Joey Hook, a smile hovering round his stubby mouth, however. "You wouldn't soil your 'ands on 'im."

"Exactly! But I'd stand half-a-quid to anyone who would give him the licking of his life."

"Oh!" said Mr. Hook.

"If you like to take it on, Joey—"

"Leave me hout!" said Mr. Hook promptly. "The young codger knows me by sight; I can't afford a case of assault and battery. But if you mean business, Master Smythe, I can put you on to the right man. Ever 'eard of Pug Wilson?"

Smythe shook his head.

"He's a 'oly terror!" said Mr. Hook impressively. "He's jest out from six months' stretch for breakin' a man's jaw when he was in drink. Bless your 'eart, he'd scalp his own dad for 'arf-a-quid! You 'and me the money, and I'll fix it. I shall see 'im to-night at the Ship!"

"I—I don't want the kid damaged, you know," said Adolphus, rather alarmed by Mr. Hook's description of the Pug. "Only a jolly good hiding, you know."

"That's all right. I remember Master Silver; he's chipped in more than once agin me!" said Mr. Hook viciously. "Spoiling a gentleman's game! Wot business is it of 'is if a cove lays a bet with a young gentleman, I'd like to know? I'll tell the Pug; he'll take a rope's-end and lather 'im—what!"

"Good! A rope's-end will be simply ripping!" said Adolphus, his eyes gleaming. "A thumping good hiding, so that the cad will simply crawl home. That's the idea!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

"Leave it to me. Where can the kid be found, though? 'Tain't much good the Pug comin' up to the school!" grinned Mr. Hook.

"No, no! Besides, I—I don't want to see the man," said Adolphus uneasily, with a half-formed thought in his mind of possible future blackmail on the part of the redoubtable Pug. "Fix it with him when you see him. Tell him to rope's-end Jimmy Silver till he howls for mercy. That'll do the trick. Silver is going over to Latham to-morrow afternoon—alone. He'll walk; the road's too rotten for biking in this weather. He's bound to take the cut across the moor; I've noticed he does so. That's a lonely place, Joey."

Mr. Hook rubbed his hands.

"Prime!" he commented. "Couldn't be better. Nobody with 'im—wot!"

"No; his pals will be playin' footer. He's sure to leave Rookwood soon after dinner. If your friend waits on the short cut over the moor at two, he'll be sure to be early."

"But 'ow'll he know him?" said Mr. Hook.

"No good in asking a kid if he's Jimmy Silver, 'cause he wants to lick 'im, is it?"

Adolphus grinned.

"No, hardly. Let me see. Silver's a Classical chap, so he'll have a Classical cap—a red ribbon, you know, like mine."

"But that ain't 'ardly enough."

Adolphus reflected.

"S'pose you could put some mark on 'im?" suggested Mr. Hook. "Somethin' that the Pug would know him by?"

Smythe brightened up.

"Easy as fallin' off a form," he said. "I'll put a chalk mark on his back while he's watchin' the footer. He won't notice it. Tell Bilson to see that the kid's got a cross chalked on the back of his coat—or his jacket, if he's not wearing a coat."

"Good enough."

That precious scheme being arranged, the rest of Adolphus' conversation dealt with horses. When he parted with Mr. Hook, and sauntered back to Rookwood, Smythe of the Shell was grinning contentedly. Jobson of the Fifth had failed him, but the same idea had worked after all. Mr. Hook's friend the Pug being a little less particular.

On the morrow Jimmy Silver was to receive the thrashing of his life, and Adolphus looked forward to the prospect with great joy.

The Fistic Four were chatting in the hall when Smythe came in. They noted the expression on his face, and Jimmy hailed him cheerily.

"Hallo, Adolphus! Gee-gee got home at last?"

Adolphus took no notice of that humorous query. He walked away with his nose high in the air, leaving the chums of the Fourth smiling.

Smythe of the Shell smiled, too, in his study. He reflected that he laughs best who laughs last, and the deep and unscrupulous Adolphus felt that he was sure of the final laugh.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Luck!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. came out of the School House the following afternoon in a merry group. It was a fine, clear winter afternoon, ideal weather for footer. The Classical juniors were playing the Moderns that afternoon, and Jimmy's place was at the head of his team. But for once Lovell was captaining the side.

Jimmy Silver's uncle was in Latham, and Jimmy was going to see him there. He was loth to give up the footer, but he did not feel that he could put his uncle off. There had been a great deal of discussion about Jimmy Silver's missing the match, but it could not be helped.

"You've got to beat the Moderns, mind!" Jimmy Silver said impressively. "I wish I could stay and help you, but there you are. I'll see you start, anyway."

"Bless your uncle!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver went down to the footer-ground with his chums, Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side were there, looking very fit and well. Smythe of the Shell strolled down to the ground with the other fellows.

The teams lined up in the field. Tommy Dodd kicked off, and the match started. Jimmy Silver stood with his hands in his coat-pockets, looking on. He was keen to see his men get going before he left.

The Classics were starting well. Lovell led the forwards in a fine rush for the Modern goal, and there was a sharp tussle.

At such a moment Jimmy had no thoughts for anything but what was going on in the

football-ground. He watched eagerly. If the Classics scored before he started, it would comfort him during his long tramp across the moor.

"Go it, Classics!"

"Play up, Moderns!"

"On the ball!"

The juniors round the ground were shouting excitedly. Smythe of the Shell drew nearer to Jimmy Silver.

All eyes were on the footballers. There was no eye to observe Adolphus as, standing close behind Jimmy, he drew a stick of chalk down the back of his coat, and then drew it across.

A thick chalked cross marked Jimmy's coat on the back now. Smythe slipped the chalk back into his pocket and strolled away to the pavilion.

His work was done.

"Oh, what rotten luck!" said Jimmy Silver, as the ball rebounded again into play from one of the goalposts.

"A miss is as good as a mile!" grinned a Modern junior. "Go it, Moderns!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at his watch. He felt that he ought to be off, but the football en-chained him to the spot. The Moderns were attacking now, and Lovell & Co. were hard pressed. Half-past two rang out from the clock-tower, and Jimmy Silver started.

"Dash it all! I shall be late!"

He tore himself away from the ropes, and hurried down to the school gates. There he paused. At that hour the carrier's cart generally passed, on its way to Coombe, and it occurred to Jimmy Silver that he could get a lift as far as the village which would make up for lost time.

"Carrier passed yet?" he called out to old Mack, the porter.

"Not yet, Master Silver. Any minute now."

"Good!"

Jimmy Silver leaned on the gatepost, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled as he waited. He could not return to the football-ground without missing the carrier.

So he waited.

In a few minutes the carrier's cart came in sight, rumbling heavily along the slushy road.

"Here you are, William," said Jimmy Silver cheerily, detaching himself from the gatepost. "Will you give me a lift to Coombe?"

"Certainly, Master Silver! Jump in!"

Jimmy Silver jumped into the carrier's cart. Mack handed up a parcel, and old William drove on his old horse.

On the gate-post, where Jimmy Silver had been leaning, appeared a chalked cross, transferred from the back of his coat. Smythe of the Shell had been liberal with the chalk, in order that there should be no mistake.

It caught Jimmy Silver's eye, and he stared at it.

"What the merry dickens!" ejaculated Jimmy. "Some silly ass been playing tricks with my coat, William, old scout!"

Old William blinked round.

"Is there anything on my back, Willy?"

Jimmy Silver turned his back to the carrier, and old William blinked at him.

"There's a chalky mark, Master Silver."

"Rub it off, old chap!"

"Yessir!"

While the horse trotted on up the lane, old William's horny hand rubbed the back of Jimmy Silver's coat, and obliterated the cross to the very last vestige.

"You been leanin' on something, Master Silver," said William.

Jimmy frowned.

"Some silly-ass chalked me for a joke, I suppose," he said. "It came off the gatepost. Thank you, William!"

The carrier's cart rumbled on, and reached Coombe. There Jimmy Silver alighted. He thanked the old carrier, and started on his long walk. By taking the short cut across the heath, he saved a mile or more on the road; and it was a long walk to Latham.

In a few minutes he was out of sight of the village, and he soon passed the last farmhouse.

The lonely heath lay stretched before him, the footpath slushy and wet, and piled on either side by snow that had not yet melted.

Jimmy Silver stepped out briskly, invigorated by the keen breeze that came from the distant sea.

Suddenly, from a tree beside the lonely path, a figure detached itself—a short, thickest man, with a square jaw and a beetling brow, in a fur cap, had been leaning on the tree watching the path.

He stepped out into the path as Jimmy Silver came along.

Jimmy glanced at him rather suspiciously. He had never seen the man before, but

he looked so thorough a ruffian that the junior was not pleased by the meeting in that lonely spot. He was more than a mile from any habitation.

Jimmy drew to the other side of the path, and kept a wary eye on the rough as he came by. The man looked like a tramp of the most dangerous character. Jimmy was not troubled by nerves, but he did not want to tackle a muscular footpad if he could help it.

The man, however, seemed to take no notice of him. He was fumbling with a pipe as he stood in the path.

Jimmy passed, and the man shambled after him. His eyes were scanning the back of Jimmy's coat.

Jimmy turned quickly as he heard the shambling footsteps behind him.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded.

The Pug grinned. Had there been a chalked mark on Jimmy Silver's back the Pug would very quickly have made known what he wanted. But that chalk mark was no longer in existence.

"Praps you could tell me the time, sir?" said the Pug, quite civilly.

Jimmy glanced at his watch, keeping one eye, however, on the tramp.

"Quarter-past three," he said.

"Thanky!"

The man went back to the tree, and leaned on it, watching the path. Jimmy Silver strode on his way.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Pug Earns is Half-Quid!

"GOAL!" Adolphus Smythe yawned portentously.

It was the first goal in the match, and it was taken by the Classic side—from the foot of Arthur Edward Lovell. But it did not interest Smythe of the Shell.

Adolphus sauntered away from the football ground.

He was bored.

It was awkward to be stony. That afternoon might have been spent in congenial society at the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe—strictly under the rose, of course, if only money had not been so tight. The last half-quad had gone to pay the redoubtable Pug for his services, and the money extracted from Flynn of the Fourth was reposing in the hospital collecting-box, owing to the interference of the Fistical Four.

Adolphus' only consolation was the thought of the terrific rope's-ending Jimmy Silver was to receive that afternoon—in fact, was probably receiving already.

Smythe of the Shell had to kill time that afternoon. But his thoughts dwelt with pleasure upon Jimmy Silver's probable state.

He glanced at his watch. "Turned three," he murmured. "He's getting it already, I should say. Depends on where he meets the Pug. By gad, I'll be glad to see him when he comes crawling in."

Smythe reasoned it out that, after receiving the terrific thrashing now due, Jimmy Silver would not continue his journey to Latham. He would not be in a condition to do so. When Pug Wilson had finished with him, Jimmy would crawl home to Rookwood. Smythe of the Shell looked forward with great delight to seeing him come limping home.

That sight would compensate him for his many injuries.

Having yawned about the quadrangle for some time, Smythe of the Shell sauntered down to the gates.

It was getting near time for the badly-used Jimmy to come limping in, and Smythe did not want to miss him.

He looked out into the road.

No sign of Jimmy so far. Half-past three chimed out.

"Dash it all," murmured Adolphus, "he can't be long now!"

He leaned on the gatepost, with his hands in his coat-pockets, and watched the road.

A cyclist or two passed him—a cart rumbled by, and a motor-car came grinding up the mud.

But Jimmy Silver did not appear.

A quarter of an hour glided by, and Smythe of the Shell was still leaning on the gatepost, growing more and more impatient.

Why didn't Jimmy Silver come?

Had the Pug missed him after all—had Joey Hook failed to make the necessary arrangements? Or—Smythe shivered a little at this thought—had the brutal Pug done his work too well, and was Jimmy Silver lying disabled in some lonely spot on the moor?

Adolphus was growing uneasy as well as impatient. If that terrific thrashing had been bestowed on Jimmy Silver, it was impossible

that he could have gone on to Latham just the same. Where was he, then?

Smythe was too impatient at last to wait any longer. He stepped out into the road, and strolled away towards Coombe.

The chalky mark on the gatepost was fainter now. Smythe of the Shell had been leaning heavily against it, and most of it was transferred to the back of his elegant coat.

But as Adolphus had no eyes in the back of his head, he was quite unconscious of the fact.

He sauntered down to Coombe, but he did not pass Jimmy Silver on the road. He strolled out on the heath, and looked across the dim expanse.

There was no one in sight.

"By gad!" muttered Adolphus. "Either the fool's missed him, or—or he's hurt him, and he can't get home. I—I didn't want anything of that kind. By gad, the kid can't stay out all night; it'd be his death!"

Adolphus was a little pale now. If something really serious had happened to Jimmy Silver, the stern inquiry that would follow might have all sorts of results.

The dandy of the Shell began to wish that he had not made that excellent arrangement with Mr. Hook and his friend, the Pug.

He started across the heath at last. He felt that he must know what had happened, or whether anything had happened at all.

He scanned the footpath, and the drifts of snow along it, as he walked on. But there was no sign of the Pug's victim.

He started a little as he came in sight of a ruffian-looking man leaning against a lonely tree by the path.

Adolphus had never seen the man before, but he could guess that it was most probably the Pug. The man was evidently waiting there.

The Pug took a black pipe out of his mouth, and came into the path. Adolphus paused. The man was there to do his work, doubtless; but the dandy of the Shell did not like his looks.

Adolphus hurried his steps a little. Whether this was the Pug or not, Adolphus felt that the sooner he gave him a wide berth the more comfortable he would feel.

The man glanced after him, and grinned.

He ran down the path after Adolphus. The Shell fellow spun round in alarm, panting.

"Wha-at do you want?" he gasped.

"I've been waitin' for you," said the Pug cheerfully.

He had spotted the chalky cross on Adolphus' back. It was the sign he was looking for.

"W-w-waiting for me!" stammered Smythe. "Wotto!"

To Adolphus' great alarm, the Pug extracted a thick and knotted rope's-end from his pocket. Adolphus backed away.

"Don't!" shrieked Smythe. "Don't!"

But the Pug did not stop. He had waited over two hours in that cold and windy spot to earn his half-quad, and he was not inclined to waste any more time. He came for Adolphus with a rush, flourishing the rope's-end.

With a shriek of terror Smythe broke into a desperate run. But his legs felt like lead—he stumbled rather than ran. The Pug overtook him in two or three seconds.

Adolphus shrieked again, in mortal fear, as a heavy hand grasped his shoulder, and spun him round.

"Help! Mercy! Oh, help!"

Lash, lash, lash!

The Pug, with a single twist of his powerful arm, turned Adolphus over on the slushy ground. Then the knotted rope's-end rose and fell with terrific lashes.

Whack, whack, whack!

Shriek after shriek of anguish pealed from the unhappy Smythe. The chalk mark on his back was soon obliterated. The rope's-end lashed without ceasing.

Face downwards in the mud, smothered with slush, Adolphus wriggled like a worm under the terrible infliction.

And it was terrible.

The brutal ruffian was earning his money, and he was enjoying the work. It was a pleasure to the savage rascal, and the cowardly fear of the wretched Smythe added to his enjoyment.

For ten minutes at least the heavy rope's-end rose and fell with cruel force, till Adolphus felt that his back was flayed and burning. A Rookwood flogging would have been a mild amusement compared with that terrible infliction.

Then the Pug left him. He grinned at the writhing, mucky figure in the slush, put the rope's-end into his pocket, and slouched away.

Adolphus lay moaning in the mud.

He hardly knew that the ruffian had gone. He was aching and thrilling with pain, and his tears mingled with the slush on his face as he sobbed and groaned and moaned.

This was what he had intended for Jimmy Silver, though Jimmy would certainly not have fallen so tame a victim.

But Adolphus was not thinking of that; he was only thinking of the burning pain that racked him from head to foot.

He lay and moaned, and moaned, and moaned, incapable of movement, while the early winter dusk descended thicker and thicker over the lonely heath.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Nice for Adolphus!

"WHAT the dickens—" Jimmy Silver halted in astonishment.

He was tramping homeward cheerily across the dusky moor, after his visit to Latham. His thoughts were chiefly on the football match, wondering whether Lovell & Co. had beaten the Moderns. A low moan came to his ears, and he spotted a figure extended on the ground beside the path.

Jimmy Silver ran to it at once.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he exclaimed.

A muddy, miserable face turned towards him in the dusk.

"Smythe!" gasped Jimmy.

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned Adolphus.

"What's the matter?"

"Hang you! Hang you!" muttered Smythe. "It's all your fault! You've tricked me somehow! I'll make you pay for it—"

"What on earth are you burbling about?" asked Jimmy, in wonder. "What's the matter with you? How on earth did you come in this state?"

Smythe pulled himself together. He remembered in time that it would not do to let Jimmy Silver know the facts. Somehow—how he did not know—the thrashing intended for Jimmy had fallen upon himself. But it was necessary to keep his agency in the matter strictly secret.

"I—I've been assaulted!" he stammered. "A beastly ruffian! Ow-ow! I—I can't walk! Oh dear!"

"By Jove, you've been through it!" said Jimmy. "Why, your coat's torn! My hat! Let me give you a hand, Smythe! Let me help you, old chap!"

The forlorn condition of the wretched Nut touched Jimmy's generous heart. He helped Adolphus to his feet. Smythe, moaning, moved on, leaning heavily upon Jimmy Silver's shoulder.

"I saw a hangdog-looking brute hanging about here when I passed," said Jimmy. "The same chap, very likely, who pitched into you. What was he like?"

"I—I don't know! I—"

"We'd better call in at the police-station in Coombe, and give a description of him," said Jimmy.

Smythe trembled at the idea.

The arrest of the Pug for assault meant the publication of the whole story, and disgrace and ruin for Smythe himself. He found himself under the stern necessity of shielding the ruffian who had so savagely used him. Certainly, if Smythe accused the Pug, the Pug, on his side, would not hesitate to counter-accuse Smythe of having planned the whole affair.

"He ought to be charged for this," said Jimmy.

"I—I don't remember what he was like," mumbled Adolphus. "I—I'd rather not say anything!"

And Smythe of the Shell stumbled home painfully to Rookwood, leaning on Jimmy Silver's shoulder.

Adolphus had had the lesson of his life!

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why Smythe of the Shell took that flagrant case of assault and battery "lying down" was a puzzle to Jimmy Silver & Co. But he did. It was not their business, however, and Smythe had his own way without question. But for a long time afterwards Adolphus was sore in both mind and body, and he bitterly repented that exceedingly clever scheme—which had been too clever by half!

(Another grand story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next Friday, entitled: "A Cool Customer!" by Owen Conquest.)