

GREAT FIRE AT ROOKWOOD!

Many strange things have happened at Rookwood of late. The HEAD OF ROOKWOOD and the SCHOOL have been at hammer and tongs with each other over the fall of the mighty George Bulkeley. But there is a time when all things must come to an end. The unexpected happens, which completely alters the amazing state of affairs at the School!

BULKELEY'S CHANCE!**BACK TO HIS OWN!**

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale
of The Famous Chums of Rook-
wood School:—

By **OWEN CONQUEST**

(Author of the Stories of Jimmy Silver & Co., appearing in the "Boy's Friend").

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Nice for Raby!**

RABY'S the man!"

"Yes, rather!"

George Raby of the Classical Fourth looked doubtful.

"You—you see—" he began.

"You're the man!" said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "It will be all right, Raby. We shall be there to back you up."

"Yes. But—"

"The Head won't eat you!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I know he won't; but he may jolly well give me a licking," said Raby. "I don't want to be licked!"

"My dear chap," said Newcome, in a tone of patient remonstrance, "your personal wishes don't count at a time like this!"

"Ass!" said Raby.

"Now, look here, old chap—" began Jimmy Silver & Co. in chorus.

The Fistical Four had been in council in the end study, and they had come to a decision—at least, three of them had. Raby did not seem enthusiastic.

"I think it's up to Jimmy, as captain of the Fourth!" said Raby. "I shouldn't mind, of course—ahem!—but I really think that!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"I'd take the lead, like anything," he said. "But you're the man, you see!"

"I don't see!"

The door of the end study opened, and Mornington of the Fourth looked in.

"You fellows ready for the giddy deputation to the Head?" he asked.

"Nearly," said Jimmy Silver. "We're talking to Raby. He doesn't want to be spokesman, for some reason."

"Jolly good reason, I should think!" hooted Raby. "Suppose the Head cuts up rusty—"

"Likely enough!" remarked Mornington.

"Well then, the spokesman is likely to get it in the neck, isn't he?"

"I shouldn't wonder!"

"I say, Morny can be spokesman," said Raby. "Morny's the man! I resign in his favour!"

"I'm ready!" said Mornington at once.

"Only—"

"Only!" snorted Raby. "I knew there'd be an 'only' or a 'but.'"

"Morny's no good," said Jimmy Silver. "It's up to you, Raby. It was on your account that the Head came down on old Bulkeley, and pushed him out of the captaincy, and stopped his being a prefect. It was your fault—"

"How was it my fault?" hooted Raby.

"Well, it was because Bulkeley gave you a thumping licking, and the Head thought he'd laid it on too thick."

"You—you silly ass! Did I ask Bulkeley to give me a thumping licking?"

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"You wander from the point, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Whether you asked for it or not, you got it, and the Head caught Bulkeley at it, and was down on him. That was the beginning of the trouble."

"I know it was. But—"

"And it's up to us to stop it," said Jimmy. "All the prefects have gone on strike in support of Bulkeley, and things are going from bad to worse. Of course, prefects don't matter to us. But the fags of the Second and Third want keeping in order."

"Hear, hear!"

"Now, if a deputation of the juniors goes to the Head, and asks for Bulkeley to be reinstated, the Head may take it as cheek—"

"He will!" growled Raby.

"The Head means well," said Jimmy. "He thought he was standing up for justice, and so forth, when he downed Bulkeley—owing to you getting that thumping licking on Putty's account. Bulkeley was a bit too previous, and he was to blame; but not so much as the Head thought. Now, you were the injured party, Raby—"

"I was!" said Raby reminiscently. "Jolly injured!"

"So, you see, as the injured party, you place yourself at the head of the deputation to ask for Bulkeley to be reinstated. That will show the Head that he's made a mistake—see? If the injured party himself speaks up for Bulkeley, that ought to make it all right. I believe the Head's getting tired of affairs as they are now, and it may give him the excuse he wants to put Bulkeley up again, and let the matter drop."

"It may give him an excuse for laying into me with his cane, more likely!"

"You'll have to risk that. We'll be there, too, and we shall get some of the cane. But I think the Head may be reasonable if you put it to him nicely, in a few well-chosen words."

"I shall feel like choosing my words—I don't think!—with the Head's gimlet eyes on me!" groaned Raby. "I shall feel more like bolting out of the study!"

"I'll see that you don't!" said Jimmy Silver reassuringly.

Erroll and Conroy looked in over Mornington's shoulder.

"Ready?" asked Conroy.

"Yes; we're coming. Got all the fellows together?"

"Nearly all the Fourth—Modern and Classical," answered the Australian junior. "Even Tubby Muffin has joined up! Who's spokesman?"

"Raby! As the injured party—"

"I think Conroy ought to be spokesman," said Raby. "As a Colonial, he's suitable to take the lead."

"I'm your man, if you like!" said Conroy at once.

"Oh, are you?" said Raby. "Well, if you could do it, I suppose I could do it—and I will! I don't like the job, though."

"We have to do a lot of jobs we don't like in this world," said Jimmy Silver.

"Think of Nelson—"

"Blow Nelson!"

"And Oliver Cromwell—"

"For goodness' sake, let's get going!" exclaimed Raby. "I'd rather face the Head's cane than Jimmy's chin! Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the heroes of the Fourth started from the end study. In the passage outside there was a large assembly—nearly all the Fourth Form and a sprinkling of the Shell and the Third. Bulkeley, the fallen captain of Rookwood, was popular with nearly all the juniors, and fellows had joined up on all sides to support Jimmy Silver's scheme of a deputation to the Head.

The army of juniors marched down the big staircase, with the Fistical Four in the lead.

Raby was not looking happy.

He was quite as much concerned about "old Bulkeley" as any other fellow at Rookwood; but he had great misgivings when he thought of facing the Head and talking to him on the subject. He felt that he was not likely to put it into a "few well-chosen words," as Jimmy Silver suggested. His words were only too likely to be ill-chosen, under the sharp eyes of Dr. Chisholm—with the cane handy.

But he had made up his mind to do it now.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.**Not a Success!**

COME in!"

Jimmy Silver had tapped at the Head's door, and the deep voice from within did not, somehow, sound reassuring in the ears of the juniors.

Some of them showed a disposition to execute a strategic movement towards the rear. Tubby Muffin disappeared round a corner.

But Jimmy Silver did not falter.

"Come on!" he said. "You six come in with me—and the rest of you stay in the passage, and cheer when you hear Bulkeley's name mentioned. That will impress the Head."

"Right-ho!" said Oswald.

"I—I say—" murmured Raby.

"Keep smiling!" answered Jimmy Silver.

He opened the study door and marched boldly in, followed by Lovell and Raby, and Newcome and Mornington, and Erroll and Conroy. The seven juniors formed the deputation; the rest of the army remained without—somewhat to their satisfaction. All the

An Amazing Cricket Match in Next Week's Tale of Rookwood!

Tellows were ready to cheer when Bulkeley's name was mentioned; but they really preferred doing it not under the eye of Dr. Chisholm.

Dr. Chisholm was in conversation with Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, in the study, and he was not looking amiable. The "strike" of the prefects had caused the Head a great deal of worry, and the appointment of prefects from the Fifth Form had proved a hopeless failure. The Head was probably not in a mood to be trifled with just now, and his eyes glittered a little as they were turned on the junior deputation.

"What is this?" he exclaimed sharply. "What does this mean? What do you want here, Silver?"

Mr. Bootles blinked at the juniors over his glasses. He was as puzzled as the Head. "If you please, sir—" began Jimmy Silver meekly.

"Kindly state what you have come here for, Silver."

"We—we're a deputation, sir."

"What!" ejaculated the Head.

"A—A deputation from the Lower School, sir—"

"Is this impertinence, Silver?"

"Nunno! Not at all!" Jimmy pinched Raby's arm. "Go it, you 'duffer!" he whispered.

Raby gasped.

"If—if if you please, sir—" he began.

"What nonsense is this?"

"We—we're a deputation, sir," gasped Raby.

"Nonsense!"

"We've come to—ask you, sir, to reinstate Bulkeley as head prefect and captain of the school—"

"Hurrah!" thundered the Head.

"Hurrah!" came from the passage.

Bulkeley's name had been mentioned, and the juniors outside had chimed in, to do their bit, as it were. Dr. Chisholm jumped as he heard the roar. The cheer was, perhaps, a little premature.

"We—we—we—" stammered Raby.

"Raby!"

"As the injured party," whispered Jimmy.

"As the injured party, sir—" mumbled Raby.

"It being on my account that Bulkeley was dismissed—"

"It being on my account that Bulkeley was dismissed!" gasped the unhappy spokesman.

"Hurrah!" from the passage.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.

"I feel it my duty to come here as spokesman of the deputation—" whispered Jimmy in Raby's ear.

"I—I feel it my duty to come here as spokeshave—I—mean spokesman of a—a—what, Jimmy?"

"Deputation, fathead!" whispered Jimmy.

"Deputation, fathead!" gasped Raby.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What—what did you say?" stammered the Head.

"What—what—what expression did you apply to me, Raby?"

"Oh dear! N-u-nothing, sir! Jimmy, you ass—"

"Oh, you duffer!" groaned Jimmy.

"The fact is, sir—" began Morington, as Raby stammered helplessly.

"That will do, Morington!" exclaimed the Head. "Boys—"

"Go it, Raby!" hissed Lovell, pinching his unfortunate chum's arm.

"Yow-ow!"

"Raby! How dare you—"

"We—we've come here as a deputation, sir," stammered Raby. "As the injured Bulkeley—"

"Hurrah!"

"I—I mean, as the injured party, sir, I feel it my deputation—I mean, my duty, to—come here as—as an injured party!" floundered Raby.

"Oh crumbs!"

"And—as an injured party, sir," gasped Raby, "we, the Fourth Form at Rookwood, request you to—to—to—"

"Reinstate!" whispered Jimmy.

"To reinstate Bulkeley—"

"Hurrah!"

"As prefect of Rookwood—I mean, as captain of prefect—that is, I mean, as prefect of the school—"

"Oh, you ass!"

"I—I mean—that is, as Bulkeley is an injured party—"

"Hurrah!"

"I mean, as I am an injured party, I

feel it my duty to reinstate Bulkeley as a deputation."

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head, rising to his feet in great wrath. "I repeat, silence! If there is another sound from the corridor, I shall immediately cane every boy there and—"

There was another sound from the corridor at once; but it was a sound of scampering feet.

It was followed by the silence of the tomb.

Dr. Chisholm picked up his cane.

"How dare you come to my study, to enact this scene of absurdity?" he exclaimed.

"Raby—"

"Oh, sir! As—as an injured deputation—"

"Silence! Hold out your hand!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But, sir—" began Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

"Silence! I shall cane every boy in the study," said the Head. "This absurd impertinence must be put down with a severe hand!"

"Oh!"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Raby.

"Hold out your hand, Raby!"

He held out his hand. There was nothing else to be done. It was only too clear that the Head was not in a mood to listen to words even well-chosen ones.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

For some minutes there was a steady sound of swishing in the Head's study, as the hapless deputation "went through it."

When the infliction was finished, Dr. Chisholm pointed to the door with his cane.

"Leave my study!" he said.

"But, sir—" began Jimmy Silver, as he rubbed his hands.

"Do you desire a further caning, Silver?" thundered the Head.

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then leave my study at once!"

And Jimmy Silver left.

In the passage, as the door closed upon them, the deputation looked at one another, and rubbed their hands, with feelings almost too deep for words.

"Ow!" murmured Lovell.

"You ass, Raby!" said Jimmy Silver witheringly. "You mucked it all up!"

"It didn't want mucking up; it was all rot from the beginning, like all your stunts!" groaned Raby. "Ow! My hands! You're a silly ass, Jimmy Silver! Ow! You're a burbling idiot! Wow!"

"Yow-ow!" murmured Newcome.

"You ass, Raby!"

Slowly and sadly the deputation meandered away. Even Jimmy Silver could not claim that it had been a success. And as he rubbed his hands, the captain of the Fourth found it hard to live up to his own maxim, and "keep smiling."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Case of Smoke Without Fire.

YOW-OW-OW!

Thus Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical came along the Fourth Form passage, squeezing his fat hands and uttering sounds of woe.

"Shurrup!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Wow-wow!"

The Fistical Four were chatting in the passage—on the subject of cricket. It was the day following the deputation to the Head, and the subject of the deputation had been dropped by common consent.

Jimmy Silver had averred that it was up to the end study to make a finish of the present unsatisfactory state of affairs at Rookwood; but since the deputation to the Head had ended in such a ghastly "frost," Jimmy had said nothing more on the subject.

The august body of the prefects were still "on strike," maintaining a lofty and dignified attitude of passive resistance, till the Head should come round. But the Head showed no sign whatever of coming round.

Meanwhile, it was certain that the school suffered from the state of affairs.

Fags slid down the banisters, and kicked up shindies in the passages, almost as they liked.

Masters could not be everywhere at once. A great many duties had fallen to the prefects; now they fell to the masters, and a good many of them were left undone.

Carthew, the only prefect who refused to join in the strike, was "cut" by the rest of the Sixth, and very considerably "checked" by the juniors.

The Fistical Four, indeed, were at open war with Carthew, who, prefect as he was, found it rather too difficult to deal with Jimmy Silver & Co., having no support from the other seniors. Even fags of the Third would take the liberty of yelling opprobrious epithets through Carthew's door and bolting.

Tubby Muffin squeezed his fat hands and blinked at the Fistical Four reproachfully, evidently in expectation of sympathy.

"I've had a fearful licking, Jimmy!" he said pathetically.

"I dare say you wanted one," answered Jimmy.

"It was that beast Carthew!" groaned Tubby Muffin. "I simply went to his study to take him lines—he'd given me lines, the beast! He was smoking—"

"Nice prefect!" grunted Lovell.

"I suppose he was waxy at a fellow catching him smoking!" groaned Tubby. "He pitched into me. Yow-ow-ow!"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"Dash it all, that's too thick!" he said. "Carthew's a beastly bully; and he's no right to smoke. As a prefect, he ought to be setting us a good example."

"Catch him!" snorted Lovell.

"Sure he was smoking, Tubby?" asked Jimmy.

"He had a cigarette in his mouth, and there was no end of smoke in the study," said Tubby. "I saw fag-ends in the grate, too. The beast smokes no end. Yow-ow! And he pitched into me just because I saw him!"

"Smoke in the study?" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes, lots!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes glistened.

"What have you got in your noddle, fat-head?" asked Raby. "A rag on Carthew?"

"Well, not exactly a rag," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "If there's smoke in Carthew's study, it looks as if the study must be on fire."

"Tubby says he was smoking."

"But we have a right to suppose that a prefect of the Sixth wouldn't smoke," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Taking it for granted that Carthew is incapable of breaking the rule—as we've a right to do—it stands to reason that his study must be on fire, if it's full of smoke."

"What the thump—"

"If Carthew's study is on fire, we're bound to roll up at once, and put out the conflagration," said Jimmy Silver. "Carthew is a beast, but I suppose you wouldn't leave even Carthew to be burned to death. Come on!"

"Where?" howled Lovell.

"To Carthew's study."

"What for?"

"To put out the fire."

"But there isn't a fire."

"My dear man, we're going to put it out, whether there is or not. If Carthew is not satisfied, he can explain to the Head how there came to be smoke in his study."

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "I see!"

"Time you did, old chap."

"He, he, he!" cackled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded downstairs to the Sixth Form quarters, to act as an amateur fire-brigade. As Jimmy declared, they had a right to suppose that Carthew's study was on fire, if it was thick with smoke. They were going to exercise that right.

"But—but there'll be a row if we swamp Carthew's study with water," murmured Raby.

"Rot! It's our duty. Carthew won't complain to the Head."

"But the other prefects—"

"There aren't any other prefects now."

"My hat! I forgot that!" grinned Raby.

"There's some advantage in having no prefects," observed Jimmy Silver. "The Sixth can't interfere with us. This way!"

The Fistical Four scudded along the Sixth Form passage to the row of little red fire-buckets. There was a tap round the corner, and the chums of the Fourth filled the buckets.

Then four juniors, each bearing a bucket of water, moved along to Carthew's study. Jimmy Silver turned the handle, and threw the door open suddenly.

There was an angry exclamation within

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The study. Mark Carthew was there, sprawling in his armchair, with his feet on the table, and a cigarette between his lips.

The bully of the Sixth was taking his ease in his study; and he had certainly smoked a good many cigarettes, for the atmosphere of the study was quite hazy.

"What—" he began angrily.

"Go it!" shouted Jimmy.

Carthew leaped to his feet as the Fistical Four rushed in with swamping fire-buckets.

Swoooooosh!

"Yoooop!"

A flood of water deluged the Sixth-Former from head to foot. It swamped upon him from four buckets at once, choking him and blinding him.

Carthew staggered back, spluttering wildly, and sat down in the fender with a crash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall we get some more water, Carthew?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"Gurrrrrrg!"

Carthew scrambled to his feet. He gazed the water from his eyes, and stood gasping, dripping, and furious.

"You—you young scoundrels! I'll report you to the Head! I'll have you flogged! I'll—"

"Have us flogged for putting out the fire in your study!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in pained surprise.

"You young rascal, there's no fire here, and you know it—"

"Where does the smoke come from, then?"

"Waa-a-at!"

Carthew had seized his ashplant, and was striding towards the juniors, when Jimmy asked that question. He stopped suddenly.

"The—the smoke!" he repeated.

"Don't you notice the smoke?" asked Jimmy Silver sweetly. "It's quite thick, Carthew."

"You—you—"

"Bulkeley!" Jimmy called to the captain of Rookwood, who was coming along to his study. "Will you look in here, Bulkeley?"

"What's the matter?"

"We want you as a witness," said Jimmy.

"We've been putting out a fire in Carthew's study—"

"What?"

"And he's going to complain to the Head. We want a witness that the study really was full of smoke."

Bulkeley sniffed the smoke, and frowned. "That's tobacco-smoke, you young ass!" he said.

"Impossible!" said Jimmy Silver. "A prefect of Rookwood wouldn't smoke in his study. He wouldn't dare to tell the Head so, anyhow! Come away, you fellows—the fire seems to be out. You needn't thank us, Carthew—you're quite welcome!"

Carthew stood rooted to the floor, ashplant in hand. As the juniors were well aware, he dared not let the matter come before the Head. Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered away, and hung up the fire-buckets. Bulkeley remained standing in the doorway of the study, looking at Carthew with a very expressive look.

"So you're smoking here?" he said.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Carthew. "Those young villains didn't think the study was on fire, and you know it."

"They know you can't take them before the Head, as you're breaking the rules of the school yourself," said Bulkeley contemptuously. "You've asked for this, Carthew, and it serves you right!"

"Oh, get out!"

"If I were still a prefect, I should report you myself."

"Well, you're not!" sneered Carthew. "I'm a prefect, and you're not, Bulkeley, and you're under my orders! Get out of my study!"

Bulkeley clenched his hand for a moment; but he turned quietly and walked away. Carthew kicked the door shut savagely after him. And for a long time afterwards the "blade" of the Sixth was busy with towels—what time he murmured anathemas, both loud and deep, upon the Fistical Four of the Fourth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Carthew Looks In.

"BEDTIME, my boys!" said Mr. Bootles mildly. The master of the Fourth blinked into the Common-room. In the days of the prefects it had been a prefect's THE POPULAR.—No. 224.

duty to shepherd the juniors to their dormitories; but that was one of the many duties that now fell to the staff.

The Classical Fourth obediently marched out, and little Mr. Bootles walked after them with a sigh. Mr. Bootles did not like the stairs. Carthew of the Sixth was coming downstairs, and he bestowed a dark scowl upon Jimmy Silver & Co.

Jimmy bestowed a sweet smile upon him in return.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath; but Jimmy's sweet smile certainly failed to have that effect.

Carthew strode on, scowling, to his study, and slammed the door savagely.

There he threw himself into his armchair and lighted a cigarette by way of solace.

Since Bulkeley's fall Carthew had been a good deal more free and easy in this respect than of old. He had nothing to fear, as it was not likely that a master would drop into his study. His example was followed by the "doggy" youths among the juniors, such as Smythe & Co. of the Shell, and Towny and Topy, Lattrey and Peele and Gower of the Fourth. Those amiable youths found life much more free and easy without any prefects "nosin' around," as Adolphus Smythe expressed it.

Carthew took a pink paper from his pocket and began to scan it, with corrugated brow. His little speculations on "gee-gees" had not been fortunate of late. He glanced occasionally at the clock over his mantelpiece. He was waiting. The amateur firemen who had performed in his study that day were not to escape scot-free, if Carthew could help it; and as soon as the coast was quite clear the prefect intended to visit them in the Fourth Form dormitory.

It would be easy to explain afterwards that he had heard a disturbance there—Carthew not being a stickler for the truth. He intended to take a cane with him, and by the time he had finished with the cane it was probable that Jimmy Silver & Co. would be sorry that they had extinguished that non-existent fire in his study.

He crumpled the pink paper in his hand, and threw it angrily upon the hearthrug. Then he smoked a couple more cigarettes, while the clock-hand crawled round the dial.

When it indicated ten o'clock, Carthew threw away a half-smoked cigarette and rose to his feet, picking up his ashplant.

He turned out the light and quitted the study, and went quietly towards the staircase.

The room remained in darkness, save for a tiny red glow—the still burning end of the cigarette. Carthew had not noticed where the cigarette had fallen, in his carelessness; but it had fallen on the crumpled paper, and the paper was dry and inflammable.

The tiny red glow did not go out; it was increasing as it scorched the edge of the paper, which began to glow, too.

It was an even chance whether the red ember died out or whether it burst into flame, and a draught from the door, which Carthew had left open, decided the matter.

There was a brighter glow in the darkened room as a little tongue of flame rose and flicked along the edge of the paper.

A few moments more, and the paper was ablaze.

It flared up, and the fluffy rug on which it lay flared up, too, fanned by the draught from the corridor through the open doorway.

The flames licked round the armchair, and caught the tablecover. The study was full of dancing light and shadow now, and thickening with smoke. Even then it was time for the growing fire to be stamped out if Carthew had returned. But Carthew did not return. Little dreaming of what was happening in the study he had left, the bully of the Sixth had reached the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, and turned the handle of the door. He switched on the light and strode in, ashplant in hand.

Jimmy Silver started out of slumber and rubbed his eyes, startled by the light in the dormitory.

"What the thump—" began Jimmy drowsily.

Then he jumped as he saw Carthew striding towards his bed.

"Carthew! What— Yaroooh!"

The ashplant came down on Jimmy Silver with a sounding whack. His yell rang

through the dormitory, and awakened every other fellow there.

Jimmy rolled out of bed, but as he did so Carthew grasped him by the back of the neck.

"Now, then, you young rascal!" said the Sixth-Former, between his teeth.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy.

Lovell was out of bed with a bound, grasping his pillow. Baby and Newcome were only a second after him, and Mornington was next. They rushed at Carthew, brandishing pillows and bolsters.

"Stand back!" exclaimed Carthew fiercely.

"Sock it to him!" yelled Mornington.

Carthew, attacked by half a dozen swiping pillows, defended himself with his cane, letting Jimmy Silver go. Jimmy grasped his pillow at once, and joined in the attack.

"Down him!" shouted Courroy.

"Stand back!" yelled Carthew furiously.

Once more the bully of the Sixth had succeeded in awakening a hornets'-nest. Nearly all the Classical Fourth were out of bed now, and scrambling over one another to swipe him with pillow or bolster. By that time Mark Carthew probably regretted that he had made the venture.

He made a rush for the door; but it was too late. A crowd of juniors were round him, and the swiping pillows sent him spinning to the floor.

"Hurrah! He's down!" gasped Lovell.

"Keep off! You young villains— Oh, my hat! Yow-wow!" howled Carthew, as the Fourth-Formers piled on him.

"Collar him!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"We've got him!"

"Stretch him on a bed, and I'll give him his own ashplant!"

"Hurrah!"

Carthew—quite repentant now—struggled furiously, but in vain. In the grasp of a dozen hands, he was dragged to the nearest bed, and plumped upon it, face down. Then Jimmy wielded the ashplant.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver "went it" with vigour.

Whack, whack, whack!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Fire!

"NEVILLE, old chap!" Bulkeley of the Sixth was leaning back in his chair, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep line in his brow. He had been silent for some time, and Neville, who had dropped in for a chat after prep, was silent, too. He looked up as Bulkeley spoke.

"Well, old fellow?"

"This won't do!" said Bulkeley.

"The prefects' strike, you mean?"

Bulkeley nodded.

"It won't do!" he repeated. "It's a rotten state of affairs for Rookwood. I'm grateful, of course, for the fellows backing me up as they've done, but—I'd rather it came to an end. There must be a captain of the school, Neville—especially with the matches coming on soon. The Head's down on me—and I was partly to blame, as I've admitted. Well, if the Head won't alter his mind—and he won't do—"

"Sooner or later—" began Neville.

"He won't, Neville. I'd rather not let it go on. I'm not keen on being captain of Rookwood, excepting that I think I can do pretty well for the school. But you—"

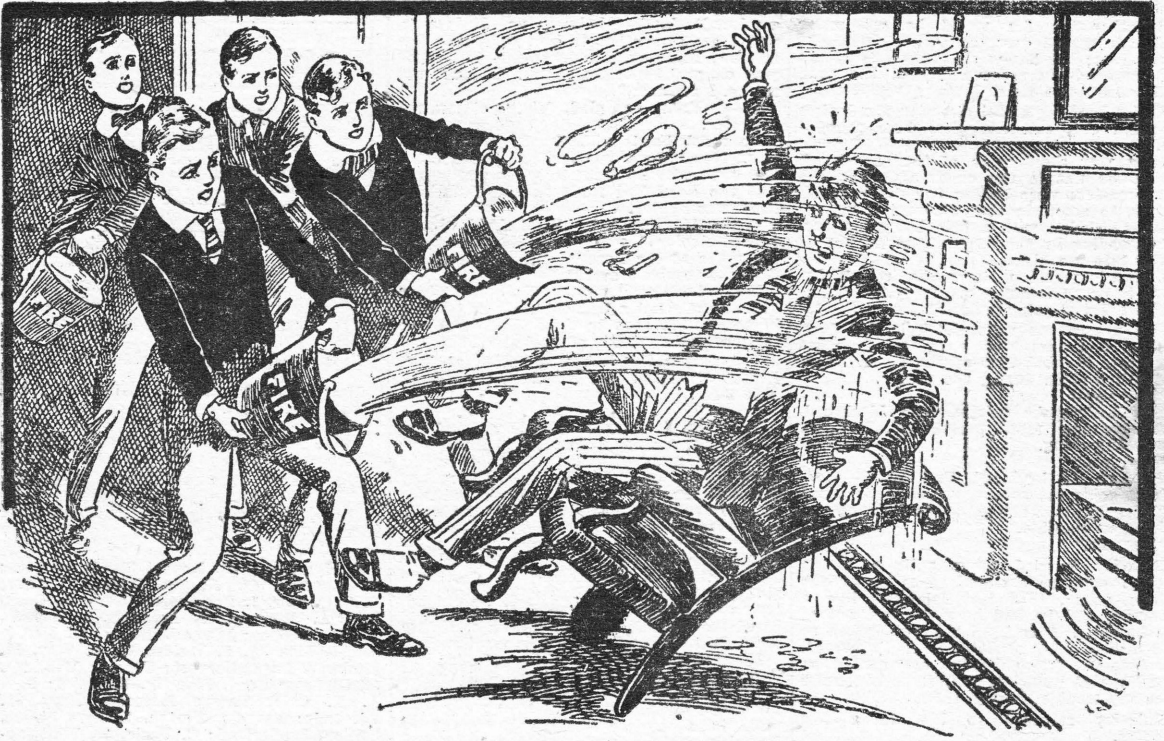
"I'm not bagging your job," said Neville decidedly. "You've suggested that before. Nothing doing!"

"It's for the sake of the school," urged Bulkeley. "This can't go on!"

"It's jolly well going on till the Head sees reason!" Neville shook his head. "It's no good, Bulkeley—whether you like it or not, the Sixth are going to back you up to the last shot in the locker! The Head knows very well that he's made a mistake; but he won't admit it. Well, he will have to admit it, sooner or later. That's settled."

Bulkeley did not answer; but the line in his brow deepened.

He was worried and distressed by the state of affairs; all the more because it was on his account. It was hard for him to find fault with the loyalty of the fellows who were backing him up; but he wished deeply that they would let him be set aside, and let affairs at Rookwood take their normal course once more.



WHERE'S THE FIRE? Jimmy Silver threw open the door of Carthew's study. The prefect leaped to his feet as the juniors rushed in with swamping fire-buckets. Swoosh! "Yoooop!" A flood of water deluged the Sixth-Former from head to foot, choking and blinding him. "Ha, ha, ha! Shall we get some more water, Carthew?" inquired Jimmy Silver. (See Chapter 3.)

There was silence in the study again. Neville broke it. He had sniffed once or twice, and now he rose to his feet.

"Something's burning somewhere," he said. "Do you notice it?"

Bulkeley started. "Yes—now you mention it. I don't think there's any fires going this evening," he said. "Some ass has dropped a match on something. Look in the passage!"

Neville threw the door open and started back, with an exclamation. A volume of smoke was rolling down the corridor.

"What the dickens! It's a study on fire!" he exclaimed. "My hat! It's Carthew's study—"

He ran along the passage with Bulkeley at his heels. A rush of smoke, mingled with flame, from the study doorway drove them back.

Carthew's study was a mass of blaze. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What—what—"

"Fire!" shouted Neville. Doors opened on all sides, and voices called. Half a dozen of the Sixth came dashing out into the passage.

Mr. Bootles' voice was heard, high-pitched and excited.

"What—what—what—"

"Fire!"

"Bless my soul! The boys—the boys—"

"That fool Carthew!" said Bulkeley, between his teeth. "How has he done that? Where is he?"

"Fire!"

There was a roar of voices now. Bulkeley's clear tones rang above the din.

"The fire-buckets! This way! Neville, cut off and call the sergeant—the hose will be wanted! You fellows help me!"

Neville scudded away.

Bulkeley's voice calmed the confusion. The Sixth-Formers, as one man, backed him up. Buckets were filled and rushed along the passage, and the water hurled into the blazing study.

But the fire had gained a strong hold, and the water hissed and spluttered, with little effect. Furniture and floor were ablaze now, and a rush of flame drove the Rookwooders back from the doorway. Flames were creeping along the walls from the door-

way, and shooting across the passage. Loud shouts from above announced that the fire had burst through the ceiling into the room over Carthew's study.

The alarm-bell was ringing now. Into every corner of the great school the alarm had penetrated, and Rookwood, from end to end, rang with the cry:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Reconciliation.

"SILVER, let me go! I—I—I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

While the rest of the juniors of Rookwood were asleep in bed, there was very wide wakefulness in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth.

Carthew of the Sixth was sprawling on the floor, his wrists tied to the leg of Jimmy Silver's bed.

The unhappy prefect had been in that uncomfortable position for some time, the chuckling juniors paying no heed to his threats.

"My dear chap, you can stay there!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You came here to please yourself. You can stay to please us!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Carthew.

"All in good time, my pippin! You've got to beg the pardon of the Fourth Form on your bended knees first!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I won't! I—I'll—I'll—"

spluttered the hapless bully of the Sixth. "I'll—I'll—"

"Then you can spend the night there!" chuckled Jimmy. "You shouldn't have come, you know. You weren't invited into this dormitory."

"Fire!"

That sudden shout from below silenced the chortling in the dormitory. Jimmy Silver spun round towards the door.

"Hallo! What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Fire! Fire!"

"My only hat!"

Lovell ran to the door and threw it open. A din of voices came from below, and a smell of burning and an acid taste of smoke.

"It's fire right enough!" gasped Lovell.

"The school's on fire! My only hat!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Help!"

"Shut up, Tubby!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Carthew.

Jimmy Silver hastily cut the prefect loose. Carthew staggered to his feet. The fire was below, and, as yet, nowhere near the dormitory; and it certainly was Carthew's duty, as a prefect of the Sixth, to think of the safety of the juniors. But he didn't! He made a rush for the door, and dashed out.

Carthew vanished from sight in a moment. But the sound of a collision came from the passage, and Bulkeley's voice:

"Carthew—"

"Let me pass, you fool!" shrieked Carthew. "The juniors have got to be got out!"

"Let me pass!"

"You rotten funk! Get out, then, and good riddance to you!" roared Bulkeley.

Pattering footsteps died away down the passage and the stairs. The next moment Bulkeley looked into the Classical Fourth dormitory upon a sea of scared and startled faces.

"Order!" he rapped out, as two or three juniors rushed for the door. "Get into your clothes—quick! There's plenty of time to get into the quadrangle. Don't lose your heads!"

"All serene, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Yarooop! Help!" came from Tubby Muffin.

"Quiet, you fat idiot!"

The Fourth-Formers dressed themselves quickly—or half-dressed. Under Bulkeley's eye, they marched out of the dormitory in order.

Down the big staircase they went, amid flying smoke. On the staircase was Neville, keeping order. Lonsdale, Jones major, and Scott were shepherding out the Shell, the Third, and the Second.

The prefects of Rookwood had taken charge, under Bulkeley's order.

Outside, in the quadrangle, the hose, handled by Sergeant Kettle, was hissing streams of water in at the window of Carthew's study.

Enter for our Simple Cricket Competition To-day!

Whether the fire would be got under before it spread over the building was still a question; but it was evidently wise to get the boys out into the safety of the quad while there was time.

Under Bulkeley's cool direction the juniors marched out, and stragglers were rounded up.

In a very short space of time nearly all Rookwood was in the quadrangle, and the Form-masters were calling the roll of their Forms, to ascertain that all were there.

Dr. Chisholm, with a pale but calm face, was standing by the sergeant, as he flooded water into the blaze.

Smoke, mingled with sparks, rolled skyward in dense volumes, obscuring the stars. The fire was going under at last.

The promptness with which it had been tackled had prevented a catastrophe that bade fair to rival that of the air-raid that had taken place during the war.

"Bulkeley!"
The Head spoke quietly, as a blackened, smoke-begrimed figure passed him. Bulkeley stopped, gasping.

"Yes, sir."
"Are all the boys out, Bulkeley?"
"I'm going the rounds, sir, to make sure."
"Very good! Please let me know as quickly as possible."
"Yes, sir."

Bulkeley hurried away with a rather curious expression on his face under the smoke grime. He had laboured like a Hercules, and he had been the last out of the building. The Head had not spoken to him hitherto; but probably he had observed. His tone was very quiet, but very cordial, as he addressed Bulkeley, as if there had never been any trouble between them.

Bulkeley returned to him in a few minutes.

"All out, sir!"
"Thank goodness!" said the Head.
Dr. Chisholm hesitated a moment, and Bulkeley, seeing that he had something more to say, waited, wondering what it was. There was a brief struggle in Dr. Chisholm's breast, but the obstinate pride of the old gentleman was vanquished at last.

"Bulkeley, I have observed you during this unfortunate affair, and—and I thank you, my boy. But for your promptness and coolness, I do not like to think what might have happened. If the boys had not been got out before the smoke filled the house—"
The Head paused a moment. "Bulkeley, I think you may have saved many lives this night."

"At least, none have been lost, sir, thank goodness!" said Bulkeley cheerily.

"I think that is owing to you, my boy." There was another pause, and the Head watched the last spluttering flames that sank under the hissing streams of water. He turned to Bulkeley again, and held out his hand frankly. "My dear boy, there has been

a misunderstanding between us. It is over, and I am sorry that it ever occurred. Tomorrow, Bulkeley, I request you to resume your old position in the school. You will not refuse, I am sure."

"I—I shall be glad, sir!" stammered Bulkeley.

He shook hands with the Head mechanically. Never for a moment had he expected this concession from the lofty old gentleman. But the Head had made it, and Bulkeley's heart was lighter.

"By gad! There's the Head shakin' hands with Bulkeley!" murmured Mornington, in the ranks of the Fourth. "Does that mean that the trouble's over?"

"Let's hope so!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "The Head's not a bad old sort; and surely he must have seen to-night that Bulkeley's the man to be captain of Rookwood!"

The rift in the lute was healed at last. Rookwood School had its old captain back once more.

The next day a considerable part of the Sixth Form passage in the School House was a charred mass of ruins. Apart from the damage done by smoke, however, the rest of the building had escaped. Rookwood was able to "carry on" as usual while the workmen were busy on the burnt-out studies.

The origin of the fire was not discovered—luckily for Carthew of the Sixth. It was known that it had started in Carthew's study, and that was all. Carthew professed ignorance of the cause; and if he remembered the cigarette he had thrown carelessly down, he took great care not to mention it.

The fire had been an exciting episode; and it was fortunate that matters had turned out no worse. In the opinion of most of the Rookwood fellows, they had turned out very well, in fact. For the reinstatement of Bulkeley as head prefect and captain was followed by the return of the other prefects to duty; the "strike" was ended and done with, and nothing more was said on that subject.

Carthew of the Sixth was probably the only fellow who was not satisfied. But, as Jimmy Silver remarked, Carthew did not matter. And the rest of the school rejoiced that the Prefects' Strike was over, and that "Old Bulkeley" had once more come back to His Own!

THE END.

(Next week's tale of Rookwood will take some beating. It is called: "Jimmy Wins Through!" and is packed full of breathless adventures and exciting situations.)

POETS PLEASE NOTE.

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The second prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following fifteen competitors, whose solutions contained one error each:

S. Moorhouse, 41, Nugget Street, Oldham; K. Coverer, 41, Nugget Street, Oldham; E. Carpenter, 1, Dene Street Gardens, Dorking; A. Burrows, 2, Broadheath Terrace, Ditton, Widnes; James Williams, 31, Marine Street, Llanelly, S. Wales; W. E. Way, 19, Elmhurst Road, Gosport; Thomas Williams, 43, Glamour Road, Llanelly, S. Wales; Mrs. A. T. Cole, Thorpe Morceux, Bury St. Edmunds; Frances Morton, 7, Eyre Street, Pallion, Sunderland; C. Veale, 37, Whittington Street, Plymouth; B. Ashworth, 756, Oldham Road, Failsforth, Manchester; John Miller, 108, King Street, Stratford, Manchester; N. Cross, 141, Moorhey Street, Oldham; L. Bachelor, 19, Kettering Road, Levenshulme, Manchester; H. H. Mattick, Church Hill, Writhlington, Somerset.

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