

THE ROOKWOOD SLEUTH!

In spite of the failure of his first case, Detective Tubby Muffin decides to try his powers again!



Tubby On The Trail!

A Rollicking Long Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood, featuring Tubby Muffin of the Fourth.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the famous stories of Rookwood appearing in the "Boys' Friend" every week.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Chance for Detective Muffin!

I SUPPOSE he's gone to sleep!" Arthur Edward Lovell spoke in a tone of deep and patient resignation.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were waiting on the steps of the School House at Rookwood. They were waiting for Jimmy Silver.

Several other fellows of the Classical Fourth were waiting, too.

It was a fine October afternoon, with a clear and sunny sky. On fine, clear days the sea could be seen from the summit of the clock-tower at Rookwood. And somebody had announced that one of the battleships of his Gracious Majesty King George the Fifth was off the coast, and naturally all the fellows wanted to look at it. That was where the telescope came in; or, rather, ought to have come in.

For Jimmy Silver's telescope was a wonderful telescope. It was worth, on the lowest computation, five guineas. But it had gone cheap at a sale of Government stuff, and Jimmy Silver had picked it up for the moderate sum of ten-and-six. It had adorned the end study for a week or more, and dozens of fellows had visited that celebrated study to try the telescope from the window. Now that a battleship was in the offing that telescope was wanted at the summit of the clock-tower, and Jimmy Silver had rushed in to get it. And he hadn't returned.

"If he doesn't come soon the dashed battleship will have cleared off, and we sha'n't see it at all," said Raby. "With that telescope you could see the captain shaving, it brings a thing so near. Why doesn't that thumping ass come out with it?"

"Gone to sleep, I tell you!" said Lovell.

"Hallo! Here he comes!" exclaimed Newcome, glancing back into the house. "He hasn't got the glass, though."

Jimmy Silver appeared at last. His face was rather flushed, and rather wrathful.

"Tain't there!" he announced. "The telescope—"

"It's gone!" said Jimmy Silver. "I've hunted through the dashed study for it, and it's gone! Some silly owl has bagged our telescope!"

"I suppose I'd better go and look for it!" said Lovell, in his resigned tone. Lovell seemed to be very resigned that afternoon.

Jimmy Silver sniffed. "You won't find it! I tell you it isn't in the study!"

"Rot, old chap!" answered Lovell.

And Arthur Edward swung into the House, with an evident confidence in his powers of finding the telescope. Jimmy Silver breathed hard. For a moment he felt a strong impulse to take Lovell's collar and bang Lovell's head on the banisters. Fortunately, he restrained the impulse.

"Let's all go and look!" suggested George Raby. "If we're going to see that dashed battleship we've got to buck up!"

"It isn't there!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "I've looked!"

"Well, you see, it must be there!" explained Raby.

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, old top! Come on, and let's look!" said Raby amiably. And Raby went into the House with Newcome, and Jimmy Silver followed, looking quite cross. Tubby Muffin rolled in after the chums of the Fourth. Tubby seemed interested in the matter, for some reason.

The juniors arrived at the end study in the Fourth. Arthur Edward Lovell was already there, rooting about the room with a rather excited look.

"Found it?" inquired Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

Lovell grunted.

"I expect you've shoved something over it in looking for it!" he answered. "You know what you are!"

"Ass!"

"Well, it's gone!" said Lovell.

"No doubt about that!" agreed Jimmy.

"It's dashed annoying!"

Tubby Muffin chimed in.

"That telescope was worth a lot of money, Jimmy. Higgs said you could sell it for pounds, if you liked. You got it cheap because it was Government stuff. But usually they cost quids."

"I know all that, Fatty."

Reginald Muffin looked very serious. Thoughts of deep import seemed to be working in his fat brain.

"What I mean is, that telescope has vanished," he said. "Telescopes can't walk away by themselves. That stands

to reason. My idea is that some fellow has bagged that telescope, because it was jolly valuable, and sold it."

"Fathead!"

"It's been stolen," said Tubby Muffin, heeding the glares of the Fistical Four. "I'm pretty certain of that. Where did you fellows see it last?"

"It was on the mantelpiece this afternoon!" growled Lovell.

"Somebody has pinched the thing," said Tubby. "Now, look here, Jimmy Silver. This is a serious matter. That telescope has been stolen, and it's got to be found, and the thief shown up."

"There isn't any thief!" howled Jimmy Silver. "Some cheeky ass has borrowed it."

"You say yourself it's queer. All the Fourth know that you're looking for it," said Tubby. "A fellow wouldn't come along from another Form and borrow it without asking. Tain't likely!"

The Fistical Four did not answer that. It was, indeed, an unlikely occurrence, and they had to admit it.

Tubby blinked at them victoriously.

"Now, you leave the matter to me," he said. "I've been reading up Sherlock Holmes and Ferrers Locke lately, and I'm convinced that, as a detective, I could play both their heads off. I'll take up this case, Jimmy—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Jimmy Silver ungratefully. Apparently he was not prepared to close with the offer of the amateur Ferrers Locke of Rookwood.

"I shall take up the case," said Tubby Muffin calmly. "This is my first real opportunity of showing my powers, and I'm not going to let it slip. Will there be any reward, Jimmy, if I recover your valuable telescope?"

"There'll be a thick ear if you start any yarn about my telescope being stolen!" answered Jimmy Silver gruffly.

"Look here—"

"Oh, scat! Let's get off to the tower, you fellows."

The Fistical Four quitted the study, leaving Tubby Muffin frowning. But Reginald Muffin was in a determined mood. There didn't seem to be much encouragement for a second edition of Ferrers Locke at Rookwood, but Tubby was not to be beaten.

He sat in Jimmy Silver's armchair, and produced a pocket-book and a stump of pencil. And with a wrinkled brow—

deeply wrinkled with thought—Tubby Muffin proceeded to make notes of the case in a scrawling hand, and in remarkable spelling, and he headed the notes with the imposing heading:

"The Case of the Missing Teleskope."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Sleuth at Work!

TUBBY MUFFIN was busy that afternoon.

And as soon as the Classical Fourth knew that Detective Muffin was on the trail again, most of them showed some interest in the proceedings of Tubby.

Tubby's fat brain was full of Ferrers Locke and the exploits of that wonderful detective. Tubby had discovered that he had the gift himself; that he was, in fact, a born detective, rather better, if anything, than Ferrers Locke himself. All he needed was an opportunity—scope, as he told the grinning juniors. Given scope, Tubby was confident that he would soon display his powers to an amazed Rookwood. He had the clear, cool intellect, the unique concentration of mind, the unerring intuition, the marvellous power of deduction; and all he needed was scope. At least, Tubby was sure of all that himself.

Now the case of the missing telescope afforded him the long-desired scope, and Detective Muffin set to work.

He spent an hour in the armchair in the end study, thinking it out; a "deep think," as he told one or two grinning juniors who looked in. He made voluminous notes. Then he wandered up and down the Fourth Form passage making inquiries.

He questioned every fellow in the Classical Fourth that afternoon, and every fellow denied having borrowed the telescope.

Then, in order to make assurance doubly sure, Detective Muffin crossed over to Mr. Manders' House, and questioned the Modern Fourth. But nobody in the Modern Fourth knew anything about the telescope.

It was clear to Tubby's mind that it had been stolen. The question was, to find it, or to find the thief if he had already disposed of it.

That was the problem.

About tea-time, Tubby Muffin dropped into the end study, with a notebook and pencil in his fat hand. The Fistical Four were sitting down to tea, and they did not seem pleased to see Reginald Muffin; which was rather ungrateful, considering that the Rookwood detective had taken up the case of the missing telescope without bargaining for fee or reward.

"Heard anything of the telescope, Jimmy?"

"No!" grunted Jimmy.

"Nobody in the Fourth knows anything about it."

"Oh, it will turn up!" said Raby.

Tubby shook his head sagely.

"That's exactly what it don't do," he said. "The thief won't give it up unless he's found out."

"There isn't any thief!" bawled Jimmy Silver.

"My dear fellow," said Tubby patronisingly, "I've worked the matter out on my best methods, and I've proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the telescope was stolen. Whether it's been sold yet, I can't say for the moment; but I'll soon find that out."

"Let that cake alone!" growled Lovell.

"I think it's rather mean to grudge a fellow a little cake when he's spending his time searching for your stolen telescope. I haven't asked you for a

fee, Silver. If you care to spring a guinea, say, I shall not refuse it."

"You won't have the chance!" grunted the captain of the Fourth.

"Run away and play, Muffin."

"I shall not expect a fee until after I've recovered the telescope for you," said Muffin calmly. "I don't bother much about fees, either; Ferrers Locke never does. I'll tell you what, Jimmy. I'm willing to take you on as my boy assistant in this case, if you like, and explain my theories to you as we go along—what?"

"Ass!"

"I want to ask you fellows a few questions," said Tubby, with his mouth full of cake. "The telescope was taken from this study, and, of course, suspicion rests on you fellows in the first place."

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four, in chorus.

"Not you, Jimmy!" said Tubby reassuringly. "As the telescope was your property, you are exonerated."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy sarcastically.

"But Lovell and Raby and Newcome," said Tubby thoughtfully. "It might have been any one of them, of course."

Three ferocious glares were fixed upon the amateur detective of Rookwood. But Tubby rattled on in happy unconsciousness.

"Lovell seems to have seen the telescope last!" he said. "What time exactly did you see it on the mantelpiece, Lovell?"

"Find out!"

"I require an answer to that question, Lovell."

"Go and eat coke!"

Tubby made a note in his book.

"Lovell prevaricates!" he remarked.

"Although not a complete proof, it indicates that Lovell is probably the thief and—"

The Rookwood detective got no further than that.

Arthur Edward Lovell made a jump from the tea-table, and his powerful grasp closed on the disciple of Ferrers Locke.

Tubby Muffin found himself sprawling in the passage, with a suddenness that quite took his breath away.

"Gurrrrrrrghh!" spluttered Tubby. His mouth was unfortunately full of cake at the moment; and some of the cake went the wrong way. Reginald Muffin sprawled on the floor and gurgled.

Tubby Muffin squirmed away, just escaping Lovell's angry boot, and scrambled up and fled.

Evidently there was no encouragement for the Rookwood detective in the end study.

The hapless detective burst into Study No. 2, and slammed the door behind him. Putty Grace and Higgs and Jones minor were at tea there, and they stared at Muffin.

"What the thump's the row?" demanded Putty of the Fourth.

"Grooogh! That beast Lovell—"

Tubby spluttered. "Yurgh! The awful rotter—kicking a chap, you know, just because I found out that he'd stolen Jimmy Silver's telescope! Yurrrgggh!"

"What?" yelled Putty, and there was a howl of laughter from Jones minor and Higgs.

Tubby Muffin sat down, gasping.

"It's a pretty clear case," he said breathlessly. "Lovell was the last person to see it alive—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, he was the last person to see the telescope. He refused to answer my question—put professionally.

He broke out into violence when I accused him of the crime—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putty. "So would any other fellow, I fancy."

"Rot!" said Tubby. "That's a proof of guilt. Now, the question is, has Lovell hidden the telescope somewhere, or sold it? He can't have sold it yet; he hasn't been out of gates since it was missing. It's hidden in his box, most likely. It's dashed awkward not having a skeleton-key to open his box. Ferrers Locke has a bunch of skeleton-keys, you know, and can open anything with them, from a Yalo lock to a—"

"An oyster?" asked Putty.

"No, you ass; of course not! I mean he can open any old kind of a lock. But I'm not really equipped for the profession," said Tubby sadly. "So far as brainwork goes, I'm all there! But I haven't any skeleton-keys, and it's rather a problem how to search Lovell's box."

"It won't be a problem what will happen to you, if Lovell catches you nosing into his box," grinned Jones minor. "There'll be a slaughtered porpoise lying about afterwards."

"Have you done your impot for Mossoo, Tubby?" asked Putty Grace.

"Bother my impot! I've no time for impots when I'm working on this case!" answered the Rookwood detective irritably.

Putty chuckled.

"You had to take it in by tea-time," he said. "Mossoo will speak to Mr. Dalton if you don't. You'll get a licking! Better do your impot and give Ferrers Locke a rest."

Tubby snorted angrily. He had forgotten, in his keen interest in the case of the missing telescope, that he had lines to do for the French master.

But he realised that those lines had to be done, even if he had to delay in bringing home the guilt of Arthur Edward Lovell to him. Monsieur Monceau was not likely to make any allowances on account of his important detective work.

"Isn't it rotten!" demanded Tubby.

"Fancy a chap having to do lines when he's engaged on an important case! Ferrers Locke is never handicapped like this. Neither is Sherlock Holmes! Fat lot of chance a fellow has of distinguishing himself at Rookwood!"

"Fathead!" said Putty.

"Chump!" said Jones minor.

Those two complimentary tributes only made Tubby Muffin snort with contempt. It was said of old that a prophet is not honoured in his own country, and undoubtedly the Rookwood detective was not honoured in his own study. Tubby Muffin cleared a corner of the table, and sat down to write twenty-five lines from the *Henriade*, in a bitter and sardonic mood. Lines—at such a time! Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was nothing to it, in Reginald Muffin's opinion.

Yet the lines had to be done, and when they were done, Tubby Muffin rolled away to the French master's study to deliver the goods, anxious to get this trifling matter off his mind, and to get back to his important detective work.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Detective Muffin's Triumph!

GREAT pip!" Tubby Muffin fairly gasped. His little round eyes almost-started from his fat face, as he gazed, and gazed, and gazed, with incredulous eyes, at the telescope! Jimmy Silver's Government telescope!

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"TUBBY ON THE TRAIL!"

(Continued from page 12.)

It was incredible. But there it was! Tubby Muffin had arrived at Monsieur Monceau's study, and tapped at the door. As there was no answer, he opened the door and entered, and found that the French master was absent.

That did not matter to Tubby, however. He had only to leave his lines on the table. He came across to the table to lay the imposition there, and then he sighted the telescope!

In his wildest suspicions, and in forming his most extensive and far-reaching theories, Detective Muffin had not thought of suspecting a Rookwood master of stealing the missing article. His suspicions, indeed, had centred on Arthur Edward Lovell. But, in any case, he would not have suspected a master. The discovery was an amazing shock to him.

On the desk in the French master's study lay a large telescope. Tubby blinked at it, and stared at it, and gazed at it! There was no mistaking it! It was one of the Government naval telescopes. Tubby had seen it often enough in the end study, and he knew it at a glance.

"Great pip! It was Mossoo, then!" murmured Tubby faintly.

He tiptoed across the study to the desk, and picked up the telescope. He wanted to make sure of it, beyond the shadow of a doubt. There was no doubt in Tubby's mind. It was exactly the telescope he had seen a dozen times or more in the end study; every mark on it was the same, and it was the same shape and size. Tubby turned it over in his hands, his heart beating wildly.

He had succeeded!

Certainly, it was not precisely the process of deduction that had led him to the French master's study. He had come there to hand over his lines. But he had succeeded, anyhow; the stolen property was in his hands—in his own fat hands! He had only to stroll into the end study in the Fourth and hand over that telescope with a careless air, disdaining to explain the clues which had led to its recovery. After all, Ferrers Locke did not always explain. Why should Detective Muffin go into details?

Besides, as Tubby now began to be think him, he had really suspected something when he came into the study. Mossoo had rather a sly eye, and he had always ragged Muffin in class, and—and—Reginald Muffin had a fertile imagination; and it took him about two minutes to come to a fixed belief that he had suspected Monsieur Monceau all along, and had made the "lines" a masterly pretext for coming to the study to investigate.

"Jolly lucky for Silver that I took this job on!" murmured Tubby Muffin complacently. "He'd never have suspected a master of stealing his Government telescope—he hasn't brain enough to think of a theory like that! Takes a fellow like me to think it out! He can't refuse to stand me a fee when I hand over the giddy telescope!" Tubby grinned. "After all, it's worth pounds, and I dare say I've got it only just in time to keep Mossoo from pawning it, or something. Stands to reason he wouldn't dare to keep it about Rookwood, when all the fellows would know it at a glance. Awful rotter! Fancy baggin' a chap's telescope!"

There was a step in the passage, and Tubby started.

He had discovered the culprit; but if the culprit caught him in the study with the stolen telescope in his hands and—

Tubby turned quite dizzy for a moment.

What might not a desperate criminal do, finding himself run down, cornered, and about to be exposed in his true colours by the Rookwood detective? Mossoo was a foreigner, too. He had served in the French Army in his time; and he had a queer-looking sword hanging over the mantelpiece. Suppose, driven to desperation by the certainty of exposure, the villain made a murderous attack on Tubby! Such things had happened to Ferrers Locke, and to Sherlock Holmes, too, to say nothing of Sexton Blake.

Tubby could have gasped with relief as the footsteps passed the study door without stopping. It was not Mossoo, after all!

Tubby realised that he had no time to waste, however. He crept to the door, and peered out. The passage was empty; the coast was clear.

But on the verge of departing with the telescope in his hands, Tubby paused. He might meet Mossoo in the passage, and meeting the detected criminal face to face, with the telescope on view, might be dangerous. In one respect the Rookwood detective fell short of his model, Ferrers Locke. He had a distinct distaste for danger of any sort.

But Tubby's powerful intellect was equal to the occasion.

The telescope, closed, was about fifteen inches long. Tubby stuffed it under his packet, and succeeded in concealing it from view. He rolled out into the passage, looking as if he had suddenly grown a remarkable hump on one side of him. He hurried away as fast as he could, and at the corner of the passage came face to face with Monsieur Monceau. The French master was returning to his study after a chat with Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth. He stopped Muffin with a gesture.

"Ah, le petit Muffin!" he said, while Tubby quaked. "You have done some lines, isn't it, my little Muffin?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby. "I—I've put them on your table, sir, as—as you weren't there, sir!"

"You carry somezing zere zat you show not!" said the French master. "Is it zat you play some trick in my study, Muffin?"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

He blinked round desperately.

In another moment the French master would see the hidden telescope, and the Rookwood detective would be at the mercy of the exposed criminal! But again Tubby's mighty brain rose to the occasion.

He made a sudden dodge, and darted round the French master, and went round the corner at top speed.

Monsieur Monceau stood and stared after him in blank astonishment.

"Is ze boy mad?" he murmured. "Vat is ze matter wiz him? Zis is verree strange! Muffin! Garcon! Muffin!"

But Muffin did not heed.

He was sprinting for the staircase, and he went up the stairs two at a time, in spite of the burden of the telescope and of his very considerable avoirdupois.

He was panting and puffing like a grampus by the time he reached the Fourth Form passage. Then he ran into Mornington who was coming out of his study, and there was a crash as the telescope went to the floor.

"You owl! Where are you running to?" howled Morny.

"Yow! Don't stop me!" gasped Tubby. "I've got the stolen goods—oh dear!—and the thief's after me! Oh! Ow!"

He grabbed up the telescope and rushed on to the end study. He expected every instant to hear the pursuing footfalls of the detected thief. But there was no sign of pursuit, and Mornington shrugged his shoulders and went his way. Tubby, breathless, almost at his last gasp, reeled into the end study.

"Help!" he gasped.

"What the thump——"

"I've got it!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"The—the telescope!" panted Tubby. And he banged the telescope down on the study table, and blinked at Jimmy Silver & Co. in breathless triumph.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Awful!

JIMMY SILVER stared at Tubby, and stared at the telescope. Arthur Edward Lovell picked the instrument up and examined it. Raby and Newcome looked it over. And they all nodded.

"It's the giddy article!" said Lovell.

"No doubt about that," said Raby. "There's the Government mark on it. Where did you find it, Muffin?"

Tubby recovered his breath at last. He expanded his fat chest, and gazed at the Fistical Four with what he fondly believed was an inscrutable smile.

Jimmy Silver looked anxious.

"Are you ill, Muffin?" he exclaimed.

"Ill? No!"

"Then what are you screwing up your face like that for?"

Tubby snorted.

Inscrutable smiles were evidently a sheer waste in the end study.

"I've recovered the goods," he said brusquely. "Perhaps you'll admit that I am some detective now?"

"Well, it's my giddy glass, right enough," said Jimmy Silver with a nod. "I'm much obliged to you, Muffin. I'll stand you a couple of tarts for this!"

"My fee is one guinea!" said Detective Muffin.

"Go to sleep and dream again," suggested the captain of the Fourth pleasantly.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver——"

"Tell us how you bagged it," said Raby curiously. "I don't see how Muffin could have found it, when we've all looked for it without finding it."

"Fool's luck," suggested Lovell.

"Yes, I suppose that's it."

"I don't mind explaining," said Tubby loftily. "I suspected you at first, Lovell, as you know——"

"You silly idiot!"

"A detective can't afford to be a reflector of persons," said Tubby sagely. "Why, I'd have suspected the Head himself if the finger of suspicion had pointed that way!"

"Fathead!"

"You can call me names," said Tubby scornfully, "but you can't deny that I've recovered the stolen article."

"Well, how did you do it?" demanded Lovell.

"Following up my clues!"

"What clues?"

"Certain clues," said Muffin hastily. "I needn't go into details. You fellows wouldn't understand, as you've had no training, and your intellects are not very keen, either. Following up certain clues,

I went to Mossoo's study to investigate and—"

"Mossoo!" yelled the Fistical Four. "Yes; and there I unearthed the stolen goods."

"In Monsieur Monceau's study?" said Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"That's it!"

"Impossible!"

Sniff from Muffin.

"Impossible or not, I tracked Mossoo down, and recovered the stolen goods in his study," he said loftily. "Nothing's impossible to a really expert detective. I met Mossoo as I came away with the telescope, and he looked the picture of guilt. He started, and his jaw dropped, and his eyes bulged from his head, and he gasped for breath, and he—"

"My hat, what a performance!" said Lovell. "I should think he had a fit after all that!"

"He flushed with guilt, and turned deadly pale," resumed Muffin.

"Both at the same time?" gasped Raby.

"Yes—I mean, no—one after the other, of course," said Muffin hastily.

"His knees knocked together, and he glared at me ferociously, and clutched at his revolver—"

"His what?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"His revolver."

"Did you see the revolver?" howled Newcome.

"I didn't exactly see it," said Tubby cautiously. "I deduced that he had a revolver."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Tubby Muffin crossly. "I've faced a desperate criminal to recapture stolen property. I've barely escaped with my life. If he follows me here, I want you fellows to stand by me. And one of you had better cut off and telephone to the police—"

"Do you seriously mean that you found my telescope in Monsieur Monceau's study?" asked Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Of course I did!"

"It's jolly odd," said Lovell. "Mossoo must have heard that we'd lost a telescope. We've been asking about it everywhere. In fact, I remember he was close by when I was asking Higgs

if he'd borrowed it. Mossoo never borrowed it, or he'd have said so."

Jimmy Silver looked worried. "It's jolly queer," he said. "Anyhow, we've got the telescope. Mossoo couldn't have stolen it. It's all rot!"

"How did it come in his study, then?" hooted Tubby Muffin.

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth was quite at a loss.

"You want to make out that it wasn't stolen, to do me out of my fee!" said Detective Muffin scornfully. "I call that mean! My fee for recovering your telescope, Jimmy, is half a guinea. That's cheap!"

"Make it half-a-crown," suggested Jimmy.

"Make it half-a-crown, then!" snapped Tubby. "After all, I don't care much for fees. Ferrers Locke doesn't. Make it half-a-crown!"

Jimmy considered. It was a mystery what the French master was doing with

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coming out of the bunk-houses now, and the manager shouted to them. Kaloota, still resisting feebly, was handed over to them. Red Deer Smith going with them to see that the Indian was safely "roped" up till the morning. What was to happen to him then Frank Richards did not know, but he had no doubt that it was to be something drastic.

Frank sat in the veranda to wait for Mr. Smith's return. He was feeling almost sick with the horror of what he had been through. It was a quarter of an hour before Mr. Smith returned.

"I guess that scallywag is safe till morning!" he remarked grimly. "If he gets out of the rope I've put round him he will be a wonder. Sure you're not hurt, Richards?"

"Only this scratch on my cheek," said Frank. "The knife went pretty close."

"You've been plucky. Tain't every galoot that would have tackled an Injun

THE POPULAR.—No. 352.

with a knife with his bare hands," said Mr. Smith. "I reckon it was lucky for me I gave you a night's lodging, Richards. I s'pose you woke up and saw the durned scallywag nosing around?"

"I wasn't asleep," said Frank. "I'd been thinking of him, too. I thought he'd come back for mischief."

"I reckon I'll take all the mischief outer him to-morrow," said Red Deer Smith grimly. "Now, you can get back to bed, Richards. But I guess I want to talk to you in the morning. Breakfast at six, remember!"

"Right-ho, Mr. Smith!"

Frank Richards did not find it easy to sleep. It was a couple of hours before he was able to keep his eyes closed. He slept at last, and did not waken again until the raucous notes of a "buzzer" rang through the canyon, calling the Red Deer community to a new day and its labour.

Frank came out of the shed and took a dip in the creek, and turned up at the manager's house in time for breakfast at six. He found Red Deer Smith already at breakfast when he came in.

"Pile in!" said the manager laconically.

Frank Richards piled in with a good appetite. Red Deer Smith did not speak again till breakfast was over. Then he rose and lighted his pipe, and fixed his eyes on the schoolboy of Cedar Creek.

the telescope in his study, but evidently he had not meant to hand it to Jimmy Silver, for he knew that the end study had lost a telescope, and had said nothing. Tubby had recovered it for the owner, there was no denying that. Jimmy felt that he had earned the half-crown. So he extracted a coin of that denomination from his pocket, and tossed it to the fat Classical.

"There you are, Tubby! And don't talk about this. Least said soonest mended."

"Do you want to shield the thief?" asked Muffin scornfully.

"I want you to keep your jaw quiet!"

"Oh, all right!" said Tubby. "A detective is bound to keep secrets if his clients require it. It's his professional duty. I'm as silent as the grave."

And Detective Muffin, after a cautious blink into the corridor to make sure that Mossoo was not in the offing, walked out of the end study with his first professional fee in his fat fist, and a grin of satisfaction on his face. And he headed direct for the school tuckshop. How Ferrers Locke expended his fees Tubby did not know, but he knew how he was going to expend his—in jam-tarts and ginger-beer. And as he consumed these delectable refreshments, Tubby dreamed golden dreams of unlimited jam-tarts and ginger-beer in future days when he should be a great and famous detective, with rooms in Baker Street.

He left four juniors, looking very worried, in the end study. Jimmy Silver placed the telescope on the mantelpiece, and looked at his chums. They looked at him silently.

"Fancy Mossoo!" said Lovell, at last. "Must have been off his chump, I think," said Jimmy Silver soberly. "I can't imagine it! But—but—"

"Facts speak for themselves," said Raby.

"I—I suppose so!"

"A sudden temptation," said Newcome. "We all know Mossoo's pretty hard up. I suppose he meant to sell it. He couldn't have kept it about the school, where a score of fellows know it by sight. Poor little beast!"

"Better say nothing about it, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver.

(Continued on next page.)

"You saved my life last night," he said abruptly.

"I suppose I did," assented Frank.

"It was plucky," said Red Deer Smith.

"You had a narrow shave."

"I know."

"You came here looking for a job," continued the mine-manager. "I told you straight there wasn't a job going for a kid like you."

"That's so."

"But I reckon this alters the case," said Red Deer Smith. "I'm going to give you a job."

Frank Richards brightened.

"I'd be glad of it," he said. "What can I do?"

"Nothing, I reckon. I'm going to make a job for you, and put you on the pay-roll," said Mr. Smith. "Savvy? I dare say you'll make yourself useful one way or another in the long run."

Frank rose to his feet.

"Thanks!" he said. "That's not the job I want. I'm not out looking for the bread of idleness, Mr. Smith. Thank you for a night's lodging, and good-bye!"

And Frank tramped away in the fresh morning sunshine, with his back to Red Deer, and the world before him once more.

THE END.

(Another adventure of Frank Richards—rolling stone next week.)

"Yes, rather! Hallo, what the thump do you want?" exclaimed Lovell irritably, as Hansom of the Fifth looked into the study.

The Fifth-Former gave the juniors a patronising nod.

"Just looked in to return your telescope, Silver," he said casually.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I borrowed it this afternoon to take out on to Coombe Heath," explained Hansom calmly. "Jolly good telescope, too. You can see the Channel from Coombe Hill a treat. I saw a battleship off the coast. Quite a fine sight! Hope you haven't wanted it?"

Hansom laid a Government telescope on the study table amid a dead silence.

He glanced round, puzzled by the aspect of the Fistical Four.

"I'd have asked you, only you were out," he explained, "and Talboys wanted to be off. I've brought it back the minute we came in. No harm done, I suppose?"

And Hansom of the Fifth lounged to the door, gave the juniors another patronising nod, and walked away whistling.

In the end study a pin might have been heard to drop.



CORNERED BY THE "CRIMINAL"! Tubby Muffin blinked round desperately. In another moment the French master would see the hidden telescope, and the Rookwood detective would be at the mercy of the exposed criminal. So Tubby made a sudden dodge and darted round the master, and went round the corner at top speed. (See Chapter 3.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Tubby's Reward!

JIMMY SILVER looked at the Government telescope on the table. Then he looked at the Government telescope on the mantelpiece. They were exactly similar in appearance.

"Oh, my hat!"

The Fistical Four felt quite weak.

Unwillingly, but undoubtedly, they had accepted Muffin's theory that Mossoo had "bagged" the end study telescope! Now they were feeling inclined to kick themselves—and still more inclined to kick Muffin! Indeed, they felt quite a deep yearning to be within kicking distance of the Rookwood detective.

"Wha-a-at the thump are we going to do with it?" said Lovell faintly. "Suppose Mossoo misses it; suppose—suppose he—"

"It's got to be taken back!" said Jimmy Silver desperately. "P-p-perhaps he hasn't missed it yet."

"Oh dear!"

"Who—who's going to take it back?" "Muffin ought to—"

"Catch him!" growled Lovell.

Jimmy Silver took the telescope off the mantelpiece.

"Come along!" he said. "We'll all go together. And then we'll go and see Muffin."

"Good!"

In a dismal mood the Fistical Four

quitted the end study, and made their way downstairs. They reached Mossoo's study, and found the door open, and Monsieur Monceau rooting about the study with a very puzzled expression on his face.

"Ah, come in, garçons!" he said. "Somebody he has taken away my new telescope, vich I have bought at Latham yesterday. Zat boy Muffin has been here, and I zink he play a shoke on me. I zink—"

"Here it is, sir!" said Jimmy Silver. Monsieur Monceau looked greatly relieved as he took the telescope.

"It is all right—not broken—vat?"

"Safe and sound, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "Muffin—ahem!—just took it away for—for a few minutes, sir. He—he—he—"

"Verree well," said Monsieur Monceau kindly. "Zere is no harm done, but you tell Muffin not to touch ze zings in a master's study wizout permission, Silver."

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "Certainly, sir!"

And the Fistical Four scuttled off, glad to escape. They breathed more freely when they were out of the School House.

"Thank goodness he didn't suspect anything!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Now for that blithering blighter Muffin!"

Muffin was run down as he left the tuckshop with half-a-crown's worth of

tuck inside him. He beamed on the Fistical Four.

"Want me?" he asked. "Lost something else? I'm ready! I— Yarcooh! Leggo! Wharrer Marrer? Yoooooop!"

The Fistical Four did not explain what was the matter. They left Tubby Muffin to discover that later. They collared Tubby, and they bumped him, and they rolled him, and they shook him. By the time they had finished, Reginald Muffin had a hazy impression that the whole universe had gone off with a sudden bang, and that he was floating somewhere in fragments in the midst of the ruins. And Jimmy Silver and Co. were feeling solaced.

When Detective Muffin discovered the precise facts, he said that it was a mistake that even Ferrers Locke or Sherlock Holmes might have made.

So the Rookwood detective remained quite satisfied with himself, though not with the ragging he had received. And, after due cogitation, he decided to "chuck" detective work. There were evidently more kicks than halfpence in a detective's career at Rookwood, that was obvious to Tubby, and so he chucked it.

THE END.

(You must not miss "Cousin Clara!" next Tuesday's stirring long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.)