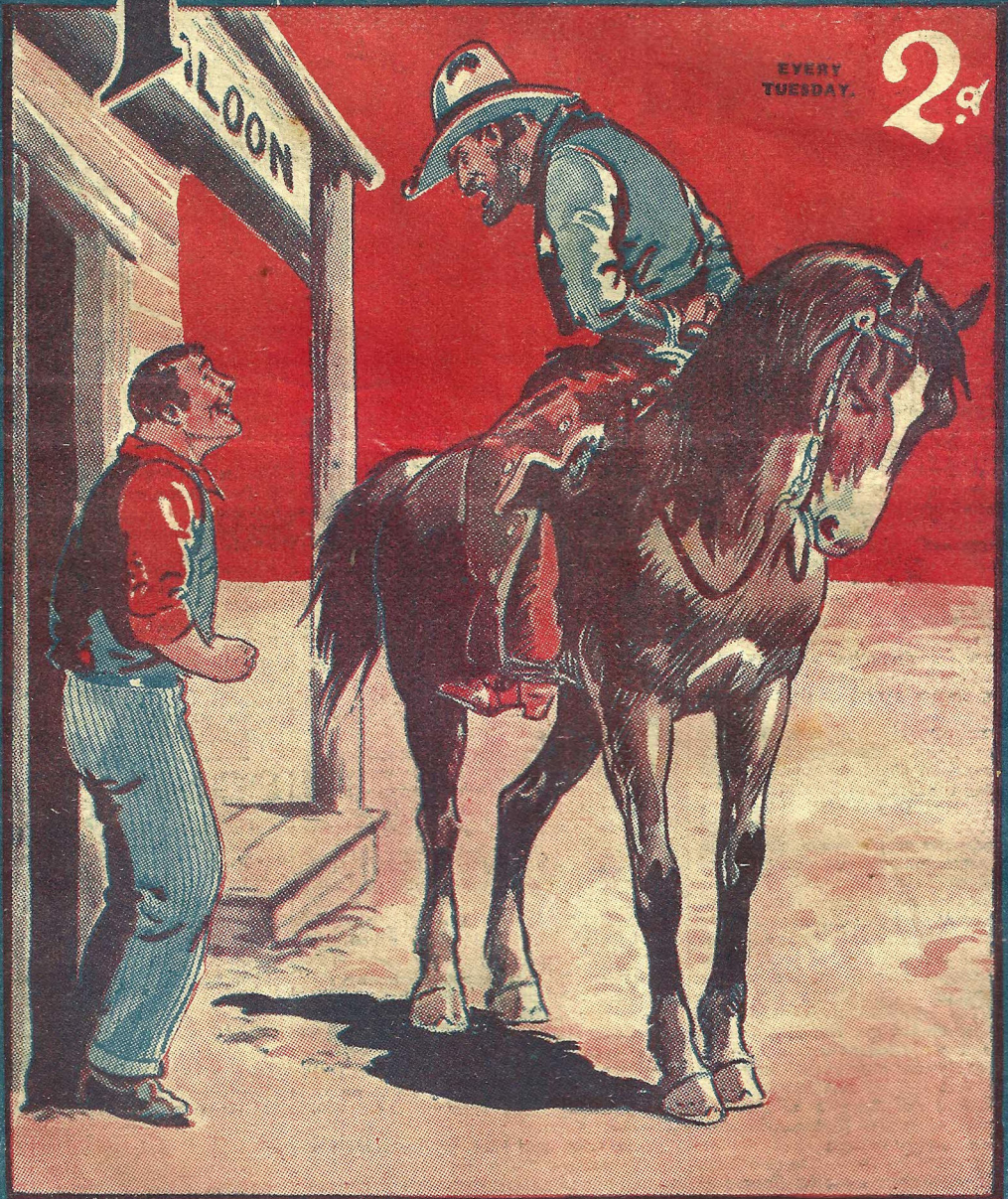


BUY THE BEST ——— BUY THE "POPULAR"

The POPULAR

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AND THIS IS WHAT THE
RIO KID DID TO THE SHERIFF!

BIG TROUBLE AT ROOKWOOD!

Sooner or later a liar gets bowled out. But before this his falsehoods may cause a whole heap of trouble. With Chilcot of Oakshott School and the Chums of Rookwood this is certainly the case!

A CAD CAUGHT OUT!



A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Visitor from Oakshott!

"**P**OOLE-POOLE!"
 "Yes, sir!"
 "Poole - Poole!" repeated Jimmy Silver, puzzled.
 "How many of them?" asked Lovell.
 Tupper, the House page, grinned.
 "Only one, sir, and he's awaiting in the visitors'-room, and Mr. Dalton said I was to tell you, Master Silver."
 "Who the dickens is it, Jimmy?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.
 Jimmy Silver shook his head.
 "Never heard the name before," he answered. "I should remember it if I had—a name like that!"
 "He's from Oakshott, sir," said Tupper.

"Oakshott School?" ejaculated Jimmy.
 "Yessir."
 And Timothy Tupper went his way, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. looking at one another across the tea-table in the end study.

"A chap from Oakshott," said Raby.
 "What the thump has he come here for? I thought we'd done with Oakshott after the shindy the other day!"
 "Same here," remarked Newcome.
 "Can't want to fix up another football match, surely?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"The answer will be in the jolly old negative in that case," he said. "But that's not likely. Perhaps it's a friend of Chilcot's, and Chilcot has sent him over with an apology."
 "Bosh!" said Lovell.

"Well, it's not likely, I suppose; but I'm dashed if I can guess why an Oakshott fellow should call on me," said the captain of the Fourth. "Anyhow, I'd better see him, I suppose."

And Jimmy Silver, much puzzled and perplexed, left the end study and went along the Fourth Form passage to the stairs.

Several days had elapsed since the football match, when Oakshott had come over to Rookwood and had been so soundly trounced that Chilcot, their skipper, had found an excuse for leaving the match unfinished. That and the trouble that had followed had decided the Rookwooders to drop that renewed fixture like a hot potato, and they had not expected to hear any more from Chilcot & Co. of Oakshott School.

Unless this particular Oakshott fellow had brought over the apology that really was due, Jimmy Silver could imagine no reason for the unexpected visit.

He descended the stairs, and arrived at the visitors'-room.

An extremely elegant youth was lounging by the window in that apartment, staring out into the quadrangle.

He did not turn as Jimmy entered, though certainly he heard him. Jimmy crossed the room to the windows.

"Well?" he rapped out.

Then the elegant youth turned his head. He eyed Jimmy Silver with a slightly supercilious expression.

"Silver?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Oh! I'm Poole-Poole!" drawled the elegant youth. "From Oakshott, you know."

"You've called to see me?"

"Yaas."

"Well, what's it about?" asked Jimmy Silver restively.

"About your row with Chilcot the other day," said Poole-Poole. "I wasn't there; but I understand that there was a row over the football match or somethin'. Some of your men fouled some of ours, or somethin' of the kind—"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Jimmy.
 "Eh?"

"Your skipper, Chilcot, fouled me, and rowed with the referee as an excuse for getting out of the match," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "We were seven goals up at the time. We might have been seventy, or seven hundred, if the match had gone on to the finish!"

"By gad!" said Poole-Poole. "That isn't how Chilcot told me the story!"

"Probably not," said Jimmy dryly.

"I prefer to believe Chilcot's version, you know," added Poole-Poole.

"You can believe what you please. Is that all?"

"Well, no. It seems that after the match you picked a row with old Chilcot—"

"It doesn't seem so. Chilcot picked a quarrel with me, and asked me to follow the party along the road to a quiet spot where we could settle the matter. I did."

"Well, we needn't argue about it, need we?" yawned Poole-Poole. "I

didn't come here to bandy words, you know. What?"

"I don't know why you came here at all," answered Jimmy Silver. "I'm waiting for you to tell me."

"Yaas, I'm comin' to that. It seems that you fought Chilcot without gloves. Rather a no-class sort of thing, don't you think?"

"We had the gloves ready, and Chilcot refused them," said Jimmy quietly. "He thought he was going to knock me out. That was a little mistake of his."

Poole-Poole shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we needn't argue," he repeated. "As it turned out, Chilcot was fearfully knocked about. He came home to Oakshott with a pair of black eyes and a mouth like an over-ripe tomato, and a nose to match. Horrid sight, believe me!"

"Very likely," said Jimmy. "It was his own fault!"

"Dr. Cranston doesn't stand for that sort of thing," went on Poole-Poole. "We're a bit particular at Oakshott. Fellow showin' up with a black eye is bound to be hauled over the coals. Two black eyes was really the giddy limit. Poor old Chilcot went into sanny!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

He could not help smiling. No fellow at Rookwood had ever dreamed of going into sanny after a combat, howsoever severe.

"You see, he simply couldn't let the Head know he'd got those damages in a fight," explained Poole-Poole. "He was up on the carpet before the beak, and he spun a yarn. A fellow does, you know."

"Well," said Jimmy, still puzzled. "I don't see what all this has to do with me. Chilcot asked me to say nothing about the fight, and said that he was going to spin some yarn to his headmaster. It was no business of mine, and I said I'd say nothing, and I haven't. I've got my own opinion of a fellow who tells lies, of course."

"Oh gad!" said Poole-Poole, staring at Jimmy. "Yaas, of course! You wouldn't understand—not a Rookwood chap! But we go for appearances an' that sort of thing at Oakshott. But we needn't argue. Arguin's a bag, isn't it? Well, as I was sayin', Chilcot

span a yarn—quite a good story about a tramp. He had walked about, or somethin', and the tramp tried to rob him, or somethin' and he resisted, you know, and the brute hammered him, and his pals came up and frightened the ruffian off, or somethin', you know. That was good enough for the Head. He was frightfully sympathetic, and ordered Chilcot into sanny."

"I hope he's on the way to recovery by this time," remarked Jimmy Silver, with gentle sarcasm.

"Well, you see, he's got a pair of terrific eyes and he can't show up in Oakshott Quad like that!" exclaimed Poole-Poole. "But that really isn't the point."

"Oh, you're coming to a point?" asked Jimmy.

"Yaas. Havin' pulled the Head's leg about it, Chilcot naturally supposed the matter was at an end. But it wasn't."

"Well?"

"The Head was waxy at the idea of a hooligan moppin' up an Oakshott fellow in that style, and made Chilcot give a description of the tramp."

"Great Scott! Of course he couldn't!"

"He had to, you know."

"He had to give a description of a man who doesn't exist at all," ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Yaas. It was really easy," said Poole-Poole. "He gave the first description that came into his head. As it happened, a tramp had begged of him the day before, and was cheeky when Chilcot refused to give him anythin', and, rememberin' what the johnny looked like, Chilcot gave his description to the Head—see? He thought it would do all right."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"Of course, the johnny's cleared off from this neighbourhood long ago, and won't be seen," said Poole-Poole. "That doesn't matter. Man with a black patch over his eye and a front tooth missin'. But that really isn't the point."

Jimmy Silver began to wonder whether there was a point at all, or whether this elegant and rather vacant youth was going to ramble on unendingly. But Poole-Poole came to the point at last.

"That was all right," said Poole-Poole. "The Head telephoned to the police about it, which Chilcot never expected. But the one-eyed johnny bein' probably a hundred miles away that didn't matter. But this is where Chilcot's pater comes in."

"Does he?" said Jimmy, suppressing a yawn.

"Yaas. You know these pater—they butt in at a fellow's school at the most inconvenient times," said Poole-Poole. "My own pater's always doin' it, though I discourage him all I can. Well, Chilcot's pater butted in to see him and found him in sanny lookin' as if he'd just crawled out of a motor-smash or from under a train. You can imagine that the jolly old colonel was wrathy."

"Well?"

"Of course, as Chilcot had spun one yarn to the Head, he couldn't spin another to his pater," said Poole-Poole. "Placed him in a frightful difficulty, you know."

"Not a new experience for liars, I believe," said Jimmy. "There's always something to be said for telling the truth."

"Yaas. We needn't argue," said Poole-Poole. "Now, you see, the jolly

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old colonel, being wild at his hopeful son bein' so handled by a measly tramp, hiked off at once to the police station, and he's offered a reward of twenty pounds for the giddy apprehension of that patch-eyed tramp."

"Phew!"

"Twenty pounds isn't much, of course," said Poole-Poole. "But it's a lot of money to a country bobby. Chilcot can't help thinkin' that possibly they may lay hold of the patch-eyed merchant. Bein' worth twenty pounds, he's worth lookin' for—what? So that's why I've come over. Chilcot wanted to remind you that you'd agreed to say nothin' about the fight."

"That's so."

"Of course, he doesn't doubt your word, and all that," pursued Poole-Poole amiably. "But the matter's gettin' serious now, so he wants you to be careful. Not a giddy syllable, an' all that, what?"

Jimmy stared at the Oakshott dandy. "If the man should be collared, of course Chilcot will tell the truth at once about it," he said.

"Oh gad!"

"Why, his father would prosecute the man," said Jimmy. "The poor wretch might be sent to prison."

Poole-Poole nodded.

"Yaas. I believe they make prisons very comfy in these days—lots of money spent on prisons."

"What?"

"You see, Chilcot's bound to stick to his story," explained Poole. "It's not likely that the man will be bagged. Not likely at all. No doubt he's in another county long ago. But if some enterprisin' bobby should lay him by the heels, I don't quite see what's goin' to happen. Anyhow, he's a loafer and a beggar and a seedy sort of scoundrel—cheeky, too. I don't think Chilcot's worryin' about him. The point is, he sent me over to remind you that you'd agreed to say nothin' about the fight. Catch on?"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"I can't believe that Chilcot would be rotter enough to stick to his story, if it were a question of an innocent man being taken up by the police," he said.

"That isn't your bizney, really, is it?" said Poole-Poole agreeably. "Not mine, either! Chilcot's you know. Now, I've told you Chilcot's message. I'll be goin'—"

"The best thing Chilcot can do is to own up to his father."

Poole-Poole smiled.

"I'll repeat your advice to him. I think he will grin. Colonel Chilcot is out for blood. He's goin' to make an example of that patch-eyed johnny if he can. I fancy he'd make an example of old Chilcot if he found out that his jolly old leg had been pulled. No end of a stern old Roman father, you know—jolly old Brutus over again, only a bit more so. Well, good-bye! Remember you agreed to keep it all dark."

Poole-Poole, of Oakshott, lounged to the door.

Jimmy Silver stared after him.

He was tempted, powerfully tempted, to stride after Master Poole-Poole and assist his passage through the doorway with a hefty kick.

Fortunately, he refrained.

Poole-Poole lounged elegantly out of the House and disappeared; and Jimmy Silver returned to the end study in the Fourth, with a frowning brow. The unfortunate affair with Oakshott was by no means at an end yet; and Jimmy Silver had now ample food for thought.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Wanted Man!

"HALLO, Boggy!" said Arthur Edward Lovell genially.

It was a fine afternoon, and the police force of Coombe was sitting on a stile in Coombe Lane, when Jimmy Silver & Co. came strolling by. The police force of Coombe—otherwise, P.-c. Boggs—was studying a document with great care and attention, wrinkling his brows over it, and did not even notice four cheery youths sauntering up till Arthur Edward Lovell addressed him with disrespectful geniality.

Then Mr. Boggs looked up.

"Arternoon, sir!" said Mr. Boggs; and then his glance dropped again on the document in his podgy hand.

Then he looked up again.

"You young gents ever noticed a feller hanging about these parts with a patch over his eye?"

"A—a which?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

P.-c. Boggs tapped the document with a podgy finger.

"This 'ere is a description of a man wanted," he explained. "There's a reward."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged curious glances. Jimmy Silver had told them of his talk with Poole-Poole of Oakshott. The Fistical Four had no difficulty in guessing whose description it was that P.-c. Boggs was so intently perusing.

"Rough-looking man, with a patch over a missing eye, and a front tooth knocked out!" said Mr. Boggs. "I fancy anybody would know that bloke that set eyes on him. Now, you young fellers ramble about the country a good deal—see? P'r'aps you seen such a cove somewheres."

Mr. Boggs looked earnestly and inquiringly at the chums of the Rookwood Fourth.

But the juniors smiled and shook their heads.

"Haven't seen anybody like him, Mr. Boggs," said Jimmy Silver. "Is his name known?"

Mr. Boggs nodded.

"Yes. It's come out that he stopped one night at an inn Latham way, and gave the name of Larry Linkins. That was two days ago, and he ain't been seen since."

"Two days ago!" repeated Jimmy.

The words gave the captain of the Rookwood Fourth rather a shock.

It was a week since the football match which had led to the fight, and to the damaging of Valence Chilcot. Some time shortly before that match Chilcot had seen the man Linkins, and the tramp had begged of him, and "cheeked" him, according to Poole-Poole. Chilcot, in giving the man's description as his mythical assailant, had supposed that the patch-eyed wanderer had gone on his way, and was probably outside Hampshire, perhaps two or three counties away.

But if he had been seen at a Latham inn only two days ago it looked as if Mr. Linkins was hanging on in the neighbourhood.

Obviously, Mr. Linkins did not know his danger.

Being perfectly innocent of the attack on Chilcot, and in ignorance of Chilcot's yarn, Mr. Linkins probably saw no reason for hurrying on his way. Jimmy wondered what on earth would happen if Larry Linkins were taken up by the police on a charge of assault and battery.

Certainly, Chilcot's statement was sufficient to cause the arrest of a wan-

dering vagrant, who was known to be a beggar, if not worse.

"Like his neck, 'anging on about 'ere, arter what he's done," said Mr. Boggs. "You aint seen anything of the man?"

"Nothing!" said Jimmy.

The Fistical Four walked on, leaving Mr. Boggs poring over the printed description of Larry Linkins, which he hoped might be worth twenty "pun" to him.

"My hat! This is getting thick!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a whistle. "Suppose they got hold of the man, Jimmy?"

"Kind gents!"

It was a whining voice, as the chums of Rookwood turned from the lane into the footpath through Coombe Wood.

A ragged, down-at-heel, stubbly-faced man, with a patch over one eye, and a gap in his front teeth, came towards them under the leafless trees.

The Fistical Four stared at him.

"Elp a man on his way, young gents!" said the patch-eyed man, holding out a dirty hand for alms.

"Oh, great Scott!" gasped Lovell. "It's the giddy merchant himself!"

"Phew!"

The man was easy to recognise at a glance. The patched eye and the missing front tooth left no doubt on the matter.

Evidently Larry Linkins had not cleared out of that part of the country, for here he was, not two hundred yards from the spot where the juniors had left P.-c. Boggs sitting on the stile.

"'Ard times and 'ard weather for a cove on the tramp, gents," said Mr. Linkins. "Looking for work, sir—looking for it hevery-where, but these are 'ard times. Spare a shilling, sir"

Lovell broke into a chuckle.

"There's a man looking for you, ready to give you a free lodging, with board and clothes found," he said.

Larry Linkins stared at him.

"It's a bobby down the lane yonder," grinned Lovell.

"Oh, my eye!" said Mr. Linkins. "I ain't done nothing—on my davy, I ain't! Not since I served a month's stretch in Sussex for them chickens, I ain't done nothing!"

"Your name's Linkins?" asked Jimmy.

"That's it, sir!"

"Well, the sooner you get out of this part of the country the better," said Jimmy Silver. "Do you remember begging of a fellow belonging to Oakshott School a week ago, and cheeking him?"

"Saucy young 'ound he was," said Mr. Linkins. "Cut me with his cane, he did, and I told 'im what I thought of 'im. No law agin that, that I know of!"

"You are going to be charged with assaulting and battering him."

Larry Linkins stared.

"I never touched him," he said.

"I know you didn't; but he's going to

say you did; and if you've been in prison, as you say, you won't have much chance! Look here, my man, you'd better clear—and the sooner the better!" Jimmy Silver groped in his pockets. "Here's five bob, and your best way is the shortest cut out of Hampshire, see?"

Mr. Linkins was moving off, but it was very doubtful whether he realised that his best way was, as Jimmy had said, the shortest cut out of Hampshire. It was more probable that Mr. Linkins was thinking of the shortest cut to the nearest inn.

But just then a fat and wheezy voice shouted from the road behind the Rookwood juniors:

"'Old him!"

And Police-constable Boggs came trundling on at a run, his fat face red with exertion and excitement.

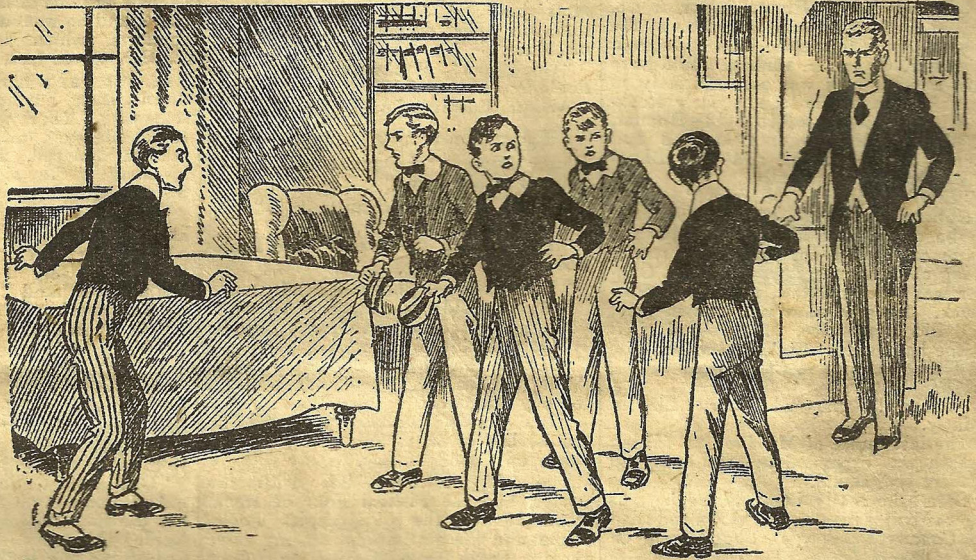
but he was not a good sprinter. Mr. Linkins, when he had cash in hand, was a whole-hearted supporter of the drink traffic. The result was that he was flabby and wheezy, and generally unfit, and certainly never in a state to put up a foot-race.

P.-c. Boggs was plump and podgy; he had much weight to carry, and he was short of breath. But he was in infinitely better condition than the liquor-soaked Mr. Linkins, and he gained at every step.

"Stop him!" panted Mr. Boggs to the Rookwood juniors. "The raskil may dodge into the trees; you young gents 'old him, and give me a chance with this 'ere truncheon. I calls on you to 'elp in the excecotion of the lor."

"After him!"

"Collar him!"



LETTING THE CAT OUT! "You got knocked about in a fair fight, Chilcot!" bawled Lovell. "Then you were afraid of your headmaster ragging you, so you tell a pack of lies about a tramp biffing you about. You're willing to perjure yourself rather than own up—!" Lovell broke off, and spun round to the door as it opened suddenly. There stood Colonel Chilcot! (See Chapter 5.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Grip of the Law!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. stared round.

Mr. Boggs, plodding along the lane towards the village, had glanced into the woodland footpath, and, to his great astonishment, had sighted Mr. Larry Linkins.

Plump and podgy was Mr. Boggs, not much given to exertion; but this was a moment for energy. Twenty pounds' reward was at stake. Mr. Boggs came up the footpath like a traction engine.

Lovell gave Larry Linkins a shove. "Hook it!" he breathed.

"Stop him!" panted Mr. Boggs. "That's the man! 'Old him! Don't let him get away!"

He came panting and puffing on.

Mr. Linkins seemed to grasp the situation at last. The constable's red and eager face, the drawn truncheon, convinced him that it was his cue to go while the going was good.

He spun round and ran for it.

"Stop him!" panted Mr. Boggs, still several yards distant.

"After him!" roared Lovell, with a private wink at his comrades. And the Fistical Four ran in pursuit.

They realised that it was wiser not to let Mr. Boggs guess that they were anxious for the escape of the patch-eyed gentleman.

Larry Linkins sprinted up the path;

"Tally-ho!" roared Lovell.

The Rookwooders rushed on with Mr. Boggs, while the hapless Larry Linkins panted on ahead. Perhaps it was by accident that Jimmy Silver ran into Mr. Boggs, mixed up a foot with Mr. Boggs' podgy leg, and brought the police-force of Coombe to the ground with a heavy bump.

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Boggs. "Ow! Oh! Oooch!"

"Man down!" gasped Lovell.

"Help him—help Mr. Boggs!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Lead a hand, all of you—quick!"

"You bet!"

All the Fistical Four helped Mr. Boggs. They helped him with such effect that he went sprawling and rolling as he was scrambling up, and somehow Arthur Edward fell on him.

"You young idjits!" roared Mr. Boggs breathlessly. "You clumsy young howls, lemme alone! I don't want your 'elp! 'Ands hoff!"

Mr. Boggs scrambled up at last. Larry Linkins had vanished into a narrow track through the wood, and was doubling back towards Coombe Lane. But the crashing of the thickets told of the direction he had taken; and Mr. Boggs, after a ferocious glare at Jimmy Silver & Co., tore after him, truncheon in hand.

The Co. stared at one another breathlessly.

"Will he get clear?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"He's got a chance——"

"Come on, we'd better see."

Jimmy Silver & Co. ran after Police-constable Boggs. They could not venture to give that plump gentleman another fall. It was a serious matter to impede an officer in the execution of his duty; and Mr. Boggs was now wary and suspicious. But they kept him in sight, and followed on as he panted and laboured out of the wood into Coombe Lane.

There Mr. Linkins came in sight again, running for his life, with perspiration streaming down his dirty face, in spite of the frosty weather.

But the patch-eyed gentleman had a good start, and Mr. Boggs was very nearly winded. Jimmy Silver & Co. halted in the lane and looked on at the chase, hoping to see the hapless vagrant get clear. Clear Mr. Linkins would have got, but his luck was out. Directly in front of him in the lane, a burly Rookwood junior appeared in sight—Gunner, of the Fourth. Gunner stopped and stared at the chase, and Mr. Boggs yelled to him frantically.

"Stop him, sir! 'Old him!"

Gunner was supposed at Rookwood to be every kind of a duffer; he was quite celebrated for doing the wrong thing at the wrong moment. But Gunner was a hefty fellow, with unbounded pluck. He saw what was wanted here, and did it at once. He rushed right at the hapless Mr. Linkins, collared him and brought him to the ground with a crash.

"Ooooop!" moaned Larry Linkins faintly.

The last ounce of Mr. Linkins' failing breath was expended in that bump on the frosty ground.

Before he really knew where he was he was being marched off down the road to Coombe, with Mr. Boggs' grip on his collar—a prisoner!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Calling on Chilcot!

THE day following Larry Linkins' arrest, Jimmy cycled down to Coombe after class, and saw Mr. Boggs, and learned things from him. He found the plump Mr. Boggs in a state of great satisfaction.

The police force of Coombe had brought off its first arrest of a malefactor successfully. Mr. Boggs fairly strutted with gratification over it. Also, the plump policeman had seen Colonel Chilcot, and had been congratulated by him on his success; and it was made clear to him that the reward would be duly paid over as soon as Mr. Linkins had been convicted.

That conviction was a matter of course when Mr. Linkins should appear before the magistrates at Rookham the following week. Mr. Linkins' record was so exceedingly shady that there was not a shadow of hope for him—if Valence Chilcot stuck to his story.

But would he, and could he?

Jimmy Silver determined to see Chilcot at last. There was nothing else to be done. He simply had to know the Oakshott nut's intentions.

He was extremely reluctant to visit Oakshott after the football match trouble; but there was nothing else to be done, and on Saturday afternoon he decided to cycle over.

"We'd better come," said Arthur Edward Lovell, when Jimmy announced his decision in the study.

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Jimmy looked dubious.

"We don't want a row," he said. "I'm just going to drop in for a talk with Chilcot, to see what he means. No rags, of course."

"You can't trust those outsiders," said Lovell. "I'm jolly well coming to take care of you!"

"You might get a ragging, Jimmy," said Raby. "They're a lot of outsiders at Oakshott!"

And Newcombe nodded.

Jimmy Silver conceded the point, and the Fistical Four wheeled out their bicycles together. It was about seven miles to Oakshott, a pleasant ride in the clear, frosty afternoon.

The Fistical Four arrived at the gates of Oakshott School. They found the elegant Poole-Poole lounging by the gateway, with Merton and Tippet and two or three other extremely nutty Oakshott juniors. Poole-Poole stared at them as they dismounted from their machines.

"Good gad! Rookwood cads!" said Poole-Poole.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave him a glare.

"We've called to see Chilcot," said Jimmy Silver. "I suppose he's out of sanny by this time?"

"Yaas. Did he ask you to call?"

"No; but I've got to see him."

"That's cheek, you know!" said Poole-Poole.

"Look here——" began Lovell.

"Shush, old man!" said Jimmy.

"We haven't come here for a shindy. Where's Chilcot, Poole?"

"He's in the House," said Poole-Poole.

"But, believe me, he doesn't want to see any Rookwood rotters!"

"It's not a question of what he wants, but of what he's going to get! Come on!" said Jimmy.

The bicycles were left with the porter, and the Fistical Four of Rookwood crossed the quadrangle, Poole-Poole and his companions staring after them. Poole-Poole decided to follow on, and he arrived at the door of the House as the Rookwooders stopped there.

"You'll find Chilcot rather ratty if you insist on seein' him," he said warningly. "His jolly old eyes are still quite a queer colour, and his boko is all shapes, except the right one."

"We can stand it, even if he is ratty," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"His pater's here, too," said Poole-Poole. "The jolly old gent is hangin' on, stayin' with the Head till the matter's settled about that tramp. You don't want to butt into the colonel."

"I don't mind," said Jimmy.

"I—I say, you're not goin' to give Chilcot away, are you?" muttered Poole-Poole, in alarm. "I say, that's not playin' the game, you know!"

"We know more about playing the game at Rookwood than you fellows do at Oakshott!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Let's get in, Jimmy. We're wasting time!"

"Look here, I'll take you up to Chilcot's study, if you like," said Poole-Poole. "It's bound to be noticed if you hang about downstairs seein' him. The jolly old colonel is frowstin' about somewhere."

"All serene!"

Poole-Poole was evidently alarmed at the idea that the Rookwooders might come into contact with Chilcot's father. Obviously, the "Roman" parent would have taken a very different view of the matter had he known what Jimmy Silver could have told him.

The Oakshott dandy led the way into

the House. A log fire blazed in the oak-panelled hall, and close by it stood two gentlemen in conversation. One was a master in cap and gown, the other a tall, thin, military-looking gentleman, with a hard, brown face, and keen, penetrating eyes under shaggy grey brows. The Rookwooders noticed him in passing, and guessed that this was Colonel Chilcot. Certainly, if looks counted for anything, the colonel was a Roman father, as Poole-Poole had described him—quite unlike his dandified son.

Poole-Poole hurried the Rookwooders on, and they ascended a broad staircase into an oak-beamed corridor, where Poole-Poole stopped at a door and threw it open. Valence Chilcot, the captain of the Oakshott Fourth, was in the study, a handsomely furnished room, almost sybaritic in its appointments. Oakshott was a wealthy school, and Chilcot was one of the wealthiest fellows there, and he was surrounded by elegant comforts, which most of the Rookwooders would have disdained.

Chilcot was a handsome fellow in his normal state, but he did not look handsome now. There were still dark shades round his eyes, and his nose was still swollen and red. He started up from his seat at the sight of the Rookwooders.

"What the thump do you want here?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing!" retorted Arthur Edward Lovell. "Only a little civility, and you'd better hand it out, Chilcot."

"You cheeky cad——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lovell.

"What have you brought that crew here for, Poole, you ass?" demanded Chilcot angrily.

"You see, old bean, they'd come," said Poole-Poole. "I thought it better to bung them in here, instead of letting your pater get hold of them."

"Oh!" said Chilcot.

And Poole-Poole left the study, leaving the four Rookwooders standing just inside the open door, and Valence Chilcot glaring at them across the room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Roman Father!

CHILCOT stared grimly at his unexpected and unwelcome visitors. His brows were knitted, and his discoloured eyes gleamed at the Rookwooders. Evidently they had not found him in a good temper.

"Well," snapped Chilcot at last, "what do you want?"

"Only a few words, Chilcot," said Jimmy Silver mildly. "It's about that tramp Linkins."

"No need to talk to me about him, that I know of."

"I only want to know what you intend to do," said Jimmy. "You know that the man has been arrested."

"I know that."

"He's in custody at Rookham now, and he's coming before the magistrates next week, according to what I've heard from Boggs."

"What about it?"

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"Something must be done, Chilcot. Surely you understand that? You'll have to appear against the man."

"That's my business!"

"You can't stand up and tell lies about the man on your oath."

Chilcot gritted his teeth.

"I tell you that's my business! The man is a loafing scoundrel—a thief and a vagrant! He's better inside a prison than outside one! What does it matter whether he goes to gaol now, or next

week, or the week after, for stealing chickens or pinchin' clothes from a line. Let him take his chance."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell. "You can't mean that, Chilcot," said Jimmy quietly. "I know you've got yourself into a difficult position. But you can't swear a man's liberty away to save yourself from trouble."

"I'm goin' to do exactly as I think best," said Chilcot. "If I'd foreseen all this fuss, I'd have owned up to the Head in the first place. It would have meant a row, but I could have stood it. Now it means a lot more than a row. It means a floggin' at least, if not the sack, and a shindy with my father. If you'd seen my father, you wouldn't think it possible to own up to him."

"You awful rotter!" burst out Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Chilcot. "If you've come over here for a row you've come to the wrong shop. Oakshott isn't Rookwood, and it isn't a home for rowdies!"

"Why, you—you—" gasped Lovell. "Leave it to me, old man," said Jimmy Silver. "Chilcot, can't you understand that the thing's impossible? If you hold me to my word, you're making me a party to what amounts to a crime—perjury and false witness. You can't do it. It's not decent!"

"That's my business!" "Linkins never touched you. You have got to own up and get the man released before he comes up before the magistrates. It will be easier now than then."

"You fool!" said Chilcot between his teeth. "It's too late! Can't you see it's too late? The man's actually arrested on my description of him. How can I back out now?"

"Look here, Chilcot—" "That's enough! You're bound to keep your promise, and I hold you to it. What happens to that brute Linkins doesn't matter to you. It's on my conscience, not yours. And I can stand it," added Chilcot, with a bitter sneer.

"You rotter" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, in great wrath as Jimmy Silver stood silent and nonplussed. "Why, you're a dashed scoundrel—nothing more nor less than a thundering scoundrel!"

"Do you want all Oakshott to hear you, you ye'lling fool?" hissed Chilcot, with a stare of concentrated malevolence at Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I don't care who hears me! I say you're a scoundrel!" bawled Lovell. "You got knocked about in a fight that you fairly begged for, and wouldn't take 'No' for an answer! Then you were afraid of your headmaster ragging you for your black eyes, and you told him a bushel of lies. And now you're willing to perjure yourself rather than own up! Why, you ought to be in Rookham gaol, not that seedy tramp! And I tell you—you—"

Lovell broke off, struck by the sudden white, anguished terror in Chilcot's face. Chilcot's eyes were on the door, and Arthur Edward, who had his back to the door, spun round.

In the doorway stood a tall, thin, erect figure. A hard, brown face stared into the room.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell.

"You've done it now!" murmured Newcome.

Colonel Chilcot strode into the study. His brown face was as hard as iron, and his grim look showed plainly enough that he had heard every one of Lovell's angry words.

A pin might have been heard to drop in Valance Chilcot's study for a moment or two. The silence was almost terrible.

Colonel Chilcot broke it. He spoke in a quiet, cold, cutting voice.

"What does this mean?"

No reply.

"Who are you?" asked the colonel, fixing his grim glance on the Rookwooders. "You do not belong to Oakshott?"

"We're from Rookwood, sir," said Jimmy.

"I heard what this boy was shouting out," said the colonel.

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Lovell. "I—I never knew—I—I—"

His voice trailed off.

The colonel turned to his son. Chilcot seemed frozen to his seat in sheer nerveless terror. His wretched falsification had fallen to pieces like a house of cards now. His father knew!

"Valence!"

The Oakshott dandy tried to speak. But only a gasp came from him.

"Valence!" The old colonel's voice was deep and stern. "Is there anything in what this boy has said? Have you deceived me, and deceived your headmaster?"

Valence Chilcot panted for breath.

Even at that point he would have lied and equivocated, had it been possible. But he realised that the game was up, that further falsehood would not save him, even had he been capable of it under the grim, stern, penetrating glance of his father.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"Is it true that you were hurt in a fight with another boy, and not by a tramp, as you stated to Dr. Cranston?"

"Yes," groaned Chilcot.

The colonel compressed his lips.

"Then the man Linkins has been arrested on a false statement made by you, my son?"

Chilcot bowed his head in utter misery and terror.

"I—I never meant—I—I spun the Head a yarn—the fellows do. I never dreamed there would be all this fuss. I—I—"

"I understand. I am glad that the truth has been brought to light. The man Linkins will be released and compensated. You will take the consequences of your conduct, Valence! It is for your headmaster to deal with you, and I shall urge him to deal with you with the utmost severity. Follow me!"

The colonel wheeled and strode out of the study, taking no further notice of the Rookwooders.

Chilcot picked himself limply out of his chair. He almost tottered across the study to the door.

There he paused for a second to look at the Rookwooders, his eyes gleaming with rage and malice.

"I'm sorry for this, Chilcot," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "But it's better so. If you wouldn't have owned up—"

"I'll make you sorry, you cad!" said Chilcot, between his teeth. "I'm for it now, but you haven't heard the last of it. I'm goin' through it now, and I'll make you go through it, somehow!"

And with that Chilcot left the study, following his father down the staircase. "Let's get out of this!" muttered Raby.

Jimmy Silver & Co. lost no time in getting out of the House. They wheeled out their bicycles, and Poole-Poole hurried out to speak to them.

"It's all right—what?" he asked.

"Quite all right," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Colonel Chilcot butted into the study while we were talking to Chilcot and heard the whole story. He's taken Chilcot to the Head."

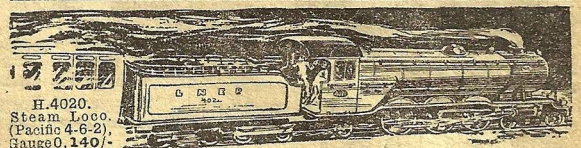
Poole-Poole jumped.

"Good gad! That means that old Chilcot is for it! Good gad! How will old Chilcot stand a floggin'? All the fault of you Rookwood cads for buttin' in! You're jolly well not goin' to get off after that! Here, you chaps, this way! Collar these rotten outsiders! Yaroooooh!"

Poole-Poole's expensive silk hat was crunched over his ears under a mighty smite from Arthur Edward Lovell, and he sat down in the gateway with a howl. Then the Fistical Four jumped on their machines and pedalled away for Rookwood.

THE END.

(Jimmy Silver & Co. have not heard the last of Chilcot, the cad of Oakshott. They meet him again in: "THE OAKSHOTT FEUD!" next week's stirring story of the Rookwood chums.)



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