

Gunner Gets Going

by
Owen
Conquest.



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Gunner Gets Going!

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Something really unique in new boys, is Peter Cuthbert Jenner! And events at Rookwood School become more than lively with the advent of the newcomer and his weird and wonderful ways!

CHAPTER 1.
Tubby Butts In!

THIRD lesson had ended in the Fourth Form room at Rookwood School—the last lesson for the day, as it happened to be Wednesday—a half-holiday. But Mr. Dalton had not given the word to dismiss.

Apparently the Fourth Form-master had something to say to his pupils before they went trooping out into the spring sunshine. The Fourth wondered what it was. Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather anxious.

They had the usual number of sins upon their youthful consciences, and they wondered dismally whether anybody was going to be detained, and whether, worst of all, it was going to be their noble selves.

The weather was unusually warm for the time of year, and the Fistical Four had arranged a swim for that afternoon, which,

of course, detention would have knocked on the head.

And the Co. at that moment were acutely conscious of the fact that they had rolled Smythe of the Shell down the School House steps that morning, with disastrous results to Smythe's shining topper and to his gorgeous necktie. If Mr. Dalton knew about that, and if he regarded the incident as more serious than it really was—Form-masters had a way of regarding incidents as more serious than they really were!

"Silver!"

Jimmy repressed a groan.

"You have doubtless heard that a new boy is expected at Rookwood," said the master of the Fourth.

"I—I've heard it mentioned, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "Chap named Gunner, or something."

"A boy named Peter Cuthbert Gunner,"

said Mr. Dalton. "He arrives at Coombe by the three-thirty train from Latcham. It is probable that he will enter the Fourth Form here. In any case, he will be on the Classical side. As you are head boy in the Form, Silver, I was thinking of requesting you to meet him at the station and conduct him to Rookwood."

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

"Very well, then. This boy, Gunner

Tubby Muffin jumped up.

"If you please, sir," spluttered the fat Classical, "I—I'm willing to go and meet Gunner, sir."

"Muffin!"

"Jimmy's got something on for this afternoon, sir," said Muffin; "and I know Gunner, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dalton. "If you are personally acquainted with the boy Gunner, Muffin—"

"Oh, quite, sir!" said Tubby. "He will be delighted to see me. No need for Jimmy Silver to go, sir."

Jimmy Silver gave Muffin quite a grateful glance. For once in his fat career Tubby Muffin had come in useful. As a rule, Tubby was neither useful nor ornamental. But he had justified his fat existence for once—in the opinion of Uncle James.

Mr. Dalton reflected for a moment or two.

Reginald Muffin was not the fellow he would have selected for any task or duty. But the Form-master was a kind-hearted young man, and he could see that his request had considerably disconcerted the Fistical Four. And Tubby's statement that he was acquainted with the new boy made a difference.

"Very well, Muffin!" said Mr. Dalton, at last. "The matter shall be left in your hands."

"Thank you, sir!" purred Muffin.

"You will be at the station in good time for the train, Muffin, and you will bring Gunner directly to Rookwood."

"Certainly, sir."

And Mr. Dalton dismissed the class.

As the Fourth Form went down the corridor, Jimmy Silver tapped Tubby on his fat shoulder.

"Good for you, Muffin!" he said.

"You're not a bad little fat oyster, after

all. I didn't know you knew the new kid either."

Tubby grinned.

"I haven't exactly met him," he explained.

"Then how the thump do you know him?" asked Lovell.

"Well, everybody knows the name—Gunner's Hardware, you know," said Tubby Muffin. "You see it on every blessed boarding, and in every newspaper. Gunner's Hardware is the Best, you know."

"Thought I'd heard the name," said Raby. "But this Gunner can't be that Gunner. This Gunner is a kid, and he can't be a hardware merchant."

"That'll be his father, of course," said Tubby. "The Gunners are simply rolling in money, you know."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

He thought he understood now why Reginald Muffin had thrown himself into the breach, as it were.

"And you want to roll in it, too, you fat bouncer!" said Jimmy. "Is that it?"

"I don't call that grateful, after I've saved you from chucking away your half-holiday," said Tubby Muffin severely. "Of course, I made my offer out of friendship for you, Jimmy—pure friendship. Besides, after I'd saved you from giving up your swim, I knew you'd lend me half-a-crown or so."

"Quite a mistake!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"I say, Jimmy—"

"If this is the hardware Gunner, you can stick him for half-a-crown!" chuckled Lovell. "He's got more than we have."

"Look here, I can't go and meet a new chap without a bob in my pocket," said Tubby Muffin. "In the circumstances—"

"Leave him to us, then," said Raby, laughing. "If the new kid's a giddy millionaire, he may be worth meeting!"

Tubby Muffin looked alarmed.

"I—I say, you keep off the grass, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to meet Gunner. I've got Mr. Dalton's authority—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shall have him, for what he's worth, Tubby!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You're welcome to my share in the hardware profits."

"And mine!" chuckled Lovell.

"But, I say, Jimmy, what about that half-crown—"

"Nothing about it, old fat bean!"

And the Fistical Four walked out cheerily into the quadrangle, leaving Tubby Muffin as stony as they had found him. But Master Muffin was in a very hopeful frame of mind.

Gunner's hardware had a world-wide fame. Nobody could read a newspaper without learning something about Gunner's hardware.

It stood to reason, in Tubby's opinion, that some of the hardware profits would arrive at Rookwood in the pockets of the son and heir of the great Gunner, and Tubby had full confidence in his skill as a borrower.

Tubby's idea was that that afternoon he was going to meet not merely a new kid, but a horn of plenty, and during dinner Tubby's fat face wore a smile of happy anticipation.

CHAPTER 2.

The Arrival of Gunner

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were sauntering cut at the gateway that afternoon when Reginald Muffin came along. The Fistical Four smiled as they saw him. Tubby had been taking a little trouble to make a good impression upon the new fellow.

His collar was spotless—an indication that it wasn't Tubby's own collar, but a borrowed article. His boots shone resplendent, reflecting the spring sunshine—or, to be more correct, Putty Grace's boots shone resplendent for Tubby had borrowed Putty's best boots for the occasion.

His necktie was really handsome, which was accounted for by the fact that it belonged to Valentine Mornington. Master Muffin evidently felt that he was dressed to kill, and was pleased with the result, for there was quite a strut in his gait, and he bestowed a rather lofty look on the Fistical Four.

With his fat little nose high in the air, Reginald Muffin marched along the lane to Coombe, and Jimmy Silver & Co., grinning, went on their way by the towing-path.

The Fistical Four were heedless of the arrival of Peter Cuthbert Gunner, and

utterly disregarded the millions Gunner senior was supposed to have made in the hardware trade.

They attached more importance to their swim in the Roke that afternoon than to any number of Gunners, poor or wealthy.

Indeed, Arthur Edward Lovell remarked that it did not matter a red cent if the whole Royal Artillery happened along at Rookwood that afternoon—this being a brilliant pun on the new boy's name.

But all Tubby Muffin's fat thoughts were fixed on Gunner, and he arrived at Coombe Station half an hour before the train, leaving nothing to chance.

He spent the interval on the platform, eyeing the automatic machine which provided chocolates, and occasional groping and fumbling in his pockets in the hope of discovering there a coin previously overlooked—a wild hope that proved unfounded.

When the train came in from Latcham, Tubby Muffin was on the alert. The local train carried few passengers, and among the half-dozen that alighted at Coombe, Tubby was confident of picking out a new junior for Rookwood. But he was puzzled now.

Two big farmers, a soldier in khaki, and a lady with a shawl and a shopping-bag passed him. Not one of this party could possibly be supposed to be Peter Cuthbert Gunner.

Then there was a fat, sporting-looking gentleman, whom Tubby recognised as Mr. Joey Hook, of the Bird-in-Hand. The sixth and last passenger to alight was a rather big fellow, and as he was the only boy in the train, Tubby concluded that he must be Gunner.

But Tubby was puzzled. Mr. Dalton had said that Gunner was likely to enter the Fourth, and this youth was bigger than most fellows in the Shell at Rookwood; indeed, he looked almost old enough and big enough to be in the Fifth.

"That must be him!" murmured Tubby, with a ruthless disregard of his nominatives. "That's him! But what a whacker for the Fourth! Must be some awful dunce."

He blinked rather uncertainly at the stranger, Gunner—if this was Gunner—stood on the platform and looked about him. He was a sturdy fellow, with a rather round face and rugged features.

Tubby had rather expected a shy and sheepish fellow. New boys were often shy and sheepish. But there was absolutely nothing shy or sheepish about this new boy.

From his looks, the railway-station might have belonged to him. He had the air of being monarch of all he surveyed.

His size and his assured looks smote Tubby Muffin with doubts. This was not exactly the kind of fellow to be taken under the protecting wing of the fat Classical, and led in the way in which he should go, and subjected to the gentle process of "touching" for a loan or two. Tubby's happy anticipations began to fade.

But he rolled up to the stranger at last, and intercepted him as he turned away from a porter and started for the platform exit.

"I say, Gunner—" began Tubby.

The big youth stared at him.

"Hallo, fatty!" he said.

"You—you're Gunner?"

"I'm Gunner!" assented the big fellow. "P. C. Gunner."

"P. C. Gunner!" repeated Tubby.

"Police-constable Gunner—what? He, he, he!"

This was a joke—a little pleasantry to put matters on a friendly footing at once.

But the pleasantry was wasted on Master Gunner. He did not seem to catch on, as it were. He stared rather grimly at Muffin.

"What's that?" he said. "I don't follow."

"P. C., you know," explained Tubby, with another feeble giggle; "that stands for police-constable, doesn't it?"

"Of course it doesn't!" said Gunner. "It stands for Peter Cuthbert—my names."

"I—I mean, it might, you know," said Muffin feebly. "Only—only a little joke, you know. He, he, he!"

"Joke?" said Gunner. "I don't see the joke. Do I look anything like a police-constable?"

"Nunno."

"Then what do you mean?" asked Gunner.

Tubby began to wish that he had not been humorous. He decided to let the matter drop.

"I'm from Rookwood," he said. "Mr. Dalton's sent me to meet you, Gunner."

"Who's Mr. Dalton?"

"Our Form-master—master of the Fourth, you know."

"Blessed if I see why he should send you!" said Gunner. "Are you in the Fourth?"

"Yes—Muffin of the Fourth."

"Muffin!" repeated Gunner. "Is that your name?"

"Yes—Reginald Muffin."

"My only sainted Sam!" said Gunner.

"What a name! Do you really go about calling yourself Muffin?"

Tubby Muffin breathed hard. He was justly proud of his name, which was at least unique. Moreover, Tubby was, according to his own account, descended from Sir Reginald Muffin de Muffin, who came over with the Conqueror, and he had often told an unbelieving Fourth so.

But he checked the wrathful retort on his lips. He had not come there to dispute with P. C. Gunner.

"I'm to take you to Rookwood, old chap!" he said.

Gunner sniffed.

"Take me to Rookwood! I suppose I can get to Rookwood without your help, Muffin, Crumpet, or whatever you call yourself!"

"I—I say—"

"Jolly careless of them to send a Fourth Form fag to meet me!" said Gunner, frowning. "Not respectful."

"You're going into the Fourth, ain't you?" asked Muffin.

"What rot! I'm going into the Sixth, I expect."

"Wha-at?"

"The Fifth at least!" said Gunner. "I really left St. Bede's because they wouldn't give me my remove. You can cut off, Muffin, or Shortbread, or whatever your name is. I don't care for the company of fags!"

With that Peter Cuthbert Gunner walked off the platform, leaving Muffin staring after him.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Muffin, in dismay.

He rolled out of the station after Gunner. His hopes were reduced almost to zero; but after all the trouble he had taken, he would not leave a stone unturned.

He overtook the hefty new fellow outside the station, where Gunner was looking about him again, still with the air of a fellow who was monarch of all he surveyed.

"I say, this is the way to the school, Gunner!" murmured Tubby. "We—we pass Mrs. Wicks' tuckshop down the High Street. They've got awfully good jam-tarts there, Gunner."

"They can keep them!" said Gunner.

At the end of a side street the river could be seen gleaming in the sunshine, and Gunner started in that direction.

Tubby rolled after him.

"I say, it's a mile longer if you go by the towing-path," he said.

"What's a mile to me?" said Gunner scornfully. "I'm going by the towing-path. I'm in no hurry."

"Mr. Dalton expects—"

"Let him expect! He's not my Form-master," said Gunner.

"But he said—"

"Oh, don't worry."

P. C. Gunner walked off with long strides. Tubby Muffin set his fat little legs in rapid motion. He was determined not to part with Gunner, if he could help it, at least until the last hope was gone. The fat junior breathed spasmodically as he trotted along by the side of Gunner, whose long legs covered the ground in great style.

Gunner followed the towing-path as far as the bridge. Tubby was glad when the new junior stopped on the bridge to take a survey of the scenery. Gunner leaned on the stone parapet and looked over the shining river with an appreciative eye. Tubby almost collapsed on the parapet and breathed in gasps. Gunner grinned at him.

"Fagged?" he asked.

"Ow—yes—a little!" spluttered Tubby.

"You're too fat!" said Gunner.

"Look here—"

"I shall get some swimming here," said Gunner thoughtfully. "Do they do much swimming at Rookwood, Muffin?"

"Lots!" gasped Tubby. "Jimmy Silver's great on it."

"Who's Jimmy Silver?"

"Captain of the Fourth!" said Tubby.

"Ob, a fag!" said Gunner contemptuously. "I don't suppose he can swim! I was the best swimmer at St. Bede's. I ought to have had the prize the term I left, but there was a mistake. I should have won the long jump, too, only there was a slight accident; and it was me for the hundred yards, but for a fluke. And there isn't much doubt that I should have

kicked the winning goal in the match against the Old Boys, only—only—"

"Only what?" asked Muffin.

"Only they wouldn't play me in the team," said Gunner frowning. "I was never properly valued at St. Bede's. I hope it will be different at Rookwood. I'm great on games—simply great."

Tubby Muffin grinned. Gunner's recitals of his triumphs did not really sound to him like the record of a fellow who was great on games.

"Hallo there's somebody in the water!" exclaimed Gunner with a start.

He stared down over the parapet. The water was deep by the bridge, and on the sunny surface there showed a dark head.

Gunner did not hesitate.

To Tubby Muffin's amazement, he threw off his hat, and jumped on the parapet.

"I—I say!" gasped Muffin.

Gunner did not heed. He put his hands together and dived, and there was a heavy splash below.

Tubby Muffin simply gasped.

"Off his rocker!" he articulated. "Fancy a chap diving into the river with his clothes on! I wonder if he can swim? Lucky that Jimmy Silver's swimming there!"

CHAPTER 3.

Saving Jimmy Silver!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were enjoying their afternoon. It was not every junior of Rookwood who was allowed to go out for a swim without the presence of a master or a prefect. But the Fistical Four were quite at home in the water, and they were not reckless. Lovell and Raby and Newcome contented themselves with disporting under the willows; but Jimmy Silver, who was the best junior swimmer at Rookwood, went farther afield. He was swimming across the river near the old stone bridge when Peter Cuthbert Gunner arrived on the scene with Reginald Muffin. Jimmy's task was easily within his powers, and certainly it did not occur to him that anyone, seeing him in the water, would suppose that he was in danger. He had not yet had the pleasure of making Gunner's acquaintance, and so he knew nothing, naturally, of the wonderful processes of that youth's powerful intellect. The Rookwood swimmer was

startled when a heavy splash sounded in the water within a couple of yards of him.

He spun round, concluding at once that someone had fallen from the bridge.

A head came up on the surface, and two hands were flung up. Gunner gasped and snorted like a grampus.

"I'm coming!" called out Jimmy at once.

A swift stroke carried him to the struggling Gunner.

He grasped Gunner's collar to keep his head up, and at the same moment Gunner grasped him by the hair. Jimmy being in swimming costume, it was not easy to grasp him, and Gunner collared his hair as the safest hold. Jimmy gave a yell.

"Leggo!"

"Keep cool!" gasped Gunner.

"What?"

"I'll save you!"

"Save me?" spluttered Jimmy.

"Yes. Keep cool! Keep your courage up! I'll save your life!"

"My only aunt!"

Grasping Jimmy's rather thick hair tenaciously with his left hand, Gunner swam with his right, heading for the shore.

Jimmy Silver was so astounded that he let go Gunner's collar, and for a moment or two the gallant rescuer had it all his own way.

But Gunner, though he certainly had heaps of pluck, was under a serious misapprehension with regard to his powers as a swimmer.

His clothes were soaked and his boots full of water, and he found it extremely difficult to keep afloat.

He ducked under for a moment, and Jimmy went with him, dragged under by the grasp on his hair, and both came up spluttering.

"Let go!" shrieked Jimmy.

"Keep cool!" gasped Gunner.

"You silly owl!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Leggo my hair! You're pulling it out by the roots! Yarooooogh! Leggo!"

"Oh dear! Oooch!" spluttered Gunner, as his rather large mouth filled with water. "Ooooooh! Grooooooh! Don't struggle, kid! I'm saving you! Ow!"

"You cross dummy!" spluttered Jimmy.

"Saving me, you fathead! I don't want to be saved, you frabjous jabberwock!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Gunner. "I

didn't know it was an attempted suicide! I'm going to save you, all the same!"

"You—you—groooooooocch!" gurgled Jimmy, as his head was dragged under again.

It was no time for argument, and his rescuer was obviously impervious to argument. There was only one way of releasing his captured hair, and that was by giving Gunner a gentle "jab," which Jimmy Silver accordingly administered.

He jerked his head free then, and backed away in the water. Gunner swam blindly, spluttering and gasping. His head went under, and Jimmy, realising that his extraordinary rescuer was being dragged down by his soaked clothes, seized him by the collar again.

"Don't struggle!" he said sharply.

"Leggo my collar!" spluttered Gunner.

"How can I save you if you hang on the back of my neck, you idiot?"

Jimmy chuckled breathlessly. It was Gunner that needed saving, though he did not seem aware of it.

Keeping a grip like iron on Gunner's collar, Jimmy steered him shoreward, while Peter Cuthbert struggled and splashed and floundered frantically.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome swam out to lend aid to their chum, and they all grasped Gunner, and finally dragged him into the rushes. There the bulky new boy was landed on his back, spluttering. Tubby Muffin came scudding down from the bridge.

Jimmy Silver pumped in breath. Gunner seemed in a dazed state, and he was pumping in breath also, in spasmodic jerks.

"You've got him out?" gasped Muffin. "I thought he was a goner! I say, Jimmy, that's Gunner! Is he mad, do you think?"

"Jolly near it, I should say!"

"Didn't he fall in?" asked Raby.

"Jumped in—with his clothes on!" said Tubby. "Fancy that! Must be off his silly rocker, you know!"

"Must be!" said Newcombe, in wonder.

"They've sent him to Rookwood in mistake for a lunatic asylum, I should say."

Gunner sat up.

"All safe?" he gasped.

"Safe?" said Lovell. "Of course! Why shouldn't we be safe?"

"Oh, here you are!" said Gunner, blinking at Jimmy Silver. "I've saved your life, then."

"Saved Jimmy's life!" said Lovell dazedly.

"Lucky I came by the towing-path, wasn't it?" said Gunner. "I saw you in the water, and came in for you, young 'un. Pretty hefty dive from the bridge—what? But I'm a topping swimmer, luckily. You were a young ass to go into danger like that. But I'm glad I saved you."

"You frabjous, burbling jabberwock!" said Jimmy Silver, in measured tones. "I wasn't in danger. I was taking a swim. And you might have been drowned if we hadn't yanked you out of the water, you crass fathead!"

Gunner looked at him.

"Is that what you call gratitude?" he asked.

"Gratitude!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. When a fellow's saved your life at the risk of his own, you might at least thank him."

"You haven't saved my life!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "We've saved yours, if any lives have been saved, you frumptions chump!"

Gunner staggered to his feet.

"I'm feeling a bit blown," he said.

"Otherwise, I'd lick you for your cheek. Still, I'm glad I've saved your life."

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin.

"You'd better get to the school and change your clothes," said Jimmy Silver. "You'll catch cold at this rate. Tubby, you're supposed to be in charge of this born idiot. Tie a string on him and lead him to Rookwood."

"Ho, he, he!"

The Fistical Four went back to their swimming, and Gunner stared after them.

"Hi!" he called out.

"Hallo! What is it now?" asked Jimmy.

"Don't go out of your depth again."

"Wha-at?"

"I'm off!" said Gunner. "I've got to get a change of clothes. I can't stay here to pull you out again."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Keep in your depth," said Gunner.

And with that, Peter Cuthbert Gunner started up the towing-path with Tubby Muffin, and the Fistical Four blinked at one another.

"So that's the giddy new kid," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Of all the born idiots—"

"Of all the frabjous chumps——" said Raby.

"Of all the burbling, footling dummies——"

"He's got pluck!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "But of all the crass, fat-headed, potty duffers——"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner had not succeeded in making a great impression on the Fistical Four of Rookwood. But he was quite satisfied with himself, which, after all, was perhaps the important point.

CHAPTER 4.

Gunner—Not of the Sixth!

TUBBY MUFFIN chortled as he trotted beside Gunner on the towing-path. The "rescue" of Jimmy Silver struck Tubby as the best joke of the term, and he was looking forward to relating it in the Common-room. Gunner squelched out water as he trotted, keeping himself warm by vigorous motion. And Tubby's fat chortle soon died away. He needed all his breath to keep pace with Gunner.

"I—I say, not quite so fast!" gasped Tubby, at last.

"I don't want to catch cold, you fat duffer!" said Gunner. "I don't mind going in to save a fellow's life, but I'm not going to catch cold. Is it right on from here to Rookwood?"

"Yes; turn when you come to the boat-house. But, I say——"

"Then you needn't come."

"Oh, I say, Gunner——"

"Don't worry!"

Gunner increased his speed, and Tubby Muffin had to give it up. He was too winded to keep pace. The fat Classical stopped at last, panting for breath, and in almost a homicidal mood. He had wasted his half-holiday on Gunner. He had dressed himself with unusual care to make a good impression on that youth, and it had all been for—nothing! He had had his trouble for his pains. He had not even been able to approach the subject of a small loan, and he realised that even if he had approached it, he would not have got so near as to touch it. Reginald Muffin sat down on the bank, and gasped for breath, still stony, and faced, also, with the prospect of having to answer for box-

rowing Morny's necktie, and Putty's boots, and somebody else's collar. He had only one comfort, a faint hope that Gunner might catch a cold!

Without bestowing a thought further on Tubby Muffin, Gunner trotted on at a good pace. He was wet through, but keeping himself warm, and he was in a mood of glowing satisfaction. At his old school he had never been appreciated at his true value, as he had mentioned to Muffin. But fortune had smiled upon his arrival at Rookwood. On his first day at the school he had saved a Rookwooder's life at the risk of his own, and that was bound to bring him into the limelight at once, and show all Rookwood the kind of fellow he was. At his new school Peter Cuthbert Gunner was going to receive the kudos so long denied him, and which he so well deserved.

He found himself at the gates of Rookwood soon after dropping Tubby Muffin. Old Mack stared at him in surprise as he came in, drenched.

"This is Rookwood, I suppose?" said Gunner.

"It are," said old Mack. "And who are you, please?"

"I'm Gunner."

"Oh, the noo boy!" said Mack, staring. "Ow did you get in that state? Noo boys ain't supposed to come 'ere in that state. You'll get into a row, you will, Master Gunner. It's agin the rules."

"Is it against the rules to jump into the river and save a fellow's life?" asked Gunner.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Mack.

Gunner tramped on. There were a good many fellows in the quadrangle, and they all looked at the new fellow as he passed, squelching water from his boots and dropping it from his clothes. Certainly it was an original manner for a new boy to arrive at Rookwood. Gunner was not in the least disconcerted by so many stares. He walked on as if the quadrangle belonged to him, with the grey old buildings and the beeches thrown in. Bulkeley of the Sixth came out of the School House as Gunner came up, and stopped to speak to him.

"What's this? Who are you?"

"Gunner."

"Oh, Gunner!" said Bulkeley. "Have you had an accident?"

"No."

"Then what are you in that disreputable state for?" demanded the prefect.

"Jumped into the river to save a fellow's life," said Gunner.

"Eh—what? Whose life?"

"Don't know his name. A fag. The other kids called him Jimmy, I think—"

"Silver, I suppose," said the astonished Bulkeley. "Jolly queer! Was he in trouble in the water?"

"Drowning!" said Gunner. "I dived from the bridge for him."

"My nat!" ejaculated Bulkeley. "Well, you'd better get changed—quick! Come in! I'll show you where."

"Thanks!" said Gunner coolly.

He followed Bulkeley into the house.

"Change in this dormitory," said Bulkeley. "Towel yourself down hard. I suppose your things haven't come yet? I'll get you some things to change into somehow. It's jolly odd about Silver. The best swimmer in the Lower School. If you're pulling my leg, Gunner, it means a licking!"

"What rot!" said Gunner. "I certainly should refuse to be licked. Are you in the Sixth?"

"Eh—what? Yes."

"I expect to be put in the Sixth," said Gunner. "I shall refuse to be put in any Form lower than the Fifth, anyhow."

"I understood you were going into the Fourth."

"Utter rot!" said Gunner.

Bulkeley gave him a stare, and quitted the dormitory.

Gunner towelled himself down, and Tupper, the page, brought a bundle of clothes to the dormitory, and a message that the Head expected him. Gunner squeezed himself into the clothes, and followed the page downstairs. Jimmy Silver & Co. had just come in, and they smiled at the sight of the new junior.

"Behold the giddy rescuer!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner stared at the Fistical Four.

"Oh, you're Silver, I think?" he said.

"Feeling all right after your narrow escape, Silver?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!" chortled Jimmy. "How do you feel after yours?"

"Eh? I haven't had any escape," said Gunner, puzzled. "I don't follow. But you needn't worry about me. I'm as right as rain. Bless you, a little incident like

that is nothing to me. I'm only glad I happened to come along in time to save your life!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Mornington of the Fourth. "Somebody been saving your life, Jimmy?"

"Not quite," grinned Jimmy. "This frabjous ass saw me swimming in the river, and thought I was in danger, and jumped in. We just managed to get him out alive."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington.

Gunner crimsoned with wrath.

"You confounded cheeky fag!" he exclaimed. "What the thump do you mean? Serve you right if I'd left you to drown, I think!"

"It wouldn't have hurt me," grinned Jimmy, "and it would have saved me the trouble of fishing you out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The 'Ead's expecting you, sir," murmured Tupper to Gunner.

Peter Cuthbert did not heed. Perhaps it dawned upon him just then that he was going to be misunderstood and unappreciated at Rookwood, just as he had been at St. Bede's. It really looked like it.

"Do you know what I'd do if it wasn't infra dig., Silver?" he exclaimed. "I'd give you a thundering good hiding!"

"Infra dig.!" repeated Jimmy. "It would be jolly painful for you, old bean. But I don't see the infra dig."

"I can't very well serap with fags," said Gunner loftily. "As I'm going into the Fifth or Sixth, it would be beneath my dignity. Otherwise, I'd give you a terrific licking!"

"Don't let that stop you!" chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Judging by your brains, old chap, you're more likely to go into the Second than the Sixth."

"I'll keep an eye on you, though," said Gunner. "If I'm made a prefect—as I expect—I shall look after you cheeky fags. Trust me for that. Now, then, young shaver, where's the Head? Get a move on!"

"This way, sir!" murmured Tupper.

With a lofty look of disdain at the Fistical Four, Peter Cuthbert Gunner followed the page to the Head's study. He walked with his nose in the air, evidently not at all dismayed by the august presence into which he was about to enter.

When he appeared in the Fourth-Form

quarters later, Tubby Muffin put a fat, grinning face into the end study, and announced:

"Here he comes! Here's Gunner!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked out of the study doorway—and so did a crowd of the Fourth from their studies. Gunner came up the passage with quite a peculiar expression on his face. He seemed like a youth staggering under a heavy burden of astonishment.

"Blessed if I catch on to it!" he said. "I told the Head plainly that I expected to be put in the Fifth at least. He said that as I was a new boy he would not care me for impertinence. I don't know what he was driving at. They've told me I'm to be in the Fourth—same as I was at St. Bede's. I don't quite follow, you know."

And Jimmy bestowed a sweet smile on Gunner of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 5.

Gunner Means Business!

"OOOOOOOH!" It was Arthur Edward Lovell who uttered that sudden yell.

Arthur Edward was standing in the end study with his back to the door.

The door opened suddenly, without a knock.

Lovell was only a foot from the door, with his back to it, and he had no time to dodge.

Crack!

The door came into violent contact with the back of Arthur Edward Lovell's head. Lovell's yell might have been heard at the other end of the passage.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my head!" stuttered Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Raby and Newcome.

"Haven't you ever heard of knocking at a door before you butt into a room, Gunner?" inquired Jimmy Silver mildly to the newcomer.

Gunner sniffed.

"I don't stand on ceremony with fags!" he answered.

The Fistical Four looked at Gunner. That cheery youth had been only a few days at Rookwood; but he had already been

much remarked upon in the Classical Fourth.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner was a big fellow—properly speaking, too big and too old for the Fourth. But his brains, apparently, had not developed along with his body—at all events he was at the bottom of Mr. Dalton's class, and seemed likely to remain there. That did not diminish Gunner's good opinion of himself, however. Gunner was the happy possessor of a self-satisfaction that was absolutely unlimited.

Nobody would have taken him for a new boy, from his manners and customs. There was nothing shy or backward about Gunner. He had an excellent opinion of himself, and did not hesitate to make it known. Upon what qualities that good opinion was founded, only Gunner knew—the other fellows, hitherto, had been unable to discover any grounds for it.

"I've come here about the cricket," he said "I understand that you're junior cricket captain. Silver?"

Jimmy raised his eyebrows.

"You understand that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You surprise me!" said Jimmy.

"Isn't it the case?"

"Oh, yes, it's the case!"

"Then what is there surprising about it?"

"Nothing—it's surprising that you understand it," said Jimmy sweetly. "I shouldn't have guessed that you'd be able to understand anything."

Gunner stared at him. Gunner's powerful brain worked rather slowly, and he required some moments to grasp Jimmy's remark.

"Don't be a funny ass!" he said, at last. "I haven't come here to listen to silly jokes. It's about the cricket. It seems to me utter rot for you to be junior captain; but there it is. I'm a member of the club, of course—a playing member. Rotten enough for a fellow like me to be playing among a lot of fags; but one must make the best of what can't be helped. Put my name down for the first match!"

"Eh?"

"You know my name," said Gunner. "Put it down! There's going to be practice on Little Side this afternoon, I understand?"

"My hat! That's another thing you

understand!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in astonishment. "What a brain?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it so?" roared Gunner.

"Oh, yes, it's so."

"Good! I'm turning up," said Gunner.

"I may be able to show you fags some things in cricket. If I can find the time, I may be able to give you all some coaching in the game. I was the best junior cricketer at St. Bede's—my old school, you know. I shouldn't mind giving up some of my time to knocking you kids into shape."

"Thanks awfully!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep sarcasm that was wholly wasted on Peter Cuthbert Gunner.

"Not at all," said Gunner. "I look on it as a duty, really. Later on I shall be skipper, of course; but I suppose I must leave that to be settled by the junior club. For the present, you can carry on."

"Much obliged," grinned Jimmy. "I will!"

"What time practice?" asked Gunner.

"We're just going down."

"Good; I'll come, then. I'll just get my bat."

Gunner of the Fourth strode out of the end study, with his heavy stride. Lovell gave the back of his head a final rub and blinked at his chums.

"That chap will have a high old time in the Fourth, if he goes on as he's started," he remarked.

"He will!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "I wonder what his cricket's like. Let's see."

And the Fistical Four proceeded to Little Side, where a dozen of the Fourth were gathering for practice. Gunner of the Fourth joined them there, with a very handsome bat under his arm. As a new fellow, whose proper place was the background, Gunner ought really to have waited meekly till he was called upon; but there was nothing meek about Gunner. He went to the wicket, as if the wicket were his personal property.

"I'm ready!" he called out to Jimmy Silver. "Just tell your best bowler to send me down a few."

"You cheeky ass!" roared Lovell, in indignant wrath.

"Shut up, please."

"Wha-at?"

"Shut up! I've told you I'm ready, Silver."

And Gunner waited.

CHAPTER 5.

The Champion!

JIMMY SILVER grinned. He was a good-tempered fellow, and he had plenty of patience—which a cricket captain needed. Gunner had apparently taken possession of Little Side and of the cricket practice; it was not to be so much Form practice, apparently, as an exhibition of what Peter Cuthbert Gunner could do. Wrathful looks were turned on Gunner from all sides, which he did not heed in the least.

"Is that feeny merchant potty?" inquired Valentine Mornington. "Kick him out, somebody, and let's begin!"

"Get out of the way, Gunner!" called out Conroy.

Gunner looked round.

"I'm waiting for a bowler!" he said.

"Let him rip, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. "If his cricket is anything like his jaw, he must be as good as the three Graces rolled into one. Carry on, Gunner; I'll give you a few!"

"Buck up, and not so much chin!" said Gunner.

"Is that the way you talked to your captain at St. Bede's?" inquired Jimmy politely.

"Certainly! Get going, and don't waste time!"

The Fourth-Formers looked at Jimmy Silver, fully expecting him to take Gunner by the scruff of the neck and walk him off the field. But Jimmy took the ball and went on to bowl. He was patient and good-tempered, and was rather curious, too, to see what Peter Cuthbert Gunner could do as a cricketer.

Jimmy was the champion bowler of the Lower School at Rookwood; and there were few juniors who could stand up to him. If Gunner could, he was worthy of a place in the junior eleven.

Jimmy sent down the ball, and he put all his skill into it. As it proved, he need not have taken the trouble.

Gunner was whole seconds late in swiping at the ball, and when he swiped, it was not even where the ball had been.

The bails went down; and Gunner stared at the wicket. There was a loud cheer from the juniors on the field.

"Jolly queer!" commented Gunner.

"Queer enough, if you mean that at ting!" remarked Oswald.

"Don't be cheeky! Try that on again, Silver!"

Conroy fielded the ball, and returned it to Jimmy Silver. The captain of the Fourth tried it again.

This time Gunner was very careful. Perhaps he was too careful. Or perhaps he had over-estimated his powers as a batsman. There was a crash as the wicket went down, though the ball did not touch it. It was Gunner's handsome new bat that did it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fourth-Formers. They were beginning to enjoy the scene now.

Even Tubby Muffin did not play cricket quite like this.

"Set that up again!" said Gunner, frowning. "And don't cackle, you cheeky fags! I've thrashed fags for cackling when I was playing cricket at St. Bede's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wicket was set up again, and Gunner took his stand. Jimmy Silver took the ball again, and this time he sent down a very easy one, which even Muffin of the Fourth could have played with success. But it was beyond Peter Cuthbert Gunner. The middle stump was whisked out of the ground, and there was a shriek of laughter from the field.

"Ha, ha, ha!" What price this for cricket?" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Gunner. "I haven't quite got going yet. Stick those bails on, one of you kids!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Send down the ball, Silver, you young ass!"

Jimmy Silver laughed and shook his head.

"No more time to waste," he said. "You can't play cricket, Gunner, and you must put in some practice before you butt in with the Form."

"Can't play cricket!" repeated Gunner. "Don't be a fool, Silver! Send down that ball, as I've told you!"

"Get away from the wicket, Gunner!" was Jimmy Silver's answer. "No more time to waste!"

"Clear off, Gunner!" called out two or three impatient voices.

"I haven't fairly started yet," said Gunner calmly. "I'm staying here. I'm waiting for you to bowl, Silver."

"Clear off!" roared Lovell.

"Rats!"

"Shift him!" said Mornington.

Five or six juniors shifted Gunner from the wicket. Peter Cuthbert, in great indignation, resisted; but half a dozen juniors were not to be argued with. Gunner was whirled away and deposited in the grass, in a breathless condition.

Mornington went to the wicket, and Jimmy Silver continued to bowl. The practice went on, and the juniors almost forgot Gunner. But that youth was not content to be forgotten. He sat for some time pumping in breath, but he scrambled up at last, with a red and wrathful face, and strode on the pitch. There was a yell.

"Keep away, you ass!"

"Clear off!"

"Gunner, you dummy!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Gunner did not heed. He strode up to the captain of the Fourth.

"Give me that ball!" he said. "If you don't want to see good batting, I'll show you something in bowling—"

"You thumping ass—!"

"Give me the ball, I tell you!" snapped Gunner.

"Chuck him out!" bellowed Lovell.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Possibly the silly ass may be able to bowl. Let's see."

He tossed the ball to Gunner. It was an easy catch, but Gunner's rather extensive hand came up too late for it, and the ball landed on his chin. Gunner gave a yell.

"Yow! What are you chucking the ball at me for, you duffer?"

"Why didn't you catch it, you ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, let's see you bowl, if you can bowl," said Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Carry on!"

"I'll show you some bowling that you've never seen on this ground before," said Gunner contemptuously.

Gunner gripped the ball, Jimmy Silver standing aside for him. The new junior took a little run, whirled over a good deal like a propeller, and the ball flew from his hand.

In what direction the ball flew was a mystery—for a second. Then a fearful yell from Jimmy Silver announced where it had flown.

As Jimmy was at right angles to the line of fire, so to speak, he had considered himself safe. But Gunner was a bowler of uncommon gifts. The ball fairly crashed on

Jimmy Silver's shoulder, and the captain of the Fourth staggered away yelling. He was hurt.

Mornington, at the wicket, was almost doubled up with merriment. The whole field yelled with laughter.

Jimmy Silver yelled—but not with laughter. He clasped his damaged shoulder in anguish.

"Oh, oh, oh! Ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner looked round.

"What are you kicking up that row about, Silver?" he snapped. "Where's that ball? Field that ball, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner spotted the ball, and made a dive for it. Jimmy Silver made a dive for Gunner at the same moment. Gunner was caught by the collar, whirled round, and sent spinning in the grass.

"Get off the field!" yelled Jimmy.

"What?"

"You dangerous ass! You might have brained me!" howled the captain of the Fourth. "You've jolly nearly dislocated my shoulder!"

"Eh?"

"I shall have a lump as big as an egg!" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"D-d-did the ball touch you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did it?" gasped Jimmy. "Don't you know that it did, you frabjous lunatic?"

"You shouldn't get in the way," said Gunner. "Now, then, I want that ball. I'm going to show you some bowling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words were wasted on Gunner, that was clear.

"Take him away!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Put him somewhere where he can't do any harm."

"Look here—" roared Gunner, as the hilarious Fourth-Formers closed round him.

"Frog's-march!" shouted Lovell.

"Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner resisted desperately. But six or seven pairs of hands grasped him, and he was frog's-marched off the junior cricket ground to the accompaniment of a series of fiendish yells from Peter Cuthbert.

He was bumped down in the grass at a considerable distance with a heavy bump, and there left to consider himself. Jimmy Silver & Co. had had enough of Gunner's

cricket—too much, in fact, especially Jimmy. Practice on Little Side proceeded without any further assistance from Peter Cuthbert.

CHAPTER 7.
Wholesale!

DICKINSON minor, of the Fourth Form grinned.

Dickinson minor was in Study No.

7, last but one in the Fourth Form passage, which study he shared with Peter Cuthbert Gunner, the new junior. Dickinson minor was thinking of tea, and going carefully through all his pockets, one after another, and turning out all the resources in cash that they contained.

A sixpence, a penny, and a halfpenny turned up, and Dickinson minor considered very seriously what sort of tea that magnificent sum would stand. Whether to cut down to Hall before it was too late, and save his sevenpence-halfpenny, or whether to have the best tea in the study that could be obtained for that sum, was the problem that occupied the intellect of Dickinson minor when Gunner came in. The aspect of Gunner banished the problem from Dickinson's mind for the moment.

Gunner sank breathlessly into the armchair—a magnificent new armchair which had been sent specially for that study for Gunner's use by Gunner's people.

Gunner was breathless, and he was dusty, and he was rumpled, and he was not in a good temper; and he glared at his study-mate as he detected the grin.

"I don't want any cheek!" he observed.

"Got plenty of your own—what?" said Dickinson.

"I've been handled!" said Gunner.

"You look it!"

"Kept off the cricket field," said Gunner. "All the louts combined to chuck me off, you know, because I was going to show them some really decent cricket. Chucked off the ground, you know!"

"I wouldn't have let them."

"How could I help it?" said Gunner. "There were seven or eight collaring me. I couldn't fight more than four or five at once!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Dickinson.

Gunner was certainly a hefty fellow, but Dickinson minor had his doubts about Gunner being able to tackle even four or

five Rookwooders at once. Apparently Gunner had no doubts.

"Of course, I'm not taking it lying down," said Gunner. "I had cheek enough to stand when I was at St. Bede's. I'm determined not to have any of it at Rookwood. I've decided what to do. I'm going to thrash every fellow that laid a hand on me on the cricket field this afternoon. That will show them who's who and what's what, you see."

"Hear, hear!" yawned Dickinson minor. "You having tea in the study, Gunner?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Dickinson. "I've got sevenpence-halfpenny. You put sevenpence-halfpenny to it, and we'll do the best we can for fifteenpence—what?"

Gunner sniffed contemptuously.

"Bother your sevenpence-halfpenny!" he said, with all the pride of the heir of Gunner's Hardware, Limited. "For goodness' sake, chuck those dirty coppers into the fender. Cut down to the tuckshop and get something for tea. There's a note."

Gunner threw a pound note on the table.

Dickinson minor looked at it, and looked at his new study-mate with a new respect. He picked up the note.

"I'll go, old top!" he said. "Leave the shopping to me. How much change do you want out of this?"

"None, of course."

Dickinson's eyes opened.

"You're blowing a whole quid on a study tea!" he ejaculated.

"Why not?"

"My hat! Why not certainly, if you're rolling in it!" assented Dickinson, beginning to think that Gunner's arrival at Rookwood was one of the most fortunate things that had happened since the war. "Why, even Morry before he lost his money wouldn't have thought of spending a pound on tea."

"What rot!" said Gunner. "You cut off and get the tuck, while I make up my list."

"List of tuck?"

"No, you ass! List of the fellows I'm going to lick this evening!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Dickinson. "All right, I'll be your second if you like."

Dickinson minor grinned and quitted the study, with the pound note crumpled in his hand. Hitherto Dickinson had not quite decided whether he could stand

Gunner in the study or not. Now he decided at once that he could.

A fellow who could throw pound notes about like that was a fellow whom Dickinson minor delighted to honour. It was all very well for Townsend and Topham and fellows like that to turn up their noses at Gunner's hardware, and to talk scornfully about bounders with money.

A pound note was a pound note, Dickinson minor sagely considered, and he blissfully reflected that Study No. 7, where a very thin time had reigned hitherto, was going to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

At Sergeant Kettle's little shop Dickinson minor dutifully expended the pound note to the last penny, and he returned to his study laden with tuck. Tubby Muffin sighted him in the passage and joined him, with a friendly and affectionate grin, and an offer to help with carrying the parcels.

Dickinson minor's reply was more emphatic than polite. Tubby hopefully followed him to the study door, but he had to retire when that door was slammed fairly on his fat little nose.

Gunner was busy with a pencil and paper, and he did not look up as Dickinson entered. The latter proceeded to get tea. He was more than willing to contribute the labour when Gunner contributed the goods on such a lavish scale.

Gunner was pencilling a list of names. Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome, Mornington, Conroy, Oswald were on his list. Dickinson minor glanced at it when tea was ready, and Gunner laid it on the table before starting on the good things.

"What's that for?" asked Dickinson.

"The fellows I'm going to thrash this evening," said Gunner. "I want you to go round after tea and tell them all to be in the Common-room after eight. I'm going to take them on one after another, and thrash the lot, this evening. As a warning, you know."

"Jimmy Silver's rather hefty!" murmured Dickinson.

Gunner smiled.

"I could wallop him with one hand tied behind!" he explained.

"Lovell's rather tough——"

"I could thrash him on my head!"

"Morny's rather a hard nut, too, you

"You'll see that he won't last me three minutes."

"And Conroy," said Dickinson. "I say, he's an Australian, you know, and as hard as nails. He's licked Shell fellows."

"I could lick the whole Shell here, and the Fifth, too!" said Gunner. "You wait till you see me started. In fact, I think I shall lick some of the Fifth soon. They don't treat me respectfully. But I'm going through the Fourth first—putting them in their place, you know. I shall start with Jimmy Silver, as he is junior captain. Licking him will be a warning to the whole Form. It will make him understand, too, that I've got to have a place in the junior cricket eleven."

Dickinson looked curiously at his new study-mate. Gunner was a hefty-looking fellow certainly, and looked like a fighting-man.

But whether he could lick seven Rookwood juniors, one after another, in the same evening was a still more dubious question.

Under the genial influence of an ample spread, Dickinson felt kindly towards his study-mate, and he would willingly have saved Gunner from himself, as it were.

But Peter Cuthbert was not disposed to listen to wise counsel.

"You're a fool, Dickinson!" he explained kindly. "You don't know yet the kind of fellow I am. Wait till you see me get going. Why, I scrap quite as well as I play cricket."

"Oh, my Aunt Selina!" murmured Dickinson.

And he said no more. He had not seen Gunner scrap, but he had heard about the cricket.

After tea Dickinson minor, as Gunner's second, dutifully proceeded to carry his principal's challenges up and down the Fourth Form passage. The Fistical Four were finishing tea in the end study when Dickinson came in.

As it happened, the Co. were talking about Gunner, and three of them were grinning. Jimmy Silver, who still had a painful ache in his shoulder, was not grinning. He was not able as yet to see the comic side of Gunner's cricket so clearly as his comrades.

"You fellows are wanted this evening," said Dickinson minor. "Challenge from Gunner to a scrap."

"All four at once?" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"All four this evening, one after another!" said Dickinson. "In the Common-room after eight."

"So Gunner's looking for more trouble?" asked Raby. "Isn't the dear man biting off more than he can chew?"

"Three more as well!" said Dickinson. "Morney, Conroy, and Oswald. Gunner's on the war-path!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Does he want an answer?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm to take it back."

"Tell him not to worry about scrapping," said Jimmy. "Tell him to fill up his time by getting some tips from a Second Form fag on cricket."

"I don't think I'll tell him that. He might begin on me. I say, he blued a whole pound note on tea! He's not a bad sort."

And Dickinson minor departed, to finish his round with the challenges. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another and smiled.

"Leave him to me," said Lovell. "I want to punch him for banging my head with the door to-day."

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

"If he knows how to use his hands he will be pretty tough," he said. "He's big, for the Fourth, and he's as strong as a horse—"

"And as brainy as a donkey!" remarked Raby.

"Just about!" said Jimmy, laughing. "But he may be able to box, and in that case he will be a hard nut to crack."

"I'll crack him fast enough!" said Lovell disdainfully.

"Let's hope it will blow over," said Jimmy. "We don't want to hammer a new kid, even if he is a silly exasperating ass like Gunner."

The Fistical Four turned their attention to prep, and forgot all about Peter Cuthbert Gunner. They were reminded of him when the study door was flung open and he appeared.

"I'm going down!" he said.

"Good!" said Jimmy. "Sooner the better. Shut the door after you!"

"Don't keep me waiting," said Gunner.

"Haven't you finished prep?"

"Not yet."

"I have!" said Gunner. "I suppose I

don't need to swot so much as you fellows—brains, you know. But don't keep me waiting long."

Gunner retired, slamming the door after him. Arthur Edward Lovell half-rose, but sat down again.

"Doesn't need to swot so much as we do!" said Lovell, breathing hard. "And that's the fellow who construed this morning 'in pace regebat' 'he regulated his paces.'"

The Fistical Four chuckled. Gunner's construe was a joy to listen to—all excepting his Form-master. Mr. Dalton had seemed rather dazed by it. Certainly his statement that King Latinus had "regulated his paces," instead of reigning in peace, was a startling one. Gunner could make even the classics entertaining.

Jimmy Silver & Co. finished their prep, and adjourned to the junior Common-room downstairs. In the passage they came on Mornington, Conroy, and Oswald, the three other victims of Gunner's destructive wrath. The three were smiling, and a crowd more of the Classical Fourth wore smiles. Gunner's liberal handing-out of challenges seemed to have tickled the Form. After prep, the Classical Fourth all turned up to watch the proceedings; they were quite interested in Gunner.

"Oh, here you are!" said the new junior impatiently, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the Common-room.

"Here we are!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "Top of the evening, dear boy."

"I've got some gloves here," said Gunner. "I thought we'd better have the mittens on. I'm going to thrash you, you know, but I don't want to hurt you too much. Mr. Dalton would make a row if seven fellows turned up with black eyes in the Form-room to-morrow morning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that," said Gunner. "I'm being considerate. I'm beginning on you, Silver!"

"Begin on me!" implored Lovell.

Gunner shook his head.

"No. I'm beginning on Silver, as captain of the Fourth," he explained. "I'll take you next, if you like."

"What's the good of taking me next?" demanded Lovell. "There won't be anything left for me after you've done with you."

"And how much will be left for me?"

asked Mornington. "Where do I come in?"

"Third!" said Gunner, referring to his list. "Conroy fourth—"

The Australian junior chuckled.

"Raby fifth, Newcome sixth, and Oswald seventh," said Gunner. "But to save time, I'll take Raby and Newcome together, I think."

"You cheeky ass!" roared Raby.

"Shush!" said Gunner, waving his hand at them. "Wait for your turn! Now lock the door, somebody; we don't want any prefects butting in. Will you get the gloves on, Silver?"

Jimmy sighed.

"I will if you want me to," he said. "But we generally scrap in the gym, Gunner, not in the Common-room."

"Might be interrupted there—seniors there!" said Gunner. "I don't want to be interrupted. I'm going to make an example of all the cheeky rotters that handled me this afternoon; and prefects won't be allowed to butt in. Just lock the door and let's get going. It's turned half-past eight, and I want to finish before bed-time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin locked the door. The Classical Fourth and a crowd of the Shell gathered round with grinning faces.

Hefty fellow as Gunner undoubtedly was, it was not quite credible that he could possibly stand up against seven Rookwooders one after another. Gunner had no doubts, but his sublime confidence was not shared even by his faithful second, Dickinson minor.

Jimmy Silver threw off his jacket and put on the boxing-gloves. Gunner drew his gloves on smartly and stepped up. He towered nearly a head over the captain of the Fourth, and he had at least a stone advantage in weight. But Jimmy Silver did not seem to be disconcerted. Jimmy had been through many a scrap in his career at Rookwood, and he was quite prepared to deal efficiently with the obstreperous and truculent new junior.

"Who's keeping time?" asked Lovell.

"No need to keep time—Silver won't last more than one round!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You keep time, Van Ryn," said Jimmy Silver. "You're not one of the happy victims—unless Gunner makes you eighth on the list."

Van Ryn grinned and took out his watch.

"Ready? Right! Time! Go it, ye cripples!"

And Jimmy Silver and Peter Cuthbert Gunner toed the line and "went" it.

CHAPTER 8.

The First of the Seven—and the Last!

ROUND the two combatants the ring of juniors was thick, all looking on with keen interest. Six of them were specially interested—the six whose names were on Gunner's comprehensive list. "Scrapping" was not at all common in the Fourth Form at Rookwood; but for a fellow to challenge seven fellows to scrap in one evening was decidedly uncommon. That Gunner should expect to work through the list, and arrive at the seventh, was quite surprising; but he evidently did expect to. Nobody else did. As Mornington remarked classically, the "Seven against Gunner" was not likely to be so serious a business as the "Epta epi Thebas," or the "Seven against Thebes." At which the Classicals chuckled.

There was no doubt that Gunner had plenty of pluck, at least. He did not wait to be attacked—he came on with a rush, and his powerful arms went like the sails of a windmill.

But in less than a minute Jimmy Silver had taken his measure, and there was a smile on the face of the captain of the Fourth.

"Time!"

When Van Ryn called time Gunner was in a rather breathless condition, and he was glad to stop and get in breath. His thrashing fists had not touched Jimmy Silver. Somehow—Gunner did not know how—his terrific drives had been brushed away, and he had received three or four taps on his heated countenance without knowing in the least where they came from. He stood and pumped in breath, and glared at Jimmy Silver.

"Call this fighting?" he gasped.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I can't lick a fellow that dodges all

the time," panted Gunner. "Stand up to it! Have some pluck!"

"I'll try!" said Jimmy sweetly.

"Time!"

Gunner came on with a rush.

This time Jimmy Silver did not retreat. Gunner did not know how his big fists were brushed away, but they were brushed away. His nose came in contact with a fist which, fortunately for Gunner, was in a well-padded glove. It was rather Gunner's terrific rush than Jimmy Silver's punch that gave the force to the blow, but it was forceful. Peter Cuthbert went over backwards, and came down on the floor with a sounding crash.

"Yooooop!" gasped Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Man down!" chortled Lovell. "Leave some for me, Jimmy!"

"And some for me!" chuckled Mornington.

"And a little bit for me!" yelled Conroy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner sat up.

Van Ryn began to count, but the champion staggered to his feet in time. Jimmy Silver stood back to give him leisure. Gunner came on again with undiminished pluck, and then it was hammer and tongs to the end of the round.

Jimmy Silver's drives landed just where he liked—and Gunner was tapped and rapped, and rapped and tapped, on his nose, his chin, his eyes, and his chest, till he was completely bewildered. He went down at last under a terrific right-hander, and fairly crumpled on the floor.

Van Ryn counted ten—he might have counted a hundred. Peter Cuthbert Gunner lay and gasped.

"Our little win!" chuckled Lovell.

"Are you letting off the rest of the seven, Gunner?" demanded Conroy.

"Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was evident that Gunner was letting off the rest of the seven. Dickinson kindly helped him away to his study. He left the Common-room in a roar of merriment. On the following morning Peter Cuthbert showed a highly-decorated countenance, but he was no longer on the war-path—nothing more was heard of the "Seven Against Gunner."

CHAPTER 9.

To the Victors the Spoils!

"BAGSHOT Bounders!"
"Oh, bother!" said Jimmy Silver crossly.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were not pleased.

Jimmy Silver, and Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, of the Rookwood Fourth, were sitting in a cheery circle in the grass on Coombe Heath. In their midst was a lunch-basket.

It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, a sunny spring afternoon. A picnic on the heath had seemed an excellent idea to Jimmy Silver & Co. that sunny afternoon. The basket had been duly and carefully packed at Sergeant Kettle's little shop; Tubby Muffin had been successfully dodged, and the chums of the Classical Fourth, after a long ramble, had settled down on a grassy slope to enjoy their spread. And just as they were about to begin, trouble loomed up on the horizon.

The Fistical Four rose to their feet as Pankley & Co. came trotting down the slope, with grinning faces. The Bagshot Bounders were evidently pleased by the unexpected meeting.

"Fancy meeting you, old beans!" said Pankley affably, as he came up. "How did you know we'd been for a walk and got hungry?"

And the Bagshot crowd chortled, and closed in a grinning circle round the Rookwood four.

"Keep off!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

But the heroes of Bagshot School evidently did not intend to keep off.

There was a rush.

It was only what the Rookwooders might have expected, for there was war between the Rookwood juniors and the juniors of Bagshot. They seldom or never met without "rags." The Fistical Four knew what to expect—exactly what they would have handed out, in fact, if the position had been reversed! But though they were only four against eight, they did not intend to yield tamely; and as the Bagshot Bounders attacked, Jimmy Silver & Co. stood on their defence, and there was a terrific scrap raging the next minute.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were great fighting men—especially so was Jimmy

Silver. They lived up to their warlike title on this occasion.

But the odds were too heavy. Four Bagshot Bounders were down, but the other four pressed on hard, and in a few seconds the fallen four were up and rushing on again.

Then a dozen fellows mixed up inextricably in a wild and whirling combat. For several minutes it lasted, but the end was inevitable. And at the end, Jimmy Silver & Co. were lying in the grass, with the victorious Bagshot Bounders sitting or standing on them.

Pankley wiped a stream of crimson from his nose, as he sat on Arthur Edward Lovell's neck.

"My hat! Quite warm while it lasted!" he said breathlessly.

"Gerroff my neck!" came in deep, muffled tones from Lovell.

"Is the lunch ours, Silver?"

"Ow! Ooooh! No!"

"Hand me the mustard," said Pankley ominously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You awful rotters! You can have the lunch! Groooogh!"

"Sure you don't mind?" smiled Pankley. "Dear boy, this is really kind of you. So thoughtful, too, when we're hungry after a long walk. As you're so good, we'll let you off. We'll just tie you leg to leg and let you hop home, and when you get to Rookwood, you can just mention that Bagshot is top school. Anything else we can do for you?"

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Jimmy.

The Fistical Four began to struggle again. But their struggles were useless—in the grasp of so many hands. With fragments of string, and the neckties of the prisoners, and other odds and ends, the wrists of the Fistical Four were tied behind their backs, and then they were tied leg to leg, in a staggering, gasping row. The Bagshot fellows roared with laughter as they looked at them.

"Now trot, dear boys," said Pankley.

"Let us loose!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell ferociously.

"After all the trouble we've taken? Not likely! March!"

"We can't get back to Rookwood like this!" shrieked Newcome.

"You never know what you can do till you try," said Pankley encouragingly. "You can start, anyhow, can't you?"

"No, you rotter!"

"I think you can. F'instance, I'm going to land out with my boot until you do—like that—"

"Ow!"

"And like that—"

"Oh crumbs! Ow! Wow!"

The Fistical Four found that they could start. In fact, they were anxious to start.

They scrambled and staggered and swayed away, in a row, followed by a yell of laughter.

"Good-bye, little birds, good-bye!" sang Pankley.

The unhappy four scrambled and hopped away, and Pankley & Co., in great spirits, gathered round the lunch-basket. The picnic was coming off after all; only with a different set of picnickers.

CHAPTER 10.

Vae Victis!

"GREAT pip!"

Gunner of the Fourth fairly gasped.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner, the new boy at Rookwood, was taking a walk on Coombe Heath that afternoon.

The burly Gunner was sauntering along with his hands in his pockets, when all of a sudden a strange and startling sight dawned upon him, and he stopped and stared.

Four juniors, in a row, were coming towards him. Their hands were behind them, and they were walking very close together, in quite an odd way. They seemed to have some difficulty in making progress, which was explained by the fact that each fellow had his right leg tied to the left leg of the fellow next to him.

Gunner blinked at the Fistical Four.

"Well, my only aunt Belinda!" ejaculated Gunner, as he stared blankly at the Fistical Four. "What are you fellows got up like that for? Is it a game?"

"Come and let us loose!" howled Lovell. Arthur Edward Lovell had never expected to be glad to see Gunner; but he was glad to see him just then.

The prospect of appearing on the public road in their present eclipsed condition was

very painful to the heroes of Rookwood. The sight of any Rookwood fellow was welcome just then—even Gunner.

"Let you loose!" repeated Gunner. Gunner's powerful brain was rather slow in the uptake. "I suppose you can let yourselves loose if you've tied yourselves up!"

"You frabjous cuckoo!" hissed Lovell. "Do you think we tied ourselves up like this, you burbling jabberbox?"

"Didn't you?" asked Gunner.

"Fathead!"

"Ass!" said Raby. "Frumptious owl! Dummy!"

"Burbling chump!" said Newcome.

It was not a polite way to request assistance. But the obtuseness of Gunner was irritating at times.

"Let us loose, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got landed by the Bagshot Bounders, and they've fixed us up like this. Our hands are tied behind."

Gunner understood then. Gunner could always understand if given plenty of time. He burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" shrieked Lovell, in a fury.

"You!" roared Gunner. "Ha, ha, ha! You call yourselves the Fistical Four, don't you? The Funny Four would be better! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Gunner—"

"If I had my hands loose," said Lovell, in concentrated tones, "I'd knock your silly nose half-way through your silly head!"

"But you haven't got 'em loose!" chuckled Gunner. "Oh, my hat! What a sight! Do you fellows know how funny you are?"

"Let us loose!" raved Newcome.

"Call yourselves leaders of the Fourth!" grinned Gunner. "Precious leaders! Why, I came out this afternoon to look for some of the Bagshot Bounders. I want to show them that there's a chap at Rookwood now who can give them the kybosh! What a pity I wasn't with you when they bagged you!"

"You silly owl, you'd have got the same," howled Lovell. "They were two to one!"

Gunner shook his head.

"Two to one wouldn't matter much to me," he said airily. "I never count odds. Where did you leave them?"

"Never mind that. Let us loose."

"Have they bagged your picnic?" grinned Gunner.

"Yes, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling chump, will you let us loose?" shrieked Lovell, in great exasperation.

"Tell me where you left them?"

"Over the ridge yonder," said Jimmy Silver, jerking his head.

"How long ago?"

"Ten minutes."

"Then they'll still be there," said Gunner. "I'll tell you what. I've already told you, Jimmy Silver, that you're no good as a leader, haven't I?"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I'm going to show you, and all the fellows," said Gunner. "I'm going to see the Bagshot Bounders, and get your lunch-basket back from them. See?"

"You can't, you howling ass."

Gunner laughed.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I can handle them. I dare say I shall be back at Rookwood, with the lunch-basket, by the time you get there—in that state."

"Aren't you going to untie us?" yelled Raby.

"I think not. You see, you fellows want putting down a peg, for your swank," explained Gunner calmly. "It will do you good to hop it into Rookwood in that state. It will show the chaps just what you are worth. Then when I walk in with the lunch-basket, the fellows will be able to see the nose they really want for junior captain. Catch on?"

"Look here, Gunner—"

"Good-bye!" said Gunner.

"You—you—you—" spluttered Lovell.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner walked on cheerily. The Fistical Four looked at one another with feelings too deep for words.

"The—the—the awful rotter!" gasped Lovell. "Don't I wish I had my hands loose! I'd knock some of the stuffing out of him!"

"The Bagshot Bounders will do that, if he drops on them!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, that's one comfort."

"Let's go on," groaned Newcome.

The unhappy four progressed, slowly and uncomfortably, across the grassy heath. Gunner had failed them, but they nourished a faint hope of meeting some other Rookwooder before they reached the road.

Arriving at the school in such a state was not to be thought of; it would have been too terrible a humiliation for the great chief of the Lower School. But they had reached the road before they sighted a single passer-by. And then they breathed relief as they caught sight of a fat and podgy figure in Etons.

"Muffin!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Muffin! I say, Muffin!" he shouted, with all the strength of his lungs; and the fat Classical blinked round, and then came trotting up.

"He, he, he! Where's the picnic!" chortled Tubby Muffin. "I was looking for you fellows——"

"Cut this dashed string!" hooted Lovell. "You dodged me!" said Tubby Muffin severely. "I was coming to the picnic, and you know it. Where's the grub?"

"The Bagshot Bounders have got it. Cut us loose, Tubby, there's a good chap!"

The fat Classical chortled. He seemed in no hurry to release the helpless picnickers.

"Serve you jolly well right!" he said. "I'm jolly hungry, you know. I'll come to tea in the end study, if you like, Jimmy."

"Cut us loose, and we'll stand you a tea with—with pleasure," gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Buck up!" howled Lovell.

"A real, decent spread?" asked Tubby.

"Yes, yes! Cut us loose!"

"You look awfully funny tied up like that," said Tubby Muffin agreeably. "They'd cackle no end at Rookwood if you came home like that."

"Will you get a move on?" hissed Lovell.

"Certainly, old chap. Will there be cake for tea?"

"Bother the cake! Let us loose!"

"The cake's rather important. Sergeant Kettle has some new plum cakes that are simply ripping. If there isn't going to be a cake——"

"There will be a cake," said Jimmy Silver. "Do let us loose, Muffin. There's some people coming up the road."

"Wouldn't they cackle to see you like this?" grinned Muffin. "Will there be any jam?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"More than one kind?" asked Tubby.

"Yes, yes!"

"Three kinds?" asked Muffin, taking out his penknife.

"I—I'll smash you——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, yes, three kinds of jam."

"Honest Injun?" asked Tubby cautiously.

"Honest Injun!" answered Jimmy Silver, in a gasping voice.

"Right-ho! I'll come," said Muffin.

"Shift round and I'll soon cut you loose.

Keep still, Lovell."

"Yaroooh!"

"What's the matter now?"

"You fat villain, you're digging that dashed penknife into my dashed wrists!" wailed Lovell.

"I told you to keep still, didn't I?"

"Oh, dear! I—I——"

"Yaroooop!" came in a wild yell from Raby.

"You ought to keep still," said Tubby.

"No good wriggling when a chap's handling a knife."

"Yow-wow-wow!"

"It was only a little jab. If you keep on wriggling you'll very likely get it worse."

"Whoooooop!"

"There. I told you so!"

Arthur Edward Lovell choked with wrath. Tubby Muffin had the cords cut at last, and the Fistical Four wrenched their hands free. Arthur Edward Lovell's first action was to grasp Reginald Muffin by a fat ear. It was Tubby's turn to yell.

"Yaroooh! You awful beast! Leggo! After I've let you loose! Yarooop! Woop! Woop! Yooooop!"

"There, you fat rotter!" gasped Lovell.

"That'll teach you to vivisect a chap——"

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

Jimmy Silver jerked away the penknife, and cut loose his legs and those of his chums. The Fistical Four were free at last. If Tubby Muffin had expected any demonstration of gratitude, Tubby Muffin was booked for a disappointment. The Fistical Four glared at him in a way that expressed many feelings, but gratitude was not among the number.

"We've said we'll stand that fat rotter a spread, and we'll do it!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "But we haven't said that we won't kick him all the way to Rookwood. And we'll do that!"

"Yaroooh!"

Tubby Muffin broke into wild flight.

After him went the Fistical Four. Tubby Muffin deserved something, but it is much to be feared that he received the deserts of Gunner and the Bagshot Bounders, as well as his own! That run to Rookwood was like a horrid dream to Muffin. The Fistical Four fairly dribbled him all the way to the school.

When the spread came off in the end study—for Jimmy Silver's word was his bond, and the spread was duly stood—Tubby Muffin did not enjoy it as much as he had anticipated. He stood up to it. For reasons best known to himself the fat Classical had no desire to sit down just then.

CHAPTER 11.

This Side Up, With Care!

AFTER tea, Jimmy Silver & Co. remembered the existence of Peter Cuthbert Gunner. He had left them with the declared intention of seeking the Bagshot Bounders, giving them the "kybosh," and recapturing the lunch-basket, which was to be brought home to Rookwood in triumph as an undeniable proof of the amazing prowess of Peter Cuthbert Gunner. The task which had been too much for the Fistical Four was nothing to Peter Cuthbert—in Peter Cuthbert's own estimation. As he had said, he never counted odds.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled as they wondered what had happened to him. Doubtless he had found the Bagshot party. The rest of it, undoubtedly, he had not performed. It must have been the Bagshot Bounders who had performed. Gunner's part could only have been passive, while that of Pankley & Co. was active. Quite curious to know what had happened to Gunner, whether he had yet returned to Rookwood, and whether he had returned all in one piece, the Fistical Four went down after tea and inquired for him.

They found that Gunner had not yet returned.

They inquired for him up and down the school, and, at last, they received information from Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth. Tommy Dodd had seen the great Gunner.

"That idiot?" said Tommy, as Jimmy met him at the gates, and inquired. "Oh, yes, I've seen him!"

"Still alive?" asked Lovell, with a grin. "Oh, yes. He was walking with some Bagshot fellows."

"Walking with them?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in astonishment.

"That's it. I saw them coming off the heath," said Tommy Dodd. "As there were eight or nine of the Bounders, I didn't go close to them."

"They can't have chummed," said Raby, puzzled. "What was he walking with them for?"

"Possibly because he couldn't help it," grinned Tommy Dodd. "Pankley and Price had arms through his arms, and I fancy they were holding on. The whole crowd were grinning like a lot of Cheshire cats. Gunner seemed to have amused them somehow. They were walking off towards Bagshot. I dare say he's there by now. I hope they'll keep him. Gunner's superfluous here."

"Well, he asked for it," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "I suppose they'll rag him a little, and send him home in time for calling-over."

"I'd have chipped in, if it had been worth while," observed Tommy Dodd. "But, as he's only a Classical, it didn't matter much what became of him, did it?"

After which remark, Tommy Dodd wisely scudded for Mr. Manders' house before the Fistical Four could make a suitable rejoinder.

"Cheeky Modern ass!" growled Lovell. "I say, I wonder what they've done to Gunner. I suppose he just dropped into their paws like a ripe apple."

Jimmy Silver laughed. "Just that!" he said. "I hope they haven't quite slaughtered him. He's a born fool and a cheeky ass, but—"

"Hallo, I hear from Muffin that you fellows had a great time this afternoon," remarked Valentine Mornington, joining the Fistical Four, with a grin on his face.

"Blow Muffin!" growled Lovell. It was not pleasant to the heroes of the Fourth to have their misadventure talked of up and down Rookwood. It was an indignity they would gladly have forgotten. They walked away without giving Mornington any particulars, leaving the dandy of the Fourth grinning. But Morny was not the only one who had heard the story. Tubby Muffin, perhaps remembering the way he had been dribbled home, was relating it up and down the Lower School

to every fellow who would listen, with details and exaggerations of his own. The Fistical Four found themselves subjected to a fire of inquiry and chipping, which did not please them.

They retired to their study, and Peele of the Fourth looked in to inquire whether it was true that Tubby Muffin had seen them on their knees, begging for mercy from the Bagshot Bounders. Tubby was evidently improving the tale every time he related it. The Fistical Four did not answer Cyril Peele's inquiry, but they colored him and jerked him into the study, and the next minute Peele was howling for quarter. When Peele left the end study, it was "on his neck," and he did not return to make any more inquiries.

The chums of the Fourth started their prep, unusually early. They did not yearn for the company of their Form-fellows just then. As for Gunner, they dismissed that fatuous youth from their minds. Whatever had happened to Gunner, it did not matter. The Fistical Four agreed upon that. They were deep in prep, when a tap came at the door, and Tubby Muffin looked in.

Arthur Edward Lovell reached for a ruler.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Muffin. "Pax, you know! I say, Jimmy, you're wanted."

"Well, what is it?" grunted the captain of the Fourth.

"Something's come for you," said Tubby, his round eyes beaming. "I say, if it's tuck, there's a thumping lot of it. Perhaps it's a new bike, though. Are your people sending you a new bike?"

"Not that I know of," said Jimmy, with a stare.

"It must be tuck, then," said Tubby. "I came up to tell you specially, old chap. The carrier won't leave it till he's been paid, and old Mack's arguing with him now."

"What is it, then?" demanded Jimmy.

"A packing-case, a jolly big one," said Tubby impressively. "If there's a hamper in it—"

The Fistical Four jumped up. Jimmy sometimes had hampers from home, and they were always welcome.

"Let's go down," said Lovell. "If it's a hamper it's just in time, after we've had our picnic scoffed. Come on!"

"Can't be a hamper if it's in a packing-case," said Jimmy, puzzled. "I did mention to my pater that if I had a new bike

for the summer, it would come in jolly useful. But he hasn't said anything. I wonder—"

"Let's see, anyhow."

"If it's tuck!" said Tubby Muffin, blissfully.

Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried out of the end study, without heeding Muffin. They found a dozen fellows gathered round Mack's lodge, outside which the Coombe carrier had deposited a large wooden packing-case.

Jimmy looked at it curiously.

It was for Jimmy; there was no doubt about that. The name and address were stencilled on it in large letters: "J. SILVER, ROOKWOOD SCHOOL, NEAR COOMBE, SUSSEX." In still larger letters were stencilled: "PERISHABLE. OPEN AT ONCE. THIS SIDE UP, WITH CARE!"

"Perishable!" said Jimmy Silver. "It can't be a bike, then."

"Tuck," said Tubby Muffin, who had followed the Fistical Four, in a state of breathless anticipation. "I say, what a cargo! If it's tuck—"

"This 'ere's for you, Master Silver," grunted old Mack. "And Carter says there's five shillings to pay."

"I've got to get on my round," grunted the carrier. "I've been waiting here five minutes."

"Sorry," said Jimmy politely. "Only just heard. Lend me a bob or two, you fellows. I've got only half-a-crown."

Lovell sorted out a shilling, and Raby another, and Newcombe a sixpence. Jimmy produced half-a-crown, and the variety of coins of the realm were presented to the carrier. There was nothing left over for a tip, so Jimmy thanked Mr. Carter politely instead of handing out a gratuity. Mr. Carter grunted; it was possible that he would have preferred a gratuity. He returned to his cart and drove away.

"I say, that's a bit odd," remarked Potty Grace, looking at the packing-case. "Carter must have brought it from the station."

"I suppose so," said Jimmy.

"But there's no railway labels on it."

"That's odd," said Jimmy, in surprise.

"Unless somebody in Coombe has sent it to me. Blessed if I catch on."

"Open at once, perishable!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "It must be tuck. Perhaps the labels came off in the carrier's cart."

What does it matter, anyhow? Open it at once. I say, Jimmy, I'll help you. If it's tuck—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"If it's tuck, somebody must have spent a small fortune on a cargo that size," grinned Mornington. "Anyhow, it's perishable. Better get it open, Jimmy, and if it's tuck, you can stand a dormitory spread."

"Hear, hear!"

Old Mack chimed in.

"You'd better open that there case 'ere, Master Silver," he said. "If so be there's pastries and sich in that there packing-case, it's my dooty to report it."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Lend me a hammer, old bean."

Old Mack produced a hammer, and Jimmy Silver started on the wooden case. It was made of closely fitted rough wood, and he noticed, with some surprise, that there were a number of large holes bored in the wood.

"Can't be white rabbits," he said, in wonder. "They wouldn't send rabbits in a packing-case. But—"

He stopped suddenly. In his astonishment he nearly dropped the hammer. From the interior of the packing-case there came, suddenly, a low, faint sound—a faint, mumbling gurgle! What the mysterious packing-case contained was a mystery. But, whatever it was, it was alive!

CHAPTER 12.

A Huge Jape!

JIMMY SILVER blinked at the packing-case.

The Juniors crowded round in great excitement.

"D-d-d-did you hear that?" gasped Jimmy.

"It—it's alive!" ejaculated Lovell. "Listen! Something grunting! Can't be a pig!"

"Nor white rabbits," said Corney. "Rabbits don't make a queer sound like that. Sounds sort of suffocated."

"Get it open, Jimmy!" exclaimed Raby breathlessly.

Jimmy Silver recommenced on the packing-case. He cracked fragment after fragment of wood from the top, and straw and packing oozed out. Three or four

juniors seized hold of the lid as soon as it was loosened, and jerked it off.

There was a general craning of necks to look into the mysterious case. The excitement was breathless now.

"It's a nigger!" yelled Lovell, in utter amazement.

"A human being—"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, lor'!" spluttered old Mack, as he stared at the weird contents of the packing-case.

Jimmy Silver fairly blinked.

On his back in the packing-case lay a human being. His body was hidden by straw packed round him, but the face was uncovered, just under the holes in the lid where the lid had been. The face was as black as the ace of spades, and the eyes were rolling wildly.

"A—a—a blooming nigger!" stammered old Mack. "This 'ere is a lark—sending a nigger to this 'ere school in a packing-case. I know that fellow Carter was on to it. I knowed there was something up. He was so pertickler the case must be opened at once. He knows all about it, that there carrier does!"

"What—what—what on earth does it mean?" babbled Jimmy Silver. "A—a negro! My hat! Ho—he—he's alive!"

"Can't he speak?" exclaimed Raby.

A faint mumble came from the negro.

"He's dumb!" howled Tubby Muffin.

"Fathead, he's gagged!"

There was a handkerchief tied round the boy's head, passing between his open jaws. He was just able to mumble.

Jimmy Silver, with his brain in a whirl, began to unfasten the handkerchief. The negro sat up suddenly, and there was a loud crack as his head came into violent contact with Jimmy Silver's chin.

"Yow!" roared Jimmy.

"Groooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's in Etons!" shrieked Raby.

It was true. Now that the boy was sitting up, and the straw packing fell away from him, it could be seen that he was wearing an Eton jacket. His wrists were loosely tied together. In blank amazement, the Rookwood juniors stared at him.

"Tain't a man," said Lovell; "it's a boy—a black schoolboy. Can't be a new

kid. We should have heard that there was a nigger coming to the school."

"New boys don't arrive in packing-cases!" chuckled Mornington.

"I say, it's a burglar!" howled Tubby Muffin, in great excitement. "This is a trick to get into the school, you know, and burgle it."

"He's in disguise!" yelled Lovell.

"What!"

"Look!"

Lovell had been helping Jimmy to remove the gag. He held up his hand, and a smear of black showed on his fingers. Evidently it had come off the boy's complexion.

"He—he's not a nigger!" stammered Jimmy Silver dazedly. "Why, my fingers are all black, too! He's in disguise!"

"He's a burglar!" hooted Tubby Muffin. "I say, stand clear, you fellows, while I hit him on the head with the hammer. Better stun him!"

Jimmy jerked the gag away at last. The prisoner of the packing-case opened his mouth wide, and gasped:

"Oooooooh!"

"Stand aside!" yelled Tubby Muffin, brandishing the hammer. "Lemme get at him! Better stun him—"

"Hold on, you fat chump—"

"He's a burglar, I tell you! Better stun him, and—"

"Yaroooh! Keep off!" shrieked the black boy. "Keep that dangerous maniac off!"

Jimmy Silver almost fell down.

He knew that voice!

"Gunner!"

"Gunner!" babbled Lovell.

"Gunner!" shrieked the Rookwood juniors. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gunner!" said old Mack dazedly. "Master Gunner! Oh, holy smoke! I'll report yer!"

"Can't you untie a fellow?" yelled Gunner. "I've been in this dashed packing-case half an hour! Let a fellow out, can't you, you blithering owls? Untie my paws, you boobies!"

"Gunner!" gasped Jimmy Silver faintly.

He mechanically released the hapless Gunner. Peter Cuthbert—for it certainly was he, though he was quite unrecognisable—rolled out of the packing-case and scrambled to his feet.

Peter Cuthbert was almost foaming with rage.

"Calling me a nigger!" he howled. "You frabjous chumps! Don't you know a Rookwood chap when you see one?"

"Not when he's got a face like that!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You unspeakable idiot, what do you mean by coming home in a packing-case with your silly face blacked?"

"How could I help it!" raved Gunner. "They collared me, and walked me off, and kept me, and got that dashed packing-case, and shoved soot over my chivvy, and put me in, and tipped that villain Carter five bob to bring me here! Oh dear! I—I've had an awful time!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver, comprehending at last. "The Bagshot Bounders, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You owe us five bob, Gunner!" exclaimed Lovell warmly. "We've paid five bob on that packing-case. We're not paying that for you. You're not worth one of the bobs!"

"Perishable! This side up, with care!" sobbed Mornington. "Oh, my only summer hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at!" howled Gunner.

"Wait till you get near a looking-glass, old bean, then you will."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that's how you gave them the kybosh, Gunner!" said Jimmy Silver, wiping his eyes. "You let them black your face and shut you up in a packing-case—this side up, with care! Ha, ha, ha!"

"How could I help it?" roared Gunner. "There were eight of them. I could have licked seven; but eight was too many!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes Greely!" howled Raby. "You'd better take that face away before it's seen, Gunner!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Gunner sprinted. Mr. Greely had the surprise of his life as an excited-looking negro dashed past him in the Rookwood quadrangle, and vanished before the Fifth Form-master could raise a hand to stop him. Jimmy Silver & Co. scattered, howling with merriment. It was a Bagshot triumph, and "one up" against Rookwood. But the Rookwooders howled over it—all except Gunner.

The humour of the situation was quite lost on Peter Cuthbert Gunner. For a long time he was busy in the bath-room,

removing the complexion the Bagshot Bounders had bestowed upon him, while the Fourth-Formers howled with merriment, and Mr. Greely, in a very surprised and startled frame of mind, was seeking up and down Rookwood for the wild-looking negro who had rushed past him in the quad. Fortunately, Mr. Greely did not find him!

CHAPTER 13.

Gunner Doesn't Care!

"BULKELEY—" "Bother Bulkeley—" "Bulkeley says—" "My dear fellow," said Peter Cuthbert Gunner of the Rookwood Fourth, "you needn't tell me what Bulkeley says. I'm not interested."

And Gunner waved a large hand at Jimmy Silver, to intimate that the matter was closed.

Gunner's study-mate, Dickinson minor, looked at Gunner in great amazement. Gunner's remarks indicated that he possessed either a very strong nerve, or a remarkably thick head.

"Bulkeley says," roared Jimmy Silver, "that you're to go to his study at once." "Haven't the time," said Gunner.

"I don't know whether I ought to take you by the scruff of the neck and walk you there," said Jimmy meditatively. "But I want my tea. I've given you Bulkeley's message, anyhow."

"Shut the door after you!" said Gunner. Jimmy Silver suppressed his feelings with difficulty. Peter Cuthbert Gunner had many little ways that made fellows yearn to punch his head. In fact, his head had been punched fairly often since his arrival at Rookwood School. Whether cheek, or swank, or obtuseness predominated among his engaging qualities, the juniors had not been able to decide. But he possessed all those valuable gifts in generous measure.

Jimmy decided that Gunner was likely to get enough from Bulkeley, and he forbore to give him any to begin with. He closed the study door, and went on to his own quarters with his comrades.

Gunner settled down comfortably at the tea-table again in Study No. 7. Dickinson minor blinked at him, wondering where Gunner got his nerve from; but Gunner did

not seem aware that he had displayed unusual nerve. He helped himself to a third egg and a fourth muffin. Gunner had a very healthy appetite; and fortunately he had ample funds, and tea in Study No. 7 was always a royal spread. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Dickinson minor was a faithful and admiring follower of P. C. Gunner. Certainly Dickinson did full justice to the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

"I say, Bulkeley will be waxy if you don't go!" said Dickinson.

"Let him wax!" said Gunner.

"Yes; but prefects lick, you know."

"They don't lick me," said Gunner. "I'm not exactly like the other juniors here, Dickinson. Properly speaking, I should be in the Fifth. It's only the Head's crass stupidity that keeps me in the Fourth. I told him so—"

"You told the Head so!" ejaculated Dickinson minor.

"Not exactly in those words," said Gunner.

"Oh!"

"But I've got to stick in the Fourth," said Gunner. "Rotten, if you like—fellow like me in a junior Form, and having to chum up with scrubby little beggars like you, Dickinson."

Dickinson minor coughed.

"I've got to stand it," said Gunner. "Can't make the Head see sense. Getting a bit old, I think—hardly suitable for head-master of a school like this. The governors don't seem to see it—but that's my opinion. But there's one thing I won't stand—I'm not being hectored by prefects. Properly speaking, I should be a prefect myself. If Bulkeley of the Sixth wants to speak to me, let him come to my study. As for a licking, I should refuse."

"But—"

"Pass the muffins," said Gunner. "Don't talk so much, Dickinson. Follow can hardly hear his own voice in this study."

"Oh!" gasped Dickinson.

There was a tap at the door as Gunner negotiated his fifth muffin, and Mornington looked in.

"Bulkeley wants you, Gunner!" he snapped.

"He can come here if he likes," said Gunner.

"Didn't Silver tell you—"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, now you're to go! Hook it!"

"Rot!"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Mornington. "Bulkeley's told me to bring your answer."

"Right! Tell him that if he wants to speak to me, I'm willing to receive him in my study. I haven't time to come down at present."

Valentine Mornington blinked at the new junior.

"You want me to tell that to the captain of the school?" he ejaculated.

"Certainly!"

"Well, I'll tell him," said Morny, with a grin.

"Do!"

Mornington departed, and Gunner cracked another egg. Dickinson minor regarded him almost with awe. Certainly there was no other junior at Rookwood who would have ventured to send such a reply to Bulkeley of the Sixth. Unless Gunner possessed a colossal cheek and the courage of a lion, it was a case of fools rushing in where angels feared to tread.

The door opened again quite suddenly, and Tubby Muffin's fat face grinned in.

"Bulkeley's coming for you, Gunner!" chortled Tubby.

"Let him come!" said Gunner calmly.

"He's got his ash-plant."

"What does his ash-plant matter to me?" said Gunner, with a superb indifference.

"Lots, I should think!" chuckled Tubby; and he rolled away, as a heavy tread sounded in the Fourth Form passage.

CHAPTER 14.

Gunner is Sorry!

BULKELEY of the Sixth stood in the doorway of Study No. 7, and gazed into the study—at Gunner. Dickinson minor was on his feet, nervous and uneasy. Not so Gunner. He looked cheerily at the prefect across the tea-table, and waved his egg-spoon towards a vacant chair.

"Trot in," he said. "Sit down, Bulkeley."

The captain of Rookwood came in, but he did not sit down. His rugged face was angry and grim. It did not please him to have to negotiate two flights of stairs in quest of a recalcitrant junior.

His ash-plant was under his arm, and he let it slide down into his hand.

"I sent for you, Gunner!" he said gruffly.

"I know."

"Why did you not come?"

"Having tea."

"Don't you know that a junior has to obey an order from a Sixth-Form prefect?"

"That hardly applies to me," said Gunner calmly. "I hope you don't look on me as a fag like Silver, or Mornington, or Dickinson?"

"He, he, he!" came from the passage. Tubby Muffin was there, looking in for the entertainment. Some more members of the Classical Fourth were gathering round, with grinning faces. They seemed to expect to derive some entertainment from the sight of Peter Cuthbert in conflict with authority.

"I was going to cane you, Gunner, for boxing the ears of Snooks of the Second Form," said Bulkeley.

"What utter rot!" said Gunner. "Why shouldn't I box a cheeky fag's ears? I considered that it might do Snooks good."

"But now," continued Bulkeley, "I shall cane you for molesting Snooks, and cane you also for cheeking a prefect."

"You won't!" said Gunner.

"Get up and hold out your hand."

Gunner got up; but he did not hold out his hand. Much to the astonishment of the Sixth-Former, the burly junior seemed to be preparing for warfare.

"You hear me, Gunner?" snapped Bulkeley.

"I'm not deaf!"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the Rookwood captain.

"Rats!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickinson minor, almost overcome by that reply to the captain of the school.

Bulkeley of the Sixth said no more. It was a time for action, not for words. He strode at Gunner, and grasped him by the collar with his left hand; and with his right he wielded the ash-plant.

Whack!

"Yoooop!" roared Gunner, struggling.

Gunner struggled round on the prefect, and drove his clenched fist full at Bulkeley's chin. Bulkeley uttered a sharp exclamation as the hard knuckles landed

there. Gunner was game, at least, as well as being much too obtuse to realise the seriousness of his line of action.

Bulkeley's grasp tightened on the rebellious junior, till it seemed like the grip of a vice. Gunner found himself lifted helplessly across the end of the table, face down. Then the ash-plant rose and fell with vigour and rapidity, and the dust rose from Gunner's trousers, and a series of demoniac yells rose from Gunner.

Up to that moment Gunner had flattered himself that he could put up a fight even against a Sixth-Former. Gunner's confidence in his own powers was unbounded. But, as had often happened before, when the pinch came, Gunner found that his confidence was misplaced. Burly as he was, he was an infant in the hands of the stalwart prefect, and he was held helplessly on the table while the ash-plant lashed and thrashed.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yooop! Yooooohooooop!" roared Gunner. "Leggo, you ratter! Oh, my hat! Whooooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Now," said Bulkeley, pausing in the castigation, "I think you're too big a fool, Gunner, to understand quite what a cheeky young idiot you are. Otherwise, I should take you to the Head. I'm trying to make you understand."

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggol!"

"If you're sorry for playing the goat, I'll let it go at this," said Bulkeley. "Are you sorry?"

"No!" roared Gunner.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Are you sorry now, Gunner?" inquired Bulkeley grimly.

"N-n-no!" gasped Gunner, wriggling helplessly in the powerful grip that pinned him to the table.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-woooooop!" roared Gunner. "Stoppit!"

"Are you sorry, my boy?"

"Oh, dear, yes!"

It was out at last!

"Very good," said Bulkeley, releasing the rebel of the Fourth. "I hope this lesson won't be lost on you, Gunner. I don't want the trouble of licking you again."

He tucked his ash-plant under his arm and walked out of the study. Peter

Cuthbert Gunner rolled off the table, wriggling painfully.

"He, he, he!"

Gunner made a jump for the doorway, and Tubby Muffin made a jump to escape. He eluded Gunner's large boot by the fraction of an inch as he fled. Gunner slammed the door savagely on the grinning crowd outside.

"Hard lines, old chap!" murmured Dickinson minor.

Gunner groaned.

"Oh, dear! I'm hurt! Ow!"

He sat down heavily in his chair, but jumped up again with a howl. He decided to lean on the mantelpiece instead of sitting down. Dickinson minor bent his face over his tea-cup to hide a grin. Gunner's glorious defiance of constituted authority had ended rather ignominiously, and his study-mate saw a comic side to the affair. Gunner did not.

"I've been licked!" said Gunner, with a deep, deep breath. "Me, you know. Licked—just like a fag!"

"Well, you are a fag, ain't you?" said Dickinson innocently.

"Don't be cheeky, Dickinson. I don't want any back-chat from you," said Gunner wrathfully.

"N-n-no! Certainly not, old chap."

"I've been licked!" resumed Gunner. "Bulkeley of the Sixth has had the cheek to handle me. Me, you know! I can't lick Bulkeley!"

"Of course you can't!" agreed Dickinson minor, grinning at the idea.

"There's no 'of course' about it!" said Gunner, frowning. "Nothing of the sort. Bulkeley happens to be a bit too hefty for me, that's all. I can't lick a fellow above the Fifth! But I'm not going to take this lying down!"

"Bulkeley's licked me!" went on Gunner darkly. "Ow-wow! Well, we shall see what we shall see! Perhaps Bulkeley thinks that the matter is finished."

"No perhaps about that!" murmured Dickinson.

"It's not finished!" said Gunner. "I've got to get my own back. I shall leave everything else aside till I've got my own back. I'm going to make Bulkeley sit up—sit up and take notice, you know. I'm going to make him sorry for himself."

"I—I say, you'll get into an awful row

if you jape a perfect!" said Dickinson minor in alarm.

"I don't want any advice from a fag, Dickinson."

"Oh!"

"I'm going to make him sit up, and you're going to help me!"

"Oh, am I?" exclaimed Dickinson warmly.

"Yes, or else I'm going to give you a jolly good licking!" said Gunner, pushing back his cuffs and advancing upon his study-mate.

Dickinson minor backed round the table.

"I—I say, Gunner—"

"Are you going to buck me up?" roared Gunner.

"Ye-es, old chap; of course!" said Dickinson feebly. "I—I was going to all along, you know!"

"That's all right, then!" Gunner said, placated. "Now shut up! I keep on telling you that you talk too much! Now shut up and listen while I explain what's going to happen to Bulkeley!"

And Peter Cuthbert Gunner proceeded to explain in grim, concentrated tones, and Dickinson minor listened, with eyes growing larger and rounder with every word.

CHAPTER 15.

Vengeance!

JIMMY SILVER looked up from his prep with a smile as Gunner came into the study. Gunner was limping a little—he seemed to be still feeling the effects of the drastic lesson he had received in discipline. There was a grim, determined expression on his rugged face. Gunner had let the sun go down upon his wrath.

"You fellows got any treacle in this study?" asked Gunner.

"There's some golden syrup, if you want any," said Jimmy. "Half a tin."

"Thanks."

Gunner crossed to the study cupboard. The Fistical Four looked at him with smiling faces.

"Mind I take this blacking?" asked Gunner. "I'll square for it, of course."

"I'll square myself," said Jimmy.

"What do you want treacle

and liquid blacking for?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, puzzled. "Not going to mix them for supper, are you?"

"Not for supper," said Gunner darkly. "I'm going to mix them though."

"Mix them?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Yes."

"What on earth for?"

"Bulkeley!"

"Wh-a-at?"

Gunner left the study without replying, taking the liquid blacking and the tin of golden syrup with him. The Fistical Four looked at one another blankly.

"Is that silly fathead going to jape Bulkeley?" asked Raby. "I should have thought he'd had enough trouble with Bulkeley already!"

"Gunner never has enough!" chuckled Newcome. "He's always hunting for more!"

Jimmy Silver looked a little worried.

"If that howling chump japes the captain of the school he will get it fairly in the neck," he said uneasily.

"Let him!" said Lovell. "No bizney of ours."

"No. But—"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Arthur Edward. "The more lickings he gets the better for him. He needs 'em. In fact, he seems to be pining for 'em. Let him rip!"

Jimmy Silver nodded and went on with his prep. But he did not wholly dismiss Gunner from his mind.

"Uncle James" of Rookwood had a tender heart, and exasperating duffer as Gunner was, Uncle James was feeling a little concerned for him. He finished work before his chums, and quitted the study and went along to No. 7.

He found Gunner there. Apparently the end study was not the only one Gunner had visited in search of supplies, judging by the collection on his table; he had made a regular round, collecting all sorts and conditions of liquids. There were several bottles of ink—red and black and purple—there were two or three kinds of boot-polish, there was a large bottle of mahogany furniture stain, and several cans of cycle oil, as well as other things. And there were empty bottles, the contents of which Gunner had poured into a large pan, mixing with a cricket-stump as he did so.

Jimmy Silver looked at him, and looked at the ghastly concoction he was stirring with the cricket stump.

"What on earth's that for?" he asked.

"Bulkeley!"

"Gunner, don't be such a howling ass!" said Jimmy, almost gasping. "If you chuck stuff like that at a prefect it will mean a flogging at least!"

"Let it!" said Gunner tersely.

"But—you awful ass!"

"Flogging or not, Bulkeley won't get this stuff off in a hurry!" said Gunner. "He will be piebald for a week, after he gets this fairly over his napper. I can stand a flogging, if it comes to that. This will be a lesson to Bulkeley. Flogging me afterwards won't get this stuff off him, will it?"

"N.no. But—"

"I've got it all cut and dried," said Gunner calmly. "I want this to be a lesson to the whole Sixth. I want them to understand that I'm not a chap that can be handled with impunity. I dare say that word's above you, Silver," added Gunner condescendingly. "It means—"

"Never mind what it means," said Jimmy, laughing. "I'll look it out in the dictionary another time, if in doubt. But you can't really be fool enough, Gunner—"

"There's too much Sixth in this school," said Gunner. "Too much prefect! If the Fourth choose to make me captain, instead of a silly, incapable ass like you, Silver, things would be a bit different. But when they choose a dummy like you — You don't mind my mentioning that you are a dummy?"

"Not at all," said Jimmy. "We can't all have your powerful intellect, old bean."

"That's it," assented Gunner. "I don't brag of having more brains than the average fellow; it just happens to be the fact, and there you are. More pluck, too—more determination! More character, as it were, you know. You've got practically no character, Silver—a sort of nincompoop, if you don't mind my saying so!"

"Carry on," said Jimmy politely.

"After I've stood up to the prefects, and shown them I don't care a rap for them, the Fourth may decide to back me up," said Gunner. "I shall be in my rightful place as Form captain—like the

king coming into his own, you know."

"Oh, like that?" gasped Jimmy.

"Just," said Gunner. "Now, where's that fathead Dickinson got to? I told him to be here not later than nine to help me, and it's turned nine now, and he's not here."

Jimmy Silver grinned. If it was a question of swamping that weird concoction over the captain of the school, it was extremely probable, to Jimmy's mind, that Dickinson minor would not turn up at nine, nor after nine. Dickinson minor was likely to be scarce and rare, so to speak, when the great event came off.

"I'll punch his head if he doesn't come soon," said Gunner. "But you can help me, if you like, Silver. Have you got the nerve?"

"I think I've got the nerve," said Jimmy blandly. "But I haven't got the fat-headed stupidity, old bean."

"Queer that I'm the only fellow in the Fourth with any pluck to speak of," said Gunner musingly. "It just happens, I suppose."

Jimmy Silver was silent. He knew already that it was useless to argue with Peter Cuthbert Gunner, and now he realised it once more. Gunner added the rest of his ingredients to the pan, and stirred away industriously with the cricket-stump. There was more than a gallon of the stuff now, and it looked and smelt horrid. The thought of it swamping over Bulkeley's unsuspecting head made Jimmy feel quite dazed. Nothing short of an earthquake would follow; but Gunner was not at all alarmed at the prospect. His powerful brain had room for only one idea at a time, and at present he was thinking of the mixture for Bulkeley.

"If that ass Dickinson doesn't turn up, I shall have to carry on on my own," said Gunner. "Fancy his forgetting that I told him nine! Fool, you know."

"Not such a fool as if he remembered, perhaps!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? I don't follow," said Gunner. "He ought to remember. I shall punch his head for forgetting. I'll let you help me, if you like."

"Thanks! Nothing doing."

"It's simple enough," explained Gunner. "Bulkeley's in the gym now, and he'll come in in time to see lights cut

for the Fourth. When he comes in, you get him into conversation—"

"Do I?" grinned Jimmy.

"Yes; as near the big staircase as possible—easy enough. I'm on the staircase with the pan; while he's talking to you, I got my chance. See?"

"I see!" chuckled Jimmy.

"You may get a splash or two of the stuff," said Gunner. "That won't matter."

"Not at all—as I shan't be there," said Jimmy Silver. "Will you listen to a friend's advice, and drop the stunt, Gunner?"

"Not likely! Where's that clump Dickinson?" growled Gunner. "If you haven't the nerve to help, cut along and look for Dickinson, and tell him I'll smash him if he doesn't come at once. I'll smash him anyway, as a warning!"

"I fancy you won't see Dickinson minor again this side of dorm," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "And I won't look for him, Gunner. I advise you to chuck up this rot. Bulkeley licked you because you asked for it, and Bulkeley's a good sort, and you're not going to jape him. You can chuck that stuff over Carthew of the Sixth, if you like, or Knowles of the Modern side. Leave Bulkeley out."

Gunner did not even trouble to reply. He gave the mixture a final stirring.

"You hear me?" demanded Jimmy.

"Don't worry!"

"Look here, Gunner—"

"Oh, get out!" said Gunner. "I've got to find Dickinson, and I've no time to waste on you, Silver. I can't be bothered by silly fools! Go and eat coke!"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. Gunner was no respecter of persons, evidently. The captain of his Form and the captain of the school were mere nobodies to Gunner. Jimmy Silver made a step towards the cheerful Peter Cathbert.

"No larks," said Gunner. "I've no time to thrash you at present, Silver; but if you butt in here I shall give you some of this mixture. There'll be enough left for Bulkeley."

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy. "I tell you—"

"Back out!"

Gunner jerked the cricket-stump out of the concoction, and waved it at Jimmy Silver. The captain of the Fourth jumped back, as he caught several splashes of ink,

treacle, blacking, cycle-oil, and other delectable things. Gunner grinned.

"Come and have some more!" he said invitingly.

Jimmy Silver paused for a moment, and then he walked out of the study. Gunner chuckled.

CHAPTER 16.

Being Kind to Gunner!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL hurled his Latin grammar across the end study, and rose from the table with a sigh of relief. Prep was over. Jimmy Silver came in just as Arthur Edward was thus testifying his appreciation of the classics.

"Just done," said Lovell. "How's the prize idiot going on?"

Jimmy Silver explained, and there was a chortle in the end study.

"Dickinson won't turn up!" grinned Raby. "Let's hope the silly ass will chuck the idea."

"He won't," said Jimmy. "He's going to look for Dickinson, and rope him in—if he can."

"Dickinson's most likely under a bed in the dorm, if Gunner wants him to help swamp Bulkeley."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"He won't find Dickinson," he assented. "But he's going to look for him. Let's watch him go."

"What on earth for?" asked Newcome.

"Because your Uncle James tells you to!" said Jimmy severely. "Don't ask questions of your avuncular guardian and keeper, but do as he tells you."

"Oh, rats!" said Newcome.

But Jimmy Silver had his way; and the Fistical Four posted themselves outside the study door, and watched the passage. A few minutes later Gunner came out of Study No. 7, with a black frown of wrath on his face. He was going to look for his recreant supporter—not with much chance of finding that sage youth. He did not even glance at the Fistical Four as he went.

"Well, there he goes!" yawned Arthur Edward Lovell. "What next, uncle?"

Jimmy smiled.

"He won't find Dickinson or anybody else to help him in such a potty jape," he said. "Then he'll carry on on his own. Bulkeley's a good sort, and we don't want him japed—not to that extent, anyhow."

"Not particularly," assented Lovell. "It's a bit thick, certainly."

"And we don't want Gunner flogged," said Jimmy. "He can't help being a silly owl. Silly owls are born, not made. He might even be sacked for a fool jape like that."

"All the better for Rookwood."

"M'yes, but a jolly serious thing for Gunner," said the considerate Uncle James. "I really think it's up to us to be kind to Gunner, and save him."

"Rot!" said Lovell tersely. "Kindness is wasted on a silly chump like Gunner. Besides, how can we be kind to him? He won't take any advice from us. Let him rip."

"I'm surprised at you, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver severely. "Kindness is never wasted. I'm determined to be kind to Gunner, and you fellows are going to help. Come along."

"But what—"

"Follow your uncle."

"Oh, all right!" said Lovell resignedly.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner had gone along the studies without finding Dickinson minor. Now he had gone down the staircase.

As soon as he had disappeared, Jimmy Silver started along the passage, followed by his puzzled chums.

He entered Study No. 7, where the large, flat tin-pan of evil-smelling concoction stood upon the table.

Lovell whistled as he looked at it.

"My only hat! Is that it? The potty duffer is thinking of chucking that over a prefect! Oh crumbs!"

"Let's pour it away!" suggested Newcome.

"Waste!" said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head.

"What's the good of it, ass?"

"Lots! Here beginneth the first lesson," said Jimmy Silver taking the tin pan from the table. "You cut down to the staircase, Raby, and whistle if you see Gunner coming—I don't want him to spot us when we're being kind to him—he might miss the kindness."

"But what—"

"Give your chin a rest, old bean, and hook it."

"Oh, rats!" grumbled Raby, but he went.

"You lift a chair into the passage, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver, as he balanced the tin pan in his hands. It was nearly full, and Jimmy did not want any of Gunner's concoction over his clothes.

"A what?" ejaculated Lovell.

"Chair?"

"What for?"

"Ass! For me to stand on."

Arthur Edward Lovell blinked.

"Stand on?" he babbled. "You want to stand on a chair in the passage? Are you going to make a speech?"

"Fathead!" roared Jimmy Silver. "How can we be kind to Gunner without a chair to stand on?"

Lovell gave it up; it was too much for him. In silence he picked up a chair and lifted it into the passage. Jimmy Silver followed him out, with the tin pan in his hands. Newcome came last, and drew the door shut.

"Not quite shut," said Jimmy. "Leave it about a foot open, and turn out the light."

"What for?" asked Newcome.

"Ass! Do it!"

"Oh, all right!" said Arthur Newcome, in a tone which plainly implied some rising doubts of Jimmy Silver's sanity.

The light was turned out, leaving the study in darkness. Newcome held the door a foot open.

"Put the chair close to the door, Lovell."

"What for? Oh, I see!" exclaimed Lovell quite suddenly. "Ha, ha, ha!" He roared.

"Buck up, fathead, and chortle afterwards," exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Both the juniors comprehended now. Lovell placed the chair close to the door, and Jimmy mounted on it. He carefully balanced the tin pan on top of the study door.

"Bit shutter," he said. "Careful."

Newcome drew the door closer, till Jimmy gave the word to stop. Jimmy released the pan at last. It was nicely and skilfully balanced on top of the door, against the ledge over the doorway, and

absolutely certain' to fall upon the head of anyone who opened the door.

"That's O.K., I think," said Jimmy, stepping off the chair. "Now cut before Gunner comes back and suspects that we're being kind to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver lifted the chair out of sight into the next study. There was a warning whistle from Raby at the other end of the passage.

"All serene now," murmured Jimmy.

Raby cut along the passage.

Gunner came tramping along the passage. He seemed in a hurry and was looking a little excited. He paused outside the study, and the chums of the Fourth watched him with almost fascinated interest.

"Can't find that silly ass!" he said. "But I'm carrying on—I've just shied an orange at Bulkeley over the banisters."

"Wha-a-at?"

"He's after me," said Gunner, with considerable calmness. "That's my game, you know. On my own! Bulkeley's after me—and he'll chase me into my study! Then I meet him with that giddy concoction, you know, and let him have it fairly in the features! Catch on?"

"Oh, is—is that it?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"That's it! Take him fairly by surprise, you know," explained Gunner. "He won't be expecting that—what? Here he comes—ash-plant and all! Looks ratty, doesn't he?"

Gunner eyed him warily as he came up. Bulkeley was about seven or eight feet distant when Gunner acted. His plan was cut and dried. He was going to rush into his study, grasp the pan of mixture—and heave the ghastly contents fairly into Bulkeley's face as he followed in. That amazing scheme would certainly have been carried out but for the kindness of Jimmy Silver & Co.—up till now unsuspected by Gunner. The kind action of the Fistical Four dawned upon him suddenly as he shoved open the study door and tore in.

Crash!

"Wowowoooooch!"

The sudden yell that rose from Peter Cuthbert Gunner rang over half Rookwood. It brought all the fellows out of the Fourth Form studies with a rush.

"Yooooooooooooooooop!"

Gunner staggered in the doorway of his study. The pan, tilting as it fell, had fairly bonneted him. It was still on his head, upside down, as he staggered, and the contents streamed all over Gunner.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came to a sudden halt. He blinked at Gunner. There was a wild howl from the Fourth-Formers swarming along the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooogh! Oo-ooch! Cug-gug-gooooog—ooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Jimmy Silver & Co.

Crash! The pan went clattering to the floor, and Gunner's head was revealed. But it was not recognisable. Gunner's nearest and dearest relative would not have recognised him then. His hair, his features, his ears even, had disappeared under a sticky, smelly flood, which rolled and oozed over his clothes, and down his neck, most horribly.

He staggered and spluttered.

"Goooooch! Oooooch! Mmmmm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what—what does this mean?" stammered Bulkeley, quite forgetting that he was there to cane Gunner.

"I think somebody thought it would be only kind to Gunner to let him have his own mixture, Bulkeley!" murmured Jimmy Silver demurely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

Bulkeley stared—and then he burst into a laugh. He tucked his ash-plant under his arm and walked away, still laughing. He left the Fourth Form yelling with merriment—and Peter Cuthbert Gunner yelling in quite a different way. Only Peter Cuthbert was dissatisfied at the outcome of his deep, deep scheme for japing Bulkeley.

CHAPTER 17.

A Deep-Laid Plot!

"OTHERWISE—"

"But—"

"Otherwise I shall kick you—"

"But—"

"Hard!" said Gunner.

Dickinson minor looked worried.

His study-mate was quite a nice fellow in some ways. Being the heir of Gunner's



"You may dig here, Gunner," said the Head. "If the Rookwood treasure really lies below, I will excuse you. Otherwise I shall punish you severely." Gunner, nothing daunted, plied the spade.

World-Famous Hardware, Peter Cuthbert Gunner had plenty of cash, and he spent it right royally, which was an excellent thing for Dickinson minor, who found one of Gunner's ten-shilling notes much more useful at tea-time than one of his own three-penny pieces.

But there were drawbacks. Gunner expected to be monarch of all he surveyed in the study, and he expected Dickinson minor to be his humble and faithful subject. He was prepared to punch Dickinson's head if he rebelled; indeed, he had already punched it several times, and Gunner's punches were hefty ones.

As a rule, Dickinson minor gave Gunner his head, so to speak. But there were times when he "jibbed." It was one of those times now.

"It's as easy," said Gunner, "as falling off a form. I know you're a silly owl, Dick—I've mentioned that lots of times. But this job is so easy that even you can do it."

"But—"

"It isn't as if I were asking you to use your brains," said Gunner. "I wouldn't do that—I know you haven't any, old chap. It's lucky, when you come to think of it, that I've got brains enough for two. You've simply got to go to Jimmy Silver—"

"But—"

"And tell him that his new bat is in the top box-room. A fellow put it there for a lark."

"But—" objected Dickinson feebly.

"I wouldn't ask you to tell a whopper," explained Gunner. "The bat's there. I've put it there. Just mention it to Silver, and naturally, he'll go there for it. Must have missed it already, as it's close on time for the cricket match."

"But—" murmured Dickinson minor.

"Were you brought up in a family of billy-goats?" asked Gunner with pleasant satire. "Can't you do anything but but?"

"But—" Apparently Dickinson minor couldn't. "But—"

"The Classics are playing the Moderns this afternoon," said Gunner. "You know that. I've asked—or rather demanded—a place in the Classical team. Silver, taking a mean advantage of his position as junior captain, has refused it."

"But you can't play cricket, you know—"

"What?" roared Gunner.

Dickinson minor jumped.

"I—I mean, Jimmy thinks you can't!" he said hastily.

"That's a very different matter," said Gunner. "He thinks I can't because he doesn't know anything about the game. See?"

"I—I see!" gasped Dickinson minor.

"I'm left out," continued Gunner. "As a punishment, I'm going to see that Silver is left out, too. He goes to the top box-room for his new bat. I'm hidden in the cupboard on the landing. As soon as he's in the box-room, I whip out and lock the door on the outside. I've put the key outside all ready. No other way of getting out of the top box-room; and as soon as I've locked him in, we get off in the car for the afternoon. I've ordered a car from Rookham for to-day, and it will be waiting for us at the gates now. I'm taking you for a motor run, old chap, and a spanking dinner at Rookham."

Dickinson's face brightened.

"That's good!" he said. "You're a good fellow, Gunny. But—"

"We clear off the minute Silver's locked in," resumed Gunner. "He can blow off steam in the box-room, while the other fellows are playing cricket, and while we're having our run. We get back in time for call-over and let him out."

"But—but our side may be licked if Silver doesn't play—"

"Rot! One rotten player more or less can make no difference," said Gunner airily. "Silver's only a dud, and they can play another dud instead."

"But—"

"There you go again—billy-goating!" said Gunner. "It won't make any difference to the match—it can't—but it will be a lesson to Silver, and show him that I'm not to be trifled with."

Dickinson minor wriggled uneasily. He did not like having a hand in Gunner's masterly schemes. In choosing between a kicking and a motor-run on that sunny half-holiday, it was easy enough to make up his mind.

Gunner rose to his feet.

"That's settled," he said. "Now, I'll get upstairs and get ready. Give me five minutes, and then tell Silver about his bat being in the top box-room. Then you cut out of gates at once and wait for me in the

car. Tell the chauffeur I'll be along in a tick. See?"

"Yes. But——"

"Don't you understand?" snapped Gunner.

"Yes. But——"

"If you understand, go ahead. I'm off."

Peter Cuthbert Gunner left the study. Dickinson minor almost groaned. He felt that he had to do it. Gunner was not a bully—far from that. But he had a very dominating personality, and he was a very high-handed youth. Life in Study No. 7 would have been simply intolerable if Dickinson minor failed to keep on the right side of Gunner. Besides, a motor-run and a dinner at Rookham tempted Dickinson. And he simply hated the idea of the alternative kicking. He told himself that it was only a jape, after all, and he brightened up as he remembered what a silly idiot Gunner was, anyhow—it was as likely as not that he would fail to entrap the wary captain of the Fourth—much more likely that Jimmy Silver would spot him in time and give him a hiding for his cheek. That happy thought quite bucked Dickinson minor, and he was cheerful as he walked along to the end study.

There was a sound of voices in the end study—one of them wrathful. That was Jimmy Silver's. Apparently the captain of the Fourth had missed his handsome new bat.

"Where's that thumping bat? What silly ass has been sticking my bat out of sight? Seen it, Lovell?"

"Not since dinner," answered Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Then where the thump——"

"You shouldn't lose your bat, old man!" said Newcome.

"I haven't lost it!" roared Jimmy Silver. "It was here——"

"It isn't here now!" said Raby.

"I can see that, fathead!"

"Well, you'd better find it!" advised Lovell. "We don't want to be late on the ground. The Moderns will be ready now."

"Where the thump——"

Dickinson minor looked into the end study.

"Looking for your bat, Silver?" he asked.

"Yes; seen anything of it?"

"Chap told me that somebody had put it up in the top box-room for a lark."

"My only hat!"

Dickinson minor walked away after giving that information. Jimmy Silver breathed wrath and destruction.

"I'll give him larks!" spluttered Jimmy. "That idiot Gunner, I suppose—just his style for a lark." And Jimmy Silver started for the staircase that led to the top box-room.

CHAPTER 18.

Mr. Greely Investigates!

"A VERY serious matter!" said Mr. Greely.

Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth Form at Rookwood, spoke in his usual ponderous way.

Mr. Greely was a ponderous gentleman. He was large, and he was heavy, and he had a deep and powerful voice; and he had a manner that indicated to the full the importance of his position at Rookwood. It may even have indicated a little more importance than actually existed. He was conscious himself of being stately. Ponderous was an adjective that did not occur to his mind. It occurred to others.

"Very serious indeed!" added Mr. Greely.

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, nodded. He was busy that afternoon, and not overjoyed by the Fifth Form-master's visit to his study. He had a number of papers to get through before he could get out on his bicycle.

"Quite so," he said. "But——"

"There is no doubt about the discovery," said Mr. Greely. "One of the maids found a packet of cigarettes in the top box-room—apparently concealed on a shelf. This points to secret smoking in the box-room on the part of some person or persons unknown."

"Apparently."

"Certainly," said Mr. Greely. "I hope—indeed, I trust—that no member of my Form is guilty of this surreptitious and unhealthy practice. More probably a junior, Mr. Dalton."

"Indeed!"

"Some member of your Form, in all probability. Do you not think so?"

"Really, sir, I see no reason whatever to suppose so!" said Mr. Dalton, rather tartly.

Mr. Greely waved a ponderous hand.

"I have stated my opinion of the probability," he said. "It seems to me a matter

to be investigated with sedulous care. As the cigarettes probably belonged to some boy in the Fourth Form—pray do not interrupt me, Mr. Dalton—I have dropped in to ask you whether you would care to join me in the investigation. No doubt further evidences of these surreptitious proceedings will be discovered on the spot. If you care to accompany me, Mr. Dalton, pray do so. Otherwise I shall proceed to the box-room and investigate the matter individually."

"I am sure the matter will be safe in your hands, Mr. Greely."

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Greely, with dignity. "You may leave the investigation entirely to me, sir. I assure you that nothing will escape my eye."

And Mr. Greely retired, much to the Fourth Form-master's relief. Mr. Dalton finished his last paper and went out for his bicycle—quite content to leave the exploration of the top box-room in the capable and ponderous hands of Mr. Horace Greely.

That gentleman was about to proceed up the staircase when he met Monsieur Monceau, the French master. He stopped for ten minutes or so to bestow the delights of his conversation upon the French gentleman, who submitted with debonair outward politeness and inward groans. Mr. Greely's conversation was a one-sided affair. Monsieur Monceau had only opportunities to ejaculate "oui" or "non" at intervals. Mr. Greely was prepared to do all the talking, and he did it. But he remembered his duty at last, and Mossoo was permitted to escape, while Mr. Greely ascended the stairs with heavy tread.

A rather narrow stair led from the dormitory corridor to the top box-room. Mr. Greely had a considerable weight to carry, and he was a little breathless when he reached that stair. He went up rather slowly, and arrived at the little landing outside the box-room.

There was a window on one side of the landing, and a tall cupboard on the other. The door of the cupboard was closed; and naturally it did not occur to Mr. Greely for one moment that anybody was hidden in that cupboard.

But somebody was.

Ensconced in that cupboard, Gunner of the Fourth was waiting to hear Jimmy Silver's footsteps pass into the box-room.

Gunner had not been waiting long when footsteps came along.

He chuckled silently as he heard them.

His victim, all unsuspecting, was going to his doom—that was how Gunner saw the situation. That anybody else was paying an unexpected visit to so unfrequented a spot on a half-holiday did not enter Gunner's mind at all. With the cupboard door shut to conceal him, he could see nothing; but he could hear.

And he listened gleefully to the footsteps that passed the cupboard, and went on into the box-room.

Mr. Greely, as unsuspecting of Gunner as Gunner was of him, strode into the box-room, to carry out his investigations. He left the door half open behind him.

Gunner, scarcely breathing, looked out of the landing cupboard.

The coast was clear.

On tiptoe, Gunner stole towards the box-room door, reached for the handle, and jerked it suddenly shut.

Click!

The key was already in the outside of the lock. Gunner had seen to that. To turn the key and jerk it out of the lock and drop it into his pocket occupied Gunner a second.

With a grinning face he bent to the key-hole and shouted.

"Ha, ha! Fairly caught, you silly ass! Now get out if you can!"

With that Parthian shot, Gunner turned away and raced down the stairs. His work was done—well done; indeed, better done than Gunner supposed. He had caught a much bigger fish than he had expected, if he had only known it.

Gunner was anxious not to meet any of Jimmy Silver's friends before he could get clear. With the box-room key in his pocket he scudded down the stairs and whipped out into the quadrangle. He scudded across the quad, and darted breathlessly out at the gates.

"Here you are!" sang out Dickinson minor from his seat in the car.

"Right-ho!"

The chauffeur touched his cap, and Gunner clambered into the car.

"Off you go!" exclaimed Gunner. "Put it on—on the Rookham road."

"Yes, sir."

The car started.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner sank back in

his seat, grinning serenely. Dickinson minor regarded him rather anxiously.

"All serene?" he asked.

"Of course!" said Gunner patronisingly. "When I figure it out to do a thing, I do it, don't I?"

"You—you've bagged Jimmy Silver?" gasped Dickinson.

Gunner chuckled.

"He walked right into the trap. I locked the door on him and cut." He tapped his pocket. "I've got the key here. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, there'll be a row if Jimmy's kept out of the cricket."

"He'll be kept out right enough," said Gunner complacently. "No getting out of that room till the door's unlocked—and we shan't be back with the key till call-over Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, Jimmy Silver will give you an awful licking!" murmured Dickinson minor.

"If Jimmy Silver can lick me, he's welcome to do it," answered Gunner disdainfully.

Dickinson minor stared.

"But he's licked you once," he said.

"That was an accident."

"Oh!"

"Don't talk rot!" suggested Gunner. "I've told you very often, Dicky, that you talk rot, and you talk too much. Haven't I?"

And Dickinson minor said no more. But he congratulated himself that he would not be in Peter Cuthbert Gunner's shoes when the cheery youth returned to Rookwood at calling-over.

CHAPTER 19.

Gunner's Catch!

JIMMY SILVER came up the box-room stairs two at a time—about five minutes after Gunner had departed.

The box-room door was shut, but the room was obviously tenanted. To Jimmy's surprise there was a sound of a heavy fist banging on the inside of the door.

"Why—what—" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Open this door, you young scoundrel!" came a deep, beefy, booming voice from the box-room.

Jimmy Silver gave a jump. He recog-

nised the fruity tones of the Fifth Form-master.

"Is—is—is that Mr. Greely?" he stammered.

"You know that it is I!" roared Mr. Greely. "How dare you lock me in this room!"

"Great pip!"

"Unlock the door at once!"

"Are—are—are you locked in, sir?" babbled Jimmy Silver.

"You locked me in, you young rascal!"

"I—I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "I've only just come up the stairs, sir. I never thought for a moment—"

"Then it was some other young rascal. Now I think of it, it was not your voice. It was Gunner's voice. Is Gunner there?"

"No, sir."

"Well, unlock the door at once, Silver, and I will seek the young rascal myself."

"Certainly, sir."

Jimmy Silver approached the door, and made the interesting discovery that there was no key in the lock.

"The key isn't here, sir!" he called out.

"What? Has that young reprobate taken away the key after locking me in and addressing disrespectful epithets to me through the keyhole?" spluttered the Fifth Form-master.

"It's not here, sir," said Jimmy.

"Bless my soul! Find Gunner at once, Silver. Tell him that he shall be flogged, and bring the key back."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

The captain of the Fourth descended the stairs, grinning. What had possessed Gunner to play such a trick upon a Form-master, Jimmy could not guess. It was likely to be a serious matter for the practical joker.

Form-masters could not be trapped like rabbits with impunity. It was funny enough from the junior's point of view, but there was a serious side to the matter, too, for Jimmy's bat was in the box-room, and he wanted it for the cricket match now due.

It is sad to relate that Jimmy Silver thought more of his new bat than of the Fifth Form-master's predicament. But he did

"Got it?" called out Arthur Edward Lovell, as Jimmy Silver returned his chums in the lower passage.

"No."

"Wasn't it there?" asked Raby. "That cheeky young ass Dickinson pulling your leg?"

"I haven't looked yet," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Greely's in the box-room. Gunner's locked him in."

"What?" yelled the Co.

"Can't get in without the key. Got to find Gunner and rifle him," said the captain of the Fourth. "Lend a hand."

"Look here, there's no time now!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell. "The Moderns will be waiting for us."

"But the box-room is locked."

"You can use your old bat."

"Yes; but Mr. Greely—"

"Bother Greely! He's not your Form-master," said Lovell warmly. "Tell a Fifth Form chap, and then come along to the cricket."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Greely will explode if he's not let out pretty quick," he answered. "The Moderns can wait a few minutes. Let's find Gunner. The sooner Greely's let out the better it will be for that potty duffer. He must be off his chump to play a jape like that on a Form-master."

"What has he got up against Greely, anyhow?" asked Raby. "We never have anything to do with Greely."

"Blessed if I know. There never is any accounting for what Gunner does. Let's find him quick."

The Fistical Four started looking for Gunner, but that youth was not to be found quickly—or at all. By that time his car was a good three miles away from Rookwood School, and going strong.

Most of the Classical junior cricketers were already on Little Side, waiting for their skipper. Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern Fourth, were waiting, too.

But there was no help for it. Apart from the question of the new bat, Mr. Greely had to be released if possible.

High and low the exasperated four hunted for Gunner. But Gunner seemed, as Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it, to have done a complete fade-through. He was not to be found within the walls of Rookwood.

"Gone out, perhaps?" suggested Newcome at last. "Let's ask Mack."

Old Mack, the porter, was able to give information when questioned. He had seen

the hired car from Rookham start, with Gunner and Dickinson minor in it.

The Fistical Four blinked at one another. "Gone out for the afternoon—with the key—after locking a Form-master in a box-room!" said Lovell. "A doctor ought to see that chap."

Mornington came racing up from the direction of the cricket-ground.

"You fellows ever coming?" he demanded hotly. "Are we goin' to kick our heels waitin' for you till dark?"

"Can't be helped," said Jimmy Silver. "We've been looking for an escaped lunatic. Shan't be long now. I must tell Greely."

Jimmy Silver ran back to the School House and ran up the stairs to the top box-room. Within that somewhat dusky and dusty apartment he could hear the heavy strides of the Fifth Form-master as he paced furiously to and fro.

Locked in as he was, Mr. Greely had ample time to carry out the investigations he had come to the box-room to make. But he was not thinking of the investigations now.

Cigarette-smoking was a serious matter, but not nearly so serious as locking a Form-master in a box-room, especially when that Form-master was Horace Greely. Mr. Greely could scarcely credit that such an act of unparalleled audacity had really taken place.

It was amazing, incredible, unheard of, and many more things like that. But there it was. He paced up and down the box-room, muttering ejaculations, fairly snorting in his wrath and indignation.

He swung impatiently to the door as he heard the sound of footsteps on the landing at last.

"Silver, is that you?"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Why did you not return before?" exclaimed Mr. Greely. "Why have you kept me waiting so long here?"

"I—I was looking for Gunner, sir. I—"

"Pish! You should have found him sooner. However, now you have found him—"

"I—I haven't found him, sir."

"What?"

"He—he's gone out for the afternoon! Seems, sir," faltered Jimmy Silver.

"What? What? And taken the key with him?" roared Mr. Greely.

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"Upon my word! Is it possible that that wretched boy, that—that young hooligan has locked me in this—this dusty room and left me—" Mr. Greely choked. "Do you know of any other key that fits the lock, Silver?"

"No, sir. It's a rather old-fashioned key."

"I must be released!" thundered Mr. Greely. "I must be released immediately, without delay. Upon my word! The insolence—the unheard of audacity! Silver, go and inform the Head at once of my—my predicament!"

"Very well, sir. But if you don't mind my asking—"

"What? What?"

"Can you see a cricket-bat in the room, sir?"

"A cricket-bat?" repeated Mr. Greely.

"Yes, there is a cricket-bat standing in the corner. What does it matter?"

"It's my new bat, sir," said Jimmy. "I want it for the game this afternoon, sir. Would you mind tying a string to it—"

"What?"

"And letting it down from the window, sir?"

"Wh-a-t? Silver, if there were not a locked door between us, I would box your ears. How dare you talk to me about cricket-bats at such a moment as this!" thundered Mr. Greely.

"Oh, sir, but I want—"

"Go to the Head at once, you incredibly stupid boy, and report to him what has happened. Go this instant!"

"Oh, very well, sir."

Jimmy Silver departed. He stopped on the way to pick up his old bat in the end study. Then he called into Dr. Chisholm's quarters to give the startling information that a Form-master was locked in the top box-room; and then he hurried down to Little Side, and cheerfully dismissed the whole matter from his mind.

How Mr. Greely was going to escape from his amazing predicament was a deep question. But a more important question occupied Jimmy's mind—the question of beating the Moderns at cricket. It was only in intervals of the game that Jimmy Silver remembered how he was getting on.

CHAPTER 20.

Mr. Greely's Happy Afternoon!

"B LESS My soul!" ejaculated Dr. Chisholm.

Bang!

Mr. Greely had found a use for Jimmy Silver's new bat. He was crashing it on the lock of the box-room door, in the hope of smashing it—the lock, not the bat. Unfortunately, it was the bat that he succeeded in smashing. What remained of the bat was still beating a terrific tattoo on the stout, unremoved lock, when Mr. Chisholm arrived on the landing—very much perturbed, and a little out of breath.

"Mr. Greely—"

The tattoo ceased.

"Is that you, sir?" In spite of his justifiable wrath and excitement, Mr. Greely contrived to subdue his voice to something like calmness in addressing the august Head of Rookwood.

"Yes, Mr. Greely. Silver reports to me—"

"I sent him to tell you, sir. I came up to this room, sir"—Mr. Greely's voice rose, in spite of himself—"to investigate—a packet of cigarettes having been found here by one of the maids. To my amazement, sir, the door was suddenly slammed and locked on the outside, and Gunner, sir—the new boy in the Fourth Form, sir—a boy whom I suspect, sir, of not being quite right in the head—this boy, sir—this—this wretch—this depraved young rascal, sir, shouted an opprobrious epithet through the keyhole, sir, and fled, leaving me, sir, locked in this room."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Head. "He dared to address you disrespectfully?"

"He did, sir. He applied an epithet to me through the keyhole, sir."

"What was the epithet, Mr. Greely?" exclaimed the Head in great wrath.

Mr. Greely coughed. Even to the sympathetic headmaster he did not care to say that he had been called a silly ass by a junior schoolboy.

"He—he mentioned the name, sir, of a—a quadruped, qualifying it with a disrespectful adjective, stammered Mr. Greely.

"Upon my word! But is it really the case that you cannot get out of the room, Mr. Greely?"

"I have broken a bat belonging. I think, to Silver, in attempting to force the lock,

sir. I am not a bird, to escape by the window."

"Quite so, quite so! But the boy, no doubt, has the key—"

"It appears that he has gone out for the afternoon, with the key in his pocket!" hooted Mr. Greely.

"I can scarcely believe it, Mr. Greely. Pray be silent, and I will give orders for Gunner to be found at once, and will also inquire of the house-dame whether there is another key to this lock. Pray be patient, Mr. Greely. Gunner, of course, will be flogged for this outrage." A snort was heard from the box-room, and the Head coughed. "Pray be patient, my dear Greely—as patient as—as possible."

The Head rustled away down the stairs. Perhaps Mr. Greely was as patient as possible, but perhaps it was not possible for the unfortunate gentleman to be very patient. It was undoubtedly a trying situation. Mr. Horace Greely did not look patient, as he tramped up and down the box-room, breathing wrath and vengeance. He kicked several boxes out of the way—not that they were in his way, but he found solace in it. He resumed his attack on the lock with the remnant of Jimmy Silver's new bat, but the lock was a very old one, manufactured in the days when locks were locks, and it showed hardly a scratch when Mr. Greely was left with nothing but a cane handle in his hand. He hurled that remnant across the room with a crash, and resumed his pacing—or, rather, stamping. It was probably half an hour—though it seemed to Mr. Greely hours and hours—before he heard a footstep on the landing again.

"Are you there, sir?"

It was the voice of Hansom of the Fifth.

"I am here, Hansom! A ridiculous question to ask. Have you brought the key?" snorted Mr. Greely.

"No, sir. Dr. Chisholm says will you kindly be as patient as possible, sir, with his sympathy, until Gunner returns. The Head thinks he may not be long, sir. And there's nothing to be done till he comes in, as the door's too thick to be broken in, sir."

Mr. Greely exploded.

"Pish! Tush! Nonsense!" he roared. "The door must be broken in. Am I to remain a prisoner till it suits the convenience of an insane Lower boy to release me?"

"Am I to tell the Head what you say, sir?" roared Hansom demurely.

"No!" roared Mr. Greely. "You are to take five hundred lines, Hansom."

"Oh, my hat!"

Hansom of the Fifth fairly fled down the stairs. He was afraid that if he remained another minute or two Mr. Greely might make it a thousand. Mr. Greely hammered on the door.

"Hansom! Boy! Hansom! Answer me!"

But Hansom was gone.

Mr. Greely whirled about the box-room in his rage. He thumped the door and he kicked the boxes. He made remarks—not in a subdued voice. But he checked his flow of eloquence as a giggling voice was heard on the landing without.

"He's going it, ain't he? Awfully waxy. What? He, ho, ho!" It was the fat voice of Tubby Muffin of the Fourth.

Chortles, not loud, but deep, followed. Mr. Greely realised that the news had spread, and that Lower School boys were gathering on the landing and the stairs, to listen to him, and to enjoy the situation. Those thoughtless and misguided youths evidently thought there was something comic in his imprisonment in a dusty box-room, not realising at all what a matter of awful seriousness it really was.

"Fancy old Greely—boxed like a badger!" That was Jones minor's voice. Ha, ha, ha!

"Ramping about like a wild lion!" said Tubby Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hear you, Muffin. I hear you, Jones!" roared Mr. Greely. "I shall report this insolence to your Form-master."

"Oh dear! I—I didn't say anything, sir!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin in alarm. "I didn't utter a word, sir. I only said it was a shame to lock you up like a lion, sir—"

"Pah! Go away at once!" roared Mr. Greely.

There were retreating footsteps. But at intervals, through the painful hours that followed, Mr. Greely detected a sound of whispering voices and subdued chuckles without. He suspected that there was a regular procession up and down the box-room stairs, to listen to him, and to stare at the door that held him a prisoner. With every minute that passed Mr. Greely grew

more and more volcanic, until really he seemed in danger of exploding like a bomb.

When Jimmy Silver & Co., cheery and ruddy from the cricket, came back to the School House in the golden sunset, they found a grinning crowd of juniors downstairs.

"Old Greely!" panted Tubby Muffin. "Did you know—"

"Isn't he out yet?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He, he, he! No fear!"

"Great Scott!"

"Hasn't Gunner come in with the key?" exclaimed Lovell. "Well, of all the potty jabberwocks—"

"I wouldn't care to be Gunner when Greely gets loose!" remarked Mornington with a chuckle.

"He must be fairly off his rocker!" said Jimmy Silver aghast. "Can't imagine what he's done it for. I wish he'd come in, the awful ass!"

There was a shout from Tubby Muffin in the doorway at last.

"Here he comes!"

And there was a rush to meet Gunner.

CHAPTER 21.

A Little Surprise for Gunner!

PETER CUTHBERT GUNNER walked airily across the quad. He wore a cheery and satisfied look. He had had a pleasant afternoon out. So had Dickinson minor; but the latter was thinking of the trouble to come. Gunner did not seem to be bothering about trouble. By some of his own wonderful mental processes he justified his conduct to himself; and the opinion of others did not matter—to Gunner. He was prepared now to release Jimmy Silver from the box-room, and face the music—if any.

"Here he comes!" shouted a dozen voices.

Gunner smiled. Evidently his exploit had attracted general notice, and Gunner did not object to the limelight. He swanked rather than walked in at the big doorway.

"Here I am!" he said cheerily. "I—Why, what, how, which—" He fairly spluttered at the sight of Jimmy Silver in

the crowd of juniors. "You! How did you get out?"

Jimmy stared at him.

"What's that?" he asked.

"You've played in the match after all?" roared Gunner.

"Played in the match? Of course!"

"My hat! How did you get out, then? Did you have another key after all?" howled Gunner, in wrathful disappointment.

"What is he burbling about?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, in wonder. "Are you quite off your rocker, Gunner?"

"I thought I'd fixed him all right for the afternoon!" howled Gunner wrathfully. "How the thump he got out of the box-room beats me!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"The box-room!" he repeated.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

They all understood now. It was one of Gunner's many little mistakes—the latest and greatest.

"Oh dear!" moaned Arthur Edward Lovell, wiping his eyes. "That born idiot will be the death of me yet! You crass duffer, it wasn't Jimmy you locked in! Ha, ha, ha! You caught a whale instead of a sprat!"

"What! Who was it, then?" stuttered Gunner.

There was no need for the juniors to answer. Across the hall came the stately figure of the Head, and the juniors fell back before him. Gunner blinked at the Head.

"So you have returned, Gunner!" said the Head, in an awful voice.

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"Have you the key of the box-room?"

"Ye-e-es, sir—in my pocket, sir!"

"Then hand it to me at once."

Gunner handed over the key, still blinking. Dr. Chisholm handed the key to Jimmy Silver.

"Silver! Go up to the box-room at once and release Mr. Greely!"

"Yes, sir!"

Gunner staggered.

"Mr. Greely!" he said faintly.

"Request Mr. Greely, Silver, to come to my study as soon as possible, to witness the condign punishment of the boy who locked him in the box-room."

"Locked him in the box-room!" mumbled Gunner mechanically. "Oh crumbs!"

"You, Gunner, will follow me!" said the Head grimly.

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner followed the Head, limping. At one fell swoop, all the swank had departed out of Peter Cuthbert, and his knees fairly knocked together as he went.

Scores of eyes watched Mr. Greely as he descended the stairs and headed for Dr. Chisholm's study. Some of the juniors thought he looked like a wild Hun—some like a famished cannibal. At quite a distance from the Head's study, sounds of deep and woeful anguish could be heard immediately afterwards. Later, deep groans were heard proceeding from Study No. 7 in the Fourth, while in every other study there was laughter loud and long over Gunner's great catch.

CHAPTER 22.

A Startling Secret!

"BETTER whisper."

"We're safe here."

"Can't be too careful," said Tommy Dodd cautiously. "If these Classical bounders should get on to it—"

"Sure, they'd think nothing of bagging the treasure and leaving us out in the cold."

"Exactly."

Peter Cuthbert Gunner of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood sat up and took notice, so to speak.

The whispering voices came to his ears, low but clear, round the huge trunk of the beech in a quiet corner of the Rookwood quadrangle.

Gunner was seated on a bench under the big beech, with Virgil on his knees, and a frown upon his brow. Gunner was studying Virgil—not willingly. Mr. Dalton had found serious fault with Gunner's construe that morning—not an unusual experience for Gunner. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and Gunner had to spend part of it with P. Virgilius Maro, who was about the last companion he would have chosen on a half-holiday if he had had his own way.

Gunner was trying manfully to make head or tail of the celebrated shipwreck scene, when the whispering voices came to his ears.

He grinned.

He knew the voices—those of Dodd, and Cook, and Doyle, of the Modern Fourth—the Three Tommies.

Evidently, the Modern chums had retired to that sequestered spot to discuss some matter that was to be kept from the knowledge of their old foes and rivals, the Classics.

Gunner could not help grinning.

It struck him as funny that the three Moderns should halt under the very tree where he sat, only the thick trunk separating him from their sight. He was out of view, but he was well within hearing.

Although Gunner had his faults—and they were legion—he was no eavesdropper. In ordinary circumstances he would never have listened to talk not intended for his ears. But in the present case the talkers were Modern juniors, and Gunner regarded himself as learning the plans of the enemy. So he made no sound, and only sat up and took notice.

Besides, he was rather curious. The mention of the treasure interested him, for, of course, Gunner had heard of the Rookwood treasure. Every new boy heard of that as a matter of course—in fact, new boys often went rooting round the old Abbey ruins in the hope of finding it. They never succeeded. If there was any treasure left buried about Rookwood by the ancient monks, they had done their work remarkably well.

"Pieces of eight!" Tommy Dodd's voice ran on in a whisper, which reached Gunner quite clearly. "That's some sort of old coin, you know—worth a lot of money. That shows it's ancient."

"May be enough to make us all rich for life!" said Tommy Cook eagerly.

"More than that! Those old monks were no end rich, you know, and when Henry VIII came down like a wolf on the fold, they shoved it all out of sight. Might be a million pounds."

"Phew!"

"Sure, oughtn't we to take this paper to the Head?" asked Tommy Doyle. "Will the treasure belong to us if we find it?"

"I think half goes to the Government, and the rest to the finder," said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully. "Something like that. Nothing to do with the Head. He hadn't a hand in finding this old document. We found it. Pieces of eight. It doesn't say how many, but it mentions the oaken

chest. Must be a good bit if it needed an ouken chest—what?"

"Yes, rather!" murmured Cook.

"All we've got to do," continued Tommy Dodd, "is to follow the directions in this paper. Then we get hold of the famous Rookwood treasure. It's been searched for for hundreds of years, and nobody's had any luck. Fancy the looks of the Classical duffers when we turn it up! Jimmy Silver will be ready to kick himself!"

"Take care of the paper, Tommy," said Doyle anxiously. "You couldn't remember what's on it if you lost it."

"That's all right. I'm not running any risks with it. It won't be safe to make the search till the dead of night—"

"The which?"

"The dead of night. We'll take a spade and a lantern, and seek the hidden treasure at the dead of night. But I'm not going to carry this precious paper about with me. Might lose it any minute. I'm going to put it in a safe place."

Peter Cuthbert listened with breathless interest now. His heart was thumping with excitement.

The discovery of a document containing a clue to the lost Rookwood treasure was a great event. The Moderns had had that luck, but they were not going to have the treasure if Gunner could help it. All was fair in war, Gunner considered, and he was already planning to get hold of that valuable document. He was prepared to give the Modern juniors a series of hefty punches in exchange—which was all that Moderns were entitled to, anyhow.

Gunner did not worry about the un-doubted fact that any one of the three Tommies could have made rings round him at fisticuffs. It was not a fact to Gunner.

He had half risen, but he sat down again as he heard Tommy Dodd's next words:

"I'm shoving it in the hole in this tree. It will be safe there till we want it."

"Good!"

Gunner smiled at the sunny spring sky. He abandoned his half-formed plan of seizing upon the document by force of arms. There was a bare possibility, even in Gunner's mind, that he might have got the worse of the tussle, considering the odds. Tommy Dodd was fairly playing into his hands, and Gunner was content to let it go at that.

He could hear Dodd fumbling on the

other side of the big beech. Then there was a sound of retreating footsteps, and of voices dying away in the distance.

Gunner ventured to peer cautiously round the trunk.

The three Tommies were disappearing afar, without even looking back. Gunner indulged in a gentle chuckle.

He stepped round the beech and scanned the old trunk. He was not long in discovering the hole in the bark, and he fumbled in it, and drew out a folded paper.

Gunner did not stop to read it there. He put it hastily into his pocket, and walked away with his prize.

Ten minutes later, for reasons best known to themselves, Tommy Dodd & Co. came sauntering back to the spot. This time they passed the bench on the other side of the beech. On the bench lay a forgotten Virgil, but there was no sign of Gunner. Tommy Dodd, with a grinning face, circumnavigated the beech, and groped in the hole in the bark. It was empty.

"Dear me!" said Tommy Dodd.

And the three Tommies sauntered away again, with amazing equanimity considering the immense value of the document they had lost.

CHAPTER 23. Glorious Prospects!

"SILVER!"

Jimmy Silver waved his hand at Gunner.

It was an emphatic gesture of dismissal; but Gunner did not heed it.

"Hook it!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Don't begin on cricket, old man!" implored Raby. "We know you can teach us all about the game. But don't do it!"

"Don't!" urged Newcome. "Leave us in our ignorance. Do!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were on their way to Little Side for cricket. They really did not want Gunner's conversation. Gunner was the Complete Cricketer—in his own personal estimation. But he always found it difficult to secure listeners, when the spirit moved him to draw upon his stores of knowledge.

"Look here!" hooted Gunner. "It's not cricket! I want to speak to you about something else, Silver!"

"Oh!" said Jimmy, more amiably. "You're not going to ask me for a place in

the junior team, nor tell me what a born idiot Bulkeley is not to play you in the First Eleven?"

"No!" snorted Gunner.

"Then you can run on!" said Jimmy kindly. "I'll give you a minute or two. Back-pedal, you chaps!"

"Rot!" said Lovell tersely. "I'm going to play cricket. You can listen to Gunner's chinwag if you want to."

And Arthur Edward Lovell marched on, having no politeness to waste on Gunner. Ruby and Newcome hesitated; but they finally walked on after Lovell, leaving Jimmy Silver to his fate.

"Well, what is it, Gunner?" asked Uncle James of Rookwood. "Give it a name, and cut it short!"

"It's about the Rookwood treasure——"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Jimmy. "Somebody been pulling your leg about that?"

Gunner smiled.

"I hope I'm not the kind of fellow to have my leg pulled!" he said disdainfully.

"You're a hopeful sort of chap," said Jimmy cordially. "Sanguine temperament, and all that. Well, what about the treasure? Found it?"

"I hope to find it shortly!"

"Good!" said Jimmy. "If it makes you a millionaire, we shall expect you to stand a spread to the whole Fourth. We'll all miss our tea specially to do it justice. I shan't miss my tea to-day!" added the captain of the Fourth reflectively.

"What do you know about this old treasure of the Abbey?"

"Nothing!" said Jimmy. "The yarn is that the monks buried it when Henry VIII came looting after their goods, ever so long ago. It's said that an old document exists giving the clue, but nobody's ever seen the giddy document."

"It's known about the document?" asked Gunner thoughtfully.

"So they say. Hidden about Rookwood somewhere," smiled Jimmy. "Might turn up any day—perhaps."

"Now, suppose some Modern kids found the document——"

"Suppose anything you like, old bean!"

"Suppose they did, a Classical chap would be justified in bagging it off them, considering that we're up against the Moderns all along the line," argued Gunner.

"I don't know about that," said Jimmy, staring at him. "But as they're not likely to find anything of the sort——"

"You agree with me that I should be justified——"

"Well, not quite," said Jimmy Silver. "It doesn't matter, anyhow, as it will never happen; but if——"

"I might have known I shouldn't get any sense out of you!" said Gunner.

"Why the fellows made you captain of the Form beats me!"

"Anything else to say?" inquired Jimmy politely.

"Only that you're a born idiot!"

"Thanks!" said Jimmy.

He went on his way, and, in passing, took Gunner by the collar, tripped him, and sat him down heavily on the ground. Gunner sat and gasped, hardly knowing how he came to be in a sitting posture. His mighty brain never worked quickly.

By the time he scrambled to his feet, Jimmy Silver was trotting on the cricket-field. Gunner made a stride or two in pursuit; but he stopped.

"No time to thrash that cheeky idiot now!" he reflected. "I'll give him a lesson another time. I'm jolly well going to lift that giddy 'treasure before the Moderns miss this paper!"

Gunner entered the School House, and proceeded to his study, No. 7, in the Fourth. There he found his study-mate, Dickinson minor. The latter was labouring through an imposition, with a gloomy countenance. Dickinson minor wanted to be at the cricket; but a cruel destiny chained him to the study and Virgil.

"Not finished yet?" asked Gunner.

"Forty-six out of a hundred!" said Dickinson minor dismally. "Don't interrupt, old chap. I want to get through somehow!"

"Put it away now."

"I've got to take it to Mr. Dalton before tea!"

"Can't be helped!" said Gunner, in his autocratic way. "I want you."

Dickinson minor generally gave Gunner his head, for the sake of a quiet life. But he showed signs of rebellion now.

"Look here, I can't leave my impot!" he said. "Mr. Dalton——"

"Shove it away," said Gunner, unheeding. "I've got something on a bit more important than lines for Dalton. Besides, you can get round Dalton, if you like, by making him a present of a new motor-bike, or a Rolls-Royce car!"

Dickinson minor felt as if he would faint.

He backed his chair away from Gunner, looking at him in great alarm. The only explanation of Gunner's remark was that Gunner was not quite right in his head—and Dickinson realised now that there had been many signs of it. Gunner's belief that he could play cricket, for instance.

"What are you blinking at?" demanded Gunner irritably.

"I—I say, you keep off!" gasped Dickinson.

"What?"

"D-d-don't you come near me!" gasped Dickinson. "I—I say, you ought to see a doctor at once!"

"See a doctor!" repeated Gunner, in astonishment. "What would a doctor know about the Rookwood treasure?"

"The—the—the what?"

"That's what I was going to tell you," said Gunner. "The Rookwood treasure, you know—pieces of eight—a whole oaken chest full. As you're my pal, I'm going to give you a share."

Dickinson jumped up. He realised that it was not insanity; but he was very much astonished.

"You've found the Rookwood treasure?" he yelled.

"Practically!"

"Oh, only practically!" said Dickinson, much more soberly.

"It's simply a question of getting hold of it," explained Gunner. "I've found the document giving the clue."

"My hat!"

"I needn't go into details," said Gunner. "The document's in my hands, and that's enough. I understand that half a hidden treasure goes to the Government—trust them to get their fingers on anything they can. But half a million pounds is a lot of money. I shall give you ten thousand, Dickinson."

"W-w-will you?" stammered the astonished Dickinson.

"Yes. Nothing mean about me!" said Gunner. "I shall also let the Head have a whack. I may give him about fifty thousand. Dash it all, he's a deserving case!"

"B-b-but—" stammered Dickinson.

"Then he may see, too, that I ought to be in the Fifth Form, and may give me my remove," said Gunner. "Of course, I wouldn't bribe him. But he may see the facts then. Besides, he ought to have something for his trouble. I shall require him to be present when the hidden treasure is

unearthed, to bear witness that it's mine. Those Modern cads might put in a claim to it. People are so jolly unscrupulous."

"But where's the document?" gasped Dickinson.

"Bit more interesting than lines for Dalton—what?" smiled Gunner. "Here it is, old chap! I trust you, you see."

And Gunner laid the precious paper on the study table, and Dickinson minor devoured it with his eyes.

CHAPTER 24.

Gunner's Luck!

IT was quite an interesting document. It ran:

"Wrytten by ye monk Ambrose by ye order of ye Abbot of Rookwood. Ye Abbot's treasure of ye golden candlesticks and chalices and pieces of eight, lies buried in ye oaken chest in ye vaults of ye Abbey. Twelve goodly paces from ye lowest step. Search, and ye shall fynde."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Dickinson.

"Easy as falling off a form—what?" smiled Gunner. "I've been in the Abbey vaults already—know the place like a book. We've only got to get a lantern and a spade—"

"But, I say—"

"Well, what?"

"This paper doesn't look so jolly old—"

"Well-preserved, of course," said Gunner. "Kept inside a book, I dare say—shut up for hundreds of years, you know."

"The ink doesn't seem so faded as—"

"Ink keeps its colour if it's shut up away from the light, you know."

"D-d-does it?"

"Oh, yes. You see, the document's quite genuine."

"How do you know?"

Dickinson minor was not a very bright youth, but he was smitten with doubt.

"Well, I do know!" said Gunner loftily. "Leave it to me. You're a bit of a fool, Dickinson. I've often told you so. Don't waste time jawing, but come along."

"But—but my lines—"

"Lines—when I'm going to give you ten thousand pounds for helping me dig up a treasure!" howled Gunner.

"Yes, but—but Mr. Dalton—"

"You can give him a thousand pounds

out of it if you like, and get on his right side for ever. Come on!"

"I—I say, we shall get into a row if we're caught digging up the vaults——"

"Are you coming?" roared Gunner.

Gunner was already pushing back his cuffs, and Dickinson minor decided to come. With an extraordinary expression on his face, he followed his burly study-mate down the Fourth Form passage and down the stairs.

"Now," said Gunner, "I'll get my bike lamp, and you sneak a spade from the gardener's shed. See?"

"I see."

"Bring it to the Abbey, and keep it dark."

"Ye-e-es."

Five minutes later Peter Cuthbert Gunner was in the Abbey ruins, at a little distance from the school buildings, with a bicycle lamp in his hand. On the steps that led down to the vaults he halted and lighted the lantern. Then he waited for Dickinson.

He waited a considerable time. This was accounted for by the fact that Dickinson minor, as soon as Gunner's back was turned, had scudded off to the study for his unfinished imposition, and had taken it away to a deserted Form-room, there to finish it in peace.

For some reason or other, Dickinson minor was not tempted to risk Mr. Dalton's wrath, even by the dazzling prospect of handling ten thousand pounds in pieces of eight.

Gunner waited. He occupied his leisure in saying things about dawdling asses and fat-headed duffers—doubtless alluding to Dickinson minor.

He promised Dickinson half a dozen lickings when he came. But he did not come! Like the Lady of the Moated Grange, Peter Cuthbert Gunner waited for him that came not. And at last, with feelings that could not be expressed in words, Gunner put down his bike lamp on the steps and went in search of a spade himself, inwardly resolving not to hand Dickinson minor a single threepenny-bit out of the vast treasure he was about to unearth.

The treasure-seeker succeeded in annexing a spade from the gardener's shed, but getting it to the Abbey ruins unseen was a different matter.

Two or three fellows asked him on his way whether he was going to bury himself, adding that it was time he did. Quite

near the Abbey ruins he fell in with three Modern juniors. Tommy Dodd & Co. were taking a stroll in that direction.

"Hallo! What's on, Gunner?" asked Tommy Dodd affably.

"Mind your own business, you Modern bouncer!" answered Gunner truculently.

"Is it a sayeret intirely?" asked Tommy Doyle.

"Find out!"

"Bump him for his cheek!" suggested Tommy Cook.

"Good egg!"

"Here, keep off! Yaroooooop!"

The three Tommies strolled on, smiling, leaving Gunner sitting on the hard, unsympathetic ground with his cap stuffed down the back of his neck.

"You checky Modern rotters!" spluttered Gunner. "I'll—I'll— Groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By the time Gunner recovered his breath, however, he was glad that the three Moderns had strolled away. Vengeance could wait, and he did not want Modern eyes upon him while he was searching for "ye treasure of ye Abbot."

With an angry grunt, Gunner tramped on to the ruins, spade in his hand. He descended the steps to the vault to the door at the bottom, which was always kept padlocked to bar enterprising juniors out of the dangerous precincts.

It was rather a serious matter to burst that padlock, but Peter Cuthbert Gunner was not likely to allow such a consideration to stand between him and an oaken chest crammed with golden candlesticks, chalices, and pieces of eight.

A hefty swipe with a spade abolished the padlock, and Gunner threw the door open, picked up his bicycle lantern, and entered the vault.

He did not even notice before he swiped the padlock to fragments that it had already been opened and set carefully to give it an appearance of being locked.

Gunner's powerful intellect did not descend to the observation of trifles.

Dark and gloomy looked the old vaults as Gunner flashed the light of his lamp round him. But darkness and gloom did not deter Gunner. He was not afraid of the ghost of Rookwood, though that spectral gentleman probably had as much a real existence as the Rookwood treasure.

"Twelve goodly paces from the lowest step!" murmured Gunner, consulting his

document. "Search, and ye shall find. Good!"

Carefully, very carefully, he paced off from the lowest step twelve goodly paces. Gunner's paces could not help being goodly ones; the size of Gunner's feet was not diminutive.

He stopped after the twelfth pace and bent down, lantern in hand, eagerly examining the ground. There was a flagstone at his feet—similar to the flags that covered the whole floor of the vault.

But it was dissimilar in one respect. The surface of the stone was chipped, as if with a chisel and hammer.

Gunner's heart beat faster as he discerned it. He knelt down on the flag, and turned the light of the lantern on the stone.

In the light, he felt along the chipping with his finger. There was no doubt about it—it was the letter "T" that was chipped there in the stone.

"T!" murmured Gunner. "If that doesn't stand for 'Treasure,' I'll eat my hat!"

He set the lantern down and took the spade. There was room to insert the edge between that flag and the next, and Gunner inserted it to prise up the heavy stone.

It came up with surprising ease, almost as if it had been raised before in recent times.

There was a terrific crash as it rolled backwards and fell on the adjoining flags.

The noise rolled like thunder through the echoing vaults.

Gunner did not heed it.

He was on his knees at the aperture, lantern in hand. He half-expected to see a spiral stair leading downwards. He had read of such things, and a spiral stair certainly would have been in the picture, so to speak. But there was no spiral stair.

Solid earth met his view. But embedded in the earth was a flat stone, and on that stone the word was cut—or, rather, roughly chipped:

DIG!

Gunner rose to his feet, breathing deeply. He had found it!

There was no doubt about that now. There was the spot, at twelve goodly paces from the stairs—there was the direction "Dig!" Nothing more than that was required.

Probably any fellow, excepting Gunner, would have set to work with the spade with frantic activity.

But Gunner was not an ordinary fellow.

There was going to be no doubt about the ownership of that treasure when it was unearthed. Gunner was determined on that. It was possible—indeed, probable—that some Modern cads might put in a claim in the circumstances. Gunner burned with indignation at the thought, but he had to admit the possibility.

There had to be official recognition of the fact that Gunner was the finder—that the treasure-trove was Gunner's. On a matter of such tremendous importance nothing short of the Head's authority was adequate. Gunner only needed absolute proof—and now he had it. He blew out the lantern, laid down the spade, and quitted the vault, carefully shutting the door after him.

Then, with a smiling face, and looking like a fellow walking on air, he headed for the School House and Dr. Chisholm's study.

CHAPTER 25.

Treasure Trove!

"GUNNER!"
Bulkeley of the Sixth called to Peter Cuthbert as he came into the School House.

Gunner glanced round carelessly.

"Can't stop!" he answered.

"What?"

"In a hurry," explained Gunner. "I've got to see the Head."

"What do you mean by going about with muddy trousers, and your hands covered with mud?" snapped the prefect.

Gunner glanced down—he had signs of his treasure-hunting all over him. That was a trifle, however. He could not resist the temptation to astonish Bulkeley.

"Oh, that!" he said casually. "Can't grumble at a little mud, Bulkeley, in laying hold of a million pounds."

"Eh?"

"You see, I've discovered the Rookwood treasure," said Gunner, with studied carelessness.

"Wha-a-at?"

Six or seven fellows heard Gunner's amazing statement, and they all stared at him.

Gunner smiled. He enjoyed the lime-light.

"You've discovered what?" yelled Hanson of the Fifth.

"The Rookwood treasure!" yawned Gunner.

"You young ass!" exclaimed Balkeley angrily.

"Well, I'm going to report to the Head, anyhow," said Gunner, and he walked on to the Head's study, leaving a buzz behind him.

"Off his rocker, bedad!" remarked Smythe of the Shell.

"Fairly off it!" said Peele of the Fourth. "He can't be goin' to spin a yarn like that to the Head! He's gone to the beak's study, though."

Gunner tapped at the Head's door and entered. Dr. Chisholm glanced at him, looking up from the entrancing pages of Euripides. He did not seem pleased.

"What is it, Gunner?"

"I thought I'd better mention to you, sir—"

"What—what?"

"That I've discovered the Rookwood treasure, sir."

"What?"

Euripides fell with a crash.

"Golden candlesticks and chalices and pieces of eight, sir," said Gunner. "I want you to witness that the stuff's mine, sir, if you don't mind. Of course, I'm prepared to hand over the Government's whack. And I should like you, sir, to accept fifty thousand pounds, with my kind regards, sir."

"Is this boy mad?" said Dr. Chisholm, addressing space, in a dazed sort of way.

"Really, sir—"

"If this is a childish jest, Gunner, I—"

"Seeing is believing, sir!" said Gunner calmly. "I shall be much obliged, sir, if you will come to the Abbey vaults and see the treasure."

"Have you been in the Abbey vaults, Gunner?"

"Yes, sir. I had a clue—"

"You have ventured to break the padlock?" thundered the Head.

"In the circumstances, sir, with a million pounds at stake—"

"Nonsense!"

"If you'll come and see it, sir—"

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet.

"I will certainly come and see any discovery you have made in the vaults,

Gunner. Afterwards I shall punish you for your temerity."

Gunner followed the Head rather sulkily. He felt that this was not the right way to treat a successful treasure-seeker, and he mentally reduced the Head's "whack" to a mere twenty-five thousand pounds. That was more than he deserved, Gunner thought.

There was a murmur as the Head came sweeping out of the School House, with Gunner at his heels. Gunner's amazing statement had spread already. The rumour that the Rookwood treasure was discovered was fairly blazing through the school. Jimmy Silver & Co. heard it as they came in after cricket, and they gasped.

"Who's discovered it?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Gunner!"

"Oh, Gunner!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Then I'll give twopence for the treasure—not more than that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jolly well going to see!" declared Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical was not the only one who wanted to see. Half the school followed on the trail as the Head and Gunner made for the Abbey ruins. Some fellows hurriedly fetched bike-lamps, guessing that the discovery had been made in the vaults. Three Modern juniors, who were strolling near the ruins, looked surprised at the sight of the crowd, and dismayed at the sight of the stately Head.

"What's this game, Silver?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, catching the captain of the Fourth by the arm.

"Gunner's discovered the giddy treasure—so he says!"

"But the Head—"

"He's taking the Head to see it."

"Taking the Head!" babbled Tommy Dodd. "Oh, my hat!"

"Who'd have thought that?" gasped Tommy Cook.

"He can't have dug up the giddy chest yet if he's taking the Head to see it!" ejaculated Tommy Doyle.

Jimmy Silver gave the three Moderns a very suspicious look.

"What do you fellows know about it?" he asked.

"Nothing that we're going to tell now that the Head's in it," grinned Tommy Dodd. "But that crass dummy— Oh, my hat!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. joined the crowd streaming into the Abbey ruins.

Gunner opened the door of the vaults, and retrieved his lamp and lighted it, politely lighting the Head's way in. With a grim countenance Dr. Chisholm strode into the vaults. Half a dozen seniors and a swarm of juniors pressed in behind.

"Well, Gunner," said the Head, in a grinding voice, "where is the treasure you speak of?"

"Here, sir!" Gunner picked up the spade. "You see what it says on the stone, sir? Dig."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough, sir?" demanded Gunner warmly. "I'll jolly soon turn it out, sir! I want you to be a witness that it is mine."

The Head gave him a glance that a basilisk might have envied.

"You may dig here, Gunner. If the Rookwood treasure really lies below—as I do not for one moment credit—I will excuse you. Otherwise, Gunner, I shall punish you severely. I am waiting."

Gunner, nothing daunted, plied the spade.

Evidently Gunner's announcement of the discovery of the treasure had been a little premature. It was not actually discovered yet—it was only a moral certainty. That moral certainty was good enough for Gunner; but the Head seemed a little difficult to satisfy. His face grew grimmer and grimmer, as Gunner turned out spadeful after spadeful of earth. There was a sudden crash as Gunner's spade struck something hard. A thrill ran through the watching crowd; even the Head started. A chip of wood flew from the end of the spade.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"Touched it, sir!" said Gunner cheerily. "I'll have it out in a minute or two now."

"You may proceed, Gunner," said the Head, and there was much less acerbity in his manner.

It was really striking and extraordinary for the spade to crash upon wood six inches below the surface of the earth, where it had been covered for centuries by the ancient flagstones.

Gunner shovelled away earth at a great rate. The Head signed to the crowd to keep back, but every neck was craned forward. Gunner cleared what was evidently the wooden lid of a box.

"The oaken chest, sir!" he announced.

"That wood does not look like oak," said the Head, peering into the excavation. "It appears to me to be common deal, and—and— Bless my soul! There are some letters on it—stencilled on it, apparently—"

"Something in dog-Latin, sir, written by the old monks—"

"S—U—G," the Head read out, in surprise. "Clear away that earth, Gunner. Ah, now I see the remainder. A—R! Upon my word! Sugar! It is a box that has contained sugar; and those stencilled letters are quite modern—undoubtedly modern. The wood, too, is in too complete a state of preservation to have remained long in the earth. If you have played a foolish practical joke upon me, Gunner—"

Gunner gasped.

Even he was astonished to find a cubical oaken box in the place of the expected oaken chest. He crashed the spade on it, smashing off the lid, with the intention of dazzling the Head into full belief by the sight of the golden candlesticks and chalices and pieces of eight. He fairly stuttered at the sight of the contents of the box. There were several half-bricks, and there was a quantity of cinders, and there was an old tomato-tin. The discovery was surprising, but not valuable. On top of the treasure lay a sheet of impot paper, and upon that sheet was daubed, in large capital letters:

**"CLASSICAL FATHEAD!
TRY AGAIN! BOW-WOW!"**

Dr. Chisholm stared at the paper as if he were mesmerised. Gunner blinked at it, and wondered if he was dreaming. Even Gunner could not suppose that that cheery message had been written by the ancient monks of Rookwood. The crowd craned forward to see it, and the message passed from mouth to mouth; and then the depths of the Abbey vaults echoed and re-echoed with an unaccustomed sound—a terrific yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Chisholm. "All of you disperse at once—immediately! Gunner, you will come with me!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Gunner, "I—I—I had the document—I— Oh, my hat! Those Modern rotters—"

"You have broken into the vaults against my commands, you have wasted

my time, you—you—" thundered the Head. "Have you anything to say for yourself, you incredibly stupid boy?"

"They—they must have known I was behind the tree. They'd got all this up to pull my leg; they—they—I—I—" babbled Gunner incoherently.

"Do not stammer senseless words at me in that ridiculous manner, Gunner. I shall cane you for this severely. You are the stupidest boy in the school. Follow me at once!"

The Head swept from the vaults. Peter Cuthbert Gunner followed him, looking like anything but a happy and successful treasure-hunter. The quad swarmed with chortling Rookwooders—only the Head and Gunner looked serious.

"The frightful ass!" said Tommy Dodd, wiping away his tears. "Fancy his yanking the Head into it; never even thought of that, you know."

"Just like Gunner!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell. "He would!"

"Oh, just!" said Jimmy Silver.

In the Head's study Peter Cuthbert Gunner nourished a faint hope that his intended generosity to the Head would have the effect of mitigating his punishment for wasting that gentleman's valuable time. After all, he had been going to give the Head fifty thousand pounds out of the treasure—if it had materialised. In common gratitude the Head couldn't fail to consider that, Gunner thought. True, the treasure hadn't materialised, but if it had—Gunner's considerations were cut short by the dread command:

"Hold out your hand!"

Judging by what followed, the Head was lacking in common gratitude. He swished just as if Gunner had never intended to give him fifty thousand pounds! Gunner felt that life was hardly worth living—especially to a treasure-hunter—as he crawled away to his study, and he found only a partial solace in punching Dickinson minor's head.

CHAPTER 25.

Jimmy Silver is Surprised!

"O H!"

Gunner jumped.

Never had a Rookwood fellow looked so startled as Peter Cuthbert Gunner did at that moment.

Yet there was nothing particularly startling in Jimmy Silver's face, as he looked into Gunner's study.

Jimmy's face was rather good-looking, in fact, and very good-natured and pleasant. Certainly there was nothing about it calculated to have such an effect on a fellow who saw it suddenly.

But undoubtedly Gunner was startled. Jimmy's glance seemed to have the same effect upon him as the Gorgon's glare upon its victims.

He ejaculated "Oh!" in startled tones, jumped up out of his chair, and his hand, holding a book, was hurriedly thrust behind him.

He blinked at the captain of the Fourth, his face growing very red.

Naturally, Jimmy Silver was surprised. He was not accustomed to his glance producing that effect upon fellows.

"What on earth's the matter?" he demanded.

"M-m-matter?" stammered Gunner.

"Yes, ass! What did you jump for?"

"J-j-jump?"

"Gone potty?" inquired Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

"Nunno!" gasped Gunner.

"Good! You hadn't far to go, if you'd started!"

"I—I—I—"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner began to recover himself a little. His hand, holding the book, was still behind him, as he faced Jimmy Silver. But Jimmy did not notice that specially. That Gunner was hiding a book from his view naturally did not occur to him—there was no reason why Gunner should do anything of the kind.

"The—the fact is—" stammered Gunner, "I—I—you—you—that is, you startled me."

"Well, you're a silly ass!" commented Jimmy Silver. "I suppose you didn't take me for a ghost, did you?"

Jimmy eyed him curiously. Gunner's face was still red, and he was obviously confused. If he had been smoking a cigarette, and a prefect of the Sixth had looked in, there would have been reason for his startled confusion. As it was, Jimmy could see no reason at all. Yet Gunner certainly looked as if he had been caught—or nearly caught—in something that he wished very much to conceal.

But Jimmy was not deeply interested. Gunner was a champion ass, anyhow, and

why he did things was a matter of little consequence. In his own estimation, Peter Cuthbert was a most important person. In the estimation of everybody else, his unimportance was absolutely without limit.

"W-w-what did you want?" asked Gunner.

"Nothing! I looked in to tell you that we're going down to cricket practice, and if you'd like to come, you may," said the captain of the Fourth. "You're the worst cricketer that ever was, and if you like, I can find time to give you a little coaching."

Gunner quite recovered himself at that. He sneered.

"Coaching—from you!" he said. "I like that!"

"Well, if you like it, come along!" said Jimmy. "I'll try to put you up to a wrinkle about bowling without braining all the field."

"You cheeky ass!" roared Gunner.

"What?"

"Is there a chap at Rookwood—even in the Sixth—who bowls as I do?" remanded Gunner hotly.

"No fear! Not even in the Second!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "I'll show you how to hold a bat, too, if you like."

"Talking about cricket," said Gunner, ruthlessly ignoring that kind offer, "are you going to play me in the Bagshot match?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

His laugh was echoed from the passage, where Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned into the study. The Fistical Four of the Fourth seemed greatly tickled by Gunner's question.

"If you're not," said Gunner, "don't talk cricket to me! Coach me! Ha, ha! Why, I could give Bulkeley of the Sixth tips about cricket!"

"Don't be funny, old chap!" urged Jimmy Silver. "Come down and get some practice, and try to pick up the game."

Gunner waved his hand at him. "I don't want any more of your cheek!" he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm going to play in the Bagshot match next week."

"Are the Form going to sack Jimmy, and elect you skipper in his place?" chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"They might do worse," said Gunner contemptuously; "in fact, they do worse already. Why the fellows keep Silver in the job, I can't imagine. Sheer fatheaded-

ness, I suppose. I've offered to stand for election, and nobody backs me—except Dickinson minor. Dickinson minor is the only chap in the Fourth with the brains of a gnat!"

"The only chap who shares your study, and has to pull your leg to keep you quiet, you mean!" grinned Raby.

"But the time will come!" said Gunner. "After I've shown the fellows what I can do, in the Bagshot match, you won't be able to keep me out of the team for the big fixtures, Silver!"

"But you're not in the Bagshot match!" said Newcome, staring at him.

"I'm going to be!"

"How's that?" asked Jimmy Silver curiously. "As you can't play up to Second Form style, you're not likely to be picked to play for the School. How are you going to manage it?"

"There are ways and means!" said Gunner mysteriously.

"Well, what are they?" asked Jimmy, really wondering whether Peter Cuthbert Gunner was wandering in his mind. The way Gunner played cricket was really almost enough to inspire doubts of his sanity; and his present remarks were really extraordinary.

"That's telling!" said Gunner. "I decline to explain—but if you won't do the right thing, Silver, you'll be made. I shall exert my power."

Jimmy regarded him reflectively.

"I suppose you're trying to pull my leg, somehow," he said. "If not, you'd better see a doctor, Gunner. Why they sent you to Rookwood instead of Colney Hatch is a puzzle to me. Are you coming down to practice or not?"

"I don't need the practice you fellows do. You'll find me all right on Bagshot day."

"Shall we bump him before we go?" asked Lovell, looking round at his comrades.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Not worth the trouble," he said. "Come on!"

The Fistical Four walked away down the Fourth Form passage.

Gunner shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and closed the door.

Then his hidden book came into view again. Gunner looked at it and grinned.

"My hat, that was a near thing!" he

muttered. "Jolly nearly caught! If Silver had seen this—phew!"

With which mysterious observation Peter Cuthbert Gunner sat down and opened his book, and began to read and study it with a deep and absorbed attention that he never bestowed upon his lessons.

CHAPTER 27.

Alarming!

JIMMY SILVER looked rather thoughtful as he came out of the School House with his chums.

And Jimmy was beginning to wonder whether Gunner really was weak in the head. His manner, and his remarks had been so very queer.

Dickinson minor, who had the doubtful privilege of being Gunner's study-mate in No. 7, was coming off the cricket-ground as Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived there. Jimmy called to him. Dickinson was an inoffensive youth, who contrived to keep peace in the study by pulling Peter Cuthbert's leg to any extent that Peter Cuthbert required, which was a very great extent.

"Have you noticed anything queer about Gunner lately?" Jimmy Silver asked.

Dickinson minor grinned.

"Same as usual," he answered—"more than usual, in fact. Are you going to play him against Bagshot?"

"No jolly fear!"

"He says he's going to play; that's his latest," said Dickinson minor.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"He's not a bad chap, you know," said Dickinson, who really was rather attached to his burly study-mate. "He can't help being an ass. But he seems to think he's going to play Bagshot; he seems to think he's got some way of making you put him in the team. It's queer, I know."

"Jolly queer," said Jimmy. "He's just been talking out of his hat in a very odd way. Is he getting up to some trick or other?"

"Blessed if I know. He's got a book that he's always reading, and he won't show it to me," said Dickinson minor. "I keep on finding him mugging into it, but he won't even let me see the title. Can't be a lesson-book, or he wouldn't want to read it. Except for that, he doesn't seem a bigger idiot than usual."

"A book!" repeated Jimmy. "Well, there's no harm in that. Come to think of it, he was hiding something when I looked into his study. If that's all, there's no harm."

Jimmy joined his chums on the cricket-ground, dismissing Gunner from his mind.

Dickinson minor went on to the School House. It was past tea-time, and Dickinson wanted his tea. Tea in Study No. 7 was always a lavish spread; that was one of Gunner's good qualities.

There was no sign of tea when Dickinson minor came into his study, and clumped his bat down in a corner. Gunner gave a start as he came in, and slipped a book into his pocket, but that did not surprise Dickinson. He had seen Gunner do that a dozen times at least during the past week. Any other fellow acting in that way would have excited curiosity, but nobody expected Gunner to act like any other fellow. Gunner had manners and customs of his own.

"What about tea?" asked Dickinson affably.

"Tea!" said Gunner. "Is it tea-time?"

Dickinson was a little surprised at that. Gunner had a healthy appetite, and he was generally acutely conscious of meal-times.

"Well, never mind tea," said Gunner absently. "That cheeky ass Silver has been here, Dick. He persists that he's not going to play me against Bagshot next week. Just because he's junior captain, you know."

"The captain generally decides these questions, doesn't he?" murmured Dickinson minor.

"Not where I'm concerned," said Gunner loftily. "I hope you don't look on me as an ordinary member of a fag Form, Dickinson. If the Head had any sense, I should be in the Fifth. I fully expected to be put in the Fifth when I came. You see, as the matter stands, I'm in the Fourth, but not of them. Catch on?"

"Ye-es. What about tea?"

"Fortunately," continued Gunner, "I have the power in my hands to make Silver do the right thing. I'm not going to explain to you at present, Dick; but I have power in my hands—great power."

"Have—have you, really?" said Dickinson feebly.

"Enormous power!" said Gunner impressively.

"Oh!"

"If I liked," said Gunner, "I could make the Head put me in the Fifth—or the Sixth, for that matter."

"C-o-could you?"

"Yes. I may do that, later. By Jove, I could make the governors appoint me Head of Rookwood, if I chose!"

Dickinson minor blinked at him. He was thinking about tea, but he decided to keep near the door. Gunner in this mood was a little alarming.

Gunner, deep in his own thoughts, did not notice Dickinson. He began to walk about the study in suppressed excitement.

"It's a great responsibility," he said.

"Wha-a-at is?" murmured Dickinson.

"This enormous power that is in my hands. Fancy being able to make the Head jazz across the quad by lifting my finger?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I could do it," said Gunner—"easily! Of course, I wouldn't!"

"N-n-no!" gasped Dickinson. "I—I—I shouldn't, old chap."

"Trust me not to do anything of the kind," said Gunner. "I've got a sense of responsibility, with enormous power in my hands; I am going to use it with discretion. It came quite by chance, too. I just bought that book out of curiosity, never dreaming that it would reveal this tremendous gift that I possess."

Dickinson put his hand behind him and unlatched the door. He felt safer with an avenue of retreat open.

"Now," continued the unconscious Gunner. "I've studied the matter thoroughly, and I'm fairly well satisfied. But I must make an experiment, to make assurance doubly sure. I'm going to experiment on you, old chap!"

"Eh?"

"Sit in that chair," said Gunner automatically.

Dickinson trembled. Before he could make up his mind to bolt, Gunner grabbed him by the shoulder, jerked him to the chair, and sat him into it with a bump.

"Keep quite still," said Gunner.

"Ow! Yes. A-a-anything you like, old fellow."

Dickinson watched Gunner as if fascinated. Gunner's next proceedings were still more alarming.

He raised both hands, and advanced towards Dickinson, with a steady, stony glare in his eyes, fixed on Dickinson's face.

It was too much for the alarmed junior.

With a yell of terror, Dickinson leaped out of the chair, knocking it over backwards, and sprang for the door.

He tore the door open, darted into the passage, and fled.

Gunner stood dumbfounded for a moment; then he jumped to the door and yelled:

"Dickinson! Come back, you chump! Do you hear?"

If Dickinson minor heard, he did not heed. He was vanishing down the staircase.

"The silly ass!" ejaculated Gunner. "I almost believe that chap is potty! What's the matter with him, I wonder? He didn't even know that I was going to mesmerise him. Now I can't make my experiment." Gunner frowned. "I shall have to find somebody else! It's very annoying—I can't let out the secret of my immenso power, or Silver will be on his guard, and I may not be able to get him under the influence next week. It's dashed annoying! But I've got to put it to the test somehow."

And Peter Cuthbert Gunner, feeling very exasperated, quitted Study No. 7 in search of a victim.

CHAPTER 28.

Gunner Tries it On!

"HALLO, Gunner! Trot this way!" called out Jimmy Silver cheerily.

The burly figure of Peter Cuthbert Gunner appeared on the cricket field, and Jimmy hailed him. Jimmy had been batting, and now he was taking a rest and keeping an eye on the other juniors. He concluded from Gunner's arrival that P. C. Gunner had decided on some practice after all; and Jimmy was generously prepared to help that hopeless dud master the elements of the game.

The way Gunner played cricket was, Jimmy considered, a disgrace to the Classical Fourth. It was worth some trouble to make him a little less of a dud at the great summer game.

But Gunner did not respond to the

invitation in the spirit in which it was given.

"Want some coaching?" he asked.

"Fatead!"

"Offering me some?" jeered Gunner.

"Teach your grandmother, Jimmy Silver!"

And Gunner walked on regardless. Evidently he had not come down for practice after all.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. He was not very keen on wasting his time on Gunner, anyhow. And he had plenty to do, licking his team into shape for the forthcoming Bagshot match.

Gunner sat down by the pavilion and looked about him. The cricket field was a busy scene, and of the fellows who were standing about none paid any attention to Gunner. That youth had mightier matters than cricket in his mind. He had looked for Dickinson minor, and looked in vain. His study-mate, for reasons known to himself, did not want to meet Gunner, much as Gunner wanted to meet him. Some other victim had to be found for the wonderful experiment Peter Cuthbert was bent upon. Gunner felt that it was time he got down to business. For over a week he had been studying deeply that wonderful little book he had picked up for half-a-crown—"Mesmerism Simplified"—and by this time Gunner felt that he had the whole bags of tricks, as it were, at his fingertips.

After a glance round him to ascertain that he was not closely observed, Gunner slipped the book from his pocket, and opened it.

"Mesmerism Simplified" was its title, and it was quite a small book—not much of it for half-a-crown, unless the quality made up for the lack of quantity.

Perhaps it did. Gunner firmly believed that it did, anyhow. He had read in that little book that with a powerful personality, an iron will, and inflexible determination, it was easy to master the noble science of mesmerism, or hypnotism, and thus acquire a power which kings and emperors might envy.

The thought of being envied by kings and emperors was rather flattering to Gunner.

According to the book, so was the very fellow for it; for he had a powerful personality, an iron will, and an inflexible

determination—at all events, he believed that he had.

By fixing a quelling eye upon the destined victim, and making certain passes with his hands, it was possible for a powerful personality like Gunner's to reduce the victim to a state of helpless obedience, so that he would submit to any command without even knowing what he was doing.

Gunner had practised those weird passes in the privacy of his study, sometimes even locking out Dickinson minor for the purpose.

Now he had mastered them. As for fixing the victim with a quelling eye, that was nothing to Gunner.

Like Hamlet's respected pater, he had an eye like Mars to threaten and command—or supposed that he had! More than once he had tried a quelling glare upon Dickinson minor, and that youth had shown decided signs of uneasiness. Gunner did not know that Dickinson's uneasiness was due to an alarmed surprise that he, Gunner, was going off his rocker. Gunner was not likely to guess that.

Gunner hastily consulted his book, for the last time, before he proceeded to put the theory into practice. All was familiar to him—his deep study had told. He was a master of that occult science of hypnotism—so far as he could master it from the book. It only remained to put it to the test.

George Raby came off the field and dropped into a canvas chair near Gunner. The latter slipped his book into his pocket at once. It was strictly necessary that his secret should not be known. When Jimmy Silver, the following week, put Gunner into the eleven for Bagshot nobody was to suspect that he was doing it under the weird influence of mesmerism.

Raby glanced at Gunner and grinned. Fellows often did grin when they glanced at Gunner. But the new junior was serious—not to say solemn.

"Not playing cricket, old top?" yawned Raby.

"No! Keep silent."

"Potty?" asked Raby pleasantly.

"Silence!"

Raby gave a shrug, and turned his glance away to the cricket field. Kit Erroll was at the wicket, and Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth was giving him some bowling. Raby watched.

"Look at me!" Gunner snapped out.

"Oh, dry up, ass!" said Raby. "I've got only one pair of eyes, and I don't want to damage them on your features."

"Look at me."

In sheer astonishment Raby looked at him. Gunner rose and stood before the junior. His eyes were fixed on Raby, with a deadly, stony glare in them—a quelling glance, if Raby had only known it.

As Raby blinked at him in utter amazement, Gunner raised his hands and made several passes.

Raby's astonishment grew. He blinked at Gunner, wondering whether he was dreaming. Unless the fellow were mad, Raby saw no explanation of these extraordinary antics.

"Sleep!" said Gunner in a stern voice.

"Sleep!" repeated Raby blankly.

"Sleep—in the middle of the afternoon. What do you mean?"

Gunner looked disappointed. After that stony stare, and the passes he had made, the injunction to sleep ought to have been obeyed, according to the half-crown's worth of knowledge he had absorbed. The patient should have closed his eyelids heavily and sunk into the mesmeric trance. But there was a hitch somewhere, for Raby's eyes opened to their very fullest extent in blank astonishment.

"Don't you feel a swimming sort of feeling?" asked Gunner.

"Swimming!" said Raby faintly.

"Yes. Sort of floating in space."

"Puf-fuf-floating in space?"

"Yes, don't you?"

"No, I jolly well don't!" said Raby. He took a grip on the handle of his bat. "Is this a new game, Gunner, or are you off your silly onion?"

Gunner made more passes. Raby did not even know that they were hypnotic passes; he was utterly ignorant of the enormous power acquired by Gunner for half-a-crown. He gripped his bat.

"Sleep!" commanded Gunner.

This time, surely, the effect should have been produced. But it wasn't! Instead of falling into a dreamy, passive state, George Raby suddenly became extremely active. He jumped out of the chair, with his bat in his hands, and jumped at Gunner.

Prod!

Gunner caught the business end of the bat with his chest, and sat down with a heavy bump, and roared,

"Yaroooop!"

"That for making faces at me!" growled Raby. "Now, you go on playing the giddy ox, and I'll give you another!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Gunner.

Raby walked away indignantly, and Gunner sat and blinked after him. The experiment had been a failure. Even Peter Cuthbert Gunner could not doubt that.

He scrambled up, greatly inclined to pursue Raby and exact vengeance for that prod. But he restrained his wrath. It was no time for rowing with the Fistical Four. Evidently he wanted a little more practice with the hypnotic passes, or else with the quelling glance. Raby, instead of yielding to the occult influence, had only absurdly supposed that Gunner was making faces at him!

"Let 'em wait!" gasped Gunner. "I'll show 'em! Wait-till I've had just a bit more practice. I'll show 'em! When I get fairly going, and wield my terrible and enormous power——"

That reflection consoled Gunner. He walked away, to put in a little more practice. He needed only a little, he was convinced of that, before he became an autocrat before whom Lenin and Trotsky might have trembled. He was satisfied that Raby did not suspect that he had been nearly mesmerised.

Which was quite correct. Raby did not suspect that.

"That chap Gunner's fairly dotty!" Raby told Jimmy Silver. "What do you think he was doing? Waving his paws at me, and telling me to go to sleep. What do you think of that?"

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He did," said Raby. "And he asked me if I felt myself floating into space."

"Great Scott!"

"Poor chap!" said Lovell. "He must be getting quite rocky in the crumet. I wonder if we ought to mention it to Mr. Dalton. He ought to see a doctor."

"Blessed if I catch on," said Jimmy Silver, puzzled. "He's jolly queer. If this goes on, something will have to be done."

"Look at him now!" breathed Newcome.

The Fistical Four stared. At a little distance Peter Cuthbert Gunner had halted, and he was waving his hands in the air in a most extraordinary manner,

as if brushing imaginary flies away. For several minutes Gunner did that before going on his way, and the chums of the Fourth watched him spellbound.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Lovell.

And Jimmy Silver began really to feel alarmed for the unfortunate Gunner, who was evidently going the way that might have been expected, from the way he played cricket.

CHAPTER 29.

A Startling Success!

DICKINSON minor hesitated.

He hung round the door of No. 7 in the Fourth, hesitating long.

He was in a most painful position. It was time for prep, and Dickinson minor hadn't even had his tea. He had missed tea in Hall while at cricket, counting on a lavish spread in his study. Missing tea was bad enough; but he couldn't miss prep. Prep had to be done in the study. And Peter Cuthbert Gunner was in the study!

So long as old Gunny only babbled and waved his hands and told fellows to go to sleep, it didn't matter; but suppose he should get dangerous! That was what worried Dickinson. Suppose he got at the poker before a fellow could get out of the study!

Dickinson minor had good cause for hesitation. Belated tea and prep drew him to the study; but being shut up with Gunner was no joke, in the present state of Gunner's powerful brain.

The hapless Dickinson was still hesitating when the study door opened, and Gunner looked out.

"Oh! Here you are!" he exclaimed.

"H h-here I am," said Dickinson, with a feeble smile. He backed away a pace. But Gunner, he decided, did not look dangerous. He looked very impatient, but that was all.

"Wondered what on earth had become of you," said Gunner. "Come into the study. I want you."

He stepped back into the room, and Dickinson, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, followed him in. He decided to keep the door open. But Gunner strode to it and shut it.

Dickinson felt a cold thrill run down

his spine, as Gunner stood with his back to the door. He debated in his mind wildly whether he should yell for help.

"Now," said Gunner.

"W-what about tea, old chap?" murmured Dickinson. "It—it—it's late."

"I've had my tea."

"I haven't—"

"Never mind that. I want you to help me, Dickinson. I'm going to tell you the secret," said Gunner impressively.

"You're going to help me with the experiment. You can have tea when we've finished; lots of stuff in the cupboard. I'm going to tell you the secret of my enormous power, old fellow."

"Oh, dear!" moaned Dickinson.

"I told you I could make the Head jazz across the quad, if I liked," said Gunner.

"I told you I'm going to make Jimmy Silver put me in the eleven for Bagshot next week. You remember?"

"Ye-e-es. I—I say, Gunner, hadn't you better go and lie down for a bit," suggested Dickinson weakly.

"Lie down? What for?"

"Then it may pass off."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Dickinson. But it doesn't matter, anyhow. Sit down!"

Dickinson minor dropped rather than sat in a chair. He pushed its back against the study wall. Not for the wealth of Golconda would Dickinson have allowed Gunner to get behind him just then.

"You haven't guessed?" asked Gunner.

"N-n-no."

"You wouldn't! I should have guessed in your place," said Gunner, with a touch of friendly scorn. "But you haven't my brain."

"Thank goodness!" said Dickinson minor fervently.

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—"

"I've been taking up mesmerism," said Gunner. "It's called hypnotism, too. I've mastered it."

"Wha-a-a-a-t?"

Dickinson minor opened his eyes.

"By fixing a fellow with my quelling eye, and making certain passes, I can reduce him to a state of unconscious helplessness," said Gunner. "That's mesmerism."

"Oh!" ejaculated Dickinson. "Then you're not mad?"

"What?" roared Gunner.

"I—I thought—I—I mean—"

"Don't be a fool, Dickinson! I'm going to mesmerise you now, as practice. I won't make you jump out of the window—What are you grinning at, you dummy?"

"W-w-was I grinning?"

"Keep serious, and don't be a grinning ape," said Gunner. "This isn't a laughing matter. Why, there you go again! Fix your eyes on mine!"

"Yes, old top!" murmured Dickinson. Dickinson was feeling a great sense of relief. He didn't mind old Gunny playing the goat, if it amused him. He was only too glad that Gunner wasn't mad, as he had feared. He could be as big a fool as he liked, Dickinson thought; that didn't matter so much. He did not state his thoughts to Gunner. That would have led to a serious case of assault and battery in Study No. 7.

"Now, I'm going to put the occult influence on you," said Gunner. "I shall only make you believe you're a rabbit and run round the study on your hands and knees. You won't be hurt. Do stop grinning, for goodness' sake! There's nothing to snigger at. Now!"

Gunner began to make passes. He made passes for several minutes, and all the time his quelling eyes were fixed on Dickinson.

Dickinson made heroic efforts not to laugh, or even to smile. Gunner was in deadly earnest, and it was no time for merriment. For several minutes Dickinson minor endured his ordeal, and kept a straight face.

"Sleep!" commanded Gunner at last.

"Don't feel sleepy."

"Sure?"

"Quite."

The passes recommenced.

"Feel sort of floating in space?" asked Gunner.

"No."

"Sort of dreamy, helpless feeling?"

"No."

"Look here, Dickinson, you're setting yourself against the influence," said Gunner. "I don't want to row with a thug, but if you try to spoil this experiment, of course, I shall jolly well lick you."

Gunner was getting cross.

"Now, can you sleep?" he asked, after some more passes.

"No."

"Better give it me straight," said

Gunner in a tone of menace. "I don't want any fooling. What do you feel like now?"

"Hungry," said Dickinson.

Gunner gave a snort of disgust.

"Thinking about your blessed tea, while I'm trying to work an important experiment!" he exclaimed. "That's the sort of dummy you are, is it? Well, I can jolly well tell you that you won't have any tea till I've carried through this experiment successfully. Fix your eyes on mine."

"Oh, dear!" said Dickinson minor.

Dickinson was conscious of an aching void within. The thought of not getting his tea until Gunner had succeeded as a hypnotist was dismaying. There was only one resource—Dickinson's usual resource when he found Gunner too overpowering. Peter Cuthbert simply asked to have his leg pulled.

More passes. Gunner's quelling glance was now a deadly, stony, threatening glare. He was determined, and he was angry, and half inclined to interrupt the seance by giving Dickinson minor a terrific hiding. Dickinson knew the danger-signals.

"Sleep!" said Gunner, almost ferociously.

To his delight, Dickinson minor's eyelids drooped.

"I knew I could do it!" murmured Gunner. "But the proof of the pudding's in the eating. I've actually done it now. Jolly lucky for some fellows that I've got a sense of responsibility, along with enormous and terrible power. Poor old Dickinson. He's smiling in his sleep. Wake up, Dickinson!"

Dickinson's eyes opened.

"Now, Dickinson, you're utterly under my influence, and have no will of your own," said Gunner. "Your personality is merged in mine. There's only one will between us, and that's my will. You are a rabbit, Dickinson. Now, what are you?"

"A—a rabbit!" answered Dickinson minor.

"Go round the study on all-fours."

Dickinson minor dropped on his hands and knees, and went round the study thus. Gunner watched him with glowing satisfaction.

"That settles it! You can get up, Dickinson." Gunner made a series of reverse passes. "Now, come to! I command

you! You're Dickinson minor again. The influence is off!"

Dickinson minor passed his hand over his brow. He felt that that was the proper thing to do in the circumstances.

"Where am I?" he asked dramatically.

"In the study, old fellow," said Gunner kindly. "It's all right. You've been mesmerised, and going on all-fours. I made you believe you were a rabbit. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Dickinson, glad that he could laugh at last.

"You looked no end funny, thinking you were a rabbit!" chuckled Gunner.

"D-d-did I?"

"You did, old fellow. How do you feel now?"

"Hungry."

"You can have your tea now, old chap. The experiment's finished. I'm satisfied."

Dickinson minor was glad that Gunner was satisfied—glad, too, that he was so easy to satisfy. He proceeded to transfer the good things from the study cupboard to the table, and to satisfy himself. He felt that he had earned his tea.

"Pile in, old chap," said Gunner. "You've helped me in your small way, you know. The mouse and the lion over again—what? Of course, I knew that I had this great power, but now I've proved it. Just think, Dicky! Next week when I put the influence on Jimmy Silver I'm going into the cloven for Bagshot. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed Dickinson minor.

Gunner, in high feather, walked about the study, almost crowing with satisfaction. And Dickinson minor, as he made an ample tea, could only wonder what would happen when the egregious Gunner attempted to put the "influence" on Jimmy Silver!

CHAPTER 30.

Not Quite a Success!

It was the day before the Bagshot match.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were finishing tea in the end study when Gunner looked in. The Fistical Four all smiled to see him. Gunner, and his claims to play in the Bagshot match, appealed to the sense of humour of all the Fourth Form at Rookwood. How a fellow, who fancied himself at cricket, could play so

badly as Gunner did, was a deep mystery to the Rookwood juniors; and how he could continue to fancy himself at the game in the circumstances was a still deeper mystery.

"Trot in, old top!" said Arthur Edward Lovell cheerily. "Tell us something about cricket."

"What's the difference between a wicket and a wicket-keeper, Gunner?" asked Raby.

"Gunner hasn't got that far," said Newcome. "Ask him something easier."

Gunner frowned.

"I didn't come here to talk silly rot!" he said.

"You didn't?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Then you'd better keep mum, old top. If you say anything, you'd do what you didn't come here to do."

"I want a private interview with you, Silver."

Jimmy stared.

"I mean it," said Gunner. "It's very important. The winning of the Bagshot match may depend on it."

"Wha-a-at?"

The Fistical Four blinked at Gunner.

"You've got something to tell me about the match?" said Jimmy Silver, utterly mystified.

"And why can't we hear it?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"What utter rot!" remarked Raby.

"Look here, Silver, I tell you it's important," said Gunner. "I want only a few minutes, but I must see you alone."

"My only hat!"

Jimmy looked at his chums. Why Gunner should want a private interview was a puzzle, but there was no special reason why he shouldn't have it if he wanted it. Lovell grinned, and rose to his feet.

"Gunner thinks he may be able to persuade you to put him into the team when your kind uncles ain't looking after you," remarked Arthur Edward. "If you do, Jimmy, we'll lynch you!"

"If I do, I shall deserve to be lynched," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "No danger of that."

Tea being finished, the Co. strolled out of the study. They had been going out, anyway. Gunner closed the door carefully after them. Jimmy had risen, too. He was going down to the cricket ground

with his chums—when he was done with Gunner.

"Cut it short!" he remarked.

"Sit down!"

"What for?"

"It's necessary."

"Look here, I can't waste a lot of time, Gunner," said the captain of the Fourth. "Come to the point, and be sharp."

However, Jimmy Silver obligingly sat down again.

Gunner stood before him. The hour had come. Gunner recalled to mind the instructions in "Mesmerism Simplified," which he had studied so deeply, and with such profit.

Jimmy's eyes opened with with amazement as Gunner fixed a stony glare upon him. Then Gunner's hands came up, and he proceeded to make passes—mesmeric passes.

Jimmy Silver did not know that they were mesmeric passes. He did not even think of anything of the kind.

So far as he could see, Gunner was understudying the celebrated gentleman who was "washing his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water."

Jimmy's stare grew wider.

A fellow who glared into your eyes and waved his hands about in front of your face for no ostensible reason could not be supposed to be in possession of all his senses.

Jimmy Silver pushed his chair back and doubled his fists ready to tackle Gunner if he grew violent.

"Keep still!" snapped Gunner.

"Are you potty?" yelled Jimmy,

"Sleep!"

"What?" shrieked the captain of the Fourth.

"Sleep!"

Jimmy Silver did not obey that command. He shoved his chair back farther and leaped to his feet.

He was really alarmed now.

"Keep off, you potty chump!" he shouted, as Gunner advanced. "I don't want to hurt you, but if you come nearer I'll knock you down!"

"Sit down!" yelled Gunner.

"Let me pass, you maniac!" yelled Jimmy, digging round Gunner towards the door.

Gunner grasped him. His victim was not to escape him like this before the fluence was on.

Jimmy hit out at once from the shoulder. There was a crash as Gunner stretched out on the floor.

He gave a roar as he landed there.

In another second Jimmy Silver had torn open the door and was in the passage.

He was a good deal excited and alarmed. Jimmy Silver feared no foe in the ordinary way, but being shut up alone in the study with a maniac was no joke.

Gunner sat up dazedly. He groped for his nose, which felt as if it wasn't there, and spluttered.

"Ow! Ow! Wow!"

Jimmy Silver started down the passage at a run. His idea was to cut down to Mr. Dalton's study, and acquaint the master of the Fourth Form with Gunner's alarming state, so that the unhappy fellow could be looked after and seen by a doctor.

Dickinson minor jumped out of the doorway of Study No. 7, and caught Jimmy by the arm.

"What's happened?" he gasped.

"Don't stop me!" panted Jimmy Silver. "Gunner's gone mad!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He may do himself mischief if he's

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not put under control. Let go my arm, you ass! I'm going to the Form-master!"

Dickinson minor wriggled hysterically.

"Hold on! He's not mad——"

"He's as mad as a hatter! He was glaring at me and waving his hands in my face——"

"Ha, ha! Hold on, I tell you! I'll explain. For goodness' sake, don't go to Mr. Dalton! It's all right; only a game!" gasped Dickinson. "He's told me not to tell, but I'd better now. Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver paused.

"What do you mean?" he demanded gruffly.

"I'll explain. Let's get away in case Gunner——"

"Come down with me, then," said Jimmy Silver.

The two juniors went down the passage together to the stairs, Jimmy in a state of doubt and amazement.

It was several minutes later that Gunner came out of the end study with his handkerchief to his nose. But he was not thinking about Jimmy Silver, or even the Bagshot match. His nose required attention—careful attention—and Gunner headed for the nearest bath-room, where for quite a long time he was busy bathing his nose.

CHAPTER 31.

Gunner's Latest!

LOVELL and Raby and Newcome were waiting downstairs for their study leader. They looked at him inquiringly when he came down with Dickinson minor.

"Well?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"He's potty!" Jimmy Silver explained.

"Started the maddest antics in the study. I had to knock him down and bolt!"

"Great Scott!"

"I've seen this coming on," said Raby, with a shake of the head. "It's getting pretty serious."

"Dalton ought to be told," said Newcome.

"He's going to be told," said Jimmy. "Gunner wants looking after badly. Grimacing and waving his hand at me, with a peculiar glare in his eyes, and telling me to go to sleep."

"He he, he!" cackled Dickinson.

"Laughing matter, Dickinson!"

said Lovell sternly. "He's your chum, too!"

Dickinson chuckled spasmodically.

"He's not mad!" he breathed. "I know it looks like it. I thought so at first, but he isn't! He's a mesmerist!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Which?"

The Fistical Four blinked at Dickinson. If Dickinson had told them that Gunner was an anthropophagist, or one of those peculiar gentlemen whom Othello met in his travels, whose heads did grow beneath their shoulder, the chums could not have been more astonished.

"A—a—a mesmerist!" repeated Jimmy Silver faintly.

"That's it! He's got a book on it, and he thinks he's got it pat!" murmured Dickinson. "Fathead, you know! He can't help being a fathead! He mesmerised me in the study——"

"You!"

"Yes; told me I was a rabbit!"

"Great pip! Did you believe it?"

"Well, not exactly," said Dickinson cautiously. "You see, I wasn't really mesmerised. But Gunner wouldn't let me have tea till he'd done it, so—so—so——"

"So you pulled his leg?"

"Well, yes! How's a fellow to get on with Gunner without pulling his leg?" said Dickinson defensively.

"By punching his head!" suggested Lovell.

"Well, I can't punch his head; he's too hefty. Besides, I like the old chap; he's a good sort in his way. He stands magnificent spreads in the study!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Than which there is no higher praise!" he remarked.

"Well, you see——"

"I see that you think more of the flesh-pots of Egypt than of the frozen truth!" said Jimmy Silver. "You've no right to take Gunner in like that!"

"Well, I wouldn't," said Dickinson. "But he asks to have his leg pulled; he fairly sits up and begs for it. Well, that's how it is. He thinks he can mesmerise, and he's going to mesmerise you, Jimmy, and make you put him in the Bagshot eleven!"

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"So that's it!" he stuttered.

"That's it."

"He he ha!" roared Lovell.

The Fistical Four shrieked. The discovery that Gunner wasn't insane was a relief; but the discovery that he was a mesmerist, endowed—in his own imagination—with fearful and irresistible powers, took the Fourth-Formers by storm.

They roared till the tears ran down their faces. They were used to Gunner, but this was unusually rich even for Gunner.

"Oh, dear!" sobbed Jimmy Silver at last. "Gunner will be the death of me some day!"

"Don't tell him I told you," implored Dickinson. "Just bump him when he tries it on. That will meet the case."

"Oh, we won't tell him," said Jimmy. "Set your feeble little mind at rest."

"Will the howling ass try it on again," said Lovell, "after coming a mucker, as he's just done?"

"Let him try it on again!" said Jimmy. "Now I know what the burbling jabber-wock is at. I'll pull his silly leg. I'll let him think the 'fluence is on—right up to the time we play Bagshot. That will give him a lesson for his silly check!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And with that Jimmy Silver & Co. left Dickinson, and went on to the cricket field, still chortling.

CHAPTER 32.

Under the 'Fluence!

"SILVER!"
"Hallo, Gunner!"
Jimmy Silver's tone was quite merry and bright.

It was the following day, and dinner had just finished at Rookwood. Most of the juniors were thinking about the Bagshot match. Pankley & Co., of Bagshot, were expected at Rookwood quite early in the afternoon.

Gunner was thinking about it as much as anybody. Time was getting very close now, and the 'fluence was not yet on.

During the previous evening Gunner had looked for chances without finding them, and the amateur hypnotist hadn't been able to get to work.

Quite unknown to Gunner, Jimmy intended to give him a chance. Pulling Gunner's egregious leg was entertaining,

but the captain of the Fourth hadn't too much time to waste on the entertainment.

"I want to speak to you," said Gunner. "Come into the Common-room, will you?"

"Certainly."

Jimmy followed Gunner into the junior Common-room, which was deserted at that time of the day.

"Sit down, old chap," said Gunner.

Jimmy sat down.

Gunner stood before him, just as he had done in the study the previous day. But this time Jimmy Silver showed no signs of restiveness. He seemed like clay in the hands of the potter.

Gunner fixed his eyes on Jimmy's, with a steady, fixed glare.

"The fact is, Silver," said Gunner, "I'm doing some new gymnastics—wrist exercises, in fact, and I'd like you to see them. Just sit still and watch for a few minutes, will you?"

"Go ahead, old chap!" said Jimmy.

"This is quite interesting!"

"More interesting than you think, perhaps!" said Gunner. "Just you watch me!"

With his eyes fixed on Jimmy's, he started the mesmeric passes. His large hands waved and wove patterns before Jimmy's eyes.

To his delight, Jimmy's eyelids began to droop.

Gunner had been washing his hands in invisible soap in imperceptible water for only a couple of minutes, when the captain of the Fourth displayed unmistakable signs of drowsiness.

In three minutes his eyes had closed.

"Sleep!" said Gunner in a thrilling voice.

Jimmy snored.

Gunner almost gasped. Of course, he had known that he could do it; he had not had any doubts about that. Still, it was a thrilling moment when the amateur hypnotist saw his victim helpless before him—his will merged in Gunner's, as it were, the slave of the master-mind.

"Open your eyes!" commanded Gunner.

Jimmy Silver's eyes opened.

"Now," said Gunner in a deep, impressive voice, "you're under the influence, Jimmy Silver—the slave of my will. Understand?"

"Yes," said Jimmy drowsily.

"You have to obey my orders."

"Yes."

"Stand up!"

Jimmy Silver stood up.

"Now stand on one leg!"

Jimmy Silver stood on one leg.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner almost crowed with delight. Evidently the captain of the Fourth was the slave of his powerful personality.

"By George," murmured Gunner aloud. "This beats it! Way, after this, I'll mesmerise Bulkeley of the Sixth, and make him put me in the First Eleven, and win matches for Rookwood. I'll mesmerise the Head, and make him put me in the Fifth Form—dash it all, no, in the Sixth! It's a curious thing that they grin under the 'fluence. Dickinson minor did just the same, and now Silver's doing it. Affects the muscles of the face somehow, I dare say. Lucky for some people that I'm a chap of high principles, and only mean to use this terrible power for good things!"

Jimmy was still standing on one leg, the slave of the hypnotist's will!

"Now, Silver," said Gunner, "your name's not Silver at all. Your name's Higgins. Now what's your name?"

"Higgins," said Jimmy.

"Good! Now you're a cat!"

"Miaou-au-iau!" mewed Jimmy Silver.

Gunner fairly chortled with satisfaction. He was putting his victim to severe tests, and all of them were successful.

"Now you're a tiger!" said Gunner gloatingly. "What are you?"

"A tiger!" said Jimmy Silver.

And Jimmy, apparently in the belief that he was a tiger, made a sudden spring at Gunner. The mesmerist went with a crash to the floor, taken quite by surprise, and Jimmy clawed at him ruthlessly, as undoubtedly a real tiger would have done.

"Yaroooh!" roared Gunner. "Oh, my hat! Gerroff! Oh! Ooop!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" growled Jimmy Silver tigerishly. And he clawed at Gunner, and gnashed his teeth in the hypnotist's startled face.

"Great pip! Gerroff! Here, I say, you're a canary!" gasped Gunner breathlessly. "Just a harmless little canary bird! Gerroff!"

Jimmy Silver ceased to claw. He went and perched himself on the corner of the table.

Gunner staggered to his feet. His collar

had been torn off the studs and his necktie wrecked by the clawing of the tiger.

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "I shall have to be jolly careful how I exert my power! Better not make a chap believe he's a lion or a tiger again!"

Gunner set himself to rights hastily. He was feeling rather bumped and breathless and triumphant.

"Now you're Jimmy Silver again!" he said. "Captain of the Rookwood Fourth, you know! You're playing me in the Bagshot match this afternoon. Understand?"

"Yes," said Jimmy drowsily.

"Good! Come with me. Mind, you are the slave of my will, and have to do exactly as I tell you!"

"To hear is to obey!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Come on!"

Gunner took the captain of the Fourth by the arm and led him out of the Common-room.

CHAPTER 33.

Gunner Wakes Up!

"COME on, Jimmy!" called out Arthur Edward Lovell. The Co. were waiting for Jimmy Silver in the passage.

"I'm ready!" said Jimmy.

Gunner gave his victim a rather anxious side-glance. Jimmy Silver looked quite normal—there was no trace of 'fluence in his looks.

"The fellows are ready," said Raby. "Bagshot may be here in a few minutes."

Jimmy turned to Gunner.

"Get into your flannels!" he said.

"What's Gunner to get into flannels for?" asked Lovell, suppressing a chuckle.

"He's told me to play him!"

"My hat!"

"I won't keep you two jiffies!" said Gunner in great delight. And he bounded for the staircase.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked out of the School House. Jimmy Silver smiled serenely.

"Is the 'fluence on?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy nodded.

"Right on! Gunner took me into the Common-room and mesmerised me. He made me believe that I was a tiger and a canary. At least, he thinks he did."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As a tiger I clawed him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.

"As a canary I was just thinking of pecking him when he came to business," said Jimmy Silver. "Now I'm going to play him against Bagshot—I don't think! Dear old Gunner!"

Meanwhile Gunner was changing into flannels in high spirits. As soon as he had changed he hurried down to Little Side, carrying his bat.

There was a crowd of Rookwooders on Little Side—Jimmy Silver and his merry men were ready. Bagshot were expected any moment now. Jimmy stood among the cricketers, and Gunner was rather surprised to see eleven fellows ready. Apparently the skipper had not yet decided which one to leave out to make room for Gunner.

The Fistical Four exchanged merry glances as Gunner came up.

"Ready!" announced Gunner.

Many eyes turned on Gunner.

"And what are you ready for?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"What's the ass doing with that bat?" asked Conroy. "Has he dreamed that he's a cricketer?"

"I'm playing!" said Gunner coolly.

"Is there a match on to-day at marbles, then?" asked Conroy.

"I'm playing Bagshot!" roared Gunner. "Silver, I want to open the innings and take the first over."

"Oh! You want that?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes. A good innings at the start will buck up the team. You can take the other end."

"Thanks."

"Don't try any showing off, or fancy cricket," said Gunner. "What I want is some good, steady stonewalling. Leave the run-getting to me. Just back me up, that's all. That's all I want."

"What you want, and what you are going to get seem to be a bit different," remarked Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Hallo, there's the Bagshot brake! Run away and play, Gunner."

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Put some more 'fluence on, Gunner."

Gunner jumped.

"What? Silver—I'm playing! I've told you—ordered you—why, I'll jolly well smash you—here, leggo!" roared Gunner.

"It's time for you to wake up!" explained Jimmy Silver. "Carry him away and drop him somewhere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Co. collared the astonished Gunner, and he was lifted off his feet. His bat dropped in the grass, and Gunner struggled wildly—but in vain. Jimmy Silver smiled at him sweetly.

"The 'fluence wasn't quite strong enough," he explained. "Try again—another day. Too busy now."

"Why, I—I—I—" stuttered Gunner. He choked with wrath. Amid a roar of laughter he was whirled away, and dumped down at a distance from the pitch, and there left to recover himself.

By the time Peter Cuthbert Gunner had his second wind, Bagshot were batting, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the field. Gunner sat up in the grass and blinked at them. Slowly, but surely, the truth forced itself into his powerful-brain that Jimmy Silver hadn't been under the 'fluence at all—that he had been pulling the mesmerist's egregious leg. It took Gunner a long time to realise that, and to digest it.

He sat for quite a long time and blinked at the cricketers. Jimmy Silver & Co. had quite forgotten his existence by the time he limped away—a sadder, if not wiser, Gunner.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner did not play in the Bagshot match. But he found another occupation that afternoon. He lighted a fire in Study No. 7, and put "Mesmerism Simplified" upon it. With a gloomy brow Gunner watched his half-crown's worth of marvellous knowledge reduced to ashes.

From which Dickinson minor—with considerable satisfaction—deduced that Gunner had given up mesmerism!

THE END.

GHOSTS OF THE WATER.

The Phantom Wherry.

The legend of the Flying Dutchman is world-famous; how the sighting of it forebodes tragedy and disaster. Not so famous, but quite as baffling, is the story of the phantom wherry that a Thames boatman claims he saw going under London Bridge. In it were three persons, two men and a woman, all dressed in a fashion long since dead and gone. The strange craft passed from the boatman's view under the bridge, but never came out on the other side!

There is a possible solution to the mystery in the fact that a Mistress Fordham, daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant, fled from the man her father wished her to marry and made for the ship which the man of her choice was in. She was drowned with her companions under London Bridge. This was in the year 1560.

There is a strange story of the seventh island of the Canaries. In fifteenth-century charts there are seven islands shown, whereas to-day there are only six. Yet at times this seventh island, which has apparently vanished into the sea, can be distinctly seen, a speck, thickly bushed and with a white building on it.

The islanders are convinced that it is the ghost of the island that has sunk between the waves, and so far there has been no other explanation.

The Faroe Cutter.

Ghosts are usually used in reference to apparitions of human beings, and it is strange to hear of ghosts of material things such as boats and islands. Maybe it is just sailors' superstition, but many of these apparitions have been seen by those who place no faith in the hoodoo.

One of these inexplicable mysteries of the sea occurred at the port of Reykjavik, Iceland, in April, 1927. One evening two vessels entered the harbour, an Icelandic trawler and a Faroe cutter. The latter had two boats in tow, and in one of these were two men in oilskins. The crew of the trawler, the crew of a pilot-boat, and the harbour-master had seen the cutter. The harbour-master had noticed, as many others, the letters of identification, which were F.D. There was no activity in the cutter, so the harbour-master ordered the port-doctor to go aboard her.

When the boat with the doctor aboard put out it was to find that the cutter had vanished into thin air. The hard-headed Icelanders are not fools, yet many would have sworn to seeing the cutter. No explanation has ever been found for her disappearance, and she is considered to have been just a ghost.

A Ghostly Warning.

The appearance of a ghost ship off Boffin Island, near the coast of Connemara, is reckoned to be a warning. Like the Flying Dutchman this phantom presages evil.

One day in October, 1927, some fishermen from Boffin Island were returning from a day's fishing. Suddenly there was sighted a curragh, a light boat made of timber and tarred canvas. The curragh was following them, but there was no one aboard her, and the boat had a strange, misty look.

The fishermen were convinced it was a ghost ship, and that it was following them as a warning.

On the next day they refused to go fishing, and it was well they did, for a terrific storm blew up so suddenly that fifty-one fishermen were drowned.

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