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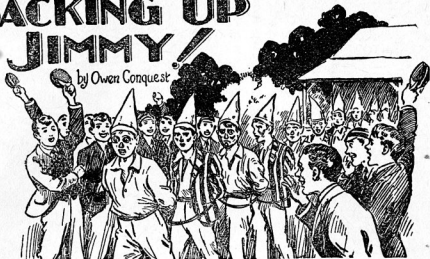
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BACKING UP JIMMY!

by Owen Conquest



A lively long complete school story, featuring JIMMY SILVER & Co., the irrepressible chums of Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 1.

Jimmy Silver Means Business.

"I won't do!"
down on the table in the end study Jimmy Silver brought his fist with a bang that made the table jump, and made his study-mates jump, too.

Jimmy Silver had been thinking, with wrinkled brows and a glint in his eyes. That bang upon the table was the outcome of his reflections—apparently of an exasperating nature.

But it was certainly an unfortunate moment for that demonstration, even though Jimmy Silver, like the prophet of old, did well to be angry.

For Raby was pouring out the tea.

The jump Raby gave as the table jumped naturally spoilt his aim with the teapot.

There was a ferocious yell from Lovell as the hot tea came over his knees.

"Look out, fathhead!"

The startled Raby jerked his arm back, to the accompaniment of a wild war-cry from Newcome, who caught the teapot with his chest.

"Oh, you idiot!"

"My hat!" gasped Raby, quite flabbergasted. "Mum-my hat! I—"

"Stop pouring out the tea!" shrieked Newcome. "Do you want to drown the study?"

The tea was still streaming from the pot, fortunately into the sugar-basin now. Raby righted it at last.

Lovell mopped his knees, and gave Raby looks that ought to have felled him on the study carpet. Newcome mopped his waistcoat, and said things.

"'Twasn't my fault!" said Raby. "How could I help it? When a silly idiot bangs a silly table with his silly fist just when I'm pouring out the silly tea—"

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you fathead! I'm scalded!"

"Look at my bags!"

"Look at my waistcoat!"

"Mop the rest of the tea over him!" howled Lovell.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Raby, in alarm. "Mop it over Silver! It was his fault! The silly jabberwock made me jump——"

"So he did," said Lovell, "and he made us jump, too! Now I'll make him jump!"

Jimmy Silver did jump as the teapot swung round towards him. He jumped up in time to escape the stream, fortunately. But Lovell was not to be denied. His knees were soaked with hot tea, and he was wrathful. And he pursued Jimmy Silver ferociously round the study, teapot in hand.

"Hold on!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Don't play the goat! Keep that teapot away, you burbler! Gerrout of the way, Raby! Stop, you ass!"

"Stop him!" yelled Lovell, chasing round the table.

"Oh, my hat!"

Raby and Newcome grinned, and collared Jimmy Silver. Lovell came up panting with the teapot.

"Now, then, where will you have it?"

"Pax!"

"Blow pax! Look at my bags!"

"Look at my waistcoat!"

"Yaroo!" roared Jimmy Silver, as the tea streamed over his trousers. "Stoppit, you dangerous lunatic! It's hot! Yowowp!"

"Now, his waistcoat!" grinned Newcome. "Fair play all round!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaro-o-o-p! Will you stoppit?"

"Yes—the pot's empty!" said Lovell. "Next time you can moderate your transports when a clumsy chump is pouring out the tea!"

"Oh, you asses!" groaned Jimmy Silver, as he mopped away the warm fluid with his handkerchief, which was soon a stained and limp rag. "You cuckoos! I've been thinking it out——"

"Thinking what out, fathead?"

"About the Greyfriars match."

"Well, you can think it out next time without banging the table," said Lovell. "All the tea's wasted now, and there isn't any more in the cupboard. That was the last lot."

"Serve you jolly well right for wasting it!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Look here, I suppose you fellows agree that something's got to be done?"

"Yes; we shall have to borrow some tea from Hooker, I suppose."

"Blow the tea!" shouted Jimmy Silver, "I'm thinking of the cricket match!"

"Blow the cricket match!" retorted Lovell. "I'm thinking of the tea!"

Jimmy Silver gave a snort of wrath.

"You silly ass——"

"You burbling cuckoo!"

And, with that exchange of compliments, Lovell left the end study, to borrow a new supply of tea from Hooker of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver sat down again with a growl. Jimmy had been giving that important subject a lot of hard thinking, and the lack of enthusiasm on the part of his study-mates exasperated him.

It really was an important matter. Every fellow in the Fourth agreed that Smythe, of the Shell, was about the "rottenest" junior cricket captain that Rookwood could possibly have.

Smythe of the Shell was perfectly indifferent to their opinion on the subject. He went on his way loftily, and made no sign, like Jove of old on high Olympus.

The only thing that could possibly worry Smythe was a new election and a majority against him in the votes of the junior sports club.

And that couldn't happen. For the junior club was almost equally divided between the juniors of the Modern and the Classical sides at Rookwood. And Moderns and Classicals could not agree upon a candidate.

Smythe was a Classical, but then Smythe was in the Shell. The Shell stood upon their dignity as "Middle School," and not a Shell fellow would have voted for a candidate from the

Fourth Form. It happened that there were more Classics than Moderns in the Shell. So Smythe was a safe Shell candidate.

The Fourth Form was more numerous, and could have beaten the Shell easily in an election, if they could have come to an agreement. But no Classical would vote for the Modern man, and no Modern would vote for the Classical man.

Indeed, at the last election all the Classical Fourth had voted for Smythe to avert the fearful danger of having a Modern junior skipper.

Anything was better than that, from a Classical point of view—the rivalry between the two sides at Rookwood being very keen, especially in the lower Forms.

Jimmy Silver had averted that danger—they had a Classical skipper. But he was a first-class rotter, as the juniors elegantly expressed it, and under his guidance the junior eleven was going to "pot."

Hardly a Modern chap was put into the team, which was a very sore point with Tommy Dodd & Co., the heroes of the Modern side.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. might have pardoned that—they were very much down on the Moderns. But hardly a Classical who could play was put in, and that was the rub. Smythe of the Shell exercised his powers as a skipper to the full, so far as the selection of the team went. And he seemed to regard the making up of a team as a sort of family arrangement. His friends in the Shell filled most of the places. If he took players from the Fourth they were usually slackers like Townsend and Topham.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had sworn a solemn swear that the cricket season shouldn't be "mucked up."

But, without coming to an agreement with their old rivals of the Modern side, there was no giving Smythe a fall. And all attempts at a "rapprochement" with the Moderns had ended in free fights, so far.

Such was the state of affairs which gave Jimmy Silver food for thought, and caused him to bang the table in the end study with such disastrous results.

Jimmy Silver sat with a gloomy brow. He felt that he was not getting the proper amount of support from the Co. Lovell came back into the study with a fresh supply of tea, borrowed from Hooker, and Jimmy looked at him with a glum eye.

Lovell did not seem to mind. He made the tea, and cheerfully asked Jimmy Silver if he would have some.

"Oh, pour it out!" said Silver misanthropically. "There's nothing to think of in this study except guzzling, I see. It doesn't matter if Greyfriars lick us! We're used to being licked, ain't we? Let's have tea! Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we'll be licked!"

"Well, you're a cheery soul!" said Lovell. "Got any more nice consoling jaw like that? Reel it off, and don't mind us!"

"Something ought to be done!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose we can't lynch Smythe?"

"I'd like to!" said Jimmy Silver savagely. "The ass wouldn't be so bad if he knew how to make up a team. 'Tain't that I want to play myself—though I do want to, as a matter of fact! I'd forgive him if he'd put that Modern worm Dodd in. Dodd can play. But what's the good of a set of dummies like Smythe and Howard and Tracy and Townsend and the rest going over to play Greyfriars?"

"Not much good," agreed Raby. "But they're going, and we can't help it. Smythe's skipper, and we elected him."

"It's all the fault of those Modern cads," said Newcome. "If they'd vote for one of us we'd soon shift Smythey out."

"But they won't, the worms."

"Well, we'll get up a game among ourselves while they're gone," said Lovell. "We'll play cricket while they're playing the giddy ox."

"We're not the junior eleven; it don't count. Smythe has got to be prevented from making a giddy ass of himself."

"Can't be done. He was born, not made," said Lovell. "Asinus nascitur, non fit," added Lovell brilliantly—a little joke quite worthy of a study on the Classical side, where they patronised Latin.

Jimmy Silver declined to grin. He did not feel like grinning.

"Something's going to be done," he said determinedly.

"What?" asked the Co., in chorus.

"Blessed if I know," grunted Silver.

"Same here! Have some of this cake, and stop grousing."

Jimmy Silver had some of the cake, but he did not stop grousing. It was a little too thick for a topping cricketer like Jimmy Silver to be left at Rookwood while a set of "burlers" went over to Greyfriars to play the giddy ox.

Jimmy Silver did a big think while he demolished the cake, and suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"I've got it!"

"The cake?" asked Lovell. "I can see you have. Pass it this way!"

"Fathead! Come along!"

"Whither, O King?"

"We're going to see Smythe."

"Old Bulkeley came down on us last time we ragged him," said Raby doubtfully.

"This isn't a rag. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Co. followed Jimmy Silver from the study. They were quite willing to back up their chum, even if it led to a "rag" and having old Bulkeley down on them again.

CHAPTER 2.

A Warning to Adolphus.

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE, the ornament of the Shell and junior captain of Rookwood, reposed in an arm-chair in his elegantly-furnished study. He had a cigarette between his lips. That was one of his little ways. It was

a most expensive gold-tipped cigarette. Adolphus was an expensive youth.

Three juniors of the Fourth were in the doorway, talking to Smythe, as the Classical four came along the passage. They were Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, of the Modern side. They were all talking at once, and their voices were not gentle nor were their remarks complimentary. Adolphus surveyed them with calm disdain as he blew out little clouds of smoke. Adolphus looked more Olympian than ever at that moment.

"So you're playing the giddy ox, as usual!" Tommy Dodd was saying.

"It's making a howling ass of yourself you're after," said Doyle.

"You want to give the Greyfriars fellows another cackle," said Cook.

Adolphus Smythe raised a manicured hand to remove the cigarette from his lips to speak.

"Shut the door after you!" was his remark.

"Let's have him out of that chair and scrag him!" said Cook.

"There's a prefect down the passage," growled Tommy Dodd.

"Run away and play, dear boys!" said Smythe calmly. "Your voices get on my nerves a bit, I can't stand you Modern fellows, you're so raucous."

"You've really settled about the team?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Yaas."

"Not a Modern fellow in it!" howled Doyle.

Smythe shook his head.

"I want cricketers," he explained.

"Cricketers! There isn't one of your silly gang who can play cricket."

"By gad, these Modern kids are noisy!" said Smythe. "How's a fellow to put up with these young hooligans, Tracy, old man?"

Tracy shook his head.

"Don't ask me," he replied. "Why don't they go away and study stinks or mug up German? That's what Modern kids are born for. I wonder what they think they know about cricket?"

Tommy Dodd & Co. shook their fists

at the placid Smythe, and debated whether they should rag him and chance the prefect. The Fistical Four arrived in the doorway, and Tommy Dodd glared at them. But the rivals of Rookwood met without a rag for once.

"Don't go," said Jimmy Silver. "I've come here to talk to that tailor's dummy, and you Modern kids can back me up."

"I've been talking to him," growled Tommy Dodd. "He hasn't the sense of a bunny rabbit. He's going to let Rookwood down again. All because you Classical worms won't vote for a decent candidate."

"All because you Modern idiots won't, you mean," said Lovell hotly.

"Why, you ass——"

"Why, you fathead——"

"Peace, my infants!" said Jimmy Silver. "Smythey is our game now. I'm going to try to bring the sublime Smythey to reason."

"By gad," said Adolphus, lighting a fresh cigarette, "it's a regular deputation! Any more fags coming here to jaw?"

"I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle," said Jimmy Silver. "You've made up a rotten team for Greyfriars. You've put in every slacker you could dig up, and left out every fellow who can play. Well, I want you to make some changes."

Smythe yawned.

"I want you," continued Jimmy Silver calmly, "to make seven changes at least. Put in us four and these three Modern chaps."

"We'd be satisfied with that," said Tommy Dodd. "We're willing to be reasonable."

"Well, do you agree, Smythey?"

"Hardly!" yawned Smythe.

"You're going on your own way?"

"Yaas."

"Well, then, now I come to the second point. Do you think that your team can beat Greyfriars Remove?"

"Yaas."

"You don't think they'll beat you with an innings to spare?"

"Very improbable, dear boy."

"It's a dead cert," growled Tommy Dodd. "If Greyfriars bat first they'll declare, and you'll have to follow on your innings, and they'll beat you with runs to spare and without batting again."

"What a pleasant prospect," said Smythe pleasantly.

"Yes, you care a fat lot if Rookwood is let down all through the season," growled Lovell savagely.

"By gad!"

"Now I'm coming to the point," said Jimmy Silver.

"Time you did, dear boy," agreed Smythe.

"We're going over to Greyfriars to see the match."

Smythe shook his head.

"Can't have a lot of fags tagging along after the team," he said decidedly.

"We're coming, all the same."

"You jolly well won't come in the car."

"We shall bike it."

"By gad!"

"And we'll see the match and——"

"What the thunder are you driving at?" demanded Tommy Dodd angrily.

"Do you think I'm going over there to see the Greyfriars fellows cackling at our eleven?"

"Let me finish, my son. Smythe says he can beat Greyfriars Remove. I say that he'll be beaten with an innings to spare. Well, we'll watch the match. If the Greyfriars Remove win by an innings, Smythey——"

"Yaas?" drawled Smythe.

"Then we'll give you the ragging of your life."

"What!"

"And give the Greyfriars fellows something to laugh at as well as Rookwood cricket," concluded Jimmy Silver.

"By gad!"

The Fourth-Formers burst into a chuckle. Jimmy Silver's scheme just jumped with their inclinations.

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd heartily. "We're on."

"Faith, and we are intiorely!"

"Good egg!"

"You savvy, Smythey? You've picked the team, and if you win the match or give the Greyfriars team a good tussle, you're all serene; we'll cheer you no end. But if you have a licking that makes them cackle, we rag you bald-headed!"

"By Jove!"

"Now will you make some changes in the team?"

"Hardly!"

"Then you know what to expect."

"Thanks!"

"You idiot!"

"Would you mind shutting the door after you?"

The Fourth-Formers retired from the study. They closed the door after them with a bang. In the passage they looked at one another expressively.

"The burbler thinks we're bluffing," said Tommy Dodd.

"He'll find out to-morrow," growled Jimmy Silver. "We're going?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll tell Towle," said Tommy Dodd. "That'll make eight of us. Eight will be enough to handle eleven slackers like that crew."

"More than enough," said Jimmy Silver. "All of you get your bikes out after dinner to-morrow. It's a long ride—"

"It's a long, long way to Greyfriars!" sang Newcome.

"But we'll get there; and if they put up their usual funny game, we'll make 'em look funny afterwards!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And so it was settled.

CHAPTER 3.

Two Parties for Greyfriars.

CRICKET was the order of the day now at Rookwood.

Rookwood has always been a cricketing school, and the Rookwood First Eleven was famous for its exploits on the playing-fields. Bulkeley, the captain of the school, was getting together a first eleven that was to do wonders that season—if Bulkeley could bring it about. And there was excellent material in the Lower Forms for a first-rate junior eleven.

It was only owing to the unfortunate state of affairs between Moderns and Classicals that the Rookwood juniors had no opportunity of distinguishing themselves, but nobody was satisfied with Smythe & Co. They did not seem to mind that. They bore their many defeats quite cheerfully. Indeed, Adolphus had been heard to declare that no game was worth a chap's while if he had to fag over it.

Fagging over anything certainly wasn't in Adolphus' line at all. When he was got up for cricket, he was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever to look at. It was quite a sight to behold Adolphus lounging down to the wicket, elegantly drawing on his gloves.

It was another sight to see him lounging away again, quite unperturbed, when he had been bowled, stumped, or caught, often without breaking his duck. But it was not a sight to be enjoyed by fellows who were keen on cricket, and jealous of their school's record in games.

The day after Jimmy Silver's interview with the great Adolphus was the date of the match with Greyfriars. Very soon after dinner Smythe & Co. came out to start. A whacking great car had come round for them. Adolphus always did things in style. He generally had plenty of money, and his friends were in the same fortunate position—for the simple reason that Adolphus declined to know anybody who was hard up.

If Adolphus had suggested paying for the car out of the club funds, Adolphus would probably have been scalped; but he didn't. The Giddy Goats—the name Adolphus & Co. loved to call themselves by—stood the car themselves. And they felt very proud of the big car and of themselves, as if stood snorting outside the School House, waiting for them.

Half Rookwood gathered to see them off. It was a party of twelve—special friends of Adolphus, and most of them Shell fellows. Only Townsend and Topham of the Fourth were included.

The Fistical Four and Tommy Dodd & Co. were there, looking ferocious. They had hoped up to the last moment that Smythe might change his mind. If he took even a few good players with him, they were willing to call it square. But Smythe had made no change.

He did not take Jimmy Silver's threat at all seriously. It was a long way to Grey-

friars, and such a bike ride would have killed Adolphus. He did not believe for a moment that the Fourth-Formers intended to undertake it.

"So you're off?" growled Jimmy Silver. Smythe glanced at him carelessly.

"Yaas," he replied.

"Remember what I told you!"

Smythe looked reflective.

"Did you tell me anything, dear boy?" he asked. "Excuse me, I've quite forgotten. Shocking memory, by gad! What was it?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Come on, Smythe," said Howard. "Don't waste time talking to fags, old chap!"

"Yaas, I'm comin'."

Smythe & Co. disposed themselves in the car with their cricket-bags. The chauffeur drove the big car down to the gates.

"Well, they're off!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"Right off!" said Lovell. "Off their onions! Off their silly rockers!"

"Get out the bikes," said Jimmy Silver.

Eight juniors rushed for their bikes.

They rushed the bikes down to the gates and mounted. On Big Side a trial match was going on between two senior elevens—Bulkeley's Classical team and Knowles' Modern eleven. At any other time the heroes of the Fourth would have been glad to watch old Bulkeley batting; but they had no time for senior matches now.

The Classical four and Tommy Dodd & Co. were all sturdy fellows, and in the pink of condition. They pedalled away at a great rate on the track of the car.

The big car was still in sight, and as it slackened down to let a market-cart get out of the way in the narrow lane, the cyclists almost overtook it. Smythe & Co., looking back, perceived them.

There was a ripple of laughter from the fellows in the car.

"By gad!" said Smythe, extracting an eyeglass from his pocket, and jamming it into his eye. "Those fags are after us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where are you kids going?" called out Tracey.

"Greyfriars," replied Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha! You've a long way to go!"

"Chauffeur!" called out Smythe.

"Yes, sir."

"Let her go! There are a gang of cycling bounders just behind!"

"Yes, sir."

The chauffeur "let her go," and the big car raced away from the cyclist. It vanished in the distance in a cloud of dust.

"Steady, the Buffs!" said Jimmy Silver. "No good trying to race a giddy motor-car! Don't pump yourselves out at the start!"

"Yes, go easy with these Classical kids," remarked Tommy Dodd. "We don't want them cracking up on the road!"

"Probably leave you behind fainting about half-way!" snorted Lovell.

"You Classical ass—"

"You Modern worm—"

"Shut up!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Is this the time for ragging, you chumps? We want all our wind for riding, if we're getting to Greyfriars?"

"Right-ho!" said Lovell. "But that Modern ass—"

"That Classical chump—"

"Dry up, you pair of bruisers! Kim on!"

The rivals of Rookwood, with noble self-restraint, forbore from ragging. Jimmy Silver's remark was just—they needed all their breath for their long ride. They went on at a steady pace, without scorching, but they covered the ground pretty quickly.

The motor-car was long out of sight, and they did not expect to see it again till they arrived at Greyfriars. But half-way to their destination, when they were feeling decidedly warm, a sight burst upon their vision which caused them great joy.

It was the sight of a big motor-car drawn up beside the road, with a smudgy and sulky chauffeur at work upon one of the wheels, and twelve elegantly-dressed fellows standing round and looking on.

"Hooray!" cried Jimmy Silver. "Smythe's car, by gum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cyclists put on a spurt, and swept up in fine style. Smythe & Co. stared and blinked at them. They had never dreamed of seeing the juniors so far from home.

"By gad, it's those fags!" said Smythe. The cyclists jumped down.

"Breakdown—what?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Beastly puncture or something!" growled Tracey. "Man doesn't seem 'o be able to get the tyre off, or something; or he can't get it on, or something!"

Tracy's knowledge of motor-cars were evidently somewhat limited.

"This is what comes of swanking," remarked Tommy Dodd. "A common or garden train would have landed you there without a puncture!"

"We'll expect you at Greyfriars, Smythe," said Lovell. "I'll tell you what—as we've found you, there's still time to make a change in your team!"

"Last time of asking," said Raby.

Smythe frowned.

"Don't be cheeky!" was his reply.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "Leave 'em to worry with their old car. We shall get there first now!"

The cyclists rode on in great spirits. If they did not get to Greyfriars first, it was certain that they would not be far behind. Mile after mile slipped under the flashing wheels.

The loud hoot of a motor-horn behind them drove them to the side of the road, and Smythe's big car came whooping by. Smythe & Co. smiled disdainfully at the warm and dusty cyclists as they passed, and left them choked with petrol and dust.

"Never mind!" panted Jimmy Silver. "There's a giddy milestone—two miles to Courtfield; that's close to Greyfriars!"

They pedalled through Courtfield at last. It was another mile on to the school, they found, and that mile certainly seemed a long one to Jimmy Silver & Co., hard riders as they were.

But the gates of Greyfriars came in sight at last, and they jumped down, a warm, perspiring, and dusty crowd, but greatly satisfied with themselves. With red and smiling faces they wheeled their dusty bikes in at the school gates.

CHAPTER 4.

"Cricket!"

HARRY WHARTON, the captain of the Greyfriars junior team, greeted Adolphus Smythe with great politeness. Smythe was gratified to see that a goodly crowd of Greyfriars fellows was gathering about the ground to see the match.

He would not, perhaps, have been so gratified if he had divined the reason that drew the Greyfriars juniors to the spot.

Harry Wharton & Co. were keen

cricketers, and in the Remove cricket club it had been debated more than once whether they should drop the Rookwood fixture very seriously. But Bob Cherry, a humorous youth, maintained that the Rookwood match was as good as a cinema of the most comic variety; and the other fellows agreed that to see the Rookwood slackers leather-hunting was a sight for gods, and men, and little fishes. It wasn't cricket, but it was an entertainment. But it never dawned upon the sublime Adolphus that he was regarded in that light.

Smythe gave Harry Wharton two fingers to shake. The Greyfriars fellow bestowed a grip upon them that made Smythe yelp.

"By gad!" said Smythe, gasping.

"Eh?"

Smythe rubbed his fingers. He was very glad that he had not given Wharton his whole hand. As a matter of fact, it was the offering of two cold, fishy fingers that had earned him that iron grip.

"Any of your fellows coming over?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yaas, I think there are some fags on the road, biking it," said Smythe. "They may get here. I don't know."

"Biking it!" said Bob Cherry, a little surprised. Judging by what he had seen of the Rookwood fellows, he would never have supposed that any of the Rookwooders were keen enough about cricket to ride over twenty miles to see a match.

"Yaas," said Smythe. "I dare say they'll crack up on the road, though."

"Very likely," agreed Bob Cherry. "I suppose you're going to give us a thumping licking this time, and they're coming to see it—what?"

"Yaas."

"Well, it would be worth the ride."

Harry Wharton gave his chum a warning glance. The egregious Smythe could never see when his leg was being pulled, but some of his team might. And comic as the Rookwooders were considered as cricketers, courtesy came before everything.

Greyfriars won the toss, and Harry Wharton elected to bat first. He did not think that more than one innings would be needed for his side.

Bob Cherry and a sunburnt youth whom his comrades called Squiff went out to open the innings.

Adolphus led his merry men into the field.

Round the field the crowd was thickening.

They had smiling faces. They were prepared to enjoy the acrobatic performances of Smythe & Co. in search of the elusive ball.

Smythe bowled the first over. He fancied himself as a bowler. He also fancied himself as a bat; and he fancied that as a fieldman he was hard to beat. He had quite a number of fancies. But if he fancied that he could make any impression upon Bob Cherry's wicket, never had his fancy so deluded him.

The batsman knocked the ball carelessly away, giving Townsend at point a pretty easy catch, if Townsend had been wide awake. Townsend woke up after the ball was on the ground, and the Greyfriars crowd smiled audibly.

Smythe sent down another ball. Bob Cherry let himself go at that, and the ball soared away, and the batsmen ran. Four times they crossed the pitch before the leather was fielded and sent in.

"By gad!" said Smythe.

Smythe had rested in an easy attitude waiting for the ball. When it came in at last he managed to catch it with both hands. Then he strolled away to take his little run, and delivered the ball once more. It gave Greyfriars three, and brought Squiff to the batting end. There were loud shouts of ironical warning from the spectators, as Smythe grasped the ball again.

"Look out, Squiff!"

"Mind your eye."

Squiff cut the ball away for three, and Smythe bowled to Bob Cherry again. Bob Cherry contented himself with a single that time. Then Squiff knocked away the last ball of the over for four.

Harry Wharton was smiling. He had never had a good opinion of Rookwood play; but this was a little "thicker" than he had ever expected. It looked as if Bob Cherry obligingly gave Townsend a catch, and came out.

"What the dickens did you let that duffer catch you out for?" demanded Wharton.

The batsman chuckled.

"Thought I'd give you a turn, old chap."

Wharton laughed, and went in. Smythe varied the bowling with Howard and Tracy and Townsend. By a miracle, Squiff's wicket fell when the score was at sixty. Mark Linley went in to take his place.

It was just then that eight dusty fellows

arrived. Bob Cherry gave them a cordial greeting as they came up to the pavilion.

"Come to see us licked—what?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver gave an expressive grunt.

"Come to see our team play the giddy goat," he replied.

"My hat! Was that worth biking twenty miles?"

"Oh, it's funny!" said Lovell. "Too good to miss! I see a lot of your fellows think so. My only summer hat, look at the way Townsend's bowling! Does he take the wicket for a barn?"

Mark Linley knocked the ball away.

"Look out in the slips!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

Slips were not looking out. The ball glided past them and vanished. Mark Linley and Harry Wharton sauntered along the pitch, stopped for a little chat in the middle, and then went on lazily to their wickets. The crowd yelled with laughter.

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums expressively.

"That's what we've come to see," he said, between his teeth. "To see a Rookwood team guyed by these bounders. Simply guyed, by gum!"

"It's too sickening!" said Tommy Dodd wretchedly. "The Greyfriars chaps bat well, but we could give them something to think about. But those dummies—oh, it's too rotten!"

"There they go again!"

It was quite an easy catch this time, and Smythe, that brilliant field, looked like getting it. But it passed his fingers and dropped. Smythe did not seem perturbed. He shrugged his shoulders, and remarked calmly:

"By gad!"

"Yah! Butterfingers!" yelled Jimmy Silver, exasperated.

Smythe looked round calmly.

"Hallo! You fags there?" he said.

"Don't make a row here, dear boys! Even the Fourth are supposed to have some manners."

The Fourth-Formers of Rookwood were not thinking about manners just then. They were in such a state of exasperation that they were inclined to invade the field, and "mop up" the egregious Smythe on the spot. Fortunately, they restrained their feelings.

What they felt was almost too deep for

words, as the picturesque innings went on. To see batsmen strolling across the pitch, while the Rookwood slackers dawdled after the ball, was too irritating. And the sublime Adolphus appeared to have not the slightest inkling that he was being "guyed."

It was a relief to Jimmy Silver & Co. when the innings ended. It was not played out. With three down for a level hundred. Harry Wharton declared. The Greyfriars bats could have stayed in all the afternoon if they had liked, but they generously decided to give their visitors a look-in, and Smythe jumped at the chance.

"Only made a hundred, by gad!" said Smythe, as the field came puffing and panting off. "Expect at least that in an innings—what!"

It did not matter a rap to Smythe that the Greyfriars team had made the hundred with eight wickets in hand. If he beat them, he beat them, and Wharton would be sorry that he had taken chances. It did not even occur to Adolphus that he had no chance of beating Harry Wharton's team.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. were perfectly aware of it. They knew that the Greyfriars team would not need to bat again. That hundred would never be equalled by Smythe & Co. in a couple of innings—or in half a dozen, if half a dozen had been allowed. But Smythe & Co. came off to discuss cake and ginger-beer with placid faces—only a little breathless—and looking as if they thought that they deserved well of their country.

CHAPTER 5.

Licked to the Wide.

JIMMY SILVER & Co., in spite of their exasperation, found the Greyfriars fellows very agreeable. They were a little sore over the guying of the Rookwooders; but they did not blame Wharton & Co. for that. They could not expect keen cricketers, as the Greyfriars fellows evidently were, to take such a team seriously. There was an interval before the Rookwood innings started—which the visitors were glad to prolong—they needed a rest. Harry Wharton & Co. were very hospitable, and the ginger-pop flowed freely. Jimmy Silver found himself

chatting with Bob Cherry as if he had known him whole terms.

And he felt that he was bound to explain a little. He found Bob a sympathetic listener.

"Don't you run away with the idea that those burlblers represent Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver emphatically. "They don't! Our first eleven is a terror. I can tell you! You should see old Bulkeley's boundary hits. And Knowles is a topping bowler—I'll say that, though he's on the Modern side."

"Better than any rotten bowler you can dig up among your mouldy Classics, and chance it!" said Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy proceeded to explain the somewhat complicated politics of the Lower School at Rookwood, which had led to such an egregious duffer as Smythe of the Shell being junior captain, with the unhappy consequence that a team of howling asses went forth to represent Rookwood in the playing-fields.

"Why don't you get a better skipper, then?" asked the puzzled Bob Cherry.

"It's all the fault of those Modern cads! They won't vote for a Classical man!"

"It's all the fault of those Classical cads! They won't vote for a Modern chap!"

Those two explanations were made simultaneously by Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, and Bob chuckled. An argument seemed about to commence, which would have been more suitably conducted at Rookwood than at Greyfriars; but, fortunately, the resumption of play came just then.

Smythe and Howard went in to open the innings for Rookwood, and Harry Wharton & Co. sauntered into the field.

Smythe came to his wicket with a swanking stride that made the spectators chuckle, knowing what they had to expect.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on morosely. They knew what to expect, too.

Harry Wharton tossed the ball to a dusky youth, whom he called Inky, but whose name, Jimmy Silver learned, was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and who was a nabob or rajah or something in a far-off Indian land. And as soon as the dusky bowler went on to bowl, Jimmy Silver said at once:

"That fellow knows something."

Jimmy Silver's keen eye had not deceived him. The dusky junior did know something. He did not seem to take much

trouble about his delivery, but the ball knocked Smythe's off-stump out of the ground without giving the Rookwood captain the slightest chance.

Smythe stared down at his wrecked wicket, evidently in a state of surprise.

"By gad!" he ejaculated.

"How's that, umpire?"

"Ha, ha! Out!"

"Yaas, it's out!" agreed Smythe. "By gad!" And he strolled elegantly off with his bat under his arm.

"What price ducks' eggs?" howled Jimmy Silver.

Smythe did not deign to reply to that question. He signed to Tracy to go on.

"Oh, don't talk about ducks' eggs," said Tommy Dodd. "It's going to be a pair of spectacles for Smythe! Wait till he bats again!"

"There goes Tracy!"

Tracy was staring at his wicket. The middle stump had gone, and the wicket looked as if a dentist had visited it. Tracy had the grace to look glum as he came off. His armour of self-satisfaction was not quite so thick as Adolphus'.

Townsend went in next, and the third ball of the over laid him low. After that, it was quite a procession. Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh was not satisfied with the hat trick. He was evidently a deadly bowler, and he was putting in all he knew, whether for the sake of putting the batsmen out of their misery, or for a lark. Jimmy Silver could not guess. All kinds of bowling came with equal ease to him, and never a ball seemed quite like its predecessor. Townsend warned Topham to look out for a fast ball like a shell from a particularly powerful big gun. But it was a slow that knocked Topham's wicket to pieces. Topham told Chesney to watch for that slow, with a weird twist on it, pitching to the off; but the ball pitched to leg and brought Chesney to grief.

"Oh, what a giddy entertainment!" groaned Jimmy Silver, as the sixth wicket went down to the sixth ball.

It was the double hat trick, and a roar of cheering from the crowd greeted the performance. It was good work, even against such poor batsmen as the Rookwooders. Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh grinned, and went into the field, and Harry Wharton took the ball. Rookwood were six down for nil.

"Looks rather thick," Smythe murmured to Tracy. Even Smythe was a little staggered. "Blessed if we don't scratch this fixture, old man. They don't play cricket here—they work at it."

"It is rather thick," agreed Tracy. "Look at those fags—they're boiling."

"Oh, blow the fags!" said Smythe carelessly. "They'd have done worse."

How the fags could have done worse than lose their wickets for no runs, the great Adolphus did not trouble to explain.

Matters looked up a little for Rookwood in the second over. Harry Wharton, either from good-nature or carelessness, gave them a run for their money. Howard almost chirped when he took a two. Selwyn chuckled when three came to him.

Nugent, of Greyfriars, bowled the third over. Then Howard went back to the pavilion, his joys suddenly cut short. Another and another bat followed him.

"For mercy's sake, buck up a bit!" Smythe whispered, as the last man went in.

Last man in tried to buck up, with the result that Bob Cherry caught him out at point.

"All out for five!" said Jimmy Silver, with a gasp. "All—all—all—out—out—out for five! Carry me away and bury me, somebody."

Even Adolphus Smythe looked a little sick at the result. He was more determined than ever, mentally, to scratch Greyfriars off the Rookwood playing list. He wasn't going to work at cricket. Not if he knew it. Selwyn was the only fellow who looked pleased. Selwyn was not out, for the simple reason that the innings being at an end, he could not be bowled, stumped, or caught. But Selwyn chose to attribute his survival at the finish to his superior play.

Tea had been arranged after the Rookwood innings. But that innings had been so remarkably short, that it was decided to go on before tea. Smythe was called upon to follow on, which he did in somewhat low spirits.

"Better let me open the innings with you," said Selwyn, "and, for goodness' sake, back me up this time, some of you."

But Selwyn's cheery assumption of superiority was short lived. For he got the first ball of the over, and it knocked his middle stump out of the ground.

Selwyn came back to the pavilion talking about rotten flukes. He was greeted with remarks about rotten batsmen.

"How long is this blessed funeral going to last?" grumbled Raby.

Jimmy Silver snorted with disgust.

"Not long," he said. "There's that blessed nigger going to bowl again." "I knew it would be rotten," said Tommy Dodd. "But I didn't dream it would be quite so rotten as this! There isn't one of the silly idiots who can play for nuts."

"Not one, by gum!"

"The Greyfriars chaps will simply burst their ribs soon," said Newcome. "They're trying not to laugh. I thought that black bouncer was going to have a fit."

"There's Smythe's duck's egg."

Adolphus Smythe ambled off the field. He had secured a duck's egg in his second innings, making the dreaded "pair of spectacles." He was quite silent for a long time, apparently ruminating on the uncertainty of the things of this world, especially in cricket.

Man after man ambled in, and ambled out again. The Greyfriars crowd did not wish to be rude, but they could not restrain their merriment; it was more than flesh could stand. Shouts of laughter followed the fall of every wicket.

The second innings lasted longer than the first. But it did not last very long. It drew to a rapid and disastrous close.

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed when last man went in.

"The finish now," he said. "You fellows are ready?"

"Ready, O king!" said Raby.

"Those silly duffers have made us look fools to all Greyfriars. We're going to make them look the same, and a little more so!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Rookwood chums were quite determined upon that. They had given Adolphus Smythe fair warning; that could not be denied. Adolphus had not chosen to take the warning, or to act upon it, and Adolphus had to take the consequences. Jimmy Silver intended to show Smythe & Co. that they could not cover Rookwood with ridicule with impunity, and he meant to show the Greyfriars fellows just how much the ineffable Smythe was appreciated by his own school. At least, they would

not allow Greyfriars to believe that all Rookwood was a home for idiots. And they waited grimly for the finish.

It was not long in coming. The last slacker was clean-bowled, and Rookwood were all down for nine.

"Five and nine, that's fourteen," said Jimmy Silver. "Fourteen for the two innings! Fourteen, my sons! Fourteen! Greyfriars have won by an innings and eighty-six runs!"

"Oh, don't!" said Lovell. "It's a bad dream!"

"And look at Smythe!" breathed Tommy Dodd. "Only look at him!"

Smythe seemed to have recovered his self-satisfaction. After all, what was a blessed game of cricket, that a chap should worry about it?

"By gad," said Smythe, "you seem to have licked us rather badly, Wharton!"

"Rather badly!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Only rather, my infants. Not very!"

"It's an uncertain game," said Wharton blandly.

Smythe nodded assent.

"Yaas. Astonishin' number of flukes occur in a game like this—astonishin'. Some of your bowling was good though—some of it."

"Only some of it?" murmured Bob Cherry, almost overcome.

"And I noticed some of your batting," said Smythe. "You've got a couple of good bats."

"Only a couple!" grinned Harry Wharton.

"A couple quite good," said Smythe, "and some of the bowlin' was good; you've got a couple of bowlers that I'd be willing to play in my team, by gad!"

And Smythe sauntered into his dressing-room with his team, not looking in the slightest degree downhearted. He left the Greyfriars cricketers almost in convulsions.

CHAPTER 6.

Things of Beauty.

SMYTHE & CO. had been about a couple of minutes in the dressing-room, when the door was opened, and eight juniors swarmed in. Jimmy Silver & Co. had called on business.

Smythe looked round with a frown.

"Clear on, you fags!" he said. "Is tea ready?"

"No, tea isn't quite ready," said Jimmy Silver. "But we're ready. We've had some buns, and we're not stopping to tea, thanks!"

"Well, it's time you got off, if you're not going to be late for calling-over," said Tracy. "If the match had lasted as long as we expected, we wouldn't have got home by calling-over."

"It lasted as long as we expected," said Tommy Dodd.

Smythe waved his hand to the door.

"None of your cheek! Get out! What are you up to, Silver, you cheeky young sweep? What are you locking that door for?"

Jimmy Silver turned the key.

"That's to prevent interruptions," he said agreeably.

"Look here——"

"You remember my warning, Smythe?" said Silver, in a tone of deadly politeness. "We gave you the straight tip. If you were beaten by an innings, you remember——"

"I don't want to argue with you fags!" said Adolphus loftily. "Unlock that door and get out, or you'll be thrown out!"

"Get on with the throwing, bedad!" chuckled Doyle.

"If you've come here to make a row——" began Howard.

"Bless you, we haven't," said Jimmy Silver. "There won't be any row unless you make it. We're simply going to rag you!"

"What!"

"You've made us look fools, and made Rookwood look like a home for idiots. Now we're going to make you look like suitable inmates for a home for idiots! See?"

"Why, you——"

"Perhaps you'll know better next time. There's more matches to follow this, and you're still skipper. But I hope you'll benefit by the lesson. Collar him!"

"Look here," roared Smythe, "there's a dozen of us, and if you don't clear out quietly, you'll be put——"

"Put away!"

Jimmy Silver slipped the key in his pocket. There was no danger of interference from the Greyfriars fellows, with the door locked. Indeed, it was not likely

that Harry Wharton & Co. would have interfered in the private domestic affairs of the Rookwood crowd. If they heard a row, they were most likely to turn a politely deaf ear.

They certainly could not fail to hear a row.

For Jimmy Silver & Co. were rushing to the attack, and the slackers of Rookwood put up a fight, astounded by the assault.

As they were twelve against eight, they ought to have carried off the victory quite easily. But they didn't. A dozen slackers and nuts had no chance whatever against such doughty fighting men as the Fistical Four, and Tommy Dodd & Co. They were mostly older fellows, too, and somewhat bigger; but it did not steady them. They were knocked right and left.

The battle raged for full five minutes, and then the members of the team who were not groaning on the floor were dodging about the dressing-room, seeking in vain an avenue of escape.

Adolphus Smythe sat dazedly on the floor, and held his nose, which was streaming with crimson. He was not really much hurt, but he was completely hors-de-combat. Adolphus was not a fighting-man.

"Ow! Crumbs!" gasped Adolphus. "You young ruffians! You hooligans! Help!"

"Help!" yelled Townsend. "Rescue!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Gerroff!"

"By gad! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Floor 'em!" roared Tommy Doyle. "Floor 'em, bedad! Knock 'em down as fast as they get up, begorra!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Chuck it! Yow!"

"Stoppit, you young fiends! Oh, my nose! Ow, my eye! Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. burst into a roar of laughter as they surveyed the field of battle. The dozen slackers of Rookwood were on the floor, most of them severely damaged. As fast as one jumped up, he was promptly knocked down again, and they had finally decided to stay on the floor.

There was a discreet tap on the door, and Harry Wharton's voice was heard outside:

"Ahem! Anything wrong, you fellows?"

"Yes," panted Smythe; "we Ger-ro-o-ogh!" he broke off, gurgling, as Jimmy

Silver lunged at his ribs with a cricket bat.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"If they say a word, jump on 'em—hard!" said Jimmy Silver.

The wretched nuts of Rookwood did not say a word. They dared not. Jimmy Silver flourished the bat within an inch of Smythe's nose.

"Call out to Wharton that it's all right!" he commanded.

"Oh! Ow! I— Yow!" gasped Smythe, as the bat lunged again. "All right; I was just going to! Oh, you young demon! I—I say, Wharton, it—it's all right!"

"All serene!" replied Wharton.

And he walked away, in a state of wonder. He had certainly thought that a battle-royal was going on in the dressing-room.

"Now, you confounded young hooligans—" panted Smythe.

"Shut up!"

"I— Ow! Yow! Oh, dear! Stoppit!"

"Got the cords, Lovell?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, rather! Here they are!"

"Tie up their paws!"

"Tit-tut-tie us up!" gasped Smythe.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Didn't I warn you there would be a ragging if Greyfriars beat you by an innings? This is going to be a valuable lesson for you for next time!"

"You young rotters—you—"

"Thump them if they wriggle!" said Jimmy Silver. "It doesn't matter if you hurt them; it can all go down as part of the lesson!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the wretched victims, in desperation, attempted resistance. Their resistance was quelled sharply and efficaciously. Townsend howled loudly that he wouldn't have his hands tied. But when Lovell had bumped his head on the floor three times, getting harder each time, Townsend decided that he would. And his wrists were fastened together behind his back.

Lovell and Raby did the tying, one after another, while the other fellows were on guard, watchful as cats, to thump the unhappy victim into submission at the first sign of resistance.

Adolphus Smythe was the last. He gave

the juniors almost homicidal looks as they secured his hands. But he did not resist. He had had enough of that.

"Get up!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

The dozen slackers scrambled to their feet, with their secured hands behind their backs. They were powerless now, even if they had been inclined to offer further trouble.

"What's the little game, you young villains?" roared Smythe. "What are you playing us this trick for?"

"We—we—we'll smash you for this!" mumbled Howard.

"Rescue!" bellowed Topham.

And then he yelled as his head was bumped against the wall.

"Going to be quiet?" smiled Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, dear! Yes."

"Good! We can't have Rookwood fellows making a row on another school's ground!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "Think of your manners, you sweeps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hapless team were slammed against the wall in a scowling, furious row. Jimmy Silver took a pair of scissors from his pocket. Smythe trembled with apprehension as the junior approached him.

"What—what—what are you going to do?" he panted.

"Cut your hair!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Only a little bit," said Silver reassuringly. "Not enough to give you a cold in the napper! Only that beautiful curl that you put in pins every night!"

"I don't!" shrieked Smythe. "Let it alone! I—I'll smash you—"

"Better keep your head still, or I may have your scalp instead of your curl!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!" shrieked Smythe.

Deprived of that beautiful curl, upon which he expended a great deal of time daily, the dandy of the Shell felt that life would not be worth living.

Bump!

Smythe's head knocked against the wall, and he did not yell for help any more. The scissors clipped, and the beautiful curl dropped at his feet.

Jimmy Silver moved along the dismayed and demoralised line of "knuts," who could not play cricket, but who were as

skilful as professional hairdressers in looking after their hair.

The scissors clipped and clipped, amid gasps of horror from the victims.

Jimmy Silver had as light a hand as a barber. He simply gave the nuts a "workhouse fringe," as Tommy Dodd called it, along their foreheads. The change it made in their nutty appearance was considerable, however.

"That do, you chaps?" asked Silver, cocking his eye thoughtfully to survey his handiwork.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Oh, you beasts!" groaned Adolphus Smythe. "Oh, you awful beasts! I shan't get that grown again this term! Oh, you beasts!"

Adolphus almost wept.

"Chuck hairdressing, and start cricket practice!" suggested Lovell.

But Smythe only groaned. It was excellent advice; but there was no consolation in it for Adolphus of the Shell.

Jimmy Silver slipped the scissors back into his pocket. The wretched victims hoped that he was finished. But he wasn't; he had only started.

His next-step was to take a bottle of red ink and a brush from his pocket. Dipping the brush into the ink, he painted Adolphus' nose a brilliant red. Adolphus' aspect, when he had finished, was really remarkable.

Eleven more noses were similarly adorned. The slackers mumbled and endured it. But that was not all.

A dozen paper fools'-caps came into view from Lovell's pocket, and he unfolded them while Jimmy Silver was painting noses. The fools'-caps were placed on the twelve wretched heads, and fastened there by a really novel means—Lovell swamping thick gum on the hair, and jamming the paper hat on it.

The Fourth-Formers were almost suffocating with laughter by this time. The aspect of Smythe & Co. was un-nerving.

"Now for the specs!" said Raby, gurgling.

Jimmy produced a large pair of spectacles of huge size, with rusty, metal frames, which he had evidently picked up cheap. He placed them on Adolphus' nose, and fastened them securely behind his ears, by passing a knotted string round the back of his head. There were no lenses in the

spectacles, and they did not impede Adolphus' vision. But they made him extraordinary to look at.

"Oh, you beast!" gasped Adolphus.

"That's to mark your score, you know," explained Silver.

"Ow! I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you—I'll—I'll— Oh—oh—oh, dear!"

"Sort of look well-finished now!" said Jimmy Silver, surveying the hapless dozen with great satisfaction. "Put 'em in file."

Smythe & Co. were dragged from the wall, and placed in file, one behind another. A cord was run along,

"You villains! You ruffians! You're not taking us out like this!"

"We jolly well are!" said Jimmy Silver. "This is a warning to you! We heroby promise solemnly to do the same over again, every time you lose a match for Rookwood by playing the giddy ox!"

"We swear!" chuckled Tommy Dodd.

"We do—we do!" Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver flung the door open.

"March!"

"I won't!" shrieked Smythe.

"Kick away!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Luckily, it doesn't matter if they're hurt, as it goes down as part of the lesson. Pile in!"

Kick! Kick! Kick!

"Yow, yow, yow!"

There was no resisting persuasion of that sort. The miserable procession wriggled out of the dressing-room. Still persuaded from behind, the twelve juniors wriggled on, like a huge centipede, out of the pavilion. A wild roar greeted their appearance.

CHAPTER 7.

Adolphus Smythe Sings Small.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The Greyfriars fellows stared at the human centipede, and shrieked. Bob Cherry threw himself down in the grass, and kicked. Yells came from everybody within sight, and the yells drew others to the spot.

Smythe & Co. almost wept with wrath and shame. They would have given whole Golcondas of wealth if the earth would have opened and swallowed them up.

There were twelve of them, and they had let eight fellows handle them like this—helplessly. Even the ineffable Smythe realised that it does not always pay to be a hopeless slacker. Some of the care he had spent on parting his hair and curling that beautiful curl—now lost for ever—would have been better expended in the gym. with the gloves on. There was no doubt about that now. Ever so dainty a touch in hair-dressing could not save him from this!

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" groaned Bob Cherry. "I'm having fits! I'm having apoplexy! Oh, my ribs—my poor ribs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"B-b-but what does it mean?" gasped Wharton. "What the dickens—what the thumping dickens—"

"Halt!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

The centipede halted, the different members bumping on one another, and hacking with their heels.

"Look at them!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha! We're looking!"

"Help!" wailed Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These fellows are the nuts of Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen of Greyfriars, I have great pleasure in presenting the nuts of Rookwood, and can guarantee them genuine filberts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The honourable nuts came here to play the giddy goat and to let their school be guyed by the way they play cricket. We came here to exhibit them in a get-up suitable for giddy goats! They can't play cricket, but they part their hair beautifully. They can't box, but they have a topping taste in scent. They can't make runs or stop a ball, but they can mop up all the places in the eleven, and play the giddy ox off the cricket-field. Here you behold them suitably attired as giddy oxen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, I leave you to contemplate our happy nuts! Good-bye!"

"You villain! Don't leave us like this!" screamed Smythe.

Jimmy Silver did not reply. Greyfriars crowd were shrieking and rolling with merriment. The slackers of Rookwood wriggled and panted with fury. Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered up their bikes, which

they had left at the lodge, and rushed them out through the gateway.

The mounted their machines, and sailed away gaily for Rookwood.

They did not ride fast. They couldn't. At every turn of the pedals they burst into a fresh roar of laughter.

The ridiculous defeat Rookwood had suffered—the loss of a match wholly due to the fatuity of Adolphus Smythe & Co.—was avenged now. And with the promise of similar attentions to come next time he threw away a match, it was possible that even the egregious Adolphus would begin to consider himself, and see the error of his ways. Certainly he could not want to go through such an experience again.

"Oh, what'll they say at Rookwood?" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pity we couldn't have brought 'em home like that—"

The juniors yelled at the idea.

"And I wonder what the dickens the Greyfriars chaps think of it!" gurgled Raby; and he went off into a fresh-roar.

Jimmy Silver released a handle-bar to wipe his eyes.

"It'll show Greyfriars that we're not all fatheaded chumps at Rookwood!" he said. "Smythe has given them the impression that we were. After Smythe's beer through this a few times, he'll see light!"

* * * * *

On the following Wednesday there was another cricket fixture to come off, and Jimmy Silver & Co wondered grimly what kind of a junior team was to play. They soon heard some news—news which made it unnecessary for Jimmy Silver to purchase any more gum, red ink, or fools'-caps. One lesson had been enough. Adolphus' beautiful curl had not had time to grow again yet. Perhaps he was afraid of losing his back hair next time. Anyway, there was news.

There were to be changes in the team!

When Jimmy Silver & Co. heard that news, they grinned, they chuckled, but they nobly forbore to gloat over Adolphus. They resolved to give Adolphus a chance, content that the school would no longer be represented in the cricket-field by the slackers of Rookwood!

CHAPTER 8.

Slack Ingratitude.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were grinning joyously.

The four young rascals were leaning, in a row, against the wall in the Sixth-Form passage, near Bulkeley's study, on the "Classical" side at Rookwood.

The juniors had, of course, no business in the sacred precincts of the Sixth-Form passage. But they were there all the same.

They were interested.

From Bulkeley's study came the sound of raised voices. Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, the idol of the Classical side, had visitors. And from the sounds that proceeded from the study it was evident that Bulkeley and his visitors did not find themselves in agreement.

And Jimmy Silver & Co., instead of being shocked and pained, as they really ought to have been, seemed to regard it in the light of a "lark." There was not the slightest sign on their grinning faces to show that they were shocked or pained. They were enjoying it.

Bulkeley's visitors were seniors from the "Modern" side—Knowles and Catesby. The sharp, unpleasant voice of Knowles came distinctly from the study, backed up by the grumbling tones of Catesby. The pacific voice of old Bulkeley could hardly be heard.

The talk ran on cricket. And it was growing excited. In the passage Jimmy Silver of the Fourth pushed back his cuffs, as if to be in readiness.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome all followed his example, and pushed back their cuffs. Then they waited in gleeful anticipation.

"The rotten Modern cads!" said Jimmy Silver. "Awful cheek to come over here and worry old Bulkeley. He'll get fed up soon. What an awful lark to see Bulkeley slinging Knowles out on his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're two to one," said Jimmy Silver. "When Bulkeley gets fed up, he will want more help. We're backing up old Bulkeley."

"Hear, hear!"

"We can't lay hands on prefects as a rule. But as soon as there's a row in old Bulkeley's study, that's where we chip in.

He's bound to be grateful to see us ready to back him up like this."

"Oh, rather!"

"My word! Knowles is going it!" said Raby, with a whistle.

The metallic voice of the Modern prefect could be clearly heard.

"I warn you, Bulkeley, that there will be trouble, if there isn't fair play for our side. We've stood about as much Classical bunkum as we intend to stand. If the Modern side doesn't get a fair show in the cricket this season, we shall make up our minds to leave the club."

Jimmy Silver & Co., of course, were not there to listen. They were there to back up their popular captain in case of need. It did not occur to them that the captain of Rookwood was not likely to "chuck out" his visitors like a fag, even if words ran very high. In their keenness to get a chance of laying hands on the Modern captain, they did not think of that. Any one of them, in Bulkeley's place, would have kicked Knowles out long ago. And they did not make allowances for the self-restraint of the high and mighty Sixth.

"Bulkeley must go for him now," murmured Jimmy Silver.

But Silver was disappointed. Bulkeley replied in a calm tone:

"That would mean ruin for the first eleven this season, Knowles."

"Well, it would be your fault!" came Knowles' snappish reply. "We want to back up the school as much as you do. But three Moderns in the first eleven against eight Classics—it's a little too thick!"

"If you had the men, I'd play 'em."

"Well, we think we've got the men. I fancy we shall give your side a tussle to-morrow in the trial match, anyway."

"I hope you will, Knowles. I want to see both sides play up. But the fact is, your side have been slacking a lot—"

"I don't admit anything of the sort!"

"I suppose you don't think the Modern team will keep its end up against the Classics in the trial match?" said Bulkeley, a little irritably.

"Yes, I do."

"Certainly," chimed in Catesby. "I think very likely our team will beat you to the wide, Bulkeley."

"Bulkeley surely can't stand that!" muttered Jimmy Silver, in the passage. "Get ready to chip in, you chaps!"

But Bulkeley's patience seemed to be inexhaustible. The "chucking-out" process, to the bitter disappointment of the four juniors, did not begin. Instead of that, the captain of Rookwood could be heard replying quite calmly:

"Very well, Catesby. If the Modern team beats us to-morrow, I'll admit that I've made a mistake in the selection of the first eleven. Beat us on the field, and you'll prove that your men are better than I've thought."

"So you say now!" sneered Knowles.

"Oh, he can't stand that!" gasped Lovell.

But Bulkeley stood it.

"I say it now, and I will stand to it, Knowles. If the Modern team beats the Classic team in the trial match it will show that I've made a mistake, and I'll admit it, and prove it by putting six Moderns in the first eleven."

"It's a go?" said Knowles.

"Certainly."

"All right!" said Knowles. "We only ask for fair play, but we mean to get that. Come on, Catesby!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances of the deepest disappointment. Bulkeley had stood the Moderns' cheek, and they were going quietly. There was to be no chucking out at all—their valuable aid was not required.

"What's the Classic side coming to?" said Silver, in deep disgust. "I'm jolly well ashamed of old Bulkeley. I wouldn't have stood it!"

"No fear!"

"Give the cads a groan as they go," said Lovell.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four were intensely exasperated. The Modern prefect had been slanging their captain, the Classical idol, and Bulkeley had taken it all pacifically. They felt almost ashamed of Bulkeley. But they meant to let Knowles see that there were some fellows on the Classic side who had a proper opinion of his cheek. If they had been a little less excited, they might have hesitated to "groan" a prefect in the Sixth-Form passage. But they were furious now.

The study door opened, and Knowles and Catesby came out. From Jimmy Silver & Co. there burst deep groans in chorus.

Groan!

Knowles stared at them.

"You cheeky young cads——"

Groan!

Knowles looked back into the study, with a bitter sneer on his hard face.

"So that's the outcome of all your talk about keeping the peace and pulling together, Bulkeley—planting a gang of fags in the passage to insult us as we go out!"

Bulkeley strode to the doorway, his face flushed and angry.

"What are you fags doing here?" he rapped out.

Bulkeley did not look so good-tempered as usual. The mere idea that a band of fags had heard raised voices in his study annoyed him. The thought that the dispute between the great men of the Sixth should become common talk to the Lower School was exasperating. The captain of Rookwood did not see eye to eye with the heroes of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. left off groaning. They blinked rather doubtfully at Bulkeley. They did not like his looks.

"Ahem!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Just so!" said Lovell vaguely. "Ahem!"

"What are you doing here?" thundered Bulkeley. "Do you mean to say that you've been eavesdropping?"

The Fistical Four turned crimson. It was an unpleasant accusation—especially unpleasant from old Bulkeley, who ought to have known them better.

"Oh, draw it mild, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "Of course we haven't."

"You must have heard——"

"We couldn't help hearing Knowles yell, could we, when we were only six feet from the door?" demanded Lovell.

"And what were you doing six feet from my door?"

"Ahem!"

"Listening, the young cads!" said Knowles.

"We weren't listening!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Only a cad would think we would do such a thing!"

"The manners of the Classic fags are improving," said Knowles, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That's how you let your fags talk to a prefect, is it?"

"Will you explain what you were doing here, if you have anything to say, Silver?" asked Bulkeley, in a tone of concentrated anger.

"Well, we—we—we were going to back you up, Bulkeley," confessed Silver, seeing that there was no help for it.

"Back me up! What the dickens do you mean?"

"We—we thought you'd chuck out those cads for checking you, and—and we were going to lend a hand."

Jimmy Silver stole a look at Bulkeley's face as he made that explanation. He hoped to see some sign of gratitude there. But there was not the faintest sign of it. Bulkeley seemed to gasp for a moment. Then he turned into the study, and grasped a cane from his table, and strode out into the passage.

"Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Now, then——"

"Oh, my hat!"

Swish!

"Now the other—sharp!"

Swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now you other rascals—Lovell"—swish, swish!—"Raby"—swish, swish!—"Newcome"—swish, swish!

"Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

"Wow-wow-wow!"

"Now clear off!" said Bulkeley. "And if there's any more of your cheek, I'll give you a real licking next time."

Jimmy Silver & Co. cleared off. They felt as if they had had a real licking that time. Bulkeley went back angrily into his study; Knowles and Catesby walked away, smiling in a way that exasperated the Fistical Four even more than that unexpected licking.

Jimmy Silver & Co. retired to their own quarters, the end study in the Fourth, and squeezed their hands, and groaned in chorus.

"The awful beast!" gasped Raby. "After we were going to back him up, too!"

"Ungrateful rotter!" groaned Lovell.

"Ow, ow!" mumbled Newcome. "I always thought—ow!—that Bulkeley was a decent chap—yow!—but now I think—wow!—he's a beast! Groo!"

Jimmy Silver rubbed his hands hard, and for some time he said never a word. His loyalty to old Bulkeley had been put to a very severe test. But it stood the strain.

"It's rotten!" he said at last.

"Wow-ow!"

"But we're backing up old Bulkeley all the same!" said Jimmy Silver firmly. "Oh, my hands! He's rather a beast—oh, dear!—but you can't expect much sense from a

Sixth-Formee—wooh!—and we're backing him up all the same!"

The Co. did not answer. They only groaned.

CHAPTER 9.

Knowles' Little Plot.

KNOWLES was smiling as he came into his study on the Modern side. Catesby followed him into the study, looking considerably puzzled.

Knowles kicked the door shut, and lighted a cigarette. He smiled at Catesby through a blue haze of smoke.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Catesby, "I'm blessed if I understand!"

"Why don't you understand?"

"You seem to be jolly well satisfied," said Catesby.

"I am satisfied," said Knowles, with a nod.

"Well, I don't see it. It seems to me that we're beaten all along the line. When the trial match comes off to-morrow, the Classics will win hands down. We can say what we like over there, Knowles, but you know as well as I do that the Modern eleven will never beat the Classic team. It wasn't easy to scrape up a senior eleven on our side at all. We've got half a dozen good men, but the rest are very scrappy. And Bulkeley's team is nearly all good stuff."

"Between ourselves, I suppose we may admit that," assented Knowles.

"Well, then," argued Catesby. "The First Eleven is going to be picked from the best men on both sides. Bulkeley had already agreed to take three of us—yourself and Frampton and me. We've simply wasted time over there."

"Hardly. Bulkeley has agreed that if the Modern team beats him in the trial match, we get six men in the School Eleven."

"But we can't beat him, and you know it."

"I don't know it," said Knowles calmly.

Catesby stared at him. Catesby was hand in glove with Knowles, and prepared to back him up to any extent in securing the Moderns their rights, or a little more than their rights. To have a majority in the First Eleven was the keenest ambition of the Modern seniors.

But among themselves they had to admit that the Modern players did not equal the Classics in the field—at least, Knowles and Catesby admitted it in strict privacy. In making his plans and stratagems Knowles had no use for humbug.

The selection of the First Eleven was an important question. There was a great deal of keenness, too, about the Modern versus Classical match, though it was only a trial match to show the form of the various players. The rivalry of the two sides found its keenest expression on the playing-fields.

Bulkeley kept his men well up to the mark, and the Classical senior team was a very good eleven. The Modern senior team was nowhere near it in form. On the merits of the case, the Moderns should have been satisfied with having three men picked for the First Eleven, but they did not see it. Knowles saw it, but was determined not to see it, and all the Moderns were backing up the view Knowles chose to take.

"If you've got anything in your head, you may as well tell me," said Catesby, at last. "I'm quite in the dark. How can we beat the Classics? Not on our form?"

"So long as we beat them, Bulkeley will have to keep his word."

"I know that. But——"

"We're going to beat them," said Knowles. "A lot in cricket depends on the captain. If the Classics had to play under another skipper to-morrow, it would make a big difference."

"Of course it would; but they're not likely to give Bulkeley the go-by to please us."

"They may have no choice. Besides, Bulkeley is their best man. He is a good change bowler, a reliable field, and a whacking batsman. Their biggest score will come from Bulkeley. Without him I don't believe their score will even tie with ours."

"But they won't play without him!" almost shrieked Catesby. "Why should they?"

"Not if they can help it, of course."

Catesby started.

"Dash it all, Knowles!" His voice faltered a little. "You don't mean to say you're thinking of some dodge for nobbling Bulkeley?"

Knowles ceased to smile; his face grew harder, and his eyes had an unpleasant greenish glint in them.

"This isn't a time to be particular," he

said. "Of course, this is strictly between ourselves, Catesby."

"We're fairly in for it," pursued Knowles. "We've set out this term to down Bulkeley. We're going to make our side top side of Rookwood. The fellows depend on us to keep their end up. We're all fed up with Classical swank. Every fellow on that side is a swanking cad, from Bulkeley down to the littlest fag. They're up against us because we have more money, more brains, and generally because we're the Modern side, and their mouldy old side is going to the dogs. Well, we're going to help it get there."

"Hear, hear!" said Catesby heartily.

"This season we're coming out strong on cricket. If we play our cards well, we may get the school games right in our hands, and we may be able to shift Bulkeley——"

"By gad!"

"That's the goal. You know very well I ought to be captain of Rookwood, and you ought to be vice-captain, Catesby."

"Of course, I see that. But—Bulkeley is a pretty good skipper; the Classics stand by him to a man, and a lot on our side back him up no end."

"We've got to alter all that, and we're going to begin by getting a good representation in the School eleven. Bulkeley was talking a bit too loosely this afternoon, but he will have to keep his word; I shall nail him down to it. If we beat the Classics in the trial match, we get six men into the first eleven. If they don't play Bulkeley we shall beat them. Well, then, the long and the short of it is, they won't play Bulkeley. I shall fix it."

"Oh, Knowles!"

"The game's worth the candle," said Knowles. "Of course, it will have to be kept awfully dark."

"I should jolly well say so!" gasped Catesby. "Why, the fellows on our own side would scrag us if they suspected."

"They won't suspect," said Knowles coolly. "I can fix it for Bulkeley to be called away just before the match on a fool's errand—and he's too fatheaded ever to suspect that I had a hand in it himself. If he did suspect he wouldn't dare to say so—there wouldn't be an atom of proof. Of course, I shall get a third party to do the trick."

"My hat!"

"Joey Hook is the man," said Knowles, "the fellow who drove us in the car to the

paces the other day—another little secret of ours." Knowles grinned. "He can work it. When Bulkeley finds out he's been spoofed, he can think what he likes. As a matter of fact, he won't suspect me—"

"He wouldn't suspect a Rookwood chap of playing a trick like that," agreed Catesby.

Knowles flushed a little.

"Well, never mind what he suspects. That's the little game. Without Bulkeley, we shall beat them. Bulkeley will have to keep his word all the same. I specially said there was to be no backing out after the match. You see, this idea came into my head the minute he'd spoken. We are going to win that match, and then we will have six men in the First Eleven. That's only a beginning—but there you are."

"But how—"

"No need to talk that over here. We shall have to see Joey Hook."

"I—I say, it's a bit risky meeting him near the school, or going to see him in Combe—in the daylight," said Catesby doubtfully. "If we should be spotted, you know the reputation he has—"

"We're not going to the Black Dog to see him," grinned Knowles, "and we're not meeting him near the school. I shall wire to him to meet us somewhere, where I've met him before, out of sight—the old barn."

"But—but is it safe to send a wire like that?"

"Fathead! We've got a code, the same we use when it's a wire about horses."

"Oh, I see!"

Knowles sat down to the table, and drew pen and ink, and a telegraph-form towards him. Catesby read over his shoulder as he wrote:

"John Harris, Ivy Cottage, Lanchester. Six, C. K."

"That's his name for telegrams," explained Knowles. "And when I don't mention a place of meeting, he knows it's the old barn. See?"

"Oh, good!" said Catesby. "Puzzle anybody to guess anything from that."

"If he's not at home, they'll 'phone him wherever he is, so that's all right—I've given him plenty of time." Knowles opened the study door, and shouted: "Fag!"

Tommy Dodd of the Fourth came along.

"Take this telegram to the post-office, Dodd, and send it off at once. Here's a bob!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said Knowles irritably.

"I'm going down to cricket practice this afternoon," said Tommy Dodd. "We're keen about it, you know. We're making Smythe put some new men in the junior team."

"Take that wire at once, you young sweep. It's important."

"Not so jolly important as our cricket practice," said Tommy Dodd, backing away as he spoke, however.

"Why, you—" Knowles caught up a cane.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "Anything to oblige a nice chap like you, Knowles. You're always so kind and considerate."

Tommy Dodd dodged away before Knowles could reach him with the cane. He went somewhat dismally to look for his chums, Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, and they heroically decided to cut the cricket practice and walk down to Combe with him. So the three Tommies started off together to take the telegram, little dreaming of the treacherous scheme to which they were unwittingly giving their aid.

CHAPTER 10.

Taking Cover.

"WELL hit!"

Jimmy Silver grinned as he watched the ball in its flight.

He strolled off the pitch, tossing the bat to Jones minor, and joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome outside the pavilion.

The Classical juniors were at cricket practice. Smythe of the Shell was looking on, with an eyeglass in his eye, and a somewhat disdainful expression upon his face. Smythe, the junior captain, had been constrained to agree to put players in the junior team who could play, as well as his own "nutty" pals who could not play. It had been difficult to bring Smythe to reason, but he had been brought. And when the re-formed eleven was selected, there was no doubt that Jimmy Silver would have a place.

Silver was a good bat, but it was in bowling that he excelled, and the Rookwood junior team was weakest in bowlers.

The juniors were prepared to "scrag" Smythe if he left Jimmy Silver out of the next match.

"Nuff for to-day!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "What price a stroll out, my infants? We'll drop in for tea at Combe, al fresco—what!"

"Good egg!" said Lovell. "We've done our little bit. Those Modern cads have been cutting practice. They're all expecting places in the eleven, too."

"Cheeky cads!" said Silver. "Of course, Tommy Dodd will have to go in; he's a thumping good bat; but Doyle and Cook can go and eat coke. We shall have to keep an eye on Smythe when he's making up the team. He'll dodge us if he can. He doesn't like playing anybody outside the select family circle of nuts. Well, come on!"

The Fistical Four sauntered away towards the gates.

It was a sunny afternoon, and a walk through the green country-side was very pleasant. The chums of the Fourth had done their duty at cricket practice, and they had recovered from the licking received at the hands of Bulkeley. So they strolled out of the gates of Rookwood in great spirits.

Three Modern juniors coming up the road met them in the lane. Jimmy Silver wagged an admonitory forefinger at Tommy Dodd & Co.

"You've been missing practice," he remarked.

"That ass Knowles sent us with a telegram," said Tommy Dodd, with a snort. "It doesn't matter, though, we don't need practice so much as you Classic mugs."

"Sure we could play your heads off any time," remarked Tommy Doyle.

"And not half try!" added Tommy Cook.

Jimmy Silver winked at his comrades, and they made a sudden rush. Three Modern caps went flying over the hedge, and three Modern juniors sat down suddenly in the dust, and the Classical chums fled along the lane laughing.

Tommy Dodd sprang to his feet, and shook his fist after them.

"You Classic worms!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aft'er them!" yelled Doyle.

"Hold on! We've got to get some practice, or that cad Smythe will be trying to have us out of the eleven," said Tommy Dodd.

So the Modern chums recaptured their caps, and went on, postponing vengeance till a future occasion.

Much inspired by that little victory over their Modern rivals, the Classical quartette sauntered on. They stopped in the ancient village of Coombe for ginger-pop, by way of refreshment, and then started on a long walk across the heath. Jimmy Silver was a keen walker, and the Co. weren't going to admit that they were not just as good walkers as he, so they followed Jimmy's lead without demur, and left Rookwood a very considerable distance behind.

"Thinking of walking to London?" asked Raby at last.

"Or Manchester?" queried Newcome sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"If you're tired, little ones——"

"Oh, we're not tired," said Lovell. "Keep on to Inverness if you like."

"Let's get to Coombe," said Silver. "I'm ready for tea now—quite. It's only three miles following the footpath."

"Blow the footpath!" said Lovell. "There's a short cut of less than a mile if we go by the old quarry."

"Right you are," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, I'm feeling a bit fagged myself."

Jimmy Silver was at once restored to popularity by that candid admission.

The Classical four followed a track, guided by Lovell, which led them past the old quarry.

They were sauntering towards a barn, knee-deep in grass and ferns, when Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hook it, quick!"

"What's the row?"

"Into the barn, I tell you—sharp's the word."

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell by the arm, and rushed him at headlong speed into the old barn. Raby and Newcome, much surprised, followed at a run. They did not understand in the least what Jimmy Silver was acting in that remarkable manner for, but they knew he must have a good reason.

Jimmy Silver panted as they stopped in the barn.

"Saved!" he ejaculated dramatically.

"What the thunder——" began Lovell warmly.

"Slush!"

"Look here——"

"Jolly nearly spotted," said Silver. "If I hadn't seen them coming over the ridge, they'd have nailed us, as sure as houses."

"Who would?"

"Prefects, my son!"

"Oh!" said the Co. They understood then. The old Coombe quarries and their vicinity were strictly out of bounds for the juniors, owing to the dangerous nature of the locality. To be "spotted" there by prefects meant lines and a gating, and perhaps a caning.

"Blessed if I saw them," said Raby.

"Lucky for you you had your Uncle Jimmy with you, then," said Silver cheerfully. "Two rotten Modern prefects. No business to report Classics, of course; but they'd do it all the same."

The four juniors cautiously approached the old window, which was partially covered by a broken shutter, and peered out through the opening. Knowles and Catesby of the Sixth were in full view, crossing the heath towards the barn. They were talking together as they came, and evidently had seen nothing of the juniors. Jimmy Silver's prompt action in taking cover had saved the chums of the Fourth from a discovery that would have had unpleasant consequences. Knowles would have been delighted to report them for being out of bounds.

The juniors grinned as they watched the Sixth-Formers, from the cover of the barn.

"Poor old Knowlesey! He doesn't know what he's missed," remarked Lovell. "Might have got us a licking all round if he'd been a bit sharper. We'll lie low here till he's cleared off."

"I suppose he can't be coming here," muttered Silver uneasily.

"Why should he? He hasn't seen us!"

"I know that; but they're coming straight towards the barn."

The juniors watched in silence from the window. There was no doubt of it. Knowles and Catesby had left the path, and were striking across towards the barn directly. It was clear that the old barn was their destination.

The Fistical Four exchanged uneasy glances.

"Spotted after all, it looks like," murmured Raby.

"We're not spotted yet," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Get up into the loft."

"Good egg. If they don't hear us, it will be all right. They can't be going to stop long, I should think."

"We'll take good care they don't hear us."

Jimmy Silver swarmed up the rickety old ladder into the loft, and his chums followed him quickly. Knowles and Catesby were very close to hand now. Silver closed the creaking, cracked trap-door over the ladder.

The ancient boards under their feet creaked as they moved.

"Quiet!" whispered Silver. "If we're spotted, it means Saturday afternoon's detention, and no cricket-practice—as well as being marched back to the school by a Modern cad. Sit down and don't even breathe."

That command was a little difficult to execute. However, the chums of the Fourth sat down, and breathed softly. Through chinks in the dilapidated floor of the loft, they could see into the barn below. In a few minutes there was a sound of boots on the old brick floor, and Knowles and Catesby entered. Knowles looked round the barn.

"Not here yet," he remarked.

"We're early," said Catesby, looking at his watch. "It's only a quarter to."

"Better early than late. Have a fag?"

"Thanks."

The two prefects lighted cigarettes, and stood leaning against the old door of the barn, smoking and chatting—and waiting.

CHAPTER 11.

A Startling Discovery.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. exchanged glances of deep disgust and indignation.

Smoking was strictly prohibited by all the rules of Rookwood, and if Knowles had caught a fag smoking, he would have been "down" on him like a load of bricks. Yet here he was smoking himself with Catesby. Knowles was evidently one of those authoritative persons whose maxim is, "Do as I say, not as I do!"

The scent of tobacco and the murmur of voices floated up to the juniors in the loft. Through the chinks in the floor, they could see the two seniors quite plainly.

The minutes passed very slowly. They

saw Knowles look at his watch several times.

"Dash it all, it's well past six," said Knowles. "He ought to be here."

"I suppose he got the telegram?" said Catesby.

"If he didn't, they'd have telephoned to him. I know he's not away—I saw him yesterday."

Again the Classical juniors exchanged silent looks. That was the telegram Tommy Dedd had mentioned, of course.

They began to be interested, and also uneasy. Knowles was evidently keeping a secret appointment—he would not have come such a long way without good reasons. But the Classical chums had no desire whatever to hear his little secrets, whatever they were. But there was no choice about the matter, if the interview was held directly below them in the barn. They could hardly be expected to hand themselves over to punishment, for the sake of Knowles' beastly secrets. And Jimmy Silver reflected grimly that Knowles had accused them of eavesdropping that afternoon. It would serve Knowles right!

They would gladly have got out of hearing, however, if it had been possible. But it was not possible. Anywhere in the loft they could have heard the voices below—and they could not even stir without risk of immediate discovery.

The Co. looked silently and inquiringly towards Jimmy Silver. Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. It could not be helped.

Knowles was uttering impatient exclamations every few minutes. But at last Catesby, who was looking out of the doorway, called out:

"Here he comes!"

Another minute or two and a man entered the barn. He was a man of medium height, with a horsy look, a gaudy tie, and a bowler hat cocked on one side of his head.

"You're late, Hook," said Knowles irritably.

"Sorry, Master Knowles, I 'ad to get 'ere, you know."

In the loft above Jimmy Silver exchanged eloquent glances. They had seen Joey Hook before, hanging round the Black Bull and the Bird-in-Hand at Coomb. He was a gentleman of sporting propensities, with a kindly predilection for helping anybody who wanted to put a

"bit" on a geegee. Any fellow with that kind of sporting taste found a friend in Joey Hook; and to judge by the amount of liquid refreshment Joey Hook imbibed at the Bird-in-Hand, he did very well out of it.

"My only hat!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "Knowles—Catesby—and a bookmaker—a sporting tout! Oh, ye gods and little fishes!"

It was a startling discovery, and the Classical chums almost trembled at the bare thought of Knowles discovering their presence now.

"I s'pose it's somethin' on a 'orse-wot?" said Mr. Hook. "I recly came as soon as I could, Master Knowles. You 'eard something for the Spring 'Andicap?"

"It's not that," said Knowles; "quite a different matter. You remember you picked us up in a car the other day—"

"Yes."

"I suppose you could bring the car out to-morrow?"

"Suttigly."

"You could come rigged out as a chauffeur, I suppose—respectable sort of chauffeur, with goggles and so on?"

Joey Hook stared.

"Suttigly I could," he replied. "But why—"

"I want you to do me a good turn," said Knowles. "It will be worth a quid to you, and the expenses of the car. It will take up to-morrow afternoon."

"I'm at your service, Master Knowles. I don't quite see—"

"I'm going to explain. You know Bulkeley of Rookwood—a big fellow in the Sixth Form?"

Joey Hook scowled.

"Don't I know 'im!" he said. "He punched my 'ead once 'cause he found me talkin' to young Master Leggett. Punched my 'ead, the scoundrel!"

"Then he knows you by sight?" said Knowles uneasily.

"Oh, yes! Wot about it?"

"I suppose you could rig yourself up in driving goggles so that he wouldn't know you?"

"Easy as winkin'. But—"

"Well, I want you to call at the school with the car to-morrow afternoon—"

"At the school!" ejaculated Joey Hook, his eyes opening wide.

"Yes—got up as a very respectable

chauffeur, of course. You'll ask Mack, the porter, for Master Bulkeley. You'll give him a message that old Mr. Bulkeley, that's Bulkeley's uncle, has become seriously ill, and is sinking fast. You're old Mr. Bulkeley's chauffeur, and you've been sent in the car to fetch him quick."

"My eye!" said Joey Hook, in a state of great astonishment. "Wot is it—a lark on that there Bulkeley?"

"That's it," said Knowles, "pulling his leg, you know. It will take him away from a game for the afternoon, and worry him no end. You don't object to that."

Joey Hook chuckled.

"No fear! I'm your man!"

"Old Mr. Bulkeley lives at Shoremouth—that's thirty miles or so. He lives at the Elms, a place outside the town. Well, you'll take as much time as you can getting there—to use up the afternoon, you know. Have a puncture, if you like, at some place where there's no railway-station on route—or, say, the road's up and go a long way round—anything you like, so long as you use up time. Finally, land him at the Elms. While he's gone into the house, and is finding out that his uncle's the same as ever, you can clear off in the car, and leave him there."

Joey Hook burst into a hoarse laugh.

"What a game!" he said.

"He won't know you again—he'll know somebody has spoofed him, and that's all," said Knowles. "You'll get away quite safely while he's interviewing his uncle, and finding out that the old gent isn't at death's door."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"He can get back from Shoremouth by train. It's a cross-country journey, and he will have to change three times, so he won't arrive at Rookwood in a hurry—not before dark, I fancy. It's easy enough for you," said Knowles.

"Easy as winkin', Master Knowles. What a young gent you are! I'll be glad to serve him a turn, too—punchin' my 'ead, the scoundered, for 'aving a word with Master Leggett. You rely on me, Master Knowles. I'll be sich a respectable chauffeur that you wouldn't know me yourself. I can borrow a chauffeur's livery easy enough, and look like an old family servant. I'll rig a spoof number on the car, in case he notices, too. You leave it to me!"

"Right! Get to the school not later than two. Get there at half-past one to make sure."

"Arf-past one it is!" said Joey Hook. "That'll be a quid for me, and a quid for the car, Master Knowles!"

Knowles nodded. The prosperous banker's son had plenty of money. He would have spent much more than that to deprive the Classical seniors of Bulkeley's services for the afternoon if it had been necessary.

"Here's a quid!" said Knowles. "You rely on me!"

"Time we got back," said Catesby, who had listened without speaking a word. "It looks to me like an easy catch!"

"Easy as winkin', Master Catesby."

"Good-bye, Joey! I shall see you on Saturday as usual!"

With a nod to the dingy blackguard, Knowles went out of the barn with Catesby. The sporting tout remained a few minutes to light a cigar and to let the Rookwood seniors get clear. It would not have done for Knowles to risk being seen in the company of Joey Hook.

Mr. Hook chuckled gleefully over his cigar.

"My eye!" he murmured. "What a lark on Mister 'Igh-and-Mighty Bulkeley! And wot a precious rascal Master Knowles will make when he grows up! He, he, he!"

And Mr. Hook departed in his turn, and the old barn was deserted—save for the four juniors silent in the loft.

CHAPTER 12.

"Mum's the word!"

"WELL!" Jimmy Silver broke the silence at last with that ejaculation.

The Classical chums were trembling with indignation and horror.

The rascally plot had been unfolded under their very noses; they had heard every word from beginning to end.

"The cads! The rotters!" spluttered Lovell. "Let's get straight back to Rookwood and tell Bulkeley!"

"He'll lick Knowles for that, surely!"

said Raby. "Even Bulkeley wouldn't stand that!"

"What a lark for old Bulkeley to lick that howling cad!" said Newcome. "And show him up to the whole school, too! Come on, Silver! What are you mooning about?"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!" said Lovell warmly. "Let's get back to the school. The sooner we tell Bulkeley this the better. The awful beast! You remember we heard old Bulkeley say that if the Moderns won the trial match he'd give in, and let Knowles have six men in the first. This is a trick to let the Moderns win. They'll win very likely if old Bulkeley's away. Knowles would pin him down to his word, all the same, though Bulkeley meant if he was playing, of course."

"We'll jolly well put a spoke in his wheel!" said Raby, with great satisfaction. "This will be a regular show-up for Knowlesy! Fancy letting all Rookwood know that the cad has plotted with a rascal like Joey Hook to nobble old Bulkeley!"

"Are you coming, Silver, you ass?" demanded Lovell, lifting the trap, and preparing to descend from the loft.

Jimmy Silver was standing silent, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his boyish brow. He was thinking hard.

"Wait a bit Lovell! Give those cads time to get clear. We don't want them to spot us," said Silver.

Lovell gave a snort.

"I don't care much if they spot us now. They'll know we were here, anyway, when we tell Bulkeley what we've found out!"

"You do as your uncle tells you," replied Jimmy Silver. "This matter isn't so jolly simple as you think! We've got to be careful!"

"Blessed if I can see it! My idea is to go to Bulkeley at once, and tell him the whole yarn!" said Lovell.

"Suppose he doesn't believe it?"

"Eh?"

"You see," continued Jimmy Silver quietly. "Bulkeley knows we're up against Knowles, and he would find it jolly hard to believe that a Rookwood fellow would be such an utter cad. He would speak to Knowles at once, and Knowles would

be on his defence. He would deny every word of it!"

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"And Catesby would back him up through thick and thin."

"But—but it's true!"

"We know that, fathead, but Bulkeley doesn't. All Bulkeley will know is that we came to him with a very improbable yarn—"

"Improbable?"

"Well, it's improbable on the face of it," said Jimmy Silver. "If you hadn't heard it, and somebody told you, what would you think of such a story? We know Knowles better than Bulkeley does—we've got reason to—but we shouldn't have believed it even of Knowles if we hadn't heard it with our own ears!"

The Co. looked at Jimmy Silver in silence. It was true enough. Such a story wanted the most conclusive proof before it could be believed, and they knew that frank, unsuspecting old Bulkeley would be slow to believe evil of anybody.

"It will be our word against Knowles' and Catesby's," said Silver, "and they're prefects, and we're only fags in the Fourth. And it's well known that we've got our knife into Knowles. There'd be no proof, for Knowles would get word to Joey Hook at once, and he wouldn't turn up with his blessed motor-car to-morrow. Knowles would say it was an infamous slander—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And he's got nerve enough for anything. He hates us already. He would be quite capable of taking the matter before the Head, just to prove to all Rookwood that he was innocent—"

"Innocent!" stammered Lovell.

"Yes. And he'd prove it, too—good enough for all the school, my boy. Imagine Dr. Chisholm's face when he heard such an accusation brought by fags against one of his prefects! I tell you Knowles has got nerve enough to report it to him, and demand our punishment as slanderers!"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"And then," added Jimmy Silver, "this little scheme being knocked on the head, Knowles will lay some other scheme to dish Bulkeley very likely, so we shall have done it all for nothing. He won't talk over the next scheme under our noses!"

"B-b-but what's to be done, then?" said Lovell quite limply. "You don't suggest letting him rip, and letting old Bulkeley be spoofed to-morrow?"

"No fear! We've got to think it out," said Jimmy Silver; "but it's no good starting by getting ourselves hauled up before the Head for slandering a prefect. My dear kid, if we told this to the fellows in the Fourth, they'd think it was gammon. Wouldn't you, if Jones or Townsend came to you with such a yarn?"

"I—I—I suppose I should," said Lovell, after a pause.

"Mum's the word," said Jimmy Silver. "Speech is silver, and silence is golden. In this case, Silver is silent!" he added, with a grin. "We've got to have a pow-wow over this, and think it out. We've got to prevent Knowles dishing old Bulkeley; but we can't prevent it by getting ourselves into an awful scrape, and leaving Knowles free to lay another little scheme. Let's get out!"

In silence the Classical chums quitted the old barn, and took their way to Rookwood.

It was too late for tea at Combe now; they had only time to get in before locking-up.

Almost in silence they walked back to the school.

The Co. thought it over, and they realised that Jimmy Silver was right. If they had carried out their first impulse to rush off to Bulkeley with the news of the rascally plot there was no doubt that the cunning Knowles would have "dished" them, and their attempt to "back up Bulkeley" would have recoiled on their own heads. Indeed, the three juniors shivered to think what might have happened to them but for Jimmy Silver's foresight.

"The fellow's a criminal—simply a criminal!" gasped Lovell at last.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"He's not much better," he said. "But it's no jolly good saying so in public without a lot of proof."

"But what are we to do, then?" said Newcome helplessly.

"That wants thinking out. We'll have a pow-wow over tea."

But that "pow-wow" was not to come off so soon. Jimmy Silver & Co. entered

just before old Mack came down to lock the gates, thinking of their problem, and of anything but Tommy Dodd & Co.

But Tommy Dodd & Co. were thinking of them.

The three Tommies had not forgotten the encounter in the lane, and they were waiting for the Classical four to come in. And as the Classics entered and hurried across the quad towards the School House there was a sudden rush of feet under the old beeches.

"Collar the cads!"

Before Jimmy Silver & Co. knew what was happening they were surrounded by a horde of Modern juniors and swept off their feet and rushed away in the grasp of many hands.

CHAPTER 13.

Trial by Jury.

"H A, ha, ha!"
"Bagged!"

"Bring 'em along!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. struggled desperately.

They were generally ready for a scrap with the Moderns; but just then, with that deep problem on their minds, they were in no humour for japes.

But their humour in the matter was not consulted.

There were a dozen Modern juniors round them, all holding on, and the four Classics struggled and wriggled in vain as they were rushed away.

Away under the beeches they went, and away round the gym., the Modern heroes taking great care to keep their little game out of sight of the School House. They reached the wood-shed, and there the prisoners were rushed in, and dumped down on the floor. To secure them a heavy Modern youth sat on each of them, and the rest gathered round, laughing like hyenas.

The dusk was falling over Rookwood, and it was very shadowy in the wood-shed. Tommy Dodd lighted a bicycle-lamp to illuminate the proceedings. Tommy Cook carefully closed the door and bolted it. There was to be no chance of a rescue, if the other Classics got wind of the Modern raid.

"Look here, chuck it!" said Jimmy

Silver crossly. "We don't want any of your rot now, Tommy Dodd!"

"Yes, do chuck it!" said Lovell. "We want to get in to tea. Besides, we've got something to do!"

The Classical chums were very anxious to have that "pow-wow" in the end study, and decide what was to be done. There was not much time to waste, for it was upon the morrow that Knowles' plot was to be carried out. But they could not explain all that to the Moderns—indeed, if they had made that accusation against Knowles to the Modern juniors they would have received a terrific ragging as a reward. Tommy Dodd & Co. were not likely to admit that their captain was so thorough a rascal.

"Safe as houses!" said Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "Keep quiet, you Classic worms, and leave off wriggling!"

"Look here, what's the little game, you fatheads?"

"It isn't a game," said Tommy Dodd. "Nothing like it. A very serious matter. Form the court."

The grinning Moderns formed themselves into a circle, excepting the four who were sitting on Jimmy Silver & Co. They settled themselves a little more comfortably. There was not much comfort for the Fistical Four, but that couldn't be helped.

"Lacy!" rapped out Tommy Dodd.

"Adsum!" said Lacy.

"Fathead, this isn't roll-call! You're judge. No good being the hopeful son of a King's counsel if you can't judge. Get on the bench."

Lacy sat cross-legged on the bench.

"Put on your wig, you ass! What's the good of a judge without a wig? The wig is the chief part of the bizney. There's no difference between a judge and a criminal in the dock, excepting the wig."

"All right, keep your wool on, Tommy Dodd!"

Lacy adjusted his wig, which was nothing more imposing than the cover of a cushion, and gave Lacy a very striking appearance.

"Now, Webb!"

"Here I am!" said Webb.

"You're prosecuting liar—I mean lawyer. Put on your wig."

Webb donned a cushion-cover. The Modern juniors had evidently prepared

this little scene, and they seemed to regard it as very amusing. Jimmy Silver & Co. were not in the least entertained.

"Look here, will you gerrup?" growled Lovell. "We want our tea!"

"We're fed up!" grunted Raby.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said Tommy Dodd. "I beg you to note the contradictory statements of the prisoners on the floor. One says that he wants his tea, and another states that he is fed up. I draw attention to this trifling circumstance, gentlemen, as a proof that Classical cads are habitual storytellers, and couldn't tell the truth if they tried."

"Hear, hear!"

"Will you lemme gerrup?" roared Jimmy Silver sulphurously.

"Sit on him tight, Green!"

"You bet!" said Green.

"What silly game are you playing, you duffers?" yelled Lovell.

"I appeal to the court for protection," said Tommy Dodd.

"Contempt of court," said the judge.

"Knock his head against the floor."

Rap! Rap!

"Ow! Oh, I say! Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you silly idiots don't let me get up—" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Contempt of court! Knock his head on the floor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver gave a fiendish yell as his head was rapped on the floor. The floor was hard and unsympathetic.

"Oh, you rotters! Ow, you Modern cads! Yow-ow!"

"Silence in court!" said Judge Lacy.

"This is a trial by jury, and if you don't know how to behave yourselves in court, you Classic worms, you'll be taught! Any interruption is contempt of court. Sit on his head, Green. Gentlemen of the jury, the court is now open, and the proceedings will—er—proceed."

"Your worship, and honourable gentlemen," said Webb, pushing the corner of his wig out of his eyes, "I regret to say that this is a very serious case. I hope to prove that the prisoners at the bar—I should say, on the floor—are guilty of manslaughter, pocket-picking, petty larceny, and cheek."

"My learned brother may get on," said the judge.

Webb cleared his throat with quite a legal little cough. The gentlemen of the jury stood round grinning.

The Fistical Four, safely pinned down, glared. Trial by jury might be funny from the Modern point of view, but the four Classicals entirely failed to see where the fun came in.

"Your honourable worship," pursued Webb, "these prisoners—known to be bad characters—"

"I rise to order," said a member of the jury. "Let the learned counsel state in what way these prisoners are known to be bad characters."

"The question is in order," said the judge.

"I hope to satisfy the court upon that point," said the prosecuting lawyer. "They are Classicals—measly, mingy Classicals! I trust the jury require no further evidence on that point."

"Hear, hear!"

The jury were quite satisfied. The prisoners on the floor looked daggers.

"To resume," continued Webb, "these bad characters—these measly Classicals—committed assault and battery upon three respectable citizens this afternoon. They attacked Messrs Dodd, Doyle, and Cook, and deprived them of their caps, undoubtedly with the intention of purloining them. Owing to their great speed in retiring from the scene, Messrs. Dodd, Doyle, and Cook were unable to deal with them on the spot. Gentlemen of the jury know the great speed a Classical cad can put on when there is a Modern after him."

"Hear, hear!" said the jury.

"You rotter!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Lemme get up, and I'll mop up the floor with any three of you!"

Rap! Rap!

Green jammed Jimmy Silver's head on the floor without waiting for the judge to pronounce the interruption, "Contempt of court!"

"I will now call the injured parties," pursued the prosecuting counsel. "Mr. Dodd, kindly come forward"

Mr. Dodd kindly came forward.

"State what occurred this afternoon, on the occasion of the assault, Mr. Dodd."

"We were coming along the lane," said the witness; "we noticed a bad smell in the atmosphere, so we knew there were some Classicals hanging round. These

Classicals never wash their necks. The prisoners came up and rushed us. They actually had the cheek to lay their hands on us—us Moderns! That is lese-majesty and contempt of court by all the laws of Rookwood. The touch of a Classical cad is well known to be contaminating."

"The witness' statement is according to law," said the judge. "For a Classical worm to lay hands on a Modern young gentleman is lazy-majesty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court! The prisoners are guilty of lazy-majesty—"

More laughter in court. The learned judge's pronouncement of lese-majesty made even the Classicals grin.

"I have other witnesses to call," submitted the learned counsel. "Messrs. Doyle and Cook will kindly step forward. They corroborate the statement of Master Dodd."

"Faith, and we do!" said Tommy Doyle.

"The prisoners on the floor laid hands upon you?"

"Yes. I had to burn my jacket afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I had to wash in Condy's Fluid!" corroborated Mr. Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" roared Lovell. "I'll jolly well—Yarooop!"

Rap, rap!

"Gentlemen of the jury, and learned judge, and your worship and honour, that is my case," said the learned counsel. "I demand a verdict of guilty against the prisoners on the floor."

"You thumping idiots—" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Sit on his silly head, Green!"

"I'm sitting on it! I— Yoowwwww!" shrieked Green, making a sudden spring into the air. "Yoowwwwwww!"

"What the thunder—"

"Yurrrrrrr! I'm bitten! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Great laughter in court.

Jimmy Silver had jumped up. But the jury piled on him as one man, and he was bumped down again. This time time two jurymen sat on him—not on his head, however.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"Gutty, my lord!"

"Prisoners on the floor, you have been found guilty by a jury of your fellow-countrymen, sitting in the wood-shed, according to law. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?" demanded the judge.

"Wait till I get hold of you, and I'll say something!" gurgled Jimmy Silver.

Rap, rap!

"Ow! Oh, jiminy!"

"I shall now proceed to pass sentence," said the judge. "After a fair trial, the prisoners have been found guilty. Wretched, depraved, and hardened offenders, I need not enlarge upon the enormity of your conduct. You, measly Classics, belonging to the mouldy side at Rookwood, have ventured to lay your mingy hands upon the honourable persons of Moderns, thus contaminating them, and committing the crime of lazy-majesty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! No words can express the heinousness of the prisoners' conduct, so I will not enlarge—"

"No; cut it short, Lacy!" came from Raby. "Your voice gives me a pain!"

Some of the jury chuckled, and the judge glared.

"I shall now pass sentence," he said. "The prisoners on the floor are sentenced to be hanged, and as the regular hangman has gone to tea, I call upon the jury to carry out the sentence."

"Hear, hear!"

"Why, you silly jabberwocks," howled Jimmy Silver, as Tommy Dodd dragged four ropes into view, "what are you at?"

"Carry out the sentence!" said the judge severely.

The ropes were thrown over a beam above, and four nooses were made at the ends. The four Classics were dragged under them. They were a little alarmed now. To their relief, the loops were slipped under their arms. The whole crowd of Moderns dragged at the ropes, and the Fistical Four were swung off the floor.

They clutched at the ropes above them, to ease the strain, and hung on, glaring like basilisks at the yelling Moderns.

"Let us down, you silly duffers!" yelled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unfortunate Classics swung three feet from the floor. Tommy Dodd & Co. proceeded to make the ends of the rope secure. Jimmy Silver & Co. turned round on the ropes as they swayed.

The ropes being secured, the Moderns gathered round them. They turned them as if they had been on spits, taking care, however, to dodge the lunging boots of the enraged Classics.

"Will you let us down, you shrieking, fathheaded burblers?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver kicked out desperately. He could not loosen the loop under his arms—his weight dragged it too tight. He could only hang on and kick.

The Moderns surged back, Doyle uttering a wild howl as Silver's boot caught him. Tommy Dodd picked up a long broom.

Keeping out of reach of the lunging boots, he stirred the swingers. The unfortunate victims gasped and roared, but there was no help for them. The Moderns shrieked with laughter.

"Time we got in to tea," chuckled Cook. "Good-bye, Bluebell!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-night, Mary Ann!"

"Fare thee well, and if for ever, still for ever fare thee well!" sobbed Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you're not going to leave us like this!" hooted Jimmy Silver, as the chortling Moderns made for the door.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye, sweetheart—good-bye!"

The Moderns streamed out of the wood-shed. Their laughter died away in the distance, and Jimmy Silver & Co. glared unspeakable things. Jimmy made a wild effort to drag the rope loose. But his weight was too much—the loop was tight round him, and was not to be argued with.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell. "The beasts! They can't leave us here like this! Oh, my only hat!"

"Oh, crikey! I'm getting cramped!"

There was a sound of footsteps outside the wood-shed a few minutes later. But it was not the Moderns returning. Jones minor of the Classic Fourth came in, and after him a crowd of Classical juniors. They stared blankly at the four Classics swinging under the beam, and there was a shriek of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Townsend.
 "Tommy Dodd told us we should find something funny here. Ha, ha, ha!"
 "He was right!" shrieked Jones minor.
 "Oh, my hat! What are you fellows up there for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Get us down!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.
 "Loosen those ropes, you silly idiots! This isn't a joke, you fatheads!"

"Isn't it?" stammered Jones minor. "It looks like one! It looks a jolly lot like one! I should have taken it for a joke!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dummies——"
 "You chortling chumps——"
 "You burlbling jabberwocks——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The hanging Classics glared daggers at the yelling juniors. It was bad enough to furnish merriment to their old enemies the Moderns, but to be howled at like this by their own side was a little too thick. Jones, almost weeping with mirth, cut the ropes at last, and the Fistical Four came down with a run. They bumped on the floor, and roared, and the Classical crowd roared.

"Go for 'em!" yelled Jimmy Silver, who would have gone for anybody at that moment.

The Fistical Four charged furiously, and the hilarious crowd roared—not with merriment this time. The Classical chums knocked them right and left, and ran for the School House. They did not halt till they were safe in the end study.

"Well, this is a go!" gasped Lovell. "Those Modern cads have scored this time!"

From the passage came a howl of laughter. There was no doubt that for once, at least, the Moderns had scored.

CHAPTER 14.

Jimmy Silver Does the Trick.

TEA in the end study was a somewhat grumpy meal that evening.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were considerably sore over their "guying" at the hands of the merry Moderns. All the Classical juniors—with the exception of the Fistical Four, of course—were howling with laughter over it.

"We shall have to down those worms, or this study will lose its giddy prestige!" growled Jimmy Silver. "But for the present we've got to discuss that other matter."

The "pow-wow" was long and earnest, but the difficulty was great.

To go to Bulkeley with the story was impossible, for the reasons Jimmy Silver had made very clear. But to stand aside and let the Modern prefect's plot be carried out was still more impossible.

"We've somehow got to let Bulkeley know in advance that the man's coming, and then he'll know it's spoof when he comes," said Jimmy Silver. "But we can't go and tell him; we've worked that out. How the thunder——"

"It beats me!" confessed Lovell.
 Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Eureka!"
 "Got it?" asked his admiring chums.

Jimmy Silver's face was very excited, and his eyes had lighted up.

"Yes, I think so. You see, if Bulkeley got the tip now, it would be out. Knowles would hear of it, and warn Joey Hook off; that would make us look like liars. Bulkeley has got to have the tip just when Joey Hook gets here; and, at the same time, he's got to have proof that it was known beforehand that Hook was coming. Black and white, my sons—black and white!"

"Eh! What are you driving at?"
 Jimmy Silver jumped to the table, and jabbed a pen into the ink. His chums watched him breathlessly as he scrawled on a sheet of impot paper:

"Dear Bulkeley,—Joey Hook will call for you to-morrow in a car with a whopping cram about your uncle being seedy, to take you away from the match. It's all spoof; your uncle is all right. Don't be taken in. We heard him jawing it over with another villain. It's a jape.
 "Yours affectionately,

"A FRIEND."

"There!" said Jimmy Silver, with great pride. "When Bulkeley sees that, and knows it was written to-day, he will know it's all spoof to-morrow, won't he? Because if Hook's yarn is true, how could a friend have known it in advance?"

"But——"

"Bulkeley won't get this till the car is here," explained Jimmy Silver triumphantly. "Then it will be too late for Knowles to change his plans."

"Oh!"

"You see, I'm going to give this to Neville of the Sixth."

Jimmy Silver sealed up the communication in an envelope.

"Neville?"

"Yes; he's Bulkeley's chum. You come with me."

Jimmy Silver rushed out of the study, and his chums followed him in amazement. Jimmy did not pause till he reached Neville's study in the Sixth-Form passage. There he tapped discreetly at the door, and Neville's good-natured voice bade him enter. The prefect looked inquiringly at the four excited juniors.

"I've got an envelope here," said Jimmy Silver. "It's awfully valuable—awfully! Would you mind putting it in your pocket till to-morrow, Neville?"

Neville laughed.

"Somebody been sending you bank-notes?" he asked.

"N-n-not exactly. But it's awfully valuable!" said Jimmy Silver impressively. "I'd like you to put it in your pocket-book, if you will, and hand it over to me when I ask you for it to-morrow. It's sealed—I've done it up with wax!"

"Oh, all right!" said Neville, surprised, but good-natured. And he took out his pocket-book, and slipped the letter into it. "Now get off."

"Right ho! I say, we're awfully obliged, Neville."

"Oh, don't mench!" said Neville, laughing. "Clear off!"

The juniors scampered away. They had very cheery faces when they came up to the dormitory. They could not help chuckling as they thought of the scene on the morrow—when the car would arrive for Bulkeley, and Neville would be called upon to produce that letter, clear proof that it had been written the night before, and so that the story of Mr. Bulkeley's sudden illness was "spook." The thought of Knowles' face, when Bulkeley did not go, made the Classical Four chortle.

"Hallo!" said Townsend. "What's the joke? Thinking how we found you

strung up in the wood-shed? Funny, wasn't it? Ha, ha, ha!"

But the Classical Four did not explain what the joke was. They hugged that knowledge to themselves, and looked forward with blissful anticipation to the morrow.

CHAPTER 15.

Simply Awful.

"ON the ball!" said Jimmy Silver. Morning lessons were over, and the boys of Rookwood had streamed out into the quadrangle, bright in the spring sunshine.

Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Fourth, the heroes of the Modern Side, were punting about an old football in the quad. And as soon as Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Side spotted them their natural impulse, of course, was to "bag" the ball. Which they immediately proceeded to do.

There was quite a crowd of Modern juniors round the ball, but the Classical four never counted odds. Jimmy Silver led the charge, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome backed him up at once. Tommy Dodd was rushed off the ball, and Tommy Cook was shoved aside, and Tommy Doyle was floored, and Leggett swept over with a roar, and the Classical youths rushed the ball away to their own side almost before the Moderns knew what was happening.

Tommy Dodd sat up and roared.

"Yah! Classical cads! After them!"

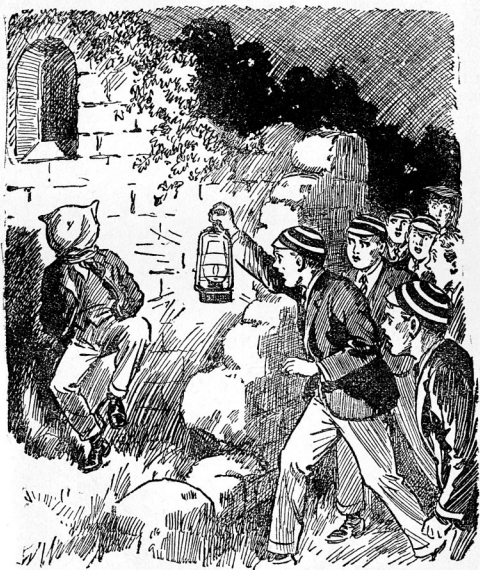
"Ow!" gasped Doyle. "I'm kilt entirely! After the bastes!"

The whole crowd of Moderns rushed in pursuit.

But Jimmy Silver was going in great style, dribbling the ball at top speed. He took it right round the gym, and then passed to Lovell as he was charged over, and Lovell passed to Raby as he fell in the clutches of the exasperated Tommy Dodd. Raby sent it to Newcome, and Newcome kicked it as the three Tommies rushed him over. Jimmy Silver recaptured it as it came down, and dribbled it away towards the House.

"After the beast!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were left sprawling on the ground, gasping for breath, and the Modern horde sped on the track of Jimmy Silver.



It was Jimmy Silver who found Knowles in the ruins. He was tied hand and foot, and over his head was a bag with a slit for him to breathe through.

Jimmy was going strong, and it looked as if he would escape into the House with the ball, when two or three Moderns, coming from a different direction, cut him off. Jimmy Silver paused, and Tommy Dodd & Co. gave a yell of triumph. But Jimmy was not beaten yet. He was within shooting distance of the big doorway, and the brilliant idea occurred to him to kick the ball right into the House, where there were plenty of Classics to secure it.

No sooner had that idea flashed into Jimmy Silver's active brain than he acted upon it. There was no time to think it out, which was rather unfortunate, as it happened.

Jimmy delivered a tremendous kick, and the ball rose over the heads of the Moderns in front of him and sailed straight for the doorway. Never had Jimmy delivered a surer kick for goal.

It was sheer ill-luck that Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, chose that very moment for coming out of the House.

Jimmy Silver couldn't possibly have foreseen that, as he told his chums afterwards. Neither could Bulkeley have foreseen it, or he would certainly have dodged. As it was, the somewhat muddy footer caught the captain of Rookwood fairly under the chin.

Bulkeley staggered back with a yell, and the ball rolled at his feet.

The rush of the juniors stopped as if by magic. Bulkeley sat down in the doorway, blinking. Jimmy Silver stood petrified. Bulkeley—the great Bulkeley—old Bulkeley, the captain of the school, had been flogged by the ball, and his face was splashed with mud, likewise his collar and his waistcoat. It was time for the skies to fall!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver, in utter dismay.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Tommy Dodd. "You've done it now!"

"Serve the beast right!" muttered Leggett, who had his own reasons for disliking Jimmy. Jimmy was always down on the cad of the Fourth.

Bulkeley jumped up. He took out his handkerchief, and mopped his muddy face, and glared at the juniors.

"Who kicked that ball at me?" he roared.

Dead silence.

Jimmy Silver did not feel inclined to impart any information. And Tommy

Dodd & Co. would not have "sneaked" to save their lives.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Bulkeley. "Who kicked that ball? By Jove, I'll lick the lot of you all round!"

"Please, Bulkeley, it was Silver!"

It was Leggett of the Fourth, the cad of the Modern side, who squeaked out that piece of information.

"You cad!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Shut up!"

"So it was you, Silver!" demanded Bulkeley.

"Yes, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver meekly. "Awfully sorry! It was an accident—quite an accident! I didn't see you coming."

"You were kicking the ball into the doorway, anyhow."

"Ye-es!"

"You young idiot! The Head might have been coming out!"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Jimmy, almost overcome by that awful possibility. It was bad enough to have flogged Bulkeley of the Sixth. The mere idea of flooring the Head made him feel giddy.

"Come into my study!" said Bulkeley.

"Anything to oblige!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

Disconsolately he followed Bulkeley to his study. The prefect picked up a cane.

"You thundering young ass!" said Bulkeley. "Accidents like that can't be allowed to happen! Hold out your hand!

Swish!

"Now the other!"

Swish!

"Oh, dear!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "I say, Bulkeley, are you getting your muscle up for your batting this afternoon?"

Bulkeley grinned.

"You can clear off, you cheeky rascal!"

Jimmy Silver did not need telling twice. He cleared off promptly, and the great Bulkeley proceeded to take an extra wash.

CHAPTER 16.

Leggett in Luck.

"MODERN sneak!"
Lovell and Raby and Newcombe howled out the words together. "Sneaking" was almost unknown among the cheery juniors of Rookwood, and Leggett's betrayal of

Jimmy Silver made the Classical chums boil with rage. And Tommy Dodd & Co. were equally furious. The cad of the Fourth had brought disgrace on their side, and given the Classics a "handle" against them.

"What do you expect of these Modern worms?" hooted Raby.

"Yah! Modern cads!"

"Tain't our fault, is it?" howled Tommy Dodd. "We didn't sneak! It was that rotter Leggett! We don't own him. He ought to be a Classical!"

"Yah!"

"Scrag the beast!" yelled Cook. "Make an example of him!"

"Collar him!"

Leggett was speeding away towards the Modern side. He did not like the looks of Tommy Dodd & Co.

But he was not allowed to escape. The three Tommies were keen to show in the plainest possible manner that they were as much "down" on sneaking as any measly Classical at Rookwood.

They charged after Leggett, yelling to him to stop.

Under the circumstances Leggett was not likely to stop. Fear lent him wings, and he dashed on at a pace he had never displayed on the playing-fields.

He rushed into the House, with Tommy Dodd & Co. whooping after him.

"Collar the cad!"

"Scrag him!"

Leggett, in desperation, rushed for the Sixth-Form passage. In those sacred precincts he felt that he would be safe from the avengers. As a rule, the most reckless ragers would have kept clear of the quarters of the high and mighty Sixth.

But Tommy Dodd was too exasperated to think of that. The disgrace Leggett had brought on his side had to be wiped out. They scudded after the sneak of the Fourth, and Leggett panted with terror as he heard them still on his track.

They were close behind when Leggett whipped open the door of Knowles' study and dashed in, slamming the door behind him.

Then even the three Toms paused.

Knowles was head prefect of the Modern side, and a fellow of uncertain temper, and it was manifestly impossible to perpetrate a ragging in his study.

"The thafe of the world!" gasped

Doyle, coming to a sudden halt. "Niver mind; we'll scrag him when he comes out!"

The three juniors waited, breathing hard, in the passage. It was evident that Knowles was not in his study, or the fugitive would have been booted out already.

Leggett was palpitating with alarm in the study. He had rushed in blindly to escape the avengers, without stopping to think that the sharp-tempered prefect might be there. Fortunately for him, Knowles was not there. Leggett squirmed under the bed in the corner, as the safest place, determined to stay there, and kick his hardest if the three Tommies ran him to earth.

"Ow, the rotters!" he mumbled. "The beasts! If Knowles comes and catches me here—oh, dear!"

He was almost inclined to face the angry juniors rather than Knowles. But not quite! He remained palpitating under the bed, waiting till the coast should be clear, and hoping that Knowles would not come.

Alas for his hopes! Tommy Dodd & Co. had not been on guard three minutes when Knowles and Catesby of the Sixth came along. Knowles frowned at the trio of Fourth-Formers.

"What are you fags doing here?" he snapped. "Clear off!"

The three Tommies cleared off.

Knowles and Catesby entered the study.

Leggett, under the bed, palpitated, thinking that the avengers had resolved to run the risk of cornering him in the prefect's study. But the sight of two pairs of legs that certainly did not belong to the Fourth reassured him. But his case was not much improved. He knew what to expect if Knowles found a junior hidden under his bed. Leggett subdued his hurried breathing, and lay very low. It was evidently advisable just then to understudy the celebrated Brer Fox.

"Shut the door!" said Knowles. "Help yourself to a fag, old man!"

Leggett grinned under the bed. Leggett had a way of knowing most things that went on, whether they concerned him or not, and he knew already that Knowles was a smoker.

"There's the match this afternoon, Knowles," said Catesby doubtfully. "Be-

ter not put on a smoke till afterwards, I think."

"Poo! One won't hurt you! Besides, we shall win, anyway."

"Here's the list of our side," went on Knowles. "It's the best team we can get into the field. Without Bulkeley on the other side, I haven't the slightest doubt that we shall beat them hollow."

"They'll put a man in in Bulkeley's place—"

"Yes; one of the Fifth very likely—not much good! Mind, when Bulkeley's called away, there's to be no rot about postponing the trial match. Some of the Classics may suggest it. We're all to be down on it at once."

"You bet!" chuckled Catesby. "And Bulkeley will be held to his promise, too. If we win the match, we have six men in the school eleven."

Knowles chuckled, too.

"What-ho! Of course, the sublime Bulkeley did not foresee that he would be called away from the match. And, under the circumstances, he will very likely think that his promise ought to be called off. Of course, we shall not listen to any suggestion of the kind."

"Some of the fellows may—"

"The fellows will back us up," said Knowles. "They're all as keen as we are to get a fair show for the Modern side. We can't afford to yield an inch. I haven't taken all this trouble for nothing!"

Catesby rubbed his hands.

"Looks like a dead cert for us!" he remarked.

"It is a dead cert!" said Knowles. "I took a spin on my bike before lessons this morning, and saw Joey Hook. It's all fixed. He's got the car ready, and he's calling at half-past one got up as a respectable family chauffeur. Bulkeley can't refuse to go—unless he's a heartless beast—when he hears that his uncle's sinking fast, and asking for him."

"I—I say, it is rather thick!" said Catesby slowly.

Knowles burst into a sneering laugh.

"Are you getting soft?" he asked. "We've got too much at stake to stick at a trifle. We've got to win the trial match, and start the season with a good show for the Moderns in the First Eleven."

"I wish we could beat them on our form," muttered Catesby.

"So do I. But we can't, and that's

an end. When we get the First Eleven into our hands, the fellows will put more beef into it; we've never really had a fair show."

"Well, that's so," said Catesby, hesitating. He did not really think, in his heart, that Bulkeley had not given the Moderns a fair show, but it made his conscience more comfortable to think so as much as he could.

"Anyway, it's fixed now," said Knowles. "It's too late to stop Joey Hook, even if we wanted to. Not that we would."

There was a smell of tobacco in the study.

The two prefects, whose duty it was to punish or report any fellow in the school found smoking, puffed at their cigarettes, and chatted, their talk running on a certain Spring Handicap, which seemed to interest them very much.

Leggett, under the bed, was trembling.

He was getting an insight into Knowles' little ways that, with all his prying and spying, he had never dreamed of before. The thought of what Knowles would do to him if he found that he had overheard, made him feel faint. He scarcely breathed as he lay like a mouse under the bed.

Would they never go? he wondered.

Knowles and Catesby were not in a hurry to go. The Spring Handicap, and the chances of Blue Bird and Snooker II, respectively, seemed to interest them even more than the trial cricket match of the afternoon.

They did not leave the study till the bell was ringing for dinner.

Then, to Leggett's great relief, they left the study, without even suspecting the presence of a third party in the room.

Leggett waited till their footsteps had died away, and then crawled out from under the bed, trembling in every limb. The discovery he had made terrified him. There was a plot to get Bulkeley away from the school that afternoon, and deprive the Classical team of their captain's services. He understood now why Knowles was so confident of winning. Without Bulkeley in their ranks, the Classics would have a hard struggle to keep their end up against Knowles' team.

The cad of the Fourth peered out into the passage. It was deserted; everybody was in the dining-room. Leggett scuttled out, his heart beating. He was five minutes

late for dinner, and received a hundred lines from Mr. Manders. But the thought of what might have happened to him if Knowles had found him in the study consoled him for the hundred lines.

CHAPTER 17.

"Let him rip!"

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were adorning the steps of the School House when Bulkeley and Neville came out after dinner.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled at one another as the great swells of the Sixth walked away chatting. The valuable letter, which had been delivered so mysteriously into Neville's charge, was their counterstroke to Knowles' plot. They felt elated that it had fallen to them to back up old Bulkeley and save the Classical side from defeat.

"Mind you kids are at the gate at half-past one," murmured Jimmy Silver. "I want to see Knowles' face when his little game goes bang."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Knowles don't know we know," chuckled Lovell blissfully. "Hasn't the faintest suspicion that we were in the barn when he jawed it over with Joey Hook. His face will be worth a guinea a box when he finds out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, here's the Modern sneak!" said Newcome.

Leggett of the Fourth was approaching. Leggett did not look happy. One of his ears looked swollen, and his nose was very red. There was a bluish tinge round one of his eyes. Tommy Dodd & Co. had interviewed him immediately after dinner, with painful results to the cad of the Fourth.

The Fistical Four glared at him.

"Just in time for a licking," said Jimmy Silver.

"Chuck it!" growled Leggett. "I've come over here to speak to Smythe. You're jolly well going to see your rotten Classics licked this afternoon."

"Not much chance of that!" said Lovell disdainfully.

"What will you bet on it?" said Leggett. The amiable Leggett was much given to making bets on the school events.

"I won't bet anything, because I'm not a blackguard," said Lovell; "but if I did bet, I'd lay a hundred to one on the Classics."

"I'd take you," said Leggett. "I'll take you at two to one, if you like. In quids, too."

The Fistical Four stared at him. Leggett's unpleasant manners and customs got on their nerves, but so far as they had observed him, he generally did well out of his little transactions. That he should be willing to bet against the Classic side, when even the Moderns themselves had little hope of winning, was extraordinary. Leggett generally found a sure thing to put his money on, and now it looked as if he was deliberately betting against the chances. They were puzzled.

"Where's the quids?" said Lovell sceptically.

Leggett drew quite a handful of money from his pocket.

"Money talks," he said.

"Where on earth did you get that?" exclaimed Raby, in astonishment. "You don't generally have much money."

"I've got some now, anyway," said Leggett, with a sneering smile. "As a matter of fact, I've been collecting some little debts for this special occasion."

Lending money among his Form-fellows was another of Leggett's delightful ways. He would lend a shilling for a week, to receive back fifteen pence on Saturday. There were always half a dozen fellows owing Leggett money.

"You think your rotten Classics are going to win?" added Leggett.

"We know they are!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Well, then, put your money on it."

"You know we don't bet, you worm!"

Leggett laughed sneeringly.

"Yes; I forgot you were a set of giddy Erics. Never mind—Smythe, of the Shell will take me—so will Howard and Tracy, and as many as I like. They're sporting."

"Blessed if I make you out," said Lovell. "Even if you think your Modern cads have a chance, you can't think it's a cert, and you are always doing your dirty betting on certs. You must be going off your rocker. Anyway, you're not coming here with your filthy racecourse tricks. Bump him!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome collared

Leggett before he could flee. But Jimmy Silver shouted at once:

"Hold on! Let him go!"

"What rot!" exclaimed Lovell. "Look here, Jimmy Silver——"

"Hands off the dear boy," said Jimmy Silver. "Let him go, I tell you, or I'll make you."

"Why, you ass——"

"You fathead, I'll——"

"You cheeky chump!"

Leggett bolted into the house, leaving Jimmy Silver's three chums arguing wrathfully with Jimmy. Jimmy was grinning serenely.

"Don't jaw, my infants——"

"You silly fathead!" roared Lovell.

"Come away with your Uncle Jimmy—— come where that worm can't hear us—and I'll whisper in your silly ear!" said Silver.

He led his comrades away across the quad. He did not want to risk letting Leggett hear what he had to say, and he knew Leggett's wonderful gift of hearing all sorts of things he was not intended to hear. Under the old beeches they paused.

"Don't you see?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"No, I don't," growled Lovell, "and I think——"

"Oh, you don't think!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "Can't you see? Don't you tumble? All Rookwood knows that the Classics will beat Knowles' lot—and yet here comes the sportive Leggy offering to lay odds against the Classics? Don't you know that Leggett is the champion spy and eavesdropper and sneak generally? Can't you see he's got on to something?"

"What?"

"He's spotted Knowles, same as we did," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "He's spied, or listened, or something, and got on to what Knowles has arranged for to-day."

"My hat!"

"And instead of trying to bottle him as—we've done, Leggy is on to make a good thing out of it. He thinks Knowles' little game is going to be a success, and so it's safe to book bets against the Classics. See?"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome burst into a roar. It was plain enough now that Jimmy Silver pointed it out. That was the only possible explanation of Leggett's apparently reckless conduct.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell. "The

silly cad! Of course, he doesn't know we know—he doesn't suspect that Knowles' little game is going to be knocked sky-high—ha, ha, ha!"

"Let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver. "It will be a lesson to him about betting on dead certs—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And at the idea of the cunning Fourth-Former overreaching himself in that way the Fistical Four yelled with laughter. And they let Leggett rip!

CHAPTER 18.

Good Business.

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE, the dandy of the Shell, was in his study. The august countenance of the great Adolphus was clouded. He was not contented.

It was, as he told his study-mates, Howard and Tracy, dashed rotten.

Adolphus was a sporting young gentleman, resembling Master Leggett in his tastes, though the lofty dandy of the Shell regarded the former as a rank outsider, and would not have touched him with a pair of tongs.

It was a custom of the great Adolphus to make up a little "book" on the principal events at Rookwood, and as he generally had plenty of money, he sometimes booked quite extensive bets. He was ready and willing to make up a book, as usual, on the trial cricket match, Modern versus Classical. But he found that, for once, his sporting proclivities were nipped in the bud.

There were no takers.

Everybody on the Classic side knew that Bulkeley's team would win. Everybody on the Modern side felt pretty sure that they would.

There were some sports, of Smythe's variety, on the modern side, and Adolphus had sought in vain to get them to back up their team with their money. Perhaps Knowles would have taken him on if Smythe had dared to approach a prefect on the matter, and if the prefect had dared to risk making bets with a junior. But that was out of the question.

Modern fellows declared that the trial match would be by no means a walk-over for Bulkeley's lot. But for reasons best

known to themselves they declined to bet on their own men.

It was in vain that the well-lined Adolphus had offered odds of three to one on the Classics. There were simply no takers.

"I call it dashed rotten!" said Adolphus, lighting a cigarette, with a discontented frown. "Seems to be no sporting instinct left in Rookwood, by gad, since they started that measly Modern side in the school. I've offered young Leggett three to one on Bulkeley, and he wasn't on, by Jove!"

"Catch him!" said Howard. "That young cad bets on certs."

"Well, a fellow ought to back up his own team!" said Smythe. "If I was a dashed Modern, I'd put my money on 'em, I would, you know, by gad!"

There was a tap at the door, and Leggett of the Fourth came in. The three Shell fellows stared at him with far from welcoming looks. Unless it was to make a bet they had no use for Leggett, and he had already been tempted in vain.

"Oh, get out, do!" said Smythe. "I'm rather particular who I have in my study, bai Jove. I bar Modern cads. There's the door."

"Why the dickens don't you buy a new necktie, Leggett?" said Tracy. "Blessed if I ever saw such a dingy boulder as you are, by George!"

"Oh, kick him out!" yawned Smythe. "Hold on!" said Leggett suavely. "You were offering me bets last night, Smythe—three to one on Bulkeley's team."

"Yaas, and you were afraid to back your men," said Smythe disdainfully.

"I've changed my mind," said Leggett. Smythe's expression changed at once. Quite a cordial smile came over his face. Tracy, who had picked up a cricket-stump to help Leggett out of the study, dropped it behind him very quickly. The nuts of the Shell were all smiles now.

"Goin' to bet, what?" asked Howard.

"I'll take you on," said Leggett. "I've been thinking it over. It's only patriotic to back up one's own team, isn't it?"

"Quite so," said Smythe heartily. "You're a sport, after all, Leggett."

"Besides, I think the Moderns will win," said Leggett.

The Shell fellows suppressed their merriment at the idea. They were quite willing to let Leggett think so, if he was

willing to back up his own opinion with hard cash.

"Well, there's no game so uncertain as cricket," said Adolphus. "A team isn't licked till its beaten. A game isn't lost till it's chucked away. You're a real sporting fellow, and no mistake, Leggett."

"Yaas!"

"What are you going to put up?"

"Quids, if you like?" said Smythe negligently.

"Same here!" chorused Tracy and Howard. "Don't leave us out! Take us all in, Leggett, old man!"

"Money talks," said Leggett. "I'm ready to put up hard cash, if you fellows do the same. I don't believe in betting on the nod."

"Go easy, though," said Smythe suspiciously. "Let's see the colour of your money, Leggey. You're a jolly bad payer."

"Three quids!" said Leggett, producing his money. "I've been screwing it together to put on this match. There's my tin, if you fellows can cover it."

The young rascals of the Shell looked greedily at the handful of silver with two or three notes in it. Smythe produced three currency notes for a pound each.

"There's my little bit, by gad!" he remarked.

Leggett looked inquiringly at Howard and Tracy. Those two young gentlemen hesitated. They were eager to book bets with Leggett, but they were not rolling in money like Adolphus.

"Among gentlemen——" began Howard. Leggett laughed.

"Money talks," he said. "I'll put up stakes if you do, and Selwyn will hold them for us. Selwyn can be depended on."

"Why, you cheeky rotter, do you think we wouldn't pay up?"

Leggett shrugged his shoulders.

"Cash or no bet," he said.

"Hold on," said Tracy. "This is too good to let slide. I'll get some of the fellows in, and we'll whack it out."

"Right-ho!"

Tracy rushed from the study. He came back in five minutes with half a dozen fellows, all excited and eager. Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, and Selwyn and Chesney and a couple of Shell fellows followed him in.

They were all "nuts" of Smythe's secret circle, and they were all looking excited. Like Adolphus, they had hitherto sought in vain for "takers."

Leggett greeted them with a grin.

"All on?" he asked.

"By gad, you can bet we're all on," said Chesney. "Tain't often we get a chance like this. We'll take all the tin you like to offer."

"I've only got three quid, but I'll put it all up," said Leggett. "I want nine pounds to cover it. Smythe's put up three."

"We'll jolly soon make up the rest," said Selwyn.

The nuts of Rookwood almost tumbled over one another to take Leggett's bet. Never had so easy and gorgeous a chance come the way of the "Giddy Goats," as the sporting young rascals styled themselves.

"Selwyn holds the stakes," said Leggett. "He's square."

"If you mean that we're not square——" began Smythe.

"I don't mean anything, only Selwyn holds the stakes."

"That's all right," said Selwyn. "You can trust me, I suppose, Smythey."

"Oh, yaas, absolutely!"

And the Giddy Goats booked the bet with great care, and the cash was handed over to Selwyn for safe keeping. Leggett looked very satisfied.

"If the Classics win, you pay out these chaps, Selwyn," he remarked. "If the Moderns win I'll call on you after the match, and you hand it over to me."

"That's it," said Selwyn.

Leggett nodded and left the study. The Giddy Goats burst into a joyous chuckle when he was gone.

"It's as easy as pickin' up quids, by gad," said Smythe. "The young ass must be absolutely off his rocker, don't you know."

"Balmy, I should think!" said Selwyn. "If the Moderns win—ha, ha!—I'll hand him the money right enough. If!"

"He's generally so jolly cute," said Tracy thoughtfully. "There can't be anything the matter with the team that he's heard of and we haven't, I suppose?"

"Oh, rot!" said Smythe. "It's a dead sure thing for us!"

And the Giddy Goats agreed that it

was, and chuckled gleefully over the prospect. Leggett was chuckling, too, as he walked away. He also regarded it as a "dead sure thing."

CHAPTER 19.

Jimmy Silver Chips In.

"**T**IME!" said Jimmy Silver.

It wanted a few minutes to half-past one. The Fistical Four came out of the tuckshop, where they had been refreshing themselves with ginger-beer, and sauntered down to the school gates. They had smiling faces. The denouement was at hand.

Jimmy Silver leaned on one of the old stone pillars, and surveyed the road. Never had Jimmy Silver felt quite so satisfied with himself.

"Sister Anne! Sister Anne, do you see a motor-car coming?" chirruped Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a hoot of a motor-horn down the road a few minutes later, and a small grey car came in sight. It dashed up to the gates of Rookwood and stopped. A very respectable chauffeur stepped down. His face was almost hidden by his motor-goggles. He glanced at the juniors in the gateway, but passed them without speaking, and went up to the porter's lodge. Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged ecstatic glances. If they had not known of the plot, they would never have dreamed of recognising Joey Hook, the sporting tout, in that extremely respectable get-up. He looked like a very sedate old family servant.

Old Mack, the porter, looked out of his lodge.

"Is Master Bulkeley about?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes," said old Mack. "Wot is it?"

"I have a message for him from his uncle. Will you call him at once, please. Tell him his uncle, Mr. Bulkeley at the Elms, has had a sudden attack, and is sinking fast, and I have been sent over to fetch him. There is not a moment to lose."

"Bless my 'eart," said old Mack.

The old porter hurried away for Bulkeley. The chauffeur stepped out into the road again, and busied himself with

his car, turning it for the return journey. Jimmy Silver & Co. waited patiently.

Bulkeley of the Sixth, his face very pale, came striding down to the gates with old Mack following him. Bulkeley was in his flannels, he had already changed for the match, and he was bareheaded. He had come out with a rush immediately he received the porter's message.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, as the chauffeur touched his cap. "Mack tells me you've been sent from my uncle's to fetch me?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's serious."

"I gave the porter my message, sir. Mr. Bulkeley is sinking fast, and if any time is lost, you may not see him alive."

"Good heavens!" muttered Bulkeley, his lips trembling. "Poor old Uncle George! I hadn't the faintest idea he was like that! I'm coming, of course."

"What on earth's the matter, Bulkeley?" exclaimed Neville. The Classical cricketers, in a state of great dismay, had followed Bulkeley down to the gates. They had heard old Mack's message.

"I say, I'm sorry," said Bulkeley, his lips twitching. "You'll have to play without me this afternoon, Neville. Do the best you can."

"But——" began Raikes of the Sixth.

"My uncle's dying," said Bulkeley, with a catch in his voice. "I'm sorry to leave you fellows in the lurch like this, but it can't be helped. Lend me a cap, one of you—I've forgotten mine. I shan't stay to change."

"It's rotten," said Neville, concerned for his friend, and concerned too for the Classical prospects in the trial match. "Of course, you can't think of cricket now. I hope you'll find it's not so bad, old chap. Here's a cap."

"I'm sorry, too," said Knowles. "Keep your pecker up, Bulkeley." The look on Bulkeley's face sent, for a moment, a pang of remorse to the heart of the cad of the Sixth. Knowles would have heard of the illness of any of his uncles with great equanimity; but Bulkeley seemed to be made of different stuff. "Don't be downhearted; you may find him better, old fellow."

"Thank you," said Bulkeley. "I hope so. Do the best you can, Neville. Good-bye!"

"Hold on!"

It was Jimmy Silver's voice as he sprang into Bulkeley's way. The captain of Rookwood, who was springing for the car, almost fell over him.

"Get out of the way, you young idiot."

"Hold on, I say! Bulkeley, listen to me. Your uncle's not ill——"

"What!"

"It's a rotten jape!"

"You young fool, get aside!" roared Bulkeley.

"I tell you it is!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "I'll prove it! That man isn't a chauffeur; he's Joey Hook, the tout."

"What!" yelled all the Classical seniors together.

Knowles' face was a study.

"Make him take off his goggles, and you'll see," panted Jimmy Silver. "I tell you he is Joey Hook, and he's fooling you, and I can prove it."

Bulkeley almost staggered. He could not believe that anyone would play so heartless a trick, but Jimmy Silver's earnest face impressed him in spite of himself. He swung towards the chauffeur.

"Let me see your face, quick! If this is one of your jokes, Silver, I'll flay you."

"If that man isn't Joey Hook, flay me and welcome," said Jimmy Silver.

The chauffeur stood motionless. He was taken as much by surprise as Knowles.

"Do you hear me?" roared Bulkeley.

"Let me see your face! Hang you, man, what are you wasting time for?"

Without waiting for the man to answer or move, Bulkeley dragged the motor-goggles away with his own hand.

"Joey Hook!" yelled Neville.

Bulkeley stared furiously at the pretended chauffeur.

"What does this mean, Hook, you rascal?"

Joey Hook pulled himself together.

"Wot does wot mean?" said Hook, in his turn. "I come over to fetch you, sir, and if you don't choose to come, that's your look out. Mr. Bulkeley's doctor sent, because there ain't time for you to get to Shoremouth by train. And I warn you that there ain't a minute to lose, from what the medical gentleman said."

Bulkeley hesitated a moment. It was plausible enough. It was one of Joey Hook's many lines of business to hire out motor-cars, which he often drove himself. It seemed absurd to suppose that he would waste time, trouble, and money in taking

the captain of Rookwood on a run of thirty miles for nothing. That Joey Hook knew, or cared, anything about the trial match that afternoon, never even entered Bulkeley's head.

"I must go," he said. "I can't chance it. It must be all right."

"You shan't go!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "It's a trick to get you away from the match, so that the Moderns will win."

"You young idiot—" stammered Knowles. "How dare you—" He broke off hurriedly. Jimmy Silver had not accused the Moderns yet, and a too hurried defence would have been a proof of guilt.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Bulkeley. "What can Hook know about our matches, Silver? I suppose you mean well, but you're a little fool. Get aside!"

"He was put up to it!" shouted Jimmy.

"Who by, then?"

"The Moderns."

"You young rascal!" roared Bulkeley. "How dare you say such a thing!"

"Oh, I say—Oh—ow!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as the angry captain of Rookwood grasped his collar and shook him furiously. "Bulkeley—I say—"

"The young cad!" exclaimed Knowles curiously. "Bulkeley, you can't believe —"

"Do I look as if I believed it?" panted Bulkeley. "When I get back, I'll lick him within an inch of his life for saying such a caddish thing."

"It's true!" bawled Lovell. "We can prove it."

"We can prove it!" shrieked Raby and Newcome.

They had expected that Bulkeley would be hard to convince, but they had hardly expected this.

"Don't talk rot," said Neville. "As for that young cad—"

"It's true!" howled Lovell desperately.

"It's true! We've got proof—proof! Bulkeley, don't be a beast! We can prove it if you listen just a single minute."

Bulkeley gritted his teeth.

"Well, then, you young rascals, I'll give you a single minute," he exclaimed, "and if you don't prove it, I'll report this to the Head, and ask him to flog you!"

"Right-ho!" panted Jimmy Silver, as the Rookwood captain released him. "A minute's enough. Neville, you've got the proof! Give me my letter!"

"Your letter! What—"

"Give it me! No, open it and show it to Bulkeley! It's all written down in that letter."

"What is?" shouted Bulkeley.

"It's written down there that Joey Hook was coming for you to-day in a car, with a lie about your uncle being ill," stammered Jimmy Silver. "Now, if what he says is true, how could I have known it last night?"

"You couldn't, you young imbecile. You—"

"It's in the letter."

"Nonsense! You—"

"Open the letter, Neville, and show him!" shrieked Jimmy in desperation.

Neville, amazed, drew the letter from his pocket.

CHAPTER 20.

Proof Positive.

HALF Rookwood seemed to be gathered round the gates now.

The strange scene had drawn the fellows from all quarters.

Knowles was pale as death. His scheme was crumbling about his ears; but it was not only the failure of his scheme that he dreaded. He dreaded exposure more than that! Yet, how could it be proved? His word was as good as anybody's—better than that of a fag in the Fourth—a fag who was known to be on the worst of terms with him. Knowles did not want for nerve. He pulled himself together. But Catesby had already hurried away. He could not face it out.

Neville broke the seal of the letter.

In the midst of a deadly silence, he drew the letter out of the envelope. He unfolded it, and handed it to Bulkeley.

The captain of Rookwood read it, with his eyes almost starting from his head. The letter bore the previous day's date, and it ran, in Jimmy Silver's sprawling hand:

"Dear Bulkeley,—Joey Hook will call for you to-morrow in a car, with a whopping cram about your uncle being seedy, to take you away from the match. It's all spoof; your uncle is all right. Don't be taken in. We heard him jawing it over with another villain. It's a jape.

"Yours affectionately,

"A FRIEND."

Bulkeley read the letter aloud, and every word was heard by everybody present.

Jimmy Silver smoothed his rumpled hair and collar, while Bulkeley read. He did not bear any malice for that rough shaking. It was just like old Bulkeley to refuse to believe harm of anybody, though he might have been a bit more gentle about it, perhaps.

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Neville, when Bulkeley had finished.

"What on earth does it mean?" exclaimed Raikes. "When was that letter given to you, Neville?"

"Last night," said Neville.

"Last night!" muttered Bulkeley.

"And you've had it in your pocket ever since, haven't you, Neville?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ever since," agreed Neville.

"But—but—" stammered Bulkeley.

"If what that rotter says is true about your uncle having a sudden attack, and the doctor sending him over for you, how could I have known it last night?" demanded Jimmy Silver triumphantly.

"You—you couldn't—"

"But I did, you see, because we wrote it down in that letter, and gave it to Neville to mind!"

"I've certainly had this letter in my pocket ever since half-past nine last night," said Neville. "There's no doubt at all about that. Silver knew last night that Joey Hook was coming here in a car for you to-day, Bulkeley. He must have!"

"And we knew it, too," said Lovell. "We all wrote that letter together, in the end study last night."

"It was a trick to get Bulkeley away from the match," said Raby, taking up the tale. "We heard them talking it over in the old barn!"

Knowles' teeth came together with a click. He understood now.

"Hook was paid to do this," chimed in Newcome. "He had a pound down for the car, and he was going to have another quid afterwards."

"I—I—I suppose the yarn can't be true, if these young beggars knew this last night," stammered Bulkeley at last. "Hook's message is that my uncle had a sudden attack, and the doctor sent him here. If it's true, he couldn't have known

it himself last night, let alone these kids. It's a trick!"

"Collar the cad, and make him explain —" began somebody.

"Stop him!" yelled Jimmy Silver, as the car buzzed. "He's mizzling!"

There was a rush towards the car, but it was too late.

Joey Hook was in the driving-seat, and he had started the engine the instant Bulkeley had read out that letter. Hook understood that the game was up, and he did not intend to remain to be handled by Bulkeley. The car whipped away down the road, leaving nothing but a cloud of dust and a smell of petrol for the enraged and disappointed Rookwood fellows.

Two or three of them broke into a run in pursuit, but it was in vain. The car vanished round a bend in the lane, and Joey Hook was gone. Knowles was left to get out of the scrape the best way he could.

If the astonished Bulkeley had needed any further proof, the flight of Joey Hook would have furnished it.

The captain of Rookwood stood dumb-founded.

It was evidently a heartless trick that had been played upon him. No message had come from his uncle; his uncle was not ill. That was clear enough now. It was equally clear that only Jimmy Silver had saved him from being taken away on a fool's errand, and leaving his team to be beaten in his absence.

"It's plain enough," said Raikes. "We'll jolly well go into this."

"Yes, rather," said Neville. "Silver says it was a Modern chap fixed it up with Hook. Who was it, Silver?"

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Knowles furiously. "And I tell you plainly, Bulkeley, if that young cad dares to accuse anybody on my side, I'll take the matter to the Head!"

"Hold on, Silver!" said Bulkeley quickly. "You can come into my study and tell me, and I'll see whether there's anything in it!"

"But, I say—" began Neville.

"Leave it to me," said Bulkeley. "Come, Silver—and you other fags, too!"

The Fistical Four followed Bulkeley to the School House. They were not feeling very pleased. They had backed up old Bulkeley, and dished Knowles, and the

Classicals were going to win the trial match. That was all to the good. But the triumphant exposure of Knowles' villainy did not look so assured.

CHAPTER 21.

The Reward.

BULKELEY marched the Fistical Four into his study, and closed the door.

Bulkeley's rugged face was very grim in its expression, and Jimmy Silver & Co. felt uneasy. Bulkeley had cut up rusty before they proved their statements, and they had forgiven him for that. They really liked him all the better for his faith in others, which made him so slow to believe evil; but surely he wasn't going to cut up rusty now? That would be a little too thick.

"Now tell me about it," said Bulkeley. "You, Silver! Don't all jaw at once. You say a Modern fellow put Hook up to playing this trick on me!"

"Yes. It was——"

"Don't tell me his name."

"Oh, all right!"

"If it's true, I don't want to know his name."

Jimmy Silver trembled with indignation.

"If it's true!" he gasped. "You—you don't believe me! You—you think I'm telling crams! I won't say a word, then! You can lick me if you like! I think——"

"I hope you've made a mistake, Silver," said Bulkeley quietly. "I can't doubt your word after the proof you've given me. I admit that if you'd come with this story to me before Hook got here with the car, I shouldn't have believed a word of it—couldn't! It's too utterly rotten to believe it of any fellow! Where did you hear this man Hook getting his instructions?"

"In the old barn yesterday."

"What were you doing there, out of bounds?"

"It's because it was out of bounds. We spotted—ahem!—if I'm not to mention his name, I won't—we spotted a certain party coming—a party who had no right to report us out of bounds because he's only a rotten Modern prefect; but he would have done it, all the same, so we took cover in the loft. Then they—there were two of them—came in, and then Hook. We couldn't help seeing them, and hearing what they

said. We didn't dare show ourselves. And what they said was what I put in that letter I gave to Neville."

"You saw them, as well as heard them?"

"Yes."

"You're sure you couldn't have been mistaken?"

"How could I, when I saw them—we all saw them?"

Bulkeley looked deeply worried.

"I'm going to ask you to keep this dark," he said.

"Oughtn't they to be shown up?" demanded Lovell hotly.

"Perhaps they ought," said Bulkeley.

"But it's a frightful disgrace for Rookwood. If it came out they would be expelled, and—and think of the disgrace to the school! We don't want the good name of Rookwood dragged in the mud!"

"Well, no; but——"

"And the bitterness it would cause between the two sides," added Bulkeley; "it might take years to heal."

"Well, those rotten Moderns ought to be put down!" said Lovell.

"Yes, rather!" chorused the Co. "You must see that, Bulkeley. Put the cheeky cads in their places, you know!"

Bulkeley smiled faintly. It was not much use trying to get the fags to look at that matter as he looked at it.

"There's another point," he said.

"You've got no proof. A fellow who is villain enough to do a thing like this is villain enough to deny it. Suppose he—or they—denied it point-blank. Your word against theirs; and they could warn Hook that if he was sent for, he was to deny all knowledge of them!"

The Fistical Four were silent.

They realised that they were not out of the wood yet.

The proofs they had produced were indeed conclusive against Joey Hook, and had baffled the rascally plot. But they were as far as ever from possessing any kind of proof against Joey Hook's employer. They realised that.

"But what I'm thinking of chiefly is the disgrace to the school," said Bulkeley. "Least said soonest mended. Now, I don't want to order you like a prefect—I ask you to do as I wish. Let the matter drop!"

"I suppose we shall have to," said Jimmy Silver. "That's why we didn't come to you last night because we'd got no proof

against the rotter. That's why we fixed up that letter with Neville, because you wouldn't believe a word of it till Joey Hook came with the car. You'd have told—ahem!—told the chap we accused, and he'd have warned Hook to keep away, and we should have been dished and held up as liars."

"I understand," said Bulkeley. "You've proved it against Hook, but you can't prove it against the other chap. If the tale's told, all the Classics will believe you, and all the Moderns will say it's a falsehood, and it can't lead to anything but rows and bad blood."

"I—I suppose so."

"But will the Moderns let it drop?" said Lovell. "They're awfully wild about it."

"They may demand inquiry," grinned Raby. "If they do, they'll get it."

"They will follow Knowles' lead in that matter," said Bulkeley.

"Oh, Knowles won't demand an inquiry," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Knowles will be glad to let it drop. That—that certain party whose name I mustn't mention is a very close friend of Knowles—very close."

"That's enough," said Bulkeley, as the four juniors chuckled. "You're talking too much, Silver. If Knowles is satisfied, the Moderns will let the matter drop, and the sconer the better. You fellows say nothing."

"All right, Bulkeley," said Lovell.

"All right, if you believe us," said Jimmy Silver. "But if you don't say plainly that you believe every word we've said, Bulkeley, we're going to have the thing right out. We're not going to have our word doubted."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

"I do believe you, every word," said Bulkeley. "I wish I didn't! Now, least said soonest mended; we don't want re-creminations and accusations that can't be proved, and a Rookwood prefect lying himself black in the face to get out of the scrape, and all that."

"Mum's the word!" agreed the juniors.

Bulkeley opened the study door.

"I rely on that!" he said. "You can clear!"

The Fistical Four cleared. They were only half satisfied.

"Bulkeley don't seem so jolly grateful," grumbled Lovell. "Of course, he's a bit

cut up to find a Rookwood fellow such a cad. But it's only a Modern, and they're cads any way."

"Never mind; we'll give him his head," said Jimmy Silver generously. "After all, it would make Tommy Dodd rather sick, and he's a decent chap, for a Modern, you know."

The Classical Four had agreed that mum was the word. But there were difficulties. The moment they came out into the quadrangle, they were surrounded by an army of Classics, all demanding information.

"Who was it, Silver?"

"What Modern cad was trying to nobble old Bulkeley?"

"Tell us all about it."

"Why don't you speak up, you ass!"

Jimmy Silver looked helplessly at his chums. It wasn't easy to refuse information to the Classics; but their promise was given to Bulkeley now.

"Why don't you tell us?" bawled Smytho of the Shell.

"It's in Bulkeley's hands now," said Jimmy Silver at last. "He's rather waxy about my saying so much already. We've left it entirely in his hands."

"But you can tell us!" shouted Jones minor.

"Bulkeley's told us not to jaw."

"My sainted aunt!" said Townsend.

"He's going to screen the Modern cad who did it! That's just like Bulkeley! He's an ass! But we won't have it! You'll just tell us about it, Jimmy Silver, or we'll scrag you!"

"Get it off your chest, you cheeky young villain."

"Now then, out with it!"

"Look here——" said Silver.

"Bump him! Scrag the cheeky rotter if he won't tell!"

"Hands off, you duffers! Oh, my hat! Oh, crikey! Yow!"

The exasperated Classics, their thirst for information unslaked, swarmed over the Fistical Four, and bumped them down in the quad. They left them in a breathless condition. Even then they would probably not have left them, but somebody shouted that the places were filling for the match, and the Modern cads were bagging all the front places. The Classical crowd rushed off to the cricket-field, and the Fistical Four sat up, and blinked at one another and gasped.

"Oh, my word!" groaned Silver. "Oh,

crumbs! This is what we get for backing up old Bulkeley, and giving the match for our side, and frustrating Knowles' knavish tricks. Blessed if I'll bother about his knavish tricks any more. Oh, my hat!"

And the Co. groaned assent.

CHAPTER 22.

Well Won.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were rather late on Big Side for the match. They found the Rookwood fellows swarming round the field of play, and there was no room for them anywhere near the pavilion. The match had already started, and Bulkeley and Neville had opened for the Classics, and the Moderns were in the field, Knowles bowling the first over.

Knowles was not looking quite so fit as usual.

His scheme had been shattered like a house of cards—the certain win he had been counting on was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and he felt that Bulkeley knew, or, at least suspected, his treachery. Bulkeley had spoken a few words to him before the match. The Rookwood captain said simply that he had told the four juniors to hold their tongues, and that the matter had better be allowed to drop, for everybody's sake.

Knowles, only too glad to let it drop, had assented at once—greatly relieved in his mind, but feeling that his ready assent was as good as an admission that he was concerned in the plot with Joey Hook. However, that could not be helped. He had been prepared to pile up a mountain of falsehoods in self-defence, but he was immensely relieved not to have to do it. Lies come home to roost sometimes, and he might make a slip—he knew that! Bulkeley's view of the matter lifted a weight from his mind.

But he did not feel quite himself. Bulkeley, saved from that fool's errand to Shoremouth, was playing in the Classical team. On its merits, the Modern team could not win. The great object Knowles had had before him was slipping from his grasp. He was down-hearted, dismayed, irritable, uneasy—in anything but a mood to put up a good game.

That was soon evident from his bowling. He was the best bowler at Rookwood: but

now that he needed all his skill, he was bowling like a fag. The wretched schemer was completely off his form.

Loud cheers from the Classic crowd greeted Bulkeley's mighty hitting. The captain of Rookwood was piling up runs. The score was at fifty before a single Classic wicket fell.

The Moderns, with the exception of Knowles and Catesby, played hard. There were some good catches in the field, and Frampton did some good bowling. But Catesby was like a limp rag, and Knowles was off-colour. The Classic first innings was a tremendous success.

The Modern crowd looked on glumly, and the Classics roared themselves hoarse. Jimmy Silver & Co. added their voices to the din at every hit. Smythe of the Shell and his select coterie were in the ecstasies. Leggett's three quids were as good as theirs. As for Leggett, his face was green and yellow as he watched the game.

The cad of the Fourth had staked upon Knowles' success in his plot. The failure of the plot completely "dished" Leggett. He gave Jimmy Silver & Co. savage looks, and they grinned at him cheerily, and asked him how Black Tulip was getting on for the Spring Handicap, and Blue Bird for the Swindleum Stakes. For once the trickster of the Fourth had burned his fingers badly in his little speculations, and Jimmy Silver & Co. charitably hoped that it would be a lesson to him.

When the last Classic wicket went down for a total of 110, the Classics roared. Smythe gave Leggett a dig in the ribs.

"Feeling chippy—what?" chortled Smythe.

Leggett groaned.

"Now watch the Modern duffers playing the giddy ox!" said Jimmy Silver, as Knowles and Frampton came in to open the innings. "Knowlesey looks a bit off colour, doesn't he? I wonder if Knowlesey can have anything on his mind, you chaps?"

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

"A little bird may have whispered to him that old Bulkeley would be missing—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And old Bulkeley's here as large as life. Hard cheese for poor old Knowlesey! These Modern cads are always getting left!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Modern innings made their supporters groan; they were all down for 40. The Moderns followed on, and the Classical crowd chortled. It looked as if the Classic team would win with an innings to spare. Jimmy Silver turned a beaming face on his chums when the Moderns began to bat a second time.

"If Knowles wins this match, he's going to have six men in the School team, my infants! Do you think Knowles is likely to get his six men in?"

And Lovell and Raby and Newcome almost howled with glee. They were not so very sorry now that Knowles had been let off. He was getting it fairly "in the neck" now; there was no mistake about that!

Wicket after wicket went down, and it soon became clear to the most obstinate and enthusiastic Modern that the second innings would not pull the team level with their opponents. Last man in was greeted with a chuckle of derision from the Classic juniors.

He did not stay in long. The last batsmen did their best to force the Classics to bat again, at least, but they could not do it. Fifty-five was the score for the second innings when the last wicket fell to Neville's bowling.

"Total for two innings, ninety-five!" gurgled Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, the Modern mugs are licked by an innings and fifteen runs! Where will Knowles get those six places from—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the field rang with Classical cheering.

Knowles strode away from the field of his defeat, his brow black, his teeth set, his eyes glinting green. The way of the transgressor is hard, and Knowles was finding it so.

Leggett shared his feelings to the full. The wretched "sport" of the Fourth thought of his three pounds, and fairly wept.

But Adolphus Smythe and the Giddy Goats were in high feather. They claimed their winnings from Solwyn, who handed them out in the study; and there was a great celebration among the Giddy Goats that evening, to which they did not even ask Leggett. Leggett, in his own study on the Modern side, was bemoaning his loss.

In the end study the Fistical Four went

carefully through all their pockets in search for forgotten sixpences and coppers, and pooled the result, and paid a visit to the tuckshop. They felt that that great occasion had to be celebrated. It did not often fall to fellows in the Fourth Form to save a first eleven match—especially a trial match, upon which so much depended!

"Only to think," said Jimmy Silver, "that if we hadn't spotted the little game, the Classics would have been licked, and the first eleven would have been fairly in the hands of those Modern cads! Only think of it! Gentlemen and chaps we've saved old Rookwood from going to the giddy bow-wows! Here's to us, and may our shadow never grow less! We are it—absolutely it!"

And the Co. agreed heartily that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, they were IT!

CHAPTER 23.

Very Rough.

KNOWLES of the Sixth strode into the junior Common-room at Rookwood, with a black frown upon his brow, and a stout ashplant in his hand.

Knowles looked wrathful, and really it was not surprising. A very little sufficed to make Knowles wrathful; and a very great deal was going on in the junior Common-room.

It had started as an argument. Tommy Dodd & Co. had come over from the Modern side to argue a certain important matter with the Classical juniors.

Nearly all the Rookwood juniors, Modern and Classical, were dissatisfied with the junior sports captain. It was agreed on all hands that Smythe of the Shell was no good. Tommy Dodd knew what was wanted. A new election, and a general rallying of Classical and Modern juniors to elect him, Tommy Dodd—that was Tommy's idea.

The Classics didn't see it. Jimmy Silver had his own ideas about what was wanted. A new election, and a general rallying of Moderns and Classics, to elect him, Jimmy Silver—that was his idea.

But Jimmy Silver was accommodating. He conceded that the case might be met by the election of one of his pals—Lovell or Raby or Newcome. He felt that he

could not say fairer than that. As for the election of a modern cad, that was absurd on the face of it, and he put it to Tommy Dodd as a sensible chap.

Then the band began to play, so to speak. Voices rose crescendo, and from words the rival juniors of Rookwood proceeded to actions.

Both sides had really intended that the matter should be urged out peacefully and calmly—quite calmly. But somehow or other, after ten minutes or so, Jimmy Silver had Tommy Dodd's head in chancery, and Lovell was rolling on the floor with Tommy Cook, and Newcome and Tommy Doyle were staggering about in a loving embrace, and Raby and Towle were hammering one another, and a dozen other excited juniors were shouting, punching, trampling, pommelling and generally raising Cain.

Then Knowles dropped in.

"You young hooligans!" roared Knowles. "Stop that row at once!"

"Cave!" squeaked Jones minor—rather late.

It was too late to "cave." The prefect was on the spot.

Jimmy Silver released Tommy Dodd, and Tommy Dodd released Jimmy Silver. Both of them blinked rather dazedly at Knowles. Lovell and Cook sat up breathlessly. The scrap ceased as if by magic.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tommy Dodd disconsolately. "We're in for it!"

They were certainly in for it. Knowles advanced into the Common-room, gripping his ashplant.

"You young ruffians!" he said. "Do you know that you can be heard all over the place? Now then, who started this?"

That was just like Knowles, too. The heroes of the Fourth had no intention whatever of accusing one another, and they simply blinked at Knowles.

"Sort of started by itself, I think, Knowles," ventured Tommy Dodd.

"We—we were only having a bit of an argument, Knowles," said Cook.

"Only talking about the cricket prospects," added Jimmy Silver. "We—we got a little excited, perhaps."

"I've no doubt you were the ring-leader," said Knowles, with a glare at Silver. "Well, I'm going to cane you all round. Now then, one at a time!"

"I say, Knowles—"

"You first, Dodd!"

Tommy Dodd grunted, and came to take his medicine. It was very bitter medicine.

Knowles gave him three on each hand, and Tommy Dodd was simply wriggling when he had finished.

"Oh, you beast!" gasped Tommy.

"What!"

"Ahem! I—I mean——"

"Come here again!" said Knowles.

"Oh, I say, Knowles——"

"Come here!" roared Knowles.

Swish! Swish!

"Ow! Ow!"

"Shame!"

Knowles glared round, as an indignant voice shouted.

"Who said that?"

"Sure, and I did!" said Tommy Doyle independently. "It's a baste ye are!"

"You next, Doyle!" said Knowles, closing his thin lips tightly.

Tommy Doyle went through it with a wry face. He suffered more severely than Tommy Dodd. Then came Tommy Cook's turn, and he wriggled with anguish. The three Tommies groaned in chorus.

Knowles was getting his hand in by this time. The rest of the Modern juniors took their punishment one after another. When he had disposed of the last of them the prefect turned to Jimmy Silver.

"You next, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver stared at him.

"Did you speak to me" he inquired politely.

"Come here!"

"What for?"

"To be caned."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"You're dreaming, Knowles!" he said pleasantly. "You can't cane the Classical side."

"No, jolly fear!" said Lovell hotly. "You can report us to Bulkeley if you like, Knowles, or to Bootles. You know you can't lick us!"

Knowles set his teeth. He was exceeding his authority as a prefect of the Modern side in inflicting canings on Classical juniors. But that was one of Knowles' little ways. And he had a special "down" on Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Will you come here, Silver?"

"No, I won't!"

Knowles strode towards him, gripping the ashplant.

"Back up!" said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome lined up with him at once. The Fistical Four had no intention whatever of being caned by a Modern prefect. The rest of the crowd looked on with intense interest; the three Tommies forgot to groan for a moment. The rebellious juniors were quite within their rights, but it was a serious matter to resist a prefect, even if that great personage was overstepping his just authority. But the Fistical Four were celebrated for their cheek.

"Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"Rats!"

"What!" yelled Knowles.

"Rats!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"You can't lick us, and you know it. We're willing to be taken to Bulkeley or to the Head if you like; but you won't touch us with that ashplant."

"Hear, hear!" sang out Hooker of the Fourth.

Knowles hesitated one moment. But he had gone too far to retreat now. He strode right at Jimmy Silver and grasped him by the shoulder.

"Let go!" roared Silver.

"Mind your own business, Knowles!"

"Clear off, you cad!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The ashplant came down across Jimmy Silver's shoulders with terrific vim. Knowles had completely lost his temper.

"Collar him, you duffers!" yelled Jimmy Silver, struggling furiously in the grasp of the big Sixth-Former.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed on Knowles. He was dragged back, and the ashplant torn from his hand. Raby tossed it out of the open window into the quad. Knowles uttered a howl of rage, and used his fists. Jimmy Silver went flying, and Lovell pitched across him, and then Raby and Newcome felt their heads being knocked together, and then Knowles pitched them over the two juniors on the floor.

Then the prefect strode out of the room. Jimmy Silver & Co. sat up dazedly. They were feeling hurt.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Silver. "The beast! The awful beast!"

"The horrible ruffian!" stuttered Lovell, clapping his nose with both hands. "The beastly prize-fighter! Oh, dear!"

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Groo-hooh-yow!"

There was weeping and wailing and

gnashing of teeth in the Common-room. And for once Classics and Moderns were quite in accord. Their own little disagreements were completely forgotten. The Fistical Four and the three Tommies vied with one another in breathing vengeance upon the bully of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 24.

Done in the Dark.

BULKELEY of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, was having a talk with Knowles, who had come across to see him that evening. Knowles' temper was still a little "edgewise" from the happenings of the afternoon. The defiance of his authority by the Classical juniors irritated him.

Certainly, they had been pretty severely punished for it. But he was still irritated. Moreover, he knew that he might be called to account.

When he received Bulkeley's message asking him to come over he had no doubt whatever that Jimmy Silver & Co. had complained to their captain, and that Bulkeley wanted to see him about it. So Knowles had come over in a warlike humour.

But he was mistaken—the Fistical Four had not complained. Badly as Knowles had used them, they were not the kind to tell tales.

Bulkeley wanted to talk about the cricket. For ten minutes the two talked together, and then Knowles left the study, and went out into the darkness of the quadrangle. He strode under the old beeches.

A sudden footstep under the heavy shadows of the trees made him pause and peer about him.

Even as he stopped there came a sudden rush of feet.

Knowles started.

"What—who— Oh!"

He had no time for more.

Hands grasped him on all sides, and an open bag was dragged over his head and jerked tight round his neck.

The astounded prefect struck out furiously on all sides at random, but the surprise was so sudden that he was down on the ground in a few seconds. still

struggling. He shouted savagely, but the bag muffled his voice.

A knee was planted on his chest, and he felt the grip of a pair of hands on each of his wrists.

He struggled wildly, but he was helpless. He knew that he was in the hands of juniors. He could tell that, but he had not caught the faintest glimpse of them in the darkness.

"You young hounds! Help! Help!"

But the thick bag drowned his cries, and a hand jammed it tighter over his mouth, almost choking him with dust.

He felt a slip-knot placed over his right wrist and drawn tight. Then his hands were dragged together, and, in spite of his resistance, the cord was twisted tightly round his wrists and knotted.

The prefect lay gasping and choking, in almost a frenzy of rage. In the darkness under the elms the scene was passing utterly unsuspected by the rest of Rookwood; and the bag jammed over his head and face stifled his cries. He knew that his voice could not be heard.

His hands being secured, his unknown captors turned their attention to his feet. His ankles were bound tightly together, several hands going to work deliberately, with the evident intention of making a secure job of it.

Then a cord was passed round the bag, fastening it round his neck.

Knowles was almost suffocated by this time. Probably he would have been quite suffocated, but a knife was slit across the bag, making an opening before his mouth sufficient to admit air. He opened his mouth to shout, but his captors evidently expected that, for a muddy chunk of turf was promptly jammed through the slit in the bag, and Knowles sputtered and gurgled instead of yelling.

There was a pause in the proceedings, and he heard faintly a murmur of voices—only the faintest murmur, which did not enable him to distinguish them.

Not that he had much doubt as to who his assailants were. He was convinced that they were Jimmy Silver & Co. At least three or four pairs of hands had been busy upon him, and he was assured that they belonged to the Classical chums. He was as certain of that as if he could see them.

He lay panting and gasping, wondering

furiously what his assailants were about to do. He soon discovered.

He was seized and raised from the ground, and this time he was certain that four pairs of hands were at work, for each of his arms and legs gave a hold to a different bearer. Four of them—the Classical chums of the Fourth, of course. Knowles inwardly resolved that they should pay dearly for it.

But what were they going to do? They couldn't intend to leave him like that. It was getting late in the evening; it would be bedtime soon. They could not intend to leave him out of doors.

He was alarmed now as well as enraged. He did not know what direction he was being carried in, but two or three times he bumped against a wall or a tree, and he knew that his captors were skirting the quadrangle, keeping in the shadows out of danger of lighted windows.

He was bumped down at last.

He felt rough and stony ground under him. Not a word came from the assailants, but he heard a sound of retreating footsteps.

They were gone!

Knowles struggled into a sitting position, writhing with rage. He dragged madly at his bonds, but he could not release either hands or feet. The bag was tied round his neck, and it was impossible to get it off. Only the narrow slit in front allowed the air to enter. The unfortunate prefect began to shout, but the bag muffled his cries.

Where was he?

Had the young rascals set him down at a distance from the school buildings? If he did not make his voice heard, he was destined to pass the night there. The thought of it made him shudder.

No answer came to his cries. He rolled over desperately, working himself along the rough ground in the hope of reaching the quadrangle again. He brought up against a wall, and felt ivy dragging against him, and two or three loose stones rattled down upon him.

He guessed where he was then. He was in the ruins of the old abbey, which, though within the walls of Rookwood, was a considerable distance from the School House. He lay there, panting, blind with rage.

It was some time before the thought

came to him to use his teeth on the bag. He succeeded in getting the edge of the slit between his teeth, and gnawed at it desperately.

The opening was soon enlarged, and he breathed more freely. Then he began to shout for help again, and his voice rang through the ruins, and echoed away over the old quadrangle of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 25.

Accused.

JIMMY SILVER sat up in bed, in the Fourth-Form dormitory on the Classical side.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and the Fourth had been in bed for some time, and most of them had fallen asleep.

The Fistical Four, however, were still wakeful—for two reasons. They were still feeling the effects of that extremely painful "scrap" with Knowles in the Common-room, and they were plotting and scheming schemes for making the bully of the Sixth sorry for himself. How exactly to make Knowles sorry for himself was a very difficult question, but it had to be answered somehow. The Classical Four did not mean to take their great wrong lying down.

Jimmy Silver had been listening for some minutes, but not to the remarks of his comrades. He sat up at last.

"You fellows hear something?" he asked.

"I can hear Hooker snoring," said Lovell.

"Fathead! Something outside, I mean! Listen!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Listen, I tell you—"

The juniors listened. Faintly through the silence of the night a cry came, as if from a great distance.

"Help!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "It's somebody calling for help!"

Jimmy Silver was out of bed in a moment.

He bent his head to listen, and as the cry came again he ascertained the direction.

The big windows at one end of the dormitory looked towards the old abbey ruins. It was from this direction the cry

came. The windows were open at the top, or Jimmy Silver would have heard nothing. He mounted to one of the windows, and put his head out, and listened again. Clearer now, through the still air of the night, came the faint cry from the old abbey:

"Help!"

Jimmy Silver jumped down.

"It's somebody in the ruins, calling for help," he said. "Nobody else seems to have heard it yet. Better go and tell Bulkeley."

"Yes, rather; we'll all come."

The four chums bundled into their clothes at top speed. Then they and two or three of their Form-mates dashed down the stairs four at a time, and sped away to Bulkeley's study.

Jimmy Silver bumped on the door, and opened it at once. There was an exclamation of wrathful astonishment in the study. Bulkeley and Neville, and Price of the Sixth were there discussing the cricket prospects, and the prospect of trouble with the Modern side over the cricket. They jumped up, staring blankly at the juniors as they appeared in the doorway.

"You young sweeps!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What are you doing out of your dormitory?"

"There's somebody—"

"What?"

"Somebody's calling for help in the ruins!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"Stuff!" said Neville.

Bulkeley looked at the junior in amazement.

"Is this a lark?" he grunted.

"Honest Injun, Bulkeley!"

"Somebody in the ruins calling for help!" repeated Price. "What utter rot! How could anybody get into the ruins after the gates are locked?"

"We heard it," said Lovell.

"How could you hear it?"

"Through the dorm. window," said Jimmy Silver. "We hadn't gone to sleep."

"Well, you ought to have gone to sleep," said Bulkeley. "More likely you went to sleep, and dreamed it. Still, we'd better look, you fellows. If there's nobody in the ruins, these young jackanapes will be licked all round."

"Well, I like that!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "After we've taken the trouble to come and tell you!"

"Go back to your dormitory," said Bulkeley. "Come on, you chaps! Better see if there's anything in it."

Neville and Price assented, and the three seniors hurried out of the house. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"Back to the dorm?" murmured Raby. Silver shook his head.

"We're going to see what's the matter," he said. "Dash it all, we gave the alarm, didn't we? They've no right to shove us out of it!"

"Hear, hear!" said Newcome. "We might as well see the whole business through now we've started on it."

Jimmy Silver ran out of the house after the seniors, and his chums followed him. They were intensely curious to know what was the cause of the alarm, and they felt that they were entitled to assist in the investigations. Out in the open air, the cries could be heard more plainly.

"Help, help!"

"By Jove, it's right enough!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "Dash it! How dark it is! We'd better get a lantern. Get a lamp from the bike-shed, Neville, there's a good chap, and come after me!"

"Right-ho!"

Bulkeley and Price rushed away towards the ruins, and the juniors followed them, unnoticed in the dark. There was a pause of silence, and then the faint voice was heard calling again. It became louder as they drew near to the old abbey.

"That's Knowles' toot!" whispered Love!!

"Knowles, by gum! Let's hope he's broken his neck!" said Newcome charitably.

They ran into the ruins.

It was densely dark there, and they could see nothing but the rugged shapes of the old masses of masonry rising dimly on all sides.

"Where are you?" shouted Bulkeley.

"Here!"

"All right. We're coming! I can't see you. What's happened?"

"I'm tied up."

"Tied up!" ejaculated Bulkeley. He humped into Jimmy Silver as he tried to find the direction of the voice. "Hallo! What are you fags doing here?"

"We've come to help, please."

Bulkeley grunted.

"Well hunt for him then, as you're here," he said.

"What-ho! We'll soon find him."

Neville was coming with the lantern. The light gleamed through the night as he came running up. But before he arrived the Modern prefect was found. Jimmy Silver stumbled over something in the dark, and there was a yell.

"Yow!"

"Hallo! Here he is, Bulkeley."

"Light this way!" called out the captain of Rookwood.

"Coming!"

Neville came up with the lighted lantern, panting. The searchers gathered round Knowles of the Sixth, as the light gleamed upon him. Bulkeley's eyes almost started from his head as he saw the prefect, bound hand and foot, with the bag fastened over his head.

"Great Scott! Is—is that you, Knowles?"

"Yes!" howled Knowles. "Get me loose, can't you?"

"I've got a knife," said Jimmy Silver.

"You young hound!" panted Knowles.

"Eh! What?"

"Don't come near me, you little beast! I'll have you sacked for this!"

"Wandering in his mind, I suppose," said Jimmy Silver, in great astonishment. "Blessed if I know what you're talking about, Knowles."

"You young liar!"

"Oh, crumbs! What is he burbling about, Bulkeley?"

"Cut him loose!" said the captain of Rookwood brusquely.

Jimmy Silver obeyed. He soon whipped through the cords, and Knowles was freed, and the bag was dragged from his head. He staggered to his feet, his face red and inflamed with rage.

He made a blow at Jimmy Silver, and Silver promptly dodged back.

"What's the matter with him?" Silver exclaimed, in amazement.

"Hold on, Knowles," said Bulkeley. "There's nothing to go for that kid about. It was he who heard you calling, or we shouldn't have known you were here."

"Yes, I suppose the young villain didn't dare leave me here all night!" panted Knowles.

"What! Do you accuse Silver—"

"Yes, I do!" roared Knowles furiously. "I was collared in the quad after leaving you, and I've been here ever since. They

tied me up and dragged me here. Those four young scoundrels!"

"My word!" stuttered Lovell.

Bulkeley looked at them sternly.

"So this was your work?" he exclaimed.

"No fear!" said Jimmy Silver promptly. "Knowles must be wandering in his mind, I should think. Or else he's dotty!"

"Dotty, I should say," remarked Lovell.

Knowles made a spring towards them. The Fistical Four put up their hands at once. They had been the means of rescuing Knowles from his uncomfortable position, and they did not mean to be rewarded with a thumping. Jimmy Silver's eyes were blazing.

"Yes, come on you cad!" he exclaimed.

"You won't find us so easy to handle as you did this afternoon. We're ready for you now!"

Bulkeley had caught Knowles by the arm, and he pushed him back. Knowles looked for a moment as though he would hit out at the captain of Rookwood.

"Hold on, Knowles!" said Bulkeley quietly. "This will have to be gone into. Do you say that you are certain these juniors assaulted you in this way?"

"Yes, I do!" howled Knowles.

"And we deny it," said Jimmy Silver. "It's a lie!"

"You hear him?" panted Knowles.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Bulkeley. "If you were collared in the dark, Knowles, are you quite sure you recognised them?"

"How could I recognise them, when a bag was put over my head first thing?" shouted Knowles.

"Then you didn't recognise them?"

"I didn't see them; but I knew who they were all the time."

"You guessed, you mean," said Bulkeley.

"There wasn't much guessing required. They did this because I licked them this afternoon."

"You had no right to lick them," said Bulkeley coldly.

"So you are backing them up, after what they've done?"

"If they've done this, they'll be flogged or expelled," said Bulkeley quietly. "But it's got to be proved first!"

"Oh, I expect that from you!" sneered Knowles. "Luckily, it doesn't rest with you. I'm going to the Head!"

Knowles, dusty and muddy and rumped,

strode furiously away, making directly for the School House. He evidently did not mean to lose any time in seeing the Head. Bulkeley bent a searching glance upon the juniors.

"Do you kids give me your word that you know nothing about this?" he asked.

"Honour bright!" said the Fistical Four, with one voice.

"Then who the dickens can have done it?" muttered Bulkeley.

There was sincerity and truth in the faces of the juniors, and it was almost impossible to doubt their assertion.

But Bulkeley was sorely troubled. Whether the chums of the Fourth were guilty or not, there could be little doubt that Classics had handled the unpopular Modern prefect, and the episode could not fail to make bad blood. It seemed that Bulkeley's efforts to draw the two sides together were doomed to failure.

"Must have been Classical chaps," muttered Neville, voicing the captain's thoughts.

Bulkeley nodded, and walked away to the house. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed, in a very disturbed frame of mind.

"Go back to bed, you fags," said Bulkeley. "The Head will want to see you."

And the four chums returned to their dormitory.

CHAPTER 26.

The Lie.

LOVELL lighted the gas in the dormitory, and the Co. proceeded to finish dressing. Most of the Fourth had awakened, and questions were showered upon the four juniors. The story of the discovery of Knowles in the ruins, bound hand and foot, made the Classical Fourth gasp.

"What a thumping lark, begorra!" said Flynn. "Serve the basto right!"

"Hear, hear!" said Hooker. "But there'll be an awful row! It's rather more than a joke, kidnapping a prefect and tying him up!"

"Blessed if I see how they had the nerve to do it!" said Townsend, the dandy of the Fourth. "Why, you may be sacked for this, you duffers!"

"Us!" exclaimed Raby.

"Yes, you. Didn't you say Knowles has gone to tell the Head you did it?"

"Yes, he has; but we didn't do it."

"Gammon!" said Topham.

Jimmy Silver clenched his fist.

"You silly ass, we didn't do it! We hadn't the faintest idea it was Knowles there when we heard somebody yelping!"

"How did you come to hear him, when nobody else did?" asked Topham sceptically.

"Looks a bit fishy for you, anyway," said Townsend. "Besides, if you didn't do it, who did?"

"There's lots of fellows hate Knowles," said Lovell. "Might have been any of you chaps!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Townsend. "Don't try to put it on us!"

"Might have been some of the Shell chaps," suggested Flynn.

"It was some fellows who'd got their knife into Knowles," said Jimmy Silver. "He's always ragging somebody. Might have been some of the Fifth, for all we know. Anyway, it wasn't us!"

"You'd better get the Head to believe that!" grinned Townsend.

"So you can't take my word!" demanded Jimmy Silver, greatly incensed.

"Well, you would deny it, anyway!"

"Not if it was true, you rotter!"

"Bow-wow!" said Townsend. "You wouldn't own up and be sacked, I suppose! Here—yah—stoppit—leggo—hoooc - hoooc—yowp!"

The exasperated Jimmy Silver yanked the dandy of the Fourth out of bed, and bumped him on the floor. Townsend roared as he came down in a tangle of bedclothes. Jimmy Silver grasped his ears, and knocked his head on the floor.

"Now do you believe me, you fathead?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Can you take my word now—what?"

"Yurroooh! Yes! Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulkeley looked in at the door.

"Stop that row!" he said angrily. "You four are wanted in the Head's study at once. This isn't a time for ragging, Silver. You're in trouble enough already!"

"I don't see that I'm in trouble," said Jimmy Silver. "If Knowles accuses us of collaring him, Knowles is telling lies. It isn't a mistake—it's a lie!"

"You can tell all that to the Head!" growled Bulkeley. "Come with me!"

The four juniors followed him from the dormitory, leaving the Fourth in a buzz of excitement, and Townsend rubbing his

head and mumbling. The news of the way Knowles had been handled afforded the Fourth-Formers pure delight. Nobody had the slightest sympathy to waste upon him. The Modern prefect had made himself too thoroughly disliked for that on the Classical side. Indeed, it was doubtful if the juniors on his own side would be displeased to hear what had happened. Knowles was a little too free with cuffs and lincs and lickings to be popular even with the Moderns.

The Fistical Four followed Bulkeley downstairs, extremely disturbed in mind, in spite of their knowledge of innocence. That Knowles would make the matter as black against them as he could was certain.

Indeed, it was probable that he really believed they were his assailants; they had to admit that. At the very moment when they had first heard his cries for help, they had been discussing plans for vengeance upon him.

And everyone would regard it as a foregone conclusion that the assailants belonged to the Classical side. And who so likely as the Fistical Four? What others among the juniors had such cause to be bitter against Knowles? And what others were known to be so generally reckless and regardless of consequences?

The four Classics realised that they were in a bad box, and they did not feel happy as they filed into the Head's study after Bulkeley.

Dr. Chisholm was looking sterner than they had ever known him look before. The dark frown upon his brow made them feel glummer than ever. Knowles had had the advantage of telling his story first. The prefect, a little calmer now, but dusty and muddy as when he had left the ruins, was standing by the Head's table. He gave the juniors a bitter look as they came in.

Dr. Chisholm made a sign to the juniors to approach his table. They came up, and stood in a row before him.

"You know why I sent for you?" said the Head, in a hard voice.

"Yes, sir."

"A most outrageous assault has been committed upon Knowles—an outrage unheard of in the history of Rookwood!" said the Head sternly. "He accuses you!"

"I know he does, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"You deny it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You assure me that you know nothing whatever about the matter?" asked the Head, searching their faces with his keen eyes.

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"It appears that you first heard Knowles calling for help. How did that come about, if you know nothing of his situation?"

"We hadn't gone to sleep, sir," Jimmy Silver explained.

"You had not gone to sleep—so late?"

"We—were talking, sir. We often jaw—I mean, chat—a bit before we go to sleep," said Jimmy Silver, "and the window of the dorm. is towards the ruins. That's how we happened to hear him, and we came down at once and told Bulkeley. We didn't know it was Knowles then."

"Knowles tells me that he punished you this afternoon, and that you have acted thus from a feeling of revenge."

"He bullied us, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "He has no right to punish us. He came into our Common-room and bullied us!"

"It would certainly be more judicious, Knowles, if you left the juniors on the Classical side to the Classical prefects," said the Head parenthetically.

Knowles bit his lip.

"No Classical prefects had taken the trouble to see to the matter, sir," he replied. "I found the Common-room turned into a bear-garden. A dozen or more juniors were fighting."

"It was only a little scrap, sir——" began Jimmy Silver.

"What!"

"I—I mean, only a tussle, sir. We didn't really hurt one another—just a—a rag!"

"Knowles is always interfering with us, too," burst out Lovell. "He never will let us alone. Nobody on this side can stand him!"

"That will do, Lovell," said the Head dryly. "By showing your personal animus against Knowles in this manner, you are adding weight to his accusation!"

"Oh!" murmured Lovell.

His outburst certainly had not improved matters.

The Head rested his chin in his hand, and scanned the juniors keenly. They looked flushed and disturbed, as was natural under the circumstances. It was no light matter to be brought before the

Head on a charge of man-handling a prefect of the Sixth. It was a matter for a flogging at least, and possibly expulsion from the school, and the four Classics could not help feeling uneasy.

"This is a very serious matter," said the Head at last. "The matter could not very well be more serious. I should be sorry to think that four Rookwood boys could stand before me and utter falsehoods. I may ask you, Bulkeley, whether you have ever found these four boys untruthful?"

"Never, sir," said Bulkeley at once. "They are rather unruly sometimes, and have given some trouble, but I should not say that any one of them would tell an untruth!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. gave old Bulkeley grateful looks. They realised, too, that a good reputation had its value.

"You are convinced, Knowles, that the persons who assaulted you were these four boys?"

"Quite, sir. There is not the slightest doubt of it in my mind."

"You did not see them?"

"They were too cunning for that; it was in the dark, under the beeches. Of course, they had all that planned."

"There is, however, no actual proof, as you did not see them."

"There is actual proof against Silver, sir, and I conclude that his friends were the boys who were with him, as they are always his helpers in mischief."

"But you say that you did not see Silver?"

"I did not see him, sir, but I heard him," said Knowles, after a hesitation so brief as to be imperceptible.

"You heard him, Knowles?"

"Yes, sir, and recognised his voice!" said Knowles deliberately.

CHAPTER 27.

Condemned!

JIMMY SILVER started violently. The Head's face had become as hard as iron now. Even Bulkeley looked very grim. Indeed, even Lovell and Raby and Newcome gave their chum startled glances.

Dr. Chisholm bent his frowning brows upon Jimmy Silver.

"You hear, Silver?"

"Yes, sir," stammered Jimmy. "I—I heard what Knowles said."

"What have you to say?"

Jimmy Silver's eyes blazed. He pulled himself together, his face flushing crimson with rage and excitement.

His voice rang through the study as he answered:

"I say that it's a lie, sir!"

Knowles compressed his lips hard together. He had lied—he knew that—but he was so convinced that the leader of his assailants was Jimmy Silver that he regarded the falsehood as a venial one. He had heard a murmur of voices among his assailants, but he had certainly not recognised a voice. But he had no doubts, and he considered himself justified in making his assertion. It was easy for Knowles' conscience to satisfy itself.

"You must not say that, Silver," said the Head harshly. "At the most, you may say that Knowles made a mistake."

"It couldn't be a mistake," said Jimmy Silver, trembling with rage. "How could he take another chap's voice for mine? He says he heard me speak, and it's a lie—a lie—a lie!"

Jimmy Silver's voice rose to an excited shout, as he lost control of himself in his fury.

Bulkeley's hand dropped on his shoulder.

"Quiet, young 'un! Remember where you are!"

Jimmy Silver tried to pull himself together.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," he stammered. "I—I— But it isn't true, sir! He didn't hear my voice! He couldn't have, when I wasn't there!"

"I am afraid that I am bound to accept Knowles' statement," said the Head coldly. "The only question is as to your accomplices. Were they these boys?"

"You—you believe I—I did it, sir?" stammered Jimmy Silver, aghast.

"Undoubtedly."

"But I—I didn't, sir—I didn't! I—"

"Silence!"

Jimmy Silver's frenzied voice died away. There was condemnation in the doctor's face.

For a moment or two there was grim silence in the study. Bulkeley broke it.

"May I say a word, sir?"

"Certainly, Bulkeley."

"Knowles was assaulted after paying a visit to my study, sir. He left me about

eight o'clock. It must have been within a few minutes that he was seized in the quadrangle."

"It was," said Knowles, wondering what the captain of Rookwood was driving at.

"Very well. Where were you at eight o'clock, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver understood. The captain wanted to give him a chance of proving an alibi if he could. The Head nodded approval.

"In my study—the end study, Bulkeley," said Jimmy.

"What were you doing?"

"Preparation. We're always doing prep. at eight o'clock."

"Then you were not alone?"

"No fear! My study-mates were all there—these three chaps."

"That we were!" exclaimed Lovell, with a breath of relief.

Knowles' statement had been so positive that it had staggered Jimmy Silver's chums for a moment, and made them wonder whether he had, after all, led that attack on the Modern prefect without their knowledge.

"Yes, rather," said Baby. "I remember we were in the study at half-past seven, when we started prep. We came down before nine."

"That hardly improves matters for the young rascals!" said Knowles, with a bitter smile. "There was no doubt that those three helped Silver in his assault on me. He would not be likely to leave them out of it. Of course, they had this story arranged ready for an inquiry!"

"We're not liars, like you, Knowles!" said Lovell hotly.

"Silence, Lovell!" exclaimed the Head. "How dare you speak in that manner in my presence!"

"We've told the truth, sir," said Lovell stubbornly. "We were all in the end study together doing our prep.!"

"Nobody else there?" asked Bulkeley.

"Of course not. The other fellows were doing their prep. in their studies. They always are at eight o'clock."

Knowles gave a sneering smile.

"And as all the juniors were at work on their preparations, it was easy enough for you to slip in and out without being seen," he remarked.

"It would have been easy, I suppose," said Lovell, "but we didn't do it."

"Take them away, Bulkeley," said the

Head icily. "To-morrow morning I shall deal with them. Knowles, I am deeply sorry for what has happened to you—it is unheard-of—but you may rest assured that the offenders will be severely punished!"

"Dr. Chisholm—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

The Head made a gesture.

"Silence! To-morrow morning, after prayers, you will be flogged, in the presence of the whole school. Go back to your dormitory!"

"But—but—but—"

"Take them away, Bulkeley!" said the Head, frowning.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stumbled out of the study. They were overwhelmed. The captain of Rookwood conducted them back to the Fourth-Form dormitory in grim silence. They found the Fourth in a buzz of excitement.

"Turn in," said Bulkeley, very quietly.

Jimmy Silver gave him an almost haggard look.

"Bulkeley, you don't believe that we did it, do you?"

Bulkeley did not reply.

"We might have handled Knowles if we'd thought of it," said Jimmy. "But—but we wouldn't tell the Head a pack of lies, Bulkeley. You ought to know us better than that."

"Knowles says he knew your voice."

"He couldn't have—I wasn't there! He was telling a lie!"

"You can't expect the Head to think so."

"Well, say a mistake, then," said Lovell. "Knowles must have been pretty excited, and how could he swear to a voice with a bag over his head, as he says it was?"

Bulkeley hesitated.

"Tain't only the flogging," said Lovell dismally. "That's pretty tough, but we could stand that. But we wouldn't tell you crams, Bulkeley, honour bright."

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Bulkeley. "Tumble in now, kids, and get to sleep."

The Fistical Four turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light and retired, considerably puzzled and perplexed in his mind.

The Fourth-Form dormitory remained in a buzz of voices for a long time.

After the rest of the Fourth had dropped off to sleep, Jimmy Silver & Co. were still awake, dismally discussing the situation.

After prayers in the morning they were

to be flogged. There was one slight chance—the real culprits might own up to save them from an unjust punishment.

They would have done that themselves, but they knew there were a good many fellows who wouldn't. It was a slight hope, but they hugged it to their hearts, it was all they had.

They slept at last, and dreamed of a stern face and a switching birch. The star of the Fistical Four was certainly not in the ascendant.

CHAPTER 28.

A Very Awkward Discovery.

KNOWLES strode away with thunder on his brow and bitterness in his heart.

A moving shadow under the old beeches caught his eye, and he stopped. It was not likely that a second attack on him was planned, but he was on his guard. It was most likely some junior who was out of his dormitory at forbidden hours, and Knowles was in the mood to punish somebody—anybody—just then. He made a spring towards the shadow, and he heard a footstep and hurried breathing.

The footsteps pattered away swiftly in the dark. Knowles set his teeth and dashed in pursuit.

He caught a glimpse of a running figure for a moment, and then it vanished round the new wing. Knowles dashed after it, guessing that it was a Modern junior out of bounds, and that he was seeking to re-enter at the back of the house.

He was right.

As he came running round the house, he saw a little window at the back half-open, and a dark figure clambering in. Knowles came up, panting, and grasped the legs of the vanishing junior. There was a startled cry.

"Oh!"

"You can come out, you sweep!" said Knowles, holding on tight to the legs. "I've got you!"

The junior made a terrific effort to drag himself in through the window, but Knowles held on like a vice. The effort slackened, and the junior gasped. Knowles dragged him bodily from the window, and he plumped on the ground, panting.

"Get up!" growled the prefect.

The junior rose. Knowles peered at him,

and recognised Tommy Dodd of the Fourth. Dodd was looking very pale, and breathing hard.

"So it's you!" said Knowles.

Tommy Dodd looked sullen.

"Yes," he said defiantly.

"What are you doing out of your dormitory?"

Tommy Dodd did not answer, but his eyes were fixed on Knowles with a peculiar expression, which the prefect could not fail to notice, dark as it was.

"Why don't you answer me?" exclaimed Knowles roughly. "Have you been playing larks on the Classical side?"

"No."

"Then what have you been up to?"

"I've been out in the quad."

"Nowhere else?"

"No."

"You were going out when I came on you," said Knowles. "You turned and ran when you met me. Where were you going?"

Silence.

"Why don't you answer?" said Knowles, as surprised as angry. "Do you want me to take you to the Head?"

"I don't care."

Knowles stared at him. It was not like the cheery Tommy Dodd to be silent and sullen. Perhaps he had not forgotten that tremendous licking of the afternoon, from which his hands were still aching. Tommy Dodd was certainly sullen and savage and reckless now.

"You were up to something," said Knowles, mystified and curious. "You may as well own up what it was. My hat!" he ejaculated, as a sudden thought struck him. "You were going to see Silver!"

"I wasn't."

"Perhaps you were with him in what he did this evening," said Knowles, his eyes glittering, and his grasp tightening on the junior's shoulder. "You young rascal! I might have guessed that!"

"I wasn't going to see Silver, and I don't know what he's done, and I don't care," said Tommy Dodd sulkily.

"Then what were you doing out of doors?"

No reply.

"I think I know well enough," said Knowles savagely. "Those Classical cads were not alone in it. Perhaps you helped

them to collar me. Own up, you young cad!"

Tommy Dodd started violently.

"So that touches you, does it?" sneered Knowles. "Were you in the gang? There were four of them at least—there might have been more."

"I—I—"

"Good! You can take the flogging along with the rest," said Knowles. "Come with me; you're going straight to the Head."

"I—I say—" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"You needn't say anything," said Knowles grimly. "I'm pretty certain that you were one of them, and, anyway, you can explain to the Head what you're doing out of the dormitory at half-past ten. You young hound, that's because I licked you to-day. You've helped those Classical cads to assault your own prefect—"

"They're going to be flogged?" asked Tommy Dodd, in a husky voice.

"Yes; and you with them, if you had a hand in it."

"Jimmy Silver and his friends, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"For—for collaring you in the quad?"

"I see you know all about it," sneered Knowles. "They're going to be flogged to-morrow. I wish they could be sacked."

Tommy Dodd drew a deep, deep breath.

"Then I'll come to the Head," he said.

"I—I'm glad you dropped on me, Knowles. I—I hadn't the faintest idea they might be suspected. I never thought of it. But I'd have owned up as soon as I heard they were going to be flogged, anyway."

"So you admit it?"

Tommy Dodd laughed recklessly.

"Yes, you brute! Yes, you bully! I collared you, and serve you right! And I shan't tell you who helped me, either."

"I know who helped you—Jimmy Silver and the rest—"

"They had nothing to do with it," said Tommy Dodd.

Knowles started. It began to dawn upon him that he had discovered a little too much.

"Don't tell lies," he said savagely.

"I'm not telling lies, you cad! Modern chaps helped me. I shouldn't be likely to go to the Classical rotters for help!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully. "Now, take me to the Head. I'm ready to own up.

and I'll show him my hands, too, and let him see how you licked me this afternoon, you bully."

Knowles released Tommy Dodd. He stared at the Modern junior blankly in the gloom. He understood now. It was not the Classics at all. The juniors of his own side, whom he had savagely punished, had planned that vengeance and carried it out. There were four of them—Dodd and Doyle and Cook, undoubtedly, and another. It was utterly unlikely that the Modern chums would have called on Classical juniors for aid in such an enterprise. Knowles knew that. His case against Jimmy Silver & Co. crumbled away. He had discovered too much.

For, oddly enough, though Tommy Dodd had collared him and tied him up, Knowles would have preferred Jimmy Silver to be flogged. And the lie he had told in the Head's study came back to his mind with staggering force. He had declared that he had recognised Jimmy Silver's voice. And Tommy Dodd was the guilty party, and ready to own up that Jimmy Silver had had nothing to do with it, and had not been on the spot at all.

"It—it was you?" stammered Knowles. "You and Doyle and Cook—"

"Find out!"

"Oh, you young hound!" Knowles was almost dazed by his discovery. His lie had come home to roost now, with a vengeance. "You—you young scoundrel!"

"Pile it on," said Tommy Dodd recklessly. "I made up my mind you'd go through it, and you have. I don't care if you take me to the Head! I was a fool to care what happened to you at all, that's all. I don't care if you know where I was going, as you know the rest. I meant to leave you tied up in the old abbey for a few hours, and then come and untie your legs so that you could walk, if you hadn't got help sooner. I was going to the abbey to see if you were still there, when I ran into you just now. Still, I don't care. I'd have owned up to-morrow morning, anyway, rather than see Jimmy Silver flogged."

Knowles panted.

He knew the truth now, and it was easy enough to take Tommy Dodd to the Head, and get the right party sentenced to condign punishment. But how was he to explain the lie he had told? He had told it, in the conviction that Jimmy Silver was

guilty, and the lie could not be explained away.

If only he had had sense enough to keep to the truth! He gritted his teeth with rage as he thought of it. Even now he would rather that Jimmy Silver had the flogging than Tommy Dodd.

"Well, why don't you take me to the Head?" growled Tommy Dodd. "I'm ready."

Knowles drew a deep breath.

"Because I don't believe you," he said deliberately.

Tommy Dodd jumped.

"You—you don't believe me, Knowles?"

"No!"

"But—but I've owned up!" stammered Tommy Dodd, in utter amazement. He had not the faintest idea of what was working in Knowles' mind, and he was astounded.

"I believe you've been trying to pull my leg," said Knowles calmly. "I don't believe you know anything about the matter, excepting what I've told you. Go back to your dormitory."

"But—but—"

"Get in at that window, and go back to your dormitory," said Knowles harshly.

**NEXT MONTH'S WINNERS!
GET ON TO THEM—THEY'RE
GREAT!**

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THURSDAY, AUG. 7th

**Is the Day to Remember—But
Play Safe and Order Early!**

"If you have the sense to hold your tongue, I will say nothing about this. Get in!"

He pushed the amazed junior towards the window. Tommy Dodd, with his brain in a whirl, clambered in, and disappeared in the darkness within. Knowles went round the building, and hurried to his own study.

The prefect's face was pale with rage and chagrin. What was to happen now? If Tommy Dodd had sense enough to hold his tongue, he could escape punishment, and Knowles would say nothing. The real perpetrator of the outrage could escape scot-free, with Knowles' blessing for that matter, so long as Jimmy Silver was flogged, and Knowles' falsehood was not brought to light.

Would Tommy Dodd hold his tongue?

After some reflection, Knowles decided that he would. A flogging was not a light matter, and he was pretty certain that the junior would keep silence, so long as the prefect held his peace. If nothing was said, Jimmy Silver would be flogged, and Knowles' falsehood, which had come home so uncomfortably to roost, would never be brought home to him.

Knowles went to bed feeling more comforted.

Tommy Dodd was sure to have enough sense to hold his tongue! Unfortunately for Knowles, Tommy Dodd, though quite a sensible youth, was not blessed with the kind of sense that Knowles gave him credit for.

CHAPTER 29.

Coming to Terms.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. turned out in the morning at the clang of the rising-bell in the lowest spirits.

As a rule, they greeted the rising sun with faces as sunny as his own. But on this particular morning, they were decidedly downhearted.

The fiat had gone forth, and there was no arguing with the Head. After prayers, before morning classes assembled, the Fistical Four were to be hauled up before the whole school and flogged.

The disgrace of that punishment, as well as the pain of it, troubled their minds. The consciousness of innocence made it all the more bitter.

They came down in glum spirits. Long

before breakfast all the Classics were in possession of the story. Smythe of the Shell and his friends, who were very much up against the Fistical Four, declared that it served them right. Smythe of the Shell, in fact, seemed to look forward to the occasion with some pleasurable anticipation. But the chums of the Fourth were too dispirited even to knock Smythe's hat off.

"It's rotten," groaned Lovell dolorously. "It wouldn't be so bad if we'd had the satisfaction of ragging the cad. But to be flogged for ragging the beast, when we didn't rag the rotter—that fairly puts the lid on!"

"Our luck's out!" grumbled Raby. "The cads who did it ought to own up! Might be Smythe and his set, for all we know! Oh, it's rotten."

"They may own up, whoever they are," said Jimmy Silver hopefully. "We're not flogged yet."

"We soon shall be!" granted Lovell.

It was exasperating, too, that most of the Classical fellows seemed to believe that the Fistical Four had "done it." Most of them highly approved of doing it, too, and commiserated the quartette on being found out. But they only smiled at the Fistical Four's almost frenzied assertions that they hadn't done it. It was a good deed, and they wished they had done it; but they hadn't.

The order had gone forth for the whole school to assemble in Big Hall after prayers to witness the flogging. The order caused much heart-searching among certain juniors on the Modern side.

For the three Tommies, and Towle, who had helped them on that great occasion, did not like the idea of being flogged themselves. But they agreed, dolefully enough, that there was nothing for it but to face the music.

"We couldn't keep quiet and let it go on," said Tommy Dodd. "It's all my fault. I got you chaps into this scrape—"

"Sure you didn't intiorely," said Tommy Doyle loyally. "We can stand in it, anyway."

"I'm going to own up, and I shan't name you chaps," said Tommy Dodd. "No need four getting licked if one will do. And I persuaded you, anyway."

"Rot!" said Tommy Cook. "If you own up, we're going to."

"Well," said Tommy Dodd, "let's go out

and look for those Classic worms, and ease their minds a bit."

"Right-ho!"

"Dodd!" It was Knowles' voice; he was looking for the cheerful youth.

"Hallo, Knowles!" said Tommy Dodd, with the respect due to a prefect conspicuously absent from his manner.

"Come into my study," said Knowles.

"Wait for me, you chaps!"

Tommy Dodd followed Knowles into his study. Knowles had been watching his face during breakfast. He was sure—almost sure—that Tommy Dodd would do the sensible thing. But he wanted to be quite, quite sure.

"You remember that rot you were telling me last night, Dodd?" said Knowles, when the door was closed.

"Yes," said Tommy.

"I told you I didn't believe it. I don't believe it now. And I shan't say anything about the matter," said Knowles.

Tommy Dodd's lip curled.

"I know!" he said. "You've got your knife into Jimmy Silver, Knowles, and you'd rather he was flogged than me, though you know I did it."

"Do you want to be flogged, you young idiot?"

"No fear!"

"Then hold your tongue!"

"I can't! And I won't! What do you want me to hold my tongue for?" demanded Tommy Dodd. "So that Silver may be flogged, when he hasn't done anything. You've still got it in for him over that barring-out, I suppose. Well, as soon as we're in Big Hall, if Silver is to be flogged, I'm going to own up."

"You—you mean that?"

"Yes, I do mean it. You ought, as a prefect, to have reported my confession to the Head already," said Tommy Dodd.

Knowles ground his teeth. It had come to that—through his crooked ways. A junior of the Fourth Form was coolly lecturing him, a prefect of the Sixth, on what he ought to have done!

"And it wouldn't do you any good if I told how you've tried to persuade me to keep quiet and let Silver be flogged," said Tommy Dodd, with flashing eyes. "Blessed if I haven't a good mind to let it out, too! If I'm going to be flogged for nailing you I'll give you a show-up, too! I'll bet the Head wouldn't let you be a

prefect after what I could tell him if I chose!"

"He wouldn't believe a word of it!" stammered Knowles, pale with uneasiness.

"Very well, I'll tell him and see."

"Wait—wait a minute! Look here, Dodd, I want you to keep your mouth shut. I—I'm willing to overlook what you did last night. Perhaps I was a bit too rough on you," said Knowles unsteadily. "I—I don't want you flogged."

"Fat lot you care!" said Tommy Dodd. "You want old Silver flogged for nothing—that's what's the matter with you. And you think I'm mean cad enough to stand by and see it done to save my own skin. Well, you'll see. As soon as Jimmy Silver is called out I shall trot up."

"You know you'll be flogged!" stammered Knowles.

"Of course I know it."

"If you hold your tongue—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tommy Dodd disrespectfully. "What sort of a cad do you think you're talking to?"

Knowles clenched his hands almost convulsively, and made a movement towards the junior. He looked dangerous at that moment but Tommy Dodd did not flinch.

The junior looked the prefect steadily in the face. He was very nearly as angry as Knowles. And a suspicion was working in his mind. It could not simply be the desire to see Jimmy Silver flogged that moved Knowles to this extent. There was something more than that in it. Knowles evidently had something to fear if Tommy Dodd owned up; and Tommy was not long in guessing what it was. He gave a low whistle, and burst into a laugh.

"You are in a fix, Knowles," he said cheerfully. "Fairly bunkered, by gum! It'll be worse for you than for me. You've told the Head crams. My hat! What a nerve! I might have guessed it! He wouldn't flog old Silver unless he thought it was pretty clear against him! Now you'll have to own up you fibbed! No more prefecting after that! I'd rather be flogged myself than own up as a liar!"

"Shut up, you young cad!"

"Hallo! There's the bell for prayers!" said Tommy Dodd. "Come on, Knowles. Mustn't be late, you know. I'm going to be flogged, and you're going to get it in the neck! The Head will be pleased to hear how you tried to get me to keep it

dark, because you'd been telling him whoppers! Oh, my aunt!"

"You—you will not tell him that——" stuttered Knowles. "He, wouldn't believe you——"

"Bow-wow! I'll give him the chance!" grinned Tommy Dodd, thoroughly enjoying the discomfiture of the bully of the Sixth. "Oh, crumbs, you have put your foot in it!"

Knowles panted with rage.

"You will hold your tongue, Dodd——"

"No jolly fear!"

"I—I will get Silver off the flogging somehow," said Knowles at last, his voice quite husky. "Then—then if you don't say anything you'll get off, too."

Tommy Dodd whistled.

"Now you're talking!" he exclaimed heartily. "Put it like that, and it's a go! We'll keep the little secret between us—what?"

"Yes," said Knowles, grinding his teeth.

"After the way we bagged you! I say, you are a forgiving chap. Knowles! You ain't really the sort of fellow a chap would expect to turn the other cheek like this!" chuckled Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, you young—you——"

"I'm willing to have it all out if you are!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Oh, what a lark! I say, the bell's stopping! Ta-ta, Knowlesey!"

Tommy strolled out of the study with his hands in his pockets, whistling, and left the door wide open. Any other fag who had done that would have been dragged back by the scruff of his neck and licked till he roared. But Tommy Dodd was a privileged person just now, and Knowles did not say a word.

The three Tommies joined Jimmy Silver & Co. as they scooted across the quad for chapel. Tommy Dodd gave Silver a thump on the back.

"It's all serene!" he said. "Keep your pecker up! There's not going to be any logging!"

"What!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"It's right as rain! You've got off!" chuckled Tommy Dodd.

"Eh? Who's got me off?"

"Knowles!"

"My only hat!"

Jimmy Silver went into chapel in a state of great astonishment.

CHAPTER 30.

Scot Free.

DR. CHISHOLM was on his way to Big Hall, where all Rookwood was assembled for the flogging, when Knowles came up to him. Knowles was looking pale and troubled.

"What is it, Knowles?" asked the Head, pausing and regarding the Modern prefect very caustically.

"I—I feel that I must speak to you, sir," said Knowles, with an effort. He had thought it out, and decided upon the only possible course of action, but he was very doubtful how the Head would take it. "It's about Silver, sir."

"His punishment is about to be administered, Knowles."

"It's—it's about that, sir. I—I've been thinking it over. You see, sir, last night I was very excited when I found myself attacked in the dark, and—and a bag was over my head, and—and after thinking it out very carefully, sir, I've come to the conclusion that perhaps I was mistaken."

"Mistaken, Knowles?"

"Yes, sir. I think perhaps I was mistaken in thinking that I recognised Silver's voice."

Dr. Chisholm's face became very grim.

"Indeed! Last night, Knowles, you declared to me in the most positive manner possible that you recognised Silver's voice."

"I know sir. But since then I've reflected very carefully—— You see, sir, I—I thought it was Silver, and—and I thought I knew his voice. But now I don't feel at all sure about it—in fact, I really think I was mistaken!"

"That is very strange indeed, Knowles. Upon your positive assertion, I have sentenced four juniors to be flogged. Now you tell me that you have made a mistake."

"I felt that I ought to speak to you in time, sir, before the punishment was administered," mumbled the wretched Knowles.

"Quite so. That was undoubtedly your duty. It would have been infamous if you had allowed those boys to be punished, if there is the slightest doubt in the matter. But you have placed me in an absurd position, Knowles," said the Head severely. "The whole school has been assembled to witness the flogging."

"I—I am so sorry, sir!"

"I trust so," said the Head tartly. "I

am glad you have spoken to me in time. But I must tell you, Knowles, that you have acted very foolishly and rashly. You had no right to make that positive statement unless you were absolutely sure. You have narrowly escaped causing me to commit a great injustice."

"I'm very sorry, sir! I felt sure then, but, on thinking it over——"

"Very well. I am glad to have made this discovery in time, at all events. Have you any fresh supposition as to the authors of the outrage?"

Tommy Dodd's name trembled on the prefect's lips.

But he dared not utter it.

It was maddening to let the junior escape punishment. But he dared not bring Tommy Dodd in contact with the Head.

For, after hearing Tommy Dodd's story, Dr. Chisholm could hardly be left with any doubt that Knowles had not made a "mistake" the previous night, but had told him a deliberate falsehood.

There was no help for it—the Head must never know that he had attempted to induce the real culprit to keep silent while Jimmy Silver was punished.

His crooked policy had led him to that unpleasant position; for by his attempt to punish the innocent he was compelled to let the guilty party escape!

"Well, Knowles?"

"I have no idea, sir," faltered Knowles. "I—I think Lovell and the rest were telling the truth last night, sir. I am sure they had nothing to do with it."

The Head frowned with intense annoyance. He felt that he had been placed in a ridiculous position. Still, he was glad that this discovery had come before the flogging had been inflicted.

"Very well, Knowles! I cannot say I am pleased with you. There will be an inquiry, and I hope the real culprits will be discovered!"

Dr. Chisholm swept on, frowning, leaving Knowles breathing more freely. The chief worry on the prefect's mind now was that the inquiry might possibly be successful. Knowles, the victim of that unexampled outrage, was in the curious position of praying that the culprits might not be discovered. It was really a valuable lesson on the advantage of sticking to the truth on all occasions!

There was no flogging that morning.

The surprised school was dismissed from Big Hall, and the fellows went to their Form-rooms in a state of wonder.

That day there was an inquiry but, as it was naturally confined to the Classical side, the facts had not much chance of coming to light. Nobody suspected that Knowles' assailants came from his own side—except the young rascals themselves.

And, to the general surprise, Knowles did not show himself at all keen to get on the track of the culprits. He seemed only anxious for the whole unpleasant matter to be dropped and done with.

And dropped it was. For some days Rookwood surmised and wondered about the mysterious affair. But it remained a mystery.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were greatly puzzled. But when Tommy Dodd and his chums came to tea one evening in the end study, the mystery was cleared up so far as the Fistical Four were concerned.

Jimmy Silver & Co. almost wept with laughter over Knowles' peculiar predicament. The mere idea of Knowles' scheming and worrying to save from discovery the fellows who had bagged him and tied him up made them shriek. But outside that select circle in the Fourth, the mysterious happenings of that night remained a mystery.



THE SPEEDWAY RACKET!

The Start of the Game.

AM I too young to start dirt-track racing? This is a question which is frequently asked, especially at this time of year when the sport is in full blast, and thousands of people are flocking to see their particular favourites shifting the cinders.

Most of the big riders of to-day started young. Billy Lamont, perhaps the most popular of all riders, started when he was sixteen. There are to-day a good many English lads making names for themselves, some of them already well-known, whose ages vary from 17 to 19. Anyone who wants to make big money out of the speedway racket has got to start young, for they aren't likely to stick it for so very long.

Dirt-track racing is probably, in fact almost certainly, the toughest game in the world. At present it is more or less impossible to say how long a man can stick it. The sport only originated seven years ago, when Roarin' John Hoskins started it down in the Hunter River valley in Australia. Billy Lamont, Sprouts Elder, and several others who are well-known to-day were among the first to ride, and they are still at it now. But forty is probably the absolute age limit, and then only for a man of exceptionally fine physique.

So the great game is to make big money and make it quick. And there is real big money to be made if you reach the top of the tree. Amounts vary in different countries, and one of the best paying is New Zealand. There is a rider there who, although he only rides at two meetings a week, makes about £100 per week. In this country rates of payment have been standardised.

£50 in a Night!

There are no "stars" these days, but the man of that standard receives £10 appearance money in the South of England and £15 in the North. This is merely for appearing. After that he gets what he wins. The winner of a handicap or scratch race gets £10, the second £5, the third £2 10s., and the fourth £1. In a three-round match race between two riders the winner gets £12 and the loser £3.

From this you can see that there is plenty of money to be made. It is no unusual thing for one of the best riders to clean up everything at a meeting. It is almost a common occurrence for this to be done at Wimbledon by Jim Kempster, at Stamford Bridge by Frank Arthur, at Harringay by Vic Huxley, or at Belle Vue by Frank Varoy.

When a rider does this he makes anything up to £45 or £50. Sometimes a rider has a really good week; he may be riding at six meetings and make between two and three hundred pounds in one week alone. Taking things all round, a top-notch rider in this country who goes to Australia during the winter and has a good tour there, can make three thousand pounds or more in the full year.

Keep Fit!

Of course, his expenses are heavy. He has at least one mechanic to pay, for no man can succeed at this game unless his motor is always giving the best possible. The competition is too great, second-best is useless to the first-class man. The keeping of a dirt motor in perfect order is an expensive job, and the big man always has two or three mounts. He must always have a spare one ready at the track if his first one should let him down.

But don't imagine that this is the lot of all the lads who go in for cinder-shifting. Many of them make nothing like this amount. They have to keep themselves really fit and well, and give their best always. One of the best examples of this fact is a well-known rider, who is riding far better this season than anyone here has ever seen him ride before, although he has been before the public eye ever since the game first reached this country. This year he has decided to take the matter really seriously, and to keep as fit as a man can be.

At the moment dirt-track racing is a rather over-crowded profession, despite the number of tracks that exist in this country. It is not a game for anyone to take up, and to the would-be track rider the essentials are a first-class physique, cool head, unlimited courage—and a hundred pounds in the bank!

A WINNER all the WAY!

THE
**FIGHTING
FORM-MASTER!**

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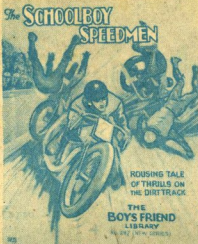
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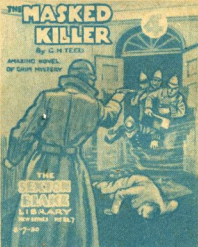


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