

THE ROOKWOOD GIPSIES!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



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THE ROOKWOOD GIPSIES!

BY
OWEN CONQUEST



Join up with JIMMY SILVER & Co., and TOMMY DODD & Co., the rival caravanners, in this non-stop laughs' story of the Great Outdoors, starring the Rookwood Chums.

CHAPTER 1.

The Caravanners!

"BOSH!"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell. "My dear man——" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Bosh!" repeated Lovell, still more emphatically.

Evidently Arthur Edward held strong opinions on the subject under discussion.

Raby and Newcome grinned and said nothing.

But they looked as if they agreed with Lovell.

"Now, look here——" began Jimmy Silver again.

Lovell sniffed.

"I said bosh, and I mean bosh!" he retorted. "Bosh, bosh! What do you think, Raby?"

"Oh, leave it to Jimmy," said Raby

philosophically. "Jimmy will have his way in the long run, anyhow."

"Bosh!"

"Give Jimmy his head," said Newcome.

To which Lovell replied once more:

"Bosh!"

Lovell's vocabulary, that fine summer morning, seemed rather limited.

"Bosh," however, expressed his feelings.

The Fistical Four, of the Rookwood Fourth, were just finishing breakfast.

But they were not breakfasting, as usual, in the dusky old oak-panelled room at Rookwood School.

The chums of the Classical Fourth were going caravanning, which they all agreed was a ripping idea, though there were some details which apparently they did not quite agree upon.

After visiting their homes they had gathered once more at the Golden Lion

Inn, in a country village, where the journey was to begin.

The caravan was there, and the horse, and the tent, and the various appurtenances.

Jimmy Silver had arrived first, and inspected the property, and he was satisfied.

After breakfast they were to start, and then came up the question upon which Arthur Edward Lovell pronounced so emphatic an opinion.

Jimmy Silver smiled patiently.

In Rookwood, or out of Rookwood, he was still the tactful "Uncle James," whose word was law in the Fourth.

He opened his lips to reply, but Lovell did not give him time to speak.

"Bosh!" he said once more. "Rubbish! Piffle! Rot! It will spoil the whole thing! What the thump do we want with an elderly person to look after us? Can't we look after ourselves?"

"We can," agreed Jimmy.

"First-rate," said Raby. "I must say I agree with Lovell there. Some dashed old dodderer interfering with us will spoil the fun."

"What do we want with a blessed elder person?" demanded Lovell.

"We don't want him," admitted Jimmy.

"Well, then that settles it."

"Not quite."

"Oh, don't begin again, Jimmy!" implored Lovell. "Let's take that question as settled. Two in the van, and two in the tent; that's enough for us. Of course, we could squeeze another in the tent; but we don't want to."

"Give a chap a chance to speak," said Jimmy Silver beseechingly. "You're like a gramophone that won't run down, Lovell. The pater said—"

"I don't want to rag your pater, Jimmy; but if he said we can't look after ourselves he's outside, and you may as well tell him."

"The pater said—"

"Hallo! They're shoving the van

out into the road," said Raby, glancing out of the window.

"The pater said—"

"And there's the horse," said Newcome, following Raby's glance. "Looks a bit of an old catsmeat specimen!"

"Did you expect to see a thoroughbred cavalry charger?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "He's a good horse, plenty of bone—"

"Lots!" agreed Raby.

"Precious little anything else," remarked Newcome.

"Oh, rats! Look here, the pater said—"

"Jimmy, old man, I respect you for admiring your pater, but there can be too much said, even on that subject," said Lovell. "I suggest you give your pater a rest."

"The pater said—"

"Oh, let him get it out, Lovell," said Raby resignedly. "You know Jimmy. He won't leave off wagging his chin till it's tired."

"The pater," pursued Jimmy Silver victoriously, "said that he could trust us anywhere, and was sure we shouldn't get into trouble; but it seemed somewhat more in accordance with the fitness of things for me to have an elder person with me on such a tour."

"Your pater talks like a picture-book, old man. I believe in letting paters run on," said Lovell generously. "It relieves their minds, and doesn't do any harm."

"I agreed with the pater," continued Jimmy Silver. "I felt that he would be more satisfied if I had an elder person with me. And he didn't care who it was. He knew I should find somebody suitable. And I've done it."

"You've found the rotter?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"In the Golden Lion?"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose we're bound to take him," growled Lovell. "Look here, Jimmy, you ought not to have sprung

tns on us. It will spoil the whole thing. Your pater didn't order you to, so there was no need. Br-r-r!"

"Well, I felt bound to concede the point," explained Jimmy Silver. "But the chap isn't a bad sort."

"What's he like?"

"Well, he's not very good-looking."

"Both his looks! That doesn't matter."

"Perhaps you might consider him good-looking, though, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver musingly. "There's no telling."

"Blow his looks, good or otherwise. What's he like in other ways?"

"Well, he talks rather a lot."

"Oh, dear!"

"He's awfully emphatic in delivering his opinions."

"Bless him!"

"And he hasn't very much sense, I'm afraid," admitted Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Lovell. "Can he drive?"

"He thinks he can."

"Can he put up a tent?"

"Well, I expect he would muck it up."

"Can he cook?"

"Rottenly!"

"Great pip! And that's the kind of howlin' frump you've planted on us for a caravan tour!" roared Lovell.

"What's his name?"

"Arthur Edward Lovell!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Lovell stared open-mouthed at the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

Jimmy Silver smiled sweetly and gently.

"You see, you're older than I am, Lovell," he explained, softly as the cooing dove. "Only a few months; but that makes you an elder person, doesn't it? When the pater said I'd better have an elder person with me I thought of you at once. You were coming, anyway, so it was all right."

Lovell's face was a study.

Raby and Newcome burst into a roar of laughter.

It dawned upon all three that Jimmy

Silver had been gently pulling Arthur Edward's leg.

"You—you—you——" stuttered Lovell at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you were describing an old frump!" roared Lovell. "You—you said he wasn't good-looking."

"I said you might consider he was. So you might. There's no accounting for tastes."

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

"You—you—you funny idiot!" gasped Lovell. "Never mind. I suppose that's what you call a joke. So we're going on our own, after all?"

"We are—we is," agreed Jimmy Silver.

"That's all right, then, fathead! Let's go and see the van," said Lovell.

And the chums of Rookwood sauntered out into the road to examine the caravan that was to bear them for days and nights through the leafy Kentish lanes.

CHAPTER 2.

The Caravan!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. were in great spirits that morning.

The weather was glorious, which was very cheering for caravanners. A downpour of rain would have been rather discouraging for the start.

But the sky was blue, dotted with fleecy clouds, and warm sunshine streamed down upon the green earth.

And the fact that they were going "on their own" elated the four.

Mr. Silver had raised no objection to Jimmy and his chums going "on their own."

He had merely suggested that they might like to have an elder person to look after them.

But that was left to Jimmy to settle. And he had settled it—to his own satisfaction and that of his comrades.

Three other Rookwood fellows were going caravanning in the same county

that vacation—Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side.

But they were taking Sergeant Kettle with them; and, though the sergeant was a splendid old character in his way, the juniors regarded him as something of a "cold douche" on a caravan tour.

They did not envy the three Tommies the "looking after" they would get from Mr. Kettle.

The Classical chums of Rookwood surveyed the van with great satisfaction.

It looked a large and roomy vehicle from without, though within it could hardly be called roomy.

It was very fresh-looking, with new paint that glistened in the sun, though how long that paint would remain fresh-looking was a question that was very soon to be answered.

A man was holding the horse close at hand, ready to put in.

The horse did look rather bony, but he looked strong; and Lovell's suggestion that things could be hung on him if there wasn't room in the van was an exaggeration.

"Ripping, isn't it?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, the van looks prime," said Lovell. "Let's see inside."

He jammed the steps in position and mounted, and tried to open the door.

It remained fast, however.

"This blessed door's stuck!" called out Lovell.

"Can't be," answered Jimmy. "I left it unfastened when I looked in last evening. Use your head, old chap."

"I tell you it won't open."

"Bow-wow!"

"Nobby, isn't it?" said Jimmy, pointing to the newly curtained window. "Like a—like a West End fiat, really—not much elbow-room, but very dainty."

"Topping!" said Raby heartily. "I dare say there'll be room for two in the van. Lucky Tubby Muffin isn't one of the two, though."

Jimmy laughed.

Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, had a circumference which was not at all suited to the confined space of a caravan.

The cheerful Tubby had informed Jimmy that he was "coming," but the opinion of the Fistical Four was that he wasn't coming.

And Jimmy, though he had received three affectionate letters while at home from Tubby—one each morning—had omitted to reply to them giving details of the arrangements.

Tubby, who was not a good walker, and was remarkably unhandy at everything, was not a desirable addition to a caravan party, especially as he would have to be watched to see that he did not bolt all the provisions on the first day.

"Is the man going to put the horse in, or are we?" asked Newcome rather doubtfully.

"Oh, we'd better do it!" answered Jimmy. "Better get into the habit. You only have to back him into place, and—and fasten the traces and buckies and things, and—and there you are, you know! Quite simple."

"I tell you this dashed door won't open!" roared Lovell.

"Oh, open it, old chap!" said Newcome. "We want to see in the van."

"It won't open!"

"Let me do it!" said Jimmy resignedly.

Lovell snorted and made room for Jimmy Silver, who tried his hand on the door.

To his surprise it did not open.

"Well?" snorted Lovell.

"My hat! It's got stuck!" said Jimmy in surprise. "It can't be bolted. There's nobody in the van, surely."

"My hat! Might be some tramp got in it to sleep, while it was in the yard last night!" grinned Raby.

"Oh, rot! It's got jammed a bit. The van isn't standing quite even," said Jimmy. "Never mind it now. Let's get the horse in."

"I shouldn't wonder if there's somebody inside," grunted Lovell: "It looks like it to me."

"Well, if there is let him stick there!" said Jimmy. "We'll rout him out later on and give him a long walk back!"

"Oh, good! That will serve him right!"

And the four juniors gave their attention to the horse.

The stableman relinquished that animal to them, touching his hat, and the juniors proceeded to back him into position.

The horse seemed to have some slight objection to backing, however.

He set his front feet firmly on the ground, and they did not budge an inch, and the backing process only caused him to rear on his hind legs.

"Obstinate beast!" growled Lovell. "What's the matter with him?"

"Wants a jolly good licking, I should say!" gasped Raby. "Here, let the man do it, and we'll watch him. I dare say there's a way of doing these things."

"Shove him in, my man!" said Jimmy Silver.

The stableman grinned and shoved him in and buckled the harness.

For some reason the horse obeyed the stableman: Perhaps he knew what he would get if he didn't.

By the time the horse was harnessed quite a little crowd had gathered round to watch the start.

The Rookwooders were the cynosure of all eyes.

They felt a little uncomfortable at being brought so prominently into the limelight, but they affected to take no notice of the stares that were fixed upon them.

"Where's the tent?" asked Lovell suddenly.

"Packed inside."

"And the grub?"

"Inside."

"Very well, the geegee's fixed up,"

said Raby. "If you're sure everything's in the van, Jimmy——"

"I went over everything specially last evening before you fellows arrived," said Jimmy.

"Then let's start. We shall have half Kent round us soon if we stick here much longer."

"We ought to get that door open first," muttered Lovell. "It may be stuck tight, and we may need tools."

"Better get off!" urged Raby.

The crowd of villagers was thickening round the caravan, and the four chums were coming in for an amount of attention that was rather discomfiting.

One old lady actually asked Lovell if he had brooms to sell; and an old fellow was heard to declare that "them gipsies" ought to be arrested; and that he knew now what had become of his fowls.

It was evidently high time to start.

Jimmy Silver had settled the bill at the inn, and he gave the stableman his tip and went to the horse's head.

"Who's going to drive?" asked Lovell.

"You can if you like, old top. I'll lead the horse while you do it, in case of accidents."

"You silly ass!"

"Oh, come on!"

Jimmy Silver started the horse.

Lovell took the reins, and Raby and Newcome walked with Jimmy.

The caravan, with a bump and a clatter, was set in motion.

And as it rumbled on the rough road there came a sudden crash from within the vehicle.

"Oh, Jehoshaphat!" ejaculated Lovell. "That's the eggs!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a loud guffaw from the watching villagers.

And the voice of the old inhabitant who had missed his fowls was heard inquiring:

"Where did them young gipsies get them eggs? The perlice ought to be told about this 'ere!"

With crimson faces the caravanners pushed on.

They were quite anxious to get out of the village and away on the long white road that stretched ahead.

CHAPTER 3.
On the Road!

JOLT!

Rumble!
Arthur Edward Lovell was driving, and he found the horse extremely easy to manage, probably because Jimmy Silver was leading him.

Three of the juniors were walking.

A number of the onlookers followed the van to the outskirts of the village, but after that the caravanners were left to themselves, for which relief they were very thankful.

A long white road lay before them, bordered on one side by green, dusky woods, and on the other side by verdant fields.

The sun shone brightly, and the surroundings were so pleasant that their spirits naturally rose.

There was a good deal of dust on the road, and a motor-car or two passed them, and a few cyclists, but the cars were few.

"All the same, we won't stick to the high road long," added Jimmy, as a motor-car rushed by, shaving the caravan by about an inch. "We turn off at the cross-roads, about three miles."

"Got a map?" asked Raby.

Jimmy sniffed.

"Do you think I should start caravanning without a map?" he inquired.

"My dear chap, there's no telling what you would do!" answered Raby affably.

"As soon as we get off the high road we'll stop and get this van open," said Lovell. "I'm rather anxious about it."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"That's all very well. But suppose the door won't come open?" said Lovell.

"What are we going to do for grub at lunch-time?"

That was a serious question, and Jimmy Silver agreed.

The keen, fresh air was making the juniors think of lunch already.

The caravan rumbled on.

Jimmy Silver ceased to lead the horse, and sauntered on beside it; but in a minute or two he found himself sauntering ahead.

The horse had stopped.

"Come on, Lovell!" he called out.

"You're driving, ain't you, Lovell?" inquired Newcome.

Lovell's answer was a snort.

He certainly was driving, but the horse did not seem to be aware of it, for he had stopped, and seemed a fixture.

Lovell cracked his whip furiously.

"Gee-up!" he roared. "Get on, you critter! - Go it, good old hoss! Get a move on, you bony beast! Yah! Gee-up!"

"Gee-up!" echoed the rest encouragingly.

Possibly the horse realised that he had only youngsters to deal with, and had already spotted the fact that there was no "elder" person in the party.

Certainly he seemed to be under the impression that he could do as he liked.

Lovell jerked the reins, and tugged at them, and slacked them, and cracked whip, and shouted and roared.

The horse moved on at a snail's pace, jerking the van slowly behind him, while he cropped contentedly at the grass on the wrong side of the road.

Sometimes he raised his head in a bored sort of way as Lovell put his strength into his tugging, but always his muzzle went down to the grass again.

"The beast!" panted Lovell, crimson with his exertions. "The rotten brute! The obstinate Hun! I'll jolly well make him go!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Lovell did not like whipping a horse; but he was at the end of his patience now, and he laid on.

The result was startling.

The horse threw up his head and

started at a run, and then broke into a gallop.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome jumped out of the way in time, and the caravan thundered away down the road.

"Stop him!" yelled Jimmy.

"Pull in, you ass!" shrieked Newcome.

Lovell did not answer. He was trying to pull his horse in, and he needed all his wind.

Bony as he was, the caravan horse was decidedly a powerful animal, and it was barely possible that Arthur Edward Lovell was not a first-class driver.

The caravan jolted and thundered along at a great rate, with Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome in frantic pursuit.

"Whoa!" panted Lovell. "Oh, you rotten beast! Whoa!"

But the horse was warning to his work now, and he thundered on.

There was an ominous clattering inside the van.

The crockery was suffering.

Unfortunately the horse kept on the wrong side of the road, and resisted Lovell's efforts not only to stop him, but to pull him across.

Zip, zip!

A motor-car came in sight ahead.

Bolt upright in it sat a gentleman, with a white moustache and a brown face and stern brows.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver, panting along behind the van.

Lovell made a frantic effort to drag the horse to the left.

He succeeded at last, to the extent that the caravan was dragged across the road, blocking it nearly from side to side.

There was a loud and incessant hooting from the car, warning the caravanners to clear the road.

Fortunately the driver knew his business, or there might have been a catastrophe.

The car slowed down in time, and stopped.

Up like a ramrod rose the impertinent gentleman, with his white moustache bristling.

He jammed an eyeglass into his eye, and fixed the unhappy caravanner with a deadly glare.

"What, what!" he ejaculated. "Clear the road! Begad! Take that dashed thing out of the way, begad! What, what!"

"I'm trying to!" howled Lovell. "Can't you see I'm trying to?"

"What, what!"

Fortunately Jimmy Silver came panting up at that moment, and he seized the horse's head and dragged him on.

The caravan rumbled to its own side of the road, and the car got into motion again and buzzed past.

The stiff gentleman sat down again stiffly, with thunder in his face, as his car sped by the caravan at last.

"I think I'll lead the horse now!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"No need. I can drive him."

"What?"

"Do you think I can't drive?" reared Lovell heatedly.

"Well, my only hat!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Yes, old man, I do think you can't drive. And I've had enough of blocking up the road and putting old gents into epileptic fits. Kim on, hoss!"

And Jimmy led him.

CHAPTER 4.

Tubby Muffin Makes Terms!

THE caravanners were glad when they turned out of the high road into a green country lane.

It was safer there, as Newcome remarked, if Lovell started driving again. Lovell sniffed.

"I can manage horses," he said. "The beast would have gone all right if Jimmy hadn't been leading him at first. That's what did it."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"Well, we've been jolly lucky," said Raby. "We've come three miles safely,

with Lovell driving nearly all the time."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver pacifically. "Don't let's begin ragging. Let's get the van open now we've stopped."

The horse was contentedly cropping at the side of the lane, and the juniors were able to turn their attention to the door of the caravan.

Jimmy Silver tried it in vain.

Somehow or other the door was blocked, and certainly it would not open.

"Blessed if I understand it!" growled Jimmy. "It seems to be locked. But how the thump can it be locked?"

"We shall want tools to open it," said Lovell. "Have we got any tools?"

"Yes."

"In the van, of course!"

"Well, of all the asses——"

"Ought we to have the tools strung outside the van?" demanded Jimmy Silver warmly. "Of course they're inside! Look here, we shall have to burst in the window. Newcome can crawl in, he's the thinnest——"

Jimmy Silver was suddenly interrupted by a voice inside the van.

"Oh, my hat!"

There was evidently someone within the caravan!

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Then—then there is some dashed tramp in the van, after all, and he's locked us out!"

"The cheeky cad!" exclaimed Lovell wrathfully.

"Hold on, though!" said Newcome. "I think I know that voice!"

"How can you know it, fathead? It's some tramp!"

"It sounded to me like Muffin's voice."

"Muffin!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

He knocked on the door.

"Who's in there? Answer, you rotter!"

"I say, Jimmy!" came from within.

And the Pistical Four shouted in surprised and wrathful chorus:

"Tubby Muffin!"

There was no doubt now. It was the

voice of Tubby Muffin, the fat Classical of Rookwood.

Lovell kicked at the door.

"Let us in, you fat villain! Have you locked this door?"

"Of course I have, old chap!"

"I'll old chap you!" gasped Lovell. "You wait till I get near enough to wallop you, you fat bouncer! I'll burst you!"

"Then you jolly well won't get in!" answered the invisible Tubby.

"How did you get in there, you fat villain?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"I told you I was coming, didn't I, Jimmy?" said Tubby Muffin in an injured tone. "I wasn't going to desert you this vac, you know. I telegraphed to your pater as you didn't answer my letters, and he wired back where I could find you."

"You—you fat rotter!" roared Jimmy. "You must have wired as if you were one of the party, then!"

"Well, I am one of the party, ain't I?"

"You—you—you——"

"I got to the place late last night," continued Tubby. "The Golden Lion was closed, and I thought I wouldn't wake you up, Jimmy; and as the van was in the yard I got into it to sleep. Don't worry about me. I slept all right."

"Worry about you!" gasped Jimmy.

"I was quite all right," said Tubby reassuringly. "And I've had some brekker. I found some biscuits and the lunch tongue."

"He's wolfed our biscuits!"

"He's scoffed our lunch!"

"We'll spifficate him!"

"Oh, I say, you know!" came Tubby Muffin's voice in protest. "You didn't want me to go hungry, did you? I call that jolly selfish!"

"Why didn't you let us know you were there when we started?" roared Raby.

"I wasn't going to bother you, you know."

"You mean you know we'd have kicked you out!"

"Ahem! I——"

"You fat villain!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "If you'd come into the Golden Lion we'd have booted you out. That's why you snoozed in the van!"

"I'm sure you wouldn't treat a pal like that, Jimmy!"

"I'll pal you!" muttered Jimmy.

"I say, it's getting near lunch-time, ain't it?" went on Tubby Muffin. "This van wants clearing up. There's a lot of eggs smashed, and some crocks broken. Are you fellows ready for lunch?"

"Yes, we are, you fat worm!"

"All serene! I've started already!"

"You—you've started?"

"Yes, I've found the sardines and salmon and the cold potatoes. I'd rather have something a bit more solid. But it's all right. Don't worry about me. The cucumber is a treat!"

"He's bagged our cucumber!" said Lovell in sulphurous tones.

"Open that door!" roared Jimmy.

"I say, are you waxy?"

"You'll see whether we're waxy or not when we get at you, you fat toad!" roared Lovell.

"Then you jolly well won't get at me!" retorted Tubby Muffin. "You can't get in unless I choose!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"If you don't open the door we'll break in the window and get in that way!" shouted Raby.

"You can't, old chap! I should shove you out with the broom!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Fistical Four exchanged glances of hopeless wrath.

Tubby Muffin was master of the situation, as a matter of fact.

He was looking in the van, and, without actually demolishing the vehicle, there was no way of getting at him.

And all the provisions were in his keeping, and the Classical chums fairly trembled for them; they knew Tubby Muffin's inordinate appetite of old.

"We—we—we'll slaughter him!" gasped Lovell at last.

"I say, Jimmy——"

"Well, you fat toad?"

"Make it pax, old man! I came to join you as a pal, you know. I'm going to caravan with you, old fellow. I shall be awfully useful. You want a fellow with a head on him to manage——"

"I'll manage you!" howled Lovell.

"I can cook, too," said Muffin. "You know how I can cook. Make it pax, and let's go caravanning together, you chaps."

"We're going to slaughter you!"

"Oh, all right! I'll go on with my lunch while you think it over," was the placid reply of the invisible Tubby.

"Let our grub alone!" shrieked Lovell in frenzied tones.

"Oh, I say! I'm hungry, you know!"

"You—you—you——"

"I say, Jimmy, is there another cucumber?" asked Tubby Muffin calmly. "If there is you might say where. It goes jolly well with the salmon!"

Jimmy Silver did not answer that cool request.

There was a sound within the caravan of a tin-opener at work on tins.

Tubby Muffin was not waiting.

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell at last.

"What the thump are we going to do? You're leader of this show, Jimmy Silver."

"Blessed if I know," confessed Jimmy.

"Open that door, Muffin!" shouted Newcome.

"Are you making it pax?" inquired Tubby.

"No, you owl!"

"Then I'm not going to open the door. I'm quite comfy in here," said Tubby Muffin. "There's enough grub to last me for two or three days. I don't mind."

The caravanners withdrew to consult.

Tubby Muffin was left to enjoy his ample lunch in peace.

The Fistical Four were perplexed, and at a loss.

How to deal with the egregious Tubby was a mystery.

Forcing in the window and creeping

in was not feasible if Tubby Muffin handled the broom inside as a weapon of defence, and doubtless he would do so rather than take a ragging and be stranded on the road afterwards.

Evidently the fat Classical had made up his mind to become a member of the caravan party by hook or by crook.

Jimmy Silver's good humour came to the rescue at last, and he grinned.

"After all, let him come," he said. "We'll make him do the cooking and work. The fat boulder will be useful."

"I'd rather scalp him!" growled Lovell.

"Better make terms with him before all the grub's gone!" grinned Newcome. "You know Tubby!"

Lovell nodded at last.

"It's a go, then!" said Jimmy Silver, and he stepped up to the door and tapped on it. "Tubby, you fat rotter!"

"Hallo, old pal!"

"Let us in! It's pax, and you're coming along with us."

"Honest Injun, Jimmy?"

"Yes, ass!"

"All serene!"

The door was thrown open, and Tubby Muffin's fat face beamed out on the chums of Rookwood.

"Jolly glad to see you fellows!" said Tubby affably. "Quite a happy party—what? Lots of grub left for you. Pile in!"

The looks the Fistical Four gave Tubby Muffin would have withered a toad, but Tubby did not seem to mind.

"Honest Injun" made the compact inviolable, and Tubby felt quite secure.

And the hungry caravanners gave their attention to lunch, and though Tubby Muffin had started first he finished last.

CHAPTER 5.

Camping Out!

"I'll drive!" said Tubby Muffin.

Lovell rose from the grass by the roadside and yawned.

The caravanners had lunched comfortably enough, seated in the grass be-

side the leafy lane, with a big oak spreading its shady boughs over them.

The caravan was drawn up beside the lane, and the horse was cropping the grass with great satisfaction.

"First of all," said Jimmy Silver, "you'll clean up the van, Tubby. You ought not to have allowed those eggs to tumble over as you were in the van. You'll clean them up."

"They're not eatable now, old chap," said Tubby. "Leave them there. They'll get trodden away in time."

"You'll get trodden away in next to no time if you don't get a move on!" said Jimmy. "Clear up the broken crocks, too. When you've done get out of the van and walk. Come on, chappies!"

Tubby, on second thoughts, was glad to take on the cleaning operations, as he could do it in the van.

He did not want to walk, especially after a meal.

The horse was induced to leave the grass, not without difficulty, and the van rolled on along the leafy lane.

The Fistical Four walked on with the horse, hoofing it cheerily, while Tubby Muffin busied himself in the van.

Tubby's idea of making himself useful was to put his head out of the van every few minutes and ask Jimmy Silver where the things were.

He could not find a pail or a cloth or a brush or a broom, or, in fact, anything by his own exertions, and after Jimmy Silver had replied to five or six questions he picked up a thick turf from the roadside.

Tubby's fat face came out once more. "I say, Jimmy!" he squeaked.

"Hallo!"

"Where's the tea-cloth, if I'm to wash these things? Yaroooooh!"

Tubby Muffin disappeared into the van as the turf whizzed through the air and smote him on his plump chest.

There was a roar of amazement and wrath from the fat Classical.

"Yaroooh! Groooh! Oh, ah, yah! Wharrer you do that for, Jimmy Silver, you mad idiot?"

"Go on asking questions, old scout!" answered Jimmy cheerily. "I've got another clod for you if you do!"

"Groogh! You—you— Look here—"

"Use your head, old chap! This isn't a slacker's procession."

Tubby Muffin snorted with wrath.

But after that he used his head, and did not ask any more questions.

When the answer to a question came in the form of a whizzing clod, Tubby found that he could find things by looking for them.

"Get down when you've finished!" Lovell called out several times. "You're too big a load for the geegee."

Tubby hung out his jobs as long as possible.

He was debating in his mind whether to start scrubbing out the caravan, in fact, rather than alight, when Lovell came in for him at last.

Lovell helped him out, and after that Tubby Muffin walked with the rest, with a very injured expression on his fat face.

"I can't keep up this pace, you chaps!" he expostulated.

"Don't then!" answered Lovell.

"But I can't be left behind, can I?" howled Tubby.

"I don't see why not."

"Br-r-r-r!" growled Tubby Muffin. And he found that he could keep the pace quite well.

Jimmy Silver consulted his map once or twice as the caravanners marched on.

He had fixed on a village for camping for the night, where there was a handy field, and "grub" could be purchased at a farm if required.

But the pace was not quite up to anticipations, and the juniors found themselves a little tired later in the afternoon.

It was their first day on the road, and they were not yet hardened to it.

And the sight of a beautiful spot for camping decided them not to push on to their intended destination.

The caravan was following a deep lane, between lines of great trees that shaded the road, with rich cornlands stretching away on either side.

The wheat gave way to pasture, and then the beautiful spot was sighted—a green field, with a shining rivulet crossing it at the bottom, and a clump of great trees near the stream, and a wide gate in the fence.

The eyes of the caravanners rested on that ideal spot, and they exchanged glances.

"That's a ripping place!" said Raby. "Just what we want!" remarked Lovell.

"No good overdoing it on the first day," Newcome remarked in a careless sort of way. "After all, we've got to light a camp-fire, and all that."

"Let's stop!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I'm tired, you know—jolly tired."

Jimmy Silver, without answering, surveyed the field.

Certainly they were not likely to find a more suitable spot farther on.

And true caravanners never mapped out their proceedings with exactitude. It was more in the spirit of caravanning to follow the fortune of the road.

"We couldn't do better!" urged Lovell.

"Right!" agreed Jimmy. "But we've got to get permission. That's not public land. That's an enclosed field."

"Well, we can ask," said Lovell. "Let's ask that farmer chap."

A man in a velveteen coat and gaiters was sitting on the gate of the field, smoking a cigarette, and glancing rather curiously at the caravanners.

He was a young man, and looked like a sporting farmer, and the juniors rather liked his looks.

Jimmy Silver left the van, which had halted in the road, and crossed the belt of grass to the gate where the young man was sitting.

The man in his gaiters removed the cigarette from his mouth, and nodded genially to the Rookwood junior.

"Caravanning—eh?" he asked.

"That's it," said Jimmy Silver. "We're thinking of camping now. Any objection to our camping in this field?"

The other looked thoughtful:

"I suppose you wouldn't set fire to the trees?" he remarked.

"No," said Jimmy, laughing.

"Or burn up half the pasture?"

"Of course not. We should be jolly careful not to do any damage if you let us camp here," said Jimmy. "We're willing to pay——"

The young man waved his hand, as if disclaiming the idea.

"I shan't charge you anything," he said. "So long as you don't do any real damage I've no objection to you camping here, I'm sure. So far as I'm concerned, you're very welcome."

"Thanks very much!" said Jimmy.

"Oh, don't mention it!"

And, with a smile and a nod, the young man slipped from the gate, and whistled to a dog, and strolled away down the lane.

Jimmy Silver opened the gate, and Tubby Muffin was stationed to hold it wide open while the horse was led in.

The horse did not seem quite to understand, and he backed, instead of going forward; but four juniors clung to him, and persuaded him at last that it was his business to go through the gate.

When that was borne in upon the equine mind the horse appeared to be under the delusion that it was necessary to pass through the gateway at a gallop, and he did.

"Look out!" yelled Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!"

The caravan rocked through the gateway after the horse, fortunately just escaping a crash.

Tubby Muffin jumped away in alarm, letting go the gate, which swung to when the caravan was nearly clear of the posts.

Then there was a crash, as the gate collided with a hind-wheel, and the caravan ground its way, leaving the unfortunate gate in a serious condition.

"You silly fat duffer!" reared Lovell.

"Why didn't you hold the gate?"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby. "Do you think I was going to be run over? Bother the gate, and bother you!"

The horse slowed down in the field, and began cropping the rich pasture with evident enjoyment.

The juniors surveyed the gate in dismay.

It hung by one hinge, and one bar had been reduced to matchwood.

"That will have to be paid for!" said Raby at last.

"Well, we can pay for it," said Jimmy Silver. "I don't think that sporting chap will cut up rusty; he looked good-tempered. I think Muffin ought to be slaughtered!"

"I like that!" said Tubby indignantly. "Why didn't you lead the horse through properly? You shouldn't have let him go?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

The Rookwooders followed the caravan, and came up with it, and the horse was led on towards the stream at the farther end of the field.

Then he was at last taken out, and tethered, with a long rope, to a peg, which enabled him to crop the grass in a large radius, and also drink from the stream if he felt so disposed.

Under the trees near the water the caravanners prepared to camp.

Tubby Muffin wanted to start at once on the tinned salmon and sardines and the bread, of which there was a good supply; but he was persuaded not to, Lovell's boot being the chief argument used.

"You fellows gather wood for the fire," said Jimmy Silver. "Get as much as you can, while I get the things out of the van."

"Right you are!"

Four juniors started in search of firewood, of which there was plenty to be gathered under the trees and in the adjoining thicket, and they returned with their arms full.

Lovell built the fire in quite a workmanlike manner.

There was an old newspaper, and it was torn up, dry twigs added, and then a match, and as it blazed up firewood was carefully fed to it—small pieces at first, and then larger ones.

The camp-fire was soon flaring away merrily.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver had brought out the big iron pot, and arranged the three sticks that were to support it over the fire, gipsy fashion.

Water was to be had in plenty, and there were ample potatoes.

While Lovell tended the fire his comrades peeled potatoes in great numbers, and put them in the pot.

"Can you put cabbage in stews?" Raby asked, rather doubtfully.

"Certainly!" answered Jimmy Silver, with assurance.

He was not sure, but it would never have done for a leader to admit that he wasn't sure.

So the cabbage went in.

"And turnips," added Jimmy. "Carrots, too. May as well slice up the carrots," he added thoughtfully. "Put some salt in, and pepper, and—

and—"

"Mustard!"

"No, leave the mustard out!" said Jimmy, with the same assurance of manner. "Plenty of salt, though."

It is said that a watched pot is long in boiling, and certainly that gipsy pot seemed a terrible long time to the hungry juniors.

It boiled at last, and Jimmy Silver jabbed a fork into a potato; but it was still quite hard.

The cabbage seemed to get cooked first; and after a time the hungry party, throwing ceremony to the winds, fished out floating fragments of cabbage, and ate them with chunks of bread.

Never had bread tasted so delightful as it did that summer evening, after a long day in the open air.

"Bless those spuds!" growled Lovell. "Will they never get done?"

"Ought to have cut them up small, perhaps?" said Newcome.

"Oh, they'll get done in time!" said Jimmy Silver. "Keep smiling!"

"I—I say!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin. "That—that chap looks rather ill-tempered, don't he? I—I wonder what he wants?"

The juniors looked round.

A big, broad-shouldered farmer, with a cart-whip in his hand, was striding into the field, and the expression on his face certainly indicated that he was very ill-tempered indeed.

The caravanners forgot the obstinate potatoes for the moment, and fixed their eyes upon the farmer as he strode up with a certain anticipation of trouble, though they could not guess why yet.

CHAPTER 6.

Marching Orders!

"DANG my buttons!" That was the farmer's first remark.

He strode up to the camp, his face purple with wrath, breathless with haste and fury; though why he should be in a fury was a mystery to the Rookwood caravanners.

"Good-evening!" ventured Jimmy Silver, wondering whether the crusty old fellow was a relation of the good-natured young man who had given them permission to camp in the field.

The crusty old gentleman did not return the greeting.

He appeared to be about to choke for some moments, and the Rookwooders watched him in surprise and alarm, but at last he found his voice.

"You young vagabones!" he roared:

"What?"

"Get off my land!" roared the farmer.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'll have the lot of you arrested! By hokey! You gang of gipsy vagabones!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed

Jimmy Silver warmly. "We've had permission to camp in this field. I don't know who you are——"

"I'm Farmer Judkins, as you know very well, and this is my field!" roared the angry gentleman. "Permission, hay? Who gave you permission? I never did!"

"A—a—a—a man did!" gasped Jimmy, with a very queer feeling inside. "A—a young man who was—was sitting on the gate gave us permission——"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell, in dismay.

The wrath of the farmer opened the eyes of the caravanners a little, and the dreadful suspicion came to them that the good-natured young man at the gate was not the owner of the field at all, but had been pulling their leg.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

"Don't tell me any lies!" roared Mr. Judkins. "Who could give you permission excepting me, I'd like to know, when it's my land?"

"But—but your son, perhaps——" stammered Jimmy.

"I haven't any son!" snorted Mr. Judkins. "Don't you tell me any more lies! You get off my land before I have you arrested! The last lot of gipsies by here stole my goat. Off you go!"

"But—but we're not gipsies!"

"I don't care whether you are or not! Get off my land before I lay my whip about you!" roared Mr. Judkins.

He flourished the cart-whip in the air as he spoke, as if about to use it.

The unhappy caravanners looked at one another in dismay.

Night was falling now, and the landscape was enshrouded in deep dusk.

The camp-fire, leaping up red against the shadows, looked very homely and comfortable, and a delicious scent came from the stewpot.

And they were hungry.

To be ordered off their camping-ground at that moment was a terrible blow.

But the farmer was evidently in earnest.

As a matter of fact, he had some cause for wrath, not being responsible for the practical joker who had given the caravanners permission to camp in the field.

"Look here, Mr. Judkins!" said Jimmy Silver, at last. "We'll pay for the use of the field till the morning, if you'll let us stay."

"You'll pay for the damage to my gate, and you won't stay another minute!" snorted Mr. Judkins. "Now then, off you go! Pack up and get out!"

"But—but—but——"

"Look here——"

"Bill!" roared the farmer. "Harry! Mike! Come 'ere, and bring the bull-terrier!"

"Oh, dear!" murmured Newcome.

There was no help for it.

The juniors were feeling greatly inclined to handle the inhospitable Mr. Judkins, but it was evident that they could not handle Bill and Mike and Harry and the bull-terrier.

Moreover, as the farm-hands came across the field one of them was carrying a rake and another a pitchfork, apparently in case there should be trouble.

"See them off my land!" shouted Mr. Judkins. "Chuck their rubbish after them! See them off! And you, my lad, you'll pay for the damage to that gate, or I'll keep you 'ere and give you into custody."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his temper rising. "How much do you want for your rotten old gate?"

"You'll pay ten shillings, and you'll get out! Put that horse in, men, and take that van into the road! Look into the van, and see if anything's been stolen and hidden in there!"

"You silly old dummy!" shouted Lovell, in great wrath. "Do you think we're thieves?"

Mr. Judkins grasped his whip, and Lovell caught up a half-burnt log from the camp-fire.

The irate gentleman held his hand.

"Get out!" he repeated. "Get off my land! Out you go, you gang of young rascals! I'll have no gipsies on my land! I dessay you belong to the same gang that stole my goat! Out you go!"

The farm-hands were already putting the horse in the traces, grinning the while.

With heavy hearts the caravanners packed their belongings back into the van, the stewpot being lifted in bodily with the stew.

A good deal of it was spilled as the caravan was set in motion again and lurched away towards the gate.

Jimmy Silver handed the farmer a ten-shilling note.

It was only reasonable to pay for the damaged gate; and Mr. Judkins received it with a snort, and a repeated injunction to get out.

The caravan rumbled into the road in the gathering darkness.

Inside the van, Tubby Muffin was bolting stew, finding great comfort therein.

The farmer stood frowning and his men grinning as the unhappy caravanners took up their route again, and moved off into the gloom.

For a little while Jimmy Silver & Co. did not speak.

Lovell was the first to break the silence.

"Well, my hat!" was what he said.

"Where the thump are we going to camp at this hour?" murmured Newcome.

"Let's get out the stew and tuck in, anyway," said Raby. "I can't hold out much longer."

He stepped into the van, and then there was a sound of roaring and scuffling.

Then Muffin's voice was heard, raised in anguish.

Raby jumped down.

"Well, where's the stew?" asked Lovell.

"Muffin's bolted all that was left!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" came from the van, in anguished accents. "You beast, you've busted my nose, and blacked my eye, and—and— Ow-ow-ow-wow-wow!"

"Oh, dear!" said Jimmy Silver. "I—I wish we could meet that chap who gave us permission to camp in that old bounder's field! I only wish— My hat!"

Even as Jimmy was speaking, the young man in the velveteen coat and the gaiters came in sight, strolling along and whistling, with his dog at his heels.

He stopped as he saw the caravan, and smiled genially.

"Hallo! Didn't you camp, after all?" he queried pleasantly.

The juniors did not answer.

With one accord they rushed upon that pleasant young man, and smote him hip and thigh.

There was a yell from the victim, as he sat down under the rush, and he struggled frantically in the grasp of the Fistical Four.

But his struggles did not avail him.

He had been too funny at their expense, and they did not spare him.

By the time they had finished with him the agreeable young man had had a severe lesson on the subject of joking with caravanners.

He was bumped and rolled and pommelled and ragged, and finally pitched into the ditch beside the road, and swamped into black mud.

"That'll do!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Gug-gug-gug-gug!" came from the darkness of the ditch.

"Gee-up!" chortled Lovell.

The caravan rolled on, and from behind the caravanners came weird and woeful sounds from a hapless practical joker struggling out of a ditch.

Greatly comforted, Jimmy Silver & Co. tramped on beside the caravan in the summer night, once more in cheerful spirits.

CHAPTER 7.

Late Hours!

"O H, dear!"
 "Dry up!"
 "I'm awfully tired!"
 "Cheese it!"
 "I say——"
 "Shut up!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell ferociously.

And Tubby Muffin shut up, only emitting an occasional groan, to show how tired he was, and how hardly he considered that he was being used.

High over the woods and the lanes the round moon soared.

It was a beautiful night.

But the beauty of the night was lost upon the Rookwood caravanners.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were fatigued, and they wanted to stop and camp, but luck was not their way.

Raby was leading the horse, who was tired, too, and obstinately refused to proceed at more than a snail's pace.

Newcome gave the horse an occasional spirited prod to buck him up.

Jimmy Silver and Lovell strode beside the van, and Tubby Muffin dragged on behind, groaning.

Tubby Muffin did not see why he should not sit on the van and ride.

The Fistical Four did see, however.

The horse was tired enough, without having Tubby's tremendous weight to pull up hill and down dale.

Caravanning was a joyful way of spending a holiday, but it has its downs as well as its ups, and Jimmy Silver & Co., of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, were experiencing some of the downs to begin with.

They passed sleeping villages and dark, silent farms, where dogs began to bark as the rumble of the wheels broke the silence of the night.

Jimmy Silver, who always looked on the bright side of things, declared that shortly they would find an ideal spot for camping.

His suggestion was to keep smiling.

His comrades, however, seemed rather inclined to keep grunting.

"I say——" began Tubby Muffin dolefully.

Lovell turned on him.

"Will you shut up?" he demanded.

"I'm tired."

"Well, you can be tired without jawing. Give your lower jaw a rest."

"We'll camp soon, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver.

"I say——"

"Shut up!"

"Yes, but I say——"

"My hat! I'll pitch him into the ditch if he doesn't dry up!" exclaimed Lovell, in great exasperation.

"But I say," persisted Tubby, with a wary eye on Lovell. "There's a field yonder that will do rippingly."

"Oh! Why couldn't you say so, then?" grunted Lovell.

"I was trying to——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Arthur Edward Lovell was not in a very reasonable mood just then.

"Halt!" said Jimmy Silver.

Raby stopped the horse.

Jimmy looked over a gate by the roadside, which Tubby had spotted.

It led into a field, with a haystack at the further end.

"It would suit us," said Lovell. "Only it's too jolly late to ask leave of the owner."

"We don't want another blessed old farmer raging on our track," said Newcome dismally.

"Let's risk it," said Raby. "After all, they can't do more than turn us out in the morning."

Jimmy Silver did not reply.

He was staring across the field at a large object that loomed up dimly in the moonlight.

"You fellows see that?" he asked, pointing.

"Looks like a cart of something."

"It's another caravan."

"My hat! So it is!" exclaimed Lovell. "I say, if one lot of caravanners can camp in this field, another lot can. Let's chance it."

"I wonder——" began Jimmy.

"Don't start wondering now, old chap. My legs are fit to drop off."

"I wonder!" repeated Jimmy thoughtfully. "Tommy Dodd and those Modern worms are caravanning in this part, you know. That may be their outfit."

"Jolly queer to run on them, if it's so," said Lovell. "Like their cheek to be camping there so jolly comfy, the Modern worms! Bless Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, and every other Tommy in the wide world! We're going to camp in this field!"

And Lovell opened the gate.

"Can't do better," agreed Jimmy Silver.

The horse was led in at the gate, and the caravan rumbled into the field.

As soon as the caravan stopped, Tubby Muffin plunged into it, rolled into one of the berths, and fell fast asleep.

The Pistical Four took the horse out of harness, to graze or sleep as he chose, and Robinson Crusoe lay down in the grass. The juniors had named the caravan horse Robinson Crusoe because he was monarch of all he surveyed.

The Co. looked at one another.

"What about the tent?" murmured Raby.

"Too jolly tired!" said Lovell, with a yawn. "It's a warm night. Let's try rugs in the grass."

"Good egg!"

"There's another berth in the van," said Jimmy. "You have it, Newcome, and we'll camp out with rugs."

"Right you are!"

Newcome was asleep in two minutes. Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Edward Lovell took rugs and coats out of the van, and disposed themselves in the thick, rich grass.

Lovell and Raby closed their eyes at once.

But Jimmy sat up on his rug, looking across the moonlit field at the other caravan.

He was tired, but he was wondering

whether that caravan belonged to Tommy Dodd & Co., the chums of the Modern side at Rookwood.

He nudged Lovell as that youth was settling into balmy slumber.

"Lovell, old chap."

"Yaw-aw! Wharrer marrer?" Lovell sat up. "Don't say the beastly farmer is coming after us!" he gasped.

"I was thinking——"

"Is it the farmer?"

"No; it's nobody. But——"

"Go to sleep, then, fathead!" snorted Lovell, settling down again.

"Can't you let a chap snooze?"

"I was thinking——"

"B-r-r-r-r! You can't think, or you'd think it was time to go to sleep. Dry up, there's a good chap!"

"I was thinking if that's the Modern caravan——"

"Blow the Moderns!"

Lovell dozed again. He was awakened by another dig in the ribs.

"Groogh! Wharrer marrer?"

"I say, Lovell, if that's the Modern van, Tommy Dodd & Co. are fast asleep, and they don't know we're here."

"Shurrup!"

"What a chance to jape the Modern bounders!" urged Jimmy Silver.

"You frabjous bandersnatch!" said Lovell, in sulphurous tones. "Are you thinking of japing at this time of the night, when we're all dog-tired? You dangerous maniac, go to sleep!"

"But I say——"

"You say another word, and I'll brain you with a tent-peg!" shrieked Lovell.

And he closed his eyes, and snored resolutely.

Jimmy Silver grinned, and rose to his feet.

At Rookwood Lovell was one of the keenest on the rivalry between Classical and Modern, and always ready for a "rag" with Tommy Dodd & Co. as the victims.

But he was too sleepy now to care a brass farthing for Tommy Dodd or the whole Modern side, and japes did not appeal to him.

But Jimmy Silver was made of sterner stuff.

Leaving his comrades fast asleep, the captain of Rookwood Fourth crossed the field, to scout around the other caravan, with many humorous plans in his head, if the caravanning party should turn out to be the Rookwood Moderns.

CHAPTER 8.

Jimmy Silver Gets Busy!

THE camp was silent as Jimmy Silver approached it in the glimmering moonlight. Only a steady crop-crop came from a horse tethered somewhere near.

Near the caravan was a tent, and as Jimmy Silver drew nearer he heard a sound that mingled with the crop-cropping of the feeding horse.

It was a low bass, rumbling sound, which rather surprised Jimmy for a moment.

But the sound came from the tent, and he grinned as it dawned upon him what it was.

"The merry old sergeant," he murmured, "snoring!"

He was aware that Mr. Kettle, the school sergeant, was with the Modern trio, his duty being "to look after" them on the tour.

And Jimmy recognised that powerful bass snore now; he had heard it before, at Rookwood School.

He was pretty certain that it was Sergeant Kettle who was sleeping in the tent.

But he had to make sure, and he approached the caravan.

Door and window stood wide open, to let in the air on the warm summer's night.

Jimmy listened.

Only the sound of deep breathing came from within.

The occupants of the van, whoever they were, were fast asleep, as was natural at that hour.

Jimmy stooped and detached a

stone from the earth, and tossed it into the van, keeping back out of sight by one of the big wheels.

There was a startled exclamation in the van.

"Hallo! What's that?"

Jimmy grinned silently. It was the voice of Tommy Dodd, of the Rookwood Modern Fourth, and all his doubts were set at rest now. It was undoubtedly the Modern party the Classical caravanners had come upon.

"What's that, I say?" repeated Tommy Dodd.

"Bedad, and what's the matter wid ye?" came Tommy Doyle's sleepy voice.

"Something woke me up."

"Go to sleep again, then!" This time it was Tommy Cook's voice.

"No need to wake us up, too, fathead!"

"Something hit me on the nose!"

"How could it, ass!"

"Well, it did!"

"Faith, it's dhraming ye are!" said Doyle. "Go to slape, and dhrame about something else!"

"I tell you something hit me on the nose!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd excitedly. "If one of you fellows is playing tricks——"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

Tommy Dodd grunted, and laid his head on the pillow again.

The voice died away, and soon the silence was broken only by deep breathing.

Jimmy Silver did not move for some time.

But as soon as he was sure that the Modern juniors were asleep again he crept to the door of the van and peered in.

It was dim enough inside, but enough moonlight penetrated by door and window for Jimmy to make out the interior.

There were two berths inside, one above the other, as in the Classical van.

A third bed was made on the floor, and Jimmy guessed that it was Tommy Dodd who occupied that, from the fact that the pebble had fallen on his nose.

Apparently the sergeant had the tent all to himself.

Possibly it was the old military gentleman's formidable snore which accounted for that fact.

Jimmy's sleepy, but cheerful, face grinned into the van.

Tommy Dodd's head was towards the door, doubtless for the air.

With a deft hand, Jimmy tossed another pebble into the van, and it dropped on the sleeper's face.

Tommy Dodd came out of the land of dreams with a jump.

In a twinkling Jimmy Silver was back in cover behind the wheel.

"What's that?" spluttered Tommy Dodd.

He sat up, in startled wrath.

"Cook! Doyle!" he shouted.

"Begorra, and is it awake ye are agin?" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "Can't ye go to slape intirely?"

"Who's playing silly fag tricks?" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Something dropped on my face again and woke me up!"

"You're dreaming," snapped Cook. "For goodness' sake, go to sleep!"

"How can I go to sleep when some thundering ass keeps on waking me up, dropping things on me?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Was it you, Cook?"

"Was what me, fathead?"

"Dropping something on my face."

"Oh, rats! I'm trying to forget your face—I don't like nightmares!" snorted Cook.

"Was it you, Doyle?" howled Tommy Dodd.

"Sure I'm not responsible for yere dhrames, Tommy. Shut up, and let a chap get some slape!"

"Well," said Tommy Dodd, in sulphurous tones, "if it happens again, I'll have one of you out of those bunks fast enough! You ought to be glad to have the bunks, without playing tricks on a fellow because he's sleeping on the floor!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Tommy Dodd snorted, and settled down again.

But it was some time before balmy slumber reigned in the Modern caravan once more; Tommy Dodd was cross, which was not surprising.

Outside the van, Jimmy Silver nodded off, sitting against the wheel in the grass.

He dozed off for a quarter of an hour or so, and woke again as he slipped from the wheel.

He woke with all his wits about him, and as humorous as ever.

Convinced by the steady breathing in the van that all was balmy slumber once more, Jimmy disinterred a pebble from the ground, and crept to the door.

Whiz!

"Ycoowwwwp!"

Tommy Dodd bounded to his feet in the van.

"You silly chumps!" he roared.

"Oh, crumbs! You awake again!"

"Phwat's the matter intirely?" exclaimed Doyle. "Hallo! Wharrer you up to?"

Tommy Dodd was dragging him forcibly out of the berth.

"I told you I'd do it!" raved Dodd.

"Begorra! Is it potty ye are?" yelled Doyle. "Lave me be!"

"You shouldn't drop stones on my face then, you duffer!"

"Sure, I didn't at all, at all."

"Well, if you didn't, Cook did."

"I didn't, you ass!" roared Cook, from the other berth. "You've dreamed it. I was fast asleep till you woke me up."

Bump!

Tommy Doyle landed on the floor, and Tommy Dodd plunged into his berth.

There was a howl of wrath from Doyle.

"Ye spalpeen! Ye loon! Sure I'll —"

"You can settle it with Cook," said Dodd grimly. "I'm having this bunk, I know that! I'm fed up with your silly tricks!"

"Sure, I'd rather slape on the floor than be woke up every ten minutes by

a blethering blatherskite!" growled Doyle. "Slape in the bunk and be blowed to you intirely!"

And Doyle settled down in Tommy Dodd's bed.

Jimmy Silver smiled up at the full round moon, admiring the beauty of the night.

With a patience that really did him credit, he waited for the Moderns to get to sleep again.

He did not have long to wait, for the three Tommies were tired with a day's tramping.

Ten minutes later a pebble was projected deftly into the van, and it dropped on Tommy Doyle's nose as he lay on the floor.

It brought him out of dreamland with a jump, and he sat up, roaring.

"Ye howling asses! Ye thundering chumps! Ye silly spalpeens! Phwat are ye up to at all, at all?" he roared.

"Great pip, is that ass beginning now?" exclaimed Cook, in great exasperation, as Doyle's voice brought him suddenly back to wakefulness.

"Ye're pelting me with stones!" roared Doyle.

"Oh, you've got it now, have you?" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "Then it was Cook all the time!"

"It wasn't!" yelled Cook. "I was fast asleep!"

Doyle jumped up.

"You can tell that to the marines, ye blatherskite!" he exclaimed. "Tommy's had it, and now I've had it, and so it must be you!"

"I tell you——" raved Cook.

"Lend me a hand, Tommy darling."

Tommy Dodd willingly lent a hand, and Cook was dragged out of his berth, and bumped on the floor, yelling.

Doyle and Dodd took possession of the berths, while Tommy Cook sat on the floor and raved.

His comrades did not heed his ravings, however. They settled down to sleep.

Tommy Cook talked to them for a good five minutes, with emphasis, and

finally settled down to sleep in the bed on the floor.

Once again slumber reigned. And Jimmy Silver, in joyous mood—not feeling at all sleepy now—waited till he was sure that the Moderns were safe in the arms of Morpheus.

Then, pebble in hand, he looked in at the door.

There was a faint whiz as the pebble flew, and it dropped into Tommy Cook's ear.

It was rather a larger pebble than before, and it gave Cook a smart tap.

He awoke with a grunt, and his hand flew to his ear, where the stone was still resting.

He clutched it, and jumped up.

"Tommy Dodd, you rotter!" he roared.

"Oh, crumbs! Wharrer marrer?"

"It's you, is it?"

"Eh?"

"Who chucked this stone down on me?" shrieked Cook.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Dodd sleepily. "Nobody chucked a stone at you. It was you all the time."

"Feel it, then!" By the way of convincing Tommy Dodd Cook jammed the stone on his nose, and Dodd certainly felt it, and started up with a yell. "That's what banged into my ear, you idiot!"

"Yaroo!"

"Faith, and if that's throe——"

"Feel it, you——"

"Yoop! Ye thundering ass—leave off hammering my nose, you dangerous lunatic!"

"Well, then, perhaps you believe now it's a stone, and it dropped in my ear!" howled Cook.

"Faith, and it's the sergeant playing thricks on us, then!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle, with conviction. "It can't be anybody else—there's nobody else here, except the horse intoirely."

The three Tommies breathed wrath.

As all three had suffered from the unknown practical joker, they could not help being aware that the stones must have come from outside, and Sergeant

Kettle was the only other member of the party.

Jimmy Silver dived under the caravan for cover, and lay very low, as the three Tommies came furiously out.

"It must have been the sergeant," said Tommy Dodd. "There's nobody else within half a mile. Fancy a man of his age playing such tricks!"

"Sure it's because I dropped the saucepan on his toe at supper," said Doyle. "He was ratty at the time."

"Hark! He's snoring," said Cook.

"Pretending to," snorted Tommy Dodd. "It's only camouflage. He can't be asleep if he was chucking stones at us only a minute ago. Lend me a hand with these tent-pegs! We'll give him chucking stones!"

Doyle and Cook chuckled, and joined Tommy Dodd at the tent-pegs.

Under the caravan, the hidden Classical grinned with silent enjoyment.

The three Tommies were quick workers.

There was a crash as the tent came down, and a roar like unto that of an angry buffalo from beneath the sprawling canvas.

And Tommy Dodd & Co. went back to the caravan, leaving Sergeant Kettle to sort himself out from the wreck of the tent. And while he was doing so the sergeant could be heard making remarks which certainly were not complimentary towards the Modern chums.

CHAPTER 9.

Sergeant Kettle Waxes Wrathful!

SERGEANT KETTLE crawled out from under the collapsed tent, breathing wrath.

"Blow it!" he said. "Bust it! Bless it! What's made the blank old thing come down like that there? Blankety-blankety-blank! Now that there tent's got to be fixed up again afore a man can get any sleep! Blow it!"

The sergeant tramped to the van. He

wanted assistance, naturally, in setting up the tent.

"Master Dodd! 'Ere, wake up!"

Deep and steady breathing answered him from the Modern caravan.

The three Tommies were apparently fast asleep.

"Wake up!" roared Mr. Kettle.

Snore!

"Oh, my heye!" grunted the sergeant, in impatient wrath. "Never seed such 'ogs for sleepin' in all my natural! 'Ere, wake up!"

He groped in the van, and caught the feet of Tommy Dodd, who was on the floor.

He gave it a jerk, and Tommy had to wake up.

But he did not wake up for nothing.

"Hallo! Burglars!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

He had placed a mop in readiness.

In a moment he grasped it, and shoved it violently at the shadowy figure in the doorway.

Crash!

Mr. Kettle disappeared into the gloom with a loud yell.

"Burglars!" panted Tommy Dodd. "I've downed him!"

"Good for yez, Tommy!"

"Oh, my heye! Yarcoh! You young idjit, I ain't a burglar!" wailed the sergeant. "You young dummy, I'm the sergeant!"

"My hat! Is that you, Kettle?"

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Dear me!" said Tommy Dodd.

"What a sad mistake!" murmured Cook. "I say, sergeant, why ain't you asleep. Not sleep-walking, I hope?"

"My ole tent's come down, and I want you to 'elp me fix it up again!" boomed the sergeant.

"Dear me! What could have made it come down?"

"The way you 'elped me fix it, I expect!" growled Mr. Kettle. "Turn out and lend a 'and."

"It must have been the sergeant's snore that did it, intirely!" said Tommy Doyle. "No tent could stand that for long!"

"Do you think it was that, sergeant?"

"Don't give me any of your imper-ence!" roared the sergeant. "You jest turn out and lend a 'and! Look lively there!"

"Can't be done, old nut!" answered Tommy Dodd. "I think your tent very likely foil on you because you'd been chucking stones in this van."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young idjit!" snorted the sergeant. "Who's been chucking stones?"

"You have, you old donkey!"

"I haven't!" roared Mr. Kettle. "Meanter say you lugged that there tent down on me, you young varmin'ts?"

"Well, I really think the tent will come down on you every time there are stones chucked into this van," answered Tommy Dodd.

"By gum, if I 'ad you in my old regi-ment!" murmured the sergeant, in sul-phurous accents.

He tramped back to the tent. There was evidently no aid to be obtained from the juniors in the caravan.

Mr. Kettle stood looking at the tent for some minutes, making remarks to space, and then he rolled himself in a rug, and settled down to sleep on the canvas, without troubling to set up the tent again.

In about ten minutes the sergeant's formidable snore was audible once more in the Modern camp.

By that time Jimmy Silver was grow-ing rather cramped under the van.

But when he heard the deep and resonant sound once more he crept out softly and tiptoed towards the sleeping sergeant.

A pail stood near the van, half-full of water, with several dishes in it, ap-parently the remains of unfinished washing-up.

Jimmy Silver took out the dishes, and laid them on the grass, picked up the pail, and trod softly on.

Sergeant Kettle was deep in dream-land again.

He woke up as he felt something plump on his manly chest.

It was a pail, and it stood there,

balancing nicely, till the sergeant moved.

But naturally when he jumped the pail overturned.

Swoosh!

Sergeant Kettle gave a gurgling roar as the pail tipped over and the wash-up water smote him on the chest.

Jimmy Silver was fleeing in the dim-ness across the field to the Classical caravan.

He felt that he had done enough for one night, and that it was time to get to rest.

Mr. Kettle probably felt that too much had been done.

He jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, and the tin pail clattered to the ground.

The sergeant breathed fury.

He had not the slightest doubt that the three merry Moderns had paid him that friendly attention.

He caught up a stick, and rushed to the caravan.

The three Moderns had been awakened once more by the noise, and Tommy Dodd was looking out of the van.

He gave a gasp, as the sergeant rushed up, seized him by the collar, and yanked him out. Then the stick rose and fell.

Whack, whack, whack!

Tommy Dodd wondered whether it was a dreadful nightmare for a moment.

But it was only too real!

"Leggo!" shrieked the astonished Tommy. "Great Scott! Help! Rescue! Yoop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Rescue!" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

Cook and Doyle leaped out of the van.

They rushed on the sergeant in great excitement, and dragged him off.

"Leave me be!" roared Mr. Kettle. "I'll thrash yer! That's what you want! You want it bad! Drenchin' a man with cold water! Leave me be! I'll thrash yer all round! I'll—I'll—I'll—Yah!"

"Down him!" panted Tommy. "He's drunk or mad! Down him!"

With combined efforts the three juniors downed the sergeant.

Then they bolted into the van, slammed the door, and fastened it.

Crash!

Sergeant Kettle's stick beat on the outside of the door.

"Hopen this 'ere door!" he thundered. "I'm goin' to thrash you all round! Young varmints! That's wot you want, bad! You're goin' to 'ave it. Hopen this door!"

Crash, crash!

"Mad as a hatter!" gasped Cook. "Lucky there's a lock on the door! Oh, my hat, what a night!"

Crash!

"Go away, you lunatic!" howled Tommy Dodd.

Sergeant Kettle left them in peace at last, and retired, snorting, to slumber once more.

But it was a long time before the Moderns slept.

It was very warm in the van with the door closed, and there was a raving maniac outside—at least, so it seemed to them.

That was not a happy night for the Modern caravanners.

CHAPTER 19.

Pax!

JIMMY SILVER was up bright and early in the morning, late as had been the hour of retiring.

Sunshine streamed down on the green fields and meadows, and a pleasant breeze came scented from the woods.

In the sunny morning the camp on the other side of the field could be seen, and moving figures in it.

"They've seen us!" grinned Newcome.

"I shouldn't wonder if they guessed that they had a visitor last night, now they know we're here," yawned Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Co., for they had been told all about Jimmy's jape on the Moderns.

Jimmy stepped into the van to help Tubby Muffin make up his mind that it was time to rise.

Tubby came out of the van with a bump and a roar.

Jimmy followed him out, in time to see Tommy Dodd & Co. crossing the field towards the Classical camp.

"Hallo!" said Tommy Dodd, as he came up, eyeing the Classics very curiously and suspiciously.

"Same to you, and many of them!" answered Jimmy Silver affably.

"I didn't know you were camping here," said Dodd.

"We arrived rather late," explained Jimmy. "Had a good night's rest?"

"Did you come over to our camp during the night?"

"Did I?" said Jimmy reflectively. "Now I come to think of it, I may have taken a stroll in that direction."

"Then it was you, begorra——" exclaimed Doyle.

"Oh, you funny idiot!" said Tommy Dodd. "We thought it was the sergeant, and the sergeant thought it was us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've a jolly good mind to wade in and mop the lot of you!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd wrathfully.

"Pile in, old scout!" grinned Raby. "I don't quite see how you're going to do it. But go ahead!"

Tommy Dodd felt very much inclined to go ahead, but the three Moderns were hardly equal to mopping up four Classics, without counting Tubby Muffin.

Tommy's good-humour came to the rescue.

"Well, I suppose you can't help being a funny idiot, Jimmy Silver," said Dodd, after a pause. "I say, did you drench the sergeant last night? He says somebody stuck a pail of water on him, and it fell over him when he moved. We thought he had gone mad."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He actually laid into me with a stick!" said Tommy wrathfully. "Of course, we're not going to stand that. We're fed up with Kettle."

"He's growling like a bear this morning," said Cook dismally. "The worst of it is that Tommy's pater planted him on us to look after us, and we can't give him the boot. Rotten, ain't it?"

"Too bad!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Let's make it pax this morning, you kids, and you stay to brekker."

"Done!" said Tommy Dodd. "We'll fetch some grub, and pool supplies for brekker. I wish you'd take the sergeant along with you when you go."

"No jolly fear!" grinned Raby. "You're welcome to him."

"We're paying two bob for camping in this field," added Tommy. "You'd better get along to the farm and do the same, or the farmer man may be crusty if he finds you here. See if you can get any milk, too."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy Silver.

In great spirits the caravanners set about preparing breakfast.

Jimmy Silver walked up to the farmhouse, armed with a huge enamelled jug.

He found a very good-natured farmer there, and paid for his camping rights in the field, and purchased several quarts of milk, and was lucky enough to secure a large piece of cheese.

There was a cheer in the camp when he returned with the milk and the cheese.

"Kettle's boiling!" announced Tommy Dodd.

"What silly ass stuck that kettle there?" howled Jimmy Silver.

The kettle was a tin one, and it was planted in the middle of a wood fire, with flames licking it all round.

It certainly was boiling—in fact, it was hissing and spluttering and jumping!

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Lovell. "It's boiling, ain't it?"

"Here's the coffee-pot!" said Raby.

Lovell took hold of the kettle-handle,

and released it at once, with a yell worthy of a cannibal.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Hot?" asked Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

"Grooooooh!" Lovell sucked his fingers frantically. "Yurrrgggh! Mummm!"

"Better make a kettle-holder, or something," said Cook anxiously. "Lend me your handkerchief, Newcome."

"Lend you rats!" grunted Newcome. "Use your own!"

"Well, this rag will do."

Cook anxiously lifted the kettle in a folded rag.

The spout dropped off into the fire, the solder having been melted by the heat, and Cook dropped the kettle after it as the water rushed sputtering out, and jumped back.

"Oh, crumbs!" he ejaculated.

"You silly ass!" Lovell left off sucking his fingers to make that remark. "Now you've done it! Just like a Modern!"

"You chump!" roared Cook.

"You've done it, you mean! You stuck a tin kettle in the middle of a blessed furnace, you Classical ass!"

"Yurrrrrgggh!" was Lovell's next remark, as he renewed his attentions to his fingers.

"Well, it's done, anyway," said Jimmy Silver. "Never mind, there's the iron pot. You can boil anything in that. Better wash it, perhaps. I don't know whether the flavour of potatoes and carrots would hurt the coffee."

It was some time before the iron pot boiled, and then the coffee was made, and the eight Rookwooders sat down to breakfast.

It was not very long since the rivals of Rookwood had parted at the old school, but they had plenty to talk about, and "brekker" was a very cheery meal.

Tubby Muffin did not join in the talk, his jaws were otherwise engaged, and he succeeded in annexing the lion's share, as usual.

Breakfast was still going strong, when

the bull voice of Mr. Kettle was heard across the field.

"Time to start!"

Tommy Dodd turned his head.

"Go and eat coke!" was his polite reply.

"Well, I'm starting with the van," said Mr. Kettle grimly.

And he proceeded to put the horse to the Modern caravan.

Evidently Mr. Kettle was the autocrat of the Modern caravan-party.

CHAPTER 11.

Jimmy Silver to the Rescue!

TOMMY DODD frowned over his bread and cheese.

"You fellows are jolly lucky to be on your own," he said. "Your pater's got some sense, Silver. Of course, so has my pater," added Tommy hastily. "Only he doesn't understand that we should be all right on our own. He arranged with the Head for Kettle to be planted on us—meaning well, you know."

"I believe paters always mean well," remarked Raby reflectively. "To do 'em justice, they always mean well."

"The sergeant is a good old sort, of course," went on Tommy Dodd. "I respect him no end. But he's not cheery company. He wants to run a party of caravanners like a squad of recruits. Laying into a chap with a stick is the limit. We've got to shed him somehow."

"We have, intirely," said Doyle.

"Can't you Classical asses make a suggestion?" asked Cook. "What would you do if you had Kettle planted on you, blotting out the blessed sunshine with his face?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, it's easy enough," he said.

"You can't drop him if he's sent with you by the powers that be. But suppose he left you of his own accord, because you're not nice company—what?"

Tommy Dodd grunted.

"Do you think we haven't tried that, ass? We drop things on his toes, spill water into his boots, and hide his hat, and leave his tent-pegs loose, and put salt in his coffee. It seems to make him even worse-tempered!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter. The worse-tempered he gets the bigger his sense of duty seems to grow. The fact is, he's having a rotten time, and he'd rather be off, only his dashed sense of duty keeps him sticking to us!" said Tommy Dodd dismally.

"Like a beastly wet blanket!" groaned Doyle.

"You used to have ideas sometimes at Rookwood, Jimmy Silver. Can't you think of a wheeze for getting rid of the chap for us?"

"I'll try," said Jimmy modestly. "Let's keep together on the road to-day, and we'll see."

"Done!"

The Modern caravan was lumbering out into the road now, the sergeant leading the horse.

Mr. Kettle was starting, and if his troublesome charges did not want to start, too, they were going to be left behind; that was the grim old military gentleman's determination.

"Well, so-long, you chaps!" said Tommy Dodd, rising. "Follow on, if you're going to keep us company to-day. Nothing will stop old Kettle. He won't even let us stop to look at the scenery! He marks out a certain number of miles, and keeps on. It's like being a blessed convict! Come on, kids!"

The three Moderns, with the remainder of their breakfast in their hands, followed the sergeant out into the road.

Jimmy Silver & Co. finished their morning meal in a hurry, and put Robinson Crusoe in harness, and the Classical van lumbered out into pursuit.

But the Modern caravan had a good start, and the sergeant was proceeding at a steady pace, never slackening a moment.

The Moderns were half a mile ahead

when the Classics started along the white road after them.

"Jolly hard cheese on these kids," Arthur Edward Lovell remarked. "There was some talk of planting Kettle on us, wasn't there? I think we'd have lynched him!"

"Well, they can't lynch him," remarked Jimmy. "But they ought to be able to drop him somewhere. He can't be enjoying the trip; he doesn't look as if he is. If he would get into a tearing temper and chuck up the job, that would suit all parties."

"He's got into the temper right enough, but he won't chuck up the job," grinned Raby.

"I'm going to have a big think," answered Jimmy Silver. "It's up to us, as top side of Rookwood, to help silly Moderns out of a fix."

"Hear, hear!" grinned his chums.

And Jimmy Silver thought it out very carefully, as he walked along beside the horse in the sunny morning.

Towards noon the Modern caravan turned into a rough cart-track that lay across a wide heath, and bumped on its way, with a jangling of tin-ware and crockery, and the Classical van followed in its wake.

Halt was made in a very solitary spot, where a shining stream ran by thick trees, out of sight of any human habitation.

"I'm jolly ready for lunch, Jimmy," grumbled Tubby Muffin, who had not ventured to raid the supplies in the van during the morning's march.

The Classical van lumbered on, and halted near the Modern vehicle.

Sergeant Kettle eyed the Classical chums rather morosely, and only grunted in reply to their cheery greetings.

"Lunch together, what?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, yes!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Bathe afore lunch, Master Dodd," grunted the sergeant. "That's what we've stopped 'ere for."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," agreed Tommy Dodd. "Ripping to get off the

dust of the road! You're a merry old genius, sergeant!"

Grunt!

"You'd be a nice man if it wasn't for your temper, and a handsome one if it wasn't for your face," added Tommy sweetly.

Grunt!

There was a pleasant spot for bathing, under overhanging trees, and the Rookwood juniors changed in the vans, and plunged into the cool water with great enjoyment.

Tubby Muffin preferred a nap in the grass, but the three Tommies and the Pistical Four were glad of a swim.

The sergeant was a good swimmer, and he kept an eye on the juniors, ready to rescue any of them that should get into difficulties.

He had changed into his bathing-costume in the thicket, and left his clothes under the trees, a fact that Jimmy Silver had noted.

Jimmy called to Tubby Muffin, after swimming a while.

Tubby sat up in the grass drowsily.

"Hallo! I'm not going to swim," he said. "I'm tired."

"Like some chocs, Tubby?"

"What-ho!" said Muffin, with great promptitude, and he came down through the rushes. "Eh! Where are they?"

"In my jacket-pocket, on that bush," said Jimmy, and then he lowered his voice to a whisper. "Tubby, the sergeant's clobber is there under the trees. Take it away and hide it somewhere sharp. Mind you put it where the sergeant can't find it. Then you can have the chocs, see?"

Tubby Muffin grinned.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver swam out again, in a happy and contented frame of mind.

Tubby Muffin disappeared into the thickets.

For a quarter of an hour longer the Rookwooders disported themselves in the stream, and then they came ashore for their towels.

The sergeant, in a rather better temper after his bathe, plunged into the green thicket where he had left his clothes, and towelled himself down with great satisfaction.

Then he looked round for his clothes. He looked and looked again!

Then his voice was heard from the thicket, like unto the voice of the Bull of Bashan:

"Where's my clothes?"

"My hat!" murmured Tommy Dodd, pausing with one leg in his trousers. "Has some blessed tramp lifted Kettle's clobber?"

"Where's my clothes?" boomed the sergeant.

"Doddy," whispered Jimmy Silver, "I suppose the sergeant's got a second suit in the van."

"I believe so—yes, in a bag," answered the Modern junior. "Why?"

"Cut off, then, and pinch the bag."

"What for?"

"And lose it somewhere," whispered Jimmy.

"Oh, my hat!"

Tommy Dodd understood.

While the sergeant was raging in the thicket for his clothes Tommy sped to the Modern van.

He came back in five minutes, a sweet smile on his face.

The juniors finished dressing cheerfully on the grassy bank, deaf to the booming voice from the trees.

They had finished when Sergeant Kettle reappeared in view, still clad in the light and airy costume of bathing-pants and towels.

CHAPTER 12.

Fed Up!

"WHERE'S my duds?"

"Which?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"My clothes!" boomed the sergeant.

"How the merry dickens should I know?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Why don't you look after your clobber?"

"Somebody's taken my clothes

away!" roared Mr. Kettle, glaring over the draping towels with a red and furious visage.

"Careless," said Jimmy Silver. "We left ours here on the bank, where Tubby could keep an eye on them."

"Which of you has taken away my clothes?"

"My dear old nut, we were all in the water with you," answered Cook, in surprise. "Don't be an ass, you know!"

The sergeant choked.

It was true enough.

The seven juniors had been in the stream; only Tubby Muffin had remained ashore.

Mr. Kettle strode to the fat Classical, who had his eyes closed, and a smear of chocolates about his mouth. He woke Tubby by sticking a very large toe into his fat ribs.

"Yow!" gasped Tubby, sitting up in the grass. "Wharrer that? Ow! I say, if you chaps have finished, let's have lunch!"

"Did you take away my clothes?" boomed Mr. Kettle.

"Eh"

"Clothes!" raved the sergeant.

"What clothes?"

"My clothes!"

"Do you think I'm a sleep-walker?" demanded Tubby Muffin. "Run away and play, do! I say, Jimmy, are we going to have lunch now?"

"Yes, rather!"

Sergeant Kettle trod into the trees again, and indulged in another frantic hunt for his clothes, as the juniors prepared lunch.

It was quite possible, of course, that a tramp had come along and lifted the clothes; if one of the caravanners was guilty it was certainly Tubby Muffin.

Mr. Kettle searched again through the thickets, and then searched the Modern van and then, with a glare at the Fistical Four, searched the Classical van.

But he came out fuming.

He was almost convinced by this

time that a tramp had lifted his clothes in the thicket, and made off with them.

Certainly they were not in the vans, or anywhere near the camp.

He bethought himself now of his second suit, and entered the Modern van once more, and then there was another roar.

"Where's my bag?"

"Do you mean your bags?" asked Lovell.

"I mean my bag, with my other clothes in it!" raved Mr. Kettle. "Somebody's taken it out of the van."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, in alarm. "You don't mean to say so, sergeant!"

"I'll spifficate somebody for this!" groaned Mr. Kettle. "I believe it was one of you young rips. I was a hass to come on this 'ere trapesing about the country with a set of young varmint's. A silly hass, that's what I was."

"Well, you always were," agreed Tommy. "No good complaining about that, old nut; you're too old to change now."

"Where's my bag?"

"Echo answers where."

"I can lend you a pair of trucks, if you like, sergeant," offered Baby.

Mr. Kettle only gave the generous youth a glare in return for that offer.

The junior's "trucks" would not have been of much use to the burly sergeant.

"And you can have my second pair of socks," said Dodd.

"And my cap," said Doyle generously, "and wan of me collars, bedad!"

Snort!

Sergeant Kettle, picturesquely draped in towels, roved around the camp for some time, wondering whether a tramp had robbed the caravan; and wondering where his clothes were, and hunting for them with intensifying fury.

He returned at length with a purple face, and found the juniors putting the horses to the vans.

The sight of those preparations for departure made Mr. Kettle give a very good imitation of Vesuvius in a state of eruption.

"What are you up to?" he roared.

"Time to start, isn't it?" said Tommy Dodd, in surprise. "We've got a good many miles to do this afternoon. You can get some lunch in the van as we go along, Kettle."

"My clothes——"

"Haven't you found them?"

"No!" roared the sergeant. "I hain't!"

"Well," said Tommy thoughtfully. "It's jolly warm weather. You won't need them."

Mr. Kettle filled the air with wrath.

It was quite true.

He really did not need clothes that sunny afternoon, and had the caravan tour been taking place in the South Sea Islands, it would not have mattered at all.

But it was scarcely possible to travel along the English lanes attired in a bathing-suit and two or three towels.

No doubt it was simply a question of local custom, but customs of that sort had to be respected.

"You ain't going to start till I've got my clothes!" he roared.

"How long will it take you to get them?"

"How can I get them when they're lost?"

"My dear man, we can't remain on this spot for the rest of the vacation," said Tommy Dodd, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "You can't expect it. You can travel in the van, if you like, and keep out of sight. It will be nice and cool. When we come to a town you can get out and buy some clothes."

"Ow can I go into a shop like this 'ere?" gasped Mr. Kettle.

"Ask me another, old chap. Tell 'em you're the Wild Man from Borneo, and then they won't be surprised."

"Off we go!" said Jimmy Silver. "Fellow on, Doddy!"

And the Classical van lumbered on its way, the Modern horse starting to follow of its own accord.

"Stop!" shrieked the sergeant.

"Can't be did, old man. Get inside, if you like."

"Will you—will you go into a shop for me and get some noo clothes, if I do?" gasped the unhappy sergeant.

The three Moderns grinned, and shook their heads.

"Couldn't be done," said Tommy Dodd. "You wouldn't be satisfied, sergeant, you grumble at everything."

"I—I won't grumble!" gasped Mr. Kettle.

"Done, then! Hop into the van!"

Mr. Kettle hopped into the van, towels and all.

In a most unenviable frame of mind, he sat there, while the Modern caravan lumbered after the Classical.

The latter was soon overtaken, and passed.

Jimmy Silver had his own reasons for falling behind.

As soon as the Modern van was well ahead, Jimmy Silver cut back to the camping-place, and shinned up a beech-tree, and recovered the sergeant's bag, which Tommy Dodd had hidden there.

The clothes which the sergeant had left on the bank, however, were not recoverable, for the simple reason that Tubby Muffin had thrown them into the stream.

Bag in hand, Jimmy Silver ran after the caravan, and the bag was tossed into the Classical van for the present.

The sergeant, anathematising Fate in the Modern van, was quite unaware of that proceeding.

The caravanners walked cheerily on, across the sunny heath, with the caravans, bursting into cheery song as they walked.

It was a couple of hours before a village was reached, and on the outskirts the caravans halted.

Sergeant Kettle put his head out of the Modern van.

"Now, 'urry up with those clothes, Master Dodd!" he said.

"Right you are!" answered Tommy. "You're sure you'll trust to my taste, sergeant?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You wouldn't rather go yourself?"

"No!" roared Mr. Kettle.

"Right-ho! Keep your wool on. You come with me, Jimmy. The other chaps can look after the vans till we get back."

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd walked into the village together, smiling.

The other fellows were smiling, too, as they sat down under the trees by the roadside to wait.

In the Modern van the sergeant waited and fumed. He did not smile.

It was an hour before the two juniors came back from the village, each of them carrying a bundle.

"Here you are, sergeant!" called out Tommy Dodd.

The van door was opened and the bundles tossed in.

There was no word of thanks from inside; the sergeant was not in a thankful mood.

He was still less so when he had opened the bundles.

The door opened again, and a red and furious face looked out.

"You young varmint!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?" asked Jimmy Silver.

The vans were in motion once more, turning off to keep clear of the village, and following a long country road that led away towards hazy blue hills.

"Do you think a man can wear these 'ere clothes what you've brought me?" shrieked Mr. Kettle.

"You promised to be satisfied with my taste in clothes," answered Tommy Dodd severely.

"You—you—you— Turn that van back!" roared Mr. Kettle.

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll come out to yer!"

"Oh, do! There's some ladies. coming along in a trap."

The van door slammed hastily.

For a long time, as the caravans rumbled merrily on, there was an incessant stream of mumbblings and grumblings from the Modern vehicle.

But the sergeant realised that he had no choice left.

Either he had to don the clothes Tommy Dodd and Jimmy Silver had brought for him or he had to remain attired in towels, which really was not feasible as a permanent arrangement.

The door opened at last, and the sergeant came red and gasping out of the stuffy van.

There was a wild shriek from the caravanners at the sight of him.

Sergeant Kettle was attired in bright check trousers much too short for him, reaching a few inches below the knees, and giving a splendid view of brilliant red-striped socks.

His coat was also made for a small man—it did not meet at the buttons, and the sleeves came just beyond his elbows.

This gave a pleasant view of a blue-striped cotton shirt.

The waistcoat was cut for evening-clothes, and just buttoned round the waist, exhibiting a broad expanse of blue shirt-front.

No collar had been provided, but his neck was adorned by a crimson muffler.

On his head was a plaid cap, containing as many hues as Joseph's celebrated coat.

His feet were encased in tennis-shoes, but these, by way of compensation, were much too large for him, and flopped about as he moved.

"Oh, laugh!" gasped the sergeant. "This 'ere is a laughin' matter, ain't it? Laugh, you young varmint!"

"Thanks, we will!" stammered Jimmy Silver. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Sergeant Kettle shook a furious fist at the hilarious caravanners.

There was an ominous rending sound, and he ceased his gesticulations very hurriedly.

A farmer's cart drove by, and its occu-

pants simply jumped as they saw the sergeant.

There was a howl of laughter from the cart.

Mr. Kettle's face was as crimson as his muffler.

He dodged back into the van again.

"Better walk, sergeant!" called out Jimmy Silver. "Isn't it jolly stuffy in there?"

Snort!

"Do come out, sergeant!" pleaded Tommy Dodd. "You'll cheer up everybody we pass!"

Snort!

"Blessed if he isn't still dissatisfied, after all the trouble we've taken!" sighed Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The caravanners moved on merrily.

It was a couple of hours before the sergeant jumped out of the van at last.

The expression on his face then showed that his mind was made up.

"I'm off, you young varmint!" he announced. "'Ow I'm to get 'ome in this rig I don't know! But I wouldn't travel another day with you if I 'ad to go 'ome dressed like an 'Ottentot!"

"You're not leaving us, surely, sergeant!" said Tommy Dodd sorrowfully.

"I am that!" snorted the sergeant. "I told Mr. Dodd I'd look arter you. But there's some young varmint that can't be looked arter, which I'll write to your father and tell 'im so, Master Dodd!"

"Oh, sergeant!"

Sergeant Kettle tramped off, heading for a village that the caravans were passing.

Jimmy Silver ran to the Classical van and extracted the bag containing Mr. Kettle's second suit.

Even the humorous Jimmy could not let Mr. Kettle enter the habitations of men attired in so remarkable a manner.

"Better take your bag, sergeant!" he called out.

"Wot!"

"Catch!" said Jimmy cheerily. "I found it for you, old chap. Catch!"

He tossed the bag to the sergeant, who caught it in great relief.

Bag in hand, Mr. Kettle retired to the nearest clump of trees for a change.

The caravans rumbled on.

"Poor old Kettle!" murmured Tommy Dodd, wiping his eyes. "I don't think he has really enjoyed caravanning with us. By the way, we'll stop in the next village, and send him a money-order to pay for his clobber that went down the river, and you fellows can whip round for a tip if you like.

"I think he's earned that!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

An hour later quite a handsome remittance was dispatched from a post-office to the sergeant's address, which probably fully consoled Mr. Kettle when he received it.

Then through the gathering dusk the caravans rumbled on by road and lane, Classics and Moderns for once on the best of terms, and in the highest of spirits.

Through the summer dusk fresh, boyish voices carolled merrily, awakening the echoes in green thickets and cool, shady woods.

CHAPTER 12.

Tommy Dodd is Too Funny!

"TURN to the right!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Left!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Right!"

"Left!"

"Fathead!"

"Duffer!"

The Rookwood caravanners halted at the cross-roads.

Jimmy Silver had decided to turn to the right at the cross-roads, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome backed him up, simply because the Moderns demurred.

Even Tubby Muffin, the fat Classical, gave a slow nod in support of Jimmy.

Cook and Doyle, of course, backed up Tommy Dodd at once.

"Better keep to the right," said

Jimmy Silver. "There's a ruin or something that's worth seeing over yonder."

"Better keep to the left," answered Tommy Dodd. "Who cares for mouldy old ruins?"

"Faith, there's ruins at Rookwood, and we can see them in the term," said Tommy Doyle. "Blow the ruins!"

"It's an easier road," said Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd gave a superior sniff.

"Just like you Classical slackers, wanting to take an easy road," he said.

"Look here, you blessed Modern asses, you turn when you're told!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell indignantly.

"Rats!"

"Classical ass!"

"If you want me to mop up the road with you, Tommy Dodd—"

"I do—I does!" said Tommy Dodd instantly. "If you want your features altered, old nut, come on! They couldn't be altered for the worse!"

"Impossible!" said Cook.

Lovell pushed back his cuffs. But Jimmy Silver interposed.

"Peace, my children!"

"I'm going to lick that cheeky Modern ass!" roared Lovell.

"Let him come on!" urged Tommy Dodd. "I've often thought that a really good licking would do Lovell good."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"My dear asses, let's settle it by taking one road each," he said. "We've enjoyed your company, Tommy, and we'll give it up with dry eyes. Turn to the left, and be blowed to you!"

"Turn to the right, and be bothered!" said Cook.

"Well, so long as the Modern chumps clear off, I don't mind," said Lovell.

"We're turning to the right, I know that!"

"Right-ho!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Blessed if I know how you'll get on without us to look after you!"

"Why, we've been looking after you!" exclaimed Raby indignantly.

"Oh, don't be funny, you know!"

"You cheeky ass!"

"Shut up, the lot of you!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Get that blessed van round, and don't jaw. Good-bye, Modern asses!"

"Good-bye, Classical chumps!"

The Classical van took the turning to the right.

Jimmy Silver led the horse, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome marched with him. Tubby Muffin sitting half-asleep on the van.

They were a couple of miles from where they had left the Moderns when Lovell glanced back.

"There's a blessed bikist after us!" he grunted.

Down the lane a cyclist was riding fast, and he waved his hand to the caravanners as they looked back, evidently as a signal to stop.

"I know that chap!" said Jimmy, staring at the cyclist. "My only hat! It's Cuffy, of the Modern Fourth!"

"Clarence Cuffy!" exclaimed Lovell in wonder.

All the Classics recognised the cyclist as he came nearer. Well they knew the duffer of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood.

They were surprised to see him there. Cuffy was not an athletic youth, and he was not likely to be on a cycle tour.

He came up, gasping, in a cloud of dust.

"Tommy!" he exclaimed, as he jumped off his machine.

"Hallo, ass!" said Lovell politely.

Clarence Cuffy blinked at him through his big spectacles.

There was an expression of deep disappointment on his face.

"Is not Thomas here?" he exclaimed.

"Thomas! What Thomas?"

"My dear friend Thomas Dodd," said Cuffy. "I am searching for Thomas." I have come from Gander's Green looking for Thomas. I have missed him somehow. Dear me!"

Clarence fanned himself with his straw hat and gasped.

"Oh, you're looking for Tommy Dodd!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, my dear James. I am going caravanning with dear Thomas," said Cuffy. "Mr. Dodd thought it would be so nice for me to be with dear Thomas. What are you laughing at, my dear Arthur?"

Lovell chuckled.

"Somehow I have missed his caravan," said Cuffy in great distress. "I heard news of a caravan at the village I have just left, and rode after it at great speed, my dear fellows, expecting to find dear Thomas."

"And you've found dear us instead!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Never mind, we can tell you where to find dear Thomas."

Clarence Cuffy beamed.

"That is so kind of you, dear James!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, don't mench! Have you had your tea?" asked Jimmy Silver considerably.

"Indeed, no. From Thomas' last letter to his uncle I expected to meet the caravan at Burwood this morning," said Cuffy. "I have not seen it. I have been looking for it ever since. Thomas will be so distressed when he knows the trouble I have had."

"He'll be distressed when you find him, I'm sure!" said Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sure of it, dear Arthur," said Clarence innocently. "If you can tell me where to find Thomas, dear James—"

"Better have tea with us first," said Jimmy. "Lots of time."

"I say, we're not stopping yet!" exclaimed Lovell warmly.

"We're stopping for tea, now Cuffy's with us," said Jimmy Silver severely. "We may be able to do a good turn to dear Thomas through dear Clarence."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell.

The Co. understood, if Clarence Cuffy did not, and in great good-humour the Classical caravanners halted for tea.

CHAPTER 14.

Tit for Tatt!

THE Classical van was drawn up on a patch of grass beside the road, where Robinson Crusoe put his head over a fence and sampled a fine crop of artichokes growing on the other side.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were too busy to note how the horse was occupied, and it was to be hoped that the farmer to whom the field belonged would be too busy to note it also.

Clarence Cuffy was a guest whom the Classical juniors delighted to honour, to judge by the way they looked after him.

They nobly forbore to put mustard in his egg, and salt in his milk, and pepper on his cheese, remembering they were not at Rookwood now, and that the simple youth from Gander's Green was a guest.

But they firmly declined to allow Clarence to help in getting tea. They knew him too well.

"You just sit down, old chap," said Jimmy Silver. "You're our guest, you know. You're not going to work."

"But really, my dear James, I do not wish to eat the bread of idleness!" protested Clarence. "Pray allow me—"

"Not at all!"

"Let me at least set out the crockery."

Crash!

"You howling ass!" roared Lovell, as the dish of lettuces crashed into the jam-jar, with disastrous results to both.

"Dear me!" said Clarence, blinking at the wreck through his enormous glasses. "How ever did I come to drop that dish?"

"Don't you drop everything you lay hold of, ass?" grunted Raby.

"My dear George—"

"Shush, you fellows!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

The Classics made an heroic effort to recover their smiles, but they did not allow the duffer of Rookwood to touch the crocks again.

Clarence looked quite distressed. He

always was distressed when he brought about a disaster.

But he recovered his smiles over tea, so cheery was the company he found himself in.

Lovell even refrained from bellowing when Cuffy passed him the milk and spilt it over his trousers; and Raby only breathed hard through his nose when Clarence upset the mustard over him.

Little things like that were bound to happen when Clarence Cuffy was about. And the Fistical Four wished Tommy Dodd joy of his future comrade in the Modern caravan.

"And you have seen dear Thomas lately?" remarked Clarence, when Jimmy told him of the meeting.

"Oh, yes; it was no end of a pleasure!" said Jimmy Silver. "You'll overtake them quite easily before dark. They'll be so pleased to see you!"

"I am sure dear Thomas will be delighted," said Clarence, beaming.

"I suppose you're going to take the party under your wing, and look after them a bit?" suggested Jimmy.

"Certainly it is my wish to do so, James. I hope that my presence may keep the dear fellows from indulging in any tendencies to extravagance of spirits or any reckless proceedings," said Cuffy. "My dear papa said it should be my object to exercise a thoughtful restraint upon the exuberance of their youthful spirits."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

"I'm sure you'll do that, Cuffy," said Jimmy Silver cordially. "I can't imagine any great exuberance of spirits when you're around."

"I am so glad you think so, dear James!"

"If you really want to be useful and kind to Tommy Dodd, I can put you up to some tips," suggested Jimmy.

"That is very, very kind of you!"

"Not at all, Cuffy, old chap! You are one of the chaps that do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame," said Jimmy. "I think of you as a sort of guardian angel in the Modern caravan."

"How very kind of you to say so!"

"As an old hand, there are a few things I can tell you, Cuffy. For instance, the milk is liable to go off in this hot weather. That would be rather serious, so what you've got to do is to mix a certain amount of mustard with it."

"Mustard, my dear James?"

"Yes; about one ounce of mustard to every pint of milk. I'll give you a tin of mustard in case the Moderns are short of it."

"Thank you so much!"

"Then there's the grub," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Tommy Dodd was laying in stuff to-day for a stew this evening. I think—in fact, I'm pretty sure—that he forgot the ammoniated quinine."

"Ammoniated quinine, my dear James?"

"Yes, I really think he forgot it."

"I am aware that Thomas is sometimes a little thoughtless, James. It will be my aim to remedy this defect," said Clarence simply.

"Exactly! Drop in at the chemist's as you go through the village, Cuffy, and buy a bottle of the quinine. Don't tell Tommy. Just slip it into the stew when it's on the fire, so as to surprise him with your thoughtfulness."

"What a very pleasant thought, James!"

"Mention to him what you've done, as soon as you've done it, and see him smile," said Jimmy Silver. "It's so delightful to see a chap looked pleased over some thoughtful, friendly act!"

"How very nice!" said Clarence.

"Then about the horse," continued Jimmy Silver, in the same reflective way. "He has to have a good range for cropping the grass during the night. If you camp in a field, see that the gate's left open. If on a common, Tommy may tether the horse—he's so thoughtless. Don't say a word to him, but just get up quietly and see that the geegee's allowed to roam. It is worth while even to make a horse happy, Cuffy."

"I quite agree with you, James."

"Then about airing the caravan," said Jimmy Silver. "Caravans have to be kept well aired and disinfected, Cuffy. I suppose you know that there's danger of the beds being infected by the—the—the collywobbleitis microbe?"

"I was not aware of it, James."

"Collywobbleitis," said James, "is a serious thing. It may lead to a general outbreak of collywobbles."

"Dear me!"

"The best way to prevent that is to disinfect the berths in the caravan thoroughly," explained Jimmy Silver. "Those kids are very thoughtless, but I am sure you can be relied upon to think of this, Cuffy."

"I will make it an especial point to remember it, James. What kind of disinfectant would you advise me to use?"

"Simply pepper."

"Pepper?"

"Just so! We've got some pepper to spare, and we'll give it to you with pleasure, Cuffy. Just before the chaps go to bed, shake the pepper well into the beds, especially the pillows, and don't grudge it—use up all that I give you. That will drive away the microbes."

"I don't know how to thank you for telling me these things, James!" said Cuffy gratefully. "How very pleased dear Thomas will be!"

"Don't tell him I gave you the tip," said Jimmy. "The fact is, Cuffy, we were a bit excited when we parted with the Modern chaps. I should like you to do the kind things I've mentioned, but don't let Tommy know it comes from me till to-morrow. Then you can tell him, and I am sure it will make him feel kindly towards us."

"Certainly, my dear James!"

"In fact, don't tell him you've met us till to-morrow," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Tell him in the morning, after you've done all the things I've mentioned. Because it will be so nice for Thomas to learn all at once that he owes these kind attentions to my thoughtful friendship. It will make me very happy to think of it, Cuffy. I

shall picture that pleasant little scene in the morning, when you tell him that he owes these little kindnesses to my suggestion. I am only sorry that I shall not be present to receive his thanks."

"My dear papa would be delighted with you, James," said Cuffy, his eyes almost moist with emotion. "This kind and friendly thoughtfulness would make him very happy if he could behold it."

"If it makes Tommy Dodd happy I shall be satisfied, dear Clarence."

"So—so—so say all of us!" gasped Newcome.

And when Clarence Cuffy took his departure, climbing on his bike, after shaking hands all round twice over, the Classical juniors watched him start, with smiling faces.

They gave him ample directions for finding the Modern caravan, and they gave him a tin of mustard and a tin of pepper, which he put in inside pockets to keep them out of sight till he started doing good by stealth.

They watched Clarence Cuffy fading away down the road, and gurgled.

"Of all the sublime asses!" murmured Lovell.

"Jimmy, do you think that howling chump is chump enough to do as you've told him?" gasped Raby.

"My dear man, he's chump enough for anything," answered Jimmy Silver. "He will do it like a bird!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classical caravanners resumed their march with many chuckles.

Their only regret was that they would not be present at the Modern camp when Clarence Cuffy was doing good by stealth.

CHAPTER 15.

Cuffy Makes Himself Useful!

"YE gods! He's found us!"

"Oh, what luck!"

"Howly smoke!"

Three merry Moderns looked a little

less cheery as they glanced back along the road at the cyclist who was pumping after them.

It was Cuffy of the Fourth.

The three Tommies had not exactly been trying to elude Cuffy.

Tommy's Uncle Dodd had wished his old friend's son to join the caravanners, and Tommy did not like to say no, though he viewed with dismay the addition to the party.

Tommy Dodd certainly had hoped that Clarence would miss the Modern caravan, and trek home to Gander's Green.

Probably Clarence would have done so, but for the kind directions he had received from Jimmy Silver.

But here he was now, as large as life, and his face beamed with satisfaction as he overtook the Modern van.

Naturally, he ran into Tommy Dodd as he stopped, and bowled him over, and when he jumped off his bike he landed on Cook's feet.

It would not have been Clarence Cuffy if he had not done those things, or something like them.

Then he stood panting for breath.

"My dear, dear fellows, I'm so glad I've found you!" gasped Clarence.

"Yow-ow-ow!" said Cook.

"Is anything the matter, my dear friend?"

"Yoop! You've squashed my toes, you thumping ass!" groaned Tommy Cook.

"I'm so sorry! I hope my front wheel did not hurt you, Dodd?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "It was nice and pleasant. I like being run into by a bike."

"I am so glad," said Cuffy simply.

"Oh, you—you—you—I—I mean, I'm glad to see you, Cuffy!" said Tommy Dodd manfully. "Wheel your bike for a bit; we're stopping soon. Don't wheel it into the horse, fathead!"

"I really did not mean——"

"Well, don't do it without meaning it. And not into me, either!" roared Tommy.

"I am so sorry!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Clarence Cuffy got his machine under control at last, and wheeled it on with the caravan.

Dusk was falling, and the Moderns were close upon the spot they had selected for camping.

It was an open common, near a stream, and an excellent spot.

The caravan rumbled off the road, and the horse was taken out.

Tommy Dodd tethered him to a peg a short distance from the caravan, a proceeding that Cuffy watched with a gentle smile.

He had his own views about disposing of the horse, owing to the valuable tip he had received from Jimmy Silver on the subject.

He did not mention that to Tommy Dodd, partly because he wanted to surprise Tommy with his thoughtfulness, and partly because Tommy was so dreadfully argumentative, and had always expressed the most undisguised scorn for any ideas that emanated from Clarence Cuffy.

The afternoon's march had made the Modern juniors hungry, and they were very quick in gathering brushwood for the camp fire.

There were materials for a gorgeous stew in the van, and the pot was soon set up over the fire on three sticks, gipsy fashion.

While the three Tommies attended to the evening stew, Clarence Cuffy explored the van.

He found the big tin can of milk, and in the privacy of the van he mixed the mustard in it, as he had been instructed by Jimmy Silver.

He had just finished when Tommy Dodd shouted to him.

"Bring out the milkcan, Cuffy."

"Certainly, my dear Thomas."

"Get the tin cups, too," said Cook.

"You can't break them."

"My dear Cook, I had no intention of breaking—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, this milk looks a bit queer," said Tommy Doyle, as he dipped in his tin cup. "Ought to have boiled it, I think."

"All serene; it hasn't turned," said Tommy Dodd.

"It cannot, my dear friends," smiled Clarence Cuffy.

"Eh? It could, I suppose, in this hot weather," said Dodd. "Still, it hasn't."

The juniors were thirsty after their march, and milk was a grateful and comforting beverage.

But that milk did not prove to be either grateful or comforting.

Tommy Dodd filled his cup and drank heartily, and half the milk was down his throat before he discovered that it had a remarkable flavour.

Then he stopped suddenly.

The expression on Tommy Dodd's face was extraordinary. His remark was:

"Gruggggg!"

"Ooooch!" came from Tommy Cook.

"Woooop!" howled Doyle.

"What's the matter with it?"

"Grooogh!"

The three Moderns coughed violently.

"It—it—groogh!—tastes like—ooch!—mustard!" gurgled Tommy Dodd. "Has any silly ass been spilling mustard in it?"

"My dear Thomas—"

"Have you spilt mustard in the milk, Cuffy?" shrieked Cook.

"My dear Cook—"

"Kill him, somebody!" howled Tommy Doyle. "Yaroooh! It's poisoned I am intirely! My throat's burning! Ooooch!"

"Groooch!"

"Woooff!"

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Cuffy. "My dear friends—"

Tommy Dodd seized him by the throat.

"Have you spilt mustard in the milk?" he shrieked.

"You-ow! You are hurting my neck,

Thomas. I put the mustard in the milk."

"You put it in?"

"Yes, to preserve it!"

"Pip-pip-pip-preserve it!"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas."

"Groooch!"

"Yurgggg!"

"Kill him!" moaned Tommy Doyle. "Kill him intirely! What's he doin' outside a lunatic asylum? Oh! Ow! Wow!"

Tommy Dodd was nearly weeping.

He had had a good deal of the mustard which Clarence had so thoughtfully placed in the milk.

"Perhaps I have put it in a little too strong," said Clarence in distress. "I am really sorry— Yaroooooh!"

Three exasperated youths seized Clarence at once, and bumped him on the common.

They bumped him once, they bumped him twice, they bumped him thrice.

It was no use talking to Clarence; actions were needed, not words, and they gave him action.

Clarence Cuffy sat in the grass, gasping, when they had finished.

The three Tommies rushed down to the stream to wash out their tingling mouths.

Cuffy staggered to his feet.

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "Goodness gracious! Oh, goodness! I am sure Tommy's Uncle Dodd would be shocked at this! My dear papa would be horrified! Ow! I fear that I shall not enjoy caravanning with Thomas! Ow!"

There was a sound of gurgling from the stream.

Clarence recovered from the bumping before the three Tommies recovered from the mustard.

He was a little hurt, but he was not repentful. He was still prepared to do good to his comrades.

And while the juniors were occupied at the stream, he had his opportunity to help with the stew.

The big pot was simmering over the fire, with all kinds of vegetables floating in it, and Clarence cheerfully poured in the large bottle of quinine, and stirred it industriously.

He was stirring away when Tommy Dodd & Co. came back.

"Oh, you're trying to be useful, anyway," said Tommy Dodd.

"Certainly, my dear Thomas."

"What's that blessed taste?" Tommy Dodd tasted the stew, and sniffed. A dreadful suspicion smote Tommy Dodd. "You—you—you frabjous villain, have you been putting anything in the stew?"

"Only the quinine, my dear Thomas," replied Cuffy innocently.

"The—the what?" asked Tommy faintly.

"Merely the quinine."

"Great Julius Caesar! You—you—you've put quinine in the stew?"

"Is not quinine a necessary ingredient in an Irish stew, my dear Thomas?"

The three Tommies fixed their eyes upon Clarence Cuffy, with looks that would have put Von Tirpitz to the blush.

"Quinine in the stew!" stuttered Cook. "Where did you get it?"

"I brought it with me on purpose, my dear fellow," beamed Clarence. "I have put in half a pint. Do you think that sufficient?"

Tommy Cook's reply was extraordinary.

It took the form of rushing upon Clarence Cuffy and smiting him hip and thigh.

Clarence rolled in the grass in a dazed condition.

"Mum-mum-my dear fellow!" he spluttered. "What—what—"

"Pour the stew over him!" shrieked Doyle.

"Good! Lend a hand."

The stew was boiling, quinine and all. Clarence Cuffy leaped to his feet, and ran for his life.

CHAPTER 16.

Clarence is Tod Good!

WHY Tommy Dodd & Co. were angry Clarence Cuffy did not know.

He was sure that he had done his best.

Certainly he had carried out exactly the instructions he had received from Jimmy Silver, and what could he do more than that?

But neither the mustard in the milk, nor the ammoniated quinine in the stew, had pleased the Modern juniors.

Cuffy did not know why they were wild, but even Cuffy realised that they were wild, and that he had better keep away for a time.

He wandered sadly for a good hour before he ventured near the Modern camp again.

He found the three Tommies seated round the camp-fire, finishing a supper of things from tins.

Tommy Doyle shook a fist at him, and Cuffy decided not to join the circle round the fire.

Besides, he had other matters to attend to.

The beds in the caravan had not yet been treated with pepper as a disinfectant, and Cuffy remembered how solemnly Jimmy Silver had impressed upon him the necessity for that.

He disappeared into the caravan.

Some time later Tommy Dodd called out to him.

Tommy charitably remembered that Cuffy couldn't help being a dummy, and he was disposed to forgive him.

"What are you up to, Cuffy?" he called out.

"Getting the beds ready, Thomas?" replied Clarence cheerfully.

"Oh, good! You'd better come and have some supper."

"Thank you, my dear Thomas, I will finish the beds first."

"Buck up, then! We've got to get the fire out before we turn in," said Tommy Dodd.

Clarence joined the three Moderns a little later, and they sniffed as he came up.

There was a scent of pepper about Clarence.

The duffer of Rookwood sat down to sardines and war-bread for his supper; the unfortunate Irish stew had disappeared.

"Two in the van, one in the tent with Cuffy," said Tommy Dodd, yawning. "Let's get the tent up."

The tent was erected while Cuffy was finishing his sardines, the three Tommies sternly declining his aid.

Dodd and Doyle were to sleep in the caravan, leaving the tent to the other two.

As Tommy Dodd shook out his bed he gave a sudden, convulsive jump.

"Wha-a-at — atchoo! — atchoo! — atchoo!"

"Atchoo!" came from Doyle. "Howly mother av Moses! Chew-chew-atchoo!"

There was a formidable outbreak of sneezing in the Modern caravan.

Cook came up the steps.

"What's the matter there?" he called out.

"Atchoo—atchoo-atchoo!"

"Caught a cold?" asked Cook in wonder.

"Atchoo-atchooooh!"

"My hat!"

Tommy Cook climbed into the van, and then he joined in the chorus of sneezes, as he caught a whiff of the pepper Clarence had used with so liberal a hand.

Clarence, remembering Jimmy Silver's instructions, had not spared the pepper; he had been very generous with it.

There was enough, and to spare.

It had risen in clouds in the caravan as the beds were shaken out, and the three Tommies sneezed and coughed, and coughed and sneezed, as if for a wager.

In a frantic state of sneezing, with tears streaming from their smarting eyes, they leaped out of the caravan.

Clarence Cuffy surveyed them in consternation.

"My dear friends——" he began.

"Atchoo—atchoo!"

"Oh, howly smoke! Grooh—at-chooooh!"

"I sincerely hope there was not, too much pepper!" exclaimed Clarence in distress. "My dear Thomas——"

Tommy Dodd sat up in the grass, feebly.

He was still sneezing, and he had sneezed till he felt that his nose had parted company with the rest of his features.

"You — you — you ——" moaned Tommy. "Did you put pepper in our beds, you mad villain?"

"Certainly, dear Thomas!"

"You—you did!" spluttered Cook.

"Yes," beamed Clarence. "I am sincerely sorry that you have had an attack of sneezing, my dear schoolfellows; but at all events you are safe—quite safe—from the collywobblers."

"The—atchoo!—the what?"

"Collywobblers, my dear Thomas."

"Collywobblers!" moaned Doyle. "Faith, and I'll give yez collywobblers!"

He staggered to his feet and started for Cuffy.

But an explosive sneeze caught him, and he had to stop.

"Grooh! Atchoo-choo-chooooh!"

The unfortunate Modern was fairly doubled up.

Clarence himself began to sneeze a little, catching a whiff of the pepper from the Tommies.

For some minutes nothing was heard on the common but the incessant sound of sneezing and snoring.

Tommy Dodd found his voice at last.

"This must be a jape!" he said weakly. "Even Cuffy couldn't be idiot enough to do that simply out of idiocy! Shove him in the van, and let him have the pepper! We three'll stick to the tent."

"My dear friends—— Oh dear!"

Clarence Cuffy was grasped by the three Moderns and pitched headlong into the caravan, the door being slammed on him.

He landed on a bed that was thick with pepper, and that cheery condiment rose round him in a cloud.

"Atchoo—atchoo—atchoo!"

The anguished sneezing from the van was music to the ears of the three Tommies outside.

Weeping with pepper, the Tommies turned in in the tent, leaving Cuffy to dispose himself for the night as he thought fit.

Cuffy opened the door of the van and rolled out, sneezing.

He lay in the grass and sneezed for a full quarter of an hour before he was able to get on his feet.

Then he approached the tent where Tommy Dodd & Co., having given up sneezing at last, were settling down to sleep.

"My dear friends," said Cuffy, blinking into the tent. "I fear that it is impossible to sleep in the van, owing to the thorough manner in which I have disinfected it. Have you any objection to my sharing this tent—— Yaroooooh!"

Crash!

A boot smote Clarence Cuffy on the chest, and he sat down suddenly.

"Yaroooh! Oh, dear! My dear Thomas——"

"Do you want the other?" came Tommy Dodd's sulphurous voice. "If you do, put your silly nose in this tent again!"

"Ow! I don't want the other! Yow-ow!"

Cuffy quitted the spot in haste.

Really, Thomas' temper seemed very unreliable that evening.

The caravan was quite uninhabitable till the pepper cleared off.

Clarence Cuffy had to camp out for the night in a coat and a rug.

But this was fortunate in one way, as he did not sleep very soundly; and after all was silent in the tent he was able to

rise and carry out Jimmy Silver's instructions with regard to the horse, after which he returned to his rug and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER 17.

Black Ingratitude!

TOMMY DODD & Co. had recovered their good-humour by the morning.

They had gone to bed feeling inclined to slaughter Clarence Cuffy, but in the sunny morning light they felt that they could forgive him.

They came out of the tent and found Clarence asleep, and Tommy genially awoke him with a dig in the ribs from his boot.

"Yow-ow!" said Cuffy, as he sat up.

"Time to get up, slacker!" said Tommy Dodd. "Lend a hand in getting sticks for the fire. Hallo!" Tommy Dodd noticed that the caravan horse was not in sight. "Where's the gee-gee?"

"Sure, it's a gossoon ye are, Tommy!" said Doyle. "You've let him loose!"

"I tethered him safely enough last night!" said Dodd warmly.

"Rats! He's got away!"

"That's jolly queer."

Tommy Dodd ran to the peg to which the horse had been tethered.

The rope was gone along with the horse, so it had evidently been untied.

"He's been let loose!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Sure, some thafe of the worruld has come along while we've been asiape!" said Doyle in dismay.

Tommy Dodd fixed his eyes upon Clarence Cuffy.

"Cuffy!" he rapped out.

"Yes, my dear Thomas."

"Have you let the horse loose?"

"Cuffy!" yelled Cook. "Of course! That potty chump——"

"There is nothing potty, as you term it, in kindness to animals, Cook," said Clarence Cuffy reprovingly. "Certainly,

my dear Thomas, I let the horse loose, as you had forgotten to do so."

"Forgotten!" yelled Tommy.

"Yes. It is my aim to repair such thoughtless omissions on your part, my dear Thomas," said Cuffy, with a beaming smile. "I have given the horse plenty of room to roam."

"You—you—you mad idiot!" stuttered Tommy Dodd. "And how're we to get him back? He may be miles away now."

Cuffy looked thoughtful.

"I did not think of that, my dear Thomas. Jimmy Silver did not mention that."

Tommy Dodd jumped.

"Jimmy Silver!"

"Yes, my dear Thomas," said Cuffy, with an effusive smile. "I will tell you now that I met Jimmy Silver on the road yesterday, and he gave me directions how to find you. And he very kindly gave me tips, from his experience as a caravanner, about preserving the milk——"

"Eh?"

"And improving the stew——"

"What?"

"And disinfecting the beds with pepper——"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And letting the horse loose, if you should be so careless as to leave him tied up," said Clarence brightly.

"Oh!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Jimmy Silver!" stuttered Cook.

"Yes; he said you had done him a good turn, and he owed you one, and might be able to reward you through me," said Clarence. "Was it not kind of dear James, Thomas?"

Dear Thomas could not reply; his feelings—perhaps of gratitude—were too deep for words.

"What a very pleasant thought of dear James that I should tell you this in the morning as a happy surprise!" said Clarence, beaming. "He said he was sorry he would not be here for you to thank him personally, my dear Thomas."

Still Tommy Dodd did not speak.

He seemed to be able only to gaze fixedly at the ineffable Clarence.

Doyle gazed round wildly for a weapon.

"Where's the chopper?" he gasped. "Sure I'm going to slaughter him intirely!"

"I hope you are not angry, my dear Thomas."

"Scalp him!" shrieked Cook.

He rushed at Clarence Cuffy and got his head into chancery.

He felt that that was the least he could do.

Frantic yells rose from the unhappy Clarence.

"Yoop! Yah! Yarcoh! Help! Oh, dear! Yoop! Goodness gracious! Yah! What ever are you—yarcoh!—thumping me for, my dear—yoop!—Thomas?"

"That's for the mustard!" roared Tommy Cook, with a terrific thump. "And that's for the pepper! That's for the quinine! And that's for letting the hoss go! And that's for being taken in by Jimmy Silver! And that's for being a silly chump! And that's for being a howling idiot! And that's for being a potty lunatic! And that's—"

Tommy Dodd dragged his excited chum off.

Clarence Cuffy dabbed his nose, and blinked at the Moderns, and gasped.

Cuffy was a forgiving youth; he was full of all the virtues. But he was roused to wrath at last.

"Yow-ow-ow! My nose! Oh, dear! Thomas, I am sorry—groogh!—to leave you—yow!—but I refuse—mmmmmm!—to remain with you—you—ow—wow!—any longer! I will not—groogh!—be treated in this—yow-ow!—manner! Wow!"

Clarence Cuffy meant it. For once he was wrathy.

He dragged out his bicycle, mounted it, and pedalled away without another word of farewell, and the three Tommies gazed after him, thinking it was too good to be true.

But it was true, and Clarence Cuffy was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream.

And during the next three hours, while they were hunting for the elusive caravan horse, perhaps it was just as well for the ineffable Clarence that he was gone!

"Hallo!"

"Cuffy, by Jove!"

The Classical caravan was on the road that sunny morning, when a cyclist came pedalling out of a side lane and nearly ran into the caravan.

Jimmy Silver & Co. recognised Clarence Cuffy.

"Hallo! Not left the Moderns?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, dear! Yes," gasped Cuffy. "I did everything you told me, my dear James; and, instead of being grateful, or even commonly civil, they—they— Oh, dear! I have been assaulted and battered, my dear James! I have actually been smitten with violence upon the nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughing matter, my dear fellows!" said Clarence warmly.

"Sorry—ha, ha!—not at all— Ha, ha!"

"The extreme roughness of Thomas and his friends, my dear James, contrasted very painfully with the kindness I experienced with you," said Cuffy. "This is a most fortunate meeting. I have lost my way; but it does not matter now. I will go caravanning with you instead of Thomas."

"Wha-a-at?"

The Fistical Four left off laughing suddenly.

"How very fortunate I met you!" exclaimed Clarence, falling into line with the Classical caravanners, and wheeling his bike cheerfully. "I am sure I shall enjoy the tour in your company, my dear James. How very, very pleasant for us to be together for the holiday, don't you think so, my dear James?"

James did not reply.

He couldn't!

CHAPTER 19.

A Very, Very Painful Parting!

"JIMMY, you ass!"
 "Jimmy, you fathead!"
 "Jimmy, you chump!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome all spoke together.

The caravan stood in the grass of the common, and Robinson Crusoe, the horse, was cropping away industriously.

Jimmy Silver was seated in what a novelist would call an attitude of un-studied grace—his legs stretched out in the grass, his back supported against a rather dusty wheel, his straw hat on the back of his head.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were standing, their eyes fixed on him in exasperation.

Tubby Muffin nodded assent to Lovell & Co.'s remarks, but he did not speak, as his jaws were otherwise engaged.

A bag of apples had recently been purchased at a farm, and Tubby was apparently trying to get to the bottom of the bag in the shortest possible space of time.

In the distance Clarence Cuffy, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, could be seen. He was gone to the stream for water.

He was out of hearing of the Classical juniors, and the Co. had taken that opportunity of telling Jimmy Silver what they thought of him.

"Of all the crass idiots!" Arthur Edward Lovell said reflectively. "Of all the howling, burbling, frabjous jabberwocks!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Jimmy Silver defensively. "It wasn't my fault that Cuffy joined us."

"He's been with us twenty-four hours, and he's broken nearly all the crocks in the van, he's nearly set fire to the tent, he's upset all the milk twice, and spilt paraffin on the cheese, and—and——"

"I know he's an awful duffer," said Jimmy.

"And the worst of all, he's bored us all to death," groaned Lovell. "He

never leaves off talking, and he talks pink piffle, and you oughtn't to have planted him on us, you shrieking ass!"

"I didn't! Only—only I put him up to japing the Moderns, and they kicked him out, so we were bound to take him in," said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't see it."

"Noblesse oblige, old chap."

"Noblesse o'rats," said Raby.

"He's a good chap," said Jimmy Silver. "Ha can't help being a duffer and a bore. He's gone to fill the water-jug now, like a good chap."

"Bet you he'll bust the jug."

Jimmy grinned.

"He can't! It's a tin jug."

"Then he'll lose it in the stream."

Lovell's words were prophetic.

Clarence Cuffy came back towards the camp, and the Classical juniors noted at once that he came back empty-handed.

"Where's the jug?" asked Newcome.

"I am so very, very sorry," said Cuffy.

"It slipped from my hand, and lies now at the bottom of the stream. Was it not unfortunate?"

"That's our last big jug," said Lovell, in tones of tragic resignation. "Cuffy broke the other. We shall have to fetch water in tea-cups after this."

"Cuffy hasn't broke all the tea-cups yet," remarked Raby, by way of consolation.

"Not quite all," said Lovell. "There's enough to last him over to-morrow."

"My dear friends——" said Cuffy.

Lovell groaned.

That was Cuffy's way of speaking.

"My dear Lovell, are you in pain?" asked Cuffy, with great concern.

"Yes, awful," grunted Lovell.

"My dear fellow, I am so very, very sorry," said Cuffy. "Perhaps I can be of assistance to you, Lovell. If you are ill, I would nurse you."

"Thanks! I'm not tired of life."

"My dear Arthur——"

"Br-r-r!" said Lovell.

Clarence Cuffy turned to Jimmy Silver again.

"My dear James," he said, "I have been reflecting. I have now been with you twenty-four hours, and it has been very enjoyable—has it not, my dear friends?"

"Ripping!" said Raby, with a deep sarcasm that was quite lost on Clarence Cuffy.

"Topping!" said Newcome.

"Simply terrific!" gasped Lovell.

Cuffy beamed.

"I'm so very, very glad to hear you say so, my dear fellows," he exclaimed. "It is very flattering to me, but it is also very gratifying to learn that you find my society so agreeable. My dear papa would be so pleased!"

"I wonder your pater can spare you from home, Cuffy: you're—you're so nice," said Lovell. "If—if you feel that you ought to be with him, d-d-don't mind us. We—we should miss you, but—but—"

"But we should bear it," said Raby.

Cuffy shook his head.

"I left home for a caravan tour," he answered. "My dear papa does not expect me back yet."

"Why not give him a pleasant surprise?" suggested Newcome.

Cuffy shook his head.

"I have been reflecting," he said.

"I parted from dear Thomas Dodd in anger. I had been smitten with violence upon the nose, and I regret to say that it made me very, very angry. But since I have reflected, I have quite forgiven dear Thomas. I can make allowances for him. My dear fellows, I fear that what I am about to say may be a shock to you."

Cuffy paused, as if to soften the blow.

The Classical juniors of Rockwood gazed at him curiously.

They could not guess what in the world Clarence Cuffy was driving at.

"We have been so happy together," said Cuffy, beaming on them. "It would be so very, very pleasant for us to pass the remainder of the vacation together, would it not, employing all our leisure moments in serious and improving conversation?"

"Oh, topping!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "But—my dear friends—I fear—" Cuffy paused again, breaking it gently. "I fear that it is my duty to assure Tommy Dodd of my forgiveness."

"Eh?"

"And prove to him that I do not bear malice—"

"What?"

"By rejoining his party," said Cuffy. "Such is the result of my somewhat serious and prolonged reflections, my dear friends."

The Classical juniors gazed at him. They could hardly believe their ears.

Cuffy met their glances sadly.

"I am so very, very sorry to give you this painful shock," he said. "We have been so very, very happy together. But do you not agree with me, my friends, that such is my duty? Can I leave dear Thomas under the impression that I have allowed the sun to go down on my wrath? Can I?"

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed fervently.

"You can't!" said Lovell at once. "It's—its rather a heavy blow, icing you, Cuffy, but—but your duty is clear."

"Clear as mud—I mean daylight," exclaimed Raby. "I—I feel that I shall cry when you go, Cuffy. But then, think of Tommy Dodd's joy when you come back."

"Yes, that will console us," said Newcome.

"I am so glad you agree with me, my dear friends," said Cuffy. "I am very, very sorry to tear myself away. I feel that you will miss me. In my humble way, I have tried to lead your thoughts to a higher plane, and to banish thoughtless frivolity from our happy circle. I feel that you have been more serious since I joined you."

"We have!" groaned Lovell.

"No doubt about that."

"Awfully serious!"

"How very, very kind of you to say so," said Cuffy. "But I feel—I am

convinced—that duty calls me back to dear Thomas."

"It does, said Lovell. "Not a shadow of doubt about that."

"Not the slightest."

"I'll get your bike ready, Cuffy," said Raby.

"You are very, very kind. If you do not object, I will depart this evening, as then I can reach Valley Wood before dark, and I am aware that dear Thomas is camping there to-night," said Cuffy. "Would you mind, my dear friends?"

"Not a bit!"

"Not at all!"

"Give our love to dear Thomas."

"You are quite, quite sure that you are not offended by this somewhat abrupt departure?" asked Clarence anxiously.

"Not in the least, old fellow. We—we don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go," gasped Lovell.

And Clarence Cuffy went, much to the satisfaction of the Classical chums.

CHAPTER 19.

The Only Way!

"THIS is something like!"

Tommy Dodd made that observation in tones of deep contentment.

The sun was setting on the hills, and in the valley the Modern caravanners were camped, within a mile of the farmhouse where they obtained supplies for supper.

They had enjoyed their supper after the day's march, and were taking it easy, resting in the rich grass, and watching the red sunset.

"Beats classes at Rookwood—what?" said Tommy Cook, with a grin.

"Faith, and ye're right," said Tommy Doyle. "I wonder where those Classical asses are now?"

"And Cuffy?" said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose poor old Cuffy's gone home. I really wish his nose hadn't been punched so hard."

"The howling ass! He ought to have been lynched."

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

The ringing of a bicycle bell on the footpath caused the three Tommies of Rookwood to raise their heads and glance round.

A cyclist was bumping along the grassy path towards the camp.

Tommy Dodd's face altered.

"Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia! Cuffy!"

"Cuffy!" said Cook and Doyle, in a breath.

The three Modern juniors watched Cuffy as if fascinated as he came up and jumped off his bicycle.

Clarence beamed upon them.

"Here I am, my dear friends," he said.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" ejaculated Tommy Dodd.

"My dear, dear friends, I sincerely hope that you did not suppose I was still angry with you," said Clarence.

"I have forgiven you from the bottom of my heart. I felt that I had done wrong in leaving you, dear Thomas. That is why I have returned. I am sure you are very, very glad to see me."

"Oh, begorra!"

"I—I thought you'd gone home!" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"I fell in with the Classical fellows, Thomas, and have remained with them until this evening. They fully agreed that I ought to come back to you," said Clarence, beaming.

"I'll bet they did!" muttered Tommy Cook.

"I felt that I must," continued Clarence. "Your Uncle Dodd, my dear Thomas, would have been so disappointed to hear that I was not spending the holiday with you. It might also have pained my dear papa. Was it not fortunate that I remembered your intention of camping here this evening?"

"Awfully!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

The three Moderns looked at the ineffable Clarence.

There were certain considerations of politeness to be observed, and, moreover, Tommy's kind uncle, Mr. Dodd,

wanted his old friend's son to spend the vacation caravanning with the three Moderns, and Tommy Dodd had not liked to refuse.

But Clarence Cuffy was a heavy trial.

He was far from realising that, however.

In the simplicity of his heart Cuffy was assured that he spread pleasure and contentment wherever he went.

Tommy Dodd looked resigned to his fate, but Cook and Doyle had rebellious expressions.

They felt like Jimmy Silver's chums, and were not inclined to stand Clarence for any length of time.

They did not want to hurt his feelings, but they wanted him to go home. He really was not suitable for caravanning.

Leaving Clarence to rest after his ride, the three Tommies took a stroll down the valley.

"It's too bad," said Tommy Dodd, when they were out of hearing of Cuffy. "The ass means well, but he's an awful worry. Uncle Dodd wouldn't understand that, though."

"I've got an idea," said Cook.

"Well?"

"I'm going to have botulism."

"Whatter?"

"Botulism," said Cook.

"What on earth's that?"

"It's the new fashionable disease. It's the thing you die of nowadays, if you're really up-to-date," said Tommy Cook. "Look here, I'm going to have a bad attack of botulism, and get a rash over my face—I can work that—and Clarence can be scared off. He's awfully afraid of catching things. He thinks he's got a cold whenever the wind blows."

Doyle chuckled.

"Faith, it's a janius ye are, Cooky!" he said. "We'll help ye back to camp now, and scare Clarence out of his wits, if he's got any."

"Good man!" said Tommy Dodd, with a grin. "How are you going to get a rash, though?"

"Easy enough. A bit of rubbing will do it."

"Do botulists have rashes?" asked Doyle.

"I don't know. But Clarence doesn't, either, so it doesn't matter."

Tommy Cook began to rub his cheek with great vigour. It was soon red with rubbing.

"That'll fade out," remarked Doyle. "Sure, you'd better let me rub it hard with a rough stone, and it will last."

"You silly ass!"

"Sure, isn't that a good idea intirely?"

"Fathead!"

"Well, if you don't want to do it properly, Tommy Cook——"

"Ass!"

Evidently Cook was not amenable to reason on that point.

"That'll do," he said. "I'll give it a rub every now and then to keep it red. Now you fellows help me back to camp, and I'll begin to groan as soon as Cuffy can hear me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies returned to camp, Cook walking between his comrades, limping along with their assistance.

Clarence Cuffy jumped up, with an expression of great concern, as Tommy Cook's first groan fell upon his ears.

"My dear Thomas, are you hurt?" he exclaimed.

Groan!

"My dear Thomas——"

Groan!

Tommy Cook sank down in the grass, groaning dismally, and Clarence Cuffy gazed at him in deep sympathy and dismay.

CHAPTER 20.

A Sudden Recovery!

GROAN!

"My dear, dear Thomas, are you in pain?" exclaimed Clarence.

Groan!

"Keep away from him, Cuffy!" exclaimed Dodd anxiously. "Botulism is jolly dangerous!"

Cuffy jumped back.

"Botulism!" he ejaculated.

"It's an awful thing!" said Tommy Dodd. "I'm afraid poor old Cook is done for. But you needn't catch it."

"Goodness gracious!"

Tommy Cook groaned deeply.

"Help me into the van," he said faintly. "Cuffy can stay with me to-night and look after me, you fellows. I don't want you to run any risks."

"Oh, dear!" said Clarence.

Tommy Cook rubbed his cheek, making it a deeper red.

"Is there a pain there, my poor, poor friend?" asked Cuffy.

"Can't you see it's a rash?"

"Oh, dear! What a very, very awful occurrence, my dear friends!" said Cuffy in great distress. "You are very, very young to die, my dear Cook. Dodd had better go for a doctor while I remain with you."

Groan!

"How very, very fortunate that I have one of my dear papa's tracts in my pocket," said Cuffy. "I will read it to you now, Cook. It is very, very suitable at the present terrible moment."

Groan!

"We can't get a doctor before morning," said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you don't mind staying in the caravan with poor old Cook, Cuffy? If you catch it, the doctor can attend to both of you at the same time."

"Bb-b-but I do not want to catch b-b-botulism, Dodd!" ejaculated Clarence.

"I suppose you don't want me to catch it!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd warmly.

"Nunno! But——"

"Sure it's for poor old Cook to say," remarked Doyle. "Which would you prefer to stay with you to-night, Cook?"

"Cuffy!" said Cook faintly. "He's sure to catch it, I'm afraid; but Cuffy is so good, he won't mind. You don't mind dying if I do, do you, Cuffy?"

"Oh, dear!"

"You couldn't die in better company, Cooky!" said Tommy Dodd heartily.

"Help him into the van, Cuffy. We'd better not touch him again."

Clarence Cuffy stood rooted to the ground.

His face was a study.

Clarence was rather given to fancying that he was ill, and the word botulism had a terribly sinister sound.

What botulism might be Clarence did not know any more than the three Tommies did, but he knew it was something distinctly unpleasant.

"Of course, if Cuffy would rather clear off and avoid infection——" said Tommy Doyle gravely.

"Yes, he has a right to if he chooses," agreed Dodd.

"Oh, dear!" said Cuffy. "I—I—I am not in the least afraid, my dear friends," but—but I cannot help thinking what a terrible grief it would be to my dear papa if anything should happen to me."

"You're bound to consider that," agreed Doyle.

"Yet I cannot desert poor Cook in this fearful extremity."

"Don't mind me!" groaned Tommy Cook. "You're bound to think of your dear papa first, Cuffy. Perhaps you'd better go."

"If—if you will not regard this as a desertion, my dear friends——" said Cuffy in great distress.

"Not at all, old fellow!"

"Then—then—then——"

Cuffy hesitated.

His terror of that terrific disease, botulism, was evidently great, but his sense of duty was struggling with it.

Tommy Dodd rushed to bring his bike.

"Better clear off before you get it, Cuffy!" he exclaimed. "I say, there's a pink spot on your cheek. Do you feel any pain?"

Cuffy gave a gasp.

"Is—is that a symptom, my dear Thomas?" he gasped.

"Well, it may or may not be," said Tommy Dodd cautiously. "But the safest thing is for you to get back to Gander's Green as quickly as possible and consult the family doctor."

"You—you really think so, Thomas?"

"Well, that's my advice."

Clarence Cuffy climbed on his bike, which Tommy obligingly held for him.

Tommy Dodd started him with a shove, and Cuffy went pedalling down the footpath.

Tommy Cook sat up, grinning. He did not look like a victim of botulism now.

"My hat! He's really gone!" he breathed.

"Look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In great glee the three Tommies watched Clarence Cuffy growing smaller and smaller in the distance.

He had almost disappeared from sight when they observed the bicycle wheel round.

To their consternation, Cuffy came pedalling back towards the camp.

Three faces fell lugubriously.

"Wha-at's he coming back for?" stut-tered Cook.

"Forgotten something, perhaps; the chump's always forgetting something! Be ill again, quick!" muttered Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Cook sank back into the grass and rubbed his cheek to reproduce the fatal rash.

Puffing and blowing with his exertions, Clarence Cuffy came pedalling up once more, and clumped down from his bicycle.

"Forgotten something?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"No!" gasped Cuffy.

"Then what——"

"My dear Thomas, did you think that I could really desert poor Cook in this extremity?" panted Cuffy. "Never!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Even for the sake of my dear papa, I cannot desert the poor fellow!" said Clarence firmly. "I shall remain with you."

"Oh!"

"And nurse poor, dear Cook at any risk to my own health," said Clarence heroically. "I am ashamed of the momentary impulse to seek my own immunity from this terrible disease, my

dear fellows, I am prepared to remain with poor Cook to the very, very end."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You shall go for a doctor, Thomas, while I look after Cook. I will never, never leave him!" said Clarence.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Tommy Cook sat up in the grass.

His look did not express gratitude for the devoted kindness of Clarence Cuffy.

Evidently it was no use being ill any longer, and Cook had decided that it was time to recover.

He had no further use for botulism.

"Are you feeling better, my dear friend?" asked Cuffy anxiously.

"Oh, I'm all right!" growled Cook, rising to his feet. "Tain't botulism, after all."

"Are you quite, quite sure?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Then we have been alarmed for nothing," said Clarence, in great relief. "I am so very, very glad! But it would be much, much better to see a medical man and make quite sure, my dear friend. I will walk with you to the nearest——"

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Cook crossly.

"My dear Thomas——"

"Bow-wow! Time to turn in, you fellows," said Cook. "Let's get the tent up."

"But, my dear Thomas——"

Cuffy was not heeded.

The tent was erected, and the three Tommies turned in, and Clarence Cuffy followed their example, considerably puzzled by Tommy Cook's rapid recovery from his illness.

CHAPTER 21.

Stranded!

LOOK after the van and the horse, Cuffy!"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas!"

"We'll be back under the hour."

It was morning, bright and sunny, and the Modern caravanners had turned out in cheery spirits.

Even Cuffy did not seem so much of an infliction that sunny morning.

The three Tommies started for the farmhouse, a mile away up the valley, out of sight from the camp.

They carried a big can and a bag and a basket, in the hope of obtaining supplies of milk and eggs and bread.

Cuffy, duffer as he was, was supposed to be able to keep watch at the camp while they were gone.

Clarence wanted to be useful, and as soon as his comrades had departed he proceeded to gather materials for the morning fire.

When he returned to the camp, with his arms full of brushwood, he found that it was not untenanted.

Two rough-looking fellows were standing there, surveying the caravan and the horse, and looking about them curiously.

They turned and stared at Cuffy as he came up.

"Good-morning!" said Cuffy brightly.

The two tramps blinked at him.

"This 'ere turn-out belong to you, sir?" asked one of them, a burly fellow with a black patch over one eye.

"To me and my friends," answered Cuffy.

The two men exchanged glances.

"Oh, there's some more of you, hay?" said the one-eyed man.

"Yes, my friends have gone up to the farmhouse," said Cuffy.

"Jest coming back, I dessay?"

"Oh, no; they will probably be absent nearly an hour!" answered Cuffy innocently. "I think the farmhouse is a mile away."

"Oh! You're all alone 'ere, then?"

"Quite alone, my friend," said Clarence unsuspectingly.

The two men exchanged glances again.

Anybody but Clarence Cuffy would have seen that they were a pair of tramps of a particularly unpleasant kind, and would have kept a very sharp eye on them.

But Cuffy was not suspicious.

"This 'ere looks all right, Bill," murmured the one-eyed man.

"A bit of all right, and no mistake, Ikey," answered Bill, in the same tone. "Why, we could be miles an' miles away."

"And a fresh coat of paint would make that there van look a bit different," murmured Ikey.

"And we know where to get rid of the 'orse," murmured Bill. "The gipsies we saw yesterday wouldn't ask no questions."

"You're right, oie pal!"

Clarence was piling up the brushwood for the fire while the two tramps were muttering together.

"So them blokes going up to the farmhouse was your friends, sir?" said Ikey, addressing Clarence again.

"Yes," assented Cuffy.

"Then the message they give me is for you, I s'pose," continued Ikey, watching Clarence's simple face intently.

"Did they give you a message for me?" asked Cuffy, with interest.

"They did that. They want you to meet them 'arf way back and 'elp them to carry something," said Ikey. "Come on, Bill; time we was going."

The two tramps slouched off, and disappeared through the trees.

Out of sight of Clarence Cuffy they stopped, and peered back at him under cover.

Their intention was to impress Cuffy with the fact that they were gone, so that he would have no hesitation in leaving the camp unguarded.

But they need not have taken that trouble, for Cuffy had no suspicions.

He started up the path to the farmhouse at once, and in a few minutes he was out of sight.

Ikey indulged in a chuckle.

"That blessed young idjit's gone, Bill!" he murmured. "This is where we come in, I think."

"I think we does," grinned Bill.

The two tramps hurried back to the camp, and in hot haste put the horse to the caravan.

Cuffy's bike was shoved in the van,



"I am sorry to say, dear Thomas," said Ouffy meekly, "that the eggs are broken and I have spilt the milk." The three Tommies looked at Ouffy. It was too much for them. They fell upon him and smote him and bonneted him with the empty milk-can!

and the vehicle led out of the camp to the path down the valley.

Taking the direction opposite to that taken by Cuffy, Ikey and Bill drove off in great spirits.

They came out into the country lane, and turned into another lane, and another, feeling the safer for every turning they placed between their precious selves and the owners of the stolen caravan.

Meanwhile, Clarence Cuffy was tramping contentedly towards the farmhouse. He enjoyed that pleasant morning walk.

He was in sight of the farmhouse when he met Tommy Dodd & Co. on their way back.

Tommy Dodd had the big can full of milk, Cook had the basket of eggs, and Doyle had his bag full of other comestibles.

They had done very well at the farmhouse.

"Hallo, here's Cuffy!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, in surprise. "What have you left the camp for, fathead?"

"I came to help you carry the things, my dear Thomas," answered Clarence.

Tommy Dodd grunted.

"That's all very well, but you ought to have stayed at the camp. It's not safe to leave the van alone."

"But you asked me to come, my dear Thomas!" exclaimed Cuffy, in surprise.

"Eh? I did nothing of the kind!"

"Yes. Your message——"

"My what?"

"Your message," said Cuffy, in bewilderment. "Surely, Thomas, you have not forgotten sending me a message to meet you half-way."

"I never sent you any message!" roared Tommy Dodd. "How could I send you a message when there was nobody to send?"

"Those two men——"

"What two men?"

"The two men at the camp, dear Thomas. They said you had sent me a message to meet you——"

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Tommy

Dodd, in dismay. "What were they like?"

"Somewhat rough in appearance," said Clarence, "but very civil-spoken, I thought. It is possible that they were tramps."

"You—you've let yourself be sent away from the caravan by a couple of tramps!" stuttered Cook.

"But they said——"

Tommy Dodd set down the milk-can.

"They'll have stolen everything they can lay their hands on," he said. "Perhaps the horse, too, and Cuffy's bike—goodness knows! Oh, you idiot! You frabjous dummy! Come on, you chaps!"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Cuffy, in horrified surprise. "Is it possible, my dear Thomas, that those persons have deceived me, with dishonest intentions?"

"Idiot!"

The three Tommies set down their burdens, and, without wasting further words on Cuffy, started for the camp at a run.

They were filled with the darkest forebodings.

Cuffy blinked after them in dismay, and then gathered up the can, the basket, and the bag, and started after them.

Tommy Dodd & Co. ran their hardest. They came in sight of the camp at last.

They expected to find the caravan rifled, and possibly the horse gone.

But no caravan met their gaze. The camp was empty, save for the pile of brushwood Cuffy had gathered.

Horse and van were gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream.

The tramps had made a clean sweep.

"Gone!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"The caravan——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"After them!" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

Up and down and round about the three furious caravanners raged in search of the thieves. But they raged and searched in vain.

The tracks of the van were lost in the

many tracks of the ruddy lane, and there was no clue to the direction taken by the two rascals.

Tired, breathless, and furious, they returned to the spot where the camp had been, in utter dismay.

Clarence Cuffy had arrived there.

"The caravan is not here, my dear Thomas," he said. "Is it possible that those unscrupulous persons have taken it?"

"Dummy!"

"I—I have brought the thing you left on the footpath, dear Thomas," said Cuffy meekly. "I am very, very sorry to say that I have spilt the milk, and that the eggs are broken."

The three Tommies looked at him.

Their breakfast was strewn somewhere along the footpath, and the caravan was gone, and they were hungry and stranded.

It was too much. They fell upon Clarence and smote him, and bonneted him with the empty milk-can.

Then they held a desperate council of war—what time a suffocated and anguished voice proceeded from the interior of the milk-can—a voice they heartlessly refused to heed.

CHAPTER 22.

A Capture from the Enemy.

"MY only summer hat!" Jimmy Silver uttered that exclamation in tones of surprise.

"What's the row?" asked Lovell, looking round from the horse, which he was leading.

The Classical caravan was rumbling on its way through a deep lane in the morning sunshine.

"Those blessed Moderns seem to be haunting us!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"The Moderns!"

"Look there!"

Jimmy Silver pointed.

A short distance ahead of the Classical van a side-lane turned off from the road.

Down that lane came a caravan, rumbling.

It had nearly reached the corner when Jimmy Silver spotted it across the intervening field.

"Tommy Dodd's lot, by Jove!" exclaimed Raby.

"Look here, don't you let Cuffy plant himself on us again, Jimmy Silver!" roared Lovell. "If you begin any more noblesse oblige on us, we'll begin with out boot-leather on you, so you can take that as a tip!"

Jimmy Silver did not answer.

He was walking on beside the Classical van, but his eyes were fixed on the Modern van about to turn into the lane.

He knew Tommy Dodd's van by sight, of course.

It was rather gally painted, and Jimmy Silver would have recognised it half a mile off, and it was now only twenty yards away.

It was the Modern van, but where were the Moderns?

A rough-looking man, with a black patch over his eye, was driving the horse, and another rough fellow sat by him, smoking a pipe.

Nobody else was to be seen about the van.

It was absurd to suppose that the three Tommies and Cuffy were packed inside the closed caravan that warm morning; but if not, they were evidently not with their van at all, and it was entirely in charge of the two rough-looking men.

"What's the matter with you, Jimmy?" asked Lovell, surprised by Jimmy's fixed expression.

"There's something jolly wrong about this," said Jimmy Silver. "Stop those men—get the van in the way! It looks to me as if Tommy Dodd's van has been stolen."

"Great pip!"

But the same thought came to Jimmy's chums as they looked at the two rough men alone in the charge of the Modern van.

They hurried Robinson Crusoe on to

the turning, and reached the corner in time to block the progress of the other caravan.

Ikey and Bill, on Tommy Dodd's van, had to stop.

The Classical van was halted right across the narrow side-lane, and there was no advance to be made, and the lane was too narrow for turning the big vehicle in a hurry; that was an operation that required time and care.

But Ikey and Bill were not thinking of turning the van.

They were not aware that it was known by sight to the caravanners in the road.

"Hi, there!" yelled Ikey wrathfully. "Whatcher blockin' the way for? Let a chap pass, can't yer?"

"Clear the road, blow yer!" exclaimed his companion.

Jimmy Silver ran towards them, his comrades at his heels.

Tubby Muffin prudently remained behind.

He did not like the looks of the two tramps, and thought he would like them still less at close quarters.

"What are you doing with that van?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Ikey gave him a one-eyed glare. "Driving it, ain't I?" he replied.

"Hain't you got any heyes?"

"That van doesn't belong to you."

"Wot do you know about it?"

"I know the chap that caravan belongs to," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I want to know how you come to be driving it, my man."

Ikey gripped his whip. "Are you going to clear the road and let a bloke drive on?" he demanded.

"No fear!"

"Then I'll start on yer!"

Jimmy Silver looked at the ruffian coolly as he gripped the whip and raised it.

"If you use that whip, my man, we'll have you off that van before you can do it twice," he said. "Be careful."

Ikey paused.

The four Rookwood juniors were

rather a handful to tackle, and they looked quite determined.

Ikey lowered the whip. "Well, let a man pass, then," he said sulkily.

"You're not going to pass till we know how you got hold of that caravan. Where are the chaps it belongs to?"

"It's all right, sir, on my davy," said Ikey, civilly now. "The young gents asked me to drive this 'ere van for them. They—they're taking a walk, and they're going to join us at the next town."

Perhaps that was the best yarn Ikey could be expected to spin on the spur of the moment, but naturally the Classical juniors of Rookwood were not inclined to believe it.

It was too highly improbable that Tommy Dodd would have entrusted his caravan to the hands of such exceedingly disreputable persons as the two tramps evidently were.

Lovell grinned. "Is that the best you can do?" he asked.

"I don't know wotcher mean."

"Well, I mean that if you can't make up a better yarn than that you may as well give up trying."

Ikey looked at his comrade.

The two rascals were nonplussed.

"You may as well own up," said Jimmy Silver, as the ruffians did not speak. "You've stolen this caravan."

"Look 'ere!" roared Ikey. "Nuff of this 'ere! You move your van out of the way, and let a chap pass, or I'll soon shift yer. See?"

"You're going to give up that van," answered Jimmy Silver quietly.

"We'll see about that! Come on, Bill!"

Ikey jumped down into the road, grasping his whip, and his comrade jumped after him.

They advanced fiercely upon the Rookwooders.

The two ruffians looked dangerous!

enough, but Jimmy Silver & Co. did not flinch.

"Line up!" said Jimmy quietly.

"Now then, out of the way!" shouted Ikey, and he rushed forward, lashing with the whip.

Jimmy Silver yelled as he got the lash, but Ikey did not have time for another.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth dodged in under the whip, and closed with the one-eyed man.

They struggled fiercely.

"Lend a hand, you fellows!" panted Jimmy.

Raby was springing to his aid, while Lovell and Newcome tackled Bill.

Ikey went down with a crash, with Jimmy Silver and Raby on top of him.

The whip flew from his hand, and Ikey found himself grasped by the ears and his head jammed on the hard road.

He roared with anguish.

"Yow! Leggo! 'Elp! Lend a cove a 'and, Bill! 'Elp!"

But Bill had plenty to do, without helping his comrade.

Lovell and Newcome were pressing him hard, and Bill was retreating before the vigorous attack.

Instead of coming to Ikey's assistance, Bill suddenly made a jump for the hedge, plunged through it, and went fleeing across the fields. Bill evidently had had enough.

Lovell and Newcome, panting, turned to Jimmy's aid.

Ikey's resistance ceased then.

The four juniors collared him, and dragged him to his feet, keeping a tight grip on him.

"Heasy does it, gents!" mumbled Ikey. "No offence, gents! Go heasy with a man! It was only a lark, young gents! 'Pon my davy, it was!"

"You stole that van?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"We—we borrowed it!" gasped Ikey. "Only a joke, sir, on my davy! We wasn't going to sell the contraption to the gipsies, sir—we wasn't, really!"

"Where did you steal it?" demanded Jimmy.

"We—we borrowed it a few miles from 'ere, sir," said Ikey dolefully. "Down the valley, sir—Valley Wood they calls the place. No 'arm done, sir. Never knowed they was friends of yourn, sir, on my davy!"

"The rotter ought to be locked up!" said Newcome.

"He ought to be," said Jimmy Silver. "But it will save time to give him a jolly good Rookwood bumping and kick him out."

"Hear, hear!"

"'Ere, I say, let up! Chuck it!" roared Ikey.

Ikey probably was not conversant with Rookwood customs, and a bumping was a new experience to him.

To judge by the sounds that proceeded from him, it was not a pleasant experience.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Once, twice, thrice, the unhappy Ikey smote the hard road with his frowsy person, and each concussion elicited a fiendish yell.

Then he was pitched into the hedge.

"If you're not gone in a second——" said Jimmy Silver, picking up the whip. But Ikey was gone in a second.

CHAPTER 23.

Jimmy Silver Has an Idea!

"MY dear Thomas——"
"Shut up!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"I sincerely hope you are not cross, Thomas."

"Do you want to be slain, and buried in some quiet spot in this valley, Cuffy?" asked Tommy Dodd, in concentrated tones.

"Goodness gracious! Certainly not!"

"Then shut up!"

Clarence sighed and was silent. The Modern caravanners were not in a good humour.

They were tramping on a dusty road, in very bad tempers, as a matter of fact.

They had held a long council of war at their camping place, but the only decision they could arrive at was that there was nothing doing.

They made what breakfast they could upon the loaf in the bag, which, fortunately, Cuffy had not been able to damage.

Then they started out.

There was nothing to be done but to walk to the nearest town, and there give information of their loss to the police.

And the nearest town was several miles distant.

They came up the footpath and turned into the road, Clarence Cuffy with an expression of patient martyrdom on his face.

Cuffy was, as he would have expressed it, very hurt at the crossness of his companions.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Tommy Dodd looked up crossly as the bicycle-bell rang ahead.

Then he jumped.

"Jimmy Silver!" he exclaimed.

It was the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, mounted upon Clarence Cuffy's bicycle.

He pedalled up, smiling, and jumped down to greet the surprised Moderns.

"That's Cuffy's bike!" exclaimed Cook.

"Goodness gracious, so it is!" said Clarence. "Wherever did you find it, dear James?"

"In the van," answered Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"In our van?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, my infant."

"Then—then—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"It's all serene, Tommy!" he said. "We came on the rotters who bagged your van and got it back for you. I found Cuffy's bike inside the van, so I rot on it, and came back this way to

look for you. Your van's three miles away, so you've got a walk before you."

Tommy Dodd fairly gasped with relief.

"Oh, my hat! I say, Silver, we're awfully obliged!"

"Don't mench, my dear chap!" said Jimmy Silver airily. "It's up to us, as the top side of Rookwood, to help you poor little Moderns out of your scrapes."

To which the three Tommies replied, with one voice:

"Rats!"

A walk of three miles did not hurt the Modern juniors, with their van waiting for them at the end of it.

Tommy Dodd explained en route how the van had been lost, and Jimmy Silver chortled.

"It's all very well to cackle," said Tommy dolefully. "But if you had that born idiot planted on you—I say, would you like to try him again?"

"No jolly fear!" said Jimmy Silver promptly. "Why don't you make him tired of caravanning, same as you did the sergeant, when he was with you?"

Tommy Dodd shook his head sadly.

"We've tried it," he said. "Cook got botulism—"

"Great Scott!"

"And the dutiful beast only decided to stay and nurse him over it!" said Tommy Dodd dismally. "So Cook got well again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled as they walked on.

Having suffered under Clarence himself, he could feel for his old rival of Rookwood, but he could see the humorous side, all the same.

"Hallo! Here's our van!" exclaimed Cook, in great satisfaction.

The two vans were drawn up together beside the road.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned at the Moderns as they came up, and Tubby Muffin emitted a fat chuckle.

"You blessed Moderns are a worry!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We've lost most of this morning waiting about with your blessed van!"

"Much obliged!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, all serene, old scout! Rookwood always backs up Rookwood," said Lovell, laughing. "Here's your van, none the worse for wear. I should advise you to keep it on a chain after this."

The Moderns took possession of their caravan again, with great satisfaction.

The Classical van started up the road.

Jimmy Silver lingered to speak a quiet word in Tommy Dodd's ear, out of hearing of the ineffable Clarence.

"I've got an idea, Tommy," he said.

"You'd like to take Cuffy?" asked Tommy hopefully.

"No fear."

"Then bother your idea! Your blessed Classical ideas ain't worth much!" said Tommy Dodd peevishly. "I—I wonder if it would offend my Uncle Dodd very much if I sent him home by goods train, this side up with care?"

"Ha, ha! But I've really got a wheeze," said Jimmy.

"Well, what is it?"

"Go mad," said Jimmy.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You wouldn't have far to go, you know!"

"Look here, you silly ass——"

"Go mad," repeated Jimmy, in a whisper. "Violent and raving, you know. Cuffy would get fed-up with that. See?"

Tommy Dodd stared at him blankly for some moments. Then he burst into a chuckle.

"What a wheeze!" he murmured.

"Good enough for Cuffy!" said Jimmy Silver. "Ta, ta, old chap!"

Jimmy Silver ran after his comrades, and the Classical van rumbled on out of sight.

Tommy Dodd & Co. breakfasted in the van before they started.

And when the Modern van went on Cuffy was left inside, washing up, while the three Tommies walked with the horse.

While they walked there was a good deal of whispering among the three.

There were subdued chuckles as well as whispers as they discussed the startling wheeze suggested by Jimmy Silver.

"It'll suit you best, Doyle," murmured Tommy Dodd. "Being Irish, you're a bit potty, anyway."

"Why, you silly spalpeen," exclaimed Tommy Doyle, in great wrath, "it's potty ye are yerself intirely. But if you mane that I can do it best——"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean, old scout."

"Then, sure, I'll thry it!"

Clarence put his head out of the van.

"My dear Thomas, I have finished washing up. I am very, very sorry to say that I have somehow broken the bowl——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And it is very, very unfortunate that the water has fallen over your coat, my dear Thomas. Does it matter?"

Tommy Dodd did not reply to that question. Clarence jumped off the van.

"Shall I lead the horse?" he asked.

Doyle looked at him.

"Do ye mane the rhinoceros?" he demanded.

"The—the what, my dear friend?"

"The rhinoceros! Do you mean to say that that's a horse, and not a rhinoceros?" roared Doyle furiously.

Clarence Cuffy stared at him speechlessly. He mechanically put out his hand to lead the horse.

"Kape away!" snapped Doyle. "You don't know how to manage a rhinoceros!"

Cuffy tottered on with the Moderns. He was too astounded to speak. Tommy Doyle was beginning!

CHAPTER 24.

Dangerous!

"WELL camp here!" Tommy Doyle made the announcement suddenly. It was barely noon.

"Not time yet," said Tommy Dodd.

"We camp at sunset," answered Doyle.

"Mum—mum—my dear Doyle, it's many, many hours to sunset," murmured Clarence Cuffy feebly.

"Oh, you're mad, Cuffy!" answered Doyle. "I say it's sunset, and we're not going to wear out the rhinoceros by going any farther."

Dodd and Cook submitted, and the Modern caravanners camped on the edge of a common.

Clarence Cuffy was in such a state of bewilderment that he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He drew Tommy Dodd aside nervously.

"Wha-at is the matter with Doyle, my dear Thomas?" he asked nervously.

Tommy Dodd tapped his forehead.

"Sunstroke?" asked Clarence, in horrified tones.

"Yes."

"Oh, dear!"

"In the family," said Tommy seriously. "Doyle's father and grandfather were as mad as he is. He's not often like this, of course. It's rare—very rare. Don't irritate him. My hat! What is he doing now?"

Clarence glanced round quickly.

Doyle had taken the carving-knife, and was concealing it under his jacket.

"Wha-at is he—he—he going to do with—with that knife, Thomas?" asked Cuffy through his chattering teeth.

"I sincerely hope that he's not going to commit murder with it," said Tommy Dodd, with owl-like gravity. "That would spoil our tour, and no mistake!"

"Hadn't you better t-t-take it away from him, Thomas?"

"You take it away from him, Cuffy."

"I—I—I think perhaps it would be

wiser not to irritate him, Thomas, if he is really insane."

"Mind you don't turn your back on him while he's got that knife!" whispered Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, dear!"

Clarence Cuffy was not likely to turn his back on the mad junior. He eyed him nervously and incessantly.

The caravanners lunched, and Tommy Doyle's actions were certainly most peculiar.

If he was not insane, he looked very much like it.

He held his fork by the prongs instead of the handle, and when Dodd pointed that out to him he insisted that he was using chop-sticks.

He asked for another helping of oysters, to Cuffy's helpless bewilderment.

"Will ye pass me the oysters, Cuffy?" he repeated truculently.

"I am very, very sorry, but there are no oysters, my dear friend," faltered Cuffy.

"What do ye call these, then?"

"They—they are eggs, my dear fellow."

"Oysters, I tell ye!" shouted Doyle, leaping to his feet in great excitement. "Ye spalpeen, don't I know oysters from eggs?"

"M-m-my dear, dear— Yaroo!"

"Are they oysters?" roared Doyle, seizing the alarmed Cuffy by the collar and shaking him violently.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Oh! Yes!" shrieked Cuffy. "Leggo! They—they certainly are oysters, my dear fellow!"

"Then why couldn't ye say so at first?" growled Doyle.

Cuffy sat palpitating, squirming a little farther away from the lunatic.

"This—this is dreadful, my dear Thomas!" he whispered to Tommy Dodd.

"Awful, isn't it?" agreed Tommy.

"Frightful!" groaned Cook.

"Had we not—not better get him to a doctor?" murmured Cuffy.

"Doctors have a frightfully exciting effect on him," said Dodd, shaking his head. "Do you think your dear papa would mind very much, Cuffy, if you should happen to be slaughtered?"

"Ow!"

Doyle rose to his feet.

His hand was groping under his jacket, and Clarence, who knew that the carving-knife was there, palpitated.

"Sure, and you've bought the sheep, then," he remarked, looking at Clarence. "How much did ye give for that sheep?"

"Oh, gracious!" moaned Clarence. "The poor fellow! He takes me for a sheep! This is—is dreadful!"

Doyle came closer to Clarence Cuffy, inspecting him as if he were an animal. Cuffy trembled violently.

"Tain't a very good sheep," said Doyle disparagingly. "It's bony. It's got blinkers on."

"They—they are my spectacles, my dear afflicted friend," murmured Cuffy.

"Hould yer tongue intirely! 'Tain't for a sheep to talk to a butcher!" said Doyle darkly. "This ain't much of a sheep, but sure I suppose I'd better kill it and get it cut up before we start intirely."

Clarence jumped away.

"I'm not a sheep!" he shrieked. "Keep off! Oh, dear! Keep off!"

"Sure I'm sorry, but I've got to slaughter ye, or we shan't have any mutton for dinner," answered Doyle, sharpening the knife on his boot. "Bring that sheep here!"

"Better not cross him, Cuffy," whispered Tommy Dodd. "You have to humour lunatics, you know."

"B-b-but I cannot let him slaughter me, my dear Thomas!" gasped Cuffy.

"Well, I think you ought to humour him."

"B-b-but——"

Clarence Cuffy cast a longing glance at his bicycle, which was leaning against the caravan.

At that moment he would have given

a great deal to be safe home in Gander's Green.

He made a movement towards the bicycle as Tommy Doyle made a movement towards him.

"Keep him off!" he shrieked.

"Catch that sheep for me!" roared Doyle. "Don't ye know a butcher's a busy man intirely? I can't waste a whole day on one sheep!"

He made a rush at Cuffy, who skipped away wildly. Dodd and Cook grasped the "insane" junior and held him back.

"Hook it, Cuffy!" shrieked Dodd. "He won't hurt us! Hook it!"

Cuffy already had one leg over his bike.

"Let me go intirely!" yelled Doyle. "That blessed sheep is getting away! Phwat are we going to do for mutton?"

Whirr! Whizzz! Whirrrr! Clarence Cuffy was riding for his life.

He did not slacken down till he was five miles from the Modern caravan.

Then, at a more leisurely pace but still in haste, he pedalled on the road to Gander's Green.

Clarence had had enough of caravaning.

After he had vanished from view, naturally he could not see the three Tommies.

If he could have seen them, it might have dawned even upon Clarence Cuffy that his leg had been pulled.

The three merry youths threw themselves into the grass, kicking up their heels in hysterical mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd & Co.

They laughed loud and long, what time Clarence Cuffy was whizzing away at top speed. They were still chuckling when they harnessed the horse, and the Modern caravan rumbled on its way.

Clarence Cuffy slept that night under the parental roof at Gander's Green, while the Modern caravanners camped under the bright stars and rejoiced.

CHAPTER 25.

Old Acquaintances!

"BY gad!"
 "What a crowd!"
 "Awf'ly dusty lot!"

Those remarks fell upon the ears of the Rookwood caravanners as they jogged cheerily along in the drowsy warmth of the summer afternoon.

Jimmy Silver was leading the horse, and Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were sauntering along, while Tubby Muffin sat on the van.

The chums of Rookwood were following a deep lane between high hedges, and there was chalky dust in the lane in plenteous quantities.

Certainly Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather dusty.

The caravanners had been on the road since early morning, and a fastidious regard for appearances is not consistent with caravanning.

They were red, and they were dusty.

Lovell, indeed, had thrown his jacket on the van, and was walking in his shirt-sleeves.

Jimmy Silver had a panama on the back of his head, and a red spot of sunburn on the tip of his nose.

Perhaps the Fistical Four did look rather a dusty crowd.

Upon a stile by the roadside three extremely elegant-looking youths were seated in a row, and they made remarks as the caravanners came along.

The three elegant youths did not look dusty; in fact, they looked spotless, without speck or stain, from their straw hats to their white shoes.

Also, they had cigarettes in their mouths.

They made their remarks all at once, so that their opinions fell in a sort of chorus upon the caravanners, who looked round wrathfully.

"Smythe!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo, Rookwood chaps!" said Lovell.

The caravanners had felt hostile for a moment, but now they nodded cheerfully to the three youths on the stile.

For the three were Smythe, Howard, and Tracy, of the Shell at Rookwood School.

At Rookwood Jimmy Silver & Co. were far from chummy with Adolphus Smythe and his merry set.

But, having suddenly and unexpectedly fallen upon Adolphus & Co. on holiday, they were prepared to let bygones be bygones.

Jimmy Silver pulled Robinson Crusoe, the horse, to a halt.

"Hallo, Smythey!" he said.

"Fancy meeting you!" said Raby.

Adolphus Smythe extracted an eye-glass from the pocket of his fancy waistcoat, jammed it in his eye, and surveyed the caravanners with a lofty glance.

At school or on vacation, Adolphus was evidently the same Adolphus; in fact, his loftiness seemed more pronounced than ever.

"By gad!" he repeated. "That you, Jimmy Silver?"

"Little me, old birdy!" answered Jimmy Silver.

"What are you sellin'?"

"Selling!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Yaas. Brooms an' brushes an' things?" asked Smythe.

Howard and Tracy chortled.

"We're caravanning," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Yaas, I can see that," assented Adolphus. "Are you doin' it for pleasure, or sellin' things on the road?"

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" answered Jimmy. "Sorry you've had such a bad accident, Smythey!"

Smythe of the Shell stared.

"Eh? I haven't had an accident," he answered. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I thought somebody had trodden on your face!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "My mistake. Appearances are deceptive, I suppose."

"You dashed cheeky fag!" roared Smythe, in great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By gad, you look a precious crowd for Rookwood fellows!" said Howard disdainfully. "When did you wash last?"

"No room in your caravan for soap, I suppose?" remarked Tracy.

"Don't let people know you belong to Rookwood, Silver!" implored Adolphus Smythe. "Think of the giddy reputation of the school, you know."

The Fistical Four glared at the nuts of the Shell.

The contrast between the trio of patty nuts and the dusty caravanners was certainly striking, and evidently made Smythe & Co. very pleased with themselves, and a little more insolent and supercilious than usual.

"I've got a lot of friends in this locality," continued Smythe. "If they saw you an' knew you belonged to my school, I should never recover from it—I shouldn't, really. Think of my feelings, Silver!"

"I'm sure Silver'll be obligin', an' get out of the neighbourhood as soon as possible," remarked Tracy.

"Begad, a bobby ought to move 'em on!" said Howard. "I must say they look a lot of suspicious characters!"

"Yaas, begad!" said Adolphus, taking up the tale again, as it were. "I rather think the farmer'll be missin' their chickens with that crowd around!"

"I heard that some turnips had been stolen yesterday," observed Tracy, in a reflective sort of way.

"Move on, gipsies!" grinned Howard. "No brooms or saucepans wanted today, thanks!"

And the three nuts, delighted with their own humour, chortled in chorus.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not smile, however. Perhaps they were lacking in appreciation of such delicate humour.

"You silly chumps!" said Jimmy Silver, in measured tones. "You'd be doing much better caravanning than sitting on a stile smoking, like

three silly owls. Have you anything more to say before we bump you over?"

"Here, none of your fag larks!" exclaimed Smythe, in alarm.

The Fistical Four did not heed.

Jimmy Silver rushed towards the stile, and his comrades followed him.

In a twinkling Smythe and Howard and Tracy were collared, and they went rolling off the stile into the field.

Three bumps and three loud yells followed.

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin, who was looking out of the van.

"Oh! Ow! Yaroooh!" roared Adolphus Smythe, in anguish.

He had nearly swallowed his cigarette, and he found one end of it very hot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three nuts of Rookwood sat in the grass on one side of the stile, gasping, while the Fistical Four stood in the road on the other side and roared with laughter.

The eclipse of Smythe & Co. had been sudden and complete.

The shout of laughter was echoed from the field.

A game of cricket was going on there, and the cricketers had seen Smythe & Co.'s sudden fall.

Adolphus Smythe spat out his cigarette, and groped wildly for his eyeglass.

"Ow! You rotters! Yoooop!" mumbled Adolphus.

"Have some more?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Apparently the nuts did not want any more.

Neither apparently had they any further disparaging remarks to make to the dusty caravanners.

Jimmy Silver went back to the horse, and the caravan rumbled on, the nuts of Rookwood being left to sort themselves out—somewhat dusty themselves now.

CHAPTER 28.

Lost Ball!

BANG!

Smash!

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Silly asses!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell wrathfully.

The caravan window was in fragments.

A cricket-ball, evidently hard hit, had whizzed over the hedge, and smashed the little window fairly in the centre.

The ball dropped inside the van.

From within the van came a tinkling of crockery. The window was not the only casualty.

The caravan halted again. A shout was ringing from the cricket-field.

"Well hit, Sticker!"

"Lost ball!"

"Well, of all the howling idiots!" exclaimed Raby. "Look at that window!"

"I—I say, it might have biffed me, you know!" spluttered Tubby Muffin indignantly.

"That wouldn't have mattered, ass! Look at that window!"

Half a dozen faces looked over the hedge into the deep lane.

"Give us our ball, please!"

"What?"

"Would you mind giving us our ball?"

A sun-burnt, cheery-looking fellow asked that polite question.

He had a bat under his arm, and was apparently the batsman who had made that effective drive.

The Rookwood caravanners glared at him.

"Do you see what you've done?" roared Lovell.

"Oh, crumbs! Your window busted?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" snorted Newcome.

"Sorry! I never expected to get a bulls-eye like that, I'm sure!"

"Buck up with that ball, Dick

Sticker!" came a yell from behind the hedge.

"I suppose it's in your van," said Sticker. "I say, I'm really sorry! We'll pay for the damage if you like."

"Will you mend the window?" snapped Lovell.

"Well, I dare say I could," said Sticker. "My father could, anyway. He's a glazier. If you like to hang around till this evening I'll get my father to mend it for you free of charge—honest."

Jimmy Silver smiled genially.

After all, accidents would happen, and Master Sticker was sorry for the damage done, anyway.

Besides, Jimmy had a fellow-feeling for a cricketer.

"All serene!" he answered. "I'll get your ball."

He disappeared into the caravan, and returned in a few moments with the cricket-ball.

"Catch!"

From a spirit of mischief he gave Dick Sticker a very difficult catch.

Somewhat to his surprise, Sticker caught the ball quite easily, using only one hand for the purpose.

"Thanks!" said Sticker.

"I say, that chap would be useful in the field," remarked Lovell, his wrath quite evaporating at the sight of that neat catch.

Sticker tossed the ball to someone in the field, but he did not return to the pitch.

He seemed really concerned about the accident to the caravan.

"About your window?" he began.

"Oh, never mind that," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Can't be helped. Don't keep away from your game."

"That's all right; only practice," answered Sticker. "Look here, I meant what I said. My father will mend your window if you can stop for it. If you're going to camp in this part —"

"We're looking for a camping ground," said Jimmy Silver. The Rook-

wooders were feeling quite friendly now. "As you're a native, I dare say you can tell us of a good place."

"Well, there's the common," said Sticker. "Anybody can camp on Deepden Common, of course. It's a bit farther on. I'll show you, if you like. You'll have to fetch water rather a long way, but there's a pond for your horse."

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver. "Get on, old hoss!"

Robinson Crusoe was set in motion again, and the caravan rumbled on, Dick Sticker walking with the Rookwood fellows.

They chatted very agreeably on the way. The Rookwooders had taken rather a fancy to Master Sticker.

They found him keen on cricket, which was a subject they naturally had in common, and they learned that he was captain of the Deepden village club.

"You chaps play cricket, of course?" said Sticker.

"Well, a little," smiled Jimmy Silver. "We're rather keen on cricket at Rookwood."

"Rookwood! The school?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"I've heard of Rookwood School," explained Sticker. "Young Mr. Smythe belongs to it. He lives at Deepden Lodge, near here. You're his school-fellows, then?"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Smythe isn't a fair specimen of Rookwood, though," he said. "There are silly snobs like Smythe everywhere, as well as at Rookwood. Smythe is more or less a butt at Rookwood—simply a silly ass!"

"Yet he's captain of the junior eleven," said Sticker.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"I understood——"

"The cheeky ass!" exclaimed Lovell indignantly. "He was captain of the junior eleven once, and was turned out

because he couldn't play the game. Jimmy Silver's junior captain of Rookwood."

"Little me!" explained Jimmy, with a smile.

"Oh!" said Sticker, with visibly increased respect. "I understood from Smythe—he didn't exactly say so, but that was what he made me think. Of course, I don't see much of Smythe." He laughed. "Smythe wouldn't touch me with a barge pole, personally. But he's fixed up a match with my club because there's nothing else doing, I suppose, and he wants to entertain his friends."

"Oh, you're playing that crowd, then?" said Jimmy, with interest.

"Yes, to-morrow. I didn't care for it specially," said Sticker. "But naturally, we liked the idea of playing a public school team. We don't get a chance often, you may be sure. We don't expect to win, but I thought the match would be a good experience for us—first-class cricket."

"You won't get first-class cricket from that lot!" grunted Lovell. "They slack at cricket, same as at everything else."

Sticker shook his head.

"We might have had a chance," he said. "But I've just lost some of my men. Six chaps have been called away to work on a farm fifteen miles from here, and they couldn't get over for the match, you see. They were the best of the bunch, too. I really don't know how I shall be able to make up a full eleven at all to-morrow. I shall have to put in some kids. Here's the place for you chaps."

The common was reached.

The obliging Sticker guided the caravanners to a suitable spot, where Robinson Crusoe was allowed to halt.

Then Jimmy Silver broached the subject of cricket again.

"You're short of men for your game to-morrow?" he began.

"Yes. It's rotten!" said Sticker ruefully. "What I'm afraid of is that

that crowd will guy us. I'd give a week's wages to dish them!"

"Would you care to play us?"

"You!" ejaculated Sticker.

"Us!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're pretty keen cricketers at Rookwood, and I'm skipper of the junior eleven. We can play. If you'd care for us as recruits, we'll stay here over to-morrow. Don't mind saying no, though. It's just as you like."

Sticker looked at him curiously.

"I'd be glad," he said. "I don't know what your cricket's like, but it must be a bit above our form, anyhow. But—but—" He hesitated.

"Out with it!" said Jimmy, with a smile. "If you'd rather play your own village chaps, I understand. No bones broken."

"It isn't that. I don't quite know how I should get an eleven together, even playing duds. But we're a team of village working lads, and you fellows belong to a public school. You'd be rather out of your element. I don't know whether you've thought of that."

"My dear chap, what difference does that make?" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't put us down as being silly chumps like Smythe."

Sticker smiled.

"Well, if you'd care to play, I'd be jolly glad to have you!" he said cheerily.

"Smythe couldn't object. I can play anybody I like in my team. If you really mean it, Silver—"

"Of course!"

"Then it's a go!" said Sticker, his ruddy face brightening. "I'll be jolly glad, and so will the fellows when I tell them. It'll save me no end of trouble. I should have had to put in two or three kids of twelve; and we should have looked a lot of duffers if Smythe mopped us up in one innings. All four of you going to play?"

"If you'll have us—rather!"

"Oh, I'll have you fast enough!" said Sticker, laughing.

"You'll have to lend us bats," said Jimmy Silver.

"That's easily done!"

"Then it's a go!" said Jimmy Silver. "When do we play, and where?"

"The pitch is in a meadow at Smythe's place, Deepden Lodge," said Sticker. "It's an afternoon match. We can't get off in the morning, even on Saturdays. Stumps are pitched at two."

"Right-ho!"

"We shall pass this way going there," added Sticker. "We'll call for you, if you like, about half-past one."

"We'll be ready."

CHAPTER 27.

A Surprise for the Nuts!

"TIME we went!" said Townsend.

"Yaas."

Adolphus Smythe polished his eyeglass, and put it in his eye.

"Plummer will be carryin' the things," said Adolphus. "Plummer, mind you don't forget my bat!"

"Yes, Master Adolphus."

"An' there's a man there gettin' the place ready," added Adolphus. "Wickets an' all that! An' a tent. I thought we should want a tent. You see, it's goin' to be sunny, an' we shall want cover."

"Oh, yaas!"

Adolphus looked at his big gold watch.

"May as well be gettin' along," he remarked. "Awful shame to drag you fellows out so soon after lunch. But we agreed to have the stumps pitched at two, and it's past two now. The weird team we're playin' can't play in the mornin'. Workin', or somethin' at farmin' or somethin' or other."

"Queer lot of beggars!" said Top-ham.

"Yaas. Really, I ought to apologise to you men for lettin' you in for a match with that lot," said Smythe. "But I thought it was a kindness to them, you know, to take notice of them. And it's one way of killin' time, too!"

"Oh, we don't mind!" said Howard liberally.

Dick Sticker and his men were waiting at the tent when the nuts arrived.

There were over a dozen fellows in all with Adolphus. The nut of Rookwood was entertaining quite a large party at the Lodge.

Eleven of them, including the great Adolphus himself, were in flannels.

Dick Sticker looked rather grimly at them as they came up, for it was past the time arranged for pitching stumps.

"Here we are, Sticker," said Smythe graciously.

"We've been waiting half an hour!" said Sticker, rather gruffly.

"By gad! Have you?"

"Yes."

"Then we'd better get goin'," said Smythe calmly.

"Got all your men here?" asked Tracy, looking round.

"Oh, yes!" answered Dick Sticker. "Some in the tent. They're not all Deepden chaps. Some of my men are away, you know, and I've taken in four chaps who don't usually play with my club."

"Yaas, really?" said Smythe, with a plentiful lack of interest.

"Here they are," added Sticker, as the Fistical Four came out of the tent. "You know them, I believe. Schoolfellows of yours."

Adolphus Smythe jumped.

He blinked at Jimmy Silver & Co.

"By gad! You fellows again!" he exclaimed. "What are you doin' here?"

"Cricketing," answered Jimmy Silver.

"You're not playing for Sticker?"

"You've hit it!"

"Oh, gad!"

The nuts of Rookwood stared at Jimmy Silver & Co., not by any means pleased.

The rest of Smythe's party, who did not know the Fistical Four, were quite indifferent.

"Look here, Smythe, we're not playin' those fellows!" muttered Tracy. Smythe hesitated.

He had no grounds for raising any objection to Dick Sticker's recruits, of course, and as Sticker had no one on

the ground to take their place, raising an objection meant the match falling through.

"We're ready, if you fellows are," said Sticker pointedly.

"Yaas, we're ready."

The two skippers tossed for choice of innings, and it fell to Smythe & Co. to bat.

The villagers went into the field.

Dick Sticker had compared notes with the Fistical Four, and he kindly arranged the field to their liking.

He had not seen them play yet, but he was quite able to see that they were valuable recruits, and that their form was likely to be far above that of his own men.

His own men were keen enough, but want of leisure for practice, naturally, had kept them back.

Adolphus opened the innings with Tracy.

The two nuts of Rookwood strolled to the wickets, and Sticker himself bowled the first over.

Sticker was a good bat, but at bowling he was not so good, though in that he was the best of the bunch.

Smythe, poor bat as he was, was equal to the bowling, and he knocked it all over the field.

The over gave the nuts six runs, and the waiting batsmen, looking on, grinned at one another.

Had the nuts been playing only the villagers, the easy victory that Smythe desired would doubtless have been a foregone conclusion.

It was only the presence of the Fistical Four that made the result doubtful.

Jimmy Silver met Sticker's eyes as the field crossed over.

Sticker tossed him the ball.

Jimmy Silver went on to bowl against Tracy.

Allan Tracy looked rather thoughtful as he found himself facing the champion junior bowler of Rookwood.

He was very careful indeed with that ball, which Jimmy Silver delivered in a careless-looking way.

But Tracy's care was wasted. His leg-stump went out of the ground, his bat missing the ball by a yard.

"How's that?" called out Jimmy Silver.

The umpire grinned.

"Out!"

Tracy gave Jimmy Silver a dark look as he carried out his bat.

Howard came in next.

Howard stayed exactly long enough to score a duck's egg.

Townsend was next man in, and Towny earned a big round nought all for himself, and there was a cheer from the field for the bowler.

"The hat-trick!" grinned Lovell.

"That's bowling, if you like!" said Sticker.

"Jimmy isn't finished yet, my infant! I fancy this is going to be the double hat trick," answered Lovell.

Lovell knew his chum's bowling, and the prophecy was a safe one to risk.

Topham came in next, and was dismissed without making a run.

Then two more of Smythe's nutty friends followed him, and went bootless home.

It was the double hat trick, and not a single run had been taken for the over. The nutty batsmen looked blue as they gathered at the tent.

Adolphus Smythe looked blue at his wicket.

This was the easy victory he had been mapping out!

Apparently, he wouldn't be able to tell the fellows at Rookwood, next term, how he had beaten Jimmy Silver at cricket in the vacation.

Dick Sticker and his friends were grinning.

They had not expected their new recruits to turn out like this.

One of the villagers bowled the next over, and Smythe scored three before he was caught out by Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Seven down for nine!" murmured Raby. "Ye gods!"

Next man in was caught out by New-

come after taking two runs. It was eight down for eleven.

Then Jimmy Silver went on to bowl again.

Two wickets in succession fell to his bowling, and there would have been three if the laws of cricket had allowed it.

The "not out" batsman was not out for the excellent reason that he did not receive a ball to put him out.

Dick Sticker clapped Jimmy on the back, with a loud chuckle.

"You can bowl," he said. "All down for eleven! Did you ever?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Quite a game, isn't it?" he said.

"Your schoolfellow doesn't seem to be enjoying it."

"Well, no; this isn't the cricket Smythe was looking for."

Adolphus Smythe was, as a matter of fact, looking daggers.

The procession to and from the wickets was so funny that even Smythe could see the comic side of it.

He would have been very glad, just then, to lay his handsome and expensive bat round Jimmy Silver.

"Looks like a win, I don't think!" grunted Tracy.

"Never mind! We'll beat 'em bowling!" said Adolphus. "You chaps know how I bowl!"

This was apparently meant to be reassuring; but Smythe's friends did not look reassured, doubtless because they did know how Adolphus bowled.

CHAPTER 25.

Atlas, for Adolphus!

"WILL you open the innings, Silver?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Put us last on the list," he said.

"Just as you like."

Dick Sticker and one of his comrades went out to open the innings, the nutty cricketers going into the field.

Dick Sticker was quite equal to

Smythe's bowling, and he proceeded to make the running.

But as over succeeded over Smythe & Co. took wickets, and they looked more hopeful.

Sticker was out at last for fifteen runs on his own, and by that time the village team were down for thirty.

Only the Fistical Four remained to go to the wickets.

Dick handed his bat to Jimmy Silver. "Man in!" he said.

"Right you are!" There was a villager at the other end when Jimmy came on the crease, and he had the bowling.

He fell to a catch by Tracy, and the score stood at seven down for thirty.

Arthur Edward Lovell joined Jimmy Silver at the wickets.

Lovell received the rest of the over, and made hay of it. Four runs rewarded his efforts.

Then the field crossed over, and Jimmy Silver had the bowling.

Jimmy Silver's batting was an eye-opener to the Deepden crowd.

Jimmy was not the best bat in the Rookwood Fourth by any means. Bowling was his strong point, and Erroll and Mornington were rather better at the wickets.

But his batting was miles above the heads of Smythe & Co.

Jimmy Silver knocked the ball all over the field, and the amount of leather-hunting the nuts had to do left them quite winded and breathless.

Smythe & Co. were looking decidedly ill-tempered by this time.

The runs piled up between Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell, while Raby and Newcome and Sticker & Co. grinned from the tent.

Raby and Newcome were not likely to be wanted. But they did not mind.

They had come there to see Smythe & Co. dished, and they were seeing it, and that was enough for them.

Jimmy Silver could have knocked up a century quite easily against the rusty bowling; but Uncle James was

considerate, and he did not want to keep the Deepden fellows standing about watching him enjoying himself.

When the score was at a hundred for the innings he called out to Sticker.

"What price declaring, Sticker?" Dick nodded at once.

"I was thinking so, but I wouldn't stop you!" he called back.

"Go it, then!" Smythe & Co. were glad when Sticker declared for the hundred runs.

Perhaps Adolphus thought that that gave him a slight chance of pulling the game out of the fire; and, at all events, it gave him a rest, of which he was sorely in need.

With the scores eleven and a hundred respectively on the first innings, the result of the match did not seem in much doubt.

There was a long pause before Adolphus & Co. opened their second innings.

They simply could not begin for a while.

They wanted a long rest, and they took it. But their opponents did not mind; the match was going unexpectedly rapidly, and there was plenty of time on their hands.

Adolphus and Howard went to the wickets at last.

Dick Sticker tossed the ball to Jimmy.

"Wouldn't you fellows rather have a bit of a game first?" asked Jimmy, with a laugh.

"We want to watch you," answered Sticker. "Cricket like this doesn't often come our way, you know. Go in and scalp them."

"Right you are!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

There was a general grin around the field as the captain of the Rookwood Fourth went on to bowl. The fieldsmen knew what to expect, and they were not disappointed.

Jimmy Silver put his very best into that over, but he need hardly have taken the trouble.

Adolphus & Co. could not stand

against his bowling when they were fresh, and now they were very far from fresh.

Smythe, with a desperate sort of feeling, stood very much on his guard against the first ball, determined to do or die.

But it booted not, as the poets say. The first ball whipped out his middle stump, leaving his wicket with a toothless look.

"How's that?" cooed Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Adolphus Smythe, with feelings too deep for words, tramped back to the tent. He was fed up with that game.

A happy procession to the wicket followed.

After Adolphus five batsmen came and went, and, without a single run being taken, they walked off again.

Then the field crossed over, chortling.

As if inspired by the example of Jimmy, Dick Sticker took a wicket with his first ball.

On the second there was a catch by Newcome in the field.

On the third there was a smart return by Lovell which ran out an unhappy batsman making a desperate attempt at a run.

On the fourth there seemed a chance of keeping the innings alive, at least, till Jimmy Silver's hand was seen to shoot up, and a smack announced that the ball was in his palm.

"Oh, gad!" murmured Smythe feebly.

"Oh, my hat!" mumbled Tracy. "Hang the rotters! You were a silly fool to play 'em, Smythe!"

"All down for nix!" chortled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Did you fellows ever see a game like this?"

"Never!" grinned Raby.

"Hardly ever!" chortled Newcome.

"Hard cheese, Smythe, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Lemme see, Deepden wins by an innings and eighty-nine runs, I think. They'll be entertained when you tell them about this at Rookwood."

Smythe gritted his teeth.

"I've a jolly good mind——" he began, his hand closing on the cane handle of his bat.

Jimmy Silver smiled at him.

"You've a jolly good mind to——what?" he asked sweetly.

"Nothin'!" mumbled Adolphus.

And the nutty eleven took an inglorious departure, leaving the victors in that peculiar match chortling in great spirits.

"I say, Silver, I'm jolly obliged to you fellows for helping us out," said Dick Sticker, laughing. "I didnt know you were in such form. You've won the match for us."

"Well, I think we've helped a little," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. "It's closed rather early. Will you chaps come along to the caravan and join us at tea? We'd like you to!"

"You bet!" said Dick cheerily.

Tubby Muffin was taking a nap—a very long nap—in the grass by the caravan when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived with their guests.

Tubby had looked on at the beginning of the cricket match, but had soon returned to camp for an extra meal.

Jimmy Silver awoke him by gently jamming a boot in his fat ribs, and Tubby sat up with a yell.

"Yow-ow!"

"Tea-time!" said Jimmy Silver. "Buckle to, Tubby! We've got guests. Kill the fatted calf!"

And there was a plentiful repast at the caravan camp, and enough and to spare for the numerous guests of the caravanners.

Jimmy Silver turned in that night in a very satisfied mood.

Bright and early in the morning Robinson Crusoe was harnessed, and the caravanners started on their way once more.

Their encounters with the nuts of Rookwood had not begun agreeably, but there was no doubt that the honours rested with the caravan cricketers.

CHAPTER 29.

A Very Happy Meeting!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Jimmy Silver & Co. looked round quickly.

The Rookwood caravanners had halted on the long white road that wound over the Downs towards the sea.

Robinson Crusoe, the horse, was cropping contentedly at the grass by the roadside.

Tubby Muffin was seated on a sloping shaft, industriously extracting the last fragment of the contents of a condensed milk-tin with a spoon, and transferring it to his capacious mouth, and the Fistical Four were discussing bread and cheese.

The caravanners had been in luck.

Lovell had found a farmhouse where cheese had been obtainable.

Newcome had succeeded in purchasing a huge bundle of lettuces, and Jimmy Silver had bagged a big jug of milk.

So the Fistical Four were enjoying their lunch, with verdant fields stretching before their eyes to the deep blue of the Channel in the distance.

They heard a bicycle on the road, but did not heed it; bikes were many.

They heard it stop, but still did not heed, the bread and cheese and lettuces engrossing all their attention.

But they started when a fat voice addressed them, a voice they knew

As the caravanners glanced round in surprise they saw the cyclist.

He was a fat fellow, with a rotundity of figure that far outclassed that of Tubby Muffin.

A pair of big glasses adorned his fat little nose, and he blinked through them at the Rookwooders with much affability.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Fancy meeting you!" said the fat cyclist. "How do you do, old scout?"

"I've seen you before somewhere," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Lemme see," remarked Raby thoughtfully. "You're the butcher's boy, ain't you?"

"Oh, don't be funny, you know! You remember Bunter of Greyfriars—Billy Bunter, you know, of the Remove?" said the fat junior. "I came to see you at Rookwood in the term. Fancy meeting you here!"

"Fancy!" yawned Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not look enthusiastic.

They remembered Billy Bunter of Greyfriars quite well.

In fact, they remembered him too well to feel any special satisfaction in meeting him again.

But Billy Bunter did not notice the absence of enthusiasm on the part of the Rookwood juniors. Possibly he was determined not to notice it.

"Caravanning?" he asked affably.

"How did you guess that?" asked Raby.

"Well, that thing is a caravan, isn't it?" asked Bunter, with a nod towards the van. "I say, you fellows, it's rather jolly caravanning, isn't it?"

"Topping!" said Jimmy Silver.

"We're staying at Beachcliff," said Bunter. "My people, you know. Having a tremendous time."

"Glad to hear it!" yawned Jimmy Silver.

"I haven't had my lunch," observed Bunter.

"Join us!" said Jimmy hospitably.

Tubby Muffin looked alarmed.

His own performances at lunch were very creditable, but they were not a patch on what William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove could do.

But the Fistical Four, though they did not yearn for Bunter's society, were hospitable, and they made him welcome.

"Well, as you're so pressing, I will," said Bunter. "How jolly lucky that I should happen on you fellows here, wasn't it?"

"Awfully."

"I thought I knew you as I came along," said Bunter. "Jolly glad to see you again. I say, this is ripping

cheese. All right; I'll help myself, Jimmy, old chap."

"Do!" said Jimmy.

Bunter did.

Tubby Muffin's fat face grew longer, though the other caravanners only smiled.

Bunter took a camp-stool, which creaked under his weight.

He blinked most affably at the Rookwooders as he started.

It was a very fortunate meeting, from Billy's point of view.

"Bit rough caravanning, I should think," he remarked. "Grub rather short sometimes—what?"

"Sometimes," agreed Jimmy.

"All serene; I can rough it," said Bunter. "I'll finish the cheese, if you don't mind."

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver politely.

There was a faint sound from Tubby Muffin, a peculiar sound between a sigh and a groan. Bunter blinked round at him.

"Got a pain?" he asked sympathetically.

"Nunno!" gasped Tubby.

"I say, that's a good idea, finishing up with condensed milk," said Bunter. "You can get me a couple of tins if you like. I like it."

"I'm afraid we've only one tin left," said Lovell, with studied politeness.

"My dear chap, don't mention it! I'll manage with one."

"I dare say one of you chaps will open it for me."

"C-c-certainly!"

"There's a lot of sustenance in condensed milk," Bunter confided to his hosts, as he started with a spoon. "I say, you fellows, I'm really glad to see you again. How lucky that you stopped on this road for lunch!"

"Yes, wasn't it?"

"Now, that's what I call a decent lunch, you know," said Bunter, when he had finished the tin. "It will keep me going till I get home to lunch at Beachcliff."

"I—I hope it will."

"You should take some things in tins when you go caravanning," said Bunter. "They come in handy—pineapple and peaches, and things like that."

"We've got some," said Raby.

"Good! I could do with a little more, I admit."

Raby, with a peculiar expression on his face, fetched a tin of pineapple out of the caravan and placed it before Bunter.

That cheery youth disposed of it in a very short space of time.

"Any more like that?" he asked.

"Yes; we've another."

"Trot it out, old nut! Don't mind me. I can put up with almost anything on a picnic."

Tubby Muffin's expression was almost heartrending as Bunter started on the second and only pineapple.

He finished it cheerfully.

"Anything else you'd like, Bunter?" asked Lovell.

Tubby Muffin gave Lovell an almost homicidal look.

"Oh, any old thing," said Bunter.

"Anything in the way of chocolates. You should always take chocolates in a caravan. They come in handy when grub runs short."

"Is there any chocolate left, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Nunno!"

"Sorry, Bunter!"

"Oh, don't mench!" said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, if you travel near my home when I'm at home you must camp in the park, and come up to the mansion for your meals."

"Certainly!" said Lovell. "Where do you live?"

Bunter was afflicted with a sudden deafness.

"Which way are you going on from here?" he asked.

"Down the road."

"Good! I'll come with you part of the way," said Bunter.

"You'll be late for lunch if you do," said Raby, with deep sarcasm.

"Oh, that's all right! I dare say you've got a snack in the caravan if I

get peckish. You fellows lift my bike on the van, and I'll take a snooze inside for a bit—see?"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the caravan. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

But they did not speak.

Bunter's bike was lifted on the van, and the horse was put in, and the Rookwood caravanners resumed their route—Bunter snoozing in the van, and the Rookwooders feeling very pleased—perhaps—with that chance meeting which had bestowed upon them the entertaining company of the Owl of Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 30.

Nice for the Caravanners!

BILLY BUNTER blinked out of the van about an hour later.

Apparently his nap had done him good, for he looked very cheery and bright.

"I say, you fellows!" he remarked.

The Rookwood juniors were walking with the horse, and they did not seem to hear Bunter.

He jumped down, and joined the caravanners.

"You seem to do a lot of walking!" he remarked.

"Caravanners generally do."

"Well, I suppose so with a little van like that," agreed Bunter. "When I go caravanning I have a whacking big van."

"How nice!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose that old crock couldn't pull the lot of you?" remarked Bunter, with a disparaging blink at Robinson Crusoe.

"He isn't exactly a crock," said Jimmy mildly.

"Well, perhaps not; but nothing like the caravan horses I'm used to," said Bunter. "We do it rather in style."

"Oh!"

This agreeable and genial conversa-

tion did not have the effect of making the Rookwooders chatty.

They seemed to dry up somehow.

But Billy Bunter did not mind. He was quite able to keep up enough conversation for five.

"I say, you fellows, I've been thinking," he remarked. "I'm a bit fed up with Beachcliff. I'd like a change."

"So would we!" murmured Raby.

"I suppose we shall pass a post-office sooner or later?" Bunter remarked.

"Very likely."

"Then I could send a telegram."

"Eh?"

"The fact is, I'm thinking of joining you fellows for a few days," said Bunter kindly. "It would be a rather agreeable change."

"My hat!"

"I'm not a particular chap," continued Bunter. "You'll find me able to rough it. All I really want is plenty to eat and comfortable sleeping quarters and no work to do."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, you know. I think I could give you till the end of the week," said Bunter thoughtfully. "After that I'm afraid I couldn't put off my social engagements any longer. But you can count on me till the end of the week."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Of course, I shall stand my whack in the expenses," added Bunter. "You see that that would be essential. When I leave you I shall send you a postal-order for the full amount. I must insist upon that."

"Oh!"

"As you fellows like walking, I should be able to ride all the time; that would suit all parties," remarked Bunter. "I say, wasn't it lucky I met you? You won't be going anywhere near Beachcliff, will you?"

"No."

"That's all right, then. Of course," said Bunter confidentially, "that wouldn't quite do."

"Wouldn't it?"

"Well, not quite. We're in rather a nobby and exclusive circle there, and I

should hardly care to be seen caravanning with a turnout like this. You don't mind my saying so, I'm sure."

"Oh, no," gasped Jimmy Silver, "not at all!"

"Not a bit!" stuttered Lovell. "Go on, Bunter! You don't know how entertaining you are."

The caravanners walked on feeling quite dazed.

They had had some little experience of William George Bunter on his visits to Rookwood, whither he had come without troubling about the formality of an invitation.

But they had not known quite how colossal his nerve was.

Now that they knew they were not in the least inclined to stand it.

The addition of Bunter to the happy party was not at all in their programme.

The caravan rumbled on towards the cross-roads, and as they drew nearer, Arthur Edward Lovell tapped Bunter on the shoulder.

"That's your way," he remarked.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh?"

"That road leads down to Beachcliff, I think."

"I'll get your bike down, Bunter," said Raby.

"Don't trouble, old chap; I'm coming with you," answered Bunter. "I can send my people a wire."

"No need to send your people a wire," said Lovell. "The fact is, Bunter, we feel that you wouldn't be quite comfortable with a turn-out like this."

"Don't worry; I can rough it."

"We couldn't think of allowing you to rough it, for our sakes," said Lovell, with a shake of the head. "You see, we forgot to bring a footman and a butler, and without them you couldn't possibly stand it."

"I—I say——"

"And some of the nobby and exclusive circle at Beachcliff might happen to spot you," added Raby. "Think how you would feel then!"

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

Tubby was feeling quite relieved now.

He had been terrified at the idea of Bunter as a permanent addition to the party; it would have meant very short commons for Tubby.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Fistical Four through his big spectacles.

They were polite, but they were very determined.

Even Jimmy Silver, who erred a little on the side of being easy-going, did not feel called upon to endure the infliction of Bunter's society.

"I—I say, you fellows, if you're joking——" began Bunter.

"Not at all."

"The fact is, I'd like to caravan for a few days."

"Then the best thing you can do is to get a whacking big caravan, and do it rather in style," said Newcome solemnly.

"Ahem! If you mean that you don't care for my company——" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"I'm afraid we do," said Lovell calmly.

"Oh, really, Lovell——"

"Good-bye."

"If these are Rookwood manners, I can't say I think much of them," said Bunter. "I shall certainly refuse to join a party where I am not welcome."

"All serene, then."

"And I shall not stay with you after to-day, unless you ask me very civilly. I can assure you," said Bunter. "As I'm out for the day, I'll stick to you till to-night, under the—the circumstances. I think I'll sit down for a bit; I don't care much for walking."

And Billy Bunter clambered into the van.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him.

They had put it to Bunter as politely as they could, but they had put it unmistakably, and they had expected the fat junior of Greyfriars to take his bike and his departure.

Instead of which, he had ensconced himself in the caravan.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell at last. "Of all the cheek——"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Let him stay till to-night," he said. "He won't do any harm. Never mind his silly gas."

"He doesn't mean to go at all!" exclaimed Lovell wrathfully. "He means to stick to us like glue. You know how he planted himself on us at Rookwood once."

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows.

As a matter of fact, Lovell's suspicion was in Jimmy Silver's mind, too.

He knew that Billy Bunter was a stickler, and that he was as thick-skinned as a rhinoceros.

"If he doesn't clear this evening, we'll put it plain," said Jimmy.

"We've put it plain."

"Then we'll put it plainer."

Arthur Edward Lovell grunted, but he acquiesced.

He did not feel quite like bundling Bunter neck and crop out of the caravan, and it was manifest that the Owl was not to be got rid of by any gentler method.

The caravan rumbled on through the golden afternoon.

When it stopped Billy Bunter blinked out of the caravan.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had halted in a village street, outside a shop which was a grocer's and a post-office, and several other things.

"Good!" said Bunter. "This is very thoughtful of you, Silver. I can telephone from here."

"Oh, you want to 'phone, do you?" said Lovell.

"Yes. Better than wiring, you know."

Lovell gave the fat junior an expressive look.

There was no need for Bunter to 'phone or wire if he was going back to Beachcliff that day.

Evidently that was not his intention.

"Doing some shopping here?" asked Bunter, as he rolled out of the van.

"Yes; things for supper," said Jimmy Silver shortly.

"Right-ho! You can do your shopping while I telephone."

Jimmy Silver opened his lips, but closed them again. Bunter rolled into the post-office.

Lovell caught Jimmy's arm as he was about to enter the shop.

"Hold on!" he said.

"Why?"

"We can do our shopping later," murmured Lovell. "Let's leave him telephoning!"

Jimmy chuckled.

It was too good a chance to get rid of Bunter to be missed.

In a twinkling Bunter's bike was handed down and lodged against a tree outside the village post-office.

Then the caravanners marched on, going at a good rate, and the village was left behind, with Billy Bunter in the telephone-box explaining to his pater at Beachcliff that he had fallen in with some Rookwood friends and was booked for a few days.

CHAPTER 31.

Bunter Sticks!

"H A, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four laughed loud and long as they swung merrily along the white road.

Tubby Muffin chortled gleefully.

The village had been left behind.

How long Bunter would be occupied in the telephone-box they did not know, but when he came out they hoped to be far away.

An hour had passed, and they were quite comfortable in their minds, when there was the jingle of a bicycle on the road behind them, and Lovell glanced back apprehensively.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated.

There he was!

He came up with a rush, in a cloud of dust, and jumped off his machine.

"Here we are again!" he said cheerily. "You didn't tell me you were starting so-soon, Jimmy, old chap."

Jimmy Silver did not speak; he couldn't.

Lovell murmured something.

"Did you do your shopping?" asked Bunter.

"Nunno."

"I say, you fellows, you oughtn't to take risks of being left without grub for supper," said Bunter anxiously. "I hope you haven't forgotten that you've got a guest, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I had quite a rush getting up with you," said Bunter confidentially. "Lucky I took the right road, wasn't it? I might have missed you."

"Oh!"

"I had to inquire twice of people after your caravan; no missing that," remarked Bunter. "I say, you fellows, when are you going to have tea?"

"Never!"

"Eh?"

"Nothing till supper."

"And when's that?"

"At dark."

"I say, I don't see how I can hold out till then!" exclaimed Bunter in dismay. "I don't want to be exacting, of course, but I think I may as well say, out plain, that I don't like missing meals."

Grunt!

Bunter wheeled his bike on, with a grim expression on his fat face, but did not make any further observations just then.

Perhaps he read the danger-signals in the expressive face of Arthur Edward Lovell.

At the next village the caravanners stopped for supplies, and Bunter climbed into the van. He had had enough of walking.

The purchases were put in the van, and Lovell pulled away Bunter's bike, which was leaning against a wheel.

"Here's your bike, Bunter!" he called out.

"Oh, shove it on the van somewhere!" answered Bunter.

"Rats!"

Bunter coughed.

"You can come and take it, or I'll

leave it here!" said Lovell, who had apparently got to the end of his politeness.

"All serene. Leave it there."

"Eh? Do you want to lose it?"

"Tain't mine!"

"What?"

"I borrowed it of a chap in Beach-cliff," explained Bunter. "It's really his business, not mine. Do as you like with it, old chap."

Lovell gasped.

He lifted the bike on the van, however, and the caravanners went on, Bunter keeping on the van.

He did not mean to risk being left behind again.

Under the westerling sun the caravanners pursued their way, chatting cheerily as they went, and forgetting the presence of Bunter, who was taking another snooze in the van.

But they were reminded of his presence a little later.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Are you going to stop for the Norman castle ruins?"

"I didn't know there was a ruined Norman castle in this quarter," said Jimmy Silver, with interest. "We'd like to see it. Where is it?"

Billy Bunter pointed to a footpath that opened in a wood beside the road.

"That's the way," he answered. "About a quarter of a mile. I'll tell you what, you fellows; if you like to see the place, I'll mind the van while you're gone. It's an awfully interesting place."

"Not a bad idea," said Jimmy, looking at his chums. "I'd like to see it, you chaps."

Lovell nodded.

His grim mood towards Billy Bunter relaxed a little. It really did seem a thoughtful suggestion on the part of the Owl.

"Wouldn't you like to come, too, Bunter?" asked Raby considerably.

"Oh, I've seen the place!" said Bunter carelessly. "Awfully interesting.

It's the very spot where William the Conqueror landed, you know."

"What?" yelled Newcome. "Did he land about ten miles inland?"

"I—I mean, it's where he passed the night before the Battle of Waterloo!"

"The battle of what?"

"Of—of Majuba!" stuttered Bunter. "The—the Battle of Majuba Hill, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of William the Conqueror at the Battle of Majuba Hill tickled the Fistical Four.

"Sure you don't mean the Battle of the Somme?" inquired Lovell.

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Well, we'll see the place, anyway!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Sure you don't mind being left alone here, Bunter?"

"Not at all, old chap! I'll look after the van!"

"Right you are! Come on, Tubby!"

Tubby Muffin was not very enthusiastic. He was not much fonder of walking than Billy Bunter was.

But he rolled off the van and walked away with the Fistical Four, by the footpath through the woods, to visit the ruined Norman castle.

Billy Bunter blinked after them, with a sly, fat grin on his face.

As soon as they were out of sight Bunter disappeared into the caravan, and from the van there proceeded a steady, incessant sound, which could only have been that of active jaws tirelessly champing.

Quite oblivious of Billy Bunter's occupation, Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled on cheerily through the pleasant-scented wood.

They had covered a good deal more than a quarter of a mile, and were still looking in vain for the ruined castle.

The footpath led them into another and another, deeper and deeper into the woods, but there was no sign of a Norman castle to be seen.

Arthur Edward Lovell halted at last.

"Look here, that fat bounder said a

quarter of a mile!" he exclaimed.

"We've come jolly near a mile now!"

"We can't have missed it!" said Jimmy Silver, perplexed.

"I suppose the fathead was making a mistake. Hallo, here's a man! Let's ask him, anyhow."

A tired-looking labourer was tramping his homeward way by the footpath, and the juniors stopped him and inquired for the ruined castle.

The countryman scratched his nose, and seemed puzzled.

"Never heard of 'un!" was his answer. "Tain't in this part."

"Is there a ruined castle at all, or any sort of ruins?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Never heard of 'un, measter."

"You know this part?"

"I've lived 'ere, man and boy, for seventy year," answered the old gentleman. "If there was a ruin about 'ere, I'd have heard of 'un. But I ain't."

And he plodded on.

The Rookwood juniors looked at one another.

Lovell breathed hard.

"That unutterable fat idiot was pulling our leg!" he exclaimed. "He's sent us on a wild-goose chase."

"He couldn't be such an idiot!" said Jimmy, aghast.

"It may be the Greyfriars brand of humour. I'll squash him!"

"I suppose he's made a mistake. He's idiot enough," said Jimmy. "Let's get back, anyway. After all, it was a nice walk."

"Oh, blow the walk!"

"I'm tired!" said Tubby Muffin plaintively. "Oh, dear, bother the old castle, and there isn't a castle at all, either! Wow!"

"Br-rr!" said Lovell.

The juniors walked back along the footpaths, and reached the road at last.

The caravan stood where they had left it, and, as Bunter was not to be seen, he was apparently inside.

From the van, as they approached it, came a deep, resonant sound—the sound of a powerful snore.

Billy Bunter was apparently asleep,

Lovell looked into the van.

Bunter lay fast asleep, snoring as if for a wager. There was a smear of jam on his fat face, which was very shiny.

And there were the remnants of a feast to be seen—only the remnants.

The parcels of the late purchases made by the caravanners had been opened, and their contents were now the contents of Billy Bunter's capacious inside.

And that was not all.

The caravan larder had been cleared, and several empty tins showed that Bunter had "done himself" not wisely but too well.

Lovell's face became fixed and simply terrific in expression as he looked. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"What on earth's the matter, Lovell?" called out Jimmy Silver, quite alarmed by the expression on Arthur Edward's face.

Lovell could not speak; he pointed.

The caravanners peered into the van. There was a wall of anguish from Tubby Muffin.

"Yow-ow-ow! The awful beast! He's scooped the grub!"

That dismal howl awakened the Owl of Greyfriars.

He sat up, set his spectacles straight on his fat, little nose, and blinked at the caravanners genially.

CHAPTER 32.

Bunter Declines to Stay!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. stared at Bunter speechlessly.

They understood now why the Owl of the Remove had sent them on a wild-goose chase in search of a non-existent Norman castle.

While they were gone he had "scooped" the total provision supply.

The larder was in the same state as Mrs. Hubbard's celebrated cupboard.

Bunter blinked at them, grinning, but with a lurking uneasiness in his fat face.

"Hallo, you fellows, got back?" he murmured.

"You fat villain!" gasped Lovell, finding his voice.

"You toad!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "You horrid clam!"

"I say, you fellows, you didn't mind my having a snack while you were gone, did you?" murmured Bunter. "I generally have tea about this time."

"You—you've had tea?"

"Yes. There wasn't quite enough for me, but I don't mind. I can rough it with anybody!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

There had been supper for six, breakfast for six, and other supplies, and the whole amount had been not quite enough for Billy Bunter's tea!

The marvel was where he had put it.

Evidently he had put it somewhere, and it was not surprising that he looked shiny and apoplectic, and breathed with some difficulty.

"After all, he's a guest, in a way," murmured Jimmy Silver. "Don't kill him. Get his bike down, and let him go."

"I say, you fellows, we may as well get on a bit farther before supper," said Bunter. "I shan't be hungry for an hour or two!"

"I shouldn't think you'd ever be hungry again!" gasped Raby.

"I suppose you've got something for supper?" added Bunter anxiously.

"We had," said Jimmy. "We haven't now!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bunter, in dismay. "Something will have to be done, then."

"Look here, I'm not going to stand this, Jimmy Silver!" roared Lovell. "The fat beast scooped us into going away while he raided the grub. I'm going to slaughter him!"

"Oh, really, Lovell——"

"There wasn't a Norman castle, and you know there wasn't!" shouted Lovell.

Bunter grinned feebly.

"D-d-didn't you find it?" he muttered.

"You know we didn't, as it wasn't there!"

"I—I think I—I made a mistake," murmured Bunter. "Now I come to think of it, it—it's in a different part of the country."

"You were pulling our leg, you fat load! Now you're going to be scalped!"

Lovell collared the Owl of Greyfriars and bumped him out into the road.

Billy Bunter gave a yell of wrath and indignation.

"Yaroo! Leggo! Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Get on your bike and buzz!" roared Lovell. "I'm going to kick you till you do! Like that!"

"Yaroo!"

"And like that!"

"Yooop! Help!"

Jimmy Silver rushed at his excited chum and dragged him back.

"Hold on, Lovell!"

"I'm going to slaughter him!" raved Lovell.

"Yaroo! Keep him off!" roared Bunter. "Look here, if this is what you call—yow-ow!—hospitality—"

Bunter staggered to his feet, keeping a wary eye on Arthur Edward Lovell, who was being restrained with difficulty.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Get off!" snapped Raby.

"I'm going!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I decline to remain in your company any longer than is absolutely unavoidable! I may say that I despise you! After pressing me to join you—"

"What?"

"I told you plainly that I wasn't accustomed to travelling with a turn-out of this sort!" said Bunter. "I mentioned that it would be awkward for me if any of my nobby friends saw me with such a show. I may as well say plainly, too, that I don't think much of Rookwood manners! Not quite up to the Greyfriars' standard, I can assure you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Lemme get at him, Jimmy, you idiot!" roared Lovell.

"I've been treated with discourtesy!" said Bunter warmly. "I'm sorry now I let you over-persuade me into coming with you. Unluckily, it's too late for me to leave you, you know; I can't get home in the dark. I shall leave you after breakfast to-morrow morning."

"Look here—" gasped Newcome.

Bunter waved a fat hand.

"It's no good, Newcome; it's too late now! I'm going!"

"I tell you—"

"Too late! I refuse to remain after breakfast to-morrow morning!" said Bunter firmly.

"You fat owl!" yelled Newcome. "I was going to say—"

"You needn't say anything. I decline to have anything more to do with you! If it wasn't so late, I'd go at once!" said Bunter.

"You'll go now, late or not, or I'll squash you!" shouted Lovell.

"Easy does it!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "I dare say the blind owl can't get home in the dark, Lovell."

"Let him go to Jericho, then."

"There's no lamps on my bike," said Bunter. "It's against the law to ride without lights. Some fellows are not particular about breaking the law. I happen to have some scruples!"

Lovell almost choked.

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh.

"Keep smiling!" he said. "After all, we knew Bunter, and we ought to have kicked him out when he joined us. He's got to stay with us till morning."

"Quite against my will, I assure you!" snorted Bunter. "I'm not accustomed to such company."

"Let him stay, and be blowed!" growled Lovell. "But bear this in mind, Bunter. You're starting in the morning as soon as the sun's up, and I'm going to start kicking you as soon as it's time for you to start!"

Bunter sniffed.

But there was no mistaking the deadly earnestness of Arthur Edward Lovell. He meant every word he said.

"I decline to keep up this conversation," said Bunter, with dignity. "These are not the manners I'm used to."

And with that he climbed back into the van.

The caravanners moved on.

The sun was setting, and twilight reigned, and it was necessary to look for a camping-place.

There was little hope of getting fresh supplies for supper.

They had the happy prospect of going supperless to bed, and starting in the morning minus breakfast.

Their feelings towards William George Bunter of Greyfriars were positively Hunnish. But they were not more Hunnish than Bunter's feelings towards them.

CHAPTER 33.

Mysterious!

"THIS will do," said Jimmy Silver at last.

It was dark now, and stars were twinkling in the sky.

A stretch of open grass by the roadside offered a camping-place, and the caravanners were tired, and ready to rest.

They were hungry, too, but for that there was no remedy.

Bunter had cleared out the caravan larder almost to the last crumb.

Jimmy Silver led Robinson Crusoe from the road, and the caravan bumped on the grass.

Billy Bunter blinked out of the van, his eyes gleaming behind his big spectacles.

The ventriloquist of Greyfriars had a little scheme all ready for discomfiting the Rookwood caravanners.

"Going to stop here, Silver?" he called out.

"Yes," snapped Jimmy.

"Got anything for supper!"

"No."

"Hadh'n't you better keep on, then?"

"Rats!"

"May come to a village, you know, or a farmhouse, and get something for supper," urged Bunter anxiously.

"Oh, dry up!"

"If you call that civil, Silver——"

"Rats!"

Even Jimmy Silver's patience was worn out, the fact that he was very hungry probably having something to do with it.

The van bumped on over the grass, and stopped not far from the road. Around the grass patch nothing was to be seen but trees and bushes.

From the shadows a deep, gruff voice suddenly proceeded.

"Now, then, you gipsy vagabonds, get out of this!"

Jimmy Silver started, and looked round.

"Hallo, who's that?"

"I'll show you who I am if I have to come to you!" came the gruff reply. "You're on private land. Get off, or I'll fetch the police!"

"Oh, what rotten luck!" groaned Lovell.

"Look here, why can't we camp here?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver warmly. "Come out and show yourself, anyway."

"I've warned you!" was the gruff reply.

"Who are you?" demanded Lovell.

There was no answer; the man apparently was gone. Billy Bunter drew his head back into the van, grinning.

The caravanners looked at one another.

"Let's stop here," said Lovell indignantly. "We're doing no harm. Why can't the man show himself if the place belongs to him?"

"Better get off," said Raby uneasily. "He may be gone for the police. I suppose this is private land, as he says."

"Some rotten land-hog!" grunted Lovell.

"Well, we're not out to solve the land question," grinned Raby. "Let's get off before there a row. Can't argue with bobbies."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Better!" he agreed.

Lovell grunted, but he assented. The horse was led into the road again, and the caravan rumbled on. A fat chuckle was heard from within the vehicle.

"That fat Greyfriars beast thinks it's funny!" muttered Lovell, breathing hard through his nose.

"Oh, never mind him!"

The tired caravanners marched on.

Tubby Muffin was in the van with Bunter now, but the Fistical Four were walking.

The road ran on between dark woods, and there was no camping-place to be found for several weary miles.

"I think this will do," Jimmy Silver said at last.

It was a cross-roads, with a signpost standing in the centre, surrounded by a wide patch of grass.

The caravan was turned from the road upon the grass-patch. There was plenty of room for it, and it was out of the way of traffic.

It was not an ideal camping-place, by any means, but the caravanners were too tired to care much about that.

Moreover, there was no need to light a fire, as there was no supper. They had nothing to do but to turn in.

Bunter's big spectacles glimmered from the van.

"I say, you fellows, ain't you going on?" he asked.

"No!"

"Suppose that bobby comes along?"

"It wasn't a bobby; but I don't care a rap whether he comes back or not!" hooted Lovell.

"I don't think you'd better stop here, Lovell. You see——"

"You can think what you like, you fat toad! We're stopping!"

"Oh, really, Lovell——"

"Shut up!"

Lovell dragged out the tent, and the juniors began to set it up beside the van.

Billy Bunter watched them morosely.

He would gladly have kept the caravan going all night in the faint hope of getting fresh supplies for supper.

Marvellous to relate, Bunter was getting hungry again. But the caravanners were evidently resolved to halt there for the night.

"I say, you fellows, I suppose you don't want me to sleep in the tent?" said Bunter, as he watched the juniors at work. "This van isn't up to much, but I can manage with it."

"You needn't sleep at all, for all I care!" snapped Lovell.

"Well, I'm staying in the van."

"Stay, and be blown!"

"Move on, there, you vagabonds!" came a gruff voice from the shadows.

Lovell glared round in great exasperation.

"There's that chap again!" he exclaimed. "By gad, if I could get near enough to hit him——"

"It must be some blessed tramp having a lark with us," said Jimmy Silver, in perplexity. "If it was a bobby he'd show himself."

"Bobby or not, I'll give him a prize nose if he comes near enough!" said Lovell, between his teeth.

"Are you going to move on?" demanded the gruff voice.

"No!" yelled Lovell.

"Then I'll run you in!"

"Come and do it!"

The owner of the gruff voice did not accept that invitation. He was heard no more, and the tent was erected.

Tubby Muffin had already turned in, in one of the two bunks in the caravan, the other being left for Billy Bunter.

But the Owl of Greyfriars seemed in no hurry to retire. He watched the Fistical Four through his big spectacles till the tent was finished, and they were ready to go to bed.

"By Jove, I shall sleep like a top to-night, supper or no supper," yawned Jimmy Silver. "We'd better be up early, before folks begin to pass by. You can go to bed in the van, Bunter."

"What about supper?"

"There isn't any supper, you owl! You've scoffed all the grub, haven't you?"

"If you call this hospitality, Jimmy Silver——"

"Oh, dry up!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. went into the tent. As the tent-flap fell into place the gruff voice was heard just outside.

"Here they are, officer! Pull the tent down, and take the whole gang into custody!"

CHAPTER 34.

Haunted:

"MY hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

He tore open the tent-flap again. Lovell grasped a pillow and rushed out, breathing wrath.

"Where are you, you rotter?" roared Lovell, staring about him.

"Show yourself, you beast!" hooted Newcome.

But there was nobody to be seen. Billy Bunter blinked out of the caravan.

"I say, you fellows, what's the row?" he asked.

"Did you see anybody here?" asked Raby.

"Eh? No."

"There's somebody hanging about."

"Haden't you better move on?" suggested Bunter. "We may come to a place where we can get some grub——"

"Shut up!" shrieked Lovell. "If you say another word about grub, I'll come and pillow you!"

Jimmy Silver blinked round him into the darkness in utter perplexity.

Unless the caravanners were being worried by some tramp with a misplaced sense of humour, Jimmy could not understand it at all.

"Well, the fellow's gone," he said at last. "Let's get to bed."

"Don't I wish I could catch him!" murmured Lovell. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to give him one good cosh!"

But the desired "cosh" could not be given, and the caravanners went into the tent again.

They turned in, and Jimmy Silver blew out the candle.

Gr-r-r-r-r!

Lovell sat up suddenly in his blankets.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"A blessed dog nosing about outside," yawned Jimmy Silver. "Let him nose! He can't get in here."

Gerrrrh!

"Shoo!" shouted Lovell. "Get away, you beast! Shoooo!"

A deep growl outside answered him.

It was followed by a bark, and then another bark and a growl, and then growling went on incessantly.

Lovell jumped up.

"I can't sleep with that thumping row going on!" he exclaimed.

"Drive him off!" murmured Raby sleepily.

Lovell grasped his pillow, and cautiously peered out of the tent.

Arthur Edward was always kind to animals, but just then he wanted to give that dog a terrific "cosh" with the pillow.

But there was no dog to be seen.

"The brute's gone!" growled Lovell.

Gurrrrrh!

"Oh, my hat! There he is again!"

Lovell dashed out of the tent.

The growling was going on in the deep gloom, and it seemed to recede towards the caravan, and Lovell followed it up, with the pillow ready.

Gurrrrrh!

"He's under the van!" called out Bunter's voice. "I say, you fellows, you might drive that dog off. How's a fellow to sleep?"

"I'm driving him off, you fat fool!" snorted Lovell.

Grrrrrrrr!

Lovell peered under the van, where the dog had apparently taken refuge. It was dark there, too dark to see anything but the faint outline of the wheels.

"Shoo! Gerraway! Shoo!"

Gurrrrrghr!

"My hat! I'll simply smash the beast!" gasped Lovell. "Where's something I can poke him with? Oh, thunder! I'll smash him!"

Lovell snorted and threw down his pillow.

"There's a stick in the van, Bunter; chuck it out!" he called out.

"Certainly!" purred Bunter.

"Buck up, lazybones!"

"Here you are!"

Whiz!

"Yaroooh!" roared Lovell, as he caught the stick—with his head. "You clumsy idiot! What are you bungling it at me for?"

"You told me to chuck it out."

Lovell grasped the stick and rushed towards the van. Bunter promptly backed out of sight.

The growling under the caravan had ceased for some moments, but it recommenced now, and Lovell turned his attention to the unseen dog again.

He leaned down by the wheels and thrust the stick savagely under the van.

"There, you beast! There, you brute!" he gasped, as he prodded away fiercely into the darkness.

The growling ceased, and there was a low whine, as of deep anguish.

Lovell suddenly ceased to prod.

Whine!

That sound of pain smote Lovell's conscience, and his wrath evaporated at once.

He had not really meant to hurt the dog, but the agonised whine seemed to show that he had hurt it very much indeed.

"Oh, I say, you brute!" exclaimed Bunter from above. "You've knocked his eye out, very likely."

"Shut up!" panted Lovell.

"Listen to the poor animal!" said Bunter, with virtuous indignation.

Whine!

"Oh, dear!" Lovell dropped the stick and peered under the van. "Good

doggie! Good old doggie! Poor old doggie!"

The whine, faint and agonised, answered him.

"Jimmy Silver!" shouted Lovell.

"Hallo!"

"Bring your flash-lamp here. I—I'm afraid I've hurt the poor beast!" stammered Lovell.

"Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver emerged from the tent, with his electric-lamp in his hand, followed by Raby and Newcome.

Lovell's face was troubled.

"I—I didn't really mean to hurt him," he faltered. "I just shoved under the van with the stick to clear him off. I—I must have hit him somewhere. Listen to him!"

Jimmy Silver's face was very grave as he heard that low, miserable whine under the van.

Bunter's glasses glimmered down accusingly.

"You've knocked his eye out, Lovell!" he said. "You've hurt him badly. It's too bad! This will have to be reported to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I'm sorry, but it's my duty——"

Lovell hurled his pillow, and Bunter broke off with a yell.

"I can't hear him now," said Jimmy Silver, flashing his light under the van. "Blest if I can see him, either! Where is he, Lovell?"

"Blest if I know! He's there somewhere."

"Well, where?"

The juniors stared under the van as the electric light showed up every dark recess, and showed it to be vacant.

There was no dog to be seen.

Lovell rubbed his eyes.

"Is the blessed place haunted?" he muttered.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

The whole affair puzzled him utterly.

"I can't make it out," he said. "It must be somebody having a lark with us, somehow. I'm going to bed."

The Fistical Four, with a curiously

uncanny feeling, returned to the tent. Barely had they turned in when a deep growl was heard outside.

Gurrrrh!

"That dog again!" shrieked Lovell.

"Oh, let him rip!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I'm going to sleep."

"He doesn't seem to be hurt now."

"Oh, bother him!"

The growling continued, but the Fistic Four did not heed it, and it ceased at last.

But it was close on midnight when the Rookwood caravanners were safe at last in the arms of Morpheus.

CHAPTER 35.

Light at Last!

WAKE up!" Bright and early in the morning, Jimmy Silver shouted into the caravan.

Tubby Muffin yawned, and Billy Bunter snored on.

It had been late before Jimmy Silver & Co. slept the previous night, but they were up early enough in the sunny summer morning.

They were conscious of an aching void within, and they wanted to get on the road and scout for breakfast.

Tubby Muffin woke up hungry, too, and he turned out of the van.

But Bunter was still sleeping when the tent was struck and Robinson Crusoe harnessed.

Lovell yanked Bunter's bike down, and stuck it against the sign-post.

"Now that fat boulder's coming out!" he said. "Bunter! Bunter! Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, you can start!" came a sleepy voice from within the van. "I'm not accustomed to getting up as early as this. Don't mind me! I can sleep while the van's moving!"

"You may be able to, but you're jolly well not going to!" answered Lovell. "I give you two minutes to get out. Then I'm coming in for you!"

"Oh, really, Lovell——"

"Time's going!" said Lovell grimly.

Lovell's voice showed that he meant business, and Billy Bunter turned out. He looked very discontented.

"I say, you fellows, what about breakfast?" he asked.

"You've got our breakfast under your waistcoat!" growled Lovell. "There's your bike."

"I can't start without breakfast!" hooted Bunter.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Suit yourself!" he answered. "You can take root here if you like. We're going, anyhow!"

"I say, you fellows, I'd better come on with you, till you get some grub," said Bunter. "I know you ain't hospitable—I don't expect common decency from fellows like you, but——"

"Come up!" said Lovell, addressing the horse.

"Am I coming with you for brekker?" hooted Bunter.

"No!"

"Well, of all the rotters——"

"Good-bye!"

"Look here, Silver, let Bunter come with us, and don't be a pig!"

Jimmy Silver spun round towards Raby.

"What's that, Raby?" he exclaimed.

"What's what?" asked Raby.

"If you want Bunter——"

"I don't want Bunter!"

"Then what do you mean by calling me a pig?" demanded Jimmy Silver wrathfully.

"Eh! Who called you a pig?"

"You did."

"I didn't! I heard somebody——"

"I suppose I know your voice!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "And I jolly well think——"

"I tell you I didn't speak!" shouted Raby.

"And I tell you you did!"

"You howling ass, I didn't!" exclaimed Raby.

"Oh, don't be an ass, I heard you!" said Newcome warmly.

"So did I," said Tubby Muffin.

"You didn't!" yelled Raby. "I didn't! You silly asses, are you all potty? I never said a word!" Raby turned away to the horse, and as he did so his voice went on: "You're a set of liars!"

Jimmy Silver jumped after him, and caught him by the collar.

"Hallo! Leggo!"

"Are you out of your senses?" shouted Jimmy angrily. "Liars, by Jove!"

"Do you mean to say I said that?" hooted Raby. "It was somebody else. I heard it, but I didn't speak."

"You did!"

"I didn't! Lovell, perhaps——"

Arthur Edward Lovell uttered a sudden yell.

"I've got it!"

"Eh! What have you got?" demanded Jimmy Silver gruffly.

Lovell rushed at Bunter. He grasped the fat junior of Greyfriars by the collar and shook him forcibly.

"Bunter!" he roared.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! It wasn't—— I didn't—— Yaroooh!"

"I've got it now!" raved Lovell. "That chap speaking last night, and never showing himself, and the dog, and the rest of it! It's Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Don't you remember?" howled Lovell. "He played tricks at Rookwood once. The beast is a ventriloquist!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, a light breaking upon his mind.

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Bunter, as Lovell shook him like a fat jelly. "Leggo! Don't you shake me, you b-b-beast—— Yow! If you make my glasses fall off——yooop—and they get bib——bib——broken——yarooop!——you'll have to pay for them! Yow-ow-woop!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Bunter all the time!" exclaimed

Raby. "Of course! I'd forgotten——"

"So had I!" said Jimmy Silver. "I remember now! The fat beast was going to make us quarrel before he left us, if he could!"

"Squash him!"

"Bump him!"

"Slaughter him!"

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows!" howled Bunter. "Can't you take a j-j-joke? I——I was only doing it to——to amuse you, you know! Yaroooh! Leggo! Look here—— Oh, my hat! Yooop!"

"Bump!"

Billy Bunter descended upon the earth with a heavy concussion.

Then he was rolled over in the grass, till there was no breath left in his fat carcass, and he was left sprawling and spluttering.

The caravan swung out into the road, and Billy Bunter sat up in the grass, groped for his glasses and jammed them on his nose, and blinked after the caravan in speechless wrath.

By the time he had recovered breath sufficiently to limp to his bike, the Rookwood caravan was out of sight.

"I don't think we shall see Bunter again!" smiled Jimmy Silver, as the caravanners sat down to breakfast at a wayside inn.

And Jimmy was right!

Even Billy Bunter did not feel inclined to join the Rookwood party again, and Jimmy Silver & Co. cheerfully reconciled themselves to the loss of his fascinating society.

CHAPTER 35.

First in the Field!

"HALT!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. started, and Tubby Muffin blinked sleepily out of the caravan.

That sudden challenge surprised the Rookwood caravanners.

The Rookwooders were following a steep and winding path up the chalk

cliffs, and the van was proceeding at a snail's pace.

Close at hand was the blue Channel, but it was out of sight behind the cliffs at present.

The path was steep and tiring, and difficult for a caravan, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were giving the van an occasional shove, to help Robinson Crusoe, the horse, in his task.

Occasionally, too, they had to put stones behind the wheels to keep the caravan from slipping back.

It was a path that few caravanners would have cared to follow, but the heroes of Rookwood were not common-or-garden caravanners, as Arthur Edward Lovell had remarked.

At the end of the winding path, high up, was an old Roman camp, with a splendid view of the sea, and on fine days even the French coast opposite could be seen.

Natives of the district had given them information about the old camp, and they had decided that it was an excellent place for camping.

If the old Romans could get there, as Jimmy Silver remarked, with their war-chariots and things, the Rookwood caravan could get there, too.

The spot was a very solitary one, and they had not expected to meet anyone on the path, unless it was some chance tourist.

The sudden shout of "Halt!" astonished them.

Robinson Crusoe came to a stop of his own accord, just as if he understood the order.

Robinson Crusoe was never sorry to halt.

"What the dickens——" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

There was a yell from Raby.

"The Moderns!"

"Tommy Dodd!" shouted Lovell.

Three grinning faces looked down on them from higher up the path.

In the middle of the path a great

boulder had been rolled, blocking the way.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the rival caravanners, were first in the field, evidently.

Where the Classical caravan was going the Modern caravan had already gone, and the rival juniors of Rookwood School were face to face on the steep path—with the three Tommies in possession of the summit.

The Classical chums of Rookwood stared wrathfully at the two above them.

"Halt!" repeated Tommy Dodd. "No admittance for dogs or Classics!"

"Go back, dear boys," said Cook, with a chortle. "We've taken possession."

"You silly asses!" roared Lovell. "We're going to camp in the old Roman camp at the top."

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Your mistake," he answered; "you're not. There isn't room for two caravan parties; it's too limited. Besides, we can't have measly Classics hanging round our camp."

"If there's not room for two, you Modern cads can clear off!" growled Newcome.

"Catch us, bedad!" said Tommy Doyle. There was a pause.

The Modern caravan was not in sight. It was evidently halted at the Roman camp at the top of the path, and hidden by the chalky boulders.

The Moderns had seen the Classics coming, and descended the path half-way—to stop them.

They were masters of the situation.

It was difficult enough to get the Classical van up that steep cliff-path at all, and impossible in face of opposition from above.

But the Fiscal Four of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, were not disposed to retreat.

In school or out of school, they were "up against" the Moderns all the time.

The three Tommies grinned down at them, greatly elated at having the whip-hand of their old rivals at Rookwood.

"You can come on, if you like, of course," said Tommy Dodd. "If you can argue with this broom, for instance, you can get by—perhaps."

"And, sure, this mop will talk to yez!" grinned Doyle.

"We're not going back!" roared Lovell.

"Look here——" began Jimmy Silver. "I say, we want to camp, you know," said Tubby Muffin, from the van. "I'm hungry, Tommy Dodd."

"You generally are, my fat tulip!" answered Tommy. "You were hungry when we broke up at Rookwood, and you'll be hungry when we get there next term."

"We haven't had lunch yet," said Tubby pathetically. "I say, Jimmy, had I better start on something in the van?"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Jimmy Silver. "But I'm hungry!"

"Shut up!" roared Lovell.

The Classical Four were not disposed to worry just then about Tubby Muffin's enormous appetite.

There were more important matters than that to be considered.

The business in hand was to clear the Modern juniors off the path, and get the Classical van up to the Roman camp.

Jimmy Silver debated that matter in his mind.

The big boulder planted in the path by the Moderns prevented the passage of the van until it was moved.

And to move it the three Moderns had to be defeated in combat.

In any other place that would not have been a difficult task to the Fistical Four, all of them great fighting-men, and with the odds on their side.

But the Moderns were in a very strong position, and they had brought weapons from their caravan—a broom, a mop, and a big stick.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome fixed their eyes on Jimmy Silver.

"Uncle James" was the leader, and

it was up to Uncle James to say what was to be done.

"Well?" said Lovell.

"We're not going back," said Jimmy decidedly.

"No fear!" agreed three voices in unison.

"We're going on. Rookwood never retreats."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tommy Dodd, you're to clear out of the way!" announced Jimmy Silver. "If you don't, we shall come and shift you!"

"Come on!" chorused the three Moderns, and the broom, the mop, and the stick were brandished in the air invitingly.

The Fistical Four blocked the wheels of the caravan with stones, and prepared for war.

A broom, a stick, and a couple of tent-pegs were taken from the caravan, the three Moderns watching those preparations with grinning faces.

They were three against four, but they were confident in the strength of their position.

They had selected the most difficult point in the steep path, where the ascent was quite abrupt, and the enemy charging up would be under very serious disadvantages.

But it was the only thing for Jimmy Silver & Co. to do—on the theory that Rookwood never retreated.

"Come on!" said Jimmy.

"Charge!" rapped out Lovell. "Come on, Tubby!"

"I—I'm coming!" stammered Tubby Muffin, but he did not leave the van. Tubby's opinion was that discretion was the better part of valour, and for the present he was quite satisfied to be a looker-on.

But the Fistical Four charged gallantly.

They came up the steep path with a rush, and in a moment more there was a battle in progress.

CHAPTER 37,
Driven Off!

"BACK up, Classicals!"

"Ow!"

"Sock it to them!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was a gallant charge, but the difficulties were too great. The fellows above had all the advantage.

A shove of Tommy Dodd's long broom caught Jimmy Silver on the chest, and sent him spinning backwards.

He rolled on the chalky path, with a loud yell.

Raby caught the mop with his nose, and sat down suddenly.

Lovell's tent-peg crashed against Tommy Doyle's stick, and went flying from his hand.

He jumped back, and Doyle lunged out with the stick, and nearly punctured Newcome, who sat down with a howl.

Lovell rushed on fiercely, got round the big boulder, and grasped Doyle.

They rolled over together in terrific combat.

"Pin him!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

"Sure, I've got him!" gasped Doyle.

Doyle had certainly got Lovell, but Lovell had equally certainly got Doyle, and they seemed about equally matched as they rolled on the ground, clutching one another with terrific vim.

Dodd and Cook, with broom and mop to the fore, still held the pass.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome struggled up, panting and crimson and dusty, and came on again.

But it was unavailing.

The disadvantage was too great, and they could not get to close quarters. The defence from above was too strong for the attack.

Lunges from above sent them spinning, again and again, and they retreated at last, with a good many bumps, and in a very excited state of temper.

Tommy Dodd brandished his broom victoriously.

"Come on!" he yelled.

"This way!" shouted Cook. "Come on, you Classical duffers!"

"Rescue!" bawled Lovell.

But there was no rescue just then for Lovell.

In the pause of hostilities, Cook went to Doyle's assistance, and Arthur Edward was quite overcome.

Cook ran a whipcord round his wrists, and knotted it, and did the same for his ankles, and Lovell lay helpless in the path.

The three Tommies, thus relieved of one of their foes, gathered round the big boulder, ready for another attack.

The odds were even now, and the Classicals had less chance than ever.

Jimmy Silver rubbed several bruises.

"Well, are we going on?" panted Newcome.

Jimmy shook his head.

"N.G.," he answered.

"We're not going to be licked by rotten Moderns!" howled Newcome.

"Fathead!" grunted Jimmy. "We're licked already! They've got the advantage, and they've downed Lovell. If four couldn't do it, three can't! It's U.P.!"

Raby and Newcome had to admit the truth of that observation, exasperated as they were.

"Are you coming?" shouted Tommy Dodd.

"Go and eat coke!" was Jimmy Silver's answer.

"Ha, ha, ha! Who's got licked?" shouted Tommy Dodd.

"Classicals!" hooted Doyle and Cook.

"Who sings small?"

"Classicals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Jimmy," came Tubby Muffin's voice from the van, "what about lunch?"

Jimmy Silver did not answer that question in words.

He made a lunge with his broom, and Tubby Muffin disappeared into the van with a fiendish yell.

"Going back — what?" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Let Lovell come back, you Modern rotters!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"No fear!" answered Tommy coolly. "Lovell's a prisoner of war. We'll send him back later. You can come and rescue him if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not going without Lovell!" shouted Jimmy.

"Well, come and fetch him!"

The three Classics, quite exasperated, charged up the path again, in spite of prudence.

But their case was more hopeless than ever.

They were bowled over at once by the luges from above, and they rolled down.

A yell of laughter followed them. The three Tommies were in great feather.

At Rookwood they did not often get the better of the Fistical Four. That made their present victory all the more satisfactory.

"Ow, ow, wow!" murmured Raby.

"I—I say, I'm fed up, if you are, you fellows!"

There was no help for it.

It was a defeat, and Lovell had to be left in the hands of the enemy for the present. It was strategy that was required to effect his rescue.

"We'll tackle the rotters some other way," murmured Jimmy Silver. "Just at present— Ahem!"

Whiz!

A chunk of chalk came from up the path, and Jimmy Silver gave a yelp.

"Oh! You Modern rotters!"

"Fire!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

"I—I say, we—we'd better get out of this for a bit!" exclaimed Newcome.

Although Rookwood never retreated, according to Jimmy Silver's statement, retreat had to be the order of the day just then.

It simply couldn't be helped.

To stand there and be pelted with chunks of chalk furnished entertain-

ment to the merry Moderns, but there was nothing in it from the Classical point of view.

The wheels were unlocked, and the defeated Classics backed the van away down the path.

Robinson Crusoe very willingly backed downward, though he had been reluctant to pull upward.

With a rumble, the Classical caravan receded, followed by triumphant howls from the Modern juniors above.

The van had to back a good distance before it reached a spot where the path was wide enough for the big vehicle to turn.

Then, with feelings too deep for words, Jimmy Silver & Co. turned the caravan, and retreated to the lower road.

The honours were with the Moderns—for the present.

It was "up" to Uncle James to change all that—if he could!

CHAPTER 35.

Prisoner of War!

"GOT 'em beat!" said Tommy Dodd gleefully.

"Hurrah for us!"

"Hip, hip!"

"When you've done making a shindy, perhaps you'll let me loose, you Modern worms!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in sulphurous tones.

"Not yet, my pippin!" grinned Tommy Dodd.

The three Moderns dragged half a dozen more chalky boulders into the path, effectually barricading it.

Then Lovell's feet were untied, and he was helped up.

His hands remained tied, however; his looks showed how he would use them if they were loosened.

Taking the captured Classical with them, the three Tommies tramped up the path to the Roman camp at the top.

There the Modern caravan was halted.

Of the Roman camp which had stood there in ancient times very few traces were left.

It had not been a large camp; probably something like an outpost for watching the coast.

Surrounded by chalky cliffs and boulders was a stretch of greensward, with here and there traces of ancient earthworks cropping up.

A spring bubbled up amid a pile of almost shapeless masonry, which might once have belonged to a well.

Space was limited, but there was plenty of room for the caravan party.

There were traces of more modern visitors than the Romans, in old condensed-milk tins and fish-paste tins scattered about.

The spot had evidently been much used by picnickers in the summer, tourists who had braved the steep ascent to picnic in the fresh pure air high above the sea, with a view of the wide blue Channel in the distance.

The Modern juniors were the only picnickers there now, however, and the traces of former visitors were not recent.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were glad enough to have it to themselves, and not sorry that the former tourists were conspicuous by their absence.

The Moderns looked very cheerful as they came into their camp, from which they could watch most of the path, and keep guard against any attempt of the Classical to surprise them by creeping up the path without their van.

If the enemy appeared in sight they had only to rush down the path to hold it against all comers, which was easily to be done, as they had proved.

Lovell did not share the cheerful elation of the Moderns.

He was in a state of great exasperation, and he was well aware that he was not at the end of his troubles.

"Just going to lunch when we spotted your gang, old nut," remarked Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you'll join us at lunch—what?"

"Rats!" grunted Lovell.

"Let loose his left hand," continued Tommy Dodd. "He can wait at table with one hand."

"Wait at table!" roared Lovell furiously.

"That's your job," said Tommy Dodd calmly. "We haven't brought you up here for nothing. You've got to make yourself useful. I suppose you weren't labouring under the delusion that you were ornamental?"

"You Modern worm!"

"Buck up, waiter!" grinned Tommy Cook.

"I'll see you blowed first, you Modern ass!"

"You won't wait at table?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"No, I won't!"

"That's bad!" said Tommy Dodd, shaking his head seriously. "You ought to know, Lovell, that prisoners of war are bound to work. You can't expect to eat the bread of idleness. Anybody got a pin?"

Cook, grinning, produced a pin.

Lovell glared at him.

"Only an inch to begin with," said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully. "Find a tender spot, and stick it in about an inch. Then we'll see whether Lovell will wait at table."

Lovell jumped back as Tommy Cook approached him.

"I'll kick!" he shouted.

"Catch his hoofs!" said Tommy Dodd.

Lovell was surrounded by the three Tommies, and he found himself in the grass, with three boots planted on him and keeping him there.

Then Cook advanced the pin towards him.

"Where will you have it?" he asked.

"Yah! You rotter!"

"What about your leg?"

"Yaroo! Stoppit!"

"You'd prefer it in the arm, perhaps? All right!"

"Yooop!"

The pricks of the pin were only slight; it was not really an inch, but Lovell yelled as if it had been a yard.

"Try the tip of his nose!" suggested Doyle.

"Good egg!"

"Keep off!" yelled Lovell.

"Are you going to wait at table?" asked Tommy Dodd politely.

Arthur Edward Lovell gulped.

"Ye-e-es, you rotter!"

"Good! I thought you'd be a nice boy if we persuaded you. Mind you behave yourself, or you'll get the inch next time."

Lovell did not reply; he gulped with wrath.

The three Tommies sat down to lunch with smiling faces, and Lovell, with one hand free, waited on them.

Once or twice he had a touch of the pin, to liven him up, as Tommy Dodd described it.

Lovell's looks were an entertainment in themselves as he waited on his captors.

His wrath was only simmering, however.

Towards the end of that cheery lunch it boiled over.

"Hurry up, waiter!" shouted Cook, shying a chunk of turf at Lovell to enliven him. "I'm waiting for that ginger-beer!"

Lovell brought the ginger-beer, but instead of pouring in into the tin cup he poured it down Tommy Cook's neck.

There was a roar from Cook as he jumped up.

Ginger-beer down the back of the neck was not refreshing.

"Yow-ow! You horrid Classical beast! Collar him! Ow!"

Lovell made a jump for the cloth that was spread on the grass with the crockery on it, and landed among the crocks with both feet.

There was a terrific crash.

The next moment he was dragged away, but he had already made his waiting at table cost the Moderns dear.

"The awful cad!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "He's smashed our crocks. They

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were nearly done in already, and now he's finished them! Scrag him!"

Bump, bump!

"Yow-ow!" roared Lovell. "You Modern rotters! Let me loose and I'll lick the lot of you! Yaroooh!"

Bump!

"Oh, my hat! Oh! Ah! Yah!"

Lovell's hands were tied again. The Moderns were fed up with him as a waiter. That humorous idea had worked out rather expensively.

"Kick the beast out!" growled Tommy Doyle.

"Yah! I'll pulverise you!" gasped Lovell.

"We're going to keep him prisoner till sundown, just to show Jimmy Silver that he's no good, and can't keep his end up!" said Tommy Dodd. "Will you give your parole, Lovell, if we let you loose?"

"No; blow you!"

"All serene!"

Tommy tied a tent-rope to Lovell's ankle, and the other end to the wheel of the caravan.

Then the Three Tommies finished their lunch.

CHAPTER 39.

Uncle James rises to the Occasion!

"WELL, this is a go!"

George Raby made that remark as the Classical caravanners halted in the lower road, far out of sight of the party at the Roman camp above.

"Rotten!" grunted Newcome.

Jimmy Silver was silent.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth was feeling his defeat keenly, and most of all the fact that he had to leave his chum a prisoner in the hands of the Moderns.

Uncle James' brain was actively at work, but so far he had not thought of a means of turning the tables on Tommy Dodd & Co.

Tubby Muffin's face was quite pathetic.

The fat Classical was not thinking of the defeat or the capture of Lovell; he was concerned about lunch.

But he did not venture to say so. He felt that his companions would display impatience, if not something more painful.

They did not seem to realise, like Tubby, the great importance of meal-times.

However, there was an inner man to be considered, and the Classical caravanners lunched by the roadside, and Tubby Muffin was able to satisfy the inordinate craving of his inner Tubby at last.

After lunch Uncle James wore a very thoughtful look.

He was thinking it out, and Raby and Newcome waited for the result of his cogitations.

They agreed to leave it to Uncle James; they were at a loss to know what to do.

To ask for Lovell's release, and then to clear off and leave the Moderns in possession was too great a humiliation.

It was simply not to be thought of.

Somehow or other Tommy Dodd & Co. had to be downed, and it was up to Uncle James of Rookwood to think of a way.

Jimmy Silver broke the silence at last.

"This place is jolly near the coast," he remarked.

"Just found that out?" asked Raby sarcastically. "Is that what you've been making a face like an owl for?"

"That old Roman camp is very high up, and a good place for watching the sea, and so on," continued Jimmy Silver unheeding.

"I dare say that's why the Romans had a camp there," said Newcome. "But what does it matter?"

"Lots! It might be a prohibited area."

"A which?"

"I say that it might be a prohibited area, being so high up near the coast, and if you don't know what a pro-

hibited area is, I'll tell you. It's a place where you can't go without a permit from the military authorities of the district."

"Well, that Roman camp's nothing of the kind, then, or there'd be a sentry or something somewhere about."

"I dare say there would," admitted Jimmy. "But there mightn't be. But if the place was a prohibited area, and chaps camped there, and the official johnnies got to know of it, they'd soon be routed out and warned off."

"Very likely, but I don't see what it matters to us, you ass! You're wandering in your mind, Jimmy!"

"Oh, you don't see, of course! Have you ever heard of a company of first-class actors called the Rookwood Players?"

"Eh! Yes, ass!"

"Who was the best actor of the lot?"

"Erroll."

"Ahem! Well, yes, perhaps so; but a jolly good member was your Uncle James," said Jimmy Silver. "I've been thinking. We haven't got any of the theatrical things with us, but we're only two miles from a town. In that town I'll bet ninepence to fourpence that there's a costumier's! We've got some tin. Well, suppose we buy or hire some things? Hiring them will do, as we only want them this once, and we can leave a deposit."

"What the merry thunder——"

"You've seen me made up in character," continued Jimmy. "I can do it on my head. Suppose I make up as a man about fifty, with whiskers and glasses and things——"

"What on earth for?" shrieked Raby. "Is this a time for private theatricals?"

"Fathead! In that rig I'd walk up to the camp——"

"Eh?"

"As an official——"

"A—a—an official!" stuttered Raby, while Newcome stared open-mouthed and Tubby Muffin even left off finish-

ing up the remnants of the lunch in his astonishment.

Jimmy Silver nodded calmly.

"As an official," he answered. "There's no end of officials in the country now, and they're increasing in number every day. That's what they call efficiency, you know. Well, if that old Roman camp is a prohibited area, it's quite natural for an official to walk in and order the Moderns off."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You couldn't do it!" gasped Raby.

"I could do it on my head!" answered Jimmy Silver disdainfully. "To be an official you've only got to be middle-aged, with an important manner and a fat head. I can assume the fat head."

"No need for that. You're born for that part of it."

"Ass! What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Rotten!" answered Raby at once.

"Piffle!" said Newcome.

"Bosh!" said Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet.

"Well, I'm going to try it," he said. "You chaps stay here while I hike off to the town. I'll be back in an hour or so."

And, without vouchsafing another word, Jimmy Silver started.

Raby and Newcome looked at one another.

"Of all the chumps——" said Raby.

"Of all the fatheads——" said Newcome.

And they let it go at that.

They had a very agreeable rest, however, under the trees by the roadside, while they waited for Jimmy Silver to return.

He was back in about an hour, with a bundle in his hand.

"Got the stuff?" asked Raby, incredulously.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Yes, rather! You fellows can help me make up. Come into the trees, where we shan't be seen."

"It's no good, you know," remarked Newcome.

"Rats!"

"Simply rot!" observed Raby.

"Rubbish!"

Jimmy Silver evidently did not intend to argue the matter.

His comrades, with expressions of great resignation on their faces, accompanied him into the trees, giving Jimmy Silver his head, so to speak.

Jimmy opened his bundle, and his comrades surveyed the contents curiously.

They were still incredulous, but their expression altered a little as they watched Jimmy Silver in the process of transformation.

He donned grey trousers and a black frock-coat over his own clothes, which made him look a good deal stouter.

He changed his boots for a larger pair with elevators in them, which added nearly a couple of inches to his stature.

With the aid of a mirror stuck on a trunk he made up his face.

Jimmy Silver, as a leading light of the Classical Players at Rookwood School, was an adept in that art.

His present task was rather more difficult than that of making up as Julius Cæsar or Hamlet, but Jimmy did it well.

He produced a sallow complexion and a wrinkled brow in a manner that was really surprising.

A wig with greyish hair made him look fifty at least added to the effect of a pair of large spectacles which completely altered the expression of his face.

Greyish moustache and whiskers added still more to the effect.

A stiff white collar and a silk hat gave the finishing touch.

When the last artistic touch had been added, Raby and Newcome and Tubby Muffin stared at Jimmy Silver almost in awe.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth had vanished, and in his place stood a

gentleman of about fifty, rather stout and important-looking.

He still lacked a little in height, but he made that up in breadth.

He was as tall as a good many men of fifty with his elevated boots.

He blinked at his chum through his glasses, the lenses of which were, of course, of plain glass.

"Well, you doubting Thomases?" he said.

His voice was no longer Jimmy Silver's, any more than his looks.

He had adopted a somewhat high-pitched and querulous voice, which made his comrades jump as they heard it.

"My hat!" ejaculated Raby.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Tubby Muffin. "He might be his own giddy grandfather!"

"What do you think of it now?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Newcome heartily. "Whether the Moderns believe you're an official or not, I'll bet they won't know you're Jimmy Silver!"

"Blessed if I think Lovell will know you, let alone the Moderns!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver grinned, a rather peculiar grin, with his wrinkled and whiskered face.

"I fancy it will work," he said. "I'm going to try, anyway! Here goes!"

And, after a last look in the mirror, Jimmy Silver started on the path up to the Roman camp.

His chums, almost breathless with excitement, waited with the Classical caravan below.

Their faith in Uncle James had revived at last.

CHAPTER 40.

Trouble for Tommy!

"WHO the dickens is this?"

Thus Tommy Dodd as he watched a silk-hatted gentleman who had appeared on the cliff path.

The Modern chums saw him arrive

at the barricade of boulders, and stop and peer at it through his spectacles, and then climb over and continue on his way.

Then he passed out of sight on the winding path.

"Old duffer!" yawned Tommy Dodd. "Fancy a man starting out on the cliffs in a frock-coat and a silk topper! Queer idea of enjoying himself!"

The stranger did not come in sight again till he was on the level, and then he came into the Roman camp with a quick, jerky tread.

The three Tominies and Lovell glanced at him carelessly.

As Lovell was tied, the sight was likely to be rather surprising to a stranger, who did not know the merry manners and customs of the rival juniors at Rookwood.

The gentleman came towards the Modern caravan, and glanced at Lovell and then at the three Moderns.

"What are you doing here?" he rapped out, in a high-pitched and decidedly ill-tempered tone.

Tommy Dodd stared at him.

"Sitting on the grass," he answered.

"Do you know that you are liable to arrest?" exclaimed the silk-hatted gentleman sternly.

"Wha-at!"

"Were you not aware that this is a prohibited area?"

"My hat! No."

The three Tominies jumped up, rather dismayed.

Lovell grinned.

He was thinking that it was just as well that the Moderns, and not the Classics, were camped there.

Camping without a permit in a prohibited area was a serious matter.

The gentleman blinked at the Modern juniors scrutinisingly through his spectacles with a very suspicious expression.

"Is there anyone else here?" he asked. "Anyone older, I mean?"

"No; we're caravanning," answered Tommy Dodd. "We hadn't the faintest

idea that it was a prohibited area, of course. There's no notice up."

"You do not seem to have used your eyes, young man!" snapped the stranger. "What is this boy doing here, tied up?"

"Oh, that's only a lark!"

"Indeed! Have you taken any photographs here?"

"My hat! No. We haven't a camera with us."

"Have you taken any sketches?"

"No."

"Then why did you come here?" demanded the silk-hatted gentleman suspiciously.

"Just caravanning," said Tommy Dodd.

"Huh! I have never heard of caravans coming up such a steep path before. It looks to me as this caravan is simply camouflage, and you are here for some illegal purpose."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Cook.

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"Howly mother av Moses!" murmured Tommy Doyle. "We're landed in something this time, Tommy, you gossoon!"

Tommy Dodd knitted his brows.

"Look here, you're asking us a jolly lot of questions, sir!" he exclaimed. "I dare say you have a right to, if it comes to that. But who are you, anyway?"

"You are surely aware that every prohibited area has a Civil superintendent?" snapped the visitor.

"I—I didn't know—"

"You may have to prove that. If you belong to this district you must have heard of Mr. Jorrocks, Civil superintendent of the prohibited area of Beachwood, Sandycombe, Hockley-cum-Clayton, and the intervening districts."

"Great pip! Never even heard of the places!" said Tommy Dodd. "We're quite strangers here."

Mr. Jorrocks gave him a very suspicious look.

"You assure me that there is no older person in the party?" he asked after a pause.

"Certainly! We're the lot."

"Who are you? What are you?"

Mr. Jorrocks rapped out the questions sharply.

Tommy Dodd answered at once, feeling that the fullest explanation he could make to the Civil superintendent the better.

If the Modern caravanners had unwittingly done wrong the consequences might be serious enough, unless they made it clear that they had acted in thoughtlessness.

"We're schoolboys on holiday, Mr. Jorrocks," said Tommy. "We belong to Rookwood School."

"I have heard of Rookwood School. In that case you are doubtless above suspicion. Have you anything about you to prove your statement?"

"I—I don't know—"

Mr. Jorrocks became very stern at once, his wrinkled brows contracting.

"You had better accompany me to

the commandant," he said. "The matter will be dealt with by the military."

The three Tommies exchanged glances of utter dismay.

Visions of a stern and frowning military officer rose before their minds; Some stiff old martinet, who might refuse to listen to a word.

"Oh, howly smoke!" gasped Doyle. "We're in for it!"

"My hat!" said Lovell. "I say, you chaps, you must have something or other in the van with Rookwood on it! Anyway, there's my pals down below. They'll speak for you."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd in relief. "Mr. Jorrocks, there's some more Rookwood chaps on the lower road. You must have passed them, I think."

"I saw a caravan, certainly," said Mr. Jorrocks icily. "The persons there may be in league with you, for all I know to the contrary."

"They're not! They——"

"We've got some books, with the name of our school written in them, in the van, sir!" exclaimed Jack Cook. Mr. Jorrocks sniffed.

"That proves nothing! In fact, I am not empowered to let the matter rest here. You must explain yourself to the military commandant. If you are honest, and can prove that you came here with no evil purpose, you have nothing to fear. But there have been cases of spying on this coast."

"Oh, dear!"

"Ow!"

"Do we look like spies?" howled Tommy Dodd indignantly.

"Spies never look like spies," answered Mr. Jorrocks drily. "If they did they would not be of much use."

The force of that remark struck the Rookwooders, and they were silent.

"I repeat that you have nothing to fear if you can prove that you are simply schoolboys on a caravanning tour," said Mr. Jorrocks. "But you must prove that in the proper quarter.

I will accompany you and your van to the military camp, a mile from here."

"We can prove it easily enough," said Tommy Dodd.

"It remains for you to do so, then," answered Mr. Jorrocks. "Kindly put your horse to, at once, and accompany me to the colonel."

The unhappy Moderns set to work at once.

Lovell was released, and he helped them.

It was no time to think of Modern and Classical rivalry.

Lovell, in fact, was involved in the affair, as he was present in the "prohibited area."

He had the pleasant prospects of accompanying the Moderns, with Mr. Jorrocks, to the military commandant, to give an account of himself.

The horse was quickly harnessed, Mr. Jorrocks watching the process through his spectacles.

"We're ready!" said Tommy Dodd at last.

"Very well. Come."

The Modern van rumbled out of the old Roman camp, and took the steep path downward.

Arrived at the barricade, the juniors laboriously rolled the boulders out of the way, and then they rumbled on.

Mr. Jorrocks walked beside the van, keeping a very sharp eye on the Modern juniors, evidently in a suspicious mood.

With grim faces the Moderns led the horse onward and downward, till at last the Modern caravan rumbled out into the lower road, where the Classical caravan was standing.

CHAPTER 41.

Victory!

RABY and Newcome and Tubby Muffin were standing near the Classical van, and they could scarcely believe their eyes as the Moderns came in sight.

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The three Tommies and Lovell were walking with the horse, with very serious faces, and close by stalked Mr. Jorrocks—otherwise Jimmy Silver of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Raby. "Jimmy's done it!"

"Done them, you mean!" grinned Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Classics roared.

"Halt!" rapped out Mr. Jorrocks.

The Modern van halted within a few yards of the Classical van.

Raby and Newcome and Tubby Muffin were chortling, but the Moderns were serious enough.

"I say, this isn't a laughing matter, you chaps!" whispered Lovell.

"Isn't it?" chuckled Raby.

"No fear! The old jesser is a dashed official—a Civil superintendent, or something. I never knew there was such a thing."

"Ha, ha! Neither did I."

"I tell you it's not a laughing matter!" exclaimed Lovell. "It turns out that the Roman camp is a prohibited area, and we're being marched off to see a dashed military johnny and be called over the coals."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classics shrieked.

"All very well for the Moderns," growled Lovell, "but not so jolly well for me. I've got to go with them, as I was there. Jolly lucky for you fellows that you weren't in the Roman camp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To the amazement of Arthur Edward Lovell and the three Tommies, Mr. Jorrocks joined in the roar of laughter.

He laughed so heartily that his grey moustache twisted sideways, giving him a most extraordinary look.

He took off his spectacles, chortling. Lovell stared at him.

The three Tommies gazed at him as if they were fascinated.

The stood dumb, while Mr. Jorrocks removed his wig, his whiskers, and his moustache.

It was like a dream to the three Moderns.

They rubbed their eyes, wondering whether they were the victims of an optical delusion.

But they weren't, and when Jimmy Silver's spectacles and hirsute adornments were gone a certain familiarity in the features struck them, in spite of the make-up.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Raby. "Do you know the merry old Civil superintendent now?"

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

Tommy Dodd's jaw dropped.

"It—it—it isn't Jimmy Silver!" he said faintly.

"Jimmy Silver!" murmured Doyle dazedly.

Jimmy threw off the frock-coat.

"It's your own Uncle James!" he said affably. "My hat! You seem rather surprised, Lovell, old scout! Mind your eyes don't drop out!"

"You!" stammered Lovell.

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "I had to get you away from the Moderns, old bean, and the Moderns away from the camp. We're going to have the Roman camp. So far as I know, it's not a prohibited area, and I don't believe there's such a johnny as a Civil superintendent. If there is, I've never heard of it. You don't look pleased, Tommy Dodd!"

"I—I—I——" stammered Tommy Dodd.

Even yet he could hardly believe that he had been spoofed so thoroughly and efficiently by the Classical of Rookwood.

Lovell was grinning joyously, however; he did not share the feelings of the three Tommies.

He had been rescued, and the three Moderns had been turned out of the Roman camp, and it was the biggest and most successful spoof in the history of the rivals of Rookwood.

Lovell joined in the chortle, while the three Tommies began to look sulphurous, as they realised how egre-

giously their Modern leg had been pulled.

"Ye spalpeen!" gasped Tommy Doyle. "Ye thafe of the worruld! Ye — Oh, there ain't a word for yez. I'll spiflicate yez intoirely! Mop him up!"

"Not in these trousers!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "We've got you now where we can handle you, dear boys — Hallo! Buck up!"

Headless of the odds against them the three Tommies rushed at Jimmy Silver, simply thirsting to give "Mr. Jorrocks" the ragging of his-life.

But the Fistical Four piled in together, and on the open road the Moderns no longer had the advantage.

All the advantage was now with the Classicals, and even Tubby Muffin joined in.

It was a terrific scrap for a few minutes, and then the three Moderns were strewn in the road, and a Classical was sitting on each of them.

"Our win!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "You Moderns are no good, you know! This is where we smile! Give 'em a Classical smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Yow-ow-ow!" came from Tommy Dodd. "Gerroff, Lovell, you beast, you're busting my ribs! Yow-ow! Go and eat coke! Ow, wow! We chuck it! Ow!"

The three Moderns, very dusty and

dishevelled, were allowed to rise, and they limped to their caravan.

It was a great relief to know that they were not to be taken to a military commandant, certainly; but they were not feeling pleased.

But evidently the game was up, and the Classicals were the victors.

Tommy Dodd & Co. led their horse on, and the Modern caravan rumbled away down the road, and this time it was the Classicals who sent after the retreating enemy a yell of triumphant laughter.

And as the Moderns disappeared, the Classical caravan was led up the cliff path, and this time there was nothing to stop them, and they arrived triumphantly at the Roman camp.

The Classical caravanners were in possession of the prize.

From the Roman camp they could see the lower road winding away in the distance, white in the sunlight, and on it appeared, like dots to the view, a caravan and three tramping pedestrians.

Then Tommy Dodd & Co. vanished from view, and the Classical caravanners gave a cheer that awoke every echo of the chalk cliffs around them.

And that was the last that Jimmy Silver & Co. saw of their rivals of the Modern Fourth until the day when they reassembled at Rookwood at the commencement of the new term.



UNDER THE JOLLY ROGER

Private Fleets.

BUCCANEERS of the Main, scouring the seas like ranging sharks in search of Spanish gold, waiting to pounce on some fat galleon loaded with doubloons and rich merchandise—those were the days when the skull and crossbones flag, the dreaded symbol of piracy, fluttered at many a masthead. All along the coast of Maine in those far-off days when Morgan, L'Ollonais the Terrible, Captain Sharp and the rest plied their fell trade, the Spaniards lived in fear and trembling of these ferocious, daredevil pirates and their cut-throat crews. But although we think almost entirely of pirates as evil, black-bearded sea wolves, they were, more often than not, marshalled together in highly organised fleets of skilled fighters. Captain Morgan when he set out to sack the towns of Puerto Del Principe and Porto Bello, banded together a fleet of twelve ships which were manned by seven hundred fighting men. Neither did they limit their pillaging to the sea and coastal towns. Often they landed and attacked large inland strongholds.

Inland Raids.

When Captain Morgan made his famous attack on Panama in 1670, he and his men marched inland away from their ships for nine days before they reached the town. The sacking of Panama, the complete destruction of the town, the ruthlessness of Captain Morgan are matters of history, yet when this king of pirates returned to his ships, he took with him a hundred and seventy-five pack animals laden with gold and silver and other valuables!

Often these pirates were men from

the regular British navy. Captain Sharp and his partners, Captain Sawkins and Captain Harris were naval men, yet they were among the fiercest of the pirates. They, too, made several attacks on inland towns, the biggest of these being Santa Maria which was an important centre from which gold was sent to Panama. The pirates numbered three hundred and twenty-seven men and after an eight day's march they captured the town without loss of a single life despite the fact that it was garrisoned by nearly three hundred Spaniards.

Routing the Spaniards.

After Santa Maria, Captain Sharp and his men decided to follow in Morgan's footsteps and push on to Panama to attack it from the sea. Packed into canoes they set off, making down the Gulf of San Miguel. On the way they came up with a merchant tarque which they tried to capture. She managed to get away, however, and when the pirates reached Panama, they found several Spanish men o' war ready to greet them. So fiercely did the pirates fight, however, that not only did they succeed in driving off the Spaniards, but actually succeeded in capturing two of the vessels; and it was in this fight that Captain Harris was killed. The buccaneers succeeded in capturing five more Spanish ships and then decided to abandon the idea of sacking the town, returning to their more usual custom of patrolling the sea and swooping down on every merchantman which hove in sight. As Panama was at that time practically the most important centre, their "bag" was very profitable. Their headquarters were at the island of Tavoga.

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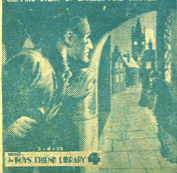
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