

MASTERS ON STRIKE!



By
Owen
Conquest

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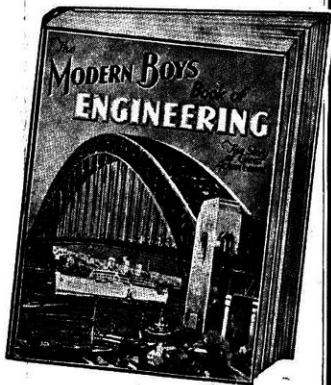


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Masters on Strike!

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A school without masters—no lessons, no prep, no impots! Never before in all its history has Rookwood School witnessed such amazing scenes as when the masters go on strike!

CHAPTER 1. Under Sentence!

"I'M going to the Head!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that announcement in tones of determination.

Raby and Newcome looked rather uncertainly at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy shook his head hopelessly.

"It's no good, Lovell," he said.

"But—"

"The Head won't listen to you. He won't listen to me. He's made up his mind. And—" Jimmy's voice faltered. "And I'm to be flogged in the morning."

"You shan't, Jimmy," exclaimed Lovell angrily. "I tell you I'll go to the Head—we'll all go! We can prove—"

"He mightn't believe us," said Raby. Lovell snorted.

"I'll jolly well make him!" he said.

"Hallo, little one, what's the trouble?" asked a cheery voice in the doorway of the end study.

It was Conroy, the Australian junior, who was looking in.

Pons, the Canadian, and Van Ryn, of South Africa, looked in over his shoulder.

"Anything wrong?" asked Van Ryn.

"Yes," said Lovell shortly.

"Well, don't bite a chap's head off," said the South African good-humouredly. "What's the row? Anything about the footer?"

"No, ass."

"Thanks, fathead. We came along to speak to Jimmy Silver about footer."

"Oh, blow footer!" growled Lovell crossly.

"Well, my hat!"

The Colonials looked astonished, as well they might.

It was something new to hear Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth "blow" footer!

"Well," said Conroy, "if we've dropped in at the wrong moment, we'll travel along. But why not tell your Australian uncle all about it, and ask him nicely for his valuable advice?"

Lovell grunted.

"There's not much to tell," said Jimmy Silver, smiling faintly. "I've got landed in a scrape."

"That's nothing new."

"This one is. I'm to be flogged to-morrow morning in Big Hall before all Rookwood!" said Jimmy Silver bitterly.

"Ye gods! What for?"

"Nothing!"

The Colonial Co. became grave at once.

It was a serious matter enough.

Flogging was very seldom administered at Rookwood, and only for very serious offences.

The disgrace of the punishment was worse in most fellows' eyes than the infliction itself—which was painful enough.

And for Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form, and the most popular junior in the Lower School, to be sentenced to a flogging, was a surprise, and it needed explaining.

"Tell us what's happened, Jimmy," said Conroy quietly.

"I hardly know," said Jimmy. "I was called down to the Head's study, and found that a trick had been played on Dr. Chisholm. Somebody had tied a cord across his study, and he went in in the dark and took a tumble. He looked hurt."

"Phew!"

"You didn't play such an idiotic trick, surely?" exclaimed Van Ryn.

"No."

"But the Head thinks he did," growled Lovell.

"Why?"

"Because he's a silly ass!"

"Draw it mild, Lovell, old chap. The Head isn't a silly ass!" said Conroy.

"I say he is!" roared Lovell.

"Then you'd better tell him so, old scout; it's no good shouting at me. Why does the Head think you did it, Jimmy?"

"They found my silver pencil-case in the study. It was dropped there as if it had slipped from my pocket when I stooped down to tie the cord. It hadn't, of course, as I never did it. But it looks as—"

Jimmy paused and coloured as he read the expressions on the faces of the juniors.

"I suppose you believe me?" he exclaimed hotly.

"Yes, of course," said Conroy, rather slowly. "But you must admit that it was pretty good evidence for the Head, Jimmy. How the merry thump did your pencil-case get there if you didn't drop it there?"

"I don't know."

"Ahem! Not much good telling the Head that!"

"I found that out," said Jimmy Silver bitterly. "But that isn't all. I was in the study a short time before, as it happens."

"Oh!"

"You remember I biffed into the Head when we were playing leap-frog in the quad; it was misty. He sent me in for his cane to lick me. I fetched the cane, and took it back afterwards. He's got it into his head that while I was there I rigged up that trap for him. Of—of course, I had the chance; I had an excuse all ready for being in the study, if I was spotted there. That's how he looks at it."

"Blest if anybody wouldn't, Jimmy. It does look bad."

"I know it does," said Jimmy Silver savagely. "But that doesn't alter the fact that I didn't do it, and never even

heard anything about it till Mr. Bootles fetched me to the Head's study."

"And your pencil-case——"

"I dropped it somewhere yesterday, or left it here in the study. I'm not quite clear which. I know it wasn't in my pocket when I felt for it this morning in class."

"Might have been in another pocket you didn't feel in, if you don't remember dropping it."

"It's possible, of course."

"And you might have dropped it in the Head's study when you were there."

"I don't see how I could without stooping down——" Jimmy Silver broke off. "Oh, you needn't tell me how it looks. Perhaps I dropped the pencil-case there, and perhaps the Head biffed his foot against it when he tumbled over, and knocked it along to where it was found. I don't know. Or the chap who rigged up that trap may have found my pencil-case, and left it there to fix the thing on to me. How can I tell?"

"That's rather thick."

"I know it is. But I know I had nothing to do with the jape on the Head, and it could be proved if he'd listen."

"That's better," said Conroy. "How could it be proved?"

Jimmy nodded towards his chums.

"Three witnesses," he said.

Lovell broke out angrily.

"Jimmy's been with us here—we've been fencing—ever since we were in the quad. He hadn't been out of our sight a minute before Bootles came to take him to the Head. We saw him take the cane back to the study; he hadn't any blessed cord with him. He didn't stay in the study three seconds. Then he came up here with us. Isn't that proof?"

"Plenty," assented Conroy. "Then go to the Head and tell him."

"Jimmy thinks the Head won't give us a hearing," said Newcome.

"He's too wild," said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head. "I've never seen

him in such a wax. He was hurt by his tumble."

"These fellows ought to go, all the same," said Conroy decidedly. "The Head's bound to listen."

"I'm jolly well going, anyhow!" said Lovell angrily. "I'll make him listen: I suppose the Head isn't a dashed Russian Czar that's got to be approached in fear and trembling? I'm going. You fellows coming?"

He looked at Raby and Newcome, who in turn looked at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy nodded at last.

"Try it, if you like," he said. "But you're risking a licking if the Head thinks it's a put-up job."

Snort from Arthur Edward Lovell.

"We'll chance that," he said. "Come on."

And Lovell & Co. left the study, the Colonial chums remaining with Jimmy Silver to await their return.

CHAPTER 2.

A Friend in Need!

"COME in!"

The Head's voice was sharp and snappish.

Dr. Chisholm was alone in his study, seated at his writing-table, but he was not occupied.

He was feeling sore, disturbed, and angry.

The sudden fall over the stretched cord in the darkness had shaken up the old gentleman badly.

He had bruises on his knees and severe abrasions on his hands, and a bump on his head where it had knocked against a chair.

Such an outrage against the majestic person of the Head was unprecedented at Rookwood, and it was no wonder that he was bitterly angry.

Indeed, he was reflecting that he had been too lenient with Jimmy Silver, and that he should have expelled the culprit from the school, instead of sentencing him to a flogging, when the tap came at his door.

His tone did not make Lovell & Co. feel hopeful as they entered the study.

Neither did his look as he turned his grim brow upon them.

Seldom or never had they seen the brow of the doctor so thunderous.

The Head's face was severe at the best of times, but at present it was, as Lovell said afterwards, a good likeness of the fabled Gorgon.

His eyes gleamed at the juniors over his glasses.

"Well?" he rapped out.

"Please——" stammered Lovell.

"What do you want here?"

"About——about Jimmy Silver, sir——" stuttered Lovell.

"What?"

"Jimmy, sir—I mean Silver——"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand with a commanding gesture.

"I am aware that you boys are Silver's study-mates," he said. "Is it possible that you have had the astounding impertinence to come here to intercede for him?"

"N-no, sir; but——"

"You may go. You can have nothing to say to me on the subject. Silver will be flogged in the morning."

"But, sir——"

"And I trust," thundered the Head—"I trust it will be a warning to him, and to any other boys who may have been his accomplices!"

"Oh, sir!"

"You may go!"

"But—but we came to say——"

The Head pointed to the door.

"We—we happen to know, sir—we were with him—we——"

"You were with him when he fastened the cord here, over which I fell violently?" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Lovell. "Not at all! I didn't mean that. I mean, we were with him when he didn't do it."

"What! Are you daring to jest with me, Lovell?"

"N-n-no, sir!" gasped Lovell breathlessly. "I mean——"

"I repeat, Lovell, that you can have nothing to say to me on the subject that I care to hear. I have bidden you leave my study!"

"But, sir——"

"One word more, and I will cane you!" said the Head, picking up the cane.

Raby caught Lovell's arm.

But Arthur Edward Lovell jerked himself free.

He did not mean to leave the study, if he could help it, without saying what he had come there to say.

"I want to explain, sir——" he jerked out.

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet, and the cane whished in the air.

"I warned you, Lovell! You have chosen to disobey me. Hold out your hand!"

"Jimmy Silver never——"

"Hold out your hand, sir!" thundered the Head.

And as Lovell did not obey promptly enough the angry headmaster took him by the collar and laid the cane across his shoulders, with a loud swish.

Lovell yelled, as much with surprise as pain.

"Now go!" exclaimed the Head. "Go before I punish you more severely for your unheard-of impertinence, Lovell!"

He pointed with his cane to the doorway.

Still Arthur Edward hesitated; but Raby and Newcome took hold of him and fairly forced him out of the study.

The door closed on them.

In the passage Lovell shook himself free, and he looked at his chums, panting, his eyes ablaze.

"The rotter!" he gasped.

"Shush!" murmured Raby. "Don't be an ass, Lovell! He's rather wild now, but he's not a rotter, and you know it! Come along!"

"I'm going to tell him——"

"You silly ass!" breathed Newcome. "Haven't you had enough yet?" Do you want to be flogged in Hall along with Jimmy? Come on. I tell you!"

"Look here, I'm going——"

"Oh, rats!"

Lovell's chums seized him again, and walked him away forcibly down the passage.

The interview with the Head had been a failure, and in the opinion of Raby and Newcome it was time that Lovell "chucked" it.

Certainly he could not have re-entered the Head's study without risking the infliction of severe punishment.

On the staircase, however, Lovell halted again.

"Let me go!" he growled. "I'm going to——"

"You're not going to see the Head again, Lovell!" said Raby decidedly. "It's not good enough, old top!"

"I'm going to see Bootles. He's our Form-master, and he's bound to speak up for Jimmy when he knows the facts."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," assented Raby. "We'll come with you."

And the three juniors headed for Mr. Bootles' study.

They found the master of the Fourth looking very distressed.

He was in conversation with Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, who was also looking very grave and concerned.

The outrage on the Head had been a shock to the masters.

Mr. Bootle gave Jimmy's chums a kindly glance..

"Well, what is it, Lovell?" he asked mildly.

This was a reception very different from that accorded by the Head, but it was the Head who had "taken a tumble" over the cord, and that accounted for the difference perhaps.

"About Jimmy Silver, sir——" began Lovell.

"I hope, Lovell, that you had nothing to do with the outrage perpetrated in the Head's study by Silver," said Mr. Bootles gravely.

"Jimmy Silver didn't do it, sir!"

"Lovell!"

"And we can prove it, sir, if you'll listen to us," said Lovell eagerly.

"Nonsense, Lovell! The case is quite clear."

"We can prove it, sir!" said Raby and Newcome together.

"I will hear what you have to say," said Mr. Bootles, with a troubled frown. "You may proceed."

Lovell & Co. proceeded, and the details were laid before Mr. Bootles, the Shell master also listening very intently.

It was scarcely possible to doubt that the three earnest juniors were speaking the truth.

Mr. Bootles' brow became more and more troubled as they proceeded.

Perhaps he realised that, though the conviction of Jimmy Silver's innocence was stealing upon his own mind, it would not be easy to convince the angry headmaster.

"Let us have this quite clear, Lovell," Mr. Bootles said at last. "You saw Silver when he took the Head's cane back to his study?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him come out of the study again?"

"We did, sir."

"And you are sure he was not long in the room?"

"Only a few seconds, sir!" said Lovell earnestly. "Just long enough to take the cane in and lay it on the desk."

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"The cord in the study was attached to two screws driven into the wainscot," he said. "It must have taken some time—many minutes, at least. If you are sure of what you say, my boys, Silver could not have done this."

"We are quite sure, sir."

"And afterwards——"

"Afterwards Jimmy came to the end study with us, and he was there all the time till you came for him, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Somebody else did it, sir!" said Lovell.

"But Silver's pencil case——"

"He may have dropped it there, sir."

or the other fellow may have put it there on purpose."

"That is a very serious statement to make, Lovell."

"Well, sir, I know Jimmy Silver didn't put the cord there. He couldn't have, as he was only a few seconds in the study."

Mr. Bootles glanced at Mr. Mooney. That gentleman coughed.

"I will think over this, Lovell," said the master of the Fourth at last. "You may go now. I will speak to the Head this evening—ahem, to-morrow morning! To-morrow morning would perhaps be best."

Mr. Bootles did not say that he hoped to find the Head in a more reasonable frame of mind in the morning; but the juniors guessed that much.

"You may go now," added Mr. Bootles abruptly.

The three juniors left the study, their hearts lighter.

They could see that Mr. Bootles believed their story.

Indeed, it was scarcely possible for him to doubt it; he knew them far too well to suspect that they had concocted the tale to shield Jimmy Silver.

After the door had closed, Mr. Bootles blinked at Mr. Mooney over his glasses, and the master of the Shell coughed expressively.

"Your opinion, Mr. Mooney?" asked the master of the Fourth.

"The same as yours, I think," answered the master of the Shell. "Silver is evidently innocent. Those boys were speaking the truth."

"And if they are speaking the truth, it is impossible that Silver can be guilty."

"Precisely!"

Mr. Bootles took off his glasses, and wiped them, and put them back again. He was in a very agitated frame of mind.

"Under these circumstances, it is undoubtedly my duty to explain the matter to Dr. Chisholm," he said.

"Undoubtedly!"

"But—but——" murmured Mr. Bootles.

"It will not be a pleasant task," said the master of the Shell. "I respect Dr. Chisholm highly, as we all do, but I have not failed to recognise a strain of undue firmness in him—I might call it, even, obstinacy. If I may make a suggestion, I should certainly not raise the matter this evening. In the morning Dr. Chisholm will be—ahem!—some-what calmer."

"My own opinion exactly," said Mr. Bootles. "It is my duty to protect a boy in my Form from an act of injustice."

"I should certainly do so if it were a boy in the Shell who was concerned," said Mr. Mooney. "After all, the Head is bound to accord you a civil hearing, and the matter will be set right."

Mr. Bootles nodded assent, but he was not feeling quite so sure of that.

In fact, he was looking forward to his interview with the Head with very much the same feelings as Jimmy Silver's.

But Mr. Bootles had a strong sense of duty, and he intended to do his duty, unpleasant as it was.

It only remained to see what would come of it.

CHAPTER 3.

In Suspense!

JIMMY SILVER was not looking happy when he came down on the following morning.

The flogging in Hall was to take place immediately before morning lessons, in the presence of all Rookwood; but it was not so certain now that it would take place.

Lovell & Co.'s visit to the Head had resulted a good deal as Jimmy had expected it to result; but the interview with the master of the Fourth had been more successful, and the Fistical Four expected Mr. Bootles to intervene.

They had noted that he was looking very troubled and clouded at breakfast.

The previous evening Jimmy Silver's

sentence had been the one topic in the Lower School; and in the morning it was still being discussed with unabated interest.

The Modern juniors were as concerned as the Classics; and Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth, came over specially from Mr. Manders' House to speak to Jimmy after breakfast about it.

Tommy Dodd was sympathetic.

"It looks jolly bad, Silver, old man!" he commented. "I take your word, of course. But I hardly think the Head will."

"There's witnesses," grunted Lovell. "And Mr. Bootles has promised to put in a word with the Head."

"But if Jimmy didn't lay that little trap for the Head," said Tommy Dodd, "who did?"

"Some rotter," said Jimmy.

"The chap ought to own up," said the Modern junior. "It's up to him, if you are going to get the flogging for it."

"I don't suppose he will. He would get the flogging."

"A decent chap would," said Tommy Dodd.

"Well, a decent chap wouldn't have played such a rotten trick on the Head—he might have hurt him badly," said Jimmy Silver. "It was a dangerous trick, and only a rotter would play a trick like that on a middle-aged man! The Head feels a tumble more at his age than we do at ours."

"That's so. It was too thick, even if the chap had had a licking. By the way, do you know any chap who'd just had a licking from the Head. That would be a clue."

"I had!" said Jimmy, with rather a wry face.

"Oh!"

Tommy Dodd was rather taken aback.

"The Head had just licked you?" he said.

"Yes."

"Jolly unlucky!"

"All the same, I wouldn't have played that trick on him."

"I know, Jimmy, but it does look bad, and no mistake. Still, your pals' evidence ought to pull you through, if Bootles pitches it to the Head!"

"There he goes!" murmured Newcome.

Mr. Bootles was seen rustling away to the Head's study—where the Head was probably, just then, selecting a birch for the painful ceremony in Hall.

The master of the Fourth had a worried look.

Only his sense of duty urged him on to face what he knew would be a very disagreeable interview.

"Bootles is a good little goat," said Tommy Dodd. "He looks almost as if he was going to be flogged himself."

"He's a good sort!" said Jimmy.

And the juniors waited in considerable anxiety after the door had closed on Mr. Bootles, and he was shut up with the Head.

The Colonial Co. joined them, and Mornington and Erroll and Tubby Muffin and several other fellows; all were concerned about Jimmy.

It seemed reasonable to suppose that Jimmy's sentence would be rescinded, or at least postponed, after Mr. Bootles' explanation to the Head; but—

There was a "but."

The Rookwood fellows respected their headmaster, and were awed by him; but some of them were well aware of the streak of grim obstinacy in his character, which was rather beyond the limit of mere firmness.

"The Head looks awful ratty this morning, Jimmy!" said Tubby Muffin, perhaps by way of comfort.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Jimmy.

"I saw him after he came out from brekker in his house," said the fat Classical. "He had a face like a gargoyle. There's a bump on his napper, and I saw him rub it."

"Is this what you call cheery conversation, Muffin?" asked Mornington. Tubby blinked at him.

"The prefects have been told to

assemble the whole school in Hall," he went on. "I heard Bulkeley say so to Neville and Knowles."

"Give us a rest!" grunted Lovell. "I wouldn't like to be Bootles!" rattled on Tubby cheerfully. "I shouldn't wonder if the Head slings him no end for chipping in. You see, he's damaged and sore, so it stands to reason he wants to flog somebody. He won't want to let you off, Jimmy, unless there's another chap to flog. Well, Bootles can't produce the other chap, can he?"

Jimmy Silver laughed. "I don't think that's quite the Head's view, Tubby," he said. "The Head wants to flog the right chap, not the wrong one."

Tubby Muffin shook his head knowingly.

"That's how he puts it to himself, of course," he agreed. "But I'll bet you, Jimmy, that what he really wants is to flog somebody because he feels sore. The masters are all the same, you know. They make out that they wallop a chap for his own good, but they never do it excepting when they're ratty."

"A Daniel comes to judgment!" grinned Mornington.

"Talking of Daniels," said Tubby Muffin, "I think Bootles is a good bit like Daniel going into the lions' den. I wouldn't have Bootles' job for a term's pocket-money!"

Bulkeley came along with a grave face.

"All you fags into Hall!" he said. "I say, Bulkeley, is Jimmy Silver really going to be flogged?" sang out Tubby Muffin.

The captain of Roodwood walked on without answering.

"That looks bad," said Tubby, wagging his head sagely. "You'd better put some exercise-books in your bags, Jimmy."

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Jimmy.

The juniors streamed away into Big Hall, where the school was assembling for the "execution," as some of the fellows called it.

Jimmy Silver received many sympathetic glances.

Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, was the only fellow who did not seem concerned about the matter at all; indeed, he looked very cheerful.

But the cad of the Fourth was on the worst of terms with Jimmy Silver, and probably he was looking forward to the entertainment.

Even Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, said it was "hard cheese, begad, you know."

There was a murmur of voices in Hall, subdued but incessant.

All the Rookwood fellows were there, ranked in their Forms, with their masters and the prefects keeping order.

They waited for the arrival of the Head and Mr. Bootles.

But the hand of the big clock was creeping round, and there was still delay.

And with every minute of delay Jimmy Silver's hopes strengthened that all would turn out well, after all.

CHAPTER 4.

N. 3.

DR. CHISHOLM did not look pleased as Mr. Bootles entered his study.

There was a birch on the table before him, upon which Mr. Bootles' eyes rested for a moment uneasily.

The Head's expression was hard and uncompromising. Perhaps he guessed that the master of the Fourth had come there to intercede for the condemned junior.

As a matter of fact, the doctor was feeling very out of sorts that raw morning.

The various bumps and bruises and abrasions he had collected in his tumble the previous evening seemed to ache more in the morning than the night before.

One glance at his face was enough to show that he was in no mood to listen to a plea for leniency.

It was not leniency Mr. Bootles was about to ask for, but justice; but he had an inward foreboding that his appeal would fall upon deaf and obstinate ears.

In fact, Tubby Muffin's smile was an accurate one; Mr. Bootles felt a great deal like Daniel entering the lions' den as he rustled into the Head's study.

"Well, Mr. Bootles?" The Head's voice was sharp and incisive.

"Ahem!" began Mr. Bootles.

"You have come to inform me that the school is assembled?"

Another cough from Mr. Bootles.

This was a deliberate misunderstanding on the part of the Head, and the Form-master knew it.

"Ahem! Not exactly, sir!"

"I have given instructions——"

"The fact is, sir, I have something to lay before you."

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"Kindly do not utter one word in favour of Silver, Mr. Bootles. I cannot listen to it."

"But, sir——"

"The subject is not one for discussion, Mr. Bootles."

The Fourth Form-master drew a deep breath. His task was turning out harder than even he had anticipated.

"You will accompany me to Hall," added the Head.

"But, sir," murmured Mr. Bootles feebly.

"There is nothing to be said, Mr. Bootles!"

And the Head walked towards the door.

Mr. Bootles gasped for breath.

Even upon the masters at Rookwood the Head had rather a terrifying effect, and Mr. Bootles was not a man of much force of character.

He was sorely tempted at the moment to hold his peace, with the feeling that he had done his best and failed.

But his heart was too good for that, and, though with great inward trepidation, Mr. Bootles dared to be a Daniel.

"Dr. Chisholm," he gasped, "I must

speak! I must really request you to listen to me!"

"What!"

The Head turned back towards him majestically.

"Mr. Bootles, I think you forget yourself!"

"I do not forget myself, sir," said Mr. Bootles, with some spirit. "I have my duty to do."

"One moment, Mr. Bootles. Is it upon the subject of Silver, of your Form, that you desire to speak to me?"

"Yes."

"Then I decline to hear you. I am surprised, Mr. Bootles, that you should even think of speaking in favour of a boy who has been guilty of an unprecedented outrage upon his head-master!"

"I am here to ask justice for Silver, sir," said Mr. Bootles, with dignity.

"Justice!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "Strict justice requires, sir, that I should expel that boy from the school with every circumstance of ignominy. I have been lenient—too lenient—for the sake of his family. A flogging, sir, is an inadequate punishment for the action he has been guilty of!"

"You mistake me, sir. The guilty person should be most severely punished, in my opinion, but I think that Silver is not guilty."

"Nonsense!"

"Really, sir——" ejaculated Mr. Bootles, colouring.

"Last evening," said the Head coldly, "you were present when the matter was inquired into. You then agreed absolutely with my opinion, that Silver was the guilty party. You regarded his denials as a barefaced falsehood, as I did. For some reason, unknown to me, you appear to have changed your mind. I have not changed mine, Mr. Bootles."

"I have learned——"

"You have learned that someone else, and not Silver, was guilty of the outrage in my study?" exclaimed the Head, starting. "His name?"

"I do not mean that."

"Then what do you mean, Mr. Bootles, if you mean anything at all?" exclaimed the Head testily.

"I mean that fresh circumstances have come to my knowledge, which, to my mind, exonerate Silver."

Dr. Chisholm made an impatient gesture.

"If you insist, Mr. Bootles, I am bound to hear what you have to say. Kindly be brief."

It was not an encouraging opening, but Mr. Bootles made the best of it, and he went on hurriedly.

"Silver's study-mates came to me last evening—"

"They came to me, and were guilty of impertinence!" interrupted the Head.

"I was forced to cane Lovell for sheer audacity."

"Ahem! However, they told me—"

"Well, what did they tell you?" snapped the Head. "Time is passing, Mr. Bootles, and the school is waiting in Hall."

"They told me, sir, that it was impossible that Silver did what was done in this study. They were with him when he came back here with your cane, and they bear witness that he was only in the study long enough to replace the cane on your desk, and then joined them outside. A few seconds, sir."

"He was here, at all events."

"The cord over which you fell, sir, was attached to two screws driven into the wainscot. That requires the use of a gimlet and a screw-driver, and must have taken some time."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, if Silver was in the room only a few seconds evidently he had no time for all this."

"And what evidence, Mr. Bootles, is there that Silver was in the study only a few seconds?" exclaimed the Head, with an expression that was perilously like a sneer.

"The evidence of three junior boys, whom I know to be truthful and honourable," said Mr. Bootles warmly.

"Am I to understand that Lovell and

his companions timed Silver with their watches!"

"Certainly not!"

"At the most, then, they have an impression that he was only a few seconds in the study—when he may have been here five or ten minutes, for all they can remember to the contrary."

"Certainly they can remember—"

"Moreover," said the Head, in a grinding voice, "I attach no importance whatever to the evidence of those three boys. I should not be surprised if they were Silver's accomplices."

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"I repeat, sir, that I consider it very probable that they had full knowledge of Silver's action at the time. I am decidedly of opinion that this story is concocted by them simply to save Silver from his just punishment."

Mr. Bootles flushed red. He was getting angry now as well as the headmaster.

"I disagree entirely, Dr. Chisholm!" he said tartly. "I have questioned the boys. You are at liberty to question them if you choose. I know them—I repeat, sir, that I know them to be boys with a high sense of honour, and I am convinced that they would not utter falsehoods to save Silver from punishment."

"Nonsense!"

"Sir!"

"I repeat—nonsense! You have allowed yourself to be deceived by a concocted tale, Mr. Bootles!"

"I am not so easily deceived, sir!" retorted Mr. Bootles. "And I am sure that if you were in a calmer mood you would admit—"

The Head's brows became thunderous. The observation was not very tactful, perhaps; but Mr. Bootles was growing heated.

"Calmer, sir! Do you imply that I am capable of punishing an innocent boy from mere irritation, sir?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "Certainly not! I—I merely meant—"

"Enough, sir; I am satisfied of Silver's guilt. If you hold a contrary

opinion, you are at liberty to hold it. You have stated your opinion, and I have taken due note of it. The matter closes here."

With that the Head swept from the study.

Mr. Bootles stood rooted to the floor. He took off his spectacles, wiped them, and replaced them upon his agitated nose.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured.

He moved to the door, and halted again. What to do was a problem to the unhappy Mr. Bootles.

He knew that Jimmy Silver was innocent. He believed that the Head himself, in a less exasperated mood, would have admitted the evidence in favour of the unfortunate junior.

Yet the punishment was to take place—an act of crying injustice from the Form-master's point of view.

His intervention had been brushed aside—he was treated as a child—and a boy of his Form, whom he was bound to protect, was to suffer an unjust and disgraceful punishment.

At that thought all Mr. Bootles' hesitation vanished, and a gleam came into his eyes.

Irresolute and hesitating as he was, Mr. Bootles had plenty of courage when it was put to the test.

"It shall not be!" he exclaimed aloud.

And with a very red face Mr. Bootles rushed out of the study and hurried to Big Hall.

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Bootles Dares to Be a Daniel!

"HERE comes the Head!" murmured Mornington.

Jimmy Silver drew a quick breath as Dr. Chisholm entered Big Hall by the upper door.

"Silence!" called out Bulkeley of the Sixth.

The buzz of voices died away.

"Buck up, Jimmy!" whispered Conroy.

There was a dead silence

Jimmy gave the Australian junior a nod and a faint smile; but his heart was heavy.

Why had not Mr. Bootles come in with the Head?

And what was that in Dr. Chisholm's hand, half-hidden in his gown?

It was pretty clear that the Form-master's intervention had failed.

All eyes were fixed upon the Head.

His face was calm and severe, and there was an unusual flush in his cheeks and a glitter in his eyes.

His voice came sharply through the dead stillness.

"Silver of the Fourth Form will stand out!"

Jimmy set his lips.

"Get a move on, kid!" muttered Bulkeley.

Lovell clenched his hands hard. Raby and Newcome looked utterly miserable.

There was a slight murmur in the Classical Fourth.

"Silence!"

Jimmy Silver stepped out of the ranks of his Form and walked up Big Hall with a crimson face but a steady step.

It was inevitable now, and he could only go through it with all the fortitude he could muster.

He halted before the Head, his glance meeting steadily the eyes that were fixed upon him.

Old Mack, the porter, was present, ready to take up the condemned junior and "hoist" him for the flogging.

Jimmy did not heed him.

His eyes never wavered as they met the Head's grim glance.

"Silver,"—the Head's voice was low but deep, and it reached every ear in the crowded Hall—"you are about to be punished for an act unprecedented in the history of Rookwood. You have committed what amounts to be an assault upon your headmaster. It was in my mind to expel you from the school; but I have spared you that extreme punishment, chiefly for the sake of your parents. Your punishment will, however, be severe, and I trust

that it will be a warning to you—and to others who may have been your confederates.”

He paused.

“I did not do it, sir!” said Jimmy Silver steadily. “My friends can prove—”

“Silence!”

“I protest!” said Jimmy, a little pale now, but still steady. “There is proof that I did not—”

“Take up that boy, Mack!”

“Yessir!”

The porter came towards Jimmy Silver.

At that moment there was a bustle at the lower end of the Hall.

The big door swung open, and all eyes turned in that direction.

Mr. Bootles, in a state of great flurry and excitement, bustled in.

A buzz rose from the crowded ranks of schoolboys.

The Head's face became thunderous as the little Form-master bustled up the Hall towards the platform.

“My only hat!” murmured Conroy. “Bootles is going to chip in!”

“Great pip!”

“Give him a cheer!” muttered Lovell.

“Shut up, you ass!” whispered Mornington, catching hold of Arthur Edward's arm. “You duffer! Shut up!”

“Silence!” shouted Knowles.

There was silence, broken only by the rustling of Mr. Bootles' gown as he whisked along.

The expression on the Head's face could only be described as awful.

The other masters looked thunder-struck.

Mr. Mooney exchanged a hopeless glance with Mr. Wiggins, of the Second.

Mr. Bohun gave the Fourth-Form master an approving look.

The sympathy of the staff was with Mr. Bootles, though they marvelled at his audacity.

Mr. Bootles was gasping as he came to a halt.

Old Mack blinked at him, wondering what this might mean.

The Head's voice was heard at last, like the rumble of distant thunder.

“Mr. Bootles! Kindly stand back!”

“Sir!”

“You are interrupting, Mr. Bootles!”

“Sir, it is my intention to interrupt!” panted Mr. Bootles, his eyes gleaming over his spectacles.

A thrill ran through the crowded Hall. Heads were craned forward to look.

There was a sound of deep-drawn breath.

The Head looked dumbfounded. His sway at Rookwood was unquestioned. For his lofty edicts to be disputed by any member of his staff was unheard of.

And here was the little, plump Form-master, not at all heroic to look at, disputing his will, opposing his determination.

An earthquake in Big Hall could not have astounded the Head—and all Rookwood—more than that.

The silence that followed could be felt.

The Head broke it.

“Mr. Bootles!” He was almost gasping. “Mr. Bootles! Do I hear aright? It—it is your—your intention, sir, to— to interrupt?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you taken leave of your senses, sir?”

“No, sir, I have not! I protest in public, since you will not hear me in private! I protest, sir, against this act of injustice!”

“No, sir, I have not! I protest in public, since you will not hear me in private! I protest, sir, against this act of injustice!”

A gasp ran through Big Hall.

“Good man, Bootles!” murmured Lovell. “Right on the wicket! Oh, good man—good man!”

“Silver belongs to my Form, sir!”

pursued Mr. Bootles, gasping. “He is under his Form-master's protection, sir. I am convinced of Silver's innocence. I will go further, sir, and say that Silver's innocence is perfectly clear to anyone who chooses to consider the facts calmly. In these circumstances, sir, I

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“Silver belongs to my Form, sir!”

cannot stand idly by while a boy of my Form is subjected to a humiliating and wholly unjust punishment!"

The speech came out in gasps and jerks.

Mr. Bootles was greatly excited, and almost lost his voice once or twice. But it came out, to the end.

The Head's face had become a little pale now, and the look in his eyes was not pleasant to see.

But he remained calm.

"This scene, Mr. Bootles——" he began.

"This scene, sir, is not to be laid to my charge. I am speaking from a sense of duty."

"Your ideas of duty differ from mine, sir, and you must be aware that after this outrageous defiance of authority your connection with Rookwood must instantly cease!"

"I am prepared for that, sir. But I will not remain silent while injustice is done to a boy entitled to my protection!"

"Bravo!" came from somewhere in the Fourth.

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

"Silence!" cried the prefects.

"Very well, Mr. Bootles," said the Head, with deadly quietness. "You have now uttered your protest. Now, sir, I beg of you to retire, and not prolong this scene, which is a disgraceful one!"

"Before I retire, sir, I desire to know whether Silver is to be flogged."

"Most decidedly!"

"Then, sir," exclaimed Mr. Bootles, "I will not retire. I am aware, sir, that I shall forfeit my position in this school, and that is a serious matter for me; but so long as I remain here, sir, I am master of the Fourth Form, and I have my duty to do, which is to protect any member of my Form from injustice!"

"Mr. Bootles!" gasped the Head.

"Silver!" Mr. Bootles turned to the dismayed junior. "You belong to my Form, and you are under my orders."

"Yes, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"I command you to leave this Hall at once!"

"Hook it, Jimmy!" came the "voice" from the Fourth once more, which sounded a great deal like Lovell's.

"Silence!"

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the floor.

He was grateful to Mr. Bootles—more than grateful. He knew what it must have cost the little gentleman to intervene like this.

But for Mr. Bootles' own sake he would have preferred to let the Head proceed.

But it was a question of now obeying his Form-master, who was sacrificing so much for his sake.

He could not hesitate about that.

And the Head did not speak.

It was on his lips to order Mack to take up the junior for the flogging, regardless of Mr. Bootles, but the little Form-master was quivering with angry excitement, and there was no telling what he might have done.

Bitterly angry as he was, the Head did not want a scuffle in Hall, and that was pretty clearly what it might have come to.

So he was silent, biting his lip till it almost bled.

"You hear me, Silver?" said Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy quietly.

He turned and walked out of Hall.

CHAPTER 6.

Sacked.

ROOKWOOD was in a ferment that morning.

What had happened in Big Hall was amazing—almost incredible.

Even yet the fellows felt that they could hardly believe their eyes and ears.

In the Classical Fourth, Mr. Bootles was at the zenith of popularity.

He had stood up for a Fourth-

Former against the Head himself, and that required a nerve the juniors had never believed him capable of.

And he had succeeded, too. Jimmy Silver had not been flogged!

Whether the flogging was only postponed remained to be seen; but so far, at all events, it had not been administered, owing to Mr. Bootles' courageous intervention.

The Rookwooders were late in class that morning, but the prefects shepherded them into the Form-rooms at last.

In the Fourth Form-room there was keen anxiety till Mr. Bootles appeared.

That he would have to leave Rookwood School seemed certain, and the juniors wondered whether he would take the Fourth that morning.

Doubts on that point were relieved by the appearance of Mr. Bootles, very troubled and agitated, in the Form-room.

When he came in, the Fourth, as if moved by a common instinct, rose to their feet and cheered.

It was a spontaneous outburst, and it seemed to surprise Mr. Bootles.

The little gentleman had only done what he conceived to be his duty, and he was sorely troubled by the thought that he had perhaps gone too far.

He stood and blinked at the juniors over his spectacles as they cheered.

"What—what——" he ejaculated

The cheers rang through the Form-room, and rolled out over Rookwood with a roar.

"Bless my soul! Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, waving his hand. "My boys, silence! I beg you to be quiet! What will the Head think? Silence!"

The cheering died down at last.

Mr. Bootles, very flustered and red, proceeded to business, but lessons were very desultory that morning.

In the prevailing state of excitement, the fellows had little attention to give to Latin grammar.

Lessons that morning, in fact, were little more than pretence, and both masters and boys were relieved when the hour of dismissal came.

Mr. Bootles whisked away to his study, still in a worried and troubled frame of mind, while the juniors streamed out into the quadrangle.

"Well!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, expressing his feelings by that ejaculation. "Well!"

Jimmy Silver was very quiet and grave.

He had been saved—for the present, at least; but he was deeply distressed by the thought of what it meant to Mr. Bootles.

"It's a shame!" said Jimmy in a low voice. "Bootles will have to go. I—I suppose he can't stay after chipping in like that against the Head."

"I—I suppose not," said Lovell.

"It's a shame!"

"Perhaps the Head will come round," said Conroy hopefully. "After all, he's in the wrong, and he may come round when he's had time to think it over."

Jimmy shook his head.

The scene in Hall was fresh in his mind.

Dr. Chisholm's authority had been deliberately set at nought, and a much more reasonable and calm man than the Head might have refused to pass that over.

It was impossible that it would be forgotten or forgiven by the Head.

After Mr. Bootles was gone, the Head might, or might not, deal with Jimmy Silver as he had originally intended.

Perhaps he would take the more dignified course of letting the whole matter drop.

But whatever happened with regard to Jimmy, it could not be doubted that the Head would be inflexible with regard to the Fourth Form-master.

Willingly enough Jimmy Silver would have taken his flogging to save his kind-hearted Form-master from what was a serious disaster to him.

But Jimmy was helpless in the matter.

He could only feel distressed and worried, which was not of much use to poor Mr. Bootles.

That gentleman was feeling distressed enough himself.

He shut himself up in his study after lessons, and was pacing to and fro, with a wrinkled brow, when a tap came at his door.

It was Tupper, the page, who presented himself.

"Yes, yes. What is it—what, what?" asked Mr. Bootles, much flurried.

"The 'Ead wishes to speak to you in his study, sir," said Tupper, with a curious eye on the Form-master.

It was known "below stairs" that something very sensational had happened in Big Hall that morning.

"Very well, Tupper! Thank you, Tupper! You may go, Tupper!" stammered Mr. Bootles.

And Tupper went.

The little Form-master pulled himself together for the dreaded interview.

He whisked out of the room at last, and whisked along to the Head's study, more jerky than ever in his movements in his state of agitation.

He found the Head cold and calm.

Dr. Chisholm's eyes were like points of steel as they rested upon the plump little Form-master in the doorway of his study.

"Pray step in, Mr. Bootles!"

His manner was studiously polite.

But it was a steely, deadly politeness, and it told of an inflexible determination, as Mr. Bootles could see.

Very red and uncomfortable, the master of the Fourth stepped into the study.

The Head did not ask him to be seated.

"After what has happened this morning, Mr. Bootles, doubtless you realise very clearly that you cannot remain at Rookwood!" said the Head, in icy tones.

"Indeed, sir!" said Mr. Bootles.

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows.

"That is surely apparent to you!" he said.

"I did my duty, sir!" blurted out Mr. Bootles. "I was sorry—I am sorry now—to have acted with any apparent disrespect towards the Head of this school. But you had left me no choice in the matter."

"I do not care to open a discussion, Mr. Bootles. I have only to say that I am prepared to receive your resignation and accept it."

Mr. Bootles blew through his nose.

"My resignation, sir!" he snapped.

"Precisely."

"Well, sir, I shall not place my resignation in your hands. To do so would be to acknowledge a fault—which I definitely refuse to acknowledge. I shall not, sir, under any circumstances whatever, resign my post in this school."

"Then it only remains for me to dismiss you, Mr. Bootles."

"You have the power in your hands, sir, to add one injustice to another," said the Form-master, with dignity.

"But I shall certainly not make the path of injustice, sir, easy to you! I refuse to resign, and if you care to carry injustice to the length of depriving me of my position here, I leave it to your conscience, Dr. Chisholm."

The Head set his lips hard.

"Very well"—his voice was low and incisive—"Mr. Bootles, you are dismissed!"

"So be it," said Mr. Bootles.

"I expect you, sir, to leave Rookwood School at the earliest possible moment convenient to you. The matter of salary will be arranged to your satisfaction."

"I am not concerned about that, sir; that is a trifle to which I have given no consideration whatever," said poor Mr. Bootles. "I have the honour to bid you good-morning, Dr. Chisholm."

And, more jerky than ever, the little gentleman whisked out of the study.

CHAPTER 7.

The Last Chance!

"ROTTEN!"

That was the verdict in the Fourth Form, and, indeed, in all Rookwood.

It was known that afternoon that Mr. Bootles was definitely dismissed by the Head.

He had done his duty.

He had paid the price, and it was a heavy price for the Fourth Form-master to pay.

The looks of the other masters were grave and concerned.

It was not difficult for even the juniors to see that their sympathies were with Mr. Bootles.

The blow that had fallen upon him was a very heavy one.

He had been so long associated with Rookwood that it was his home, the abiding-place in which all his thoughts and his feelings were centred.

Leaving Rookwood was like the uprooting of a tree to Mr. Bootles.

He was worried and flurried by the mere thought of the plunge into the great world outside, far from his old familiar associations.

The quiet old study, with its precious books; the shady old beeches, under which he had been wont to take his quiet walks; the dusky library, where he had spent many a happy hour; the Masters'-room, the scene of many a pleasant conversation—he was to say good-bye to all, and the fact that it was for conscience' sake did not make the parting any the less bitter.

And the prospect afterwards—of seeking a new post at a time when all his habits had become set and fixed, and under the stigma of dismissal for insubordination—it was dismaying enough to the little gentleman.

Jimmy Silver understood a good deal of what was passing in Mr. Bootles' breast and in his mind, and his usually sunny face was sombre that day.

He would have chosen the flogging twice over rather than this, and he had

a miserable feeling that he was, in part at least, the cause of the Form-master's misfortune.

In spite of the Head's urgency, it was impossible for Mr. Bootles to leave at a moment's notice; but he was making his preparations in a gloomy and despondent mood.

In the end study that evening the Fistical Four discussed the matter in somewhat dismal tones.

There was nothing they could do, save to give Mr. Bootles a cheer when he left—if that was any use.

"It'll let him know that we back him up, anyway," Lovell remarked.

Jimmy Silver smiled faintly.

There was a tap at the door, and Conroy, the Australian, came in. His face was clouded.

"You fellows know about Bootles, of course?" he said.

"Yes."

"He's sacked!" said Conroy.

"We know. It's rotten!"

"Well," said the Australian junior, "can't something be done? I don't see sitting down and seeing old Bootles turned out like this."

"I'd do anything," said Jimmy. "It was for my sake he's got it in the neck like this. I wish he had let the Head get on with the flogging."

"Well, I've been thinking," said Conroy quietly. "Look here, Jimmy, you didn't play that trick in the Head's study?"

"No."

"If you didn't, somebody else did."

"That follows, of course."

"Well, who was it?"

"I can't even guess—if it mattered."

"It does matter," said Conroy.

"That's what I've been thinking of. Suppose the fellow was found out and made to own up."

"Well?"

"That would prove that Mr. Bootles was in the right in backing you up, Jimmy, and then the Head couldn't push him out like this. He would have to admit that Bootles had saved him from being unjust, wouldn't he?"

"I—I suppose so," said Jimmy Silver slowly.

"The Head's ratty now," said Conroy. "But he's a good sort in the main—we know that. Suppose it was proved to him that somebody else had done that trick, he would be in honour bound to let up on Bootles."

"Yes. But—"

"Well, then," said Conroy, "Bootles isn't gone yet. He can't go for a day or two, at least. In that time the fellow may be found. It's up to us—we've got to save Bootles by finding out the guilty party and showing him up, or making him own up. That will see Bootles clear."

"By Jove!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver's face brightened.

"But how?" said Raby.

"We've got to find out how," answered Conroy. "It's up to us, and we've got to do it somehow. We'll all work together, and set our wits to work, and find out the truth, and save Bootles."

"I'm on!" said Jimmy Silver at once.

And the Co. heartily concurred.

It was a chance, at least, and the only chance.

And from the moment that Jimmy Silver & Co. set themselves that task they lost no time.

What would come of it—whether anything would come of it—remained to be seen.

But if they failed, it would not be for want of striving.

CHAPTER 8.

A Task for Tommy Dodd!

"**D**ODD!" Albert Leggett of the Modern Fourth called out to Tommy Dodd in Big Quad at Rookwood.

Tommy Dodd was chatting with his chums, Cook and Doyle, under the beeches, the subject under discussion being the dismissal of Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth—a burning topic just then at Rookwood School.

"It's rotten!" said Tommy Dodd.

"You see—"

"Dodd!"

"Of course, it was cheeky, perhaps, for poor old Bootles to stand up to the Head as he did," said Tommy Dodd judicially. "But—"

"Dodd!" howled Leggett.

Tommy Dodd condescended to turn his head at last.

"Go and eat coke!" he snapped.

Tommy did not like Leggett, and he made no bones about letting that fact appear in his manner.

Leggett scowled.

"Old Manders wants you," he growled. "He's sent me to tell you so. You're to go to his study."

"What the dickens is it this time?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, in tones of great exasperation. "What does he want me for, Leggett?"

"How should I know?" grunted Leggett.

"Better go!" remarked Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd gave a snort.

"I know that, fathead! But I'm blessed if I know what Manders is on the war-path for now. I haven't done anything."

"We never have, bedad!" remarked Tommy Doyle.

"I haven't even punched Leggett's nose—have I, Leggett?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Leggett.

"Buck up, Tommy; you know Manders," urged Cook.

Tommy Dodd indulged in another snort, and moved off towards Mr. Manders' House, followed by sympathetic glances from the other two Tommies.

Leggett joined him as he went in.

There was a worried expression on Leggett's face, and, in fact, he looked a good deal more like a delinquent in trouble than Tommy Dodd did.

"I—I say, Dodd—" he mumbled, as Tommy was heading for Mr. Manders' study.

"Well?"

"You—you really don't know what Manders wants?" asked Leggett.

"Not the faintest idea."

"You—you might tell me—after you come out—"

Tommy Dodd looked at him.

"I don't see why it should interest you, Leggett," he answered. "You don't care a rap whether I get a wigging. Go and eat coke, old scout!"

Tommy Dodd tapped at the Modern master's door and entered, Leggett hanging about outside the study, still looking worried.

The door closed on Tommy Dodd.

Mr. Manders was standing before the fire, with a grim expression upon his hard and severe countenance.

As he read that expression Tommy's palms tingled in anticipation.

"You sent for me, sir!" murmured Tommy.

"I sent for you, Dodd!" said Mr. Manders sternly. "I sent for you, as you are generally the ringleader in any infraction of discipline in this House."

"Oh, sir!"

"Something has been abstracted from my study," said Mr. Manders. "A key, in point of fact. Do you know anything of it, Dodd?"

Tommy Dodd glanced at the door.

"If—if you please, sir, the key is in the lock now," he murmured.

"I am not alluding to the doorkey, Dodd. I am alluding to a key which was kept in my desk."

The Modern junior coloured.

"You surely don't think I've been to your desk, sir!" he exclaimed warmly.

"I hope not, Dodd. I do not intend to find you guilty without proof. But someone has taken the key from my desk, and it must have been a boy of this House. A Classical boy could not enter here unnoticed. The key, Dodd, is the key of the door in the passage which leads to the School House. I am quite well aware why it has been taken. It has been taken before for the same purpose, when it was kept in charge of the porter."

"Oh!" murmured Tommy.

"It was taken to open the corridor door, in order to visit the Classical quarters and renew the incessant disturb-

ances which take place between Moderns and Classics of the lower Forms!" exclaimed Mr. Manders. "As you are generally the leader in these rags, as I believe you call them, I conclude that you know something about the abstraction of that key, Dodd."

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

Tommy was quite likely to borrow the corridor key from Mr. Manders' desk, in order to invade the Classical quarters for a "row"; but, as a matter of fact, he hadn't.

For once his conscience was quite clear.

"Now, Dodd, did you take the key?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know who took it?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen it since it was taken?"

"No, sir."

"Were you aware that it had been taken?"

"No, sir," said Tommy cheerfully, for the fourth time.

Mr. Manders searched his face with angry eyes.

The Modern junior met his glance calmly. He knew nothing whatever about the key, and he was feeling quite at ease.

"It is very curious, Dodd, that you know nothing about the affair, as you are generally concerned in such affrays!" snapped Mr. Manders.

"I don't understand it, sir," said Tommy Dodd. "We have—ahem!—raided the Classical chaps sometimes by way of the corridor, but—but we haven't done it lately, sir—not since the time we got the key from the porter's lodge. It hasn't happened since you kept the key in your study, sir."

"Then why was the key taken, Dodd?"

"I don't know, sir," said Tommy, honestly puzzled. "It couldn't be wanted except to get into the School House quietly, I suppose. But, so far as I know, nobody has been there kicking up a shindy. I—I mean, raiding the

Classicals, sir. And it couldn't happen without my knowing."

Mr. Manders gave a grunt.

It was manifest that Tommy Dodd was telling the exact truth, and even Mr. Manders could not find an excuse for pouring out the vials of wrath upon his head.

"Very well, Dodd, I accept your assurance. But the key must be found. I took charge of it, in order to prevent these incessant disturbances. It was an act of the most astounding impudence to take it from my desk. It must be found at once."

"I—I'll look for it."

"Do so, Dodd; and in order to spur you on in the search," added Mr. Manders caustically, "I may mention that all holidays for the Modern Fourth will be cancelled until the key is found."

Tommy Dodd jumped.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped.

"You may go, Dodd."

"But, sir—but—the—the footer——"

"I did not call you here to discuss football, Dodd. You may leave my study."

Tommy Dodd restrained his feelings.

If he had told Mr. Manders what he thought of him at that moment he would certainly not have escaped from the study with a whole skin.

He left the study rather hurriedly, and a figure outside the door jumped back just in time to avoid a collision.

"Leggett! Listening, you cad!" muttered Tommy scornfully.

"I—I——" stammered Leggett.

"Oh, get off, you rotter!"

Tommy Dodd strode away to rejoin his chums, and tell them of Mr. Manders' sentence—news which made Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle share his feelings to the fullest extent.

The three Tommies felt that the only adequate way of dealing with Mr. Manders was by lynch law, the only drawback to that method being that hanging was too good for Mr. Manders.

CHAPTER 9.

Conroy's Campaign!

"GENTLEMEN——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen——"

"Go it, Conroy!"

"Advance, Australia!"

Conroy of the Classical Fourth was mounted upon the table in the junior Common-room on the Classical side.

Round the big mahogany table were gathered the Classical Fourth, to the very last man.

It was a meeting of the Form—the Classical portion of the Form—and well attended.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were there—Jimmy and Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—but for once the Fistical Four were not taking a leading part in the proceedings.

Jimmy was the object of a good deal of attentive curiosity, however.

He was still under the Head's sentence of a flogging, though the sentence had not been executed yet, owing to the intervention of Mr. Bootles.

Conroy, the Australian, was taking the lead, and the lead was certainly in very capable hands.

His chums, Pons and Van Ryn, were supporting him, their support taking the form of sitting on chairs placed on the table and cracking nuts—and eating them—while Conroy addressed the meeting.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Conroy. "This meeting has been called on my suggestion——"

"Go it!"

"To deal with the very important matter of——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Mr. Bootles——"

There was a roar of cheering in the Common-room at the mention of the master of the Fourth.

For a couple of minutes at least the orator was interrupted.

Anyone who had listened to that terrific outburst would not have needed

telling that the master of the Fourth was very popular in his Form.

"Mr. Bootles," resumed Conroy, when silence was established at last, "has received the order of the boot

"Shame!"

"The Head has sacked him——"

"And here's our merry Form-master, one of the very best—a man who understands that juniors have rights, and stands up for them—here he is, with the order of the boot! Only this afternoon I saw him in his study, packing up his mouldy old papers and things, and looking as miserable as a boiled owl——"

"Poor old Bootles!"

"He's been at Rookwood for years on end—he's really part of the place—and it's an awful blow to him to leave! It will be a blow to us, too. We shall miss him. He's an institution. It's like somebody taking away the clock-tower, or the beech-trees, or Sergeant Kettle——"

"Ha, ha!"

"And to come to the point——"

"Oh, you're coming to a point?" asked Townsend, in a tone of mild surprise.

"Shut up, Towny!"

"To come to the point!" roared Conroy. "We're not going to stand it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We back up Bootles——"

"Bravo!"

"And there's one way of setting matters right, if we can work it. Suppose the real offender is found—the chap who laid that trap in the Head's study—well, then, the Head will have to own up that it wasn't Jimmy Silver, and that Mr. Bootles acted quite rightly in stopping the flogging. I don't see how Dr. Chisholm could possibly get out of that."

"Right on the wicket," said Erroll.

"But how?"

"Well, that's what the meeting's called for," said Conroy. "We don't know who did it. Might have been almost anybody. But the fellow's got

to be found and made to own up. That will clear Jimmy Silver and set Mr. Bootles right, and the order of the sack will be withdrawn. The Head can't do less than that."

There was a murmur of approval.

The whole meeting agreed with Conroy on that point.

"If the gentleman present agree——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously, old nut!"

"Let's send for Sherlock Holmes at once," said Townsend. "We'll pass the hat round to pay his fees."

"Look here, Towny——"

"If we can't get Holmes, there's Sexton Blake. Anybody know his address?"

"Cheese it, you ass! I've told you this isn't a joking matter."

"My mistake. I was thinkin' that it was."

"Order!"

"The next step," said Conroy, "is to find the merry japer. Now, if he was a member of the Classical Fourth, he's here present, and I appeal to him as a man and a brother to own up and set matters right without any more trouble."

A dead silence followed Conroy's remark.

If the guilty party was in the Classical Fourth, it was pretty clear that he had no intention of coming forward.

"It's up to the fellow, if he's here," said Jimmy Silver, breaking the silence. "A chap's bound to own up when another fellow is going to take his punishment. That's a law in every school."

"It's Rookwood law, anyhow," said Lovell. "My belief is that it wasn't a Classical. It was a rotten trick on the Head, and a good deal more like a Modern chap."

"Fathead!"

"Well, that's what I think."

"Any takers?" asked Conroy.

No answer.

"I say——" began Tubby Muffin.

"Hallo! You Tubby?"

"No!" roared Tubby, in alarm. "I

don't know anything about it, of course. I was going to make a suggestion."

"You needn't trouble. Now, you fellows—"

"But I've got a jolly good suggestion to make!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin excitedly. "I know how to find the man!"

"Well, go ahead, and cut it short. What's the idea?"

"Offer a reward."

"What?"

"Offer a reward—say, five pounds—and I'll take the matter in hand at once," said Tubby Muffin brightly. "And with my gumption, you know—my brains—I think I can undertake to—Yarooop!"

Tubby Muffin wound up with a yell as he sat down hard on the floor of the Common-room.

It appeared that Tubby's valuable suggestion was not likely to be adopted.

"Sit on that fat idiot if he begins again," said Conroy. "Now, it's agreed that the matter will be set right if the real rotter is found. My idea is for all the Form to set to work and find him. It stands to reason that he can be found. Somebody may have seen him sneaking near the Head's study that afternoon. Somebody may have seen him getting his screwdriver ready, or getting the cord from somewhere—lots of clues, if you look for them. With the whole Form investigating, the fellow's bound to be unearthed. And then he's got to be persuaded to go to the Head and own up. He will do the decent thing, or we'll make his life not worth living at Rookwood."

"Hear, hear!"

"Everything else has got to be set aside—even footer. We've got to nail the rotter and get at the truth before Bootles leaves Rookwood," said Conroy. "It's the only way to save Bootles' bacon. 'Nuff said! That's the programme."

The Australian junior jumped off the table, and the meeting dispersed.

There was excited discussion as the juniors went their ways.

Conroy had received the backing of the whole Classical Fourth, and the Form had resolved itself, as it were, into a committee of inquiry.

And in those circumstances it was very probable indeed that the culprit would be brought to light, and the painful parting of Mr. Bootles from the old school would be obviated.

In his study poor Mr. Bootles was sorting out his innumerable books with a heavy heart.

He had done his duty, and he was not sorry that he had done it; but the result was a crushing blow to the little gentleman.

He was quite unaware of the effort his Form were going to make to save him; and perhaps he would have derived little comfort from it if he had known.

But the Classical Fourth meant business, and investigations were already proceeding.

CHAPTER 10.

Tubby Muffin on the Track!

JIMMY SILVER pointed to the door. The Pistical Four were discussing tea—and the great investigation—in the end study when Tubby Muffin's fat face looked in at the doorway.

Jimmy was generally very patient with the fat Classical, but just at present he was in no mood to be bothered by Tubby.

The sentence of flogging that was hanging over his head worried him; and he was still more worried for poor Mr. Bootles, who had sacrificed so much for his sake.

It was probable enough that when Mr. Bootles had gone the flogging would be administered after all; but Jimmy was less troubled about that than about the blow that had fallen upon his kind-hearted Form-master.

"Don't bother now, Tubby," he said. "Buzz off, there's a good chap! We've only got herrings for tea, anyway."

"If you think I've come here after

your Yarmouth warriors, Jimmy Silver

"Well, whatever you've come for, cut it!" said Lovell gruffly.

Instead of "cutting it," Tubby Muffin rolled in.

"I don't expect much in the way of manners from you, Lovell," he remarked, "but you really might be civil to a chap who's devoting his time to saving Jimmy from a flogging. I've taken the matter in hand—"

"Ass!"

"As for the question of a reward," said Tubby, with a great deal of dignity. "I let that pass! If I find the chap, I hope you fellows will do the decent thing. I'm willing to let it go a. that."

"Fathead!"

"I've got a clue already," said Tubby.

"What?"

The fat Classical chuckled.

"I thought that would interest you," he grinned. "You see, I'm a bit sharper than most chaps. I see things, you know."

"You don't seem to see that door!" remarked Newcome.

"Ahem! Now, the chap who played that trick on the Head is keeping it jolly dark," said Tubby. "It needs a chap with brains to bowl him out. As it happens, I've got the brains."

"Pity you don't use 'em sometimes, then!"

"I'll bet that you fellows haven't guessed the chap's name yet, at any rate," said Tubby warmly.

"Right on the nail. You haven't, either," said Raby.

"Wrong!"

"Look here, you fat duffer," exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently. "do you mean to say you've found the fellow out?"

"Yes."

"Then who is it?"

"Conroy!"

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four together.

Tubby Muffin grinned at them cheerfully.

"I thought it would surprise you!" he said. "I'll bet you'd never have guessed it, Jimmy!"

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "I've a jolly good mind to punch your silly head for suggesting it! Conroy's taken the lead in trying to discover the fellow, whoever he was!"

"That was camouflage," explained Tubby. "Covering up his own tracks, you know, by pretending—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But there's a clue!" yelled Tubby.

"Well, what's the clue, you fat dummy?" asked Jimmy Silver ungratefully.

"You noticed that when I suggested offering a reward at the meeting some silly ass pushed me over—"

"I did!" growled Lovell. "I'd do it again now, only you're not worth the trouble!"

"Then Conroy told the fellows to sit on me if I said any more," said Tubby. "Isn't that plain enough? He was afraid a reward would be offered, and make the fellows awfully keen to find out that japer. I saw it at a glance."

"You—you saw that at a glance, did you?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes." Tubby tapped his forehead. "Brains, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I saw it at a glance. Guilty conscience, you know. Now, now we know it's Conroy, that makes it easier. We've simply got to find the proofs."

"You crass ass!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "It wasn't Conroy!"

"What!" ejaculated Tubby. "What do you mean? Haven't I just proved that it was?"

"You've just proved that you ought to be in a home for idiots, you ass!"

"Look here, Jimmy, it was Conroy, as plain as anything—"

Arthur Edward Lovell jumped up.

His intention was very plain, and Tubby Muffin made a wild bound for the passage. Lovell's boot shot after him, and landed as Tubby reached the doorway.

"Yooop!"

Bump!

Lovell slammed the door.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" came from the passage. "Oh, dear! I'm hurt! Ow, ow! Yah!"

Arthur Edward Lovell sat down at the tea-table again with a ruffled brow.

"If that fat idiot comes in here again I'll slaughter him!" he said sulphurously.

The door opened.

"Get out!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"I—I—I'm only going to say I—I made a little mistake about Conroy!" gasped Tubby. "I see it all now!" said Tubby, while the Fistical Four fairly blinked at him. "I dare say Conroy had a hand in it, because I saw at a glance that he had a guilty conscience, you know. But Lovell was the man!"

"Lovell!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"When a fellow cuts up rough with a brainy chap who's making an investigation, the reason is pretty plain, I think. Lovell was afraid I was going to spot him, and he simply gave himself away!" said Tubby triumphantly.

"I—I—I gave myself away?" gasped Lovell dazedly.

"Own up?"

"It's up to you," said Tubby, with a magisterial air. "See how the matter stands. Bootles is sacked—Jimmy Silver is going to be flogged! You've got to do the decent thing, Lovell, and own up."

"I—I suppose I'm dreaming this!" mumbled Lovell. "Is that fat idiot really accusing me of japing the Head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't a laughing matter!" said Tubby Muffin. "I think it's simply disgraceful of Lovell not to own up when poor old Bootles has got the chopper! I can tell him that the whole Form will send him to Coventry when they know.

And I'm going to tell them. I look on that as my duty."

Lovell recovered himself at last, and he made a bound for Tubby Muffin.

This time the fat Classical was too quick for him, however.

He scudded out of the study, slamming the door after him, and fled for his life.

"Come back!" roared Lovell, glaring out of the end study. "Come back, you fat villain, and I'll make shavings of you!" "I'll—I'll——"

Tubby Muffin rushed on desperately as he heard that roar behind him.

Three juniors who were coming upstairs reached the landing from one direction just as Tubby reached it from the other.

Crash!

Conroy and Pons and Van Ryn reeled right and left, and Tubby Muffin, with a gasp like very old bellows, sat down on the landing.

"Squash him!" panted Pons.

"Yaroo! I—I say, Conroy—I say, Pong—look here—he's after me!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Keep him off!"

"Eh? Keep who off?" demanded Van Ryn, glancing up the passage, which was empty.

"Lovell! Yaroo! He's after me because I've found him out!"

"I should think you'd found him at home!" said the South African junior, laughing. "Have you been bagging his grub, you fat burglar?"

"Ow! No! I—I've found out who japed the Head that time!" gasped Tubby, staggering to his feet. "Lovell, you know! Ow!"

"Lovell?" shrieked the Colonial Co.

"Yes! Rather clever of me to spot him, wasn't it?" said Tubby. "That's what comes of having gumption, you know. It was Lovell did the trick. Fancy that!"

"You burbling bandersnatch!" said Conroy. "I can't quite fancy that! It needs a brain like yours to fancy that, you jabberwock!"

"I've got proof——"

"Hand it out!" grinned Pons.

"Lovell kicked me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Because I was on the track!" explained Tubby breathlessly. "I thought at first you were the man, Conroy."

"You thought what?" yelled Conroy.

"Owing to your showing a guilty conscience, you know——"

"Oh—a—gig-gig-guilty conscience?"

"Yes. But when Lovell cut up so rusty I saw it all at a glance. It was Lovell right enough, and he was keeping it dark, though his own pal was going to be flogged for it, you know. I'm shocked at him!" said Tubby. "I think it's simply rotten of Lovell! Don't you?"

"No!" gasped Conroy. "I think—I'm blest if I know what to think of you, Muffin. Why don't your people put you in an asylum?"

"Look here, Conroy I suppose that means that you and Lovell were hand-in-glove in playing that trick on the Head! Now I think of it, it's plain enough. I wonder I didn't see it at a glance!"

"Hold on a minute!" said Van Ryn. "Tubby was suggesting in the Common-room that a reward should be handed out to the lucky finder. I think we ought to give Tubby a reward."

"Just what I think!" said Tubby brightly. "If it takes the form of cash I shall raise no objection. I really must say—Yah! Oooooo!"

The three Colonials collared Tubby Muffin, and it dawned upon the fat Classical that the reward was not to take the form of cash.

It took a much less agreeable form.

Bump, bump, bump!

Tubby Muffin smote the landing three times with his podgy person, and a fiendish yell rang out each time.

"Yaroooh!"

Conroy & Co. went into their study to tea, and Tubby Muffin sat and spluttered.

"Yow! Ow, ow! Rotters! Pitching

into a chap because he found them out! Fancy that! Yow-ow-ow! I'll jolly well chuck up the whole thing now, and I won't clear up the blessed matter at all!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Colonial Co. Get to Work!

MR. BOOTLES took the Fourth Form as usual the following morning.

It was his last day at Rookwood; on the morrow he was to leave.

Most of his packing was done, and it was probable that there had been tears dropped on some of Mr. Bootles' beloved books as he packed them.

He was looking distressed that morning, though he made a manful effort to keep his troubles from the eyes of his boys.

It was understood in the Fourth that, after Mr. Bootles had gone, a prefect would take the Fourth until a new master was appointed.

Some of the fellows had already decided that that prefect, whoever he was, would not have a happy time in charge of the Fourth.

Never had the Fourth Form at Rookwood been so exceedingly good as it was that morning.

Nearly every fellow, Classical or Modern, wanted to be as nice as possible to Mr. Bootles and to give him no trouble.

As a matter of fact, lessons were little more than a farce.

Mr. Bootles was too worried to put his mind very much into them, and the Fourth had their own troubles to think of.

The Classicals were thinking a good deal about that great inquiry for the unknown japer—not successful so far.

And the Moderns had their own worries, owing to Mr. Manders.

The prospect of all holidays being stopped until the missing corridor key was found was a dismal one to the Modern juniors.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had spent many hours already in quest of that key, without result.

Every fellow in the Modern Fourth had been questioned; and every fellow had denied knowledge of the missing key.

Fags of the Second and Third professed the same ignorance, when the three Tommies questioned them.

Yet it was clear that somebody must have taken the key from Mr. Manders' study—and that that somebody must be on the Modern side.

Evidently somebody was lying—there was no other word for it.

With all holidays stopped till the key was found it was natural that Tommy Dodd & Co. should be thinking more about the missing key than about their lessons—and they were.

Lessons were, in fact, simply "walked through" that morning.

After lessons, the Moderns scudded at once for Mr. Manders' House to put in another search for the key.

Jimmy Silver & Co., on the Classical side, had their own affairs to attend to.

So far, Conroy's idea had come to nil. Every fellow was doing his best—but nothing had been discovered.

With the exception of the egregious Tubby, the Classics had to admit that there was nothing doing.

Conroy was in deadly earnest, and he was far from giving up hope.

And he pointed out to his chums, as they strolled in the quadrangle, that the inquiry on the Classical side had not been so entirely without result as the fellows supposed.

"Nothing's come out!" remarked Van Ryn.

"There's something in it!" answered Conroy. "If the Japer in the Head's study had been a Classical chap, something would have come out. If it was a fellow on this side, I feel sure that somebody on this side would remember some little circumstance, or something"

"You mean that it must have been a Modern?"

Conroy nodded.

"That's my idea. At least, we're justified in concluding that it was most likely a Modern, and looking in that direction."

Van Ryn whistled.

"Not much chance of getting them to look at it like that, though," he remarked. "If we begin investigating in Manders' House, it simply means a scrap with Tommy Dodd and his gang."

"Not in this instance. Tommy Dodd's as sorry about poor old Bootles as we are. My idea is to put it to him fairly, and ask his help. He's a good chap—for a Modern—and he can't refuse."

"The Moderns seem to be in the wars just now," remarked Pons. "Old Manders is ragging them about a lost key, or something, I heard Towle say."

"Bother old Manders and his lost key! Let's go over and speak to Tommy Dodd after dinner."

"Oh, all right!"

And after dinner the Colonial Co. dropped in at Mr. Manders' House.

They found nearly all the Modern juniors indoors, and in a highly exasperated frame of mind.

Mr. Manders had sent for Tommy Dodd again, to learn whether the missing key had been found, and Tommy's answer had been in the negative.

Whereupon Mr. Manders had rejoined that he expected the key to be found that day at the latest, and that all the juniors in his House would be given lines if it was not forthcoming.

Fellows were searching up and down and round about, making remarks about Mr. Manders that were not loud, but very deep.

The Colonial Co. found the Tommies in the junior quarters, in a far from amiable mood.

"Bedad, and here's a gang of Classics coming to bother us intirely!" exclaimed Doyle. "Roll them down the stairs!"

"Pax!" said Conroy, holding up his hand.

"Clear out, then!" said Tommy Dodd gruffly. "We've got to hunt for a

blessed key, blow it! I shouldn't wonder if it was one of you Classical worms bagged it, after all!"

"Jolly likely, I think!" chimed in Leggett.

"Tommy, old scout," said Conroy pacifically. "There's something on now a bit more important than a dashed old key!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Mr. Bootles, you know——"

"I'm sorry enough about Bootles; but I've got to find that key, or else do a hundred lines!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"You don't want our help," said Cook. "There's enough of you to find out the Classical dummy who japed the Head, I should think."

"We think it was a Modern chap, you see."

"What" howled Tommy Dodd.

"We think——"

"You think!" snorted Tommy. "You can't think, if you think that! Do you think a Modern chap would keep mum, and let Jimmy Silver take his licking? That kind of meanness may go on on the Classical side. Not on this side."

"Don't get ratty, old chap!"

"Well, don't you talk out of the back of your neck, then!" said Tommy Dodd. "Now, you chaps, about that key——"

"You might help us, Tommy," said the Australian junior reproachfully. "You know what depends on our finding out the rotter——"

"There are no rotters on this side—they're all on the Classical side!" retorted Tommy. "You know that as well as I do!"

"Look here, you Modern ass——"

"Look here, you Classical chump——"

"Sling 'em out!" exclaimed Leggett. "I'll back you up! Collar 'em, and roll 'em down the stairs!"

Tommy Dodd was already thinking of that safety-valve for his exasperation; but as Leggett spoke he calmed down, and fixed a disdainful look on the cad of the Fourth.

"You're jolly warlike, all of a sudden, Leggett," he said. "We don't want any direction from you, thanks!"

"Look here, I——"

"Let's see you roll one of them down," added Tommy Dodd sarcastically. "We'll stand by and see fair play!" Leggett scowled, and moved away hurriedly.

Apparently he was not inclined to tackle one of the sturdy Colonials "on his own."

A chuckle from the Colonial Co. followed him; but that chuckle brought upon them the wrath of Tommy Dodd once more.

"If you fellows have come here to cackle——" he began.

"Not at all, old chap," said Conroy soothingly.

"Leggett's in a blue funk; but there's lots of fellows here can roll you down, and not half try!" announced Tommy.

But for the important business in hand Conroy & Co. would certainly have taken the Modern leader at his word.

But they suppressed their feelings manfully.

"We didn't come here looking for trouble," said Van Ryn mildly.

"You're jolly likely to find it, if you don't travel, then!"

"Look here, Tommy," said Conroy. "Keep your temper——"

"Who's losing his temper?"

"Ahem! It seems that there's a blessed key missing, and you think a Classical may have hooked it. We think that japer rotter may be a Modern. Let's make a bargain. We'll help you look for the chap who boned the key, if you help us look for the chap who japed the Head."

Tommy Dodd knitted his brows.

It was a fair and reasonable offer, and Tommy Dodd was a fair and reasonable fellow, when he was not quite so exasperated.

"Well, that's fair!" he admitted, at last.

"Good! It's a go, then! I think our affair ought to be taken first, as it's important."

"That's where you're off-side. We've got lines handed round unless that dashed key is found to-day. You find

the Classical cad who sneaked over here and bagged Manders' key——"

"Now, look here, Dodd——"

"That's flat!" said Tommy Dodd obstinately. "Until that key's found, it's no good jawing. Give your chin a rest!"

"A wilful ass must have his way, I suppose," said Conroy. "This seems a thumping lot of fuss to make about a key! Just like old Manders, I must say!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Is it the key of Manders' study?" asked Van Ryn.

Tommy Dodd snorted.

"No; he always locks his study now when he's out. Isn't that like him? Of course, the chap who took the key would like a chance of sneaking in and putting it back, now there's such a thundering fuss. And Manders keeps his door locked—he doesn't mean him to have a chance. He wants somebody to thrash."

"What key is it, then?"

"The key of the big door in the corridor that leads into your quarters. Some ass has bagged it, to let himself quietly into the School House—to jape the Classics, I suppose. And we can't find the chap."

Conroy started violently.

"The corridor key!" he shouted.

"Yes."

"It's missing?"

"Haven't I just said so?" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"My only hat!" Conroy's eyes were dancing. "It's a clue—a giddy clue! We've got on the track at last!"

CHAPTER 12.

Light at Last!

CONROY'S companions stared at him blankly.

"A clue?" repeated Van Ryn.

"Blest if I can see it!" said Pons.

"Blest if I do, either!" said Tommy Dodd gruffly. "Suppose you explain what you're talking about, you fat-head?"

Conroy's eyes gleamed.

"Don't you see?" he exclaimed excitedly. "The key of the corridor door? When was it missing?"

"Some time before yesterday."

"And Manders thinks it was taken by some chap who wanted to get into the School House to raid the Classics?"

"Naturally. It was borrowed before for that reason, when Mack used to keep it."

"But there hasn't been a raid on our quarters," said Conroy.

"I know that. I can't make it all out."

"I think I can," said the Australian junior quietly. "That key was taken by a chap who wanted to get into the School House quietly for a jape—not on us, but on the Head."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Somebody sneaked into the Head's study and set a trap for him. I know you'll say it was a Classical, but just admit for one moment that it was a Modern. How would he get there? If he walked into the School House by the door he would be seen, and fellows would remember they'd seen him at that time. But by borrowing Manders' key he could let himself into the School House by the corridor door, and get back by the same way unseen."

"My hat!" exclaimed Van Ryn.

Tommy Dodd himself looked struck by that argument.

It certainly accounted for the abstraction of the key from Mr. Manders' study, which otherwise it was very difficult to account for, since it had evidently not been borrowed to help in a raid on the Classics.

"Begorra!" murmured Tommy Doyle.

"It looks——"

"Well, I don't say it's impossible," admitted Tommy Dodd reluctantly. "That—that may be the explanation. In that case, when we find our man, you'll find yours. It will be the same party."

"And we can jolly well work together to find him!" exclaimed the Australian junior. "I tell you we're on the track!"

That accounts for the paper not being noticed anywhere near the Head's study. He came by that corridor, which is always locked up, and the back passages that nobody ever goes into. He only had to watch his chance of dodging into the Head's study. He knew the Head was out, of course. We all knew it. And he must have known, too, that the Head had sent Jimmy Silver to his study a little while before. We were all present when Jimmy biffed into the Head at leap-frog, and was sent to fetch his cane."

Tommy Dodd nodded slowly.

He was beginning to be convinced by the clear reasoning of the level-headed Australian.

"But—but," he objected, "a chap would have to be awfully ratty with the Head to play such a trick on him. He risked getting sacked. Now, Jimmy Silver had just been licked by the Head."

"Got it!" shouted Tommy Cook suddenly.

"Eh? What have you got?"

"Leggett!"

"Leggett!" repeated Tommy Dodd.

"What do you mean, Leggett?"

"I mean it was Leggett! Hadn't he just been flogged by the Head for his money-lending tricks—holding an IOU over that silly idiot Muffin's head?" exclaimed Tommy Cook. "Jimmy Silver chipped in, and there was a row, and it all came out, and Leggett was flogged."

"But—"

The objection died on Tommy's tongue before he could utter it.

Leggett!

He could only wonder that he had not thought of Leggett before.

He remembered Leggett's anxiety to know why he had been sent for by Mr. Manders the previous day; he remembered how Leggett had listened at the study keyhole while he was with the Modern master.

What was there to account for Leggett's anxiety, except the fact that he had purloined the key and had had no opportunity of replacing it?

And it was pretty clear now that the key had been purloined for the purpose of that surreptitious visit to the Head's study.

Leggett had been flogged by the Head for rascally conduct; and Jimmy Silver, though unintentionally, had been partly the cause of the Modern junior's rascality coming to light.

It was clear enough to Tommy Dodd now.

Albert Leggett had played that dangerous trick on the Head, and he had placed Jimmy Silver's pencil-case there, partly to save himself from suspicion, partly from malice towards the captain of the Fourth.

"Leggett!" repeated Tommy Dodd. "Leggett! Why, what a silly fool I've been! He's as good as given it away, and I never thought of it! No wonder he wanted us to roll you fellows downstairs when you came up here investigating! I've been as blind as a bat!"

"Let's go and see Leggett!" said Conroy.

"Let's!" agreed Tommy Dodd.

"And sure he's got the key all the toime if it's Leggett intirely," breathed Doyle, "and us hunting high and low for it!"

"More likely chucked it away when he found he couldn't sneak it back into Manders' study! Come on!"

Classical and Moderns, quite on terms of amity now, started to look for the cad of the Fourth.

The matter was not, perhaps, proved yet, but they felt a conviction that was as good as proof.

There were very few fellows at Rookwood mean enough to hold their peace while their just punishment fell on another fellow; but Leggett certainly was one of that small number.

The juniors were well aware of that.

Of most of the fellows it could be said without hesitation that they could not possibly be the guilty party, but of Leggett that certainly could not be said.

Leggett's cunning and unscrupulousness were a little too well known.

Albert Leggett was not found in his

study, and the juniors proceeded to look for him in the quadrangle.

"There he is!" exclaimed Cook suddenly.

Leggett was sighted under the trees, and the whole party made a rush for him.

Leggett started as he saw them coming, with grim looks, and his sallow face changed colour.

The cad of the Fourth was a pretty thorough rascal in his way, but he had not the courage to be a successful one.

As the juniors came dashing up, Leggett faltered and backed away, and took to his heels, without waiting to ascertain what they wanted.

If ever a guilty conscience was revealed in anybody's face it was revealed in Leggett's at that moment.

"Stop!" shouted Tommy Dodd, as Leggett ran for it. "Leggett! You cad! Stop!"

"What do you want?" panted Leggett over his shoulder, without stopping.

"We want the key!"

Leggett ran on faster.

He headed for the School House as the safest refuge, and just as he reached the door the Fistical Four came out.

The unhappy Modern halted in dismay.

"Stop him!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

"What's the row?"

"Leggett's the man!"

Jimmy Silver took Leggett by the shoulder.

The Modern junior kicked out savagely, hardly aware of what he was doing, in his affright.

"Let go!" he howled.

"Yow-ow-woop!" howled Jimmy Silver, as he caught Leggett's boot with his leg. "Oh! Ah! Ow! Why, you kicking beast—ow!"

Tommy Dodd came up as Leggett wrenched himself away. He grasped his Form-fellow by the collar.

Leggett panted.

"Let me go! I'll yell for the prefects! Let me go, I tell you!" he cried shrilly.

"Yell for as many prefects as you

like, old bean," said Tommy Dodd grimly. "Where's that key?"

"What key?"

"You know what key I mean. The corridor key—the one you bagged from Mr. Manders' study."

"I—didn't—"

Tommy Dodd gave him a grim look.

"We're not wasting time on you, Leggett. If you don't choose to tell us the truth, I fancy Manders will squeeze it out of you. Come along! Take his other arm, Cook!"

"You bet!"

Leggett struggled spasmodically as the two Tommies marched him away.

He dared not face the steely, searching eyes of Mr. Manders.

In spite of himself the truth would have come out in the presence of the stern, grim master, and Leggett felt that it was so.

"Let go!" he panted. "You—you can't give a chap away, anyhow! Let me go! I—I'll—I'll kick your shins! Let go!" howled Leggett, his voice rising to a scream.

"Now then, what's this?" came Bulkeley's deep voice, as the captain of Rookwood came out of the School House.

"Dodd—Cook—"

"Like to explain to Bulkeley, Leggett?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Leggett gasped.

"It—it's all right, Bulkeley!" he stammered.

The Rookwood captain stared at him.

"If it's all right, what are you yelling about?" he demanded.

"Only—only—n-n-nothing!" gasped Leggett.

"Then shut up!" said Bulkeley.

He walked on.

The two Tommies had released Leggett, but the whole crowd of juniors were round him.

The cad of the Fourth looked round the circle like a hunted animal.

"Are you coming to Manders?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"I—I'm not, hang you! I haven't got the key!" panted Leggett. "You

can't give me away to Manders! I—I've chucked it away!"

"You've chucked away the corridor key?" asked Conroy quietly.

"Yes. I—I was looking for a chance of putting it back, but—but I couldn't get into the study, and—and I chucked it into a window in the old clock-tower to get rid of it!" panted Leggett. "Now you know! Hang you!"

"That settles it about the key," said Tommy Dodd. "It can be found in the old clock-tower, I suppose. I'm done with you, Leggett. But I don't think Jimmy Silver has."

The three Tommies walked away to the clock-tower to hunt for the key there.

Leggett made a movement to go.

But there was no escape for him.

The Colonial Co. and the Fistical Four were round him, and Leggett, with growing apprehension, realised that the matter was not yet at an end.

CHAPTER 13.

Own Up!

JIMMY SILVER'S brow was very dark. He understood well enough now. In turning over in his mind the names of all fellows likely to be the guilty party Jimmy had thought of Leggett, among others, but only as much as some others, such as Lattrey and Peele and Gower.

There had been nothing definite to attach suspicion to the cad of the Modern Fourth.

But there was something definite now, for Leggett could only have taken the risk of abstracting the corridor key from Mr. Manders' study for one reason.

"So it was you, Leggett!" said Jimmy Silver at last.

Leggett tried to pull himself together, but it was hard to calm his shaken nerves.

"Nothing to do with you!" he muttered. "Manders will get his key now, hang you! Mind your own business!"

"I think this is my business, as I'm sentenced to be flogged for the trick you played on the Head!" answered Jimmy sternly.

Leggett's jaw dropped.

"The—the trick I—I——" he stammered.

"What did you want the corridor key for, you toad?" asked Lovell, with a look of utter contempt. "We know jolly well!"

"I think it's pretty clear," said Conroy. "You may as well own up, Leggett. You've got to, anyway!"

"I—I never went anywhere near the Head's study that evening!" said Leggett, in a shrill whisper. "I—I swear——"

"That's enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "I had thought of you, but there was no evidence. I think there's enough evidence now. The Head wouldn't want much more. Bring him into the School House!"

"What—what do you mean?" gasped Leggett.

"Can't you guess? You're going before the Head!" said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "Bootles isn't going to be sacked to save your sneaking skin!"

"You—you can't give me away!" said Leggett hoarsely. "The—the Head will think—he will believe——"

"He will think and believe the truth!" said Conroy. "And it's time he did, Leggett! If you'd had a rag of decency you'd have owned up before this!"

Leggett shivered.

"I—I can't—I——"

"You must!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You put my pencil-case there to bring me into the matter. You must have done that on purpose!"

"And stole the pencil-case in the first place!" said Lovell savagely.

"I—I didn't! Silver dropped it when we were leap-frogging that afternoon!" groaned Leggett. "I picked it up to return it to him—I swear I did! Then—then I must have dropped it in the Head's study! I swear it was an accident!"

"Yes, we know how much of an accident it was," said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "You needn't shiver, you rotter—I'm not going to touch you!"

"Bring him along!" said Lovell. "The Head's got to know!"

"I can't face the Head!" hissed Leggett. "You—you can't sneak about me! I've owned up—"

"To us! But you've got to own up to the Head!"

"I can't! I won't! And—and you aren't sneak about me!" hissed Leggett. "You can't do it!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. paused. They had been prepared to take Leggett before the Head if he refused to admit the truth; but to give information about him now that he had owned up was quite another matter.

Leggett, in spite of his terror, had not quite lost his cunning.

He knew that he could depend upon the shrinking of every decent fellow from playing the part of an informer.

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums.

"I—I hadn't quite counted on this," he said. "I reckoned that if the fellow was found he would have decency enough to own up when all the school knew. But—but that worm hasn't any decency!"

"He's got to own up!" roared Lovell. Leggett recovered himself a little.

He was feeling more assured now.

He was assured, indeed, of the stinging contempt of his schoolfellows if he refused to own up; but that did not sting him very deeply; he had experienced that before.

In the angry faces of the juniors around him he could read that he would not be betrayed, and that was enough for him.

"Leggett," said Conroy at last, "you know how matters stand. Mr. Bootles is leaving to-morrow unless the facts come out. All the fellows will know you did that trick in the Head's study. You'll be expected to own up: You can't face the school if you don't."

"I won't!" said Leggett between his teeth.

"You'll be sent to Coventry!"

"I don't care!"

Jimmy Silver set his teeth.

"If only won't, you'll be made to some-how!" he said. "Let the cad go now, you fellows. He makes me sick! Keep this in mind, Leggett: If you don't own up this afternoon we'll find some way of making you, that's all!"

He passed Mr. Bootles as he went into the School House.

The deep trouble in the little gentleman's face went straight to Jimmy's heart.

He clenched his hands as he thought of Leggett.

Somehow, the cad of the Fourth should be made to own up in time to save the master of the Fourth from dismissal. Upon that point Jimmy Silver was determined. But there was little time to lose, for on the morrow morning Mr. Bootles was to shake the dust of Rookwood from his feet!

CHAPTER 14.

The Heavy Hand!

"THEY—they're coming!"
There was a tramp of feet in the passage outside the study, and Leggett of the Fourth shivered as he heard it.

Albert Leggett had been moving restlessly about his study, unable to settle down to work or anything else.

His ears had been on the alert, as he moved, for the sound of footsteps.

He knew that they would come.

He stood still, breathing hard, as the door handle was turned.

The door did not open.

"Locked!" It was the voice of Tommy, Dodd, the chief of the Modern Fourth, outside.

"Bust it in, bedad!"

"Speak to the rotter first!"

That was the voice of Jimmy Silver, of the Classical Fourth.

Knock!

"Are you there, Leggett?"

Leggett made no reply.

"We know you're there," went on Jimmy Silver's quiet voice. "You can hear me, Leggett. Will you let us in?"

"What do you want?" panted Leggett, breaking silence at last.

"You know what we want. Will you open the door?"

"No."

"Better!" said Tommy Dodd.

"I—I won't! Keep out, hang you!" exclaimed Leggett. "I—I'll yell for a prefect if you try to open the door!"

"Go ahead! If you bring Knowles here he will want to know what the row's about!" answered Tommy Dodd. "Cut off and get the coal-hammer, Cooky! We'll soon have this door open!"

"Right-ho!"

Leggett's hands trembled.

"I—I'll open the door!" he stammered.

"Sharp, then!"

Leggett dragged himself to the door, and unlocked it.

The door was thrown open, disclosing a crowd of juniors in the passage.

There were Dodd and Cook and Doyle, the three Tommies of the Modern side; and Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, the Fistical Four, Classics.

Both divisions of the Fourth Form at Rookwood were well represented.

The seven juniors came quietly into the study.

Leggett backed away round the table, eyeing them uneasily.

Tommy Dodd closed the door, and turned the key again, Leggett's sallow face paling as he watched him.

Tommy Doyle had a fives-bat under his arm.

Leggett looked at that bat, and he thought he could guess what it was for.

"Better put him on the table," remarked Doyle thoughtfully. "Some of yez hould his paws, and some of yez hould his hoofs!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Leggett.

The threat to call for help died on his lips,

"You can howl, if you like," said Tommy Dodd, guessing his unspoken thought. "That will mean that the prefects will settle the matter—and we'll just as soon they did. Rather, in fact!"

Leggett did not speak.

"Put him on the table, bedad!"

"Hold on a minute!" said Jimmy Silver. "We'll speak to him first, Leggett, you've still got a chance to do the decent thing."

No answer.

"You know how the matter stands," said Jimmy quietly, almost persuasively. "Mrs. Bootles is dismissed, and has got to leave the school in the morning. He's your Form-master as well as mine, Leggett, and he's always treated us decently—you as well as us. You don't want him to be turned out of Rookwood, Leggett?"

"It's nothing to do with me!" muttered Leggett.

"Why, you rotter—" began Lovell hotly.

"I—I'm sorry for Bootles!" faltered Leggett. "But—but—"

"Then do the decent thing, and make it right for him."

"I—I can't!"

"You can! The Head would have to admit that Bootles did right, if he knew that I hadn't earned the flogging he was going to give me when Bootles chipped in. He'll know that, if you own up to what you did."

"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"You—you silly fool!" panted Leggett. "Own up to the Head that I fixed up a trap for him, and made him fall over and damage his dashed nose! He would flog me!"

"You've asked for it, haven't you?" growled Lovell.

"Look here, you cad—"

"Do you want Jimmy to have your flogging?"

"Of course he does!" said Tommy Dodd, with bitter contempt. "He tried to fix it for Jimmy Silver to get the flogging. He don't care a rap if poor old

Bootles is sacked. But we're going to make him care!"

Leggett licked his dry lips.

"You can't give me away!" he muttered. "That's sneaking! You can't tell Bootles—you can't tell the Head!"

"You've got us there!" admitted Jimmy Silver. "Any decent chap would own up. You won't!"

"No, I won't!" said Leggett desperately. "And you can send me to Coventry, if you like! I don't care!"

"Quite so—and so we're not going to bother about Coventry. You won't own up to the truth because you're afraid of a flogging. Well, you're going to get the flogging!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's what we've come here for. Are you ready, Doyle?"

"Faith, I'm waiting while ye're exercisin' yer chin, Jimmy darling!"

Leggett clenched his hands.

"You won't face the flogging you've asked for, from the Head," continued the captain of the Fourth. "Well, you'll get one from us, quite as bad—if not a bit worse. And that isn't all! You'll get another to-morrow—and another the next day."

"Every day till the end of the term!" said Tommy Dodd, nodding his head.

"Now, you're a business-like chap, Leggett," said Jimmy Silver. "A bit too business-like in some ways for a decent fellow. You can see whether it will pay you to sneak out of one flogging, and bag one for every day of the term in exchange. Think it over."

Leggett gritted his teeth.

"You rotters! I—I'll yell for Knowles or Mr. Manders—"

"Just as you like! Take warning, though, that if the masters are brought in the whole affair comes out," said Jimmy Silver. "You won't be allowed to make out that this is a case of bullying, you rat! If we're called to account for flogging you, we shall have to state our reason. Now you can please yourself about howling for Mr. Manders."

"Howl away, you spalpeen!" said

Tommy Doyle. "And sure I'm waitin' for yez to put him on the table!"

Leggett panted as the juniors closed in on him.

He struggled as he was grasped, but the grip of many hands was upon him, and he was swept off his feet.

There was a bump as he was landed on the table.

"Now, then, Doyle!"

Leggett gave a howl.

There was no doubt that the juniors were in deadly earnest.

Leggett's last lingering hope vanished as Tommy Doyle raised the fives-bat.

"Stop!" he howled.

Whack!

The howl came a little too late.

Whack!

"Stop!" shrieked Leggett, struggling in the grasping hands. "I—I—I'll do as you want—I'll own up! Let me go!"

"Hold on, Tommy!"

"Better give him a few more, or he may change his mind."

"Hold on! Leggett, do you mean that?" asked Jimmy Silver sternly. "Mind, if you break your word, you'll get the flogging, and harder. You've got to take it from the Head or a good many from us."

"I—I mean it!" panted Leggett.

He was lifted off the table.

He stood gasping, his face convulsed with rage and fear.

The cad of the Fourth had been brought to order at last.

"Well, lose no time," said Tommy Dodd. "We'll come with you, Leggett."

"Hang you!"

"Will you go to Mr. Bootles or to the Head?"

"Mr. Bootles!" gasped Leggett.

The thought of confessing personally to the Head was terrifying.

"Very well; we'll see you as far as his study."

Tommy Dodd unlocked the door.

Leggett, breathing hard, left the study with the seven juniors, and they walked out of Mr. Manders' House in a party, Leggett in the centre.

A good many Classical juniors eyed them as they came into the School House.

All glances were turned on Leggett.

"Is the cad goin' to own up?" asked Mornington.

"That's what he's come for."

"Good!"

Leggett gave them a glance of hatred, and tramped on to Mr. Bootles' study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went with him, and Jimmy tapped at the door.

"Come in!"

Jimmy Silver opened the door.

Leggett hesitated a moment, but the black looks of the fellows round him decided him.

He tramped sullenly into the study, and Jimmy Silver drew the door shut.

But he did not latch it.

The Fistical Four were leaving nothing to chance, and they meant to be witnesses of the confession.

CHAPTER 15.

The Confession!

MR. BOOTLES was not alone in the study.

Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bohun, the masters of the Shell and the Third, were with the little gentleman, trying, perhaps, to cheer him up on his last evening at Rookwood.

The study had a rather dismantled look.

Mr. Bootles' books were packed, and his other personal belongings; the bookshelves were nearly empty, and the bust of Socrates was gone from the mantelpiece.

Mr. Bootles was keeping up a calm manner, but in spite of himself his face was troubled and worried.

As the moment for leaving Rookwood School came nearer he felt the wrench more and more keenly.

The little gentleman was a "home bird."

Indeed, Mornington of the Fourth

had once described him as a thoroughly domesticated animal.

His life was spent between his study and the Form-room, the library, and the Masters'-room; and when he took his walks abroad he generally had a Greek classic under his arm.

All his thoughts and feelings were bound up in Rookwood School, and he had a lost and desolate feeling at the thought of leaving those grey old walls for ever.

The other masters were sympathetic.

Mr. Bootles was popular with his colleagues; he was so inoffensive and good-natured that he could scarcely be otherwise.

The "staff," indeed, had been surprised by the unexpected firmness Mr. Bootles had shown in confronting the Head, in open Hall, for the sake of the junior he believed innocent of the charge laid against him.

But it was felt that Mr. Bootles had to go.

Whether Jimmy Silver had been innocent or guilty, he was condemned to punishment by the Head, and the Head's word was law in Rookwood School.

Dr. Chisholm expected his decision to be taken without question—and, in fact, only Mr. Bootles had questioned it.

He had done what he believed to be his duty, and now the penalty had to be paid.

The little gentleman blinked at Leggett over his glasses, as the cad of the Fourth presented himself in the study.

He did not observe that the door remained ajar, and he did not know that five or six juniors were quietly gathered just outside.

Leggett was aware of it, however.

If he had hoped to trick the juniors at the last moment he abandoned that hope now.

"Well, Leggett?" said Mr. Bootles kindly. The worry on his mind did not make him any less gentle in his manner. "What is it, my boy?"

Albert Leggett drew a deep breath.

He was in for it, and there was no escape, and his only thought now was to make the best he could of it for himself.

"If—if you please, sir——" he began.

He blinked uneasily at Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bootles.

The presence of the other masters made his confession more difficult.

"Well, Leggett?"

"I—I—I've a confession to make, sir," gasped Leggett.

Mr. Bootles smiled faintly.

"You have been guilty of some fault, Leggett?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"And you feel impelled to confess it because I am leaving Rookwood to-morrow?" said the little gentleman innocently. "That is a very right and proper feeling, Leggett. You may proceed."

"It's—it's a rather serious matter, sir," mumbled Leggett. "I—I—I feel I ought to tell you, sir, because—because——" Leggett had a "brain-wave" while he was speaking, and he proceeded more confidently. "Because, sir, it's really my fault you are leaving, and it's on my conscience, sir."

It was the first that had been heard at Rookwood of Leggett's conscience.

The fellows outside the study looked at one another.

They had not expected even Leggett to put it like that.

Still, it did not matter much how he put it, so far as they were concerned—so long as he made full confession.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles, in surprise. "Whatever have you done, Leggett?" His brow became sterner. "Leggett, if you have been guilty of practising usury again—of lending money among your Form fellows at interest——"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"I am glad to hear that, Leggett. Go on."

"I—I—I played that trick in the Head's study, sir," gasped Leggett.

"What?"

Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bohun looked round quickly as the confession came out; they were as astonished as the Fourth Form-master.

"You?" ejaculated Mr. Mooney.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Bootles.

Leggett went on hastily.

"I—I've come here to own up, sir, so that you can tell the Head, and—and then you won't have to leave, I hope, sir."

Which was very clever, though certainly not very truthful, of the astute Leggett.

"What—what?"

"I—I'm sorry I did it now, sir," said Leggett humbly. "I—I never meant any harm. It—it was just thoughtlessness. I never meant the Head to hurt his boko—I—I mean his nose, sir."

"Leggett," said Mr. Bootles sternly, "you played this wicked and disrespectful prank on Dr. Chisholm, and you remained silent when Silver was sentenced to be flogged in your place!"

Leggett hung his head.

"That was very unmanly, Leggett."

"I—I know, sir."

"And since you did not confess to save Silver, your Form-fellow, from unjust punishment, why have you come to confess now, Leggett?"

"To save you, sir," said Leggett boldly.

"Bless my soul!"

"When the Head knows that Silver didn't do it, sir, he will be glad you interfered to stop the flogging," said Leggett. "Then he will ask you to stay on, sir."

Leggett had derived that idea from Jimmy Silver & Co.; and though he did not care a button whether the Head let Mr. Bootles stay on or not, he was well aware that it was an excellent plea to put before the dismissed Form-master.

Mr. Bootles' face became very kindly.

"That was a very worthy motive, Leggett," he said.

"Thank you, sir!"

Outside the study, Arthur Edward

Lovell was brandishing a clenched fist in the air.

Arthur Edward's dearest wish, at that moment, was to plant that fist in Albert Leggett's face, and thus drive his falsehoods back where they came from.

But Lovell, fortunately, was invisible to the occupants of the study.

"You are aware, Leggett, that I must report this to the Head?" said Mr. Bootles.

"I—I want you to, sir."

"It is very honourable of you to make this confession, my boy, but I cannot hold out the slightest hope that you will thereby escape punishment. Dr. Chisholm is naturally very much incensed. You will certainly be flogged, Leggett."

Leggett shivered.

But he thought of the fives-bat, and the daily application thereof, which was the alternative.

"I—I'm ready, sir," he faltered.

Mr. Bootles looked very thoughtful.

"You may await me in the passage, Leggett," he said at last.

"Very well, sir."

Leggett left the study, and shut the door after him.

Mr. Bootles glanced at the other two masters.

"This is a very honourable proceeding on the part of the boy," he remarked.

Mr. Mooney shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly so; but I fancy there has been pressure brought to bear upon Leggett!" he said. "The other juniors may—"

"Ah! It is possible."

"At all events the truth is now known," remarked Mr. Bohun. "Dr. Chisholm is bound to alter his views when he knows the facts, Mr. Bootles."

The master of the Fourth nodded.

His troubled face had brightened up wonderfully.

"I am sure of that," he said, very cheerfully. "When the Head is aware that he has narrowly escaped administering a harsh and undeserved punish-

ment, I am sure he will feel exceedingly obliged to me."

"I hope so," said Mr. Mooney, with a slight cough.

He did not feel very sure about that; but he would not discourage his colleague.

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet quite briskly.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, I had better see the Head at once."

"Certainly!"

The master of the Fourth rustled to the door.

As he opened it, the voice of Arthur Edward Lovell was audible in the passage.

"You sneaking worm, Leggett!"

"Hang you!"

"Cave!" murmured Raby, as the door opened.

The juniors scudded away.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, blinking after Jimmy Silver & Co., in surprise. "What—what? Ah, you are here, Leggett! Kindly follow me to Dr. Chisholm's study!"

"Yes, sir," mumbled the Modern junior.

Mr. Bootles whisked away, with Leggett following in his wake.

From a distance Jimmy Silver & Co. watched them enter the Head's study.

"All serene now!" said Jimmy, with great satisfaction.

"Right as rain!" said Conroy, the Australian. "The Head can't fail to play up."

"But that worm Leggett!" breathed Lovell. "Why, he was lying like anything—taking credit to himself—"

"Never mind Leggett, so long as Bootles comes out all right," said Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, I think it's going to be all right. The tuckshop's not closed yet. Who's coming to drink Bootles' health in ginger-pop? My treat!"

"Hear, hear!"

Quite a large party proceeded to Sergeant Kettle's little shop to drink Mr. Bootles' health—Tubby Muffin, in fact, drinking it several times over.

CHAPTER 16.

Nothing Doing!

REALLY, Mr. Bootles——”

Dr. Chisholm's voice was cold and incisive.

The Head of Rookwood was rather respected than liked by the school staff; and there had been times when he was almost disliked.

Poor Mr. Bootles, who had come to the study full of hope and brightness, was chilled at once.

His confident manner disappeared, and he became ill-at-ease under the uncompromising glance of the headmaster.

There was nothing encouraging in Dr. Chisholm's look.

Apparently he concluded that Mr. Bootles had come to make some appeal against his dismissal, and he desired to cut the interview as short as possible.

“The—the fact is, sir——” began the Form-master.

The Head raised his eyebrows, further disconcerting the little gentleman, who faltered and ceased.

“Well?”

“The—the fact is, sir, this boy—Leggett—has made a very surprising confession. I have brought him to you——”

“Indeed!”

“It appears, sir, that Silver, as I supposed, was guiltless of the prank played in this study.”

“That matter is closed, Mr. Bootles.”

“I can now produce incontrovertible proof, sir!” exclaimed Mr. Bootles. “Proof, sir, which you cannot refuse to credit.”

“Nonsense!”

“Really, sir!” exclaimed Mr. Bootles, colouring.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

“The matter is closed, Mr. Bootles. I decline to hear one word on the subject! That is all I have to say!”

“Leggett, sir, has confessed——”

“What?”

“He has confessed that he was guilty.”

“Oh!”

Mr. Bootles had the advantage at last.

Cold and stern as he was, the Head was essentially a just man; he could not have been respected in a school like Rookwood had he been otherwise.

He had been firmly convinced of Jimmy Silver's guilt, though possibly, as Jimmy surmised, the damage to his august nose had—unconsciously—helped to convince him.

There was a short pause, during which Leggett's knees knocked together.

He felt a strong inclination to bolt from the study as the Head's terrifying glance turned upon him.

“Leggett!” Dr. Chisholm's voice was like the rumble of thunder. “Leggett! You confess——”

“Oh, sir! Yes, sir!” gasped Leggett.

“You were the author of the outrage in this study?” thundered the Head.

“Yes, sir. I'm sorry——”

“You fastened a cord in this room for me to stumble over in the dark!”

Leggett gasped.

“And why have you kept silent so long, Leggett, in order to confess the truth at this late hour?”

“I—I was afraid, sir!” stammered Leggett.

There was no doubt of the truth of that statement.

At the present moment, Albert Leggett was so terrified that his tongue almost clove to his mouth.

“I can well believe that, Leggett,” said the Head grimly. “Yes, I can believe that. But you are a Modern boy. How did you obtain admission here without being observed?”

“I—I borrowed the corridor key from Mr. Manders' study, sir.”

“Then you had, apparently, planned this outrage very carefully, Leggett? It was not merely a foolish, boyish trick. And how, Leggett, did James Silver's pencil-case come here?”

“I—I dropped it, sir.”

“Boy!”

“By-by accident, sir!” stammered Leggett.

His voice died away under the Head's grim look.

"Very well!" said Dr. Chisholm. "I shall express my regret to Silver that he was unjustly suspected. You, Leggett, will be soundly flogged. You have acted disrespectfully towards me, and basely towards your schoolfellow. I would expel you from the school, Leggett, but for the fact that this confession is apparently made of your own free will. I shall flog you to-morrow morning, Leggett, most severely. You may go."

Leggett limped from the study.

Dr. Chisholm turned back to the papers on his table.

He seemed to have forgotten the presence of Mr. Bootles in his study.

The little Form-master coughed.

He coughed a second time, but the Head did not look up.

"Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Bootles at last, nervously.

At that the doctor raised his head.

"Well, Mr. Bootles?"

"It is clear that Silver is innocent now—"

"Perfectly so."

"In that case, an act of great injustice would have taken place if he had been flogged, sir."

"Undoubtedly!"

"I was convinced at the time of his innocence from the evidence before me."

"You were wrong, Mr. Bootles," said the Head coldly. "It is true that he was guiltless, but the evidence against him was, to my mind, conclusive. A judgment could only be formed on the known facts; and the facts, as then known, pointed to Silver's guilt. I do not blame myself for being deceived."

"But you are glad, sir, that you did not punish Silver unjustly!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles warmly.

"No doubt."

"You will allow me to point out, sir,

that my interference, which you represented at the time—"

"Not only at the time, Mr. Bootles. My feelings on that subject have not changed."

"My interference, at least, sir, prevented an act of harsh injustice. I did my duty as Silver's Form-master."

"I do not see it in that light. However, there is no need to discuss the matter. We hold different opinions. I may mention that I am rather busy at the present moment, Mr. Bootles."

The Fourth Form-master drew a deep breath.

His face was pink; his anger was rising, though he held it in check.

"Am I to understand, sir, that this discovery makes no difference to your decision as regards me?" he asked very quietly.

"None at all, Mr. Bootles. I cannot retain upon the school staff a master who opposes me in public."

"It was by your own act, sir, that the opposition was public. I tried to convince you in private."

The Head made a gesture.

"Mr. Bootles, I am headmaster of Rookwood School, and I do not brook opposition. Kindly do not reopen the subject."

"Then, sir, you desire me to leave Rookwood to-morrow morning, as arranged?" asked Mr. Bootles, with a tremble in his voice.

"Quite so."

"I am bound to say, sir, that in this matter you are acting with the same harshness and injustice you displayed towards Silver of the Fourth!" burst out Mr. Bootles indignantly.

The Head's eyes glittered for a moment over his glasses.

"Very well, Mr. Bootles," he said calmly. "You have stated your opinion, and I have noted it. Will you oblige me by closing this interview?"

"Certainly, sir! You shall not have to ask me twice to leave your study!" spluttered the indignant Mr. Bootles.

And he whisked out in a great heat.

CHAPTER 17.

Friends in Need!

PHEW!"

"That doesn't look as if it's all right, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the school House in time to see Mr. Bootles return to his study.

The agitation and distress in the little gentleman's face was visible to them, though Mr. Bootles whisked on without glance at the juniors.

The door closed on him, and the juniors looked blankly at one another.

"My—my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"It hasn't worked!" he said. "Bootles wouldn't look like that, if it was all right. What the merry dickens does it mean?"

"I'm going to ask Bootles!" said Jimmy determinedly.

He tapped at the Form-master's door and opened it, and found Mr. Bootles in excited and indignant talk with Mr. Mooney and Bohun.

Mr. Bootles whisked round at him.

"Silver! What—what is it? Please do not disturb me now."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Jimmy respectfully. "But—but all the fellows are anxious, sir. Would you mind telling us, sir, whether you are staying on at Rookwood, Mr. Bootles?"

"I am leaving in the morning, Silver. Stay go!"

Mr. Bootles waved his hand impatiently towards the door, and Jimmy Silver got out at once.

The kind and patient temper of the fourth Form-master had evidently suffered from his interview with the Head.

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums with gloomy brow.

"Still sacked?" asked Lovell.

"Yes."

"Rotten!" said Mornington. "What does it mean? The Head ought to have taken it back."

"We thought he would," said Jimmy.

"He ought to. He ought to be glad Bootles chipped in, as it turns out. I suppose he's got his back up."

"It's a shame!" growled Lovell.

"The Head's a crusty old bird!" remarked Mornington. "After all, Bootles stood up to him in Hall, and wouldn't let the flogging go ahead. I suppose it's made him a bit stiff."

Bulkeley of the Sixth came along to the group of juniors, and signed to Jimmy Silver.

"The Head wants to speak to you, Silver. You're to go to his study."

"Yes, Bulkeley."

Jimmy wondered what the Head wanted as he made his way to the dreaded apartment.

He found Dr. Chisholm cold and grim.

The Head felt that it was his duty to express regret for his mistake, but it was an unpleasant task, and he was not feeling amiable.

"Silver, I have learned that the author of the outrage in this study was Leggett," he said coldly. "Leggett has confessed, and the matter is now beyond doubt. I am sorry, Silver, that you were suspected. Your sentence is, of course, rescinded. You may go, Silver."

It was the "amende honorable," though far from gracious in tone or manner.

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"You may go!" repeated the Head.

"Thank you, sir!" faltered Jimmy. "I'd like you to believe, sir, that I wouldn't have played such a trick on you, sir."

"I believe you, Silver."

"And—and Mr. Bootles, sir——"

"What!"

Jimmy jumped at the Head's tone; but he stuck to his guns, and went on courageously;

"Mr. Bootles stood up for me, sir, because he knew——"

"That will do, Silver. You may go!"

"We shall all be sorry, sir, if Mr. Bootles leaves Rookwood——"

"Leave my study, Silver!"

That was final.

The Head's glance was straying towards his cane.

Jimmy Silver controlled his feelings and quitted the study.

He rejoined his chums, with a glint in his eyes.

"What was it—a licking or a merry apology?" asked Mornington.

"Polite regret!" grunted Jimmy. "He could have kept it for all I care. He jumped on me when I mentioned Bootles. The fact is, kids, the Head is a little bit of a Kaiser. I suppose there's nothing doing. But it's a jolly shame if Bootles goes."

"Rotten!" agreed the Co.

"Something ought to be done!" growled Lovell.

"What can be done?" asked Erroll.

"Blest if I know! It's a shame, though!"

There was a good deal of bitterness in the Co., and some of their remarks about the Head that evening were far from respectful.

Somehow, all the fellows had taken it for granted that Leggett's confession would set matters right, and when that had been brought about they expected the clouds to roll by.

Their disappointment was mingled with deep indignation.

"Just as if the Head is waxy at knowing the facts!" said Oswald.

"Just as if he'd rather have flogged the wrong party!"

"Stiff-necked old bounder!" said Mornington.

The Fistical Four had gloomy faces when they gathered in the end study for prep.

All the trouble that had been taken to discover the real culprit had been taken in vain.

The only result was to place the Head hopelessly in the wrong in the eyes of masters and boys.

But, right or wrong, the Head was monarch of all he surveyed at Rookwood School, and the juniors' only compensation was "slanging" the stiff old gentleman in the privacy of their own studies.

*Tubby Muffin looked into the end study while the Fistical Four were engaged in a rather desultory way on prep.

Tubby's fat face was full of excitement.

"There's something on, you chaps!" he announced.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"But there is, you know!" said Tubby.

"There's a Masters' Session going on, and this ain't the regular night, you know!"

"Blow the masters!" said Lovell irreverently. "Blow the masters, and bother their silly sessions!"

"But it's about Bootles!" shrieked Tubby Muffin, determined to make an impression.

Jimmy Silver looked up quickly.

"About Bootles!" he repeated.

"How do you know?"

"I heard Mooney say so to Wiggins!" announced Tubby triumphantly.

"There's going to be a protest!"

"A protest?" exclaimed Raby.

"That's it—a masters' protest!" said Tubby excitedly. "They're going to pitch it to the Head, you know. They're not going to let him sack Bootles, now it's come out that Bootles was in the right all the time. I heard Mooney say it was Tsarish!"

"My hat!"

"And Wiggins was snorting like anything—like a—a—a war-horse!" pursued Tubby. "He said to Mooney that it was time for the staff to stand shoulder to shoulder to get justice for a colleague—his very words! What's a colleague, Jimmy?"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"After all, they're right! The Head's in the wrong, and they all know it, and they oughtn't to let Bootles be sacked. If he were a plumber or a bricklayer his union wouldn't let him be sacked for nothing. They'd call a strike. Jolly good idea to protest, though I don't think it will do any good."

"Wiggins was going to say something," continued Tubby. "But just then Mooney saw me, and the beast

cuffed me—just as if he thought I was listening, you know.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Tubby rubbed his fat ear.

“You wouldn’t cackle if you’d got it!” he snapped. “I say Mooney is a beast, but I’m glad he’s standing up for old Bootles! What do you think the Head will say, Jimmy?”

“Goodness knows!”

Under such exciting circumstances, prep was evidently out of the question, and the Fistical Four “chucked it” unanimously.

They went downstairs, where they found a good many of the Classical Fourth and some of the Third and the Shell gathered in a big window recess near the door of the Masters’ Room.

The news had spread.

Probably the gentlemen of the staff were quite unaware that the subject of their weighty deliberations was known outside the sacred apartment where they were met in council.

But it was well enough known, partly owing to Tubby Muffin’s long ears, and partly to the portentous looks of the staff themselves.

“They’re goin’ it like anythin’!” remarked Smythe of the Shell. “If you listen, you can hear Bootles’ pipe and old Mooney’s deep bass. Looks like a merry indignation meetin’.”

“Blowin’ off steam!” said Townsend sagely. “They won’t dare to face the Head! Two to one they don’t, Smythey—in quidlets!”

Adolphus Smythe shook his head.

“Not takin’ any, dear boy. It would be givin’ a quid away!”

“Hallo! Here they come!” exclaimed Lovell suddenly.

The door of the Masters’ Room opened.

In stately procession came forth the staff; almost all the masters of Rookwood School, with grave and serious faces.

There was a scudding of the juniors at once.

But from corners and recesses they

watched in breathless excitement, and the excitement reached almost fever pitch when it was seen that the staff marched directly to the Head’s study.

“You’d have lost your quids, Towny!” gasped Topham. “They’re goin’ to beard the merry old lion in his den!”

“Good egg!” murmured Jimmy Silver.

At a distance the juniors watched and waited with a thrill of excitement such as had not been known in Rookwood School for many a day.

CHAPTER 18.

Turned Down!

DR. CHISHOLM raised his eyebrows.

The Head had returned to his study after dinner to attend to some business in connection with replacing Mr. Bootles.

He was deep in papers now, with a rather less severe expression on his face than of late.

A good dinner had doubtless had an ameliorating effect upon the old gentleman. But he raised his eyebrows very expressively when, after a tap at the door, the school staff presented themselves.

Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, led the way.

Mr. Greely was a stout, rather imposing gentleman, with a ruddy face and short breath.

After Mr. Greely came Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, and Mr. Bohun of the Third.

Then came Mr. Wiggins of the Second Form, and Mr. Bull, familiarly known as “Maths.”

Monsieur Monceau, the French master, brought up the rear in a state of great agitation, but with resolution in his little bearded face.

With Mossoo walked Mr. Flinders, the German master—Rookwood’s German master being no longer a native of Germany.

It was nearly the whole staff.

Mr. Bootles had discreetly remained

in the Masters' Room, there to await the outcome of the deputation.

Mr. Manders, the senior master on the Modern side, had declined to take part in the proceedings.

Mr. Manders had, in fact, sought to keep Mr. Flinders, also a Modern master, out of the affair, but unavailingly.

The staff marched in under a steady stare from the Head, and there was a general remark of:

"H'm!"

The Head's brows went up till they really looked as if they were trying to climb over his bald forehead.

"H'm!" repeated Mr. Greely.

"H'm!" came from the other gentlemen.

"Mon Dieu!" whispered Monsieur Monceau.

It was pretty clear that the staff were feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

There was something very disconcerting in the steady, steely stare of the headmaster.

"To what," said Dr. Chisholm, in a voice that seemed to cut like a razor—"to what, gentlemen, do I owe this unexpected and extraordinary visit?"

"H'm!"

"I presume that you have some business with me?"

Mr. Greely looked at Mr. Mooney, but Mr. Mooney was industriously studying the pattern of the carpet, and did not catch his eye.

He looked at Monsieur Monceau, but that gentlemen only shrugged his shoulders almost up to his ears, and murmured:

"Mon Dieu!"

The master of the Fifth pulled himself together.

"Dr. Chisholm——" he began.
"H'm!"

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"We, the staff of Rookwood, sir, have just met in Masters' Session," said Mr. Greely.

"Indeed! I was not aware that this was the evening for the Masters' Session."

"We have held an extraordinary meeting, sir."

"Yes? And you have something to communicate to me regarding your deliberations?" asked the Head.

"Exactly, sir! H'm!"

"I am occupied at the present moment," said the Head. "I am, in fact, in communication with several gentlemen regarding the appointment that is now vacant at Rookwood."

"Oh! H'm!"

"However, if you have a matter of any importance to communicate, pray be seated, gentlemen, and proceed," said the Head courteously. "As you know, it is always a pleasure to me to hear the views of my staff."

"H'm!" murmured the staff.

Mr. Greely glanced round for a chair, decided to remain standing, and went on, after two or three more "H'ms!" to clear his throat.

"The matter discussed at this meeting, Dr. Chisholm, is the dismissal of our colleague, Mr. Bootles."

Dr. Chisholm's face hardened.

"Indeed!" he said.

"Yes, sir, indeed."

"You have, perhaps, passed a vote of censure upon Mr. Bootles?" suggested the Head. "I agree with you, gentlemen, that his conduct was quite without excuse."

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"H'm!"

The discomfort of the unfortunate staff was intensifying.

But Mr. Greely came gallantly to the attack.

"The fact is, sir, we have not passed a vote of censure upon Mr. Bootles," he said. "Perhaps I had better explain."

"That would doubtless be judicious!" said the Head, with a faint inflection of sarcasm.

It was pretty clear that the headmaster knew what was in the wind now, and his eyes were growing more steely.

"H'm! When Mr. Bootles opposed your authority, sir, in the matter of

the flogging of Silver of the Fourth, his action was condemned by the staff," said Mr. Greely. "I may say that I shared Mr. Bootles' doubts as to Silver's guilt, but in such a matter I felt it my duty to be silent, and bow to the decision of the gentleman placed in authority here by the governing body—yourself, sir."

"Very right and proper!" assented the Head.

"Certain circumstances have since transpired," said Mr. Greely ponderously. "It appears that Mr. Bootles not only believed in the innocence of Silver, but was quite certain on the point. The discovery of the real culprit places that beyond a doubt."

"Undoubtedly!" murmured Mr. Mooney. "Mr. Bootles' intervention saved you, sir, from inflicting an undeserved punishment. We, the staff, certainly supposed that when this came to light you, sir, would decide to overlook any irregularity in Mr. Bootles' procedure."

"For which he would express regret," said Mr. Bohun.

"Sincere regret!" murmured Mr. Wiggins.

"And that the matter would be suffered to fall into oblivion. H'm!" said Mr. Greely. "To our surprise, sir, we find that Mr. Bootles is still under the order to leave Rookwood."

"To our amazement!" murmured Mr. Bull.

"We have discussed the matter in Masters' Session, sir, in all its bearings," pursued the master of the Fifth. "We feel it our duty, sir, as Mr. Bootles' colleagues, to make an appeal to you. In the name of the whole staff, sir, we beg you to reconsider your decision with regard to Mr. Bootles."

"Which will be taken, sir, as an act of grace, and fully appreciated by the whole staff!" said Mr. Bohun.

"Oui, oui! Mon Dieu, mais oui!" murmured Monsieur Monceau.

Dr. Chisholm looked quietly and calmly at the somewhat flustered group of gentlemen before him.

His eyes glinted a little.

The remonstrance was very respectful, in fact humble, but it was a remonstrance, and it did not accord with the somewhat autocratic views of the headmaster of Rookwood.

"Is that all?" he asked, as the staff fell silent.

"H'm! Yes. I—I think that is all, Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Greely, rather taken aback.

"Very well, gentlemen, I will answer you. I regret exceedingly that it is not possible for me to reconsider my decision with regard to Mr. Bootles," said the Head icily.

"Sir!"

"I have considered the matter very carefully, and have come to the conclusion that, after an act of open insubordination, Mr. Bootles cannot remain at Rookwood. I said I am sorry, and I repeat it. Gentlemen, the matter closes here."

"H'm!"

"Hum!"

The staff looked at one another.

This was a "facer," though they had not been unprepared for it.

"Allow me to further point out, sir, that—" began Mr. Greely rather hotly.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Mr. Greely and gentlemen, discussion is futile. I shall be obliged if you will allow the matter to rest."

The Fifth Form master drew a deep breath.

"That, sir, we cannot do!" he answered.

"What!"

"We have requested, sir, in the most respectful manner, the reconsideration of Mr. Bootles' dismissal. We are now compelled, sir, to proceed further, and protest against that dismissal." //

"We protest, sir!" said Mr. Bull firmly.

"An act of injustice to one is an act of injustice to all!" said Mr. Greely. "It is our duty to support our colleague, sir, at this crisis. Therefore, sir, we protest."

The Head's lips were hard set now.

"You protest?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir, most emphatically."

"Very well," said the Head, with grim urbanity. "You protest, and I will duly make note of your protest. I regret that it cannot influence me to alter my decision with regard to Mr. Bootles. And now, gentlemen, I am compelled to remind you that my time is of value."

The unhappy deputation looked at one another.

Monsieur Monceau made a strategic movement towards the door. He backed out, and Mr. Flinders nearly backed into him.

But Mr. Greely maintained his firmness.

"Very well, sir," he said—"very well! Oh, very well!"

It was always a matter of regret with Mr. Greely afterwards that he could not on the spur of the moment think of anything more crushing than that.

With that he stalked out of the study, bumping into Mr. Bull, and thus rather spoiling the effect of his exit.

The staff crowded rather confusedly into the corridor.

Mr. Greely popped his head back the next moment.

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"The matter does not end here, sir."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Greely; it does end here. Will you have the goodness to close the door after you?"

Slam!

The staff retired.

CHAPTER 19.

The Strike of the Masters!

LIKE a giddy gang of moulting wild-fowl!"

That was how Mornington of the Fourth described it.

Perhaps it was not quite so bad as that, but assuredly the departure of the staff was nothing in the nature of a triumphant procession.

They were all looking very pink and very flustered as they whisked away from the Head's study.

They did not disperse to their own quarters and give the matter up, as the Head undoubtedly expected them to do.

They returned to the Masters' Room in a great heat.

The door closed on them, but juniors, gathering outside from near and far, heard an excited murmur of voices going on within.

Apparently the staff were still on the war-path.

"That's Mossoo's top note!" remarked Mornington, as a shrill, excitable voice came to the ears of the juniors, though they could not hear the words. "Old Mossoo's like a merry bantam!"

"I wonder what the game is?" said Jimmy Silver. "It's pretty plain that the Head's turned down their protest."

"Yes, rather!"

"I don't see what more they can do."

"Blest if I do, either!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "I suppose they're just gassing, to make out to one another that they're not afraid of the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They are, though!" said Tubby Muffin, with a chuckle. "I say, the Head's a terrific old corker, ain't he?"

"A bit too much of an old corker," growled Lovell. "I'd give him a bit of my mind if I were in Bootles' place!"

"Hark!"

The deep bass of Mr. Greely came booming from the Masters' Room.

The juniors were not there to listen, but they could not help hearing the Fifth Form master's powerful voice.

"Then I recommend placing our resignations in Dr. Chisholm's hands. There is no other course we can pursue consistent with our dignity. We have been treated, gentlemen, with disdain and contumely!"

"Fancy that!" murmured Tubby Muffin.

"Mais, mon cher Monsieur Greely

"Such is my opinion," boomed the Fifth Form master. "Since it pleases the Head to disregard the views of his staff, gentlemen, let him manage Rook-

wood without the assistance of his staff!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Gentlemen!" came Mr. Bootles' voice. "Calmness, gentlemen! Pray do not, for my sake——"

"It is not wholly for your sake, Mr. Bootles!" boomed the master of the Fifth. "The dignity of the whole staff is at stake! This tyrannic action, sir, might have been directed at any one of us!"

"But—but——"

"Mon Dieu!"

"I propose, gentlemen, that the whole staff relinquish its duties until the Head is pleased to come to reason."

"But—but"—this was Mr. Bull's voice—"but that—that is a strike, Mr. Greely!"

"And why," boomed Mr. Greely—"why, sir, should not we, because we happen to belong to the professional class—the intelligentsia, in fact—why should not we exercise the privilege, sir, that is exercised by workmen and others in similar circumstances? Have we no rights? Have we no dignity? Are we, sir, slaves to be trodden upon?"

"Here, come away, you chaps!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I—I—I didn't mean to hear what they were saying."

"Can't help it when the bounders are shouting, can we?" said Mornington.

"Let's get farther off, for goodness' sake."

The juniors moved off, though sorely against the grain; they were feverishly anxious to know what was being decided at that unprecedented Masters' Session.

But they could not descend to listening, curious as they were to know the outcome; and they stepped out of the range of voices, only a distant murmur coming to their ears from the Masters' Room.

Tubby Muffin was the only fellow who wanted to linger, and Lovell kindly took him by one fat ear to persuade him to go with the rest.

The door of the Masters' Room was suddenly thrown open.

"Here they come again!" said Mornington, dodging into a window recess. "Keep out of sight; Greely looks rabid."

"On the giddy war-path, and no mistake," chuckled Conroy. "I wonder whether the Head will ring for the sergeant to chuck them out?"

There was a subdued chortle.

Matters were getting quite thrilling now.

The door of the Masters' Room was left open, and Jimmy Silver, after the staff had gone, caught a glimpse of Mr. Bootles there.

The little gentleman was walking to and fro, in a state of great agitation.

"Come on, Jimmy!" breathed Lovell.

At a safe distance, but with keen and eager eyes, a little army of juniors followed on the track of the staff to the Head's study.

Before Mr. Greely & Co. reached that apartment, however, the door opened, and the Head came out.

In the broad corridor, under the electric lights, the Head met the returning procession, in full career, as it were.

He halted.

The staff halted, too, little Monsieur Monceau making a hapless attempt to screen himself behind the broad shoulders of Mr. Bohun.

"There's the Head!" murmured Conroy. "Keep back, you chaps! If he spots us there'll be earthquakes!"

"Quiet!"

The staff clustered together in the corridor, flustered and confused; the Head as cold, calm, and stately as ever.

"Well, gentlemen," said Dr. Chisholm, in a tone of icy surprise, "were you coming to my study?"

"We—we were, sir!" gasped Mr. Greely.

"Not, I hope, to reopen the matter of——"

"Yes, sir! Most decidedly, sir!"

"Then I regret that I cannot listen to you," said Dr. Chisholm.

Mr. Greely drew a gasping breath.

In the Masters' Room he had been the boldest of all, and he had brought his colleagues to his way of thinking.

But somehow his boldness seemed to ooze out at his finger-tips in the presence of the Head.

But there was no retreat now, and he took his courage in both hands, so to speak.

"Dr. Chisholm! You must listen!"

"What!"

"I repeat, sir, that you must listen to what we have to say!" said Mr. Greely. "In protest against the unjust dismissal of Mr. Bootles, sir, the whole staff begs to place its resignation in your hands."

"Mr. Greely!"

There was no doubt that the Head, for once, was taken aback.

He set his glasses straight, and blinked at his mutinous staff.

"That is our decision, sir!" said Mr. Greely more boldly. "An act of injustice to one is an act of injustice to all. We have agreed to support Mr. Bootles, sir, to the utmost limit of our power."

"Is it possible?" The Head almost gasped. "Is it possible, Mr. Greely, that the staff of Rookwood School contemplates a strike, like discontented hands in a factory?"

"It is not only possible, sir, but it is the fact!" retorted Mr. Greely. "We decline, sir—decline absolutely to carry on our duties here until Mr. Bootles has been reinstated."

"I refuse to reinstate Mr. Bootles!"

"Very well, sir, so long as that is your resolve, you will remain the head of a school without masters."

Mr. Greely turned to his colleagues.

"Come, gentlemen!"

And the staff walked away, leaving the Head standing in the corridor, dumbfounded.

"Yaroooh!"

Again the dignity of Mr. Greely's departure was impaired, this time by his walking into Tubby Muffin, who dodged away too late.

"What—what! Boy, you—ah!—you—you young rascal!"

Cuff, cuff, cuff!

"Yooooop!"

Tubby Muffin fled, yelling.

Mr. Greely stalked on with his colleagues, and they disappeared.

Dr. Chisholm glanced along the corridor, and caught a glimpse of vanishing feet.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not want to interview the Head just then, and they bolted for the Fourth Form quarters.

In the Fourth Form passage there was an excited crowd, discussing the unprecedented state of affairs that had come to pass at Rookwood.

A strike of the masters!

It was unheard of!

When Bulkeley of the Sixth came to shepherd the Classical Fourth off to their dormitory he found them still breathlessly discussing the subject.

The discussion went on long after lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory.

What would happen on the morrow in a school without masters was unknown, almost unimaginable, and intensely interesting.

"There won't be any lessons, you fellows!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "I say, that's ripping, ain't it? Can't be any lessons, can there? I say, I'm backing up old Greely's gang!"

"How on earth will it end?" said Jimmy Silver.

There was no answer to that question.

The juniors could only wait for the morrow—and for their first experience of a school with the masters on strike!

CHAPTER 20.

Expectant!

JIMMY SILVER & CO., came in to breakfast next morning after a run in the keen, fresh air of the quadrangle.

They looked round at once to see whether Mr. Bootles was in the dining-room.

That day Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form, was to leave Rookwood—or was to have left Rookwood, for it was by no means certain now that he would go.

The juniors were glad to see him in the room.

He was looking troubled and harassed, but at least he was not gone yet, and that was satisfactory.

Mr. Bootles took his place at the head of the Fourth Form table as usual.

It was plain enough to the juniors that he was in a perplexed and worried frame of mind.

At the breakfast-table the Classical Fourth were very good indeed.

There was no chattering or whispering, no shying of bread bullets; they did not, in fact, take any advantage of Mr. Bootles' preoccupation.

They wanted the little gentleman to understand that they were backing him up.

Whether Mr. Bootles understood it was a question, however; he was probably not thinking about the juniors at all.

Jimmy Silver glanced at the other tables, noting the looks of the other masters present.

Mr. Greely of the Fifth was looking grim and stern.

That stout and important gentleman was the leader of the strike, and there were certainly no signs of surrender in his severe face.

Mr. Wiggins and Mr. Bohun did not look happy, and they were very quiet indeed.

The other masters were not to be seen.

Breakfast passed off in an atmosphere of subdued thunder.

Even the juniors, though they still regarded the masters' strike as a "lark," realised that it had its serious aspect.

After breakfast, when the chapel bells began to ring, the juniors headed for chapel, with a great curiosity to see the Head.

Somewhat to their disappointment, Dr. Chisholm presented his usual aspect.

Perhaps his lips were a little tighter than usual, but that was all.

Certainly he showed no sign of being in a worried frame of mind.

"The Head's a hard case!" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, as they came away from chapel. "Hard as steel. He won't give in."

"I don't think the masters will, either," remarked Newcome.

"Goodness knows what will happen, then."

"It's a case of the irresistible force brought to bear upon the giddy immovable object," remarked Jimmy Silver. "I wonder if there's going to be any lessons?"

"Are you going in to lessons, Tubby?" chuckled Lovell.

"I—I think so," said Tubby Muffin.

"On second thoughts, you know, I don't think this idea of striking is much good. Bulkeley's such a beast, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hour was at hand for morning classes, and fellows gathered round the doors of the Form-rooms in a state of subdued excitement.

The Sixth went in as usual; those high and mighty personages declined to show the slightest excitement or perturbation.

Perhaps they felt that they were called upon to set an example to the rest of Rookwood.

But outside the Fifth Form-room Hansom and Jobson and Lumsden and some more of the Fifth stood chatting in low voices, and wondering what they were to do if Mr. Greely did not come along.

Adolphus Smythe of the Shell was chatting with some more Shell fellows, with a satisfied grin on his face.

Adolphus did not object to a day off.

He was discussing "geegees" with Howard and Tracy, and making arrangements for a "little run" that day if there were no lessons.

Among the fags of the Second and Third there was open chirruping and chuckling.

Algy Silver, Jimmy's cousin in the

Third, was starting a punt-about in the Third Form-room with a cushion for a footer.

Evidently the seriousness of the position was quite lost upon that lively young gentleman.

The Fourth Form made it a point not to be noisy like the fags; something was due to the dashed dignity of the Form, as Townsend put it.

They waited—some of them in the Form-room, and some outside.

It was past the time for beginning, but not a master had put in an appearance so far.

The strike was taking effect.

The Second Form were playing leap-frog along the passage now.

It was a symptom of what was to come.

Peele of the Fourth came in from the quad, grinning.

He looked as if he had news.

"Anythin' goin' on?" asked Mornington.

"Yes—the Head!" grinned Peele.

"What about the Head?" asked Silver.

"I've just seen him through his window. Marchin' up an' down his study like a giddy Grenadier on sentry-go," chuckled Peele. "He doesn't know what to do, of course. I saw Knowles come into his study an' go out. The Head knows what's goin' on, and he doesn't know what to do! Ha, ha!"

"Poor old Head!" grinned Conroy.

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows.

"It's a rotten state of affairs, and no good for Rookwood," he said. "The Head ought to let up on poor old Bootles, and make an end of it."

"He can't give in!" said Mornington, with a shake of the head.

"Well, I don't see how he can," admitted Jimmy. "He oughtn't to have let it go as far as this. It's got to end somehow."

"There goes Bootles," murmured Lovell.

Mr. Bootles was observed, with a troubled brow, heading for the corridor that led to Dr. Chisholm's study.

Two or three of the juniors scouted cautiously after him, and they came back with the information that he had gone into the lion's den—in other words, the Head's study.

The juniors continued to wait.

Adolphus Smythe had coolly put a cigarette between his lips.

He did not yet venture to light it. Doubtless that would come later.

From the Third Form-room came a continuous uproar.

And the Second Form fags were growing more and more lively with their leap-frog.

CHAPTER 21.

The Substitutes!

DR. CHISHOLM turned a glance like steel upon Mr. Bootles as that nervous little gentleman entered his study.

Calm as he was, it was only too clear that the Head of Rookwood was deeply and bitterly incensed.

A strike of the school staff was utterly unprecedented; it was a thing incredible, almost unimaginable.

And it had happened!

It was no wonder that the Head was at a loss, and that his feelings were very bitter indeed.

He was far from laying the blame at his own door.

He was conscious of good intentions and a strict sense of duty, and he did not realise that he had carried authoritative severity a little too far.

"Pray excuse this intrusion, sir!" said Mr. Bootles mildly. "I have come here to—to—to ascertain whether—whether anything cannot be done at the last moment—"

"I have no desire to discuss the matter, Mr. Bootles."

"It is past time for classes, sir, and there are no masters to—"

"I am aware of it, and of whose fault it is."

Mr. Bootles flushed.



Lovell writhed and struggled in vain as the new master of the Fourth lashed him savagely across the shoulders. A Latin dictionary struck Mr. Stange full on the ribs; an inkpot followed, just missing. "Come on!" shouted Jimmy Silver, rushing out. "Rescue!" At that moment the door of the Form-room was flung open and the Head of Rookwood stepped in.

"It is not my fault, sir. My colleagues refused to allow me to be victimised, for that is what it amounted to. You yourself have said that it was fortunate that Silver of my Form was not flogged for a fault he had not committed. Under such circumstances, could you not have overlooked a temporary opposition to your authority, which had such happy results."

"I am Head of Rookwood, Mr. Bootles."

"The staff, sir, are not pleased at this state of affairs; they are dismayed, disconcerted," said Mr. Bootles patiently. "They would be only too happy to resume their duties."

"I am prepared to receive their apologies, and allow them to resume their duties."

Mr. Bootles sighed.

There was assuredly no hope of compromise while the Head was in this mood.

"In short, Dr. Chisholm, I am ready to express my sincere regret that there was ever any difference of opinion between us," he said. "I am prepared to do my duty here if you will reconsider—"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"I reconsider nothing, Mr. Bootles. You are dismissed from your post, and I expect you to leave the school with convenient despatch."

"In that case, the present state of affairs remains unaltered, sir—my colleagues are resolved to continue to support me."

"If they do not resume their duties to-day, Mr. Bootles, they will also be dismissed. You may tell them so, from me."

"And the school, sir—"

"The school, sir, is under my direction," said the Head calmly. "Deserted by my staff, I shall carry on with the aid of the prefects until a new staff has been appointed."

"That will certainly take some time to—"

"Doubtless—"

"And meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, sir, the matter is under my direction, and I am not in need of counsel."

Mr. Bootles bit his lip.

"It is probable that the governors will have something to say when the news of this untoward state of affairs reaches their ears," he said tartly.

"I am responsible to the governing body, Mr. Bootles, but not to you. As I am expecting the prefects, whom I have sent for, I shall be obliged if you will close this unprofitable interview."

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Bootles, with dignity.

He left the study, shutting the door very sharply.

He made his way to the Form-room, where a hush fell on the juniors as he came up.

"We're ready for lessons, sir," said Jimmy Silver respectfully. "Shall we go into the Form-room?"

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"I have not come to take the Form, Silver, I am sorry to say. I am leaving Rookwood to-day—"

"Oh, sir!"

"I should like, however, to make an appeal to you," said the Form-master. "You are no longer my pupils, and I have no right to give orders to you, but I am sure you will regard my wishes—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said a dozen voices.

"I appeal to you, then, to keep order," said Mr. Bootles. "The present state of affairs is unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed. It must not be allowed to degenerate into disorder. You will remember the good name of the school, and you will be careful not to be led into disorder or anything unseemly. I hope and trust so."

"Certainly, sir!"

"That is all, my boys."

Mr. Bootles walked away, leaving a buzz of discussion behind him.

A little later Tubby Muffin, who had been scouting, brought the news that the prefects had left the Sixth Form-room, and gone to the Head's study.

"Prefects!" said Lovell, with a grin. "Do they think they can run Rookwood with prefects? My word!"

"There was another long wait.

Then there was a hush, as Bulkeley of the Sixth came along, with Neville and Carthew and Lonsdale, all Sixth Form prefects.

Bulkeley, with a grave face, addressed the Fifth-Formers, who were lounging about at ease.

"The Fifth are to go in with the Sixth to-day," he said.

"Who says so?" asked Hansom of the Fifth.

"Head's orders!"

"Oh, all right!"

"What about little us?" murmured Lovell.

It was clear now that an attempt was to be made to "carry on" with the prefects, as masters were not available.

Lonsdale went into the Second Form-room, and with a considerable amount of cuffing the fags of that Form were reduced to order.

Bulkeley took charge of the Third, probably the most unruly of all the Forms; and even the great Bulkeley did not find it very easy to get the Third Form into an orderly state.

Neville looked after the Shell.

Adolphus Smythe's cigarette disappeared as if by magic, still unlighted, at the sight of the prefects.

The Shell went in quite meekly with Neville.

It was Mark Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, and the most unpopular prefect of Rookwood, who was assigned to the Fourth.

There was a slight grin on Carthew's face as he came up to the group outside the door of the Fourth Form-room.

The juniors eyed him rather grimly.

The Fistical Four, especially, had had their rubs with Mark Carthew, and it was not with pleasant feelings that they discovered that the Sixth Form bully was to take their Form-master's place

"Now, then!" rapped out Carthew. "Get in! You've wasted enough time, you idle young rascals!"

"What are we to get in for, if there's nothing doing?" asked Lovell.

"Don't answer me, Lovell! I'm taking you to-day, and if there's any rot in this Form I'm sorry for you, that's all."

And Carthew made a significant movement with his ashplant.

"So you're going to give us lessons?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"That's it."

"We shall go ahead like steam, and no mistake," said Jimmy sarcastically.

"No cheek, Silver, I warn you! Go to your places!"

The Fourth-Formers exchanged looks, and in silence they went into the Form-rooms and sat down at their desks.

Carthew followed them in with a grin.

The bully of the Sixth was plainly pleased with his new authority, and it was pretty clear that he was going to exercise it to the utmost limit.

From the looks of the Fourth it was pretty clear, too, that if Carthew carried his authority too far there would be trouble.

But the juniors were not unmindful of Mr. Bootles' appeal, and lessons in the Fourth Form-room began quietly, though with a subdued atmosphere of thunder.

CHAPTER 22.

"A little brief authority" and the Result!

"A RMA virumque cano—"
"Construe!"
"The Army, the man, and the dog—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin was not reflecting credit upon the instruction he had received from his Form-master.

A howl of irrepressible laughter from the Classical Fourth greeted his unique rendering of P. Vergilius Maro.

Poor Tubby was not really at his best.

He could have done better than that but for Mark Carthew's bullying manner, which made him so nervous that he hardly knew what he was saying.

"Silence!" thundered Carthew.

The laughter died away, but the juniors were still grinning.

"Muffin!"

"Ye-es, Carthew."

"Is that how you construe in this Form?"

"Ye-es, please."

"I'm not surprised at it," said the prefect sarcastically.

"This—this isn't where we left off with Mr. Bootles, you know, Carthew," ventured Tubby Muffin.

"So you forget all that's gone before every time you make a step forward—is that it?"

"Exactly!" gasped Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Muffin, come out here."

"I—I say, Carthew, what for?" stammered Tubby Muffin.

The question was quite unnecessary, for Carthew of the Sixth was taking Mr. Bootles' cane from the desk.

It was abundantly clear what the unfortunate Tubby was to come out for.

"Do you hear me, Muffin?"

"Ye-es."

"Do you want me to fetch you?" demanded Carthew.

"Nunno!" gasped Tubby.

The fat Classical came out very reluctantly before the Form.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on grimly.

Jimmy had been the first to construe, and he knew that Carthew had tried to catch him, but Jimmy was well up in the Form work, and was not to be caught.

The Classical Fourth were well on in the "Aeneid," and Jimmy had gone on in the right place; but Carthew, on his own account, had turned back to the beginning.

More than one fellow in the Fourth had a suspicion of his reason.

Carthew was a prefect of the Sixth, and was supposed to know Virgil inside out, so to speak; but there was more supposition than reality about that.

He found it easier to deal with the beginning of the "Aeneid," which, of course, everybody knew more or less by heart.

It was quite possible that some keen scholar like Erroll or Rawson would have caught Carthew himself "out" if the prefect had not taken that precaution.

Naturally, that suspicion did not increase the respect of the juniors for the fellow who was placed over them instead of Mr. Bootles.

In the First Book the dunce of the Sixth was sure of his ground—but so were most of the Fourth, and he had little chance of coming down on fellows like Jimmy Silver, or Mornington, or Lovell.

Hence, as Jimmy felt sure, he had picked on Tubby Muffin; and even Tubby would have construed "Arms and the man I sing" if the bully of the Sixth had not made him nervous and confused.

Mark Carthew's object, in fact, was not so much to impart instruction to the Classical Fourth as to find some opening for exercising his new authority.

He "fancied" himself in a Form-master's place, and he meant to let the Fourth understand that he was monarch of all he surveyed in the Form-room.

But Carthew of the Sixth, in the character of amateur Tsar, was likely to find trouble before long.

He swished the Form-master's cane in the air, with an evident satisfaction in hearing the swish of it.

The sound was not so gratifying to Tubby Muffin.

That plump youth eyed Carthew very uneasily, and looked inclined to bolt back to his place.

"Hold out your hand, Muffin!"

"I—I say, Carthew—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Carthew, in his most bullying manner. Having found a victim and an excuse, the bully of the Sixth was not to be denied.

Jimmy Silver, with knitted brows, started up in his place.

He was head of the Form, and he felt called upon to speak up for the unlucky Muffin.

"Carthew!" he called out.

The prefect spun round.

"Silence, Silver!"

"I was going to say——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I'm bound to speak," answered Jimmy steadily. "Mr. Bootles never caned a chap for a mistake in his construe."

"Perhaps that's the reason why you seem such a lot of dunces," said Carthew, with a sneer. "My methods are different, as you will see."

Carthew spoke of his "methods" as if he had been a Form-master for a couple of years at least.

He was, in fact, swelling with importance, and was not in a humour to brook the slightest contradiction.

"But——" began Jimmy again determinedly.

"Another word, Silver, and I will cane you as well as Muffin!"

"You have no right to cane Muffin," said Jimmy Silver. "He wouldn't have blundered as he did if you hadn't scared him."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lovell.

Carthew fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver.

He had been unable to catch the captain of the Fourth in his construe; but Jimmy had placed himself in his hands now. He had the excuse he wanted.

"Stand out here, Silver!" he said.

Jimmy hesitated a moment.

He was strongly inclined to refuse; but he remembered Mr. Bootles' appeal, and the fact that the bully was, after all, placed there in authority by the Head.

His hesitation was only momentary. He rose, and came out before the class.

"Wait your turn!" said Carthew grimly. "Hold out your hand, Muffin! If I have to tell you again, it will be the worse for you!"

Tubby Muffin's fat hand came out in a very gingerly manner. Swish!

"Yaroooh!"

"Silence! Go back to your place!"

Tubby Muffin, with an expression of deep anguish, squeezed his hand under his fat arm, and limped back to the form.

He had, however, escaped more cheaply than Carthew had intended, for, had not a second victim offered, the bully of the Sixth would certainly not have let Tubby off with one cut.

Carthew turned to Jimmy Silver with a glitter in his eyes.

"You have interfered and disobeyed orders, Silver!" he said. "Mr. Bootles may have allowed that sort of thing, but I don't! Hold out your hand!"

Again Jimmy hesitated.

"Do you hear me?" rapped out Carthew.

Again Jimmy was on the point of resistance, and again he restrained himself.

He held out his hand.

Swish!

It was a cruel cut, and it made Jimmy catch his breath.

Lovell's eyes glittered, and he half rose. But he sat down again.

There was a murmur in the Fourth.

Jimmy had set his teeth to keep back a cry of pain.

"Now the other hand!" said Carthew grimly.

Jimmy looked him steadily in the face, and did not move.

He had had enough, and he did not intend to have any more—from Mark Carthew, at least.

"You hear me, Silver?"

"I hear you."

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No!"

"Wha-at?"

"That's enough!" said Jimmy Silver

quietly. "I'm not taking any more, Carthew!"

A loud murmur came from the Fourth.

It was clear enough that the Classical juniors were in sympathy with the captain of the Form, and ready to back him up.

Carthew stared blankly at Jimmy Silver.

Like most bullies, he did not know where to stop, and, having provoked resistance, he did not quite know how to deal with it.

"Will you hold out your other hand?" he repeated.

"No, I won't!"

"Do you want me to lay the cane about you?"

"I shall kick your shins if you do!"

"Bravo!" chirruped Lovell.

Carthew panted.

"Silver! You—you— Go to the Head at once! I will write you a note to take to Dr. Chisholm, and he will deal with you!"

Jimmy Silver turned on his heel and walked back to his place.

There he sat down.

"Silver! You are to go to the Head!" shouted Carthew.

Jimmy Silver did not move.

CHAPTER 23.

The Fourth Breaks Out!

THERE was a breathless pause in the Form-room.

Jimmy Silver sat tight, with his steady eyes fixed upon the prefect.

The juniors round him were quivering with excitement.

Trouble had threatened from the moment Mark Carthew had taken charge of the Fourth, and now it had broken out.

Carthew stood with the cane gripped in his hand, his eyes blazing at the captain of the Fourth.

"Silver," he panted at last, "this means a flogging for you! I order you

to take a note to the Head in the Sixth Form-room!"

Jimmy did not answer.

"Will you go?"

"No!"

"Don't go, Jimmy!" called out several voices.

"I don't mean to!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Silence!" thundered Carthew.

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Rats to you, old sport!" said Mornington coolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew's face was crimson with rage.

He had made a mess of his Form-mastership already, and he had no idea at all how to deal with the situation he had created.

He decided on drastic measures, and strode towards the Form.

Tubby Muffin was chuckling, a fat chuckle, greatly delighted to see Carthew taken down; but he ceased all of a sudden as the prefect turned on him.

Probably Carthew was selecting him as the easiest victim, in the hope of striking terror to the Fourth by the sight of condign punishment.

"What are you laughing at, Muffin?" he asked in a grinding voice.

"I—I—I wasn't laughing, Carthew!" gasped Tubby in dismay. "Not a bit! I—I was—was crying— Yaroooh!"

The cane sang on Tubby's fat shoulders.

He uttered a yell that rang through the Form-room.

Carthew gripped the fat Classical by the collar and swung him out from his desk.

Then he laid on the cane.

Tubby Muffin struggled and howled wildly.

But Carthew had miscalculated, if he had supposed that the sight of that thrashing would reduce the juniors to obedience.

It had the reverse effect.

The cane had fallen thrice on the

howling Tubby, when Jimmy Silver jumped up and ran out of his place.

He grasped the prefect's arm and dragged it back.

"Stop that, you bully!" he said between his teeth.

"Let go my arm!" shrieked Carthew.

"Let Muffin alone, then!"

Carthew released Tubby Muffin and turned furiously on Jimmy. The cane lashed out with savage force.

There was a rush of Lovell, Raby, and Newcome to the aid of their leader.

They charged into Carthew, and sent him spinning.

Erroll and Mornington, Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons were only a moment behind them.

Carthew sprawled on the floor of the Form-room, with the excited juniors round him.

"Kick him out!" shouted Conroy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hurrah! Turn him out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young rotters!" yelled Carthew, as the juniors seized him on all sides. "I'll smash you! I'll call in the Head! I'll—I'll— Yaroooh! Leggo! Oh, crumbs!"

"Bump him!"

"Hurrah!"

Bumping a prefect was a form of amusement that was not, under ordinary circumstances, indulged in at Rookwood.

Perhaps for that reason, among others, the Classical Fourth were not inclined to let the present opportunity pass.

Seven or eight pairs of hands were on the infuriated prefect, and his struggles were quite unavailing.

He was swept off the floor, yelling, and he came down again with a smite that made him yell still louder.

"Give him another!"

"Ha, ha! Bump him!"

"Give him jip!" howled Tubby Muffin. "Lemme gerrat him! I'll jump on him! Let me jump on the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Help!"

The door opened.

Mr. Bootles, in his overcoat, with his umbrella on his arm, looked into the Form-room, with distended eyes behind his glasses.

The "sacked" master had been about to leave when the uproar from the Fourth Form-room reached his ears.

It had drawn Mr. Bootles to the spot.

"Boys!" stuttered the little gentleman in horror. "Silver—Erroll—Conroy! My dear boys—"

"Oh, my hat! Bootles!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. released Carthew suddenly.

The prefect lay on his back on the floor and roared.

The juniors turned crimson faces towards their horrified Form-master.

True, Mr. Bootles was no longer their master, and he had no authority there, but old habits were strong.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"What does this riot mean?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"We can't stand that rotten bully, sir," said Mornington coolly.

"Mornington!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from Carthew. "I'll go to the Head! Yow-ow-ow! You young demons, just you wait a minute or two!"

The breathless and dishevelled prefect staggered out of the Form-room.

"Carthew!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "One moment, Carthew—"

"Don't speak to me!" panted Carthew. "You are not a master here now, Mr. Bootles, and you needn't interfere."

"What! Carthew, this impertinence is—"

"Oh, rot!" snapped Carthew rudely. Mr. Bootles stood quite dazed by that reply.

But from somewhere in the Fourth a Latin dictionary whizzed through the air, and it landed on the side of Carthew's head in the doorway.

The juniors were not disposed to see their Form-master insulted, whether he was sacked or not.

Carthew uttered a fiendish yell and went staggering into the passage.

"Well hit!" yelled Lovell. "Right on the wicket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew spun back in the doorway with a face like a demon, as if about to rush at the juniors.

A regular fusillade met him.

Books and inkpots whizzed through the air, and under the volley Carthew fairly turned tail and bolted, streaked with ink.

A roar of laughter followed him.

"Boys!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, almost wringing his hands in dismay at such a scene in the Form-room. "My dear boys, do not——"

"Order!" called out Jimmy Silver. "Remember Mr. Bootles is here, you fellows! Order!"

"Right you are!" said Conroy. "Sit down, you chaps. Shall—shall we go on with Virgil, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Certainly!" stammered Mr. Bootles.

He picked up the book Carthew had laid on the desk, and the Classical Fourth sat down in a very quiet and orderly way.

It seemed to Mr. Bootles the best method of quietening the tumult.

In a very few minutes the Form-room presented its old aspect, with the exception that the Form-master was in his overcoat, and had an umbrella hanging on his arm.

But within five minutes the door was flung open, and the Head of Rookwood strode in, with rustling gown, with the ink-splashed face of Mark Carthew scowling behind him.

CHAPTER 24.

Trouble with the Third!

DR. CHISHOLM'S face was pale with anger.

A hush fell on the juniors as the Head's angry glance swept over them.

The next moment, however, the Head

observed Mr. Bootles, and he transferred his attention to the Form-master.

Mr. Bootles coloured under his grim gaze.

"You here, Mr. Bootles!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"Really, sir——"

"You have no right in the Form-room! Have I not spoken plainly enough, Mr. Bootles, in informing you that your services are no longer required in this school?" rapped out the Head.

Mr. Bootles crimsoned.

"I came here because the Form-room was in an uproar," he exclaimed. "I have interfered to restore order, Dr. Chisholm, and I have done so. Now that I have done it I am ready to retire."

And Mr. Bootles, trembling with wrath and indignation, laid down his book and whisked to the door.

"Good-bye, sir!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Silence, Silver!" thundered the Head.

Jimmy bit his lip.

Like most of the Rookwooders, he had a great respect for the Head, but the stern old gentleman was running the risk of losing it now.

"And now," resumed the Head, when Mr. Bootles was gone, "what does this riot mean? I placed Carthew, of the Sixth Form, in charge of this class. In disobeying him you have disobeyed me!"

"He's a rotten bully, sir!" said Mornington.

"How dare you use such expressions to me, Mornington!"

"It's the truth, sir!"

"You have taken advantage of the present unusual state of affairs to break out in riot!" exclaimed the Head.

"It's not like that, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "We——"

"Don't contradict me, Silver!"

"But, sir——"

"Silence! I shall punish every boy here!" said the Head. "Give me a cane, Carthew."

Carthew, with a glitter in his eyes, handed Mr. Bootles' cane to the Head.

"You may go to the Sixth Form-room, Carthew," added the Head. "I will place another prefect in charge of the Fourth Form."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Carthew.

The Head made a gesture of dismissal, and Carthew left the Form-room.

He was "sacked" from his new position already.

The Head intended to punish the juniors for their outbreak, but he had tact enough to send away the prefect who had been unable to keep order in the Form.

The next ten minutes were not enjoyable to the Fourth.

They had to file before the Head and take a cut each, and Dr. Chisholm did not lay the cane on lightly.

The juniors were looking grim, some of them sullen, when they went back to their places:

Dr. Chisholm laid down the cane.

"I shall send Bulkeley to take charge of this Form," he said. "If there is any further trouble, very severe measures will be taken."

"There won't be any trouble with Bulkeley, sir; he's not a rotten bully," said Mornington.

The Head did not appear to hear that remark.

He left the Form-room, and in a few minutes Bulkeley of the Sixth came in.

Another prefect had been placed in charge of the Third, leaving the captain of Rookwood free to deal with the Classical Fourth.

Bulkeley's methods were very different from Carthew's, and the remainder of the morning passed off quietly enough.

Bulkeley was too popular for the juniors to wish to give him any trouble, though they were in a restive mood.

Some of them were rubbing their hands as they came out of the Form-room at twelve o'clock.

"What a merry mornin'!" remarked

Valentine Mornington, with a laugh. "The Head was in a rare wax."

Lovell gave a snort.

"They can't run a school on prefects!" he said. "It's all rot. Bulkeley can handle the Fourth, simply because we like the old chap, and don't want to worry him. I'll bet you there's been trouble in the Third."

Jimmy Silver was of the same opinion, and he looked for his cousin, Algy of the Third, to learn how matters had gone on that morning.

He found the usually cheery Algy scowling in the corridor, and squeezing his hands—an occupation that was also Grant's and Wegg's.

"Trouble?" asked Jimmy.

Algy Silver grunted.

"Of course! What did you expect? Did you think the Third Form could be run by a blessed prefect?" he inquired.

"But old Bulkeley—"

"We were willing to go easy with old Bulkeley, so long as he didn't want to make us work," said Algy, in an injured tone. "Of course, we weren't going to work without a Form-master. He cut up rusty. And in the middle of the morning Bulkeley was called away—"

"He came to take us!" grinned Raby.

"And they sent in Knowles instead," said Algy resentfully. "Knowles—a Modern prefect—a worm of a Modern, you know. They actually thought that Classicals were goin' to be run by a Modern! I don't know why they made old Chisholm Head of Rookwood. It wasn't for his brains."

"Ow-ow!" remarked Grant.

"Woooop!" murmured Wegg, rubbing his grubby hands.

"You've been ragging?" asked Jimmy.

"What do you think?" answered his cousin, with a grunt. "We weren't goin' to stand Knowles. He's a bully—nearly as bad as Carthew—and he's a Modern. I shied an ink-ball at him—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, he laid into me with the pointer," groaned Algy. "He's been givin' us the pointer most of the mornin'. I don't know whether that's what the Head thinks we're sent to Rookwood for. I thought we'd come here to learn things."

"Well, Knowles could teach you the rot you learn in the Third, if you'd let him," remarked Newcome.

"Catch us letting Knowles teach us anything!"

"It's all rot," said Wegg, in a very injured tone. "There ain't any masters and there oughtn't to be any lessons. I don't call it fair play."

"Why should we pull with Knowles, when the Head himself can't pull with his giddy staff?" said Grant.

"That's what I say," agreed Algy Silver. "I know jolly well I'm goin' to make Knowles' life a burden, so long as he's lookin' after the Third. Ow! My hands!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away in a thoughtful mood.

There was no doubt that discipline was already considerably relaxed, and that the school without masters would be the scene of strange happenings if something was not done soon.

"Hallo, there go Bootles' goods and chattels," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a nod towards the gates.

Old Mack, the porter, was taking out the trap, with several trunks and boxes stacked in it.

Mr. Bootles, in hat and coat, was to be seen in the old stone gateway, in company with Mr. Greely of the Fifth.

The Fourth Form-master had not gone yet, but he was evidently going at last.

"Let's go and say good-bye to him," said Lovell.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four walked quickly down to the gates, glad of the chance of saying good-bye to their Form-master before he went.

Mr. Greely was speaking as they came up, and they could not help hear-

ing the words of the Fifth Form-master.

"The Coombe Arms, then," said Mr. Greely. "Well—very well! You will engage a sufficiency of accommodation for—"

"Yes, certainly. But—"

"If matters remain as they are, the whole staff will be leaving Rookwood," said Mr. Greely. "We do not intend, however, to disperse—not yet, at all events. My idea is to wait at hand a return to common-sense on the part of Dr. Chisholm, or the intervention of the governing body."

"Quite so; but—"

"At the Coombe Arms we can remain till matters are clearer," said Mr. Greely. "The Head, I believe, has been telephoning and telegraphing to various agencies all day, with the view of engaging a new staff without delay, but—"

The Fistical Four walked away, and Mr. Greely's voice was no longer heard.

Neither of the masters had observed them, and they gave up their intention of saying good-bye to Mr. Bootles just then.

"A new staff!" murmured Lovell. "Fancy a new set of masters at Rookwood, with the old set putting up at the inn in the village, looking on! Can the Head get a new lot in so quick as all that? And isn't that what's called blacklegging?"

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

The masters' strike at Rookwood might be a tremendous lark, in some of its aspects, but Jimmy realised that it was not for the good of the old school, and he would have been very glad to see it at an amicable end.

CHAPTER 25.

Mischief Brewing!

THERE was an interview that evening between Mr. Greely and the Head.

Probably the Fifth Form-master was

making a last attempt to reach some settlement.

If so, the attempt was a failure, for during the evening there was a general exodus of the staff from the school.

On the Modern side Mr. Manders and another master remained, but on the Classical side there was not one.

Even the French master had thrown in his lot with his English confreres.

Some of the Rookwooders watched them as they left.

The staff had very serious and grave faces, and Mr. Greely a decidedly irritated expression.

The gates of Rookwood closed behind them.

Most of the school knew that the departed masters had taken up their quarters at the village inn, which looked as if they did not believe that they had looked their last on Rookwood.

There, apparently, they were to wait till the strike had its effect, and the headmaster came to reason.

But there was no sign about Dr. Chisholm of any intention of coming to reason.

In public his face was as calm, severe, and unemotional as usual.

In private, probably, he felt the trouble that had fallen upon him and the school; in public he betrayed nothing of what he thought or felt.

The school was without masters pending the arrival of a new staff, and a new staff for such a school as Rookwood was not to be gathered at a moment's notice.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to "carry on" by the aid of the Sixth Form prefects, who did their best in the unprecedented emergency.

But that evening there were growing signs that the rule of the prefects would not long remain undisputed.

Some of the fellows alluded to them openly as "blacklegs."

That, when it came to the ears of the prefects, naturally caused great wrath, and the liberal use of the official ashplant, which, in turn, excited indignation and restiveness.

The next day the Forms went into class as usual, with the prefects in charge.

In the Classical Fourth all was quiet. Jimmy Silver & Co. were attached to "old Bulkeley," and did not want to worry him.

Bulkeley's personal popularity carried him through.

But it was different with the other Forms.

Knowles of the Modern Sixth was in charge of the Third, and there was trouble with that lively Form.

During the morning, the Fourth heard an uproar proceeding from the quarters of the Third, and grinned at one another.

They guessed that Cecil Knowles was having a lively time.

When the juniors were dismissed, Jimmy Silver & Co. went along to the Third Form-room, and, to their surprise, found the door locked—a crowd of fags roaring with laughter outside, and someone inside hammering furiously on the door.

"What's the row?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Thump, thump, thump! came from within the Form-room.

"Only Knowles!" grinned Algy Silver. "We've locked him in!"

"My only hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Knowles was a bit too fresh," explained Grant of the Third. "We're going to leave him there."

Thump, thump!

"Cave! Here comes the Head!" called out Oswald of the Fourth.

There was a sudden scudding off of the fags.

The Fourth-Formers vanished also, leaving a clear field for the Head.

Dr. Chisholm's brow was like thunder as he came up to the door.

Thump, thump!

"Let me out, you young scoundrels!" roared the Modern prefect within.

"Knowles!"

"Oh, it is you, sir! I've been locked in, sir. Those fags——"

"I will see that you are released, Knowles."

It was some time before the key was found and the prefect released.

Shortly afterwards there was a painful scene in the Third Form-room, with fags holding out reluctant hands, and the Head wielding the cane.

In the afternoon Bulkeley returned to the Third; it was pretty clear that Knowles could not handle them.

Knowles was bestowed upon the Classical Fourth.

And the moment Knowles stepped into the Fourth Form-room the juniors exchanged glances that told that their thoughts were of war.

Knowles was unusually good-tempered that afternoon; perhaps he had had enough trouble, and did not want any more.

But an angelic temper would not have saved him from trouble.

The Classics were "up against" a Modern, anyway—and Knowles had not Bulkeley's popularity to see him through.

And the feeling was growing in the Form that the prefect was acting the part of a "blackleg."

Knowles was systematically worried by his hopeful pupils, till at last his temper failed him.

Then he brought the cane into play.

And then there was a volley of grammars, dictionaries, and exercise books from the Fourth, smiting Knowles right and left and covering the floor of the Form-room like a snowstorm.

"You young rotters!" howled Knowles. "You—you disorderly little beasts, you—you—you—"

"Clear off!" called out Mornington. "You've no business here! We want Bootles!"

"Silence! Order!"

"We want Bootles!" roared the Fourth.

And that cry was taken up as a slogan, and chanted at Knowles, and his voice was drowned in the roar.

"We want Bootles! We want Bootles!"

Knowles stood panting for breath, and quite at a loss. He beat a retreat from the Form-room at last.

"He's gone for the Head!" murmured Lovell.

"Look out for squalls!" grinned Mornington.

In a few minutes Dr. Chisholm entered the Form-room, with a brow like thunder.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, as the buzz of voices did not cease at his entrance.

"We want Bootles!"

"What?"

"We want Bootles!" came in a shout.

The Head stood transfixed for a moment.

It was the first expression of opinion from the Fourth that had reached his ears, and it probably came as a surprise to him.

"How dare you!" he panted at last. "Silence! Silence! The next boy who speaks will be flogged."

There was silence then.

The Head's glance swept over his class, flashing; but it did not find there the usual awed submissiveness.

"I shall take this class for the remainder of the day!" said Dr. Chisholm in a grinding voice. "I warn you to let me hear no more insolence."

How the Fifth and the Sixth got on on their "lonesome" the juniors did not know; probably they spent the afternoon chatting.

The Head was tied to the Fourth.

And there certainly was exemplary order in that Form—while the Head was there.

The Head was probably as glad as the juniors when the time came to dismiss the Form.

He had a harassed look as he rustled away.

With all his grim determination of character, he was not finding it an easy task to run Rookwood "on his own."

Jimmy Silver & Co. were smiling as they strolled into a dusky quadrangle.

"It can't last!" said Lovell sapiently.

"I don't say I wholly approve of masters going on strike! It's setting a

bad example to us nice boys. But the Head's too stiff by half. We want Bootles."

"We do—we does!" said Jimmy. "Bootles has got pushed out because he stood up for little me! It's up to us to stand up for him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And when the new masters come," said Jimmy, "I think there's going to be trouble. We're not going to see Bootles ousted. Perhaps, when our giddy new master has dealt with us a bit, the Head will be glad to call Bootles home—what?"

And the chortle that followed indicated that Jimmy Silver's chums thought it very probable.

CHAPTER 26.

Picket Duty!

"G REELY, by Jove!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four paused.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were entering the platform at Coombe Station—the station for Rookwood School—when they caught sight of the portly figure of Mr. Greely.

The Fifth Form master of Rookwood was standing on the platform, facing the line, where the train from Latcham Junction was almost due to arrive.

His arms were folded upon his buttoned frock-coat, his silk hat pushed a little back from his bald forehead.

His brows were grimly contracted, and his fat face wore an expression of the grimmest determination.

Mr. Greely's attitude at that moment was almost Napoleonic.

The juniors looked at him, but he did not look at them; he did not even see them.

Mr. Greely had no eyes for the juniors of the Fourth Form.

He was evidently there on business—stern business.

"Waiting for the train, I suppose," murmured Lovell. "I say, Greely can't

be here for the same reason as little us, can he?"

"My hat!" murmured Raby. "I shouldn't wonder!"

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle. "I've got it! He's a picket!"

"A which?" ejaculated Newcome.

"A picket—a striker's picket, you know! He's here to speak to the giddy blacklegs when they arrive."

"Great Scott!"

"Look at his chivvy!" argued Jimmy Silver. "He looks like Ajax defying the lightning. Depend on it, he's here to jaw the new masters."

The Fistical Four chuckled.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had strolled down to the station to see the new staff arrive. They were due at Rookwood that afternoon.

Jimmy Silver had heard from Tubby Muffin that they were coming by that train. Tubby had his own means of acquiring information.

The chums of the Fourth were naturally rather curious to see the new masters.

Arthur Edward Lovell declared that they were bound, under the circumstances, to be a rather scratch lot, and his chums agreed with him.

So the Fistical Four had walked down to the station to get an early view of the scratch lot.

And they found Mr. Greely, the leader of the masters' strike, on guard at the station!

Jimmy Silver's surmise was evidently correct. Mr. Greely was there to interview the arriving staff.

From the point of view of the old masters, the new masters were, in fact, "blacklegs," and Mr. Greely was a picket.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went quietly on to the platform and took up their position a little way back from Mr. Greely, not caring to attract his attention.

They did not mean to miss the scene. The sight of a Rookwood master acting as a strikers' picket was unusual enough, and was likely to be entertain-

ing.

"Look out for the circus!" murmured Lovell. "The train's signalled."

"Good luck to him!" murmured Raby. "After all, the Head's in the wrong. He oughtn't to have sacked Mr. Bootles."

"I'd go for 'em if I was Greely," commented Lovell. "I'd jolly well mop up the platform with the whole lot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The train was rumbling in.

Mr. Greely did not change his Napoleonic attitude.

He stood with stern brow and folded arms, watching the train as it stopped and disgorged its passengers.

From a first-class carriage five gentlemen alighted, evidently travelling-companions.

Mr. Greely's stern gaze fixed upon them.

They were the only passengers who could be supposed to be the new masters for Rookwood; the rest were farmer-folk and women.

"There he goes!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Greely unbent from his Napoleonic attitude at last!

He strode towards the newly-arrived quintette.

Five frock-coated gentlemen, three of them in spectacles, blinked at him, evidently wondering who he was and what he wanted.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Mr. Greely, in his deep, rich voice. "May I inquire if you are the new masters for Rookwood School?"

"That is correct," said a tall, thin gentleman with a hooked nose cruelly pinched by a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez. "You are here to meet us, I suppose?"

"Quite so!" said Mr. Greely.

"Dr. Chisholm has sent——"

"I have not come from Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Greely. "My relations with the Head are, unfortunately, strained at the present time. Gentlemen, I am here to speak to you on my own account, and on account of the rest of the staff of Rookwood School."

"Indeed!" said the hook-nosed gentleman, blinking at him.

"You are doubtless aware of the state of affairs at Rookwood?"

"I am aware that Dr. Chisholm's staff has suddenly left the school," said the hook-nosed gentleman. "I am aware of nothing further."

"Then you are not informed that there is a strike?"

"A—a—a what?"

"A masters' strike."

"Absurd!"

"Not at all absurd!" said Mr. Greely warmly. "It is the fact! I am here, sir, to acquaint you with the circumstances——"

The hook-nosed gentlemen looked at his watch.

"Thank you very much!" he said, in a thin, acid voice. "I am afraid I have no time to spare, as I understand that I am required to take the Fourth Form this very afternoon!"

"So that's our new Form-master!" murmured Jimmy Silver to his chums.

"Looks a beaky bounder—what!"

"Horrid!" said Lovell. "We shan't get on with him. Not that we want to."

"Sir!" Mr. Greely's deep voice grew deeper. "Sir, I beg you to listen to my explanation——"

"I fear that I cannot spare the time, sir."

And the beaky gentleman walked away to the platform exit, bag in hand.

Mr. Greely gave a snort.

"Gentlemen——" he began, appealing to the other four.

One of them followed the beaky gentleman, then another.

Mr. Greely stepped in the way of the last two as they were about to move on.

The big, porty master towered over them, and they stopped.

The last pair were small men, and they seemed overawed by Mr. Greely.

"I insist upon your hearing me!" exclaimed the Rookwood master.

"Ah! Ahem! Certainly!"

"Pray proceed!"

The two little gentlemen blinked nervously at Mr. Greely, who proceeded.

CHAPTER 27.

Nice for the Fourth!

"H A, HA, HA!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. roared.
They could not help it.

The sudden flight of Mr. Greely's victims was too much for them.

The Fifth Form master looked round, frowned, and then strode out of the station, with knitted brows.

He had done his best, but certainly he had been a hopeless failure as a strikers' picket.

Probably the five gentlemen who had been in such a hurry to secure posts at Rookwood were too much in need of "jobs" to care much whose jobs they were.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "Poor old Greely. I say, that gang looked an awfully scratch lot! Not the style of Rookwood masters at all."

"What did you expect?" said Raby. "The Head had to bag them in a terrific hurry, and that gang have been sent down by some blessed agency, without much inquiry, I should say."

"That beaky boulder looks a cough-drop," remarked Lovell. "We shall have trouble with him. He's got a jaw like a vice."

"We're ready for trouble," observed Jimmy.

"Hear, hear!"

The Fistical Four strolled from the station.

Outside the Head's car was waiting, ready to take the new arrivals to Rookwood.

Mr. Greely was striding away in the distance.

The new staff packed themselves into the car, and it glided away up Coombe High Street.

As it passed the Coombe Arms a number of gentlemen could be seen looking down from the inn balcony—Messrs. Bootles, Wiggins, Bohun, and Mooney—masters of Rookwood at present on strike.

Mr. Greely joined them there, and pointed to the car as it passed with a

"I have come here, gentlemen, to protest against your taking the positions offered to you over the heads of the staff by Dr. Chisholm. Among trade unionists such a proceeding is known as blacklegging."

"H'm!"

"Now that you are acquainted with the facts, I am sure that you will not accept positions that rightfully belong to other gentlemen," said Mr. Greely.

"Ahem!"

"Such an act is unworthy, sir, of the high traditions of our common profession!"

"Oh!"

"I beg of you, therefore, not to proceed to Rookwood School, but to take the next train back to town!" pursued Mr. Greely.

"H'm!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

They could see that all Mr. Greely's eloquence was wasted on the new masters.

They were only anxious to dodge the eloquent gentleman and get out of the station.

"What is your answer, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Greely, with a great deal of dignity.

"Ah! Ahem! H'm!"

"You will not, I am convinced, act in so underhand a way?" suggested Mr. Greely. "You will not take up your positions at Rookwood?"

The two small gentlemen did not reply in words.

They suddenly parted, and ran quickly past Mr. Greely, one on either side.

The Fifth-Form master spun round in surprise.

It was quite an undignified proceeding on the part of the new masters, but really there seemed no other way of escaping Mr. Greely's eloquence.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Greely. But they did not look round.

"Gentlemen, I insist——"

"Mr. Greely strode after the fleeing gentlemen.

"Blacklegs!" he exclaimed.

And then they were gone.

fat forefinger that trembled with indignation and scorn.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the car, and they raised their caps very respectfully to Mr. Bootles, their old Form-master.

Mr. Bootles gave them rather a worried smile.

The master of the Fourth was not a truculent gentleman like Mr. Greeley, and he was greatly distressed by the turn affairs had taken at Rookwood.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" Jimmy Silver called up to the Form-master.

Mr. Bootles leaned over the balcony.

"Good-afternoon, my boys! Have you leave from lessons this afternoon?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Then surely it is time you were in the Form-room?"

"Ahem! We've taken time off, sir."

Mr. Bootles looked more worried.

"That is not right, Silver. Of course, I have no right to give you orders now. But I hope, my boys, that you will do your best to maintain order in the Form under these—these very trying circumstances."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Jimmy. "There hasn't been much order in the Fourth, though, since you left, Mr. Bootles."

"I am sorry to hear it, Silver."

"We don't like being run by blessed prefects, sir," said Lovell. "We want our own Form-master."

"That is for the Head to decide, Lovell. I must not give you commands, but I am sure you will remember my wishes."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said the Fistical Four together.

They walked on, looking very thoughtful.

"Bootles is a good little ass," remarked Lovell, as they came into the lane. "His Form is the apple of his merry eye, and he doesn't want us to break out. All the same——"

"I think he's right," said Jimmy Silver. "After all, I suppose we needn't get mixed up in a row between the Head and the masters. Suppose we give our

new man a chance. It would please Bootles."

"Oh, all right!"

"We're sure to have trouble, by the look of him," added Jimmy Silver. "Let's give him a run and let him begin it."

"Ha, ha! Done!"

"Hallo, there's the car!" said Lovell.

The Head's car had stopped in the lane, and the chauffeur was on his hands and knees.

"Trouble with the Central Powers!" remarked Raby, with a grin.

The five gentlemen were blinking out at the busy chauffeur.

The beaky master addressed him as the juniors came up.

"Are we likely to be long delayed, my man?"

Grunt!

"Kindly tell me——"

Grunt!

"We are in a hurry to reach the school!" exclaimed the beaky gentleman. "How long shall we remain here?"

The chauffeur turned up a red and somewhat excited face.

"P'raps ten minutes!" he snapped.

"P'raps an hour! P'raps two! Who knows? I don't!" Grunt!

"I shall walk!" said the beaky gentleman decidedly.

He stepped out of the car, and, catching sight of the Fistical Four, beckoned to Jimmy Silver.

"Can you tell me how far it is to walk to Rookwood School?" he asked. Then, looking more closely at the juniors, he added: "Perhaps you belong to Rookwood?"

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy.

"Your Form?" The beaky gentleman's manner was quite authoritative now, and the juniors did not like it.

"Fourth!" said Jimmy curtly.

"Then you are in my Form!" said the beaky gentleman. "I am Mr. Stange, your new Form-master."

The Fistical Four felt it incumbent upon them to raise their caps.

Mr. Stange looked at his watch.

"It is three o'clock," he said, "Surely

you boys ought to be at classes. Is it a half-holiday to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Then why are you out of school?"

"Fourth Form's taken by a prefect this afternoon," explained Jimmy Silver. "We thought we'd have a walk."

"Without permission?"

"Ahem! Yes."

"That is not the kind of discipline I shall maintain in my Form," said the beaky gentleman, his thin lips coming together like a trap. "Mr. Mobsby, will you kindly lend me your cane?"

One of the small gentlemen handed Mr. Stange a walking-stick.

The chums of the Fourth blinked at their new master.

"Your name?" snapped the beaky gentleman.

"Silver!"

"Very well! Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"What for?" asked Jimmy Silver quietly, but with glitter in his eyes.

"Don't bandy words with me, boy! I am about to punish you for absenting yourself from school without leave."

"Are you?" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Certainly. Hold out your hand."

Jimmy Silver put his hands into his pockets.

"Do you hear me, Silver?" thundered the beaky gentleman.

"I hear you," answered Jimmy.

"Obey me at once!"

"You're not our Form-master yet," said the captain of the Fourth coolly.

"We'll obey you when you are, Mr. Stange. Come on, you chaps!"

Jimmy Silver walked away with that towards Rookwood, and his chums followed him.

"Boy!" shouted Mr. Stange, growing purple.

The other four gentlemen were smiling. It was rather a setdown for the beaky gentleman.

The Fistical Four walked on without a glance back.

"Silver, come back at once!" shouted Mr. Stange.

Jimmy Silver whistled a merry tune and walked on.

Mr. Stange was left to swallow his wrath as best he might.

CHAPTER 28.

Beginning Well!

"SEEN the gang?"
Morningson, of the Classical Fourth, asked that question as Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the Form-room at Rookwood.

The Fourth were in class, but it was not a very orderly class.

Lonsdale of the Sixth, a prefect, was in charge.

Lonsdale was a good-natured and easy-going fellow, and he certainly did not worry the Fourth very much.

They rewarded him by not worrying him.

They did about as much work as they pleased, which was not a staggering amount.

It was probably fortunate for all concerned that Lonsdale let them do very nearly as they liked.

There had been severe trouble when Carthew of the Sixth had tried other methods.

So long as the juniors were not actually rioting in the Form-room Lonsdale seemed content, and probably showed his wisdom thereby.

"Seen the new crowd?" continued Morningson. "Tubby was right about the train?"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy.

"What are they like?"

"A pretty dusty lot," answered Jimmy Silver. "Three of 'em look like tame rabbits, one like a walrus, and the other like a Hun."

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Morningson. "What a zoological collection! And which one is goin' to honour us?"

"The Hun!"
Morningson grinned.

"We'll give him as good as he sends!" he remarked. "He won't find this Form easy to handle."

"No fear!" said Flynn emphatically. "Sure we're going to kick up a shindy if we don't get our Form-master back."

"Had any trouble with the man, Jimmy?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver explained.

"So that's the sort of worm he is, is it?" asked Tommy. "He will have a high old time in the Fourth if he tries that game."

"And he can bet his socks on that!" said Cook.

"Hear, hear!"

Lonsdale of the Sixth looked round.

"Not quite so much row there, please!" he called out.

"Right-ho, old top!" said Mornington affably.

Lonsdale coughed, and turned his attention elsewhere.

There was a merry buzz of voices in the Form-room, the prefect letting it go on, glad that it was no worse.

Two or three of the fellows strolled out presently to see whether the new masters had come in.

There was a call from the passage at last.

"Here they come!" howled Higgs.

Then there was a rush into the passage, but there was another rush back in a few moments.

The Head had come in sight.

"Keep your places, you young sweeps!" exclaimed the distressed Lonsdale. "I shall have to call the Head to you—I really shall, you know."

"All serene, old infant!" said Lovell.

"Better sit down, you chaps; we may have the Head in soon."

And there was a semblance of order for some time.

A scout came in from the passage with the news that the new masters had all gone into the Head's study.

"That means a long jaw!" yawned Lovell. "Mayn't see 'em this afternoon, after all."

And Lovell changed his seat from the form to the desk.

He was still in that elegant position, about a quarter of an hour later, when the door suddenly opened and Dr.

Chisholm came in, accompanied by the tall, hook-nosed gentleman.

There was a sudden hush.

The Head's keen, sharp glance swept over the class.

"Lovell!" he thundered.

Arthur Edward Lovell slid off the desk as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes upon the confused Lovell, and seemed about to begin on him, but he changed his mind and let the matter pass, much to Arthur Edward's relief.

"Boys," he said quietly, "this is Mr. Stange, your new master."

Grim silence from the Fourth.

They were not prepared to welcome any new master. They wanted their old master, as the Head was well aware.

"I fear, Mr. Stange, that you will find order somewhat relaxed in this Form," said the Head. "Doubtless you will soon effect a change for the better in that respect."

"You may rely upon me for that, sir," answered Mr. Stange, in his thin, acid voice.

"Boys, Mr. Stange now takes charge of this Form, and you will treat him with every respect and obedience. Lonsdale, you may return to the Sixth Form-room."

Lonsdale left the Form-room gladly enough.

He had not enjoyed his dealings with the Fourth.

"I shall now leave Mr. Stange in charge," continued the Head, with a grim look at the silent class. "I trust there will be no occasion for me to return here."

And after a few words in a low voice to the new master the Head rustled out.

Mr. Stange stared over the class, his glance meeting with a good many sulky faces.

His eyes rested upon the Fistical Four, and a glitter came into them as he recognised the juniors.

He beckoned to them with a bony forefinger.

CHAPTER 29.

Trouble Ahead!

"You four boys will stand out here," he said. "Silver and the three who were with you in the road this afternoon."

The Fistical Four walked out of their places with grim looks.

Mr. Stang took a cane from the master's desk.

Evidently he intended to lose no time in putting his foot down.

"Hold out your hand!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

But the new Form-master was armed with authority now, and the Rookwooders were not yet provoked to the point of resisting constituted authority.

Jimmy held out his hand.

Swish!

"Now the other hand!"

Swish!

Jimmy's face was quite pale as he received the sharp cuts—much harder and sharper than any Mr. Bootles had ever administered.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome went through the same punishment in their turn.

They went back to their seats with set faces.

Mr. Stange's glittering eye rested on Tubby Muffin, and he beckoned to him.

"Your name?"

"M-m-m-muffin, sir!" stammered Muffin.

"What are you eating?"

"A tut-tut-tut-tart, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"Come here!"

Swish, swish!

"Oh!" groaned Tubby Muffin.

Tubby Muffin crawled back to his place quite limply.

Mr. Stange laid down the cane with a grim smile.

He looked as if he thought he was starting well!

It was possible that he was starting a little too well!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were not looking happy when they came out of the Form-room that day. Afternoon lessons had turned out decidedly unpleasant.

No doubt the Fourth Form at Rookwood were a little out of hand, and perhaps they needed a strong hand to pull them together again; but Mr. Stange's hard severity was not likely to have that result.

It roused a spirit of angry opposition and obstinacy in the Fourth, which was destined to bear its fruits.

Jimmy Silver was rather curious to learn how the other Forms had got on with their new masters, who had all taken up their duties that afternoon.

Only the Form-masters, as yet, had been replaced; the less essential masters could be dispensed with for a time.

Jimmy looked for his cousin, Algy Silver of the Third Form, and found that lively young gentleman in great spirits.

He grinned at Jimmy, as the captain of the Fourth came up.

"Corkin'!" said Algy, without waiting to be questioned.

"You like your new master?" asked Jimmy.

"We love him!" answered Algy. "Don't we, Grant?"

"We do!" grinned Grant. "We does! Little scrubby beast named Mobsby—and he's afraid of us! Goodness knows where they found the animal! But we like him all right."

"He's a duck!" chuckled Wegg. "Algy caught him behind the ear with an ink-ball, and he pretended not to notice it! That's the kind of frump he is."

Jimmy Silver smiled as he walked away.

From their own point of view the Third were right to be pleased with their new master, but the discipline of the Form was likely to suffer.

Jimmy looked next to Mornington

II., otherwise 'Erbert of the Second Form.

He found Morny's cousin looking blue.

"How do you like your new master, 'Erbert?" queried Jimmy.

'Erbert rubbed his hands ruefully.

"Rotten!" was his reply. "Beast named Hogg. Lays into a chap. Oh dear!"

"Had it bad?"

"Awful! I say, we're not going to stand much of it! The chaps are talking about pelting him with exercise-books to-morrow. We'll do it, too, if he don't mind his p's and q's!" said 'Erbert darkly.

So there was trouble brewing in that quarter, too, though in a different way.

Jimmy Silver found a group of Shell fellows discussing their new master in the corridor.

Adolphus Smythe was laying down the law.

"What's the Head thinking of? That's what I want to know. What the merry dickens is the Head thinking of?" Adolphus was saying.

"How are you getting on with your new man, Smythey?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"We're not gettin' on with him at all!" answered Adolphus. "I don't know where they dug him up. His name's Snaggs, and he looks it. I shall certainly protest to the Head! The man's a fearful bounder!"

"Horrid!" said Tracey.

"Uses scent!" said Howard, with a shudder. "Strong scent—about nine-pence a gallon, I should say, by the niff!"

"And wears elastic-sided boots!" said Smythe, almost tearfully. "They creak when he walks."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We shall be going on strike soon, like the giddy masters," said Tracy. "The best thing the Head could do would be to give us all an extra holiday while he's scrappin' with his staff. He can't expect the Shell to stand a bounder like this person

Snaggs. We're thinking of screwin' him up in his study. There's no standin' his scent!"

Jimmy Silver strolled on, smiling.

Undoubtedly the new set of masters for Rookwood were, as Lovell had predicted, a scratch lot.

He looked in at Hansom's study, to ascertain what the Fifth thought of their new man.

He found Hansom and Lumsden and Talboys in excited consultation.

"Cheeky rotter!" Hansom was saying. "The Head must have been potty to take on such a cad! Picked him up in a hurry, I suppose. We can't kick up a row like the fags, but—"

"But the man will have to be put in his place!" said Lumsden. "What sium was he dragged up in, I wonder, where he never learned that you don't cane fellows in the Fifth Form?"

Jimmy Silver grinned, and passed on without making any inquiries; he had learned how the Fifth liked their man.

He went along to the end study to tea in a thoughtful mood.

Trouble was brewing at Rookwood—that was certain.

It was pretty plain already that the new masters would not be a success.

The fact was, that the masters' strike and the Head's obstinacy had shaken the habit of discipline; and even a first-class set of masters would have found it difficult to pull the school together.

With such a "scratch lot" as the Head had succeeded in mustering in a hurry the task was impossible.

"There's going to be some fun, I think," said Jimmy Silver to his chums. "I don't believe the new regime will last long."

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.

"It won't last another day in the Fourth!" he said. "I'm not going to be caned again by Stange, I know that! I've made up my mind. The man's a low cad!"

Jimmy wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"That means trouble with the Head," he remarked.

"Let it! Why doesn't the Head bring our own masters back? He's in the wrong, and he ought to know it! He sacked Bootles for nothing, and the others were right to stand by Bootles."

"Quite so! We were willing to give our new man a chance, but he's asked for trouble," assented Jimmy. "If he wants trouble, he can have it—hot and strong! He's caned half the Fourth to-day, and I dare say he'll cane the other half to-morrow. It's going to be war."

"War!" assented Lovell. "And there won't be any pacifists in the Fourth! Even Tubby is breathing vengeance!"

After tea the Fourth-Formers gathered in the Common-room, where there was a good deal of excited discussion.

It was proposed by Jimmy Silver, seconded by Lovell, and carried nem con., that there should be no preparation done that evening.

At the usual hour for prep the juniors went to their studies, but they did not settle down to prep.

What Mr. Stange would say in the morning they did not know—or what he would do. But they were agreed that they would stand no nonsense from the new master.

As it happened, they did not have to wait till the morning.

The Fistical Four had dropped into Erroll's study for a chat, when the door opened—without a knock—and Mr. Stange look in.

The juniors were silent at once, rising to their feet, with the exception of Mornington, who remained at ease in the armchair.

Morny's hands were still smarting from a caning, and he had no politeness to waste upon Mr. Stange.

The latter had a cane under his arm, as if he expected to find some use for one in the Fourth Form quarters.

"Mornington!" he rapped out, fixing his eyes upon the dandy of the Fourth.

"Hallo!" answered Mornington

coolly, without changing his position, except to cross one leg carelessly over the other.

"Get out of that chair at once! Are you not aware that you should rise to your feet when a master enters?"

"My Form-master's puttin' up in Coombe, Mr. Stange," drawled Mornington.

"What!"

"Mr. Bootles always used to knock at a chap's door before enterin'," went on Morny. "But perhaps you don't know our customs, sir."

"Will you rise to your feet at once, Mornington?" thundered Mr. Stange.

Mornington condescended to rise at last, lounging carelessly out of the chair.

Mr. Stange had let the cane slip down into his hand.

The juniors knew what that meant, and their faces hardened.

The new master's angry gaze swept over the half-dozen Fourth-Formers.

"Why are you not at your preparation?" he demanded.

"Ahem!"

"Answer me, Silver! You are perfectly well aware that this is time for evening preparation, yet I find you loafing about!"

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"We're not going to do any prep," he answered.

"What?"

"Fed up, you know!" explained Mornington, with polite impertinence. "You may be an awfully fascinatin' man in the slum you seem to have come from, sir, but we don't like you."

Mr. Stange seemed rooted to the floor, petrified by that remark, as well he might be.

He recovered himself in a few moments, however, and strode towards Morny.

"You insolent young rascal! Hold out your hand!"

Mornington put his hands behind him.

CHAPTER 30.

Back Up!

MR. STANGE stared at the juniors, and the juniors stared at Mr. Stange.

There was a breathless pause. "You hear me, Mornington?" said the new master at last.

"Oh, yaas!"

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"Not this evenin'!"

"If you do not instantly obey me, Mornington, I shall thrash you with the utmost severity!"

"By gad, will you, sir?" drawled Mornington.

"Yes!" thundered Mr. Stange.

Mornington glanced round at his silent companions.

"You fellows standin' by me?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy Silver between his teeth.

"We're backing you up, Morny!"

Mr. Stange made another stride towards Mornington, who looked at him coolly without receding a step.

But he moved quickly enough as the new master grasped him by the collar and the cane swung in the air.

"Back up, you fellows!"

Swish!

Mr. Stange had time for only one cut.

Then half a dozen pairs of hands were laid upon him, the cane was wrenched away, and he was hustled to the door.

That outbreak seemed to astonish him so much that he staggered out helplessly, scarcely resisting.

He tottered across the passage, and leaned against the opposite wall, gasping for breath.

Jimmy Silver & Co. crammed the doorway of the study, with flushed and determined faces.

So determined were their looks that the new master, after making one step towards them, stopped dead.

"Better not come back, sir!" said Morny, with a grin. "If we have to

collar you again we'll roll you down the stairs, sir!"

Mr. Stange panted.

"This is mutiny!" he spluttered.

"Somethin' in that line!" agreed Mornington with perfect coolness. "Like some more of it?"

Other fellows were coming out of their studies now, and there was a crowd in the passage, looking on breathlessly.

Mr. Stange seemed quite at a loss for some moments, and he finally turned away and strode towards the stairs.

A loud hiss from the Fourth followed him as he disappeared down the staircase.

"Bet you he's gone for the Head!" murmured Raby.

"Phew!"

"My hat! How are we goin' to deal with the Head if he comes along?" said Townsend.

"Chuck him out, too!" said Mornington recklessly.

"Fathead!"

"Who's game for downin' the Head if he chips in?" asked Morny, looking round.

"Dry up, you ass!" whispered Erroll.

"None of that!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "The Head's a bit of a mule; but he's our headmaster, and he's got to be respected. I'm against cheeking the Head in any way."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like!" he answered. "I don't care! Let him rip!"

The juniors waited rather anxiously for some time.

For Mr. Stange they did not care two pins; but the Head was, as Conroy remarked, quite another proposition.

But the Head did not come.

Evidently Mr. Stange had not, after all, gone to Dr. Chisholm to report the happenings in the Fourth Form passage.

Probably he did not care to confess to the Head how utterly he had failed to exert authority over the Form placed in his charge.

Tubby Muffin, a little later, came along with the information that Mr. Stange was in the masters'-room, talking with the other masters.

The juniors returned to their studies relieved.

They saw no more of Mr. Stange that evening.

The new master had swallowed the affront, although doubtless he was planning to make the Fourth sorry for themselves on the morrow.

In the junior Common-room that evening there was a good deal of talk, the juniors rejoicing over their preliminary success, and auguring well from it for the future.

Mornington confidently predicted that Mr. Stange would be fed up in a very short time, and would "give them their head."

When bed-time came the Fourth marched off to their dormitory in a rather noisy crowd; but the noise ceased when Bulkeley of the Sixth came along.

Bulkeley was not to be trifled with, and, moreover, Jimmy Silver & Co. had no desire to "rag" the captain of the school, who was very popular.

They rather expected Bulkeley to make some reference to the incident of the evening; but he did not, though, from his looks, it was pretty clear that he had heard of it.

There was a buzz of talk in the dormitory after Bulkeley had put out the light and retired.

The Classical Fourth were in great spirits, and quite ready for more trouble the next day.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were first down in the morning, and they came upon Mr. Stange walking in the quadrangle before breakfast.

The new master looked at them, and his thin lips closed like a vice. He called to the captain of the Fourth:

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir?" answered Jimmy Silver, without approaching.

"Come here!" said Mr. Stange, letting his walking-cane slip into his hand.

Jimmy Silver walked away.

"Silver!"

"Speech is silver, and silence is golden," grinned Lovell, as the Fistical Four sauntered away without answering.

And the chums of the Fourth chuckled.

Mr. Stange looked after them with a baffled expression on his face.

He could not very well enter into a foot-race with four elusive juniors; and really there seemed nothing else to be done—unless he swallowed their defiance.

Apparently he decided to swallow it.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went into breakfast in great spirits.

They found Mr. Stange at the head of the table in Mr. Bootles' accustomed place.

His brow was black, but he did not speak to the Fistical Four.

"We're tamin' him!" remarked Mornington, as they came out after brekker. "A few more days, dear boys, and h will feed out of our hand."

And the juniors chortled.

It really did look as if the tyrant of the Fourth was being tamed already.

CHAPTER 31.

Mr. Stange Loses His Temper!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were rather early in the Form-room that morning.

They had their own reasons for that.

When Mr. Stange came in to take his class he found all the Fourth in their places, looking very orderly—in fact, quite demure.

He glanced over them in some surprise, and all the juniors looked their meekest.

The blackboard was standing on its easel in the middle of the Form-room, and Mr. Stange glanced at it in passing.

Then he gave a sudden start.

On the blackboard was chalked in huge letters the single unpleasant word:

"BLACKLEG!"

That was why the Fourth were early in their places—to prepare that polite greeting for their new master!

Mr. Stange's hard face purpled as he looked at the blackboard, and his eyes glittered over his pince-nez.

There was a deep-drawn breath in the class as his glittering eyes turned upon them.

The struggle was coming!

"Who wrote that word?" gasped the new master.

Silence!

"I demand to know who has done this!" shouted Mr. Stange.

The juniors did not answer.

Mr. Stange was welcome to find it out if he could, if he was anxious for information.

The Fourth Form did not intend to give him any help.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Are you aware who wrote that word on the blackboard?"

"Yes, sir,"

"Give me his name at once!"

"Sorry, sir."

"Will you do as I tell you, Silver?"

"No, sir."

There was a pause.

Mr. Stange had to calm himself before he spoke again.

"Silver," he said, in a more moderate voice, "take a duster at once and wipe that word off the blackboard."

Jimmy Silver decided to obey that command.

He came out before the Form and rubbed out the offending inscription.

"Now hold out your hand, Silver," said Mr. Stange, taking up his cane.

Jimmy walked calmly back to his place and sat down.

Again there was a pause, while Mr. Stange looked at the Fourth, and the Fourth looked at Mr. Stange.

"He, he, he!"

That fat chuckle came from Tubby Muffin, who was greatly entertained by the expression on Mr. Stange's face.

The savage glance of the new master picked him out at once, with a look that made poor Tubby cease chuckling all of a sudden.

"Muffin!"

"Eh? Oh! Yes, sir," stammered Tubby.

"You were laughing!"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Tubby. "Not at all, sir! I—I—I wouldn't think of such a thing, sir! Not for worlds!"

The unfortunate Tubby sat palpitating.

Mr. Stange beckoned to him.

"Step out, Muffin!"

Tubby Muffin stepped out, with a groan.

He knew very well that the tyrant of the Fourth had picked on him because he was the easiest fellow in the Form to deal with.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were made of sterner stuff.

Jimmy knitted his brows.

Mr. Stange intended to punish Tubby severely, that was plain; partly as a vent for his wrath, partly perhaps as an example to the rest of the Fourth.

That proceeding did not accord at all with the ideas of Jimmy Silver.

As Tubby Muffin passed the end of his Form, Jimmy took hold of his fat arm and stopped him.

"Go back, Tubby!" he said.

Muffin blinked at him.

"I—I say, Jimmy—" he mumbled.

He blinked at Jimmy, and he blinked at Mr. Stange, greatly dismayed and undecided.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tubby.

He did not want the caning that was waiting for him, but Mr. Stange's cruel eye seemed to fascinate him, like a serpent's.

"Muffin," thundered Mr. Stange, "come here at once!"

Tubby jumped.

"Yes, sir. Oh, yes, sir! I—I'm kik-kik-kik-coming!" he stammered.

"You're not!" said Jimmy Silver, still holding the fat arm. "Go back to your place, you young ass!"

"I—I say, Jimmy——"

Arthur Edward Lovell rose, and took Tubby Muffin by the collar, and led him back to his place.

He plumped Tubby down in his seat.

"Stay there!" said Lovell.

"Oh dear!"

"Look out, Lovell!" yelled Oswald.

Lovell spun round just as Mr. Stange reached him.

The new master was striding on him, his eyes gleaming.

Lovell dodged too late, and the new master's grip fastened on his collar.

"Let go!" roared Lovell, struggling.

With a wrench, Mr. Stange jerked him to the middle of the Form-room, and then he laid on with the cane across Lovell's back and shoulders.

His hard face was pale with rage, and he laid on with the cane as if he were beating a carpet.

The blows fell like rain.

It was so suddenly done that for a moment or two the Fourth stared on at the scene, while the lashing of the cane and Lovell's wild yells rang through the Form-room and the corridor outside.

Jimmy Silver leaped to his feet.

His hand closed on his Latin dictionary, and he hurled it with unerring aim.

The solid volume struck Mr. Stange full on the ribs, and clattered to the floor.

An inkpot from Mornington followed it, just missing.

"Come on!" shouted Jimmy. "Rescue!"

The cane was still lashing.

Jimmy Silver rushed out, followed by nearly all the Fourth.

At that moment the door of the Form-room was flung open, and Dr. Chisholm stepped in.

CHAPTER 32.

The Order of the Boot!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL tore himself away from Mr. Stange's grasp as the Head entered the Fourth Form-room.

The new master relaxed his grip at the sight of Dr. Chisholm.

Lovell's face was white with pain.

"You rotter!" he panted. "You beast! Oh!"

"Lovell!" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Stange turned, came in hand, gasping a little.

He had quite lost his temper, and he was well aware that the punishment he had administered was far beyond what was permissible.

"So he is a rotter!" shouted Lovell recklessly. "And a beast, too!"

"Silence! What does this scene mean, Mr. Stange? I heard that boy's cries from the Sixth Form-room!" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Stange spluttered.

"I have had to deal with utter insubordination in this Form!" he exclaimed. "Disobedience and disrespect. I have actually had hands laid upon me!"

"Bless my soul!"

"And you'll have them again if you don't clear out!" shouted Mornington.

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

The shouting voices died down, but there were fierce looks on all sides.

The Fourth Form were in a dangerous state of exasperation, and their accustomed respect for the Head himself was on the point of failing.

Jimmy Silver took hold of Lovell's arm to hold him.

The unfortunate Lovell was white and almost fainting.

He leaned heavily on the captain of the Fourth.

Dr. Chisholm's brows darkened as he looked at him.

Severity was not unknown at Rockwood, by any means, but brutality was a new thing there, and it was clear

enough, even to the Head, that this was a case of brutality.

"Mr. Stange—" began Dr. Chisholm.

"The boy openly defied my authority, sir," said Mr. Stange. "He is not the first. I felt compelled to make an example of him."

"You rotten hooligan!" hooted Mornington.

"Silence!"

Jimmy Silver peeled off Lovell's jacket.

He knew what cruel marks must have been left by the blows that had rained on his chum's back, and he dragged down the shirt to reveal them.

"Look at that, Dr. Chisholm!" said Jimmy, in a choking voice. "Is that the right thing for Rookwood?"

"Let me alone, Jimmy, you ass!" muttered Lovell.

"Rot! The Head's going to see it!" answered Jimmy.

"Silence, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes blazed.

"Dr. Chisholm! You can see how that man's treated Lovell. We are not standing any more of it!"

"Silver!"

"If that man doesn't leave Rookwood," said Jimmy, too enraged to care what he was saying, "I'll take Lovell down to the police-station and show this!"

"How dare you, Silver!" rasped the Head.

"I mean what I say!" retorted Jimmy Silver. "If that ruffian stays at Rookwood, we'll see what the law says about it!"

"Bravo, Jimmy!" came in a roar from the Fourth.

The headmaster stood petrified for a moment.

Then he strode towards Jimmy Silver, who faced him undauntedly.

Mr. Stange stood biting his nails, his rage having given place to apprehension by this time.

"Silence—" The Head broke off as his glance fell on Lovell's shoulders,

cruelly scored by the cane. "Bless my soul! My poor boy! I did not imagine —"

He turned upon the new master.

"Mr. Stange! How dare you use a Rookwood boy in this manner!" exclaimed the Head, his voice trembling with anger. "You are a ruffian, sir! A brute!"

"Sir!" stuttered Mr. Stange.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Leave this school at once, sir!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I give you," said the Head, "a quarter of an hour to be gone, sir! If you remain longer than that, I will see that a prosecution follows for this act of brutality!"

Mr. Stange gasped for breath.

The tables were turned with a vengeance.

Jimmy Silver helped Lovell on with his jacket.

The tyrant of the Fourth had over-shot the mark, and he had brought about his own discomfiture.

"Dr. Chisholm, I—I—I refuse—at all events, I shall claim—" stammered the discomfited man.

"You may claim what you choose, sir, but you will leave Rookwood School immediately, or I will have you thrust from the doors!"

"I—I—I—"

"Go!"

With aw hipped looked, the tyrant of the Fourth slunk out of the Form-room.

There was a buzz among the juniors.

Dr. Chisholm turned to the class as Mr. Stange's footsteps died away down the corridor.

The beaky gentleman was gone for ever.

"My boys, I am sorry that this has occurred," said the Head very quietly. "Owing to—to—to circumstances, I allowed that—that person to take up his duties here before I had time to make a sufficiently full examination into his credentials. He was recommended to me, but— However, I

need not go into that. He is leaving Rookwood at once. Lovell!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"You may leave the Form-room. You are excused from lessons to-day. Silver may go with you. The rest will take their seats, and"—the Head's voice grew more stern—"kindly keep order here. I shall send Bulkeley here to take charge of the Form for the—the present."

Dr. Chisholm left the Form-room, and Lovell followed, leaning heavily on Jimmy's arm.

Arthur Edward rather prided himself on being "tough," but he had been very hard hit this time, and he was likely to feel the effects for some time to come.

But he grinned faintly at Jimmy Silver in the passage.

"I don't care!" he murmured. "After all, we've got rid of that brute! It was worth it! Ow! Yow!"

"There he goes!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

Through the open doorway the two juniors had a view of Mr. Stange, in hat and coat, striding away towards the gates.

The new master disappeared from sight, and Lovell grinned again.

"The Head's goin' to have a high old time, bookin' masters in a terrific hurry," he said. "I wonder what the next will be like? Ow!"

"I wonder!" said Jimmy.

In the Form-room there was a roar of cheering, fellows crowding to the windows to see the last of Mr. Stange.

"Our win!" said Mornington, with much satisfaction. "Poor old Lovell's been through it, but the rotter did himself in. After all, the Head's rather a brick!"

"He's a good sort, really!" said Erroll.

"Yes, if he wasn't quite so much like a mule!" remarked Conroy. "The best thing he can do now is to let Bootles come back."

"I'm afraid he won't do that."

"He may be glad to when we get to work with the next master!" grinned Mornington. "But we'll go easy with Bulkeley. After all, the Head's not a bad hat. I thought he would come down heavy on Jimmy for giving him so much back chat; but he let it drop. Gentlemen, I suggest that we keep order to-day like good little chappies, as a reward to the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulkeley if the Sixth found the Fourth Form very amenable when he came in in rather a doubtful mood.

The morning passed off quite agreeably, much to the prefect's relief.

After dinner it was known that the Head had been very busy with the telephone, apparently ringing up the agency in London.

"That's all very well," said Jimmy Silver. "The Head can be as obstinate as he likes, but we're fed up with his new masters, and with the whole game—and we're going to have Bootles and the rest back. We must start a proper campaign—and the campaign begins to-morrow!"

And a loud cheer from the Fourth-Formers showed that they were prepared to back up their Form-captain to a man.

CHAPTER 33.

The Campaign Begins!

JIMMY SILVER smiled as he came along to Hansom's study, in the Fifth Form passage at Rookwood. There was a buzz of voices in that study, and the voices sounded rather excited.

"The cheeky ass!"

That was Edward Hansom's voice, in tones that were almost sulphurous.

"Cheeky cad, you know, by Jove!"

That remark came from Talboys, the "nut" of the Fifth.

Jimmy Silver looked in.

Hansom and Talboys, Lumsden and Brown major, of the Fifth Form, were

gathered in the study, in what appeared to be a council of war.

Jimmy Silver did not need telling that they were discussing Mr. Pumphrey, the new master of the Fifth Form.

Hansom was holding up his hand.

"Caned me!" he said. "Me—head of the Fifth! The cad doesn't know that the Fifth Form ain't caned! I'm feeling it now! By gad, you know, I was jolly inclined to let him have my left! I'd have done it, only——"

Hansom paused.

Evidently he had been strongly tempted to let the master of the Fifth have his left, only——

There was a very considerable "only."

His glance fell on Jimmy Silver in the doorway, and he frowned.

"Cut off!" he said. "Fourth Form fags are barred here! Take your face away!"

Jimmy Silver did not cut off.

Instead of that he walked into the study with a cheerful smile.

"I've got something to say to you chaps," he remarked.

The Fifth-Formers glared at him.

Jimmy Silver's manner did not display the great respect that was due to the Fifth Form, who were seniors and great guns—in their own estimation, at least.

"Lookin' for a lickin'?" inquired Cecil Talboys.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Business!" he explained. "I can see that you're not satisfied with your new Form-master."

"Rank outsider!" growled Hansom. "But it's no business of a blessed fag, that I can see!"

"That's where you're off-side, little one," answered Jimmy Silver affably. "It is my business. We've been holding a council of war——"

"Bother your fag councils of war!"

"We're not satisfied with the new masters," continued Jimmy, unheeding. "And we've made up our minds

that they're not going to stay at Rookwood."

"Eh?"

"We want Mr. Bootles back, you see; he's a really good chap, and we're not going to lose him," said Jimmy Silver. "Same with you fellows; you'd like to have Mr. Greely here again, instead of your new man."

"Of course we would! But——"

"Well, if the new man goes, there's a good chance of it. My scheme is, to lead him such a life that he'll be glad to go."

"Oh!"

"For instance, we're beginning this afternoon," said Jimmy Silver. "It's close on time for classes. I advise you chaps to be a bit late for lessons."

"When we want advice from the Fourth Form," said Hansom, with crushing sarcasm, "we'll come and ask for it. Thanks all the same."

"Just as you like. Are you fond of tar?"

"Tar?"

"And soot?"

"Soot?" repeated Hansom. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the first man in the Fifth Form-room this afternoon will get a collection of soot and tar on his napper!" explained Jimmy Silver.

"You cheeky young sweep!" roared Hansom. "Do you mean to say you've had the nerve to rig up a booby-trap in our Form-room?"

"Exactly!"

"Well!" breathed Hansom.

"Better be a few minutes late, and let your merry Form-master arrive first," advised Johnny Silver. "First come, first served, you know. Whoever gets that collection on his napper will want some cleaning afterwards. Ta-ta!"

Jimmy Silver sauntered out of the study with that, leaving the Fifth-Formers staring.

The captain of the Fourth strolled into the quadrangle, where his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, were waiting for him.

"Told 'em?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a grin.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"What are they going to do?"

"I fancy they're going to let dear old Pumphrey bag the prize-packet," answered Jimmy. "They're wild about his caning them. He lacks respect for the noble Fifth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The man isn't really nice," said Raby. "It will serve him right. And he ought to go."

"He'll go all right, if we keep on the warpath," said Jimmy Silver confidently. "It's only a question of sticking to it. Hallo, there's Hansom!"

Hansom of the Fifth came out of the School House with his friends, with a smiling face.

The Fistical Four observed Hansom & Co. going round and speaking to other members of the Fifth, and they drew the conclusion that the Fifth were being warned to be late for lessons that afternoon.

Hansom, with all his loftiness, was evidently acting upon Jimmy Silver's sage advice.

"I think we'll be late for lessons, too," remarked Newcome. "Only a blessed perfect taking us, you know. I want to see Pumphrey catch it."

So did a good many other members of the Classical Fourth.

And so it happened that when George Bulkeley went into the Form-room for work that afternoon he found only five or six of the Fourth-Formers present.

The rest had taken French leave for the occasion.

CHAPTER 34.

Mr. Pumphrey Loses His Temper—
And His Job!

S PLASH!

"Yoooop!"

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "He's got it!"

The new master of the Fifth Form at Rookwood had "got it," unmistakably.

Mr. Pumphrey was a minute or two late for classes, and he came rather hurriedly to the Fifth Form-room, expecting to find all the Fifth there awaiting him.

He did not find the Fifth Form; he found something else.

As he shoved open the door, which was ajar, and strode in, the booby-trap above was set in action.

Mr. Pumphrey hardly knew what happened.

But he knew that something thick and sticky swamped over his head and face, accompanied by clouds of soot.

He staggered back into the passage, spluttering.

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Help! Yoooop!"

The Fistical Four, ensconced in a window-recess down the passage, watched him with friendly interest, keeping out of sight, however.

Not that Mr. Pumphrey could have seen them, or anything else; his vision was entirely obliterated by soot and tar.

He tottered in the passage, gasping and spluttering and howling, in a state of fury to which mere words could not have done justice.

From the end of the passage came a chuckle.

Hansom and most of the Fifth were there, waiting round the corner.

"Help! Yooop! Yaroooh! Grooogh! Gug-gug-gug-guggggg!" spluttered the Fifth Form-master. "Ow! Oh! Yah! Yooop!"

He clutched desperately at the tar streaming over his face, and gouged it from his eyes and nose.

"What ever is the matter?"

Dr. Chisholm came hurriedly from the direction of the Sixth Form-room, where he was taking the top Form of Rookwood that afternoon.

He blinked in amazement at the blackened figure staggering and gasping and coughing in the passage.

"What—what—what—who—how—who is that?" stuttered the Head blankly.

"Yaroooh!"

"Who are you, sir?" thundered the Head. "What does this mean? How dare you enter Rookwood, you—you unclean ruffian!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "He doesn't know him!"

"His own father wouldn't know him like that!" chuckled Lovell. "Keep out of sight, for goodness' sake!"

"Yaroo! Gug-gug-ugug! Dr. Chisholm!"

"Who are you?" thundered the Head. "You unclean, dirty, unpleasant——"

"You old fool, I am Mr. Pumphrey!" roared the unhappy master of the Fifth, too enraged to care what he was saying. "Who the dickens do you think I am?"

"Wha-a-at! Mr. Pumphrey! This language to me!" stuttered the Head.

"I am the victim of an outrage!" roared Mr. Pumphrey. "Look at me! I am smothered with something—groogh!—tar, I think! It is in my mouth—gug-gug! Look at me! Some young ruffian—groogh!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Pumphrey gouged away more tar and blinked at the Head, palpitating with wrath.

"It was a booby-trap!" he gasped. "It was set above the door! As I entered—groogh! No one is present in the Form-room. It is evidently a plot. I demand that the author of this outrage be flogged and expelled from the school, Dr. Chisholm!"

"I shall certainly punish the author of this outrage, Mr. Pumphrey," said the Head in icy tones. "But a few moments ago you used an expression to me——"

"Look at me!" hooted Mr. Pumphrey.

"Your present condition, sir, does not excuse your lack of respect," said the Head. "You applied an expression to me—an expression I do not care to repeat——"

"Look at me!" shrieked the new master. "You are wasting time, sir! I demand the instant punishment——"

"It is not for you to demand, Mr.

Pumphrey, but to request, with due respect——"

"Rubbish——"

"What!"

"Nonsense!" roared Mr. Pumphrey. "Do you think I am going to endure this? If you do not instantly flog the young scoundrel who treated me thus I will take the matter into my own hands!"

"Bless my soul!" The Head was pale with anger and indignation. "Mr. Pumphrey, I have had several serious faults to find with you already. But for the fact that, owing to—circumstances I was pressed for time, I should certainly never have engaged you as a master in this school! After your conduct, sir, it is quite impossible for you to remain here. The sooner you can leave Rookwood, Mr. Pumphrey, the better I shall be pleased."

"Twaddle, sir—twaddle!" hooted Mr. Pumphrey.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I demand the instant——"

"Mr. Pumphrey," thundered the Head, "you are dismissed!"

And with that the incensed old gentleman rustled back to the Sixth Form-room, greatly perturbed, leaving Mr. Pumphrey sawing the air with his hands, and giving utterance to a stream of remarks not at all suitable for a Rookwood master.

Jimmy Silver & Co. scuttled away, almost suffocating with laughter.

The plot had worked better than the juniors had dared to hope.

The "blackleg" who had taken Mr. Greely's post was dismissed, and there was great satisfaction among the junior campaigners.

CHAPTER 35.

Morny Takes a Hand!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. came in rather late to lessons, and Bulkeley of the Sixth gave them a stern look.

It was no pleasure to Bulkeley to take the Fourth Form in the absence of a

Form-master, and he found his hands full with those cheery youths.

"You are late!" snapped the prefect.

"Sorry, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver meekly.

"Take fifty lines each!"

"Oh!"

"And go to your places!" growled the captain of Rookwood.

The juniors obeyed meekly.

As a prefect Bulkeley's word was law, but as a Form-master he found a good many difficulties to contend with.

However, lessons passed off quietly in the Fourth Form-room, the juniors taking a good deal of credit to themselves for not ragging "old Bulkeley."

The Fifth Form-room was deserted that afternoon.

The Fifth had gone in with the Sixth, by the Head's order; so the Head had had his hands full, too.

When the fellows came out of the Form-rooms the Fifth found themselves minus a Form-master.

Mr. Pumphrey had spent most of the afternoon in a bath-room, with soap and hot water galore, in a state of simmering fury.

But after the cleansing process Mr. Pumphrey calmed down a good deal, and repented of the hot words he had uttered to the Head.

Repentance, however, came too late, as it so often does.

The Head refused even to see him, and the new master of the Fifth was under the necessity of packing his belongings and departing from Rookwood.

Quite a crowd of Rookwooders gathered to see him off.

Hansom of the Fifth clapped Jimmy Silver on the shoulder as the cab drove away to the station.

"Good for you, young 'un!" Hansom condescended to say. "Of course, you couldn't foresee that it would turn out so well. Fancy the silly ass slanging the Head! But it has turned out well, and we're obliged to you."

"My dear man, that's better than an O.B.E.," said Jimmy Silver gravely.

"I feel that I haven't lived in vain, if you're obliged to me, Hansom."

Whereat Hansom sniffed and walked away.

The Fifth Form were without a master now, and it was arranged for them to work with the Sixth for the present, under charge of the Head.

That arrangement, the only possible one in the circumstances, was far from satisfactory, however.

But after his unhappy experience with hurriedly-engaged new masters, it was pretty certain that the Head would take his time in selecting a new man.

And ere long, if Jimmy Silver's campaign went on satisfactorily, the hapless Head was to have some more places to fill.

After lessons there was a consultation among some of the Classical Fourth—especially the Fistical Four, Mornington, and Conroy, the Australian, who were the chief leaders in the campaign.

Mornington went in search of his cousin, Mornington II., of the Second Form, and brought him to the end study, where Jimmy Silver & Co. had gathered to tea.

Mornington II.—otherwise "Erbert"—was not looking happy.

He was rubbing his hands in a rueful way as he came in.

"Had it again, 'Erbert?" asked Jimmy Silver.

The fag nodded.

"Mr. 'Ogg is a corker," he said. "We don't like our noo master. The Third Form chaps rag their noo master, Mr. Mobsby; but our noo master rags us! He's a awful beast!"

"Like him to go?"

"Wotto!" said 'Erbert feelingly. "I wish the 'Ead would let Mr. Wiggins come back. He was a good sort. That 'orrid Mr. 'Ogg is down on me!"

"What for?"

"He says as 'ow I drops my aitches," said 'Erbert. "Course I does; I ain't 'ad the eddication of the other fellers, owing to me bein' lost when I was a

nipper. Mr. Wiggins made allowance for me, but Mr. 'Ogg don't! He's a reglar beast, he is!"

Valentine Mornington's brow darkened.

There was a good deal of affection between Mornington of the Fourth, the fastidious dandy, and his little cousin in the Second Form, once a ragamuffin whom Morny had befriended without knowing his relationship.

"I'm not standin' this, you fellows," said Morny. "The cad's not goin' to rag my cousin. 'Erbert's worth a hundred of him."

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver. "We're on his track. Sit down and wire into these pilchards, 'Erbert. Lovell, old man, coffee for the distinguished guest."

'Erbert grinned and sat down to tea.

In spite of his sufferings in the Second Form-room, he had a good appetite, and he enjoyed tea in the end study.

There was a considerable discussion over tea.

The somewhat harebrained scheme of Jimmy Silver & Co. was to make life not worth living to the new masters at Rookwood, and fortune seemed to be smiling on them, so far.

They had had unexpectedly complete success with the new master of the Fifth; that Form, like the Fourth, was now without a master.

Mr. Hogg, of the Second, was next on the list.

After he had been dealt with, it would be the turn of Mr. Snaggs, of the Shell, and Mr. Mobsby, of the Third.

'Erbert had to leave the end study at last for evening preparation in the Third Form-room, as the fags did their prep in the presence of their Form-master.

Morny's cousin went to the Form-room with a heavy heart.

The want of training in his earlier days placed him under many disadvantages, and Mr. Hogg made no allowance for the fact.

Mr. Hogg had a bitter tongue and a bad temper, and he was accustomed to holding up poor 'Erbert to ridicule before his class, which was little short of torture to the sensitive little fellow.

Owing to the long discussion in the end study, 'Erbert was a minute or two late in the Form-room, and he found Mr. Hogg there with the rest of the Second Form.

'Erbert slipped in quietly, hoping to reach his place without attracting the attention of the master, but the hope was vain.

"Mornington!"

"Yes, sir," faltered 'Erbert, turning round.

"You are late!" snapped Mr. Hogg.

"On'y a minute, sir," pleaded 'Erbert.

"What?"

"On'y a minute, sir."

"What do you mean by 'on'y'?" thundered Mr. Hogg. "Are you not aware that there is an 'l' in the word?"

Some of the Second grinned, and poor 'Erbert crimsoned.

"Yessir!" he gasped.

"Then why do you not pronounce it?" snapped Mr. Hogg.

"'Abit, I s'pose, sir."

"'Abit! Do you mean habit?"

"Yus!" gasped 'Erbert, his pronunciation getting worse and worse as he grew more flustered.

"Yus?" repeated Mr. Hogg. "Do you mean yes? If you mean yes, why do you not say yes? You are perfectly well able to pronounce the word if you choose, Mornington; I have heard you do so."

"It's you worritin' me, sir!" gasped 'Erbert, in despair. "I torked ever so much better with Mr. Wiggins. He didn't worrit a bloke."

"Worrit! There is no such word as worrit in the English language."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Come here, Mornington," said Mr. Hogg, taking up his cane. "This is deliberate impertinence on your part. You are not content with being a vulgar little ragamuffin—"

"Mr. Wiggins never called me names, sir," said 'Erbert. "He was a gentleman, he was."

"What! Come here at once."

'Erbert looked obstinate.

"I been caned enough, sir," he said.

"You give it to me five times to-day, and I've 'ad enough. My 'ands are swelled now."

Mr. Hogg stared at him.

"Will you obey me?" he thundered.

"I ain't goin' to be caned no more to-day, sir," said 'Erbert. "I tell you I've 'ad enough! Let a bloke alone!"

Mr. Hogg strode towards the fag, grasped him by the collar, and jerked him out into the middle of the Form-room.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The cane rose and fell on 'Erbert's shoulders, and the fag's yells filled the Form-room.

The door suddenly opened.

Mornington of the Fourth looked in, with a grim expression on his handsome face and a glitter in his eyes that was dangerous.

Without speaking a word, Mornington ran in, grasped the Form-master by the collar, and spun him away from 'Erbert.

Crash!

Morny put all his strength into that spin, and Mr. Hogg went sprawling on the floor, and there was a gasp of horror, mingled with delight, from the astounded fags.

CHAPTER 36.

Brought to Book!

"O H, dear!" gasped 'Erbert.

Mr. Hogg, hardly knowing what had happened, sprawled on his back, blinking up in a dazed state.

Valentine Mornington stood with his fists clenched, looking down at him, his eyes blazing.

"You coward!" he exclaimed. "You brute! Touch my cousin again if you dare!"

Mr. Hogg sat up dizzily.

He blinked at Mornington of the Fourth as if he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Boy!" he gasped.

"Cad!" retorted Mornington.

"You—you dare——"

"Lay your paws on my cousin again, and you'll see that I dare!" answered Morny disdainfully. "You brute! You ought to be a prison warder, not a master in a school!"

Mr. Hogg staggered to his feet.

His red, dyspeptic face was crimson now.

He grasped his cane and started towards Valentine Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth faced him coolly, his hands clenched and his eyes gleaming.

The Second Form looked on breathlessly.

Such a scene was unheard-of at Rookwood before the strike of the masters.

"I—I will——" gasped Mr. Hogg.

"Come on, then!" retorted Mornington recklessly. "Keep back, 'Erbert!"

"Morny——" stammered the terrified fag.

"Keep back!"

Mr. Hogg was springing on the dandy of the Fourth, the cane lashing out.

Mornington caught the lash on his left arm, and winced with pain, but Mr. Hogg had time only for the one cut.

The next moment the boy's right hand, clenched and as hard as iron, smote the new master full on the mouth, and Mr. Hogg staggered back.

Back he went stumbling, to lose his footing and collapse on the floor with a bump.

"Bravo!" gasped Snooks.

The Second Form were all on their feet now, wild with excitement.

Their Form-master had been knocked down before their eyes, and their fear of him was gone.

The fags came swarming out before the desks.

Three or four missiles smote Mr.

Hogg as he gasped on the floor, and Snooks up-ended an inkpot over him.

There was a roar of rebellious voices in the Form-room, which was heard far beyond the purlieus of the Second.

The fallen master, inky and dazed and confused, struggled wildly among the mob of fags.

There was a sudden howl of warning from Jones minimus.

"Cave! The Head!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The fags scampered back to their seats.

Mornington and 'Erbert were left alone in the middle of the room, with Mr. Hogg, inky and breathless, sprawling at their feet.

Dr. Chisholm swept in, with a face that was a study in itself.

Mr. Hogg sat up and blinked at him through the ink.

"What—what—what—" stuttered the Head. "What does this mean, Mr. Hogg?"

"Groogh!"

"Answer me!"

"Gerrrooogh!"

"Mornington, what are you doing here?"

"I came in to protect my cousin, sir," answered Mornington quietly.

"That brute was ill-using him."

"What! What, you dare to apply such an expression—"

"It's the truth, sir!"

"Mr. Hogg—"

"Wow-wow-wow! Groogh!" That was all Mr. Hogg could say, so far, till he got rid of some of the ink from his mouth.

"It's the truth, sir!" said 'Erbert, speaking up at once in defence of his champion. "I've been caned all day! Look at my 'ands! Mr. Wiggins wasn't always a-pitchin' into me like that bloke."

"Boy!"

"P'raps I'm a vulgar little ragamuffin," said 'Erbert. "But Mr. Wiggins never called me any sich names. He was a gentleman, he was."

"Do you mean to say, boy, that Mr.

Hogg applied such expressions to you?" exclaimed the Head.

"'Course he did, sir! And he's always a-doin' of it. Any of the coves 'ere will tell you. Look at my 'ands!"

"Mr. Hogg, kindly come to my study; and you also, Mornington, and your cousin. Boys, keep order here."

A dead silence fell on the fags as the Head left the Form-room, followed by the two Morningtons, Mr. Hogg limping and gasping in the rear.

CHAPTER 37.

Fed Up!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were at work in the end study.

Although there was a great campaign going on, prep had to be done—or, rather, the Fourth-Formers in the kindness of their hearts did prep so as not to worry "old Bulkeley" in class.

The Fistical Four were busy when Valentine Mornington strolled into the study with a cheery smile on his face.

"Finished already?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking up.

"Haven't started, dear boy."

"Time you did, then," said Raby severely. "We've agreed to keep up prep, and give old Bulkeley an easy time, you know. 'Tain't Bulkeley's fault that the Head's a bit of a mule."

"Lots of time!" yawned Morny. "I've been busy, too. You can take Hogg's name off the list, Jimmy Silver."

"Hogg's next man in, isn't he?" asked Jimmy.

"No; he's odd man out," grinned Morny. "He's leaving Rookwood in the morning."

The Fistical Four stared.

"What's happened?" demanded the whole quartette with one voice.

"The Head's happened!" chuckled Mornington. "There was a row in the Second, and I chipped in and knocked Hogg down—"

"Great pip!"

"And a merry scene in the Head's study afterwards," said Mornington. "I must say the Head is a brick. I wish he wasn't a mule, too. That cad Hogg has been down on poor old 'Erbert no end. The man's not a gentleman, you know, and he's a shocking snob in consequence. He don't like 'Erbert's dropped 'h's,' and he's fairly persecuted the poor kid. And now it's all come out! He seemed to expect the Head to approve of him."

"He doesn't know the Head, then."

"And the Head didn't know him, or he wouldn't have let him into Rookwood. And he told him so, by gad," said Morny, with a chuckle. "Poor old 'Erbert's paws are swollen with caning. That was more evidence. No end of talk before the Head, and the dear old boy was shocked at findin' that he's made such a bounder master of the Second. Talked to him like a Dutch uncle in a wax. Hogg man fires up; says if he's not satisfactory he's prepared to leave. Head clinches on that—salary till the end of the term, and the order of the boot on the spot!"

"My hat!"

"So he's goin' to-morrow morning," Mornington rubbed his hands. "For some reason or other, after sackin' the Hogg man the Head thought it necessary to cap me for knockin' him down. Dashed unreasonable old gent—what?"

"You're jolly lucky to get off with a caning," said Jimmy Silver. "I suppose the Head knew the man was a brute or he wouldn't have let you off so lightly."

"I don't feel let off lightly: But it's all right, and you can take Hogg off the list. He's goin'. Now I'd better go and do some prep, or I shall have Erroll huntin' for me."

And Mornington sauntered out of end study.

The Fistical Four looked at one another with great satisfaction.

"We're winning!" remarked Lovell.

"We are—we are—though Morny and 'Erbert seem to have done the second act all on their own," said Jimmy

Silver, smiling. "The Head's shedding his new masters like giddy leaves in Vallambrosa. Hurrah for us!"

The Fistical Four settled down to prep again in great good humour.

Work had just finished in the end study when there was another caller.

This time it was Jimmy Silver's cousin, Algy of the Third.

The cheery Algy nodded carelessly to the chums of the Fourth.

"What a life!" he remarked.

"Well, what have you been up to, you young sweep?" asked Jimmy Silver severely.

"Don't come Uncle James with me, old chap!" said Algy Silver imploringly. "I say, we've had no end of a lark in the Third. Our new man's a regular gilt-edged treasure! I hope he'll never leave."

"He's got to leave!" said Lovell, frowning.

"I don't think he'll be sorry if he does," remarked Algy reflectively. "Poor little man! He ought to take a baby-class in a girls' school. He's not up to the weight of the Third. We're enjoyin' life with him. We haven't done any work to speak of since he came."

"Slacker!"

"Oh, we haven't been slackin'; we've been givin' Mobsby the time of his life! We've stuck all his books with glue, and he can't open them!" chuckled Algy. "We've split his canes—not that he'd have nerve to use them—poor little chap! We put crackers in his desk this evenin'! You should have seen him jump!"

"You young rascal!" said Jimmy, laughing.

"I hear that you've got a scheme of scootin' the new masters out," said Algy. "I want you to let Mobsby alone. He's a duck! Bohun used to make us work, and Mobsby never does. He can't! Bohun used to lick us, and Mobsby daren't. We're enjoying life with him! Prep in the Third is better than a Rigger match! So you let him alone, old top. We want him to stay."

And Algy strolled out of the study with a chuckle.

"Well!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I don't think there'll be much trouble with Mobsby," he said. "The poor little chap means well, but he's no good for the Third Form at Rookwood. I fancy he won't last long, even without our assistance. Those young villains in the Third are making his life a burden."

Jimmy Silver was nearer the truth than he supposed.

At that very moment little Mr. Mobsby, the new master of the Third, was tapping at the door of the Head's study.

There was an expression of weighty resolution on the little gentleman's nervous face.

Dr. Chisholm was in his study in a troubled mood.

His new masters were failing him, and the future was full of uncertainty and worry.

He rapped out "Come in!" very sharply as Mr. Mobsby tapped.

The master of the Third came in hesitatingly, and blinked nervously under the fixed gaze of the Head.

"Well, Mr. Mobsby?" said the Head, scenting more trouble at once.

"I—I—I— Dr. Chisholm, I really hope this will not put you to excessive inconvenience, but—but—" stammered the nervous little gentleman.

"But what, Mr. Mobsby?"

"I beg to tender my resignation, sir," gasped Mr. Mobsby. "I have no complaint to make—none whatever! But—but I do not feel equal to dealing with the Third Form, sir. My experience here has been—been quite different from what I was accustomed to at—the preparatory school when I was— In fact, I—I beg you to accept my resignation, sir."

"Really, Mr. Mobsby, if you have any complaint to make—"

"None at all, sir," gasped the little gentleman. "I am simply not equal to the task, and I confess the fact. I

should be glad to be relieved of it at the earliest possible moment. That is all."

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips.

"Very well, Mr. Mobsby. I may remark that I have had very serious doubts as to your ability to manage the Third Form; but, owing to circumstances— No matter, I accept your resignation, sir."

The Head remained in a very thoughtful mood after Mr. Mobsby had left his study.

Of all his new masters, only Mr. Snaggs of the Shell remained, and Rookwood School was almost without masters again.

Really, there seemed no end to the troubles of a headmaster who had the firmness of a rock—or the obstinacy of a mule, whichever it was!

CHAPTER 38.

The Last on the List!

"THE old sport looks no end bottled!"

Adolphus Smythe, the ornament of the Shell, expressed himself thus as he smiled through the curling smoke of his cigarette.

Adolphus was given to expressing himself slangily.

He was referring in those irreverent terms to the Head of Rookwood.

Howard and Tracy major, also of the Shell, grinned over their cigarettes.

"Rookwood's comin' to somethin', I think," pursued Adolphus sagely. "All the new masters gone exceptin' the worm who's crawled into our quarters and calls himself master of the Shell! What I want to know is, when is he goin'? Man who scents himself like a chemist's shop an' parts his hair in the middle isn't any good for us."

"Dyes his hair, too!" said Tracy.

"Tints his eyebrows, I verily believe," said Howard. "I believe in a chap taking care of his looks if he's good-lookin'." Howard glanced into the glass and smiled, as if quite satisfied with

what he saw there. "But there's a limit, an' that smelly boulder Snaggs don't know it. Frightful outsider, dear boys!"

"Our man, Mooney, wasn't much of a nut," said Adolphus. "Still, he was a man. This creature, Snaggs, isn't a nut and isn't a man. What is he? A Snaggs! I can tell you, old dears, that I'm fed up on the Snaggs-bird, right up to the chin. He's the last of the new crowd, an' it's time he went. The Head knows it, too. When he came into the Form-room to-day he niffed the Snaggs' scent, and I saw him shudder."

"Horrid!" said his chum.

"He's lookin' worried," went on Adolphus. "Quite bottled, in fact. Bottled, with the cork in, by Jove! Why doesn't he let the old gang come back? There they are, all hangin' up in Coombe, like a lot of moultin' fowls, you know, an' Rookwood goin' to the bow-wows. Why can't he give the scented Snaggs marchin' orders, an' take the old gang back, an' let us be merry an' bright again!"

There was a tap at the door, and Jimmy Silver came into the study.

He coughed as he caught the cigarette-smoke, which was rather a worry to his healthy lungs.

Jimmy of the Fourth was not quite so accustomed to that doggish atmosphere as Smythe & Co. of the Shell.

His cough made the nuts of the Shell grin.

"Have a fag, young 'un?" smiled Adolphus.

"No, you silly ass!" was Jimmy Silver's polite refusal.

Adolphus raised his eyebrows.

"What charmin' manners they have in the Fourth!" he remarked. "Polished, you know. Quite Chesterfieldian, in fact! Oh, gad!"

"Put that rubbish away, you silly owls," said Jimmy Silver, coughing again. "What the thump do you want to turn your study into a dashed tap-room for? Have you fellows heard the news?"

"Anythin' fresh about the Latcham races?" asked Tracy.

Jimmy Silver snorted.

"Bother the Latcham races! Are there races at Latcham?"

"Are there?" repeated Adolphus Smythe, in utter disdain. "For goodness' sake, Silver, where have you been buryin' yourself?"

"I haven't come here to talk like a goat!" said Jimmy, with a grunt. "There's some news. Bulkeley's been put in charge of the Second——"

"Bless Bulkeley, and bless the Second!"

"Neville's got the Third——"

"He's welcome to 'em!" yawned Adolphus.

"I fancy the prefects are getting a bit fed up with it," said Jimmy Silver. "But the joy of the thing is that the Fourth are going to take lessons with the Shell till a new master comes—which won't be just yet."

Smythe & Co. jumped.

"You fags—in our Form-room!" shouted Smythe. "What cheek! Why, we won't stand it!"

"I don't see that you've got much to stand," retorted Jimmy Silver. "It's us that will suffer—shut up with a gang of silly owls like the Shell!"

"Why, you cheeky fag——"

"We begin to-morrow," said Jimmy. "The Head's a bit at his wits' end, I think, to run the school without masters. Tubby Muffin heard him on the telephone to-day slangin' the agency for sending him so much trash. Good masters can't be picked up like apples in an orchard. And there's another trouble brewing—the governors have got wind of it."

"By gad!" said Adolphus. "Time they did!"

"Morny's uncle, old Stacpoole, is on the governing board, you know. Morny says he never told him; but he's heard from his uncle, asking what's going on," said Jimmy. "Bet you the Head knows that the governors are beginning to get curious. I think he'll come round and

let the staff come back in time, but we're going to help him make up his mind."

"Eh? How?"

"All the new gang have gone excepting Snaggs. Snaggs has got to follow them."

"By gad! I'd like to see it! The horrid bounder uses scent—strong scent—in the Form-room! He whiffs like a chemist's shop—pays a bob a gallon for it, I should guess. And look at his waistcoat! Jevver see one like it, you fellows?" said Adolphus, appealing to his chums.

"Never!" said Howard solemnly.

"Well, hardly ever!" grinned Tracy.

"And his watch-chain!" said Smythe almost tearfully. "Rolled gold, you know—thick as a cart-rop, or thicker—and it simply howls out that it's rolled gold. How's a feller of any taste to stand a Form-master like that? Give me Mooney!"

"Well, the long and the short of it is that we're coming into the Shell Form-room to-morrow," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to make Rookwood too hot to hold Snaggs! Are you fellows with us?"

Adolphus nodded at once.

He did not pull well with Jimmy, as a rule, but in this matter he saw eye to eye with the captain of the Fourth.

"We're your little men, Silver," he answered. "You think of somethin' for scarin' away the Snaggs-bird and we'll back you up to the last ditch—right up to the chin!"

"Rely on us," said Tracy; "and that applies to all the Shell. We're with you to the last shot in the merry locker."

"Done!" said Jimmy.

And he left Smythe's study, quite satisfied.

Mr. Snaggs was to take the Fourth with the Shell on the morrow, and with all the Fourth and the Shell against him he was likely to have a troublesome time.

Adolphus smiled over his cigarette.

"That cheeky young ruffian Silver is

just the man for this job," he told his chums. "I don't like him, an' I don't approve of him, and his taste in neckties is revoltin', but he's the man to make the Snaggs-bird flutter. And more power to his giddy elbow!"

And that evening there was considerable discussion between the leaders of the Fourth and the Shell—with unusual harmony.

The Snaggs-bird, as Adolphus called him, was the last of the "new gang," and it was agreed that by a combined effort the new man was to be hoisted out of Rookwood.

On the following morning a very numerous class gathered in the Shell Form-room—Fourth and Shell combined—and Mr. Snaggs did not look exhilarated when he came in to take that swarming class.

Mr. Snaggs was a little gentleman, who made himself look a little taller by means of elevators in his dainty boots.

That was not his only affectation, however—he dyed his hair, which was scanty, and he used abundant scent, and he walked and spoke in a mincing manner.

A "nutty" master Smythe & Co. could have welcomed, but Mr. Snaggs was only a pretended nut; he did not, as Adolphus complained, know the rules of the game at all.

Perhaps even the genuine brand of nuttiness would have been out of place in a middle-aged gentleman growing bald, however.

"Good-mornin', boys!" said Mr. Snaggs.

"Good-mornin', sir!" said Adolphus solemnly. "I hope you find yourself well this mornin', sir."

"Thank you, my young friend, quite well," said Mr. Snaggs, delicately dabbing his nose with a scented handkerchief.

Adolphus gave a gasp and sank back on his seat.

"Smythe, are you not well?" exclaimed Mr. Snaggs.

"Hold me!" moaned Adolphus.

Howard and Tracy held him.

"What is it, my boy—what is it?" exclaimed Mr. Snaggs, advancing towards the class.

"Take it away!" moaned Adolphus.

"What—what is it?"

"A—a—a dreadful smell, sir! I—I think there's somethin' wrong with the drains!" moaned Smythe.

"Bless my soul! I——"

"Oh! Excuse me, sir; it was only the scent on your handkerchief," said Smythe, recovering himself. "Very sorry, I'm sure, sir!"

And Adolphus grinned affably at the new master.

For a moment Mr. Snaggs stared at him as if transfixed.

Then he woke to sudden life.

He grabbed Adolphus by the collar, and yanked him out before the class.

"Yaroo!" roared Adolphus. "Oh, by gad! Yooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"There!" gasped Mr. Snaggs. "You will not be impertinent again, I think, Smythe."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The unfortunate Adolphus crawled back to his seat, quite certain that he would not be impertinent again.

His first attempt at ragging the new master was also his last.

CHAPTER 39.

The Feeding-Up of Mr. Snaggs!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. chuckled.

It was just like Adolphus to take the lead in this way, and still more like Adolphus to put his foot in it.

But Adolphus Smythe had had enough of taking the lead now.

If anybody was to take the lead any more, it was not to be Adolphus.

He was more than willing to leave the glory—and the risk—to Jimmy Silver of the Fourth.

Lessons proceeded in rather a thundering atmosphere.

There was not much work done, however.

The class was far too numerous for one man to handle adequately, even if he had tried hard.

And Mr. Snaggs did not try hard.

He was a slacker, as well as "bouncer," and he let the juniors do mainly as they liked.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not admire slackers, and they fully agreed with Smythe & Co. that the new master was "no good" for Rookwood.

He was not even "up" to his work, for Rawson of the Fourth, who was terrific in Classics, caught him "out" in Virgil, and Mr. Snaggs blundered hopelessly, amid growing merriment in his class, till he indemnified himself by caning Rawson severely, much to that painstaking youth's astonishment and wrath.

This was really too bad, and, apart from Jimmy Silver's campaign, it was felt in the Fourth that Rawson's wrongs had to be avenged.

"The fellow's only a blessed blackleg, anyhow," said Rawson wrathfully, when the juniors left the Form-room; "and he's an ignoramus, too. He had no right to take on the job! Goodness knows what the Head was thinking of!"

At dinner Mr. Snaggs was frowning.

After dinner he retired to his room.

It was his custom to take a "nap" after lunch, in the belief that it was good for the complexion!

While he was taking his nap he did not hear a slight sound at the door of his room, naturally.

But when his nap was over, and he was ready to go down, he made the startling discovery that the door would not open.

He pulled at the handle, in great amazement; but he pulled in vain.

He rang the bell at last, and a trim maid tapped at the door in a few minutes.

"Kindly open the door!" Mr. Snaggs called through the keyhole. "It appears to be fastened on the outside."

The maid blinked at the door.

"It does not seem to be fastened, sir," she answered. "Is the key inside?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps it is locked."

"It is not locked."

"Well, I can see no fastening, sir."

"Pooh! Nonsense! It must be fastened, as I cannot open it. Use your eyes!"

The maid had already used her eyes, in vain; and she now tossed her head.

"There is nothing here that I can see, sir!" she snapped.

"Don't be silly! Look!"

The maid flounced away, and confided to her friends below stairs that the master of the Shell was no gentleman to speak to a lady in such a manner; and she remained resolutely deaf to further tinklings of the bell.

Mr. Snaggs chafed and fumed in his room.

He began hammering on the door at last.

Rookwood had gone into the Form-rooms by that time, and for some time the new master hammered in vain, but at last there was a rustle in the passage.

"What is this disturbance about?" came the Head's voice from outside. "Is that you, Mr. Snaggs?"

"Yes, sir; it is I!" hooted Mr. Snaggs. "I am a prisoner in this room, sir! I have been fastened in!"

"Bless my soul! I see no sign——"

"The door will not open, sir!" roared Mr. Snaggs.

"Kindly refrain from raising your voice in addressing me, Mr. Snaggs!" snapped the Head. "I will look——"

He proceeded to examine the door.

It was not till after a long search that he discovered three or four screws, driven so deeply into the thick wood that the heads had almost disappeared.

"The door has been screwed!" said the Head faintly. "This is most—most extraordinary! Have you any idea who screwed your door, Mr. Snaggs?"

"As I cannot see through a door, sir, especially when I am asleep, I have not!" hooted Mr. Snaggs.

"I will send for the sergeant."

During the next half-hour Sergeant Kettle and a screwdriver were at work on Mr. Snaggs' door.

The Form-master was released at last, and he came downstairs an hour late for his class, flustered and furious.

He found the Fourth and the Shell in his Form-room, engaged in cheery conversation.

Mr. Snaggs glared at the juniors.

"Who screwed up the door of my room?" he thundered.

No reply.

"Unless the culprit immediately comes forward," said Mr. Snaggs, his voice trembling with wrath, "I shall detain the whole class for two hours!"

Silence.

"Very well!" said Mr. Snaggs. "Very well indeed! We will proceed."

And they proceeded.

But Mr. Snaggs' troubles were only beginning.

As soon as he had occasion to use the cane—which was very soon, for his temper was at boiling-point—the cane split into two pieces at the first whack.

When he sat down on the high chair at his desk he sat in a sea of gum, which he did not feel for some time, but when he rose the chair rose with him.

Even when he was rid of his class his troubles did not cease, for when he retired to his study for a rest, and set a match to the fire already laid, there was a crackling as if of musketry in the grate, and wood and coal showered on all sides.

It dawned upon Mr. Snaggs—rather late—that he had inadvertently set light to a bundle of crackers.

Five times during that afternoon and evening was the Head disturbed by a raid from Mr. Snaggs, demanding his assistance in discovering and punishing the author of some fresh outrage.

When Mr. Snaggs bounced into the Head's study for the sixth time, later in the evening, Dr. Chisholm gave him a look like a basilisk.

Mr. Snaggs' face was flaming red!

"Good heavens, sir, what has happened?" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Snaggs brandished a bottle in the air.

"Look at me!" he shrieked. "This bottle—my face! My face—this bottle! Ah, ha!" He spluttered with fury.

"What—what—"

"This bottle, sir, contained my complexion-wash!" hooted the unhappy nut. "I—"

"Complexion-wash!" gasped the Head. "Absurd! In a man of your years— Absurd! Ridiculous!"

"Someone has tampered with it!" yelled Mr. Snaggs. "I did not observe it in time. But someone has put red ink in it—red ink, sir! Look at my face! Red ink, sir!"

The Head pressed his hand to his brow.

"Mr. Snaggs," he said at last, "you are ridiculous! I am not surprised that you are persecuted. The boys cannot possibly retain the slightest respect for such a man. I must request you, sir, to resign your position here. You are not fit for Rookwood!"

"I should refuse to stay at Rookwood, sir, under any circumstances whatever!" howled Mr. Snaggs. "My complexion is ruined! My hair has had a narrow escape. I discovered just in time that my hair-restorer had been tampered with! I will not stay, sir, another day in this bear-garden!"

And Mr. Snaggs didn't.

The following day Rookwood School was once more without masters.

That morning Jimmy Silver cycled down to Coombe and visited the village inn, where the masters on "strike" had their quarters.

There he interviewed Mr. Bootles, late master of the Fourth.

And after Jimmy Silver had left Mr. Bootles held a consultation with the other masters.

And so it came to pass that, about the time the station cab was bearing

Mr. Snaggs away, eight gentlemen walked in at the gates of Rookwood and proceeded to the School House.

An army of fellows watched them, for it was the staff returning.

And the army followed them in, right up the corridor to the Head's study, at which Mr. Bootles timidly tapped.

"Come in!"

Mr. Bootles threw open the door, and the eight gentlemen crowded, very quietly and respectfully, into the Head's study.

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet in surprise—perhaps in relief—at the sight of them.

"Sir!" said Mr. Bootles. "Good-afternoon, sir!"

"Good—good-afternoon!" stammered the Head.

"Sir," said Mr. Greely, taking the lead,

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"Mais oui—yes—oh, certainement!" murmured Monsieur Monceau.

"We regret exceedingly that there has been any trouble," said Mr. Mooney. "Most sincerely."

The Head's face relaxed.

The offer to return to duty came so opportunely to relieve him of his difficulties that he could not help welcoming it.

And the "strikers" were as tactful as could be wished. There was no loss of dignity in accepting the olive-branch extended in this manner.

"Gentlemen," said the Head at last,

"I am glad that you have come here. I accept your offer. I will even say that there have doubtless been faults on both sides, which by mutual goodwill we must endeavour to avoid in the future. Gentlemen, the past is forgotten!"

And Tubby Muffin, whose fat ear was at the door, scuttled off to inform Jimmy Silver & Co. that it was "all serene."

The "masters' strike" was over, and once more Rookwood School resumed the normal tenor of its way.

And all concerned were glad that the trouble was at an end, and for some time afterwards the extreme politeness of the Head and his staff to one another was quite entertaining to witness.

And in the end study satisfaction was great, for the Fistical Four, at least, agreed in attributing the happy reconciliation entirely to Jimmy Silver's campaign!



THE ROOKWOOD SHYLOCK'S REVENGE!

A Splendid Short Story of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the Popular
Chums of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 1.

Stopped in Time.

"Oh, leave me alone, Leggett!" wailed Tracy minor of the Second Form at Rookwood, as the Modern junior took a firmer grip on the fag's ear.

"Yes, I'll leave you alone—I don't think!" snapped Leggett vindictively.

"I will pay you the money, really," whimpered Tracy minor, "if only you'll let go my ear. You're hurting me, you are! Ow! Yow!"

"And I'll hurt you more," exclaimed Leggett. "What do you mean by borrowing money from me if you don't intend to pay it back?"

"But I do intend to pay it back," protested the fag earnestly. "I'll pay it all back at the earliest possible moment. Besides, I've paid you the interest regularly."

"Bah! What's the interest got to do with it?" said Leggett, the Shylock of Rookwood. "Sixpence a week on a loan of five bob! What's that?"

"Well, I've already paid you two bob in interest—Ow! Yow! Oh, do leave me alone, you spiteful beast!"

"I'll give you spiteful beast!" snapped Leggett. "How do you like that?"

Tracy minor let forth a pitiful scream.

"O-o-o-oh!" he wailed. "Don't, Leggett—please don't! I can't stand it!"

"Well, are you going to pay me that five bob?" said Leggett relentlessly.

"I will, I promise you, as soon as my governor sends me a tip," said Tracy minor.

"What's the good of that?" snorted Leggett. "He may never send you another tip."

"Oh, he will, Leggett—he will!" moaned the fag.

"Rats!" sneered Leggett. "I've heard that sort of yarn before. Look here, you've got to find that five bob somehow before Saturday. D'you hear?"

"Yes, Leggett, I hear, but——"

"No 'buts'!" said Leggett. "You've got to find it somehow. I don't mind how you get it, but I'm determined to have my five bob back."

"If my father doesn't send me a tip," said Tracy minor, "I'm afraid I shan't be able to pay you. I don't see where I can get the money from."

"Don't you?" said Leggett, with a sneer. "Let's see if we can make you."

Leggett took a still firmer grip on the youngster's ear, and gave it a harder twist.

"Ow! Yow!" exclaimed Tracy minor. "Ow-w-w-w-w! You beastly Prussian, you! Ow!"

"Well, do you think you will be able to get the money now?" asked Leggett.

"I—I—I——"

"Hallo, what's all the row about?"

Newcome asked the question as he came upon the quiet spot of the quad where Leggett was torturing the fag.

"He's a beast!" said Tracy minor.

"I know that," said Newcome, giving the schoolboy Shylock a steely glare. "Leave the youngster alone, Leggett!"

"What do you mean by——" began Leggett.

"Leave him alone!" commanded Newcome.

There was a determined look in Newcome's eyes, and, thinking it wise to do as he was told, Leggett released the fag.

"Now," said Newcome, "what's all this rumpus about? What's Leggett been doing, Tracy?"

"He's been twisting my ear for all he's worth," said Tracy minor, "just

because I haven't been able to repay some money I borrowed from him."

"What did you want to borrow it for, if you couldn't pay it back?" said Newcome.

"But I intend to pay it back as soon as I get a tip from my pater," said Tracy minor. "I've told Leggett so, but he won't believe me."

"Can't you take the kid's word, Leggett?" asked Newcome.

"No, I can't," grunted Leggett. "These fags are too fond of making promises and then not keeping them." Newcome turned to the fag.

"By the way, kid," he said, "do you mind telling me what interest you've been paying?"

"Sixpence a week," said Tracy minor.

"On what amount?"

"Five bob."

"Phew!" whistled Newcome. "Is that the game?"

"Well, you don't think——" began Leggett.

"I think you're the rottenest, meanest cad at Rookwood!" cried Newcome heatedly. "I——"

"Hallo, hallo! What's the matter here?"

Newcome looked round, to find his three chums, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Lovell, behind him.

"Leggett's up to his old games," explained Newcome. "He lent this kid five bob, and after charging him exorbitant interest, has been torturing him because he hasn't repaid the money."

"How much has he paid in interest?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Two bob."

"Well, look here, young Tracy," said Jimmy Silver. "You're a young fool to borrow money from such a beastly Shylock as Leggett; but, all the same, you're not going to be ragged for nothing. You're not to pay Leggett another penny piece. D'you understand?"

"Yes, Silver."

"If Leggett starts ragging you again, you come to me."

"But——" protested Leggett:

"Clear off, Leggett!" ordered Jimmy Silver. "And take this as a warning. If you ever rag this kid again, I'll go straight to the Head and explain matters to him."

Leggett glared at Newcome.

"It's you I've got to thank for this, you rotter!" he cried. "Well, you look out! I'll make you sit up for this, you mark my words!"

"Clear off!" commanded Jimmy Silver again.

Leggett took his heels at once, but as he went he uttered two words:

"You wait!"

The Fistical Four went back to their study, and soon Leggett was entirely forgotten. As to his threats, the Classical chums took no notice whatever.

CHAPTER 2.

Bad News and Good.

"TELEGRAM for Master Newcome."

It was the next day, and the Fistical Four were seated in the end study at Rookwood, discussing a forthcoming footer match with Greyfriars, when the page-boy put his head round the door and made the above statement.

"For me?" asked Newcome.

"Yes."

"Hand it over, then!"

The page-boy handed the buff-coloured envelope to Newcome, and, after receiving a sixpenny tip for his trouble in bringing up the telegram, he took his departure.

Newcome tore open the envelope and drew forth the piece of paper it contained.

"I wonder who this is—— Good heavens!"

Newcome stageged backwards, and his hand flew to his head. His face had gone as white as a sheet, and his chums gazed at him in amazement.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy

Silver concernedly. "Not bad news, surely?"

Newcome threw himself down in the nearest chair, and rested his head in the hollow of his hands. He was so overcome by the message he had just received that he hardly heard Jimmy Silver's question.

The Classical chums rose to their feet, and Jimmy Silver laid a friendly hand on his chum's shoulder.

"Buck up, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver sympathetically. "And tell us what the trouble's about."

"Oh, the mater," murmured Newcome—"poor old mater! If only I were with her!"

"Your mater ill?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes," replied Newcome, controlling himself quickly. "The pater says she's seriously ill, and wants me to go home immediately."

"Phew!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I say, Newcome, old fellow, I'm awfully sorry! I suppose there's nothing I can do for you?"

"No," answered Newcome. "It's awfully kind of you, but I must get off at once. It'll take me about three hours to get home. Have any of you fellows got the time on you?"

Lovell pulled out his watch.

"Quarter to one," he said.

"Good!" said Newcome, rising unsteadily to his feet. "I can catch the two-thirty from Coombe. I'd better go and see the Head first."

Newcome went off to visit Dr. Chisholm, and returned about five minutes later.

"The Head's given me permission to stay away indefinitely," he said. "I hope you chaps will write and let me know the result of the Greyfriars match. It'll probably cheer me up a bit."

"We'll do that all right," said Jimmy Silver; but I—I—I—"

The Classical captain faltered as though he was afraid to conclude his remark.

"I—I—I trust," he continued, "that you won't want any cheering up, old scout. Let's hope you'll find the mater much better when you get home."

"Same here!" said Lovell and Raby together.

"Oh, well," said Newcome quietly. "I'd better be going, otherwise I may miss the train. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said the Classical chums. "It's a pity we can't come down to Coombe with you."

"Don't trouble," said Newcome. "I shall get on better alone."

Newcome greatly appreciated his chums' eagerness to comfort him, but he felt that he wanted to be alone to think of his mother, for whom he had such a great affection. He welcomed their sympathies, but somehow or other sympathies did not seem to lessen the trouble that was on his mind.

In less than five minutes he was outside the school gates, and was walking down the lane in the direction of Combe, his mind full of troubled thoughts.

"Poor old fellow!" said Jimmy Silver sincerely, when Newcome had taken his departure. "I wish we could have done something for him!"

"So do I," agreed Lovell. "But what could we have done?"

"Nothing," said Jimmy Silver. "Only the news that his mother was better would buck him up."

It was in a very miserable frame of mind that the Classical chums went into class that afternoon. Admitted, they had never met Newcome's mother, but one and all hoped fervently that she would recover. Each of them knew what their feelings would have been like had they received similar news concerning their own mother, and their whole hearts went out in sympathy to their chum.

Tea-time came, but it was a very strange tea to Jimmy Silver and his chums. The study seemed to be different without Newcome, even the tea did not appear to taste the same.

It was one of the most frugal meals the Classical chums had ever had, and one of the quietest, too. Neither of them felt like eating, and neither felt like talking.

It was left to Jimmy Silver to break the silence.

"Coming out into the quad?" he asked. "There may be a telegram waiting for us from Newcome."

"Maybe," agreed Lovell and Raby, but they had very strong doubts on the matter. However, they followed Jimmy Silver down to the gates. Old Mack was standing at his lodge, and surveyed the chums critically.

"What I ses—" commenced the porter, but Jimmy Silver broke in with: "Telegram come for me, Mack?"

"No, there ain't!" snorted the porter. "And it's like this 'ere. I should like to know what you young ribs want with so many telegrams?"

"Br-r-r-r!" was all Jimmy Silver said. At that moment he felt no inclination to argue with the irritable old porter.

He turned away from the lodge with his chums, and was just about to walk out into the lane, when a man of about middle age came rushing into the road. He caught Jimmy Silver by the shoulder and caused him to stagger backwards.

"E-er—" he stammered. "Excuse me! I'm awfully sorry! I really did not see you!"

"Don't trouble," said Jimmy Silver. "It was as much my fault as—"

"H'm! Rookwood boys!" said the stranger.

"Yes, we belong to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver.

"T-t-then y-y-you know m-m-my son?" stuttered the stranger.

"You're son!" repeated Jimmy Silver incredulously.

"Yes, my son! Newcome is his name."

"Newcome!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Yes, we know him. He—"

"Well, take me to him!" commanded Mr. Newcome. "I must see him at once!"

"But you can't!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Can't! Why not?"

"Because he's gone," said Jimmy Silver.

"Gone!" gasped Mr. Newcome. "You m-mean t-t-to tell me m-m-my son is dead?"

"N-n-n-no!" stammered Jimmy Silver, somewhat amazed. "He left the school some hours ago in answer to your telegram."

"My telegram!" queried Mr. Newcome. "I don't understand. I don't remember sending Arthur a telegram."

Jimmy Silver and his chums stared at Mr. Newcome dumbfounded.

"It arrived about a quarter to one," said Jimmy Silver.

"By gad!" exclaimed Mr. Newcome. "Somebody's been playing a joke on us both. I came down here after receiving a wire from Dr. Chisholm, expecting to find my son dangerously ill, and—"

"Why," broke in Jimmy Silver, "Newcome's wire stated that his mother was seriously ill. It was supposed to have come from you."

"Well, I certainly did not send," said Mr. Newcome. "And I suppose that, as my son is not ill, Dr. Chisholm did not send the wire which I received!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "It's all very strange!"

"It certainly is," agreed Mr. Newcome, "and I intend to get to the bottom of the mystery. Can I trouble you to show me the way to your headmaster's study?"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy Silver & Co., and they directed Newcome's father to the Head's quarters.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, when they were alone. "That's a mystery, if you like! It's a bit thick on old Newcome being worried like that. A joke's a joke, but I consider that's carrying things a bit too far!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed Lovell and Raby.

"I wonder who it could have been," said Jimmy Silver. "Surely a Rook-

wood-chap wouldn't play such a low-down trick!"

"The average chap wouldn't," remarked Lovell. "But what about Leggett?"

"Leggett!"

"Yes, Leggett," said Lovell. "He's bad enough for most things, and I— By Jove, I've got it!"

"What?"

"You remember what Leggett said to Newcome yesterday about making him sit up for stopping him ragging young Tracy?" said Lovell.

"Great Scott! Yes."

"Well, you can bet your boots Leggett has done this by way of revenge," said Lovell.

"There's no doubt about it," said Jimmy Silver. "Look here, I'm going to have the rotter out and duck him in the fountain."

"What-ho!"

The Classical chums soon tracked Leggett down, and although the schoolboy Shylock denied having had anything to do with the telegrams, the chums were satisfied that he was the responsible party.

The result was that Leggett received

the biggest ragging of his life, and it was a very sore and sorrowful Leggett that went to bed that night.

The next morning Newcome returned, and, to the satisfaction of his chums, his face was beaming with smiles. He had arrived home to find that his mother was in the best of health.

Later in the morning the Fistical Four went down to the local post-office, and after a brief conversation with the postmistress, they were able to obtain proof that the telegram sent to Newcome's father in the name of Dr. Chisholm was sent by Leggett.

Therefore, Jimmy Silver and his chums felt that their treatment of the schoolboy Shylock the previous night had been well justified. The only thing they regretted was that they had not made the punishment a bit harder.

However, they were quite satisfied that Leggett had received sufficient castigation when, upon returning to Rookwood, they observed the Schoolboy Shylock with his hands tucked under his arms and groaning for all he was worth. They learned afterwards that the Head had come down on the cad, and they weren't at all sorry.



SOCCER'S RIVALS

SET in one of the old, ivy-grown walls of Rugby School is a stone tablet, so small and inconspicuous that a stranger would have a hard job to find it. And yet, despite its seeming unimportance, that tablet commemorates a schoolboy's exploit that has spread the name and fame of Rugby all over the world.

Rugby's Beginning.

It was near that spot, just over a hundred years ago, that William Webb Ellis, in the heat and excitement of a game of football, suddenly caught the ball in his arms, and, instead of kicking it or placing it for one of his side to kick according to the rules of the game in those days, ran with it. Not much in that, one might think, but it was to that simple incident that Rugby football, the rival winter game of Soccer, owed its beginning, for Ellis' startling new idea caught on almost at once. But, for all that, running with the ball in the hand was not officially recognised in the school rules until 1841.

There have been many more changes in Rugby since then, of course. Who could believe that the scientific, fifteen-a-side game of to-day had anything in common with those amazing free-for-all rough-and-tumbles so thrillingly described in "Tom Brown's School-days," when a hundred or more players a-side took part? When either goal was in danger even the spectators piled in and helped defend it, and one game might easily, and often did, last for days.

Rugby is not the only great Public school that can claim to have originated its own particular brand of football, but whereas Rugby's handling code has been adopted by half the

world, the others are never likely to be played elsewhere than on the playing-fields where they began.

Weird Winter Games.

One of the most curious and puzzling of these to the casual spectator, yet the greatest of all winter games to old and present Harrovians alike, is Harrow football, specially designed by one of the school's former masters to suit the uneven clayey soil on which it is played. Not the least peculiar thing about this game is the ball.

Imagine, if you can, a Soccer ball that has survived being run over by a steam-roller—but only just—and you will get some idea of what the Harrow ball looks like.

Harrow football is played by two teams of eleven a side, the formation consisting of nine forwards and two backs, while the goals, known as "bases," are more than thirty feet high and with no cross-bar. The pace of the game is terrifically hot all through, for there are no scrums, and everything, in the words of Harrow's famous school song, depends on "following up" the ball. Provided you are not off-side, that is, in front of the man on your side who kicks the ball, you are entitled to catch it off any player's foot and then shout "Yards!" claiming a free "punt" with a run of three yards. On account of the wet and slippery ground the field is marked out with shallow ditches, and the players wear white string gloves to grip the ball.

Winchester, too, has its own traditional game, though it has lost some of the startling rules it had in the "good old days" when the goal was actually a boy who stood with outstretched legs at either end of the field, a gown rolled up at each foot. Two points were scored if the ball was sent over the gown and the 'keeper failed to touch it, and three if it went between his legs or over his head. What happened if the goalie was sent flying isn't clear—probably a fight!

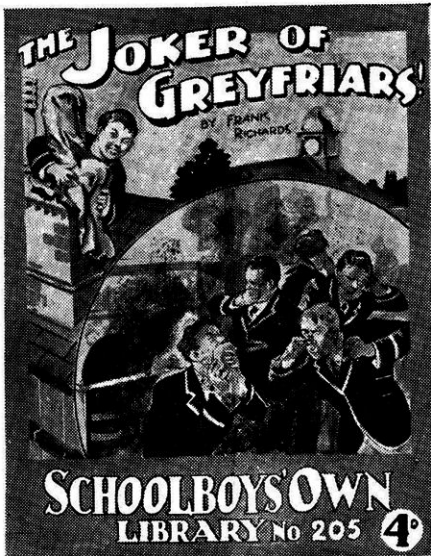
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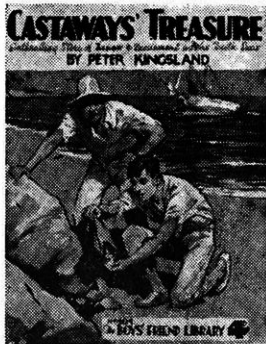
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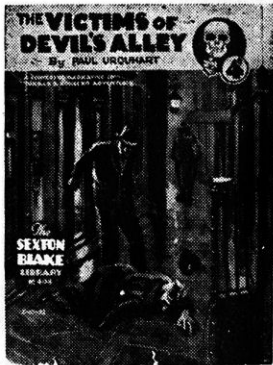
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