

TAMING THE BULLY!

By
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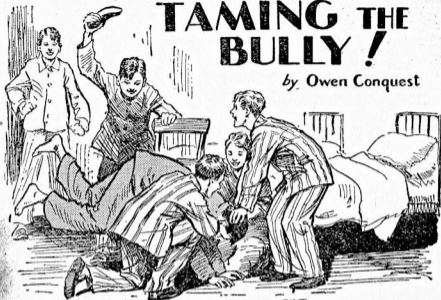
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TAMING THE BULLY!

by Owen Conquest



"Bully" Higgs, the new junior at Rookwood, regarded himself as monarch of all he surveyed . . . until Jimmy Silver cultivated a "straight left" for his special benefit!

CHAPTER I.

"Thanks for the tip!"

"JIMMY SILVER, you ass, we're waiting for you!"

"Come on, fathead!"

"Buck, up!"

It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome were ready to go down to the cricket-ground. Jimmy Silver wasn't ready. Jimmy was in the end study, talking to Leggett of the Modern side, when his three chums looked in, and made those remarks.

Jimmy glanced round at his chums.

"Hold on a minute!" he said.

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell. "Never mind that Modern worm! Come on!"

"Leggett's just told me something—"

"Blow Leggett!"

"Look here, you can't keep us waiting while you jaw to a Modern cad," said Raby. "Leggett can go and eat coke. Come on!"

"We'll chuck him out if you like," suggested Newcome.

There was always warfare between Classics and Moderns at Rookwood. The three Classics were anxious to get down to the cricket-ground, but they were willing to waste a few minutes "chucking out" a Modern fellow.

Leggett backed round the table in alarm.

"You don't want to talk to that worm," said Lovell. "I suppose you're not borrowing money of him?"

"No, fathead!"

"Well, we'll chuck him out——"

"Hold on, I tell you, fathead!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, rats!" growled Lovell.

Lovell was wrathful. He did not like Moderns, anyway; and Leggett was the least likeable of the Moderns.

He was not liked even on his own side. Tommy Dodd & Co. had "scragged" him many a time for his sneaking proclivities. And Leggett, who was a very deep youth, turned a more or less honest penny sometimes by moneylending among the juniors. He was the last fellow in the world to be welcome in the end study.

Lovell came into the study with a business-like expression. Leggett backed farther round the table. He did not like Lovell's looks.

"Look here, I came here to speak to Jimmy Silver——" he began.

"Like your cheek!" said Lovell. "You're going out on your neck! Don't dodge behind Silver, you worm—come and take your medicine!"

"Hold on, you ass!" said Jimmy, pushing his chum back. "Leggett came here to give me a tip."

"Rats!"

"There's a new chap coming to Rookwood this afternoon—a Classical——"

"Blow the new chap!"

"Chap named Higgs," said Leggett.

"Blow his name!"

"And those Modern bounders have gone to meet him at the station," said Jimmy Silver. "Leggett says so."

"Well, let 'em meet him, and be blowed!"

"They're going to rag him," said Leggett.

"Let 'em rag him!"

"Look here," said Jimmy Silver. "I don't know the new kid, but he's a Classical. We're not going to let the Moderns rag a Classical. It's up to us to chip in."

"What about the cricket?" demanded Raby.

"Well, it's only practice, and it can stand over for a bit," said Jimmy Silver. "Of course, the new kid doesn't matter twopence, so far as that goes, but we can't have Modern worms ragging Classical chaps."

"Something in that," agreed Lovell. "But what is that cad doing, giving his own side away?"

"I thought I'd come and give you the tip," said Leggett. "Of course, you needn't mention it to Tommy Dodd."

Lovell snorted.

"You mean that you've had a row with Tommy Dodd, and you want to get even with him, and you've come here for a catspaw!" he growled.

"Well, you can do as you like!" snapped Leggett. "I thought Jimmy Silver would chip in as the new kid's a Classical."

"And Jimmy Silver will," said the captain of the Fourth. "We can let the cricket slide for a bit, you chaps. A walk to the station won't hurt us. If the Modern bounders are ragging a Classical chap, we'll jolly well rag them. It will make them put their ears down, anyway."

"Well, that's all right!" agreed Lovell. "But Leggett's a cad to come and tell us, all the same. Where did you get that nose, Leggett?"

Leggett's nose was a little swollen, and of a fiery hue. It looked as if it had come into violent contact with a set of knuckles.

"Find out!" growled Leggett, rubbing his nose.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Tommy Dodd's punched his nose, and he wants us to punch Tommy Dodd," he said. "Well, we're on. We're going to the rescue; but before we go we'll bump Leggett for sneaking against his own side."

"Good egg!" said Lovell. "Now you're talking!"

Leggett was collared.

He wriggled in the grasp of the

Fistical Four as he was swept off the floor.

Then he came down on the carpet—bump!

Leggett's yell ran the length of the Fourth Form passage.

"Yoooop!"

"Give him another!" said Jimmy Silver. "He only gave us one tip, but we'll give him two bumps. That's cent per cent—Leggett likes that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Leggett. "Oh, yah—oh! Leggo! Yoooop!"

"Now all jump on him together," said Jimmy Silver, as Leggett sprawled on the carpet. "Now, one, two—"

Leggett did not wait for "three."

He was on his feet in a twinkling, and speeding down the passage to the stairs. A yell of laughter from the end study followed him.

"Now we'll trot down to the station," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "I don't think we shall ever get any more friendly tips from Leggett. But we'll put a spoke in Tommy Dodd's wheel. Come on!"

And the Fistical Four of the Fourth took their straw hats, and started for Coombe, to "chip in" very forcibly in the little game the humorous Moderns had planned for the afternoon.

CHAPTER 2.

A Slight Surprise!

"HERE'S the giddy train," said Tommy Dodd.

The three Tommies—Dodd and Doyle and Cook—were on the platform in Coombe Station.

They were looking very merry and bright that afternoon.

Tommy Dodd had heard that a new Classical fellow was coming into the Fourth Form at Rookwood, and it had been his idea to pass an hour in polite attentions to him. Not that Tommy Dodd knew anything about the new fellow, or had any dislike for him, or

anything of that kind. But the new boy was a Classical, and Classicals were born to be ragged by Moderns, and a half-holiday could not possibly be better spent than in ragging a Classical. That was how Tommy Dodd looked at it; and Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook heartily agreed with their great leader.

So the three Modern juniors were waiting on the platform, ready to pounce upon the new junior as soon as he alighted from the train.

"Nail him as soon as he shows up!" said Tommy Dodd. "Don't hurt the poor little beast, of course. We'll pull his leg, and stuff him up—Hallo! Here he is!"

The train had stopped, and among the passengers who alighted from it was a lad in Etons. He was the only boy there, so there was no doubt that he was the new fellow for Rookwood.

The three Tommies stared at him in astonishment.

He was not quite like their expectations.

They had expected to see a small, quiet, somewhat sheepish fellow, somewhat nervous in his ways—in fact, an ordinary new kid.

The newcomer was nothing at all like that.

In the first place, he was older than the Fourth Formers, and considerably bigger. He was as big as any fellow in the Shell at Rookwood. He was powerfully-built, with a breadth of chest and shoulder remarkable for his age. His face was rugged, and curiously like that of a bulldog in expression. His jaw was square, and his look very determined.

The three Tommies exchanged a queer glance.

The new boy did not look like a fellow who could be ragged, stuffed up, and have his leg pulled with impunity.

"H'm!" remarked Tommy Cook. "That ain't quite the merchant I expected to see. He's too old for the Fourth, I should say."

"Must be the chap!" said Tommy

Dodd. "I heard Bootles say he was coming by this train, and he's the only kid here!"

"Doesn't look an easy customer," murmured Doyle. "Faith, he looks like a young prizefighter, if you ask me!"

"Hallo! He's coming to speak to us!"

The three Tommies had intended to introduce themselves. But they were staring at the newcomer instead. The new arrival came across the platform, returning their stare with interest, and addressed them.

"You fellows belong to Rookwood?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you Higgs?"

"Yes; I'm Higgs. I'm going into the Fourth. One of you kids can carry this bag."

"Wha-at!"

"Deaf?" asked Higgs unpleasantly.

"Carry your bag!" ejaculated Tommy Dodd, his breath quite taken away. "Are you going into the Sixth, by any chance?"

"Eh? No!"

"And you're not a new headmaster, or anything of that kind?"

"Of course not!"

"Then you can carry your bag yourself," said Tommy Dodd, "and you can be thankful that I don't bash it over your silly coconut!"

The new junior stared at him for a moment, then burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We came here to—to meet you!" exclaimed Dodd angrily. "We thought we'd put you through your paces to begin with. I think we can't do better than take some of the cheek out of you to start with, Higgs! Collar him, you chaps! We'll teach him to cackle at us!"

"Bump the cheeky baste!" said Doyle. "We might give him the frog's-march to Rookwood afterwards. It would do him good!"

"Hear, hear!" said Cook. "Now, all together, and bump him hard!"

The three Tommies collared the new junior without ceremony.

They had intended to rag him gently, and "pull his leg," and generally extract a little harmless and necessary amusement from him. But the new boy's manner had changed all that. They felt that sterner measures were required, and they were prepared to take them.

And there was a surprise in store for Tommy Dodd & Co.

As they seized the new junior he ceased laughing, dropped his bag, and hit out. Tommy Dodd felt as if a mule had kicked him on the chin, and he went over on his back with a jerk.

Then Cook and Doyle, much to their astonishment, found themselves grasped by their collars.

They were swung to and fro helplessly, and then their heads came together with a resounding concussion.

Crack!

"Oh! Ah! Ow!" gasped Cook.

"Tare an' ounds! Yaroooh!" yelled Doyle.

Crack!

Tommy Dodd sat up. His chin felt as if it wasn't there, and he put both hands to it, and blinked.

It seemed like a dream to Tommy Dodd. He was sitting on the platform, knocked out, and the new fellow was grasping Cook and Doyle, and knocking their heads together!

The three Tommies were three of the most redoubtable fighting-men in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. And the new fellow was handling them as if they were infants in the Second Form.

"Oh, holy smoke!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "This is a giddy nightmare! Oh, my chin! Oh crikey!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Cook.

"Holy Moses! Hands off!" shrieked Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a swing of his remarkably muscular arms, the new junior sent the two Moderns spinning. They reeled across Tommy Dodd, and sat down on

the platform. The new boy grinned down at them.

"Want any more?" he asked.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Higgs. "There's a lot more where that came from. Ha, ha, ha!"

He picked up his bag and walked away, to look after his box.

The three Tommies sat up. They blinked at one another in a very uncertain way.

"We—we came here to rag that chap!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Oh, my hat! It—it looks to me as if we've woke up the wrong passenger."

"He's a blessed prizefighter in disguise!" groaned Cook. "Oh, my napper!"

"Thank goodness he's going on the Classical side!" mumbled Doyle. "Sure, they're welcome to him!"

"Oh, my chin!"

"Oh dear!"

The three Tommies picked themselves up, and limped out of the station. They had come there to rag the new Classical. But they kindly decided to let him get to Rookwood unragged. They really did not feel equal to any more ragging that afternoon.

CHAPTER 3.

Looking for Trouble.

"HERE they are!"

The Fistical Four had arrived. They met the three Tommies as the latter came out of the station. And they lined up in the path of the Moderns, with warlike looks.

Tommy Dodd gave them a feeble grin

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"Pax, ye spalpeens!" mumbled Doyle.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Pax, be blowed! We're on the war-path! What have you done with the

new kid? We've come to look after him!"

"You needn't have troubled!" growled Tommy Cook. "He doesn't want looking after. He can look after himself!"

"What has he done with us, you mean?" groaned Doyle. "Sure, I'm bumps and lumps from me head to me feet!"

"Look at my chin!" mumbled Tommy Dodd.

The Fistical Four looked astonished.

"He's handled you?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Ye-e-es!"

"And you let him?" howled Raby.

"We—we couldn't help it!"

"But—but the three of you!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "What the merry thunder is the new merchant like, then?"

"He's loike a blessed prizefighter!" bedad! I'll lick him to-morrow," said Doyle. "But 'nuff's as good as a feast for one afternoon!"

"Well, my hat!"

The three Tommies went on their weary way, the Classics gazing after them in amazement.

"Well, this beats the band!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "The new kid must be rather a prize-packet. Doesn't seem to need much looking after. I suppose that's the merchant!"

Higgs had come out of the station, after giving directions about his box. He had his bag in his hand, and was looking round him. The Rookwood fellows looked at him with interest. The fellow who had handled the three Tommies single-handed was an object of great interest to them.

"Looks like a blessed mixture of bull and bulldog," commented Newcome. "He wouldn't handle us so easily, though!"

"No jolly fear!"

"Well, we'd better speak to him," said Jimmy. "I can't say I like his looks very much, but we came here to be civil. After all, it's one up for our

side, a Classical handling the Modern bounders like that!"

The Fistical Four approached the new junior, who stared at them.

"New chap for Rookwood?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Higgs nodded.

"You're Higgs?"

"Yes—Alfred Higgs."

"Glad to meet you, Alfred Higgs," said Jimmy Silver affably. "We came to see that those Modern bounders didn't bother you. We're Classics."

Higgs grinned.

"Thanks; but I can look after myself. They won't handle me again in a hurry, I expect. I dare say I could lick any fellow at Rookwood!"

"Oh, could you?" said Lovell, nettled.

Higgs stared at him.

"Yes. F'rinstance, I could lick you!"

"Why, you cheeky worm——" began Lovell hotly.

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver. "We didn't come here to rag. Higgs, my pippin, you've got a good deal to learn, I think. I suppose you haven't come to Rookwood to start rowing with everybody you meet?"

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Higgs. "If I don't get on with a chap I give him my left."

"Your—your what?"

"My left," said Higgs—"like that!"

His left shot out suddenly, crashed on Jimmy Silver's chest, and sent him spinning along the pavement. The captain of the Fourth sat down violently. Higgs burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver was up in a twinkling.

"You silly ass!" he shouted. "What do you mean by bowling me over like that? I've a jolly good mind to mop up the ground with you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Higgs. "I'd knock you across the street as soon as look at you!"

"Then you can jolly well try it!" exclaimed Jimmy, blazing out. "Come along to a bit quieter place, and I'll give you a chance!"

"I'm your man!"

Jimmy Silver led the way. As a matter of fact, even the redoubtable Jimmy had his doubts about being able to lick the new junior. But the chief of the Fistical Four, the champion fighting-man of the Lower School at Rookwood, was bound to think of his prestige. He was going to lick this bullying "bounder," or else be licked by him.

They passed out of the old High Street of Coombe, and stopped in the lane that led to Rookwood.

"This will do!" said Jimmy, stopping on a grassy patch by the wayside, under the trees.

Higgs threw down his bag.

"Go ahead!" he said carelessly.

"I'll tell you what I think of you first!" said Jimmy. "You're a rotten, snarling, quarrelsome cad and bounder! Now, come on!"

Jimmy threw his hat and jacket on the ground, and stood up to his enemy. Higgs was half a head taller, much broader and longer in the reach, and it could be seen that he was a mass of muscle. If he knew anything about boxing, it looked as if Jimmy had little chance.

But Jimmy was hard as nails, and in perfect condition, and he was a boxer of renown in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. And his pluck was unlimited.

"Fair play, you know!" said Higgs, looking round.

"Do you think we won't give you fair play, you rotter?" snorted Lovell.

"I'll lick you all, one after another, if you like," said Higgs. "For the matter of that, I'll take you two together, if you like!"

"Oh, shut up, you swanking cad!" growled Raby.

"Ready?" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Oh, come on!"

Jimmy Silver came on, and the next moment they were fighting hammer-and-tongs.

CHAPTER 4.

A Fight to a Finish!

LOVELL and Raby and Newcome looked on anxiously.

They would each have given a term's pocket-money to see Jimmy Silver knock out this bullying, swanking newcomer.

But, great as was their faith in their redoubtable leader, they could not help having their doubts. They could not help acknowledging that even Jimmy Silver looked as if he had met his match at last.

And their doubts were soon justified.

If Higgs had had only his strength and weight to depend upon, the captain of the Fourth could have beaten him by science. But Alfred Higgs quickly showed that he knew something of boxing as well.

Jimmy's attack was hard and fast, and his blows came home on Higgs' rugged face with effect; but the new junior did not seem to mind his punishment. He drove home heavy blows in return, and he had a way of using his left that was a new thing in Jimmy Silver's experience, varied as that was.

That heavy left came on Jimmy Silver's chin before the contest had lasted two minutes, and the captain of the Fourth went to grass.

Higgs grinned down at him.

"Had enough?" he chuckled.

Jimmy Silver panted. Every tooth in his head seemed to have been jarred by that terrific drive.

"I'll show you whether I've had enough!" he gasped.

Lovell ran to help him up, but Jimmy did not need assistance. He bounded to his feet, and rushed on again.

He was very careful of Higgs' left after that.

His teeth were set, and his eyes were gleaming. Jimmy put into that fight all the strength and skill he was possessed of.

And the Co. gave a chirrup of joy and satisfaction as a drive fairly between the eyes sent Higgs spinning into the road.

The burly junior crashed down, fairly rolling in the dust, and gasping.

"Hurrah!"

"Man down!" chuckled Lovell. "Good old Jimmy! You'll lick him!"

Higgs staggered to his feet. Burly and powerful as he was, that blow told on him. He blinked rather uncertainly at Jimmy for a moment or two.

Then he came on like a bull.

His rugged face was crimson now with anger and exertion, and he put all his "beef" into it.

Jimmy Silver fought hard, but he was driven back by a rain of blows. His guard seemed helpless against the force of the driving, and blow after blow came home on his face and chest.

Down went Jimmy again with a bump.

This time he was not in such a hurry to rise.

He lay gasping, almost exhausted by his own efforts, and the hammering he had received.

Higgs glared down at him. He was not grinning now. Jimmy Silver, though apparently not a match for his burly antagonist, was a hard nut to crack, and Higgs had paid dearly for his success, so far.

"Well, have you had enough?" growled Higgs.

Jimmy panted for breath.

"Wait a tick, and I'll come on!" he said. "The next time I tackle you we'll have rounds."

"There won't be any next time!" said Higgs. "I'm going to make you sick of it this time! Get up, or I'll stir you with my boot!"

Lovell & Co. made a movement forward, their faces grim and savage. But Jimmy Silver scrambled up, and waved them back.

"I'm ready!" he said between his teeth.

And they closed again, hammer-and-tongs.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked on with bitter feelings. The new fellow, bully as he was, was entitled to fair play, and they could not interfere.

But it was bitter to them to see their leader being knocked out before their eyes by a brutal and ungenerous opponent.

Jimmy Silver stood up gamely to his enemy, giving as well as receiving punishment. But it was only too clear now that he was outclassed.

Again he went down, under Higgs' terrific left, and this time he struggled in vain to get on his feet.

"I fancy that's the finish!" grinned Higgs.

Jimmy made another effort to rise, but he rolled on his side. Both his eyes were closed, his nose was streaming red, and his face was cut and bruised. He was aching in every limb, and his strength was gone.

"I'm done!" he gasped. "I give you best!"

"I thought you would," said Higgs grimly. "Any of you fellows want a turn?"

He glared at the Co.

"No," said Lovell quietly. "You've licked Jimmy, and that means that you could lick any chap in the Fourth or the Shell. Now you can clear off!"

"One of you pick up that bag!"

"What!"

"And carry it to Rookwood for me," said Higgs.

"My hat!" said Raby.

"Are you off your rocker?" said Lovell, his voice trembling with rage. "Do you think you can fag us?"

"You're going to carry my bag," said Higgs, in a bullying tone; "and sharp's the word!"

Jimmy Silver strove to rise again, but he seemed glued to the ground. It was as much as he could do to suppress a groan.

Lovell & Co. exchanged glances. Lovell pointed up the road to the school.

"You've been given best, Higgs," he said very quietly. "That's enough. Now, the best thing you can do is to clear off!"

"Take up that bag!"

"I give you one minute to clear off, bag and all," said Lovell. "If you're

not gone then, we'll rag you till you can't crawl, and be glad of the chance!"

"I give you one minute to take up that bag," said Higgs; "and if you've not started by then, I'll mop up the road with the lot of you!"

"Then, here goes!"

The three rushed at the new junior, and collared him.

Higgs hit out furiously, and Raby dropped to the grass as if he had been shot.

But Lovell and Newcome swept the new junior off his feet, and he came down on the ground with a crash.

Raby was up in a second, his grasp on the new boy.

"Bump him!" shouted Lovell.

Bump—bump—bump!

Higgs roared as he came into violent contact with the hard road.

He struggled furiously; but, powerful as he was, he could not quite deal with the three, though he gave them a tussle.

Bump—bump—bump!

"Now, will you get off quietly?" asked Lovell, panting.

"I'll smash you!"

Bump—bump—bump—bump!

"Yow-ow!" roared Higgs. "Leave off! I'll go!"

The trio released him, leaving him sprawling in the dusty road. Higgs' face was crimson with rage as he struggled up.

"I'll lick you all for that!" he gasped.

"Do you want some more?" asked Lovell. "If you're not gone before I count three, we'll shove you in the ditch!"

"Shove him in, anyway!" said Newcome.

Higgs picked up the bag, and started for Rookwood. He paused only a moment to shake a big fist at the chums of the Fourth, and tramped away.

Lovell drew a deep breath.

"Of all the unspeakable rotters!" he muttered. "The frabjous beast thinks he can bully us—us!"

"Lend me a hand," mumbled Jimmy Silver.

"Poor old Jimmy!"

The three raised him up. Jimmy leaned heavily on Lovell's shoulder. He was utterly spent.

"You put up a jolly good fight, Jimmy," said Raby comfortingly.

Jimmy Silver grinned a twisted grin. "I did my best," he said. "I'll go into training, and tackle him again as soon as I can. The thing can't stop here. We shall have a merry time in the Fourth until somebody has licked that beast!"

"I—I say, you do look a picture!" said Lovell, in dismay. "There'll be a row about this, Jimmy. Bootles will spot your chivy at once!"

"Can't be helped!"

"Come and bathe it in the pond."

For the next quarter of an hour Jimmy and his chums were busy removing the marks of combat, as far as they could.

But they had little success.

Both Jimmy's eyes were darkening rapidly, and his nose was swollen and crimson, and there were half a dozen blue bruises on his face.

"The chap's a giddy prizefighter!" said Newcome. "It was jolly plucky to stand up to him, Jimmy; but——"

"I'm not sorry I did it. Better luck next time!" said Jimmy, with determined cheerfulness.

The Fistical Four took their walk slowly to Rookwood in a grim humour. The defeat was bitter enough. And they had the future to think of.

The Fistical Four had been cock of the walk in the Classical Fourth, though they had never dreamed of using their fistical prowess for swanking or bullying. They had fallen from their high estate now.

Bitterest of all was the knowledge that they had not been beaten by a fellow like themselves, who knew how to play the game.

Higgs was evidently determined to use his personal prowess in a way the Classical chums would never have dreamed of—for bullying, overbearing, and hectoring—and they did not quite see how it was to be stopped.

CHAPTER 5.

Higgs of the Fourth!

"GREAT Scott!"

"What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Had an accident?"

The Classical juniors stared at Jimmy as he came in. Jimmy's face burned under his bruises. He never thought of trying to conceal his defeat, if it had been possible; but this was not pleasant.

"What on earth's happened, old chap?" asked Dick Oswald, with real concern. "Been scrapping with a bargee?"

"Or wrestlin' with a motor-car?" grinned Townsend, the dandy of the Fourth.

"By gad, that face is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!" simpered Adolphus Smythe of the Shell.

"I've been in a fight, and I've been licked!" growled Jimmy. "That's all!"

"We could guess that!" chuckled Topham. "By gad! The great one-and-only has been licked at last!"

"Shut up, you cad!" growled Lovell.

"Licked!" exclaimed Oswald. "But—but who did it, Jimmy? Not one of the Bagshot chaps, surely?"

"No; a new fellow here."

"Oh, my hat! That chap in Bootles' study?" exclaimed Rawson.

"Chap named Higgs."

"You must have been off yer form intoirel," said Flynn. "But phwat did ye quarrel wid a new kid for, Jimmy? 'Twasn't polite, me boy!"

"I didn't quarrel with him—he quarrelled with me," said Jimmy.

"The baste! I'll look for him and give him a tanning when Bootles is done with him."

"Better not," said Jimmy, with a faint grin.

"Look out—here's Bootles!"

Mr. Bootles' study door opened, and Higgs came out. The Fourth Form master glanced out into the passage.

Jimmy was hurrying for the stairs, anxious to get his face out of sight; but Mr. Bootles saw it.

"Silver!" he rapped out.

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Come here!"

Jimmy Silver reluctantly went up. Mr. Bootles scanned his face with horror and indignation. Higgs looked on with a grin. Higgs' face showed signs of combat, but not nearly so noticeably as Jimmy's.

"You have been fighting, Silver?" said Mr. Bootles sternly.

"Yes, sir."

"Without gloves, I presume, to judge by the state of your face?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You have done wrong, Silver, and you are well aware of it!" said Mr. Bootles severely. "You are in a disgraceful state! Bless my soul, your eyes are quite black! Is that a proper state for a boy belonging to a respectable school, Silver?"

"Nunno, sir."

"You will be a disgraceful sight for a week or more. I am inexpressibly shocked, Silver!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!"

"As you apparently spend your half-holidays in disgracing your school, Silver, you will be detained for the next two half-holidays!" said Mr. Bootles angrily. "I am ashamed of you! You may go!"

"Yes, sir," groaned Jimmy.

His chums glared at Higgs. Higgs had been the aggressor, and if he had owned up to it, Mr. Bootles would have taken a more lenient view of the case; but Higgs did not speak.

Mr. Bootles went back to his study, and the Fistical Four went upstairs. Jimmy Silver threw himself into the armchair in the end study.

"Gated for two half-holidays because of that cad!" snorted Lovell.

"Can't be helped! Keep smiling!"

"The rotter ought to have spoken up!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"He's a rotter all through," he said. "Never mind! Gating doesn't matter much. I don't feel inclined to take two black eyes for a walk."

"Well, that's so," agreed Lovell.

"You'll have to lie low for a bit. You do look a picture, and no mistake!"

"Coming down to the cricket, Jimmy?" asked Jones minor, putting his head in at the door. Then he jumped. "Great Kitchener! What's wrong with your face?"

"Oh, clear off, and don't worry me!"

But Jimmy Silver was not to be left in peace.

He had to pay the penalty of being a prominent personage in the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

The news spread like wildfire that Jimmy Silver had been licked, and fellows came from far and near to look at him, and pass remarks.

His friends were quite concerned; but there were a good many fellows who were distinctly pleased.

Smythe & Co., the Nuts of Rookwood, rejoiced.

Their old enemy was down at last, and that was a cause of great rejoicing among the Nuts. Townsend and Topham and Peele came in to sympathise sarcastically, till Lovell caught up a cricket-stump and drove them out.

Towny and his friends dodged the stump, and went chuckling down the passage.

"This is a giddy stroke of luck—what?" chortled Towny. "Jimmy Silver's down off his perch at last. He won't be quite so ready to chip in and worry a chap now when he's havin' a smoke or a game of banker. But, I say, that new chap must be a holy terror if he can handle Jimmy Silver like that!"

"Better pal with him!" said Topham sagely. "I don't want a face like Jimmy Silver's!"

"Must be a regular prizefighter," said Peele. "Let's ask him to tea in the study, and butter him up a bit."

"Good! May be able to set him right against the end study, and keep those cheeky rotters in their place for good!" chuckled Towny.

And the cheery Nuts looked for Higgs.

They soon found him.

Higgs had come up to the Fourth Form passage, the recipient of a good

many curious glances. Flynn had looked at him, and decided not to give him the tanning he had mentioned. Higgs swaggered along the passage, quite conscious of the sensation he had made. There was none of the sheepishness of a new boy about Master Higgs.

"Hallo!" said Townsend, with great affability. "I've been lookin' for a chance to speak to you, Higgs. Glad to see you here!"

"Jolly glad!" chimed in Topham. "How do you do, dear boy?"

"Got your study yet?" asked Peele.

Higgs shook his head.

"No; I'm looking for one. Which is the best study in the Fourth?"

"Oh, the end study!" said Peele.

"Then that's going to be mine!"

"Oh!"

The Nuts were a little taken aback. They wanted to get on the best of terms with the terrible new junior; but his insolence had the effect of putting their backs up in spite of themselves. But they had no intention of quarrelling with him, if he put their backs up to any extent.

"Been to school before?" asked Peele.

"Of course I have! I was at St. Wode's before I came here."

"Oh, you know all the ropes, then?"

"Of course I do! You won't find any green in my eye!" said Higgs. "I did what I liked in the Fourth at St. Wode's. I'm going to do the same here!"

"Oh!"

"Got anything to say against it?" asked Higgs truculently.

Peele changed his mind about asking the new junior to share his study. Higgs was not likely to be a pleasant study-mate.

"Where's that study you were speaking of?" asked Higgs. "The Form-master told me he would find me a study, but he said I could go into any of them if the fellows there asked me to—I asked him that, you see. The chaps in the best study are going to ask me—see?"

And Higgs grinned at his own astuteness.

"The chaps in the end study won't," said Townsend.

"Won't they? We'll see about that! Who are they?"

"The chap you licked, and his pals!"

Higgs chuckled.

"I don't suppose that chap wants any more," he remarked. "I'll look at the study, and decide whether I want it. That'll settle the point."

"Well, there it is," said Townsend.

Higgs strode along the passage to the end study. Townsend & Co. grinned at one another, and followed him. There was more trouble for Jimmy Silver, and that was a prospect at which the Nuts of Rookwood rejoiced.

CHAPTER 6.

A Warm Reception!

CRASH!

The door of the end study flew open, propelled by Alfred Higgs' heavy boot.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were sitting down to tea. Jimmy did not feel equal to any cricket after his terrific combat with the new junior.

The Fistical Four started up as the door flew violently open. Higgs of the Fourth strode in.

Outside, Townsend & Co. watched, grinning, and a good many more fellows gathered to watch. There was much curiosity in the Fourth as to how the captain of the Form would deal with the truculent intruder.

The Fistical Four fixed their eyes upon Higgs with a deadly glare.

"Is that how you usually come into a study, you pig?" asked Lovell, in a sulphurous tone.

Higgs did not reply. He looked round the study, scanning it, and evidently calculating upon the advantages it offered.

The end study was certainly the best room in the passage. It was

larger than the others, and had two windows, one of which commanded a view of the playing-fields.

Higgs nodded with satisfaction.

"This will suit me," he said.

"Do you mean to say that Bootles has sent you here?" exclaimed Raby. "Why, he can't! We're four, and there's never more than four to a study!"

"There's only two in Peele's study," said Newcome. "You'd better go along and dig in with Peele, Higgs."

"Bootles hasn't sent me here," said Higgs coolly. "I've come on my own. I can go into any study where the fellows ask for me to come!"

"Well, we're jolly well not likely to ask you!" growled Lovell.

"No jolly fear!"

"Clear out!"

"I take it for granted that you ask me," said Higgs. "That's near enough for Bootles. But we can't have five in a study; there's no room."

"Exactly! So you can clear out!"

"Three in a study is quite enough," said Higgs. "Two of you fellows will have to clear out!"

"What!"

"My hat!"

"You can suit yourselves about the two, but two will have to go! I can't be crowded-out by a gang like you!"

"Look here!" bawled Lovell. "Do you think you're coming into this study when we don't want you?"

"I know I am!"

"You can't do it, Higgs!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I recommend you to go along the passage and look for other quarters."

"I'm staying here! I'll have tea with you as it's ready! You can all stay till after tea," said Higgs magnanimously. "After tea two of you will have to go, and you can take your traps with you!"

The Fistical Four could scarcely believe their ears. The egregious Higgs evidently regarded himself as monarch of all he surveyed by right of the

strong hand. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were not exactly the kind of fellows to be bullied out of their study.

"You won't have tea with us!" said Jimmy calmly. "And you won't stay here! Clear off, and close the door after you, please!"

"Do you want another licking?"

"It isn't a question of that. I'm going to tackle you again when I feel fit. At present I don't feel fit."

"Then you'd better dry up!" said Higgs. "Fit or not, you'll get another hiding if I have any of your cheek!"

"Are you going out of this study?" asked Jimmy.

"No fear!"

"Then pile in, you fellows!"

The Fistical Four piled in.

"Here, one at a time!" roared Higgs.

"Two at a time, if you like!"

The chums of the Fourth did not heed.

They grasped Higgs on all sides, and, struggling desperately and hitting out, he was borne to the floor.

Lovell held him with an arm round his neck, and Raby grasped his wrists and imprisoned them, and Newcome stood on his legs.

Higgs struggled in vain.

Jimmy Silver picked up the bowl of treacle that adorned the table.

"Are you going out quietly?" he asked.

"I'll smash you!" roared Higgs, struggling furiously.

Jimmy upended the bowl over his face. The treacle came swamping down in a sticky stream.

"Oh, my hat! Oh, crumbs! Grooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the passage.

Higgs' rugged, furious face disappeared under a flood of treacle. Jimmy Silver calmly rubbed it into his hair and neck.

Higgs gasped and stuttered and spluttered.

"Yurrgh! Gurggh! Yow-ow-ooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, give the spalpeen beans!"

"Rub it in!"

"Are you going now?" asked Jimmy Silver, with cheery calmness.

"Groogh! Gerroogh! Yah! I'll smash you!"

"Obstinate beast!" said Lovell. "That would have satisfied anybody else. The hog doesn't know when he's had enough!"

"Roll him over," said Jimmy.

Higgs, struggling frantically, was rolled over, his nose grinding into the study carpet. Lovell sat on the back of his head, to an accompaniment of horrid gurgles from Higgs.

Jimmy Silver wielded a shovel.

The flat part of the weapon of punishment descended upon Higgs, who was beautifully placed to receive it.

Whack, whack, whack!

Gurgle, gurgle!

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Jimmy Silver was putting his beef into it.

"Have you had enough now, Higgs?" he asked, when his arm tired.

"Gug-gug-gug!"

"He can't speak while I'm sitting on his head," said Lovell. "Give him some more, anyway."

"No, let him speak. I'm tired."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell removed himself from Higgs' head, grasping his ears. He turned Higgs' crimson and dusty face up into view.

"Are you going quietly now, Higgs, or do you want some more?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Wow, wow, wow! I'll go!" stut-tered Higgs.

"Good! Kick him out!" said Jimmy.

Higgs was dragged to his feet and whirled to the door. Four boots were planted behind him at the same moment, and he fairly flew into the passage. The juniors crowded back to give him room to fall, and he went to the floor with a crash.

"You can come back when you want some more," said Jimmy Silver, as he closed the door of the study.

Alfred Higgs did not come back. Truculent as he was, he had had enough, and he did not come back for more.

CHAPTER 7.

Drastic Measures!

JIMMY SILVER was feeling decidedly "groggy" when he came into the Fourth Form dormitory that night. His head was aching, and he had half a dozen aches all over him. His eyes were a beautiful black by this time, and his nose looked twice its natural size. The Fourth Formers could not help grinning when they looked at him. Even his own chums smiled. Jimmy did not feel like smiling himself.

Higgs of the Fourth came into the dormitory with a swagger. Apparently he had quite recovered from his rough handling in the end study.

The other fellows had not tackled Higgs in the manner of the Fistical Four. Higgs had decided on Peele's study, after all, and Peele and Gower, to whom it belonged had not ventured to say him nay. Peele & Co. had been willing, in fact, to pal with the new-comer, and to rejoice in his success if he downed Jimmy Silver & Co. But Higgs was not an agreeable fellow to pal with. He was ready to receive the friendly advances of the Nuts, and tolerate them, but nothing could prevent him from bullying and overbearing.

He burst into a laugh as he looked at Jimmy Silver's disfigured face. Jimmy's ears burned, but he took no notice. Jimmy could have taken a licking as cheerily as he would have given one—from a decent fellow. But to be crowed over was not pleasant, and to be bullied was not to be thought of.

"Well, you'll be a beauty for a week or two, you cheeky cad!" remarked Higgs. "You'll know better next time—what!"

"Next time I'll try to lick you," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, you swanking rotter!" growled Rawson. "Yaroo!"

A back-hander from Higgs sent Rawson spinning. He rolled over a bed with a roar.

"Got any more to say?" asked Higgs, grinning at him.

Rawson was up in a flash and rushing at Higgs.

He knew that he had no chance, but that made no difference. He attacked hotly, and Higgs received a blow fairly on the nose; but poor Rawson went to the floor the next moment. He lay quite dazed.

"Up you get!" grinned Higgs. "You haven't had enough yet!"

"Let him alone!" said Jimmy Silver, as the bully stirred Rawson with his boot—not too gently.

Higgs glared round.

"Do you want some more?" he demanded.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came into the dormitory to see lights out. Rawson was staggering up.

The captain of Rookwood frowned.

"Hallo, fighting in the dormitory!" he exclaimed. "A hundred lines to each! Now get into bed!"

Rawson went to bed without a word. Higgs gave the Rookwood captain a rather truculent look.

"Do you hear me?" said Bulkeley quietly.

"All right," said Higgs.

"And he turned in.

Lights were put out, and the captain of Rookwood left the dormitory. His footsteps had scarcely died away when Higgs was out of bed again.

"Up with you, Rawson, if that's your name!" he called out.

Rawson did not reply.

"Do you hear me?"

"I'm not getting up," said Rawson quietly.

"You jolly well are!" said Higgs, with a chuckle. "I haven't half licked you yet. You called me a rotter!"

"You are a rotter!" said Rawson.

There was a bump on the floor. Rawson, bedclothes and all, landed out of bed in Higgs' powerful grasp.

A match glimmered out.

"Anybody got a candle?" asked Higgs, as Rawson struggled in his tangled bedclothes. "Now, then, buck up, some of you!"

Tubby Muffin squirmed out of bed as Higgs' eye rested on him, and brought a candle-end. Higgs lighted it, and stuck it on a washstand. Rawson was on his feet now, his eyes gleaming.

"You can all sit up and watch," said Higgs. "Now, my pippin, you're going through it!"

Jimmy Silver sat up in bed.

"Go back to bed, Rawson," he said very quietly. "You can't stand up to that fellow. Higgs, if you touch Rawson, you're booked for trouble."

Higgs chuckled.

"I'll show you how I used to run things in the Fourth at St. Wode's!" he said. "I used to make 'em toe the line, you can bet your hat! This chap has called me a rotter. I'm going to lay into him with a slipper. Get across that bed, Rawson!"

Hicks picked up a slipper.

Rawson's reply was a rush at him. They closed, and Rawson went across the bed with a crash, and then the slipper rose and fell.

Jimmy Silver was out of bed with a bound.

"Back up, Fourth!" he shouted.

The juniors hardly needed the bidding.

Whatever Higgs had done in the Fourth Form at St. Wode's, he was not likely to "run things" quite as he wished in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, so long as Jimmy Silver & Co. were members of that Form.

Jimmy was upon him with a spring. The bully of the Fourth turned and

grappled with him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome collared him at the same moment. Flynn and Oswald and Gower fastened on him, and he went down with a crash, with the juniors sprawling over him.

"Pin him!" gasped Jimmy.

Higgs struggled furiously.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "I'll lick any chap here—any two of you—three, if you like!"

"This isn't a fight—this is a ragging," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Lay him face down on the bed."

Higgs crashed on the bed.

"Give me that slipper, Jones."

Jones minor grinned and handed over the slipper.

Then Jimmy repeated the performance of the fire-shovel in the end study, but considerably harder; and as Higgs was protected only by his pyjamas, his sufferings were considerably greater.

With half a dozen angry fellows pinning him down on the bed, he struggled and wriggled in vain, while the slipper rose and fell.

For a few minutes he bore it with gritted teeth, and then his yells rang out.

"You'll have the prefects here," said Townsend.

"Shove his jaws into a pillow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Muffled yells came from the pillow that was jammed over Higgs' extensive mouth. Jimmy Silver lashed with the slipper till his arm ached.

Then he tossed it aside.

"Let him get up!"

Higgs squirmed off the bed, breathless with pain and fury. He choked, unable to find his voice for the moment.

"That's a beginning," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You're a rotten bully, Higgs. You can lick any chap in the Form, and that's admitted. But you won't be allowed to bully any chap in the Fourth—that's a dead cert! Bullying isn't allowed in the Fourth Form at Rookwood!"

"I'll—I'll—"

"Are you going to bed quietly?"

"I'm going to smash you!" roared Higgs, and he made a furious rush at Jimmy Silver.

"Collar him!"

"Down him!"

And the Fourth Formers closed on Higgs again. He was hitting out savagely, and two or three juniors rolled on the floor. But he went down.

"Put him on the bed, spreadeagled, and hold him there, face up this time," said Jimmy Silver. "Whacking's no good for the brute. He's going to stay quietly in bed."

"I won't!" roared Higgs.

"We shall see!"

A dozen pairs of hands jammed Higgs on his back on the bed. Jimmy Silver went to his box and took out a coil of cord. He cut off four lengths with his penknife, the other fellows watching him curiously.

With cheerful coolness, Jimmy Silver knotted a cord round Higgs' ankles and wrists, and tied them to the bedposts.

Then he was released. He wriggled convulsively in his bonds. But Jimmy had done his work well, and he had no chance of getting loose.

"Bed!" said Jimmy.

"You're going to leave him like that?" chortled Lovell.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned in, and Jimmy Silver blew out the candle and followed their example. Higgs wriggled and gasped on his bed. Jimmy had thrown the bedclothes over him. But he was far from comfortable.

"Come and let me loose!" hissed Higgs sulphurously.

"You're staying like that till morning," said Jimmy calmly. "That's the only way to keep you quiet."

"Till morning!" yelled Higgs. "Do you think I can sleep like this, you idiot?"

"I don't care twopence whether you can sleep or not!"

"I'll yell and wake the house!" spluttered Higgs

Jimmy yawned.

"You can suit yourself about that. If you bring a master here, he will want to know why you're tied up. It will mean a licking for you from Bootles, and another licking from us after Bootles is gone, and another tying up with a gag in your mouth. I mean business. You can yell if you like."

Higgs did not yell.

He had already learned that Jimmy Silver was a fellow of his word.

"Look here, I—I'm not going to stay like this!" he growled.

"Good-night!"

"Come and let me loose, and—and I'll go to sleep quietly," mumbled the bully of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He settled down to sleep.

"Will you let me loose?" hissed Higgs.

"No!"

"Look here, Jimmy Silver——"

No reply.

"Peele, come and let me loose, or I'll lick you to-morrow."

Silence.

"Muffin—Muffin, you fat beast, come here!"

Snore.

The bully of the Fourth had to make the best of it. The Classical Fourth, chuckling, settled themselves to sleep. But it was a long time before Higgs could sleep.

Jimmy Silver turned out of bed as the rising-bell clanged out over Rookwood in the summer morning. An imploring look was cast at him from Alfred Higgs' bed.

"Come and loosen me!" Higgs' voice was pleading. "I'm stiff—I'm cramped—I've hardly slept a wink. Let a chap loose!"

Jimmy Silver cheerfully cut the cords. Higgs rolled off the bed stiffly and painfully. He was quite subdued. He did not speak a word till he left the dormitory, followed by the chuckles of the Fourth Formers. For the present, at least, they had succeeded in taming the tartar.

CHAPTER 8.

Stumped!

CRASH!

The door of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood flew open violently. Jimmy Silver, who was coming down the passage, stopped just in time as a flying figure hurtled forth and bumped on the floor.

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy.

It was Peele of the Fourth who had been violently ejected from the study. He sprawled on the floor at Jimmy Silver's feet, gasping.

"Hallo! What's the little game?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yow-ow!"

"Is that a new kind of gymnastics?"

"Groooh!"

Peele sat up, groaning. He seemed hurt.

Jimmy glanced into the study. There were two fellows in the room. One was Gower, Peele's chum, and the other was Alfred Higgs, the new boy in the Fourth. It was evidently Higgs who had hurled the unfortunate Peele into the passage. The big, burly Fourth Former was brandishing a formidable set of knuckles under Gower's nose.

"See that?" he demanded.

Gower backed away.

"Ye-es."

"Do you want to go after Peele?"

"Nunno."

"Then do as you're told."

"Look here, I'm jolly well not going to fag for you!" growled Gower.

"Then out you go!"

"Hands off! Yaroooooh!"

Gower roared as the new junior grasped him. He came flying through the doorway, and crashed upon Peele and sprawled over him. There was a yell from Peele, and a yell from Gower. Jimmy Silver's eyes glinted.

"What's the little game, Higgs?" he asked quietly.

"The cheeky rotters haven't got my tea," said Higgs. "I told 'em specially."

to have my tea ready at six. I'm boss in this study."

"Yow! You rotter!" mumbled Gower. "Do you think we're going to fag for you? Yow!"

Higgs chuckled.

"I rather think you are," he said. "You're not coming back into this study unless you do. I'm going to turn you out, and have Muffin here instead. Muffin knows how to obey orders."

"Don't you think that's rather high-handed?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"You mind your own business!" said Higgs. "I've licked you once, and I'm ready to lick you again."

Peele and Gower picked themselves up breathlessly. They did not venture to enter the study again. They were two to one, but the Nuts of the Fourth were not fighting-men, and Higgs was a formidable antagonist. He was as old and as big as most fellows in the Shell at Rookwood, but he was a dunce, and he was in the Fourth, which was rather hard lines on the Fourth.

Higgs had only been a week at Rookwood, but he had quickly made himself the most unpopular fellow in the school. Even Jimmy Silver, redoubtable fighting-man as he was, had tackled the big bully in vain, and had been licked. In his own study Higgs was monarch of all he surveyed. But his claim to fag his study-mates was resisted, with painful results for Peele and Gower.

"Look here, we're coming in!" said Gower.

"Come in, then," said Higgs. "You'll go out again on your neck! But come in, by all means!"

"Do you think you're going to keep us out of our own study?" howled Peele.

Higgs nodded.

"Yes, I rather think I am," he replied coolly. "I'm ready to chuck you out again. I can't say fairer than that."

Peele gave Jimmy Silver a bitter look.

"That's the kind of Form captain

you are!" he sneered. "You ought to keep that rotter in order."

"I'm going to," said Jimmy. "Cut along to the end study and tell Lovell and Raby and Newcome to come here."

Peele ran up the passage.

"You're going to chuck this, Higgs!" said Jimmy.

"You'd better make me!" sneered Higgs.

"Yes, that's my idea. I'm going into training to lick you," said Jimmy calmly. "But I admit I can't do that—yet. But you're going to be kept in order. You can't fag fellows as if you were in the Sixth."

"I shall jolly well do as I like!"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders. As captain of the Fourth, it was up to him to keep the bully of the Form within limits. He was prepared to do his duty.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome came hurrying along the passage.

"What's the trouble?" asked Lovell.

"Higgs again! He's pitched these chaps out—wants to fag them," said Jimmy. "He's asking for another lesson, and we're going to give him one."

"Hear, hear!" said Raby.

"Collar him!"

The Fistical Four rushed into the study together, Peele and Gower look-on, grinning now.

"One at a time—two at a time, if you like!" shouted Higgs. "Fair play."

"This isn't a fight, this is a ragging," said Jimmy Silver. "It's admitted that you can lick any chap in the Fourth. But you're going to be kept in order, all the same—see?"

Higgs hit out furiously as the Fistical Four closed on him.

But four pairs of hands grasped him, and, powerful as he was, the bully of the Fourth went down on the study carpet with a crash.

"Leggo!" he roared. "I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you! I'll—I'll—Yoop!"

"Sit on him!" said Jimmy.

"Groooh!"

"Come here, Peele!"

Peele came into the study, grinning.

"Have you got a dog-whip, or anything?"

"Here's a cricket-stump."

"That will do. Give him two dozen while we pin him."

"What-ho!" said Peele.

Higgs, struggling desperately, was rolled face downwards on the hearth-rug. Then Peele lashed out with the cricket-stump.

Higgs' roars rang along the passage, and brought a crowd of juniors to the scene. There was a shout of laughter from the Fourth-Formers as they stared into the study.

"Go it!" chuckled Oswald. "Give him beans, Peele!"

Lash! Lash! Lash!

"Yaroo! Leggo! Stoppit! Oh, crumbs!" roared Higgs.

Lash! Lash! Lash!

"Sure, he's been askin' for it!" grinned Flynn. "Give him some more!"

"Twelve!" counted Jimmy Silver. "That's enough. Have you had enough, Higgs?"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Are you going to keep the peace, and let these chaps stay in their own study without fagging them?"

"I'll smash them!" roared Higgs.

"Another dozen!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

Peele lashed away as if for a wager. For a week he had had to stand bullying and ragging from Higgs, and now his turn had come, and he made the most of it. The cricket-stump fairly crashed on the bully of the Fourth.

Higgs yelled, and writhed, and wriggled wildly.

"Stop! Have you had enough, Higgs, or would you like another dozen?"

Higgs groaned.

"Ow-wow-wow! Leave off! I give in! Ow!"

"You'll keep the peace, and make it pax with Peele and Gower?"

"I—I— Oh! Yes! Ow!"

"Good!"

The bully of the Fourth was released. He staggered to his feet, his face crimson with fury. But he had had enough. Twenty-four with a cricket-stump sufficed even for Higgs of the Fourth. It was a good deal more severe than a flogging from the Head.

"There's plenty more to come if you don't mind your p's and q's," said Jimmy Silver warningly, and he left the study with his chums. Peele and Gower followed hastily. They did not want to be left alone with Higgs just then, and the bully of the Fourth, with all the truculence taken out of him for the time being, was left mumbling, and groaning, and muttering vengeance.

CHAPTER 9.

Looking for Peele!

HIGGS of the Fourth was still feeling the effects of his licking when the Classical Fourth came into their dormitory that night. His brow was black and sullen, and he was evidently in a savage temper. Higgs was fond of relating that he had had things all his own way when he was in the Fourth Form at St. Wode's, his previous school. He had expected the same state of affairs to obtain at Rookwood, and that would undoubtedly have been the case but for the Fistical Four. Peele and Gower had done their preparation in No. 4 that evening without molestation—the effect of Higgs' lesson was still lasting. But the bully gave them a dark look in the dormitory.

"You can cackle, you funk," he said to Peele, who was grinning as the bully limped in. "You won't cackle to-morrow!"

"Hallo! Do you want some more cricket-stump?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Higgs grunted, and went to bed without replying.

When the rising-bell clanged out in the morning, and the Classical Fourth turned out, Higgs was feeling better, though he was still in a savage temper.

He cuffed Tubby Muffin as a vent for his irritation, and Tubby promptly yelled:

"Jimmy Silver!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy.

It was a rule with the Fistical Four to "pile in" immediately when Higgs began to bully. It was the only way of dealing with him. And while Tubby Muffin whimpered, the chums of the Fourth collared Higgs, and bumped him on the floor.

Higgs leaped up, and rushed at them, hitting out.

Lovell was knocked fairly over, and Raby followed him, but Jimmy Silver and Newcome grasped the bully of the Fourth, and brought him down again with a crash. Lovell jumped up and grasped a water-jug, and up-ended it, and the cold water swamped the new junior from head to foot. That was enough even for Higgs. There was peace in the dormitory.

"We shall get that brute into good order in the long run," grinned Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four went downstairs. "They must have been pretty soft at St. Wode's to let him play the giddy ox, as he says he did. There isn't room for a bully in the Fourth at Rookwood."

"No jolly fear!" said Lovell emphatically. "The blessed ass has an idea that he can run things as he likes. That's his little mistake."

After dinner that day Jimmy Silver & Co. were thinking of cricket. There was a match between Classical and Modern juniors. Higgs came down to watch the beginning of the game. The Fistical Four were rather surprised to see him there. Higgs had shown no interest in cricket hitherto.

"The duffer isn't a cricketer," said Lovell. "He's only turned up at practice once, and made an ass of himself at the wicket. What does he want here?"

"Well, he can learn something of the game by watching us beat the Moderns," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Beat your grandmother!" said

Tommy Dodd, the Modern junior skipper.

The two skippers tossed for innings, and the Moderns went into the field.

Then Higgs strolled away from the cricket-ground.

As a matter of fact, he had come down to Little Side to see the Fistical Four fairly started before he carried out the plans he had formed for the afternoon. He strode into the School House, and made his way to the study of Adolphus Smythe of the Shell. Without troubling to knock, he pitched the door open and walked in.

There was a haze of cigarette-smoke in the study. Smythe & Co. were amusing themselves in their usual manner. They looked up uneasily at the sight of the bully of the Fourth.

"Can't you knock at the door, by gad?" demanded Adolphus.

"Oh, shut up!" said Higgs. "Where's Peele?"

"He isn't here?"

Townsend and Topham of the Fourth were in the study with Smythe and Howard and Tracy. But Peele, who was usually one of the party of Nuts on a half-holiday, was absent for once.

Higgs looked round with a scowl.

"I'm looking for Peele," he said. "He licked me yesterday with a cricket-stump. What are you grinning at?"

"Was I grinning?" said Adolphus politely.

"Yes, you were, you monkey! I'd mop up the lot of you as soon as look at you!" growled Higgs.

"What beautiful manners!" murmured Adolphus. "Would you mind shuttin' the door after you, Wiggs—I think your name is Wiggs, isn't it?"

And the Nuts chuckled.

"Where's Peele?"

"Keepin' out of your way, I fancy," smiled Adolphus.

"Do you know where he is? I'm going to lick him."

"Yaas!"

"Well, where is he?"

"Find out!"

Higgs looked over the Nuts with a

truculent eye. There were five of them, and they felt safe in numbers. But they were not made of the same stuff as Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Find out—eh?" said Higgs. "Well, I'm going to find out. You're going to tell me."

He grasped Adolphus by the collar, and yanked him out of his chair.

Smythe gasped.

"Grooh! Rescue, dear boys!"

The Nuts piled on Higgs at once. They intended to hurl him forth from the study. But the bully of the Fourth was not to be dealt with by Smythe of the Shell and his nutty friends. He hurled Adolphus to the floor, and put up his hands. The rush of the Nuts was met with tremendous drives. Tracy rolled on the rug, and Howard under the table. Townsend and Topham were seized, and their heads came together with a resounding crack.

"Yow-ow! Leggo! I give in!" yelled Townsend.

"Same here!" gasped Topham. "Oh, leggo!"

Higgs grinned as he pitched them to the floor.

"Anybody want any more?" he demanded, in his most bullying manner.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"By gad!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Now, where's Peele?" asked Higgs advancing on Adolphus, who was sitting on the carpet and gasping.

"Keep off, you beast!" gasped Smythe. "I don't want any row with you! Hands off!"

"Where's Peele?"

"He's gone down to the boathouse," said Adolphus feebly. "He's goin' up the river this afternoon with Gower."

Higgs strode from the study without another word. Adolphus rose, gasping, to his feet.

"Ow! The cheeky cad!" mumbled Adolphus. "Layin' hands on a Shell chap, bai Jove! Jevver hear of such cheek?"

"Horrid rotter!" groaned Townsend.

"He ought to be kicked out of the school! Ow!"

"Awful hooligan!" mumbled Howard.

And the Giddy Goats of Rookwood, feeling very ruffled and wrathful, resumed the little game of nap that Higgs had interrupted. Adolphus taking the precaution to lock the study door first.

CHAPTER 10.

Once Too Often!

"BUCK up!" exclaimed Peele.

There was a crowd of fellows on the raft, and a good many boats on the river. Bright sunshine streamed down on the shining river and the grassy banks. Peele and Gower were launching a boat from the landing-raft, when the burly form of Higgs of the Fourth was seen striding down to the bank.

Peele had a strong suspicion that Higgs would be looking for him that afternoon, while Jimmy Silver & Co. were otherwise engaged, and he had wisely arranged to give the bully of the Fourth a wide berth.

"Shove her out, Gower!" he exclaimed. "Here comes that beast!"

The boat plumped into the water, and Gower jumped in, followed by Peele. Higgs broke into a run, and came down to the edge of the raft, panting.

"Come ashore, you young rotters!" he shouted.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Peele, pushing off with an oar against the raft.

Higgs made a spring.

As the boat floated off, he landed in the middle of it with a crash that made the little skiff jump and rock.

He rolled over in the boat, but he was up in a moment.

"Now, then!" he said grimly.

Gower backed into the bow, and Peele into the stern, in great dismay. They were at the mercy of the bully now.

Higgs grinned as he went along the

boat towards Peele, whose face was almost white.

"You licked me with a cricket-stump yesterday," he remarked pleasantly.

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Peele. "It—it was Jimmy Silver's fault, you know."

"I'm going to make you sorrier," grinned Higgs. "Ain't I cock of the walk in No. 4—what?"

"Ye-es."

"Ain't you going to fag for me when I tell you—eh?"

"No!" howled Peele. "Gower, old man, get that boat-hook!"

"I—I say——" stammered Gower.

"Boat-hook—eh?" said Higgs. "I'll give you boat-hook. Now, then——"

His heavy fist smote Peele.

The Fourth-Former staggered back. His knees caught the gunwale, and with a sharp cry he toppled backwards.

Splash!

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Higgs.

Peele disappeared under the water.

"Clumsy ass!" said Higgs; and he knelt in the boat to help the Fourth-Former in as soon as he came up.

But Peele did not come up.

Higgs waited in vain for his head to appear.

"Good heavens!" stuttered Gower. "You—you silly fool! He's gone down!"

Higgs' face was white now.

A full minute had elapsed, and there was no sign of Peele. The bully of the Fourth knelt, almost frozen with horror.

"Help!" yelled Gower. "Help!"

There was a rush of the fellows on the raft.

"What's the row?" called out Jobson of the Fifth.

"Peele's drowned!"

"He—he can't be drowned!" stammered Higgs. "He—he can't——"

"What's that?" shouted Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, who had just come down to the raft.

"Peele's drowned!" shrieked Gower. "Higgs knocked him into the water, and he hasn't come up!"

"Good heavens!"

The captain of Rookwood stayed only to throw off his cap and kick off his boots. Then he plunged in.

A thick crowd was gathering now, and there was a buzz of excited voices. Bulkeley had disappeared under the water, and a hundred eyes watched for him anxiously.

Bulkeley came up, gasping, and held on to the boat.

But he came alone.

"You can't find him?" called out Jobson.

"No!"

"He—he went in just here," stammered Higgs. "I—I just touched him, and he dropped in just here. He must have gone down like a stone."

Bulkeley filled his lungs, and sank out of view again. Three or four swimmers had gathered at the spot, and they joined in the search.

But it was in vain.

For ten minutes it was kept up, but there was no trace of Peele. Bulkeley clambered on the raft at last, dripping.

A hush fell on the Rookwood crowd.

If Peele was still under the water, there was no doubt that he was dead, and a thrill of horror went through the crowd.

Higgs sat in the boat, almost frozen with horror and fear.

He had not intended harm to come to his victim. He had only meant to bully as usual. He had not struck very hard—he had often hit Peele harder than that. But that unlucky blow had made him a murderer! And what was to happen now?

The wretched junior was trembling in every limb.

Bulkeley's hand fell on his shoulder, and Higgs looked up with a ghastly face. The Rookwood captain's face was hard and grim.

"You did this, I understand, Higgs?"

"I—I didn't; I——"

"He did!" shrieked Gower. "He jumped into the boat to bully Peele, and knocked him into the river. Lots of fellows saw him."

"I saw him!" howled Tubby Muffin.

"And I!" shouted Rawson of the Fourth.

"And I!"

"And I!"

Bulkeley held up his hand for silence.

"You'll come with me to the Head, Higgs," he said. "Keep your eyes open, you fellows, in case he—he comes up. Follow me, Higgs."

Higgs dragged himself from the boat to the raft. Black looks from the Rookwood juniors followed him.

Peele was not popular in the Fourth; he was what Jimmy Silver called a smoky beast, and he was one of the most reckless of the young rascals in Adolphus Smythe's set. But all his faults were forgotten now—now that it seemed clear that his body was hidden beneath the deep waters.

Higgs tramped wearily after the captain of Rookwood. Dripping as he was, Bulkeley made his way directly to the Head's study.

Dr. Chisholm stared as the captain of Rookwood came in, dripping with water, followed by the wretched Higgs.

"What has happened, Bulkeley?" exclaimed the Head, rising to his feet.

"An accident, sir—in the river!" faltered Bulkeley.

"Bulkeley! You do not mean a fatality?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Good heavens! Who is it?"

"Peele of the Fourth, sir. I have brought Higgs to you. Higgs knocked him out of a boat, and he did not come up again. We've searched for him, but—but—"

The doctor's face was white.

"You—you are sure, Bulkeley—"

"There seems to be no doubt, sir. We searched for him for ten minutes. I suppose the—the body must have been caught in an under-current. It will be found farther down the river."

"Good heavens! And you say this boy—"

"Yes, sir—he knocked him in. I suppose the police will want to see him."

Higgs shuddered at the word. Dr. Chisholm bent his eyes upon the wretched, trembling bully of the Fourth.

"What have you to say, Higgs?"

"I—I didn't mean it, sir!" groaned Higgs. "I just gave him a touch—"

"You were attacking that unfortunate boy, Higgs?"

"I—I was going to lick him, sir. I—I—"

"That is enough, Higgs. You will go to your study, and stay there till you are sent for. I will telephone to the police at once, Bulkeley. You had better go and change your clothes."

Higgs dragged himself away to his study.

CHAPTER 11.

Jimmy Silver is suspicious!

"**B**RAVO, Jimmy Silver!"

The leather had gone whizzing, and Jimmy Silver and Lovell were running. One, two, three, four! And loud cheers rang on the cricket-field for the junior Classical captain.

Jimmy Silver reached his wicket before the ball came whizzing in from Tommy Dodd. The news of the accident had not reached the cricket-field, or the crowd gathered there.

But as Tommy Cook took the ball again to bowl, Jobson of the Fifth came dashing up.

"Better chuck that!" called out Jobson.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him from the wicket.

"Hallo! What are you burbling about?" he asked.

"There's a kid been drowned!"

"What?"

"A chap in your Form—young Peele."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at Tommy Dodd, and the Modern skipper nodded at once. After that news, the juniors did not feel inclined to finish the match.

The batsmen and the field came off with anything but cricket in their

minds now. Gower had followed Jobson to Little Side. He was white and excited. The cricket crowd surrounded him, eager for news.

There was a deep growl among the juniors as Gower explained how the fatality had occurred.

"That beast Higgs!" said Lovell, between his teeth. "He's done it now!"

"The awful rotter!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"He—he couldn't have meant it," said Oswald. "Just his beastly bullying, as usual. Poor old Peele!"

"But is it certain?" asked Jimmy. "Peele was a jolly good swimmer!"

"He didn't even come up once," said Gower. "I dare say the knock hurt him. He never showed up once after he went in. Bulkeley went in for him and couldn't find him. They're still looking for him."

There was a rush down to the river at once.

But there was no news.

Nothing had been seen of the unfortunate junior. There were several boats out looking for him. Neville of the Sixth had picked up his cap in the water. That was all.

"Let's go and find Higgs," said Flynn. "Let's tell the thafe of the world what we think of him, anyway."

"He must be feeling pretty bad, without that," said Jimmy Silver soberly.

"It means the sack for him, and prison, too," said Oswald, "and serve him jolly well right. That's why he came and watched us begin the match, so that he could go for Peele without being interfered with."

"The awful beast!"

"Let's go and see him!" shouted Jones minor. "We'll rag him bald-headed!"

The juniors streamed away towards the School House to look for Higgs. Jimmy Silver did not follow. He signed to his chums to stay.

"Look here, the beast ought to be told what we think about him," exclaimed Lovell. "Why don't you come, Jimmy?"

Jimmy shook his head. His brow was wrinkled in thought.

"I'm thinking," he said quietly. "I—I hardly know what to think of this, and that's a fact. It's jolly queer that Peele should be drowned like that, when he was a good swimmer."

"Well, he is drowned, isn't he?" said Raby, with a stare. "Whether it's queer or not, he's drowned, poor chap!"

"I don't know!"

"You don't know?" exclaimed Newcome.

"Look here," said Jimmy. "If Peele's drowned, I'm as sorry for him as anybody. But Peele's an awfully deep chap; you know, he was as cunning as a monkey——"

"Never mind that now!" muttered Lovell.

Jimmy coloured.

"I'd be the last to say a word like that if he's drowned," he said. "But Peele was as cunning as a monkey, and he was a good swimmer. They haven't found the body. Lots of fellows have pitched in off the raft and never been drowned yet. I'm jolly well not satisfied."

Lovell whistled.

"Dash it all, Jimmy! You—you don't think it's a trick?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. It would be just one of Peele's tricks, if it were. I know it sounds rotten to say so, when the chap may be at the bottom of the river all the time. But that's the fact. He's a good swimmer, and he seems to have gone down like a stone. It's jolly queer."

"Higgs had hit him. He might have been too hurt to swim."

"He might, of course; but it's not likely!"

"But—but—what——"

"Let's go and look again," said Jimmy quietly. "Higgs has used him pretty roughly, and he's a bullying beast. Higgs will have a pretty bad time to-day. But if Peele has played a trick to scare Higgs, and get him punished——"

"It would be a rotten trick to alarm us all for nothing," said Newcombe.

"Well, Peele was always playing rotten tricks. Anyway, it's jolly odd for a good swimmer to be drowned without a struggle. Peele was good at swimming under water, too; you've seen him in the swimming-bath."

"That's so!"

The Fistical Four went down to the river again. The boats were still out on the river, some good distance down the stream, searching. On both banks there were Rookwood fellows scattered, looking for traces of the lost junior.

Jimmy Silver knelt on the edge of the plank raft, his chums watching him curiously. The raft was supported on thick wooden posts, and it was eighteen inches above the water at the present level of the river. Jimmy bent his head down and looked under it at the gurgling water beneath.

"Easy enough for a chap to come up under the raft," said Jimmy quietly, as he rose to his feet. "He could have stayed there quite safely; he only had to swim a dozen feet under water to get out of sight when he came up."

"It's possible. But——"

"But he's not there now," said Raby.

"Not now, certainly! Come this way!"

Close by one end of the raft grew a thick clump of willows. Jimmy led the way, and the Fistical Four plunged into the willows.

"Suppose Peele was playing that game," said Jimmy. "Every chap was looking towards the river, of course, as soon as the alarm was given. Nobody'd dream of looking round to see whether Peele was crawling out of the water at the end of the raft into the willows. He could have done it as easy as falling off a form. But it's the only way he could have disappeared, and if he did it, we shall find traces of him in the willows here."

"And here they jolly well are!" exclaimed Lovell.

"My hat!"

The ground was dry and hard; there

had been no rain for a week. But on the dry earth among the willows wet tracks showed clearly, and the twigs were splashed with water. Someone dripping with wet had passed through the willows lately.

The chums of the Fourth exchanged startled glances.

"One of the chaps who went in for him might have come this way!" muttered Newcombe.

"Not likely."

"Then—then——"

"Let's follow the track."

It was easy for the Fistical Four, experienced Boy Scouts as they were, to follow the wet track from the willows.

It quitted the willows, crossed the riverside path, and disappeared into the trees. There it was more difficult to follow.

But the Classical chums had little doubt that they were on the track of the missing junior now, and they pressed on determinedly.

CHAPTER 12.

Higgs Goes Through It!

THE door of Study No. 4 crashed open.

Higgs of the Fourth was in the study.

The wretched bully of the Fourth was crouched in the armchair, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, in an attitude of utter despair and misery.

He looked up as the Classical juniors crowded in, with a face white as death.

He did not speak. He did not need to ask what the Fourth had come for.

"Here the beast is!" said Jones minor.

"Here's the rotter!"

"Have the spalpeen out!"

"Collar him!"

Higgs staggered to his feet. Plunged in misery and remorse, he had not given a thought to what his Form-fellows would be thinking.

The contempt, the scorn, the horror,

and dislike in every face stung him, and a wave of crimson came over his chalky face.

"I—I say——" he stammered.

"You know what you've done," said Oswald savagely.

"I never meant to hurt him," groaned Higgs. "I just hit him——"

"Yes, you bullying beast," said Flynn. "You've just hit a good many fellows who can't stand up to you, and you'd have done a good deal more if Jimmy Silver hadn't stopped you."

"I didn't know he'd fall into the river," groaned Higgs. "How could I know? I—I thought he could swim, too! And—and I'd have pulled him out. I—I didn't mean him any harm."

Oswald relented as he looked at the face of the remorse-stricken bully.

"Let the poor brute alone," he muttered. "After all, he's got to go through it. The police will be here for him soon."

Higgs' teeth chattered.

"You—you think the Head will send for the police?" he stammered.

"They're already sent for!"

"Oh, dear! I shall be arrested!" gasped Higgs. "But—but they can't touch me. I didn't do it on purpose."

"You'll have to prove that, you slinkin' cad!" said Townsend. "How do we know you didn't?"

"It'll be a reformatory for you, my pippin," said Topham, "and that's the best place for you, too!"

Higgs groaned. Now that his bullying had brought this fearful disaster on him, he did not find within his breast the courage to face the music. He was utterly broken up by the horror of his position.

But most of the juniors were not inclined to have any mercy on him. Higgs' hand had been felt too heavily in the Fourth. Even now, he was thinking more about the consequences to himself than about the terrible fate of his victim, as the juniors could see.

"Have him out!" growled Jones minor. "We're not going to have a

murderous beast like that in our quarters."

"No fear!"

"Frog-march him in the quad, bedad!"

The Classics surrounded Higgs, and grasped him on all sides. The bully of the Fourth made no resistance.

His spirit was broken. He would hardly have been recognised now as the fellow who had bullied and "swanked," and who was the terror of the small boys.

With a rush the juniors bore him out of the study, and he went bumping along the passage to the stairs.

Down the staircase he went, with bump on bump.

Mr. Bootles came out of his study as the crowd poured into the lower passage, and he called out sharply:

"Let Higgs go at once! Do you hear? Let him go!"

But for once the Form-master's voice was unheeded by his Form.

Higgs went out into the quad in a rush in the midst of the excited juniors.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "Boys! Do you hear me? What? What? I command you—— Bless my soul!"

Right across the quad went the crowd, unheeding Mr. Bootles' agitated voice. Higgs was struggling now, but his struggles were unavailing.

Mr. Bootles dashed away to the Head's study. The Fourth Form-master felt quite unable to deal with the riot.

Higgs, struggling and shrieking, was being frog's-marched round the quadrangle, when the Head appeared at the big doorway.

"Boys!" thundered Dr. Chisholm.

There was a pause. Higgs took advantage of it to tear himself loose, and he went tearing across the quad towards the House.

"After him!" roared Flynn.

The juniors rushed in hot pursuit.

But fear lent wings to the wretched bully of the Fourth, and he reached

the House steps, and fled behind the doctor. There he stood panting.

Right up to the steps the pursuers rushed, but there they halted. Dr. Chisholm's hand was raised commandingly.

"Cease this riot at once!" he exclaimed. "How dare you!"

"Plaze, sorr, we want to get hold of the thafe," said Flynn. "We don't want the murtherous baste at Rookwood, sir."

"Silence! Higgs will leave Rookwood to-day," said the Head. "He could hardly remain in the school after what he has done. He will leave here in charge of the police!"

"Oh, good!" said Townsend.

"You will not molest him again. Higgs, go into my study and remain there."

The Head followed Higgs into the House, and the crowd broke up with a growl of disappointment. They had by no means finished with Alfred Higgs yet. But into the Head's study even the boldest did not dream of pursuing him.

Dr. Chisholm followed the panting, dishevelled junior into the study.

"You remain here, Higgs," he said. "After what you have done, it is hardly safe for you to be anywhere else. You cannot be surprised at it."

"Oh, sir!" moaned Higgs. "I—I never meant——"

"I understand that. It appears, from inquiries I have made, that you have been much addicted to bullying, Higgs, taking advantage of your age and size," said the Head. "It was mean and cowardly, and it has led you to this. But I will say no more. I trust that your conscience will represent your conduct to you in its true light."

Higgs did not reply. The Head motioned him to a chair, and the bully of the Fourth fell rather than sat in it. Dr. Chisholm sat at his table and resumed his work, taking no further notice of the wretched junior.

Higgs waited, in fearful apprehension, for the heavy steps of the police

in the passage. He knew they were coming. He wondered whether he would be taken away and lodged in a cell. The mere thought of it turned him almost sick. His heart almost ceased to beat as there was a heavy footstep in the passage, and a tap came at the door.

"Come in!" said the Head.

It was Inspector Skipp, of Coombe, who entered the study, with a grave face. Higgs half-rose to his feet, and sank back again, his face white as a sheet. The inspector gave him a curious glance as he turned to the Head.

CHAPTER 13.

The Dead Alive!

"HERE we are again!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were following the track through the wood, their eyes on the ground, watchful for a "sign."

Twice the trail had been lost, but search among the thickets revealed it again—traces of wet boots and dripping water that could not be mistaken.

Jimmy Silver had found it once more, and the chums of the Fourth pushed on again. They had little doubt of what they would find at the end of the trail.

Someone in wet boots and dripping clothes had passed that way, a short time before, and it was pretty certain who that "someone" was.

Jimmy paused suddenly, and held up his hand.

"See him?" whispered Lovell.

"I can hear him—or somebody."

The juniors peered through the thickets into the green glade beyond.

Where the sun fell hotly through an opening of the trees, they saw a suit of Etons laid out to dry. And lying in the grass, in the warm sun, was a junior in his shirt, and they recognised Peele of the Fourth.

"Come on!" said Jimmy. "He can't dodge us without his clobber."

"Ha, ha! No!"

The chums of the Fourth ran into the glade.

There was a startled cry from Peele as he leaped to his feet.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver grimly. Peele gasped.

"I—I— What—what are you chaps doing here?"

"What are you doing here, you spoofing cad?" exclaimed Lovell wrathfully.

Peele shrugged his shoulders. He recovered his coolness at once.

"Drying my clobber," he said coolly. "I don't want to catch cold, you know."

"You rotten spoofer!" exclaimed Raby.

"Well, we've found you," said Jimmy Silver. "Now you can get your clothes on, dry or not, and come back to Rookwood."

Peele started.

"Have you been looking for me?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; and we've found you."

"But—but this is a quarter of a mile from the river. How the thunder did you know——"

"You can't fool Scouts, you ass!" said Newcome. "You left a wet trail behind you."

"Oh!" said Peele. "But—but is it all out? Do the other fellows know I wasn't drowned?"

"Not yet."

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver, with a whistle. "If the Head knew you'd spoofed him on purpose, Peele, you would get something worse than Higgs. Do you know you're reported drowned, and the police are sent for?"

"Good!" said Peele.

"What did you play such a rotten trick for?" demanded Raby.

Peele's eyes glinted.

"I suppose you know what that bully did?" he said, between his teeth. "He knocked me into the river. I got caught in the current, and came up under the raft. If the river hadn't been low, I might have been drowned—if it had been a floating raft I might never have

got out from under it. As it was, there was room to breathe. Then I thought of a dodge of paying out that cad."

"So you sneaked away through the willows while the fellows were all looking towards the river," said Jimmy Silver.

"I see you know all about it," sneered Peele. "I didn't expect you to be nosing about after me. I thought you were playing cricket."

"We chuckled that when we heard the news," growled Jimmy Silver, "and then we thought it over——"

"Well, you've found me," said Peele, "and now you can clear off."

"You're coming back to Rookwood with us. Don't you understand that everybody's feeling rotten about it——"

"Let 'em."

"The Head's sent for the police——"

"That's what I want."

"My hat! But the bobbies will have something to say to you when they know you've been fooling and wasting their time," said Jimmy Silver.

"They won't know. I'm not going back to Rookwood till to-night. They can take Higgs away and put him in a cell—that's his proper place, the ruffianly beast!"

"And what do you think the Head will say to you when you turn up?" exclaimed Lovell.

Peele grinned.

"I've got a yarn all ready," he said coolly. "I got out of the river a mile farther down, crawled ashore, and lay exhausted for hours—savvy?"

"You're going to spin the Head a yarn like that?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I suppose he would believe it," said Jimmy Silver, after some thought. "He wouldn't suspect that you'd played such a trick on purpose. But, as a matter of fact, my pippin, you're not going to do anything of the sort. You're coming back to Rookwood with us. We don't want a scandal in the papers about the school to please you."

"I suppose you're not going to sneak?" sneered Peele

Jimmy shook his head.

"No. You know that. You ought to be shown up for playing such a rotten trick, but we're not going to give you away. But you're not going to keep all Rookwood in a state of anxiety till to-night for the sake of playing a rotten game. We're going to take you back with us."

"I won't come."

"Won't you?" said Jimmy Silver. "Wait till I've cut a switch in the thicket, and I'll see if I can persuade you."

"Look here——"

"Nuff said! You're coming!"

Peele gritted his teeth. The Fistical Four meant business, and resistance on his part was not of much use.

His plans had been cunningly laid; to remain away from the school till night, and then to return with a plausible story to account for his absence. By that time he hoped that Higgs of the Fourth would be locked up in the police station, and after that the bully was not likely to be allowed to return to Rookwood. That the affair would get into the newspapers and cause endless unpleasant discussion did not matter to Peele; he had not given that aspect of the case a thought. But it mattered very considerably to Jimmy Silver & Co.

Slowly the defeated schemer resumed his clothes, already half-dried. The Fistical Four watched him grimly.

"You're spoiling a first-class jape," growled Peele. "Think of that bullying brute being locked up——"

"And think of the disgrace to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, hang that!"

"Are you ready?" growled Lovell.

"Look here, I can't come back with you. If it comes out that you found me here, it will prove it's only a yarn about my being carried down the river."

"Well, don't tell any lies, then," suggested Raby.

Peele panted.

"You thumping idiot! Can I tell the

Head it's a trick—that I've alarmed the whole school for revenge on Higgs?"

"Ha, ha! I shouldn't advise you to tell him that!" chuckled Raby. "I know what would happen next—the birch and the boot."

"You fellows go on first, and I'll follow."

"No fear!" said Jimmy Silver promptly. "You're rather too downy, Peele; we can't trust you. You'd dodge, and stay away. You know we can't go to the Head and give you away!"

"Let me alone, hang you!"

"We're going to see you as far as the gates of Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "After that, you can please yourself. But you're not keeping up this game a minute longer. Come on! Take his other arm, Lovell!"

"You bet!"

And Peele, scowling savagely, was led away in the midst of the Classical chums, his little game fairly nipped in the bud.

CHAPTER 14.

A Surprise for the School!

"BY gad!"

Adolphus Smythe of the Shell almost fell down.

The great Adolphus was sauntering in the quadrangle with his friends, discussing the untimely fate of Peele of the Fourth. Adolphus had given up hope of ever seeing again a pound that Peele owed him, as he stated somewhat sadly.

And all of a sudden his eyeglass dropped from his eye, and his eyes almost bulged from his head, as the subject of the discussion walked in at the gates.

"Peele!" yelled Howard.

"Alive!" gasped Adolphus.

"Great Scott!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed Peele in. Now that he was fairly within the gates of Rookwood, however, they were done with him. They left it to him to make any explanation he pleased, so

long as he apprised the Head at once that he was alive and well.

Peele grinned sourly at his startled friends.

"I—I thought you were drowned!" stammered Townsend.

"How the thunder did you get out of the river?" demanded Adolphus. "I say, the inspector's just come from Coombe; he's with the Head."

"Carried away down the river, crawled out, and just got back," said Peele coolly.

"By gad!"

"Carried away down the river under water—what!" grinned Townsend. "That may do for the Head, Peele! You spoofin' rotter!"

"Rotten game to alarm us all for nothin'!" said Smythe.

Peele sneered.

"I suppose you were awfully cut up—what!" he said.

Adolphus nodded.

"Yaas. I was thinkin' I should never get the quid you owe me, dear boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele grinned, and walked on to the House. There were exclamations of astonishment on all sides as he was sighted.

Fellows rushed to look at him, and speak to him, and clap him on the back. Never had there been such a sensation in the old school.

Mr. Bootles spotted him from his study window, and rushed out to meet him as he came into the House.

"Peele!" he exclaimed. "Can I believe my eyes? Thank goodness you are safe, my dear boy! Come with me to the Head at once!"

"I hope you haven't been alarmed, sir?" said Peele demurely.

"I have been terribly alarmed, Peele! Come with me!"

The agitated Form-master led the junior away to the Head's study. They left a crowd in a buzz behind them.

"Aloive, after all!" said Flynn. "And, sure, we've ragged Higgs for

nothing. I suppose Higgs won't be sacked now?"

"What rotten luck!" said Jones minor. "P'raps the Head will sack him all the same, though," he added hopefully.

"But how did he get out of the river?" exclaimed Oswald. "Do you know anything about it, Jimmy Silver?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Least said soonest mended," he remarked. "Peele is a deep beast."

"But wasn't he drowned intirely?" ejaculated Flynn.

"Ha, ha! He doesn't look like it!"

"Then he was after spoofing us!" growled Flynn. "It's a dirty trick, and just like Peele! I take back all the nice things I've been sayin' about him since he was drowned—I mane, since he wasn't drowned."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver clapped Tommy Dodd on the shoulder.

"Time to finish the match," he remarked. "Shall we go on?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tommy Dodd. "It's jolly queer about Peele! Did you fellows find him?"

But Jimmy Silver did not appear to hear that remark.

The Classics and Moderns proceeded to Little Side, and the interrupted cricket match was soon in full swing again. The shadow of tragedy, which had hung so darkly over the old school for an hour, had lifted.

CHAPTER 15.

A Flogging for Two!

HIGGS of the Fourth had heard the excited buzz from the quadrangle without being aware of what it portended.

The wretched junior was standing in the Head's study, listening dully to the talk between Dr. Chisholm and the inspector. His fate was being decided—whether he should be taken into

custody, and lodged in a cell at Coombe Police Station, or allowed to remain under surveillance at Rookwood for the present.

A tap at the door interrupted the Head.

"Come in!" he said, rather sharply. Mr. Bootles entered the study.

"Pray excuse my interrupting you," said Mr. Bootles. "I have news—startling news!"

"The body is found?" asked Inspector Skipp.

"Peele is found," said Mr. Bootles. "He was not drowned!"

Dr. Chisholm started to his feet.

"He is alive!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir; he has returned, safe and sound. Come in, Peele!"

Peele entered the study.

Higgs stared at him, open-eyed, his jaw dropping.

From where he stood he had seen Peele in the passage as Mr. Bootles opened the door, and he staggered at the sight of him. For a moment he almost fancied that it was the ghost of his victim that had returned to haunt him.

"Alive!" he muttered. "Alive!"

He sank helplessly into a chair.

His eyes were glued on Peele, as if he could scarcely believe their evidence. The load of guilt and terror was lifted from his heart.

"Thank heaven, Peele, that you have returned!" said the Head. "But an explanation is required. I was given to understand that you sank in the river, and was not seen again!"

"Yes, sir," said Peele. "I—I was partly stunned, I think, by the blow Higgs gave me!"

"I hardly touched him, sir!" exclaimed Higgs.

Higgs was almost himself again now.

The Head made a gesture.

"Silence, Higgs! Tell me precisely what happened, Peele?"

There was a significant tone in the Head's voice, which sent a shiver through the scheming Fourth Former. Dr. Chisholm's keen eyes were reading

his face. He answered as calmly as he could.

"I was carried away by the current, sir. I—I think I must have lost my senses. I—I was carried a long way down the river; but I got hold of some rushes at last, and pulled myself out. Then—then I lay exhausted for some little time, and—and at last I was able to walk home."

"That is a very extraordinary story, Peele."

Dr. Chisholm turned to Mr. Bootles.

"Mr. Bootles, will you kindly call Bulkeley?"

"Certainly, sir."

The Fourth Form master quitted the study, and returned with the Rookwood captain.

Bulkeley had already heard of Peele's return, and he gave the Fourth Former a very curious look as he came in.

"Bulkeley, I think you mentioned to me that you entered the river to search for Peele almost immediately after he sank?"

"Yes, sir," said Bulkeley.

"Would it have been possible for Peele to be carried away by the current without being seen?"

"Impossible, sir. Fifty fellows were watching the river."

"I—I was under water!" stammered Peele.

"You were carried away down the river under water to such a distance that you could not be seen from the raft?" said the Head.

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"Impossible," said Bulkeley; "impossible without being drowned."

"That is my opinion," said the Head ominously. "As Peele evidently did not sink as was supposed, Bulkeley, how would you account for his getting out of the river unseen by anyone?"

Bulkeley reflected.

"He must have come up under the raft—the landing-stage, sir," he replied. "He could easily have held on there and called for help."

"Apparently he held on there, and did not call for help."

"It certainly looks like it, sir."

"Did you look under the landing-stage?"

"Yes, after I'd been in for him. He was gone by that time." Bulkeley's brow darkened. "He must have been playing a trick. It was impossible for him to float down the river far enough to be out of sight when he landed without being drowned if he was under water. It was a trick."

"So I imagined," said the Head, in a rumbling voice.

Peele was deadly pale.

The game was up now, with a vengeance.

"Well, Peele," said the Head, turning to the junior, whose knees were knocking together, "what have you to say?"

"I—I——" The lies died on Peele's lips. "I—I got under the raft, sir, and—and then into the willows, sir. I—I——"

"You deliberately threw the whole school into a state of alarm for a miserable trick!" thundered the Head.

"It—it was Higgs' fault. He knocked me in," mumbled Peele. "I—I wanted to pay him out——"

"I think I understand."

Dr. Chisholm turned to the inspector, who was listening grimly.

"I trust you will excuse me, Inspector Skipp, for having given you the trouble of coming here for nothing. As you see, it was the result of a wretched trick played by this boy, and you may be assured that his punishment will be exemplary. I apologise for having troubled you."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Skipp politely, and he took his leave.

"Bulkeley, will you be kind enough to send the sergeant here?"

"Certainly, sir."

Bulkeley left the study. Then the Head's grim frown turned upon Peele and Higgs. The two unhappy delinquents stood with knocking knees.

"Peele, you have been guilty of a most unfeeling deception. You have caused anxiety and alarm for no

reason but to gratify your revengeful feelings."

Peele mumbled.

"Higgs, you are the original cause of the trouble. You acted brutally towards your Form-fellow, and probably placed him in danger of his life."

"I—I——"

"I shall flog both of you!" continued the Head. "You, Higgs, for brutality, and you, Peele, for deceit and impertinence. I shall endeavour to make your punishment severe enough to be a lasting lesson to you."

Sergeant Kettle entered the study, and the Head took up his birch. Higgs was the first to suffer.

Outside, in the passage, a group of interested juniors listened to the swishing of the birch, and the gasps and howls of the bully of the Fourth. The doctor had said that he would endeavour to make the punishment severe; and he certainly succeeded.

The Head's arm was aching a little when he had finished.

"Now you may go," he said. "Higgs, I shall observe you in future, and I warn you to take care."

"Wow-wow!" mumbled Higgs.

The two juniors quitted the study. They blinked at one another in the passage, but they had not even enough energy left to call one another names. It was a lesson neither of them was likely to forget for a long time to come.

That evening there was peace in Study No. 4.

Over their preparation, Higgs and Peele groaned in chorus, both of them realising dismally that the way of the transgressor is hard.

CHAPTER 16.

In Training!

BIFF! Bash! Bump!
Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, was busy when Lovell and Raby and Newcome came into the study.

The punching-ball was suspended midway between ceiling and floor, and Jimmy Silver, in his shirt-sleeves, was pounding at it with terrific energy.

Jimmy was in great form.

At every "biff" it looked as if the punch-ball would be torn away from the hook either in the floor or the ceiling. He did not pause as his chums looked in at the open doorway.

"I say, Jimmy——" began Lovell.

Biff!

"There's news," said Raby.

Bash!

"Mornington's coming back," said Newcome.

Crash!

"Do you hear, fathead?" demanded Lovell. "That cad Mornington's coming back. I've just heard it from Topham. He's coming this afternoon, too!"

Biff!

"What do you think of this one with the left?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, blow!"

"Suppose that punch-ball were Bully Higgs!" said Jimmy. "And suppose I got in the left like this——"

Crash!

Jimmy Silver got in the blow with terrific vim, and with the effect of tearing the punch-ball away from its fastenings.

There was a roar from Lovell & Co. as the detached ball smashed upon them. Lovell caught it with his nose, and staggered back, throwing out his hands wildly, and his elbow caught Raby under the chin, and the back of his hand on the other side smote Newcome fairly in the eye.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Yaroop!"

"Oh, you ass! My nose——"

"My eye! Yooohh!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You shouldn't stand in the way, you duffers! You never know where a punch-ball's going!" said Jimmy Silver chidingly. "What do you chaps think of that one with the left?"

Suppose Higgs got it fairly on the chivvy——"

The Co. did not tell Jimmy Silver what they thought of his straight left. They rushed into the study, and hurried themselves upon him.

"Here, I say, hold on! Leggo! Wharrer you at? Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver descended on the study carpet with a concussion that caused the dust to rise.

The yell that rose from Jimmy Silver could have been heard at the end of the passage.

"Yah! You silly asses! What the thunder——"

"Look at my nose!" roared Lovell. "Give him another!"

"Look at my eye!" shrieked Newcome.

Bump! Bump!

Jimmy Silver struggled desperately in the grasp of his incensed chums. Accidents would happen, and could not be helped; and that accident had appeared quite comical to Jimmy Silver until the wrathful Co. collared him.

"Leggo! I'll give you my left that I'm keeping for Higgs!" he yelled.

"Give him another!"

Jimmy Silver hit out. Lovell caught the left with his chest, and sat down. Then Raby caught the right, and sat down, too. Newcome was pitched over them, and Jimmy Silver made a jump for the grate, and colared the poker. Three wrathful juniors jumped up, and rushed at him, and jumped back again just in time from the brandished poker.

"Keep off, you asses!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "What are you going for an old pal for, you chumps?"

"Look at my nose——"

"Well, it is a picture," agreed Jimmy Silver. "I dare say Higgs' nose will be like that when I've done with him. You ought to be glad."

"Glad!" hooted Lovell. "Put that poker down!"

"Not till you make it pax," grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Look at my eye——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Newcome!

Higgs' eye is going to be worse than that."

"You—you fathead!"

"Blessed if it's worth a chap's while to stand up for his study," said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "Here am I training like a Trojan, to get into form and lick Higgs, and that's the way you back me up!"

"You dangerous ass——"

"Here's a new fellow come to Rookwood, too big for any chap in the Fourth to tackle, and starting as a bully and an all-round beast," pursued Jimmy Silver. "I'm cultivating a straight left for his special benefit. You ought to back me up like pals. Blow your silly nose!"

"Groogh! You lunatic——"

Lovell dabbed his nose. It was very red. For the moment he was quite incapable of appreciating the beauties of the Jimmy Silver left, even if that left was destined to knock out the bully of the Fourth.

"Now help me fix up that punch-ball again," said Jimmy Silver.

"You fix it up again, and we'll brain you!" said Raby, in concentrated tones. "You can play the giddy ox in the gym."

Jimmy Silver snorted.

"Look here, do you want me to lick Higgs, or don't you?"

"I'd rather he licked you at the present moment, you chump!" growled Newcome. "I'd give a bob to lick you, you ass!"

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Think of the state I shall be in after I've licked Higgs."

The argument was not without its effect upon the Co. If Jimmy Silver did succeed in licking the redoubtable Higgs, there was no doubt that he would be in a very parlous condition when he had finished.

"Do you think you can do it?" said Lovell.

"I'm going to try. Somebody's got to put the beast in his place, and the fellows all say it's up to me, as captain of the Fourth."

"Well, so it is."

"Quite right."

"Well, then, back a fellow up, instead of grousing because you happen to get a thick nose," said Jimmy Silver warmly. "I mayn't have any nose left at all when I'm through with Higgs."

"Very likely!" grinned Raby.

"If you chaps were really keen about it, you'd back me up no end. Suppose you stand up to my left, Raby, and see how it goes——"

"Yes—I don't think!" said Raby.

"Lemme try it on you, Lovell."

"I'll try the tongs on you, if you do!"

"And that's what you call backing a fellow up," grunted Jimmy Silver. "I've been cultivating that left for a week, and I've got to try it on somebody. I don't want to tackle Higgs and get licked again. Whom shall I try it on—that's the question?"

"Mornington's coming back this afternoon," said Lovell. "We came here to tell you. I thought the cad had left Rookwood for good. Try it on him when he comes. It will do him good."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Mornington couldn't stand up to me for two seconds. And I can lick any chap in the Fourth excepting Higgs."

"Try Smythe of the Shell."

"Pooh! It would nearly kill him!" sniffed Jimmy Silver. "Look here, I've got to put it to the test before I tackle Higgs. What about having a row with a senior?"

"Eh?"

"Not the Sixth, of course; I couldn't whop a Sixth Former——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But a chap in the Fifth," said Jimmy Silver seriously. "If I could lick a Fifth-Form chap, I can take it that I'm able to lick Higgs."

"Why, you ass——" exclaimed Lovell.

"There's Bailey—he's a bit too tough, perhaps. What about Bingham?"

"Bingham could eat you, you ass?"

"I don't know. Bingham walloped young Muffin with a cricket-stump yesterday because he burnt his toast. He

fags the kids who'll let him. It ought to be stopped, oughtn't it? Well, I'm going to stop it and practise my left on Bingham!"

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

Jimmy Silver slipped on his jacket.

"Come on!" he said briskly.

"Where?"

"To look for Bingham."

"You thumping ass——"

"Bow-wow!"

Jimmy Silver left the study, and headed for the Fifth Form passage, and his chums, in dismay, followed him.

Jimmy Silver was evidently in deadly earnest, and the Co. were prepared to back him up—to the extent of carrying him away when Bingham of the Fifth had done with him.

CHAPTER 17.

Put to the Test!

HIGGS of the Fourth was in the passage, and he scowled at the Fistical Four as he passed.

Higgs was on the worst of terms with the Classical Co.

Being a tremendously big and powerful fellow, as big and nearly as old as most fellows in the Shell, Higgs had matters very much his own way in the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver had tackled him on his first day at Rookwood, and had been hopelessly licked. And as Jimmy was the most redoubtable fighting-man in the Lower School, Higgs was cock of the walk afterwards.

But the bully of the Fourth did not have matters all his own way. The Fistical Four stood together in that. When Higgs became too unpleasant they were accustomed to tackling him in concert, and ragging him till he saw reason. So Higgs was far from being monarch of all he surveyed, much to his indignation and wrath.

Having established the fact that he could lick any fellow in the Form, he had expected to reign supreme. He was

prepared to tackle any member of the Fistical Four, and "whop" him without mercy. But the four together handled even the burly Higgs with ease, and checked his proclivities to a very great extent.

But that position of affairs did not satisfy Jimmy Silver.

The whole Form looked to him to put Higgs in his place, and Jimmy felt that it was up to him to do it.

For a long time now the captain of the Fourth had been training specially for the purpose of "taking on" the burly Higgs once more.

Once the bully of the Form had been licked in a fair fight, matters would be very much more peaceful and comfortable all round.

But it was a tremendous task, and Jimmy knew it. He had heaps of pluck, but he was not nearly so big nor so strong as the overgrown Higgs, and he had to make up for the deficiency by training and science.

"I hear you're going into training?" Higgs remarked, with a sneer, as the Fistical Four came along.

Jimmy nodded cheerily.

"Yes, that's so."

"Thinking of tackling me—what?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, I'm ready to lick you any time you like," said Higgs, "and I may as well begin. Put 'em up!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Not quite ready yet," he said calmly. "I'll let you know the date of your licking. You're not in a hurry, I suppose?"

"I'm jolly well going to knock some of the cheek out of you!" said Higgs, in his most bullying tone.

Jimmy backed away a pace.

"I'll give you the date, if you like," he said amicably. "Next Wednesday, if that will suit you."

"Next Wednesday, or any time you like!" jeered Higgs. "But I'll give you a thick ear now to go on with!"

"Hands off, you silly ass!" growled Lovell.

Higgs was advancing, with his big fists up. But the Fistical Four did not

stand on ceremony with Higgs. They collared him together, and bumped him on the floor.

They went on their way, leaving the bully of the Fourth sprawling.

Jimmy Silver led the way cheerily to the Fifth Form passage.

Outside Bingham's study door he paused, and his chums attempted to reason with him once more; but they reasoned in vain.

Jimmy had thought the matter out.

Bingham was a senior of the Fifth, and a powerful fellow. By the kind of stand he could make against Bingham, Jimmy expected to judge his form in the coming encounter with Higgs. Even the burly Higgs was no match for the Fifth Former.

Jimmy was in the pink of condition, and extremely pleased with his left. He hoped to give a good account of himself with Bingham, and, once his mind was made up, wild horses could not have stopped him.

He thumped at the door, and threw it open.

Bingham of the Fifth was in his study, and Muffin of the Fourth was also there.

Muffin was on his knees, making toast at the fire. The Fistical Four frowned at the sight. For the Fifth to fag the Fourth was an unparalleled "cheek," and only timid fellows like Muffin would have endured it for a moment.

There was a smell of burning in the study, and Bingham was assisting Muffin in the art of making toast with the business end of a cricket stump.

"You clumsy, silly young ass!" Bingham was remarking, as the door opened. "Don't you know how to make toast?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"What are you making that row for, you fat beast?"

"Yow! That stump hurts! Yow!"

"Stop that!" said Jimmy Silver authoritatively.

The Fifth Former swung round.

"What do you fags want here?" he snapped. "Get out of my study!"

The Fistical Four came right in. Lovell, at a sign from Jimmy Silver, closed the door. Bingham stared at them.

"What's the little game?" he demanded.

"You're the little game," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "You've been fagging the Fourth, Bingham!"

"You cheeky young ass——"

"It's got to stop!"

"Got to?"

"Yes!"

"And who's going to stop it?" grinned the Fifth Former.

"I am!"

"And how are you going to stop it, you cheeky, scrubby, inky little beast?"

"I'm going to lick you!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put that toast in the fire, Muffin!" said the captain of the Fourth

"But—but——" stammered Tubby Muffin, Bingham——"

"Never mind Bingham!" said Jimmy. "I'm looking after Bingham! Get out, and take that toast with you!"

Lovell took Tubby Muffin by the ear, and led him to the door. Muffin had no choice about going.

Bingham jumped forward. Jimmy Silver jumped in his way.

"Take the toast, Muffin!"

Lovell shoved the toast into Muffin's grubby hands, and pushed him out of the study, slamming the door after him.

Bingham had no chance to interfere. He was already struggling with Jimmy Silver.

The Fifth Former was a head taller than Jimmy, and in a struggle even the hardy and athletic captain of the Fourth did not have much chance; but his chums promptly piled in and dragged Bingham off.

"That isn't the game!" said Jimmy, a little breathlessly. "If you're looking for a fight, I'm your man. No bear-hugs, please!"

"Why, I—I—I'll smash you!" splut-

tered the Fifth Former, crimson with rage. "I'll smash you to smithereens!"

"Go ahead!"

The enraged senior went ahead at once. He rushed on Jimmy Silver, hitting out with both fists.

Jimmy had to give ground before the heavy rush; but his hands were up, and he guarded well.

The Fifth Former drove him right round the study table without, however, getting a single blow home upon his face.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome stood with their backs to the door, looking on with breathless interest.

"You little beast!" gasped Bingham, pausing from sheer want of breath.

"Go it, Jimmy!" sang out the Co. "He's got bellows to mend."

Jimmy "went it."

He made a sudden onslaught as the senior paused breathlessly, and Bingham, much to his astonishment, found himself driven back.

Jimmy's right caught him under the chin, and he staggered. He hurled himself forward furiously, and then the famous "left" came into play. It seemed to Bingham of the Fifth that a mule's hind leg had struck him. With a terrific crash the Fifth Former went down on his back.

"Bravo!" roared Lovell.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver stood panting a little, waiting for his formidable adversary to rise. But Bingham was not in a hurry to rise. He lay on the carpet, gasping, and blinking dazedly at Jimmy Silver. His chin felt as if it were no longer there. He seemed unable to realise at first that he had been knocked down by a Fourth Former.

"Groogh!" he gasped at last. "Ow, ow! Why, you cheeky little beast—"

"Get up and have some more," chortled Raby. "This is what comes of fagging the Fourth!"

Bingham sat up dazedly.

"You little rotter, I don't fight with

kids in the Fourth!" he spluttered. "I'll jolly well lick you with a cricket-stump for your confounded cheek!"

He scrambled up at last, and plunged at the cricket-stump.

Jimmy backed to the door.

"If you've had enough I'll go," he said. "Mind, no more fagging the Fourth after this. The end study doesn't allow it."

"Get out!" roared Bingham.

He flourished the stump, and the Fistical four got out. They did not want to argue with the stump at close quarters. Lovell slammed the door with terrific force, to show the whole of the Fifth Form at Rookwood how much the end study cared for them generally.

And, in a gleeful mood, the Fistical Four went in to tea in the end study. Matters were looking up for that famous study.

CHAPTER 18.

The Return of Mornington!

MORNINGTON stepped from a big motor-car at the gates of Rookwood. And there was a rush of Townsend, Topham, Peele and Gower to meet him. The Nuts of Rookwood had not forgotten Mornington, and they were glad to welcome him back to the school.

Mornington shook hands with them. "Jolly glad you're back!" said Townsend.

"I've had a holiday," said Mornington, as he sauntered across the quadrangle with his dear pals. "But I decided to come back to Rookwood. My guardian wanted me to, and he's not a bad sort. I decided to come."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Topham.

"I've got to report to Bootles," said Mornington. "I'll join you in the study when I've finished with him."

"Right you are! We'll have tea ready."

Mornington tapped at the door of Mr. Bootles' study, and entered.

Mr. Bootles laid down his book.

"Ah! You have returned, Mornington," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Bootles shook hands with the junior.

"I hope, Mornington, that you have come back to Rookwood with good resolutions," he said.

"I shall be more careful than I was, sir," said Mornington.

"I am glad to hear you say so. Let me see. You will share Peele's study. I believe Peele is a friend of yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well! You may go. I trust there will be no more of the unpleasantness that marked your career here on a previous occasion. You have my best wishes, Mornington."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mornington left the study. His manner to Mr. Bootles had been very respectful, and the Form-master felt relieved. Mornington seemed to have changed considerably, and for the better, and Mr. Bootles was very glad to see it. Mornington had given him trouble enough.

Outside in the passage a bitter sneer crossed Mornington's lips as he walked away.

He had certainly changed. He had learned that he could not have matters his own way at Rookwood. That there were fellows there who did not care twopence for his wealth, and that so far as the masters were concerned he was simply a junior schoolboy who was expected to toe the line with the rest. Mornington was no fool, and he had learned his lesson. But the change was only outward; at heart he was still the insolent, overbearing, purse-proud "bouncer" who had put up the backs of the Rookwood Fourth.

There was a chorus of welcome as he entered Peele's study.

There was a handsome spread on the table, and Townsend and Topham were in the study, with Peele and Gower. Higgs, who also shared the study, was

not present, and the Nuts were glad of it. They did not pull well with the truculent Higgs.

"Welcome home, dear boy!" said Townsend. "How did you get on with Bootles?"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders. "I've had a lecture," he said.

"You didn't check him?" asked Topham.

"No fear. I've learned some things," said Mornington coolly. "I know now what I can do, and what I can't do. I'm goin' to have exactly the same kind of time as I did before, but I'm goin' to be more careful about it. What's the good of cheeking a Form-master and gettin' licked?"

"No good at all," said Peele. "But you didn't seem quite to see it before."

"I can see it now. Is Jimmy Silver still cock of the walk in the Fourth?"

"No jolly fear!" said Townsend. "There's a new chap here—chap named Higgs—a regular prize-fightin' beast! He's licked Silver!"

Mornington's eyes gleamed.

"My hat! That's good news!"

"Still up against that crowd—what?" asked Peele, with a grin.

"More than ever. I'm goin' to have a try for captain of the Fourth!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

"Not much in your line," said Topham. "You'd have to grind at cricket."

"I'm goin' to grind at cricket, and beat Jimmy Silver at his own game!"

"Ahem!"

"You think I can't do it?"

"Ahem!"

"Well, you'll see," said Mornington. "I've got some surprises in store for the Fourth, I can tell you. That's one of them."

"Well, we'd all like to see Jimmy Silver downed," said Gower. "A chap can't smoke a cigarette in peace, or have a little game of banker."

"What's this fellow Higgs like?" asked Mornington as he sat at the tea-

table, assiduously looked after by the devoted Nuts.

"A rotten, beastly bully!" growled Peele. "He shares this study, too. You'll have to be rather civil to him."

"If he's up against Jimmy Silver he's on our side."

"Ye-e-es; but he's a regular beast, you know. He expects a fellow to fag for him in his own study. I shouldn't wonder if he wants to fag you."

The door was thrown open, and Higgs of the Fourth came in. The tea-party exchanged uneasy glances.

"Hallo! Tea ready?" said Higgs. "Well, I'm ready, too. Make room for a chap!"

Peele & Co. had hoped to be free of Higgs while the little party was on. But they did not venture to dispute the lordly will of the Form bully.

"Haven't you got a chair for a fellow?" grunted Higgs. "Didn't expect me to tea—what? Hallo! You're Mornington, I suppose?"

"I'm Mornington."

"A big pot—what?"

"Yes."

"Well, you won't put on any airs in this study," said Higgs. "You'll make my toast at tea-time same as the others—see?"

"I shall do nothin' of the sort!"

"You won't, by gum! Give me that chair, to begin with!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"You can have my chair, Higgs," said Peele.

Higgs snorted.

"I didn't ask you for your chair. I asked this cheeky young cad for his chair. Now, then, up you get, Mornington!"

Mornington did not move.

"Did you hear me?" roared Higgs.

"Yes."

"Are you getting up?"

"No."

"Then here goes!" grinned Higgs, and he grasped the back of the chair and swung it away, and Mornington went with a crash to the floor.

CHAPTER 19.

Turned Out!

THE tea-party in Peele's study were all on their feet now—with the exception of Mornington. Mornington was on his back. Higgs looked down at him with a grin. Mornington's face was thunderous as he sprawled on the study carpet.

"Up you get," continued Higgs. "No slacking in this study!"

Mornington picked himself up with his lips hard set and his eyes glittering. Higgs took the chair he had vacated, and sat in it at the table.

"Now, then, where's the toast?" said Higgs. "You can make me some toast, Mornington. It will teach you to know your place in this study. Now, sharp's the word!"

Mornington sprang to the fender.

Higgs, under the impression that he was in a hurry to make the toast, chuckled. But it was not toast that Mornington was thinking of.

He clutched up the tongs from the fender, and whirled round on Higgs.

"Here, look out!" yelled Peele.

Right at the bully of the Fourth the enraged Mornington rushed, with the heavy tongs brandished over his head. The Nuts watched him in terror.

Higgs' chuckle died away.

"Put those tongs down!" he roared. "Oh, my hat!"

Higgs dodged out of the chair just in time as the tongs came down. If the blow had reached him he would have been stunned. The tongs crashed on the chair and split it. Higgs' face was pale as he backed away.

"You mad young idiot!" he gasped.

"Morny!" gasped Topham.

"Hold on, old chap——"

"Stop it!" yelled Higgs. For Mornington, unheeding his alarmed pals, was still making for him with the tongs. Higgs dodged round the table, and the tongs came down with a crash among the crockery.

"Put those tongs down!" shrieked Higgs. "I'll smash you!"

Crash!

The tongs swept the clock from the mantelpiece as a third blow missed.

Higgs was dodging wildly about the study now. The rage and fury in Mornington's face startled and terrified him. The Nuts crowded back out of the way, still more terrified than Higgs. The heavy weapon reached Higgs at the fourth swipe, catching him across the shoulders. The burly Fourth Former reeled to the floor, and crashed down on his hands and knees.

Mornington was upon him the next second.

He grasped Higgs by the collar with his left hand and whirled him over, and brandished the tongs over his terrified face. Higgs put his hands before his eyes involuntarily.

"Don't!" he shrieked. "Don't!"

"You hound!" said Mornington.

"Don't, you fool! Do you want to brain me?"

"I'd brain you as soon as look at you," said Mornington between his teeth. "Lie here, you hound! I'll smash you if you move!"

Higgs did not move. He dared not.

"Morny, old man——" said Townsend feebly.

"Bring a cricket-stump here, Peele!"

"I—I say——" stammered Peele.

"Do as I tell you!"

Peele obeyed.

"Now thrash that hound till he can't yelp!" said Mornington savagely. "I'll see that he doesn't resist. If he moves a finger his skull goes!"

"I—I say—chuck it!" stuttered Higgs. "I make it pax! I—I—— Look here, you wild beast——"

"Let's make it pax, Morny," said Peele, with very lively fears of what would result afterwards if he carried out Mornington's instructions.

Mornington paused. His fury was passing, and he was calming down. He tossed the tongs into the grate with a crash.

"Pax, then," he said. "But under-

stand, Higgs, that if there's any more of your rot in this study you'll get hurt!"

He sat down at the table breathing hard.

Higgs rose slowly to his feet.

He had been terrified to his very soul by Mornington's outbreak of savage temper. But his terror had passed now, and rage had taken its place. He had made it "pax," which ought to have been sacred. But Higgs was too enraged to think of that. The dangerous tongs were in the grate now, and Mornington was weaponless. Higgs advanced on him furiously.

"You blessed wild beast!" he snarled. "I'll give you something for your temper! I'll teach you!"

"You've made it pax, Higgs," said Peele.

Smack!

The back of Higgs' heavy hand hurled Peele out of the way. Then he sprang upon Mornington and grasped him.

Mornington's teeth came together hard. As he was swept out of his chair he caught the teapot from the table. The teapot crashed on Higgs' head and smashed there, and Higgs reeled back with a fearful yell. He was not prepared for desperate measures like that.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Peele.

Higgs staggered back, his hands to his head. His head was cut, and tea drenched his hair and face. He blinked dazedly at Mornington. The latter had caught up a jug, ready to repeat the blow.

"My—my—my hat!" stuttered Higgs. "You rotten hooligan, you—you ought to be in a reformatory!"

"Do you want any more?" asked Mornington between his teeth. "Lay your paws on me again, if you dare!"

Higgs clenched his hands hard. But it was only too evident that if he made an attack the heavy jug would smash on his head. Higgs' head was hard, but not quite hard enough to stand that.

He dabbed his forehead with his handkerchief.

"You rotten wild beast!" he gasped. Mornington laughed.

"I'm not quite big enough to lick you," he said, "but you'll keep your paws to yourself in this study. No bullying here. Now get out!"

"What!"

"Get out, or I'll start on you with this jug!"

"I'm going to have tea!" roared Higgs.

"You're not going to have tea here! You're going to get out of this study if you don't want your thick skull cracked!"

Mornington advanced as he spoke, and Higgs read savage determination in his face. He backed to the door.

"Look here——" He dodged out of the study. "I say——"

The door slammed on him.

Higgs did not reopen it. He was fed up with Mornington.

Mornington returned to the tea-table. The Nuts of Rookwood looked at him, half in admiration, half in distrust.

"There won't be any more fagging or bullying in this study," said Mornington. "Why didn't you fellows handle the brute like that?"

"Well, we don't want to be sent to a reformatory for cracking a fellow's skull," said Gower tartly. "You may like to chance that, I don't!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd rather chance that than be bullied in my own study!"

"Well, Higgs will give us a rest now," said Townsend. "Blessed if the brute wasn't fairly cowed. But he'll have his knife into you, Morny."

Mornington shook his head.

"That's all right! I'm going to make friends with Higgs now I've taught him a lesson," he said coolly. "I had to begin that way."

"By gad, he won't be very friendly with you after that lick on the head."

"Oh, he'll come round! If he can lick Jimmy Silver he's the kind of chap I want to pal with," said Mornington.

"I'm going to be captain of the Fourth before the term's out, and Higgs is going to help me."

"Hear, hear!" said Peele & Co., though they doubted it.

The tea-party finished without any interruption from Higgs. And after tea the young rascals gathered round the table to play nap and smoke cigarettes. Evidently Mornington had not changed.

CHAPTER 20.

Mornington's Little Game!

JIMMY SILVER looked rather curiously at Mornington when he encountered him in the dormitory that evening.

Mornington had been on the worst of terms with the captain of the Fourth. But Jimmy was quite prepared to let bygones be bygones. So long as Mornington behaved himself now, Jimmy did not want to rake up old troubles.

He had heard of the "row" in Mornington's study, and all the Fourth had stared at the big bump on Higgs' head. The bully of the Fourth certainly did not deserve to be gently handled, but few were found to approve of Mornington's wild beast tactics.

Whether approved or disapproved, those tactics had had their desired effect. The Fourth Form bully let Mornington severely alone. Mornington certainly had risked expulsion from the school, and perhaps a term in a reformatory. But Higgs did not wish to risk having his skull cracked, whatever might happen to Mornington afterwards. He feared Mornington's savage temper far more than Mornington feared his big fists.

Jimmy Silver nodded pleasantly enough to Mornington in the dormitory. Mornington returned his nod.

"Here you are again!" said Jimmy cheerily. "I hope you'll like Rookwood a bit better this time, Mornington."

"Thanks!" said Mornington. "I in-

tend to get on a bit better this time."

"I hear you're going to be captain of the Fourth this term!" grinned Lovell. The boast had already made its rounds in the Fourth.

Mornington nodded.

"Exactly!" he said.

"Well, you are a funny ass!" commented Lovell.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came in to see lights out, and his eyes fell on Alfred Higgs at once. His brows contracted.

"What's the matter with your head, Higgs?" he exclaimed. "Your forehead's cut. How did you get that bruise?"

There was a hush in the dormitory. The fact that Higgs had been bullying would not have saved Mornington from condign punishment if the incident of the teapot broken on Higgs' head had transpired.

"I got a knock, Bulkeley," said Higgs surlily. "With all his faults the bully of the Fourth was not a sneak.

"It must have been a pretty hard knock," said Bulkeley.

"Yes; but it's all right."

Bulkeley gave him a sharp look, but said no more, and lights were put out and the captain of Rookwood left the dormitory. The general opinion of the Fourth was that on the morrow Higgs would "smash" Mornington.

But when the Fourth turned out in the morning the bully of the Fourth took no notice of Mornington.

Still more surprising, after lessons they were seen walking together in the quadrangle.

And when tea-time came round, Higgs joined the festive board in the study in quite good humour.

Peele and Gower could not understand it. But they were glad to see their truculent study-mate in such a subdued humour.

Mornington appeared to have quite forgotten his trouble with Higgs. He was quite civil and friendly with him. But the savage temper was there, all

ready to break out again if provoked, and Higgs knew it. There was no more bullying or hectoring in the study, and Peele and Gower felt the relief very keenly. But the bully of the Fourth found that friendship with Mornington was quite worth while. Higgs was not wealthy, while Mornington had much more money than was good for him. The study was a land of plenty now that Mornington had come, and tea there was like unto the most prosperous spread of the most prosperous times in any other study. And for that combination of reasons Higgs of the Fourth found it expedient to be on pally terms with Mornington.

Mornington's announced intention of ousting Jimmy Silver from the captaincy of the Fourth excited a good deal of curiosity. Most of the fellows laughed at the idea. The only fellow who had a chance of competing with Jimmy was Tommy Dodd, of the Modern side. Mornington was one of the most unpopular fellows in the Lower School. As for Jimmy Silver, he simply shrugged his shoulders and dismissed Mornington and his boasts from his mind.

By fair means Mornington certainly never could accomplish his object; and as for foul play, though he was none too good for it, Jimmy did not see what he could do. Mornington's party in the Fourth consisted, so far, only of the Nuts and Higgs. And a captain of the Rookwood Fourth had to be, before everything else, great at games. Mornington's cricket was a joke. But it was soon discovered that there was a change in that respect. Mornington began to be assiduous at the nets, and even in a few days he showed quality as a cricketer.

Jimmy Silver looked on the change with an approving eye. He would gladly have rendered Mornington assistance in his new ambition to become a cricketer. But Mornington's dislike was too bitter to be overcome. He had not forgotten a single one of

his "rubs" with Jimmy during his former stay at Rookwood.

On Saturday afternoon he dropped into the end study when the Fistical Four were about to go down to the cricket.

"You're playing the Moderns this afternoon?" he remarked.

"That's so," assented Jimmy.

"My friend Higgs would like a place in the team."

"Your friend Higgs can go and eat coke!" said Jimmy tersely.

"You mean you won't play him?"

"Of course I won't! He's no good at cricket!"

"Quite as good as Oswald or Jones minor, I think!"

"You're welcome to think so," yawned Jimmy Silver. "But it's what I think that matters, as I happen to be cricket captain. You're not skipper yet, you know."

"Cheeky ass!" growled Lovell.

"If you refuse to do Higgs justice, I shall advise him to give you a hiding," said Mornington.

"Oh, that's the little game, is it?" said Jimmy disdainfully. "That's why you've palled with Higgs, after nearly cracking his silly skull with a teapot."

"As a matter of fact, I've a message for you from Higgs. Where will you meet him?"

"Next Wednesday, behind the barn near Coombe," said Jimmy Silver. "It's going to be a real scrap, and we can't have it in the gym—the prefects would interfere."

"You will meet him to-day."

"Buzz off!"

"I shall advise Higgs to tweak your nose in the quad, if you funk it," said Mornington.

"Like that?" asked Jimmy Silver affably, taking Mornington's somewhat prominent nose between finger and thumb.

"Groogh!"

Tweak!

"Is that how you mean?" asked Jimmy calmly, while his chums roared with laughter.

"Yow-ow! Led go by dose!" stut-tered Mornington. "Ycoooow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington dragged his nose away. It was crimson. He shook his fist savagely at Jimmy Silver, and strode out of the study, leaving the Fistical Four howling with laughter.

"Jolly lucky I'm in training for Higgs!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Now that cad's come back I shall have trouble with the beast every day. Mornington's going to use him to give this study the kybosh, if he can. Come on!"

The Fistical Four took their bats and left the study. They found Higgs of the Fourth in the passage, with Mornington & Co. Higgs barred the way.

"You're not going to play cricket just yet, Jimmy Silver!" he exclaimed. "You're going to settle with me first!"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy. "Where will you have it?"

Without waiting for a reply, he jammed his bat against Higgs' broad chest, and the bully of the Fourth backed away with a howl.

Three more bats prodded him energetically, and Higgs fairly fled.

The Fistical Four smiled and went on their way. And the match with the Moderns was played without any interruption from Alfred Higgs.

CHAPTER 21.

The Great Fight!

WEDNESDAY was a great day in the Lower School at Rookwood.

The great fight between Jimmy Silver and Higgs of the Fourth was coming off that afternoon, and it created immense interest in the Lower Forms.

Jimmy had tackled Higgs before, and had been hopelessly outclassed. But he had been in steady training for weeks since then. He was not over-confident, but he hoped to be victorious, and he had the best wishes of most of the Fourth.

Higgs was brimming with confidence,

and Mornington & Co. backed him up heartily.

After dinner the Fistical Four strolled out of the School House in a careless sort of way. It was important to keep the matter from the knowledge of the powers.

Most of the fistical encounters of the Rookwooders were fought out in the gym with the gloves on. But this special fight was to be a record in the way of fights. It was understood that it was to be a fight to a finish, and interruptions from prefects or masters were not desired.

Outside the gates of Rookwood Jimmy Silver & Co. were joined by a crowd of friends and sympathisers. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side were conspicuous among them. Tommy Dodd's sympathies were all with Jimmy Silver on this occasion. Moderns as well as Classicals yearned to see the bully of the Form taken down a peg, and put in his proper place. Tommy Dodd had tried it valiantly himself, but he had tried in vain. And Tommy was almost prepared to admit that the Classicals were "top side" of Rookwood, if Jimmy Silver succeeded in licking the bully of the Fourth.

Oswald and Jones minor, Flynn and Rawson and Dickinson minor, and a crowd of other Classicals joined the crowd. It was easy to see how feeling ran in the Fourth.

When Higgs left Rookwood he was accompanied by Mornington, Peele, and the rest of the Nuts, and Smythe & Co. of the Shell—all the old enemies of the Fistical Four. But they were not a dozen all told. There were thirty or forty fellows with Jimmy Silver when he arrived at the rendezvous.

The old barn near Coombe lay well back from the road, and there was a stretch of level ground behind it. Several large trees shut it off from view. It was quite an ideal spot for the peculiar purpose of the Rookwooders.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were first on the ground. Lovell opened his bag, and produced a towel, a sponge, and a basin.

The basin was filled at the pond, and all was ready for the fray.

"Here they come!" said Oswald, as the burly form of Higgs was seen crossing the field, accompanied by Mornington & Co.

Jimmy sedately peeled off his jacket, and rolled back his shirtsleeves. Higgs grinned at him as he came up. Not the slightest doubt did Higgs entertain of the result.

"Ready to be smashed?" he asked politely.

"Quite ready, thanks!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Two to one on Higgs, in quids!" sang out Adolphus Smythe. "Now, then, you sportin' fags, play up!"

"I'll give you two to one on the boko if you don't shut up!" growled Lovell. "None of your rotten blackguardism here!"

"I'll take you, Smythey!" said Leggett of the Fourth.

"Money down!" said Adolphus, with a supercilious look at Leggett.

The Modern junior produced a currency note, and Mornington held the stakes. Jimmy Silver observed the proceedings with a frown, but he did not interfere. As a matter of fact, Leggett's proceeding was encouraging. Leggett of the Fourth was an extremely keen and acute youth, and his backing Jimmy Silver was a good omen, though Jimmy was greatly inclined to kick him for doing so.

Lovell was Jimmy's second, and Mornington acted for the bully of the Fourth. There was a grim smile on Mornington's face. It was evident that he fully believed that the captain of the Fourth would be hopelessly knocked out. It was the first step in his campaign for "downing" Jimmy Silver.

"I'll keep time," remarked Peele, taking out his gold watch.

"No, you won't!" said Lovell promptly. "We'll have a neutral to keep time."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Bow-wow! Tommy Dodd will do it."

"I'm your man!" said Tommy Dodd

at once, and Jimmy Silver nodded assent.

Tommy Dodd could be relied on for the fairest of fair play.

"You agree to Doddy, Higgs?"

"I don't care twopence!" said Higgs.

"Right, then!"

Tommy Dodd took out his watch.

"Seconds out of the ring!" he said impressively. "Now, shake hands, you two. Time!"

Higgs grinned as he shook hands with Jimmy Silver. Then the mill started.

Round the field of combat the Rookwood juniors formed a ring that was growing thicker every minute as more fellows arrived from the school. And there was a buzz of encouraging shouts to the captain of the Fourth.

"Go it, Jimmy!"

Higgs began with a bull-like rush, which he fully expected would sweep Jimmy Silver away like chaff before the wind. Jimmy was not heavy enough to stop the weight, and he gave ground, backing nimbly, followed up by Higgs with lunging fists. They went right round the ring, amid loud laughter from Higgs' party. But Jimmy did not turn a hair. He was guarding like clockwork, and not a single one of Higgs' heavy drives reached him.

Higgs paused at last, almost out of breath. Then Jimmy came on, and the breathless Alfred was being hammered prettily when Tommy Dodd called "Time!"

Jimmy joined Lovell in his corner.

"He's got bellows to mend!" said Lovell jubilantly. "The thundering asses were keeping it up in the study last night—smoking like furnaces, you know! Higgs' wind is no good to-day."

Jimmy nodded.

"If he doesn't knock me out in the first two or three rounds, I think I've got him," he remarked.

"Stall him off, you know."

"You bet!"

"Time!"

Jimmy entered the ring again, and Higgs recommenced his bull-like tactics. This time Jimmy Silver did not give

ground. He side-stepped quickly as the rush came, and before Higgs knew what was happening Jimmy's right came crashing on the side of his head. Higgs spun sideways and crashed to the ground.

There was a roar:

"Well hit!"

Tommy Dodd grinned, and counted:

"One, two, three, four——"

Higgs was up again, looking dazed and furious. He came for Jimmy Silver again, but he was not rushing. The rush had been taken out of him.

Hammer-and-tongs they went now, and Jimmy began to receive some punishment. But he kept his bulky adversary well at arm's length, and gave as good as he received.

"Time!"

Lovell sponged Jimmy Silver's heated face as Jimmy rested on Raby's knee. The captain of the Fourth was breathing hard, but he was as sound as a bell. On the other side of the ring Higgs was breathing in gulps.

"Get closer to him and pound him!" was Mornington's advice to his principal. "If you let him stall you off, he'll tire you out and win!"

Higgs glared at his second.

"Do you think you know more about it than I do?" he snorted. "He won't stand up for another round; I can tell you that!"

"Time!"

Higgs toed the line angrily and savagely. He was hurt, and he was angry, and his second's remarks had irritated him. He resolved to finish Jimmy Silver in that round with a whirlwind attack.

The whirlwind attack came, but it did not finish Jimmy Silver.

With all the skill at his command, Jimmy kept his burly enemy off, giving ground where necessary, and side-stepping briskly to escape being cornered. Higgs followed him up fast, breathing jerkily, till he had fairly pumped himself to a stop. Then came a lightning attack from the captain of the Fourth,

and Higgs reeled and staggered blindly under a shower of blows.

The call of "Time!" came very fortunately for Higgs. He was reeling as he sank on his second's knee in the corner.

"You haven't given him the left, Jimmy," murmured Lovell, as he fanned his principal.

Jimmy smiled.

"I'm keeping that in reserve!"

"How do you feel, old man?"

"As if I'd been under a lawn-mower!" grinned Jimmy. "But I'm good for a dozen rounds yet!"

The fourth round commenced, and was fought through, then the fifth, with much less energy on Higgs' part. The burly Fourth Former had bellows to mend now with a vengeance, and he no longer rushed.

Both the combatants were showing signs of wear and tear, and the crowd was excited. Jimmy Silver's nose had a very bulbous look, and his left eye persisted in winking. Higgs had one eye closed.

"Time!"

The crowd was in a buzz when the fifth round closed. Jimmy had stood up to his burly enemy for five rounds, and certainly had had no more punishment than Higgs.

With delighted anticipation, the juniors realised that Jimmy had a chance, after all—and a good chance.

"Time!"

There were eager eyes watching the combatants as they closed in the sixth round.

Higgs made a hot attack, and "petered out," as before; but when Jimmy closed in on him he met with a surprise. Higgs' heavy right came crashing on his jaw, followed by his left, which caught Jimmy under the chin.

Higgs was winded, but not so winded as he had made out, and Jimmy had been taken in. The captain of the Fourth went to the ground with a heavy bump.

"Bravo!" yelled Mornington, in great delight.

Jimmy Silver lay gasping and Tommy Dodd counted steadily:

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight——"

Jimmy was up at "eight." Higgs rushed down on him; but Jimmy, with herculean efforts, stalled him off until "Time!" was called. His head was reeling, his eyes swimming, and he took blow after blow, hardly able to guard; but somehow he lived through the round by sheer pluck and determination. But he was at his last gasp when Tommy Dodd called "Time!" and he sank on Lovell's knee.

Lovell sponged his face, his own face showing only too plainly his anxiety.

Jimmy gave him a feeble grin.

"Bad business!" he gasped.

"You'll lick him yet," said Lovell hopefully.

But his look was not so hopeful as his words.

But a minute's rest had a wonderful effect on Jimmy Silver. At the call of "Time!" he stepped up again quite steadily, if not briskly. Higgs lunged forward, grinning. He had had a momentary doubt; but it was gone now. He was quite convinced that Jimmy Silver would not survive the seventh round.

But he did. He devoted himself to defence, and, by sheer skill and determination, he held his own, while his strength came back. He was feeling better at the end of the round than at the beginning.

"Eighth round, bedad!" said Flynn. "Sure, Jimmy's stickin' to him, and he's a broth av a boy! Go it, Jimmy!"

Hammer-and-tongs again! Rookwood junior "scraps" seldom lasted into eight rounds. It was a historic fight. Higgs was attacking again; but in that round came Jimmy's famous left, which he had practised on the punch-ball and Bingham of the Fifth.

It came on the point of Higgs' jaw with a terrific force, and Higgs' feet seemed torn from the ground as he received it.

"Hooray!" yelled Lovell.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—"

Higgs staggered up. According to the rules of the ring, Jimmy would have been justified in knocking him out; but he did not. Higgs could not have stood up against a fag of the Second Form at that moment. Jimmy let him alone until the call of "Time!"

"Ass!" said Lovell, at the end of the round.

Jimmy grinned.

"Time!"

Higgs came up to the scratch, but he was evidently "done." He was staggering as he faced Jimmy Silver. The fighting was all on one side now. The Rookwood crowd buzzed with excitement.

Higgs of the Fourth—the bully of the Lower School—was on his last legs! Jimmy Silver was winning—winning hands down!

Ninth round, and last. It was pretty plain that Higgs would not last into a tenth. Only dogged determination kept him on his feet now. Jimmy Silver was very nearly spent, but he was fit for another two rounds at least.

Jimmy's fists came home again and again upon Alfred Higgs as he fought savagely and wildly, and at last he went down—under the Silver "left," which he could not stop. He lay groaning on the grass.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—out!" said Tommy Dodd; and he closed his watch with a snap.

Higgs sat up dazedly. Mornington gave him a scowl, and turned his back and strode savagely away. His champion had been licked; it was a triumph, instead of a downfall, for Jimmy Silver.

"Lend me a hand, somebody!" gasped Higgs. "I—I—oh!"

It was Raby who lent him a hand; his own second was gone. Leggett grinned, and hurried after Mornington to claim his stakes. The rest of the fellows were cheering loudly. Higgs blinked at Jimmy Silver. He had put

up a dogged fight, and he could not stand up without assistance.

"You've licked me—me!" he stammered.

Jimmy grinned cheerily.

"You licked me once," he said. "Give us your fist on it."

He held out his hand.

Higgs hesitated for a moment; then, with a feeble grin, he shook hands with the captain of the Fourth.

Both the combatants of that great fight required considerable attention before they could venture to show themselves at Rookwood, and both of them felt the effects of it for some time to come. But in the Fourth Form, Classical and Modern alike, there was great rejoicing over Jimmy Silver's triumph.

CHAPTER 22.

Much Too Thick!

"JIMMY SILVER!"

"Jimmy!"

"Jimmy, you fathead!"

Jimmy heard his name called. But, like the dying gladiator of old, he heeded it not.

Jimmy was at the wicket, on Little Side at Rookwood, facing Tommy Dodd's bowling. It was only practice, certainly; but cricket was cricket. And Jimmy Silver kept his eye on Tommy Dodd, heedless of the fact that Lovell and Raby and Newcome were shouting to him from the pavilion.

"Telegrams, fathead!" yelled Lovell. "Two of them!"

Smack!

The bat met the ball, and sent it whizzing away. Then Jimmy Silver descended to glance round.

"Telegrams, ass!" called out Raby. "The kid's just brought two for you!"

"Well, it never rains but it pours," said Jimmy Silver. "Anybody who likes can have them. I'm batting!"

"Fathead!" said Raby. "It may be news. Suppose something's wrong at home!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy hadn't thought of that. But now he did think of it, he threw the bat to Oswald, and ran off the pitch.

The lad from the post office handed him the two buff envelopes. Telegrams did not often come to junior fellows, and it was rather remarkable for a fellow to receive two of them, at one fell swoop, as it were.

Jimmy hastily opened the first that came to hand. He read it quickly, and gave an expressive grunt.

"Rotten!"

"Nothing wrong at home?"

"Oh, no!"

"Your father——"

"'Tain't from him. It's from that fat beast Bunter!"

"Bunter! Who's Bunter?"

"That fat idiot who came over from Greyfriars once to see us! The bounder is coming again—this afternoon!"

"Like his cheek!" growled Lovell.

"Who's asked him?"

"Nobody. Bunter doesn't wait for trifles like that!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"I'm blessed if I'm going to stand it a second time! We used up all our nice manners the first time, and it was a strain."

"It was," said Raby. "I'm fed up, for one."

"What does he say?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy Silver read out the telegram:

"Arriving by two-thirty train. Meet me at station.—BUNTER."

The Fistical Four of the Fourth looked at one another grimly. It was really a little too much for Billy Bunter of Greyfriars to bag their half-holiday in this way!

Jimmy Silver & Co. were on the best of terms with Harry Wharton and his friends of Greyfriars School. They played regular matches with them, and sometimes gave one another a look-in. But Billy Bunter was a horse of quite another colour. The fat junior of Greyfriars had invited himself to Rookwood once before, and had plagued

Jimmy Silver & Co. for a whole afternoon.

He had "stuck" them for his railway fare both ways; he had borrowed money right and left; he had been a worry and a bother all the time, and he had made all the Rookwood fellows feel that it would be a delight to kick him round the quadrangle.

Because he was a Greyfriars fellow, the Fistical Four had endured Bunter with heroic politeness on that occasion. Their politeness had come near breaking under the strain. But they had stood it out manfully to the end. Now it really looked as if they had overdone it—Bunter was coming again.

Any of the fellows they knew at Greyfriars would have been welcomed with open arms. But they didn't know Bunter, and didn't want to.

The fat bounder was coolly planting himself on them, on the strength of their friendship for Harry Wharton & Co.

And William George Bunter of Greyfriars wasn't an ordinary guest. He was a very exacting one.

Jimmy Silver had no desire whatever to meet him at the station, and hear that he had forgotten his purse, and to hand him his week's pocket-money to pay his fare. He wasn't at all keen to expend the whole financial resources of the end study in feeding Bunter. Above all, he didn't feel inclined to spend that sunny afternoon in being bored by the fat and fatuous fellow. Jimmy's plans were laid for that afternoon, and they did not include being bothered by Bunter.

"There's the other telegram," said Raby at last. "You haven't opened that."

"By Jove, no!"

Jimmy Silver opened the second telegram. He grinned as he read it.

"Somebody else coming?" asked Lovell.

"Ha, ha! No. Read it. It's from Wharton."

The second telegram ran:

"Dear Silver,—Bunter is coming to plant himself on you this afternoon. Don't lend him anything. Kick him out.—WHARTON."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said Lovell. "We'll do as Wharton asks. I should enjoy booting that fat bounder."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Can't exactly boot him out!" he remarked. "But—but we're not going to have him on our necks as we did before. Once is enough!"

"I've jolly well got no politeness to waste on him!" growled Raby.

"We overdid the polite bizney last time," said Jimmy ruefully. "I felt rather a humbug at the time. I thought it was up to us to stand it civilly. We won't overdo it this time!"

"That we jolly well won't!" said Lovell, with emphasis.

"But—but a chap must be civil!"

"Oh, rats!"

"We've got the reputation of Rookwood hospitality to consider," said Jimmy. "My idea is to be polite, but firm!"

"Look here, we're not having it!" exclaimed Lovell. "I tell you I can't stand the fellow, with his gorging and lying and swanking and bragging!"

"He isn't exactly the pal you'd pick out of a thousand," agreed Silver; "but a chap must be civil. But—but I think that if we're firm as well as civil Bunter will get tired of paying visits to Rookwood."

"Well, if you've got a wheeze—"

"Of course I have, fathead! Rely on your Uncle James!"

"We're not going to the station, anyway!"

"No fear! Let's get on with the cricket!"

"Besides, it's too late to meet the two-thirty now," said Jimmy Silver. "Bunter can come along by himself. Let's get on. Sufficient for the day is the giddy evil thereof; we can deal with Bunter when he gets here."

And the Fistical Four devoted themselves to cricket practice, and dismissed Billy Bunter of Greyfriars from their minds.

CHAPTER 23.

Pay Up!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo! Bunter, by gum!"

The Fistical Four had come off the cricket-field about half an hour later, and were sauntering to the school shop for some refreshing ginger-beer when a fat voice hailed them.

Billy Bunter had arrived.

He did not come alone. Old William, the ancient porter of Coombe Station, was with him, with a grim expression on his face. Billy Bunter was not looking happy. He blinked at Jimmy Silver & Co. through his big glasses with quite a pathetic look.

"I say, you fellows, didn't you get my telegram?"

"Yes, we got it," said Jimmy.

"I asked you to meet me at the station!"

"Did you?"

"Yes, I did! You might have done it, too, after pressing a chap to visit you here!" said Bunter warmly.

"I must have a bad memory," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "I don't remember issuing any pressing invitations."

Billy Bunter gave him a quick, comprehending blink. He could see that the politeness he had put to such a severe strain was giving way.

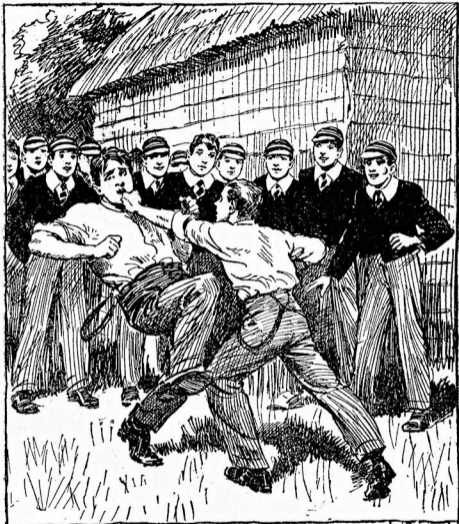
"Ahem! Well, I rather expected to see you at the station," he said. "I've got into rather a fix. You see, I forgot to put any money in my pocket. I'm an absent-minded chap sometimes—"

"Yes; I've noticed that."

"And I only just caught the train, too, and didn't have time to take my ticket," explained Bunter. "I intended to pay at this end, of course."

"After you'd met us!" said Lovell grimly.

"Ahem! You—you see, when I got out I thought you'd be there, as I tele-



Jimmy Silver and Higgs went at it hammer-and-tongs! In the eighth round Jimmy's famous left, which he had practised on the punchball, landed with terrific force on the point of Higgs' jaw, and the bully seemed torn from the ground as he received it. "Hooray!" yelled Jimmy's followers excitedly.

graphed—I borrowed the tin specially of Mauly to send the wire—I—I mean, I sent the wire specially. Well, as I'd left my cash at home, I couldn't pay up, and the rotters at the station actually accused me of wanting to swindle the company."

"You don't say so!" remarked Newcome sarcastically.

"Yes, they did, and they were going to send for a policeman," said Bunter indignantly. "If I hadn't explained that I'd got friends here who'd be anxious and eager to lend me the money, I might have been locked up."

"Oh, you've got friends here?" asked Lovell.

"Eh? Yes, of course!"

"Good! You'd better look for 'em and ask 'em to lend you the tin," said Lovell.

"Good-bye!"

"He, he, he! I say, Silver, I suppose you can lend me six bob? This beast has come along with me to take it!"

Old William touched his hat.

"Begging your pardon, Master Silver! The young person said he was a friend of yours, so the stationmaster said he'd give him a chance."

Jimmy Silver looked grim.

He knew that Bunter had deliberately travelled without paying his fare, with the intention of "sticking" the Rookwood juniors for it when he arrived. And as they had not met him at the station, the junior from Greyfriars had found himself in a serious difficulty.

The porter had come with him for the money. If it was not paid, there was trouble ahead for William George Bunter.

If anything could have made Jimmy Silver more exasperated by Bunter's visit than he was already, this incident would have done it. He could not let Bunter be marched away to answer for his sins.

He fumbled in his pocket and produced half-a-crown.

"Lend us some tin," he said. "It's all right, William, we'll pay as the fellow

was coming to visit us. Lock him up next time."

William grinned.

"Look here——" began Lovell warmly. "Oh, pay up and keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver.

With far from a good grace the juniors rummaged in their pockets for the money. The sum was raised, with a shilling over for William, who touched his hat and retired from the scene satisfied.

Billy Bunter's fat face cleared. He was out of his scrape, and the effect of a scrape never lasted long with Bunter. He was quite cheerful now.

"Thanks, awfully, you fellows!" he said. "Of course, I'll settle up that little sum as soon as I get back to Greyfriars. How much do I owe each of you?"

"Oh, never mind," said Jimmy gruffly.

"But I do mind," said Bunter firmly. "I'm very particular in matters of this sort."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Some fellows aren't particular," said Bunter; "but I'm one of the sort that are. Short reckonings make long friends, you know. Still, I suppose it will be all right if I send you a postal-order for the amount, Jimmy, and you can settle with the others?"

"Oh, yes; that will be quite all right," said Jimmy sarcastically.

"Good!"

"And when the postal-order comes I shan't cash it. I shall have it framed and hang it up in the study," said Jimmy Silver.

"He, he, he!" Billy Bunter decided to treat that remark as a joke. "Well, here we are again! Jolly glad to see you fellows! You were just going into the tuckshop, I think? Don't let me stop you."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"The fact is, I'm rather peckish after my journey," said Bunter. "Come along with me! It's my treat!"

Jimmy Silver did not move. He had been caught like that before. Billy Bunter intended to give orders reck-

lessly, on the understanding that it was "his treat," and leave the Rookwood fellows to settle the bill, to be reimbursed at some future date with a postal-order.

"Your treat?" said Jimmy.

"Yes, certainly!"

"How are you going to stand treat if you haven't any money?"

"Ahem! I suppose you could lend me a few bob, Silver, as I've left my banknotes locked up in my desk at Greyfriars?"

"Sorry! Can't be did!"

"Ahem! I say, Lovell——"

"Money's tight," said Lovell calmly.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Rookwooders. Times had changed, evidently.

"Like to come and look at the cricket?" asked Jimmy Silver blandly.

Billy Bunter grunted. He wasn't in the slightest degree interested in the cricket.

"Oh, all right," he said ungraciously.

And the Fistical Four piloted the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove to Little Side with an expression upon his fat face that spoke volumes.

CHAPTER 24.

Bunter on the Warpath!

"**F**'AT Jack of the bone-house, by gad!"

Adolphus Smythe of the Shell made that pleasant remark as he turned his eyeglass upon Billy Bunter.

Smythe & Co. were lounging upon Little Side, looking upon the cricket with a patronising eye, but taking no part in the practice. The Nuts of Rookwood dodged cricket practice whenever they could, with the exception of Mornington. Slacker as he was in other respects, Mornington was keen on cricket. He was at the wickets now, and Dick Oswald was bowling to him.

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at Smythe.

"Where did you pick it up?" pursued Adolphus. "My hat! What wouldn't they give for him in a tallow-works!

He would melt down into enough fat to last them for months and months and months, by gad!"

"Is that Rookwood good manners?" inquired Billy Bunter.

"Shut up, Smythe!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

He did not like his visitor, and he did not like Bunter's planting himself on Rookwood as he had done. But there was a limit.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes glinted behind his spectacles.

"If a chap insulted a visitor of mine at Greyfriars, I should lick him!" he remarked.

"Great Scott! Could you lick anybody?" grinned Smythe.

"I'd jolly well lick you if I wasn't a visitor here!" said Bunter.

"Don't mind that," chipped in Lovell at once. "We'll excuse you, Bunter."

"Yes, rather!" grinned Raby.

"Pile in, Bunter!"

"I'll hold your jacket," said Newcome.

"Oh! I say, you fellows, I—I mean——"

"By gad, I'd forgotten I was meetin' Howard in the village," said Smythe hastily. "Come on, you chaps!"

Adolphus was not looking for a fight, even with the fat and unwieldy Owl of Greyfriars. But his evident haste to avoid one encouraged Billy Bunter. Bunter was obtuse in most things, but he was keen in others, and it did not need much keenness to see that the lofty Adolphus was a funk of the first water.

"Blessed if I don't jolly well lick him, too!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Hold on, Smythe! Where are you going?"

"I've got an appointment——"

"You've got a previous one with Bunter," grinned Lovell, giving Adolphus a shove that sent him staggering towards the fat junior.

"By gad! You insulting rotter——"

"Go it, Smythe!" said Townsend of the Fourth. "You can lick that fat rotter!"

"I'm not goin' to enter into blackguardly scrappin'," said Smythe. "A chap's got his dignity to consider."

Billy Bunter needed no more encouragement than that. As a matter of fact, he was very nearly as bad a funk as Adolphus himself. But he was brave as a lion when there was no danger to be encountered.

He tore off his jacket and pitched it to Jimmy Silver.

"Come on!" he roared. "I'll give you Fat Jack of the bone-house! Come on, you glass-eyed funk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold my spectacles, Jimmy Silver! Mind you don't drop them! If they get broken, somebody'll have to pay for them! Come on, you skinny rotter!"

"Look here——" stammered Smythe.

He had never dreamed that the fat fellow would turn out ferocious like this.

The fat junior, blinking without his spectacles, pranced up to Smythe, and landed off forcibly, hitting Townsend of the Fourth under the chin. Townsend staggered back with a yell.

"Come on!" roared Bunter. "That's one for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly idiot!" roared Townsend.

"Eh? Did I hit you? Sorry! I'm rather short-sighted, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's that rotter? Bring him here!" roared Bunter. "I'm not going chasing him! Is this Rookwood pluck? Yah!"

Lovell and Raby grasped Smythe and fairly hurled him at Bunter.

"There he is!" chuckled Lovell.

Smythe crashed into Bunter, and the fat junior hit out wildly and blindly. As it happened, his fat fist caught Smythe on the point of the chin.

A drive with Bunter's tremendous weight behind it was no joke.

Adolphus fairly crumpled up.

He crashed backwards to the ground, and lay there, gasping, wondering whether an earthquake had happened.

"Come on!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, porpoise!"

"Get up, Adolphus!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" mumbled Smythe, caressing his chin as he lay in the grass. "My jaw's broken! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Yah! Gerrup!" roared the fat junior from Greyfriars, dancing round the fallen Nut of the Shell. "Yah! Funk!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Funk!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Did you ever see a porpoise on the warpath before? Get up, Smythe!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Townsend and Topham ran forward to pick up the dandy of the Shell. Adolphus' head was swimming, and his jaw was aching. He had had enough.

"Go it!" said Townsend.

"Yow-ow! I'm not goin' to fight the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Funk!"

"You can't funk a fat rotter like that," whispered Topham. "Go in and win!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, pile in! You can lick him!"

Smythe of the Shell reluctantly piled in. Billy Bunter's warlike dance ceased as the Shell fellow advanced on him. He backed away.

"I'll let you off now," he said magnanimously. "I don't want this to go any farther."

"Oh, don't you?" snarled Adolphus, realising that Bunter was as afraid as he was. "Well, I'm goin' to lick you, you fat rotter! Come on!"

"I—I say, you fellows—— Yar-oooooh!" roared Bunter, as Adolphus attacked him, hitting out furiously.

Crash!

Billy Bunter went to grass.

It was Adolphus' turn to dance a waltz. He pranced victoriously round Billy Bunter as he lay blinking.

"Get up, you fat rascal—get up! I'll give you a thrashin' while I'm about

it!" he exclaimed. "Drag him up, somebody!"

"Oh, dear! I—I can't get up!" gasped Bunter. "I've sprained my back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My leg's dislocated, and my backbone's sprained in two places! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Silver, if this is the way you treat a visitor, you won't see me at Rookwood again in a hurry."

"Get up!" shouted Adolphus. "I'm goin' to lick you!"

"You can lick me, if you're hungry for licking somebody," remarked Jimmy Silver, pushing back his cuffs. "Come on, Smythey!"

Adolphus would as soon have attacked a tiger in his lair as Jimmy Silver of the Fourth. His warlike ardour vanished at once.

"Well, if that fat bounder's had enough, I don't mind lettin' him off," he said loftily, and he walked away hastily.

Jimmy Silver grinned, and helped Bunter to rise.

"Is that rotter gone?" gasped Bunter, blinking round him nervously.

"Yes, he's gone."

"Oh, you shouldn't have let him go! I was just going to get up and lick him."

"I'll call him back," said Lovell.

"Oh, never mind; I don't want to hurt him!" said Bunter hastily. "I've licked him, and that will do. You Rookwood fellows ain't much in the fighting line. Not like us at Greyfriars. We simply live on it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, rather! If a chap cheeks me, I knock him down," said Bunter calmly. "I'm a regular terror in the Remove at Greyfriars. Fifth-Formers are jolly careful how they talk to me, I can tell you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! What time do you fellows have tea here?" asked Bunter, changing the subject.

"We're going to have some cricket before tea," said Jimmy Silver. "You'd like some cricket, wouldn't you?"

"I'm a demon at it," said Bunter. "I wouldn't mind showing you some things, at either batting or bowling. I suppose you call that cricket?" He nodded towards the fellows at practice.

"Of course, you'd put us quite in the shade," said Lovell sarcastically. "If you can play cricket as well as you can fight, you must be a corker!"

"That's right; I am a corker," said Bunter. "I don't play for the Remove; the cricket committee's jealous of me. That's how the matter stands. If you like, I'll show you some bowling that will open your eyes a little."

"Chuck over the ball, Oswald!" called out Jimmy Silver.

Oswald grinned, and tossed the ball to Billy Bunter. The fat junior caught it—with his chest, and sat down in the grass.

"Ow, ow! Wharrer you up to?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry!" ejaculated Oswald. "I thought you'd catch it!"

"You silly ass!"

"Ahem!"

Jimmy Silver jerked the fat junior to his feet.

"There's the ball! Go and bowl to Mornington," he said.

And Bunter grunted, and toddled on the pitch.

CHAPTER 25.

The Demon Bowler!

"BY gad! Who's that funny merchant?" asked Mornington, staring along the pitch at the Greyfriars junior.

Billy Bunter blinked along at him.

"Look out!" he called out.

"That fat idiot can't bowl," said Mornington. "What's the game? I'm not goin' to bat to that fathead!"

"He's the demon bowler from Greyfriars," said Jimmy Silver. "He's the chap who can't get into the eleven be-

cause they're all afraid of being put in the shade. Bunter is going to surprise you with his bowling. Give him a trial."

"Oh, all right!"

Mornington stood up at the wicket again, and Bunter prepared to bowl. All eyes were fixed on the fat junior. Billy Bunter enjoyed the limelight, and he was by no means averse to showing off his wonderful powers to the Rookwooders. Nothing would have convinced Bunter that he was not a first-class cricketer.

His method of bowling was striking. He retreated about a dozen paces, and took a run forward at the pace of a lazy snail, and turned himself into a catherine-wheel. The ball came whizzing down, and there was a fiendish yell from Mornington.

The Rookwood junior dropped the bat, clasped both hands to his head, and fairly danced on the crease.

There was a yell of laughter.

"How's that?" chirruped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Out—what?" grinned Bunter.

Jimmy Silver threw himself in the grass, and kicked up his heels in helpless mirth. Mornington was yelling with pain and wrath. Bunter had not bowled at all; he had thrown the ball, and it had caught the batsman on the side of the head.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" shrieked Mornington. "Oh, my head! Yah! Oh, the fat villain! He's brained me! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, field that ball."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, there's nothing to run for," said Bunter, in surprise, as Mornington came tearing along the pitch. "You're out, you know."

But Mornington was not taking a run. He was coming for Bunter. There was a big bruise on Mornington's head, and he wanted vengeance. The demon bowler uttered a yell of surprise and wrath as the infuriated batsman hurled himself upon him.

"Yaroo! He's gone mad! Help! Yah! Yoooop!"

"Punch! Punch! Punch!"

"Help! Murder! Fire! Draggim-off!" shrieked Bunter.

Mornington had the fat junior's head in chancery, and he was pounding away with terrific fury.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed to the rescue.

They seized the enraged Mornington, and dragged him off, and Billy Bunter collapsed into the grass, and yelled.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Yoop! Groogh! Oh, crumbs!"

"Lemme get at him!" yelled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on, Morny! It was an accident, you know—"

"I'm goin' to smash him!"

But half a dozen juniors hustled the infuriated Mornington away. Billy Bunter was set on his feet again, blinking dazedly.

"Grooh! Where's my glasses? Don't tread on my glasses, you silly idiots! If they get broken—groogh!—somebody'll have to pay for them! Oh, dear! Wharrer that silly idiot go for me for? Grooh!"

"Here's your barnacles, old chap!" said Lovell, sticking them on Billy Bunter's fat little nose.

"Groogh! I've had enough of this!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "You Rookwood chaps don't play the game!"

"What!"

"When a fellow's out at Greyfriars to first-class bowling, he takes it like a sport! He don't go for the bowler!" spluttered Bunter.

"Oh, my hat! Morny wasn't out!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "You chucked the ball at him, and biffed him on the napper!"

"Rot!"

"Eh—what?"

"Rot!" repeated Bunter. "I suppose I know when I've got my man out? There never was a neater ball than that. He was out, and he lost his tem-

per and went for me. We don't do that at Greyfriars!"

"You—you fat idiot——"

"Shush!"

"I'm not bowling to that chap again," said Bunter. "I never did think much of Rookwood cricket; but I really did expect you fellows to know when a batsman was out. I've had enough of this, I must say. I'm ready for tea!"

"But it isn't tea-time yet," said Raby.

"I'm hungry."

There was no gainsaying that.

"Oh, come along!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four and their remarkable visitor left the cricket-pitch, and as they walked to the School House Billy Bunter enlarged upon his views of batsmen who didn't know when they were out.

What William George Bunter didn't know about cricket wasn't worth knowing—at least, so it appeared from Bunter's remarks. And it was an undoubted fact that nobody at Rookwood was inclined to stand up to his bowling.

CHAPTER 26.

Short Commons.

BILLY BUNTER sank into the arm-chair in the end study with a grunt.

It was far from being tea-time, but Bunter was ready for tea; he was always ready for a meal.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not like being dragged indoors on that sunny afternoon, but there was no help for it. Their visitor was on their hands, and had to be looked after, to a certain extent.

But it occurred to Lovell that there was no need for four fellows to look after him, and he strolled out of the study.

It occurred to Raby immediately afterwards that there was no need for three, and he followed Lovell. Then it

was borne in upon Newcome's mind that there was no need for two, and he sauntered out of the end study and disappeared.

Unfortunately, there was need for one, and Jimmy Silver had to remain with the uninvited guest.

The captain of the Fourth turned out the contents of the study cupboard. As it happened, the Fistical Four were not in funds that day, and the sum they had been compelled to raise for Bunter's railway fare had cleared them out of cash. The guest had to take his chance.

"You wouldn't rather wait for tea in Hall, Bunter?" Jimmy Silver asked, rather hesitatingly.

"I'll have tea in Hall as well," said Bunter.

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver made the best show he could with the scanty supplies of the study. He could do no more. He would have cut down to the tuck-shop for fresh supplies, if he had possessed the necessary cash resources; but his cash had been expended for Bunter already.

The fat junior dragged his chair to the table, and blinked over the festive board.

"Ahem! Pile in!" said Jimmy Silver hospitably.

The hospitality was unbounded, though the supplies were limited.

The Fistical Four would have had an exceedingly frugal tea with those supplies. As it was, they would have to have tea in Hall. The total amount of the study supplies was at Bunter's disposal, but the amount was not large.

Bunter's blink was very expressive.

There were two sardines, half a loaf, a fragment of butter, a suspicion of jam, and tea, the latter very weak.

That was all.

Bunter had retained a loving memory of his last feed at Rookwood. The chums of the Fourth had "done" him very well on that occasion, having been in funds, and having also borrowed money for the occasion. Billy Bunter wasn't an easy guest to provide for.

Bunter looked at the tea-table, and looked at Jimmy Silver.

"Like sardines?" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter sarcastically.

"Wire in, then. Take the lot!"

Bunter took the lot; there were only two.

The meagre supplies vanished in record time, and Bunter blinked discontentedly over the table. It was enough for any ordinary eater, but Billy Bunter wasn't an ordinary eater.

"Rather short commons to-day," remarked Jimmy apologetically.

"So I see."

"You took us rather by surprise, you know."

"So it seems."

"Ahem! Would you like some more—more tea?"

"Is that tea?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You're sure you didn't forget to put the tea in?"

"I put the lot in."

"Must have been a lot!" said Bunter.

"Have some more bread-and-butter?"

"Where's the butter?"

"I—I mean bread."

"Thanks! I don't care for bread!"

"The chaps are playing cricket," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's go and see old Bulkeley batting—what?"

"I'd rather take a rest," said Bunter, rolling back in the armchair. "Don't you stay in. The fact is, I'll take a little nap!"

"Sure you'd like to?" said Jimmy eagerly.

Unwelcome as his guest was, Jimmy did not wish to be wanting in politeness. But certainly it was a pleasant prospect for Bunter to take a nap, and leave him free to follow his own devices.

"Oh, yes! You cut off; I'll join you presently!" said Bunter.

Jimmy eyed him doubtfully. He had never heard of a junior schoolboy taking a nap after meals before.

But Bunter leaned back and closed his eyes, and began to snore.

That settled it.

Jimmy left the study with a lighter heart. The Fistical Four had planned a little excursion for that afternoon. The excursion had to be given up now. But at least Jimmy could get some cricket, so long as Bunter was content to sleep in the study armchair.

But as his footsteps died away down the passage, Billy Bunter's eyes reopened. He sat upright in the chair.

"Beast!" he murmured. "Rotter! Call that hospitality! I could have had a better tea than that with Toddy! But I'm jolly well not going to be famished to please him! I'm going to have tea!"

Billy Bunter rose and tiptoed to the door. He blinked out cautiously into the passage. There was no one in sight; there was no sound from the studies. All the juniors were out of doors that sunny afternoon.

With a grin on his fat face, Billy Bunter quitted the end study. The Owl of Greyfriars was on the warpath.

CHAPTER 27.

A Pig in Clover!

"CRUMBS! This is a bit of all right!"

Billy Bunter chuckled joyously to himself.

He had scouted along the Fourth Form passage, looking into the studies—and into the study cupboards.

He had taken a snack here and there, when he had found one. Cheese and biscuits from Townsend's study, cold rashers from Jones minor's, jam and pickles from one, marmalade and ham and cake from another; all was grist that came to William George Bunter's mill. But it was when he reached Mornington's study that the fat junior found himself in clover.

He did not know it was Mornington's study. But he knew that it was a land flowing with milk and honey to speak figuratively.

Mornington was rolling in money, and

he "did" himself remarkably well. After cricket practice he was having a few friends to tea, and the study cupboard held the supplies. Billy Bunter's eyes danced behind his big glasses as he blinked into the cupboard.

Jam and cake, biscuits and ham, cheese and cold beef and pickles, and lobster, all sorts and conditions of good things were there.

Billy Bunter gazed at them ecstatically.

But he did not waste time in contemplating the plunder.

He commenced operations at once.

Guzzle, guzzle, guzzle!

There was a steady sound in the study of champing jaws. Seldom had Billy Bunter found such an opportunity. And he was making the best of it.

Ham and tongue and cold beef disappeared as if by magic. A hungry Hun could not have made a more rapid clearance.

For about half an hour Billy Bunter hardly moved.

By that time the keen edge of his appetite had worn off, and he proceeded more slowly, picking out delicacies.

He reflected too, that if the owner of the study returned, he would be surprised—and probably exasperated—to find the visitor from Greyfriars scoffing his supplies.

He resolved to finish the feed in safer quarters.

He gathered up a large cake, several bottles of ginger-beer and currant wine, a bag of biscuits, a packet of chocolate creams, and several other articles. His pockets were stuffed, and he had a cargo under each arm, as he trod cautiously out of the study.

There was a sound of voices below, and Bunter hurried along the passage. If it was the owner of the study returning, he had escaped only just in time.

A bottle of ginger-beer slipped from under his arm, and crashed on the floor, and rolled along; but Bunter did not stop for it.

He bolted into the end study, closed

the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Then he spread out his plunder on the table, sat in the armchair, and proceeded to dispose of it.

His fat face beamed over it.

If there was trouble to follow his raid, that could not be helped, and the astute Owl reflected that Jimmy Silver & Co. could not very well stand by and see their guest ragged.

Meanwhile, Mornington and his friends had come in. Townsend and Topham and Peele and Gower were with Mornington. They came into the study in cheerful humour. Mornington had recovered from his painful experiences with Bunter the bowler, though there was still a bruise under his dark hair. But a change came over his face as he saw the cupboard door wide open, and noted the depredations that had taken place.

"Who the dickens has been here?" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, a giddy raid!" exclaimed Townsend. "Some of the Modern rotters."

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Peele. "There goes our tea! Look here, we're not goin' to stand this! I'd go to Bootles about it."

Mornington scowled.

"Some cheeky rotter has collared the stuff," he growled. "We'll jolly well find him and get it back. Come along!"

He hurried along out of the study, looking about him savagely. The ginger-beer bottle on the floor caught his eye.

"He went this way!" he exclaimed.

Mornington ran along the passage, looking into the studies, in search of the raider. All the studies were empty, however, until he came to the last. There, the door did not open to his hand.

Mornington rapped savagely on the door.

"Hallo!" came a fat voice within. "Is that you, Jimmy?"

"It is I! Open the door!"

"Who's I?" asked Bunter, without moving.

"Mornington."

"How do you do, Mornny? Remember seeing me at Greyfriars?"

"Have you been to my study?" shouted Mornington, rattling the door.

"Smithy sent you his kind regards."

"You fat rotter! Have you been raiding my study?"

"And Smithy told me to tell you not to overdo the smokes, Mornny."

"Open this door!"

"Eh?"

"Open the door, you fat rotter!"

Billy Bunter made no reply. But Mornington could hear his champing, as he disposed of the cake. The dandy of the Fourth kicked furiously at the door.

"What's the row?" asked Townsend, coming along the passage. "Tain't one of those chaps who's raided us. They are on the cricket-ground."

"It's that fat beast from Greyfriars."

"Phew! Sure?"

"He won't let me into the study, anyway."

"Bunter!" shouted Townsend.

"Hallo!"

"Let us in!"

"Some other time, old chap!"

"Have you got our grub there?"

No reply.

"He's scoffing it!" exclaimed Mornington. "Bunter, if you don't open this door, we'll break it in."

Only a fat chuckle replied. The door was of stout oak, and Bunter did not think it was likely to be broken easily.

But he did not know Mornington. The Rookwood junior had flown into one of his savage, passionate tempers; and when he was in that mood he did not care how much damage he did.

"Get a form!" he exclaimed. "Get that form from the box-room. We'll batter the door in."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Townsend uneasily. "There'll be the dickens to pay!"

"I don't care."

"Well, I do!"

"Pah!"

Mornington rushed into the box-room at the end of the passage. An old, damaged form had been left there with other lumber, and Mornington remembered it. He seized it and dragged it out into the passage.

"Lend me a hand with it!" he exclaimed.

"Look here, Mornny——"

"Stand aside!"

Mornington lifted the heavy form with an exertion of all his strength, and crashed it against the lock. The door shook and groaned.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.

"Will you open the door?" yelled Mornington.

"Will you make it pax if I do?"

"No!"

"Then you can go and eat coke!"

Crash! Crash!

CHAPTER 28.

Rough on Mornington!

"HALLO! What the merry dickens——"

Jimmy Silver & Co. came along the passage. They quickened their pace as they saw how Mornington was engaged. He was about to crash the old form on the door again, when Jimmy Silver's grasp fell upon his shoulder.

"Hold on!" said Jimmy.

"Let me alone, hang you!"

"That's my study door," said Jimmy quietly. "You won't bust in my door, Mornington!"

Mornington wrenched himself away from the captain of the Fourth. The form crashed on the floor, and there was a howl of anguish from Townsend. The end had clumped on his toe.

Townsend hopped on one foot, yelling.

"Yow-ow-ow! Yah! You silly idiot! Yow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my toe! Ow-yow!"

"Now, what's the little game?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Mornington panted with rage.

"That fat beast has raided my study. He's got my grub in there, and the door's locked."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"Oh, my hat! Let me in, Bunter."

"Is that you, Jimmy, old pal?"

"It's Jimmy, anyway."

Billy Bunter unlocked the door. Jimmy Silver strode in, followed by his chums and Mornington. Townsend was still hopping in anguish in the passage.

Mornington shook a furious fist at the Owl of Greyfriars.

"Now where is it?" he shouted.

"Where's what?"

"What you've taken from my study."

"I don't understand you, Mornington," said Bunter, with dignity. "If you mean to imply that I have taken anything from your study, I can only say that I regard the insinuation with scorn."

Jimmy Silver looked sharply at the fat junior. Bunter looked rather greasy and shiny, and seemed to be breathing with some difficulty. Certainly he looked like a fellow who had over-eaten himself. But there were no signs of a feed in the study; the fat junior had taken care of that. All the eatables and drinkables were safely disposed of—inside Bunter; and the ginger-beer bottles were hidden under the table. The Owl of Greyfriars was prepared to brazen it out. Billy Bunter was quite a Prussian in some things, and "whoppers" cost him little.

"I know he's had the stuff," said Mornington between his teeth. "Why wouldn't he open the door?"

"Why didn't you let Mornington in, Bunter?" asked Lovell.

"Well, he seemed so waxy, I wouldn't risk it," said Bunter calmly. "I don't want to have to lick him. I've licked one Rookwood chap this afternoon. I didn't come over here to wallop all Rookwood."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"I tell you he raided my study!" shouted Mornington, advancing on Bunter with his fists clenched. "And if he doesn't hand it over, I'll take it out of his hide!"

Bunter promptly dodged behind Jimmy Silver.

"I say, you fellows——"

Jimmy pushed the enraged Mornington back.

"Did you collar Mornington's grub, or not, Bunter?" he demanded.

"Certainly not."

"Have you been in this study all the time?"

"Yes, fast asleep. Mornington woke me up by thundering at the door."

"What did you lock the door for?" asked Raby.

"I don't like being disturbed when I'm having a nap."

"He's lyin'!" yelled Mornington.

Jimmy shook his head.

"You can see the grub isn't here, Mornington. I dare say it was some of the Moderns raided you."

"Nothin' of the sort. It was that fat rotter, and I know it."

"Well, you can't know it."

"He's goin' to hand the stuff over, or I'm goin' to lick him!" shouted Mornington. "And if you interfere, I'll lick you, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

"Well, you're not going to touch Bunter," he said. "You've got no proof. You'd better clear out of the study."

"Yes, kick him out!" said Bunter, keeping behind the stalwart captain of the Fourth. "I don't like a hooligan like that in the place. I must say I don't think much of Rookwood manners—I must really."

Mornington made a rush at Bunter. As Jimmy was in the way, he came into collision with Jimmy. His fist crashed on Jimmy Silver's nose, and there was a roar from Jimmy.

The next moment Mornington was being driven out of the study, with Jimmy's left and right driving him.

The infuriated Mornington, resisted savagely, but he was driven out, and a straight drive from Jimmy's left hurled him fairly into the passage.

Mornington collapsed upon the floor, gasping.

"Now, if you want any more, you can come in again," said Jimmy Silver, breathing hard.

"Come away, Morny," muttered Topham. "The grub isn't there, you know."

Mornington's friends picked him up and led him away down the passage. The dandy of the Fourth had had enough.

Billy Bunter chuckled gleefully.

"You ain't bad as a boxer, Jimmy," he remarked critically. "I could give you some tips, perhaps; but you ain't bad for a Rookwood chap."

Jimmy glared at him.

"You could give me some tips?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! I'm rather a dab at boxing."

"Well, I've got some gloves here. You can give me the tips."

"Ahem! Another time. I—I don't feel quite up to boxing after a feed like that," said Bunter hastily.

"A feed like what?" demanded Lovell suspiciously.

"I—I mean, on a warm afternoon like this," said Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say."

Townsend looked into the study.

"Somebody's been robbin' my study cupboard," he said, with a savage look at Bunter. "'Tain't only Morny's."

"Who's got my pickles, bedad?" came Flynn's voice along the passage.

"Tare an' 'oun's, and my pot of jam?"

"Where's my cake?"

"Where's my ham-and-tongue?"

The Classical juniors had come in to tea, and the long list of depredations had been discovered. There was wrath from one end of the passage to the other.

"Must have been a Modern raid," said Jimmy Silver.

"Rot!" growled Townsend.

And he stamped away in a temper.

The Fistical Four eyed Bunter suspiciously. It was possible that some of the Modern fellows had raided the passage while the Classical were on the cricket-ground. But they could not help feeling suspicions of Bunter.

"Well, we're going to have tea in Hall," said Jimmy Silver. "Are you ready, Bunter?"

"Ahem! I've had tea, you know."

"You said you'd like tea in Hall as well. You didn't have much of a spread here."

"I'm not a great eater," said Bunter calmly. "You fellows go and have tea. I'll wait for you here."

"Well, I want my tea," said Lovell.

"Better lock the door," said Jimmy, with a grin.

"You bet!" said Bunter emphatically.

The Fistical Four went down to tea, and Bunter locked the door after them. Then he sat in the armchair and grinned. From his pockets he drew several chunks of cake and biscuits and chocolate creams, and proceeded to dispose of them—slowly. Even Billy Bunter had a limit, and after his tremendous feed he had to be careful how he crammed anything more in, lest there should be a catastrophe.

CHAPTER 29.

A Very Serious Problem!

BILLY BUNTER was asleep in the armchair when the Fistical Four returned to the study. A hammering at the door awakened him, and he let the juniors in. Jimmy Silver & Co. regarded him curiously as he yawned and rubbed his eyes.

"Napping again?" asked Newcome.

"Yes, just a doze, you know," said Bunter. "I can do with a good deal of sleep. I suppose I shall have to think about my train pretty soon."

"Will you?" said Jimmy politely.

"Yes. I suppose you're not going to walk to the station?"

"No," said Jimmy, misunderstanding, —perhaps purposely. "We've got a meeting of the cricket committee, and we shan't be able to get away."

"So awfully sorry," said Lovell.

"I don't mean that," grunted Bunter. "I mean, you're going to have a lift of some sort."

"No lifts here," said Jimmy; "we all use the stairs."

"I don't mean that sort of a lift. Have you got a trap to take me to the station, or haven't you?"

"Nothing but a mouse-trap. I suppose that wouldn't do?"

"Br-r-r-r-r! When I have a visitor I generally look after him a bit better than this. I shouldn't urge a fellow to come and see me if I wasn't prepared to look after him," said Bunter irritably.

As a matter of fact, the ham and pickles and cheese and the rest were engaged in internecine warfare inside Bunter, and his temper was suffering.

"Well, we're prepared to look after you," said Lovell; "we'll look after you from the gate when you go, with pleasure."

"Well, if I've got to walk, we may as well start now," said Bunter sulkily. "I suppose you're going to see me to the station?"

"Sorry. Can't cut the cricket committee."

"Then there's something that will have to be settled before I start," said Bunter, in alarm. "I told you I'd left my money at Greyfriars. I've got to get a ticket back somehow."

"My-hat! That looks like a difficulty. Sorry, I'm stony!"

"Same here," said Lovell.

And Raby and Newcome shook their heads sadly.

Billy Bunter blinked at them. Following his usual system, he had intended to "stick" Jimmy Silver & Co. for his fare. But he had overdone it for once. The Fistical Four were stony, and they had neither the desire nor the intention to go up and down Rookwood borrowing money for Bunter.

"We'll see you as far as the gate,"

said Jimmy Silver. "Sorry we can't come farther. But a cricket committee is a cricket committee, you know."

"I say, you fellows, I—I've got to have a ticket, you know," said Bunter, in alarm. "I—I can't dodge the railway company all the way."

"It's a good idea to take a return ticket," remarked Lovell. "Well, I must be off. Rawson's expecting me."

Lovell strolled away, whistling. How William George Bunter was to get home to Greyfriars was no concern of his. It was up to William George to consider those details before he issued invitations to himself.

Billy Bunter was utterly dismayed.

"Oh, really, you know. I—I can't stay here all night, you know!" he said.

"I might make you up a bed in the study," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Would you mind sleeping on the floor?"

"You ass!" roared Bunter. "I've got to get home before locking-up, or I shall get a licking!"

"Then you'd better not lose the train," remarked Raby.

"I—I can't travel without a ticket."

"No; awkward, ain't it?"

"If I had a visitor, and he'd left his money at home, I'd lend him a few bob!" snorted Bunter.

"How would you, if you were stony?" asked Jimmy Silver calmly.

"Well, I can tell you that I shall think twice before I visit you again, that's all?"

"You're welcome to think three times," said Newcome. "See you later, Jimmy. Good-bye, Bunter! So sorry you're in a fix!"

Newcome went out.

"I say, you fellows, don't buzz off like that!" howled Bunter. "Where am I to get the money for my ticket?"

"Borrow it from Mornington," grinned Raby. "Morny's got lots of oof."

And Raby sauntered out.

"Don't forget the cricket committee, Jimmy!" he called back. "The fellows will be waiting for you."

Billy Bunter caught hold of Jimmy Silver's sleeve.

"Look here, what are you going to do?" he demanded.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Blessed if I know. You should really have thought of that before you started, you know. You'll excuse me now, won't you? I can't keep the committee waiting."

"But I—say——"

"Perhaps you could borrow it of Bootles," said Jimmy, relenting.

"Bootles! Who's Bootles?"

"Our Form-master. If you tell him you're stranded here without your return fare, I dare say he would stand it. Only you'd have to send him the money afterwards, or he'd write to your headmaster."

"Look here! You go and ask Bootles, and I'll send you a postal-order tomorrow—I say, don't cut off while I am talking to you! All right, you beast, show me where his study is, then!"

Jimmy Silver, with a solemn face, conducted Bunter to Mr. Bootles' study, and the fat junior knocked and entered. Doubtless the Owl of Greyfriars succeeded in explaining satisfactorily to Mr. Bootles, for his fat face wore a look of relief when he came out of the study.

He blinked round for Jimmy Silver, but Jimmy had disappeared. The cricket committee was in session, and Jimmy was there.

Billy Bunter gave an expressive snort, and rolled out of the School House. He rolled down to the gates and departed.

His visit to Rookwood had come to an end. And, excepting for the stolen spread, it had not fulfilled Bunter's expectations in the least. He rolled away down the lane in a decidedly discontented frame of mind, and as he plumped into the train that bore him away, he registered a vow that he wouldn't honour Jimmy Silver & Co.

with another visit, not even if they went down on their bended knees and begged him with tears in their eyes to do so. But Bunter's determination was not likely to be put to such a test.

"Tubby's gone, then!"

Lovell made that disrespectful remark when he came into the end study to do his preparation.

"Did he raise the fare?" yawned Raby.

"Bootles lent it to him," said Jimmy Silver. "That was easy enough; the only difficulty is, that Bunter will have to square, or Bootles will let somebody hear of it."

Jimmy Silver sat down at the table to work. There was a clink under the table as his feet knocked against something there.

"What the dickens——"

Jimmy stopped, and pulled up the cover. Then he ejaculated:

"Oh, my hat!"

He kicked out into view a collection of empty ginger-beer and currant-wine bottles, and several empty cardboard boxes that had contained chocolates and toffee.

"What the merry thunder!" exclaimed Lovell. "Where did that collection come from?"

"Morny's grub!" yelled Raby.

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Fistical Four looked at one another. It was evidently the debris of the missing feed that had been discovered under the study table. Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"And the fat villain swore that he hadn't touched Mornington's stuff!" he said. "And I believed him, like an ass, and—and punched Morny's silly nose!"

"Well, Morny asked for it," said Lovell. "Never mind Morny's nose. Look here, Jimmy Silver, if that fat villain comes here again, he's going to have my boot! I shan't argue with him, I shall just give him my boot, and that's flat!"

Jimmy grinned.

"I don't think he'll pay us another visit," he said. "He will feel too jolly uncertain about getting his fare home."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Jimmy Silver was right. The chums of Rookwood had seen the last of the uninvited guest.

CHAPTER 30.

Too Much Self-Denial!

WHAT do you Modern bounders want?"

"What do you Classical bounders want?"

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd asked one another those questions simultaneously.

They had just arrived outside Mr. Bootles' study.

It was close on time for afternoon lessons at Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver & Co., of the Classical Fourth, came down the passage from one direction; Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern side, came from the other. And they met just outside Mr. Bootles' study.

Classicals and Moderns eyed one another suspiciously.

"You cut off," said Jimmy Silver authoritatively. And his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, chimed in emphatically:

"Cut off!"

To which Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle answered in chorus:

"Rats!"

There were four of the Classicals. But the three Tommies stood their ground. They were quite ready for a "scrap," even just outside their Form-master's door.

"None of your butting in here!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "I can jolly well guess what you're after!"

"I think I can guess what you're after, too!" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"We're going to ask Bootles——"

"Exactly! And we're going to ask Bootles——"

"About the new chap?"

"Exactly! About the new chap."

"We're going to get off lessons, and go to meet him!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha! So are we!"

"You're jolly well not! Bootles won't give leave to seven chaps!"

"You cut off, then!"

"Rats! You cut off!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Now, look here," said Jimmy Silver darkly. "We don't want any of your Modern rot. You'll cut off, or we shall shift you!"

And the three Tommies replied cheerily:

"Go ahead!"

"I give you one minute!"

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver took out his silver watch with a determined air to time them. The Fistical Four, of the Classical Form, meant business.

But so did the three Tommies.

There was a great deal at stake.

A new fellow was coming to Rookwood that afternoon—a new boy for the Fourth Form. Whether he was going to be on the Classical or the Modern side, the juniors did not know. But they knew he was coming.

Not that new boys, as a rule, mattered much. New boys could come and go in flocks and herds, as a rule, without attracting much notice from Jimmy Silver & Co.

But this particular new boy was something special.

His name was Van Ryn, and he came from South Africa. As Jimmy Silver said, it was a long, long way from South Africa to Rookwood. The new fellow, it was understood, had met friends in London, and they had put him in the train for Coombe. But, according to Jimmy Silver, the new kid, though only a new kid, had a right to expect somebody at the station to look after him after such a tremendous journey. Jimmy Silver, with great self-

denial, was prepared to "cut" lessons that afternoon, and go down to the station for that kind purpose.

His chums, equally self-denying, were prepared to let geography and English history and the French lesson "slide," all for the sake of looking after a perfect stranger.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, could not fail to be touched by such self-denial on the part of his pupils, Jimmy Silver considered. He was really bound to give them leave to carry out their generous purpose.

An afternoon out of doors, in the sunny summer weather, would be quite a sufficient reward for the self-denying juniors. Indeed, it was barely possible that the Fistical Four were thinking more of the afternoon out than of the comfort of the new boy, of whose existence they had only heard that morning.

Unfortunately, the same thought of self-denial had come into Tommy Dodd's active mind, and the three Moderns had arrived at Mr. Bootles' study with exactly the same purpose in view.

It was really a contest of self-denial, and neither party had any intention of giving way.

Jimmy Silver watched the big hand on his watch grimly.

The three Tommies occupied the interval of waiting by pushing back their cuffs, ready for combat.

"Time's up!" announced Jimmy.

"Go hon!"

"Are you going?"

"I don't think!"

"Then go for the Modern bounders!" shouted Jimmy.

There was a rush of the Classics.

"Back up!" roared Tommy Dodd.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Punch! Pommel! Punch! Yell!

The expected new boy was quite forgotten now. Classics and Moderns closed in deadly strife.

"Yah! Oh!"

"Yaroo! Take that!"

"Yoop! Classical rotter! Yow-ow!"

"Grooh! Modern cad! Yow!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The study door opened. The juniors had forgotten Mr. Bootles. The Fourth Form master was generally a good-tempered little gentleman. But there was wrath in his face as he threw open his study door.

"Boys!" he thundered.

"Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump!

"Boys!" shrieked Mr. Bootles.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Chuck it!"

The combat ceased suddenly.

Tommy Dodd and Raby were sprawling on the floor. They sat up and blinked at the Form-master.

"Silver! Dodd! Lovell! How dare you fight in the passage!"

"Ahem!"

"Grooh!"

"I am ashamed of you! You will take two hundred lines each!"

"Oh!"

"And stay in an hour after lessons to write them out!"

"Oh!"

"And now go into the Form-room at once!"

"Oh dear!"

"If you please, sir—" began Jimmy Silver, remembering his self-denying intentions.

"Not a word!" rapped Mr. Bootles.

"If you please—" began Tommy Dodd.

"Go!"

"The—the new kid, sir," stammered Jimmy Silver. "We were going to ask leave to meet him at the station—"

"What—what!"

"He's bound to feel a bit lonely, coming all the way from South America—I mean South Africa!"

"And we wanted—" began Tommy Dodd.

"Sure, we were thinking—" stut-tered Doyle.

"If you please, sir—"

"You see, sir——"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Bootles.

"Do not deafen me with clamour!"

"Ahem! Certainly not! But——"

"But, you see, sir——"

"It's like this, sir——"

"The new chap——"

"Silence! I had intended," rumbled Mr. Bootles, "to send some members of my Form to meet the new junior and bring him to Rookwood. But I shall certainly not send such noisy, rowdy, and disorderly members of the Fourth Form as yourselves. Go into the Form-room at once, or I shall cane you!"

And the rivals of Rookwood, dabbing their noses and setting their collars straight, went—dolorously. There was no self-denial for the heroes of Rookwood that afternoon.

CHAPTER 31.

The Schoolboy from South Africa!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were looking quite "down" when Mr. Bootles came majestically into the Form-room a little later.

Tommy Dodd & Co. looked glum.

It had been a good idea for getting an afternoon off—a ripping idea; but, unfortunately, the old saying, that great minds run in grooves, had proved true again. That ripping idea had occurred to both Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, and the result had been disastrous.

Instead of an afternoon off, the heroes of Rookwood had an hour's detention. It was exceedingly hard cheese.

Most of the Fourth, however, when they learned of the disaster, seemed to see something comic in it, for they were grinning at a great rate when the Form-master came in.

Townsend & Co., the Nuts of the Fourth, seemed especially amused.

Mr. Bootles glanced at the seven damaged juniors, who showed very plain traces of the scrap outside his study. But he did not speak to them. There was no hope for the delinquents.

"Townsend! Topham!" said Mr. Bootles.

The two Nuts of the Fourth rose in their places.

"I am about to ask you to render me a service," said Mr. Bootles.

Towny and Topy exchanged cheery glances. They could guess what was coming, and they rejoiced. They were not particularly "gone" on lessons, and they welcomed the prospect of a free run for the afternoon.

"A new boy arrives at Rookwood this afternoon," said Mr. Bootles. "I should like two boys to meet him at Coombe Station and bring him to the school. I have selected you, Townsend and Topham, because you are quiet and well-behaved."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Towny.

"Thank you, sir!" said Topham.

"Oh, what luck!" growled Jimmy Silver.

And Tommy Dodd snorted.

"The new boy," pursued Mr. Bootles, "is named Van Ryn. He comes from a great Dominion—South Africa. I wish you to meet him, Townsend and Topham, and conduct him to Rookwood, and treat him with great civility. He will be quite a stranger to our ways, and I am sure I can depend upon you to refrain from any absurd jokes, such as are sometimes, I believe, practised on new boys, and to give him a very good impression of Rookwood manners."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Topham.

"You can rely on us, sir," said Townsend; "we shall be delighted!"

"Very good! You will be excused from lessons for the purpose," said Mr. Bootles.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Van Ryn arrives, I understand, by the three o'clock train at Coombe. If he should be later, however, you will wait for him."

"Certainly, sir!"

"You will take him to my study when you return. You may go!"

And Towny and Topy left the Form-room in great delight. Then the

afternoon lessons began for the rest of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd gave one another quite a dispirited look. It was really hard luck.

And, as a matter of fact, Mr. Bootles would have done better to choose Tommy Dodd or Jimmy for that mission.

It was quite possible that those cheery youths would have "pulled" the new fellow's leg in a humorous way, but they could have been depended on to treat him well. That was not quite the case with Townsend and Topham. But Mr. Bootles did not know Towny and Topy quite so well as their Form-fellows did.

Townsend and Topham grinned at one another as they took their straw hats and went out into the quadrangle.

"What a little bit of luck!" grinned Townsend. "No blessed lessons this afternoon! Mornington would have liked to come, too. He tried to catch Bootles' eye."

"Never mind Morny," said Topham. "We're off! Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd dished one another. Ha, ha! And we've bagged the holiday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two Nuts of the Fourth started down Coombe Lane in great spirits.

"We can have a bit of a run this afternoon," remarked Townsend. "I suppose we'd better drop in at the station, and just speak to the new cad."

"Oh, yes! Bootles will want to know."

"I wonder what he's like," remarked Townsend. "He's got a Dutch name, and he comes from South Africa. Must be a Boer."

"Some rough-and-ready rotter, I expect," said Topham, with a sniff. "If Bootles thinks we're goin' to pal with him, Bootles is jolly well mistaken. But he comes in useful to get us off lessons. Might rag him a bit to pass the time."

"H'm! Some big, brawny chap, I expect, with a fist like a leg of mutton," said Townsend doubtfully.

"Well, we're two to one."

"Yaas, that's so. We'll rag him," agreed Townsend.

If Mr. Bootles could have heard that agreeable conversation he might have regretted that he had not sent Jimmy Silver or Tommy Dodd, in spite of the fistical proclivities of those young gentlemen.

Towny or Topy were not at all fistical in their tastes, it was true. But they were quite ready to rag a new-comer who did not know the ropes, when it was quite safe for them to do so.

They arrived at the station in very good time, and improved the shining hour by extracting packets of cigarettes from an automatic machine. That was one of Towny's and Topy's pleasant little ways.

Then the train came in.

"Look out for some beefy bounder in a slouch hat," grinned Townsend.

"And number eleven boots," chortled Topham.

But there was no one in a slouch hat and number eleven boots among the passengers who alighted from the train.

There was only one boy among the passengers, and he was in Etons and a silk hat.

Evidently this was the new boy.

Townsend and Topham glanced at him in surprise.

He was a lad of their own age, and somewhat slimly built, though his limbs were solid and strong. His face was darkly sunburnt, and he had thick, dark, curly hair. His eyes were a deep blue, and very keen and strong in their glance. The expression on his face was sunny and good-tempered.

Towny and Topy had had a vague idea that all Boers were big-boned, heavy, and lumbering. But the new-comer, as he stepped from the train, looked as lithe and as active as an antelope.

He glanced about the platform, and his eyes fell on the two Rookwood juniors.

Mr. Bootles had told the Nuts of the

Fourth to treat the newcomer with great civility, in order to give a good impression of Rookwood manners. But Towny and Topy had their own ideas about carrying out those instructions.

"That's the cad," said Townsend, loud enough for the new boy to hear.

"Yaas, that's the rotter," said Topham.

The newcomer flushed under the tan on his cheeks, and looked at them harder.

"A dashed Boer!" said Townsend. "Nearly as black as a nigger, too. I dare say he is a bit of a nigger."

"Looks like it, by gad!" agreed Topham.

"I wonder whether he speaks English," pursued Townsend calmly. "I suppose he talks some kind of broken lingo."

"Like a German," agreed Topham.

"Well, he is a kind of German."

"Yaas, that is so."

Every word of those cheery remarks was perfectly audible to the new boy. The Nuts grinned as they saw his handsome face flush with anger. Having made themselves agreeable to this extent, Townsend and Topham walked towards the new boy.

"New kid for Rookwood—what?" yawned Townsend.

"Van Tromp, or Van Bomp, or something—what?" asked Topham.

Van Ryn looked at them without replying.

He seemed puzzled what to make of them.

"We've come here to meet you," explained Topham. "Our Form-master sent us. As you probably don't speak English, you want lookin' after."

The new boy grinned.

His keen, clear eyes had taken the measure of Townsend and Topham. There was a peculiar glimmer in his eyes as he nodded.

"Me speak some little Engleesh," he said.

Townsend and Topham chuckled.

They had not really supposed that the

new boy could not speak English; that was only their exquisite nutty humour. But the supposition seemed to be well founded, after all.

"Excuse me!" gasped Townsend.

"What did you say?"

"Me speak some Engleesh."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vat for you laff?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me soon learn speak him at Rookwood, ain't it?" pursued the new boy.

"Me speak Dutch first-chop."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Topham.

"That new merchant will make 'em yell at Rookwood! Ha, ha!"

"No see why Mynheer laff," said the new boy, looking puzzled.

"Mynheer!" shrieked Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mynheer! Oh, crumbs!"

"Mynheer! That's the Dutch way of saying 'Mein Herr!' What language do you talk when you're at home, kid? Dutch or Hottentot?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your box, sir?" said the porter.

"Send it to Rookwood," said Townsend. "This chap is goin' to walk with us!"

Van Ryn slipped a shilling into the old porter's hand, picked up a small bag, and followed the Nuts of the Fourth from the station.

CHAPTER 32.

Catching a Tartar!

TOWNSEND and Topham were in hilarious spirits. A new fellow who came to Rookwood talking broken English was a new experience. Van Ryn was, as Townsend remarked, a real coughdrop.

"You show me vay to Rookwood, ain't it?" asked the new boy, as the Nuts paused outside the station.

"Not just yet," said Townsend. "You see, we've been let off lessons to fetch you. If we go straight back we shall have to go into the Form-room again.

We're goin' to let Bootles think you came by a later train!"

"Who Pootles?"

"Pootles!" yelled Topham. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Bootles is our Form-master," chuckled Townsend. "Now we're goin' round the town a bit. You wait here!"

"Vy me wait?"

"Because we don't want to be bothered all the afternoon by an African savage," said Townsend politely. "We're goin' round the town. We'll come back for you and take you to the school in a couple of hours. See?"

"No want to wait."

"It isn't a question of what you want, but of what we want. And if Bootles asks you what train you came by, tell him the half-past four!"

"Me come by tree o'clock train."

"Yaas, I know you did, you fathead! But if Bootles knows that he'll expect us to get back before lessons are over. You'll tell him you came by the half-past four, and then if we get back to Rookwood by five, it will be all serene."

The new boy's eyes gleamed for a moment.

"No tell lies," he said.

"You cheeky cannibal!" growled Townsend. "You'll do as you're told!"

"No tell lies to Pootles."

"I'll Pootles you if I have any of your cheek!" said Townsend angrily. "Now you stay here, and we'll come back for you at half-past four. If you don't do as you're told, you'll get a hidin', you silly Hottentot! Savvy?"

Townsend and Topham turned away. It was a glorious opportunity for sneaking into the Bird-in-Hand by the back way, and enjoying the society of their sporting friends there. The Nuts of the Fourth did not mean to miss that opportunity.

But as they started off in one direction the new boy started off in another. He did not apparently want to spend an hour and a half waiting outside the village station.

Townsend swung round.

"Come back, you Kaffir!" he shouted. Van Ryn looked round.

"Me go to Rookwood," he said.

"Haven't I told you you're to stay here?"

"You goes and eats coke, isn't it?"

"Well, my hat! You cheeky rat——"

"Look here," said Topham, "we're goin' to leave you here, and if you don't wait for us you'll get a hidin'!"

"Rats!"

"Do you want the hidin' first?" growled Townsend.

The new boy grinned.

"No wait," he said.

"Then we'll jolly well give you a lesson to start with! Collar him, Topy, and bump the cheeky cad!"

Townsend and Topham were exasperated.

The afternoon off would be quite spoiled if they had to carry out Mr. Bootles' instructions. They did not see why the new boy could not wait at the station till they condescended to return for him. Apparently the new boy did.

Townsend and his chum grasped Van Ryn, with threatening looks.

"Now, are you goin' to do as you're told, or are you goin' to have a jolly good bumpin'?" demanded Townsend.

"You take dem hands off me!"

"Yes or no, you Hottentot?"

"No!"

"Bump him!" growled Townsend.

They dragged at the new boy. Van Ryn promptly returned grasp for grasp, and, to their surprise, Towny and Topy were dragged together, and their heads came in contact with a resounding crack.

Crack!

"Oh, by gad!"

"Yow-oh!"

Then Towny and Topy sat down suddenly on the pavement.

The new boy grinned down at them good-humouredly.

"I tinks tat you not pump me," he remarked.

"Yow-ow-ow! You beastly Boer!"

"Yoop! You rotten Dutchman! Oh dear!"

"You gets up and haves some more, isn't it?" grinned Van Ryn.

Townsend and Topham got up, but they did not want any more. They regarded the new boy with mingled rage and alarm, but they showed no desire to come to close quarters again.

"What a rotten strong beast!" growled Topham.

"You puts up der hands, isn't it?" said Van Ryn, advancing on them.

"Keep off, you savage!" yelled Townsend, in alarm.

"Hands off, you Dutch rotter!"

The Nuts of the Fourth backed away in alarm.

"No want to scrap, Mynheer?"

"No, you beast!"

"Keep your distance, you rotter! I want nothin' to do with you!" groaned Topham, rubbing his head.

"Den you takes me to Rookwood, I tink."

"You rotter! We're not goin' back to Rookwood yet. Look here, you can come with us if you like," said Townsend. "You—you needn't wait at the station if you don't want to. We let you off that."

"Thank you!" grinned Van Ryn.

"Thank you for notting, Mynheer!"

"Well, come on!" growled Townsend ungraciously. "We're goin' to have rather a good time, and you can come."

"But Pootles expect us."

"Blow Bootles! You can tell him you came by the four-thirty."

"No tell lies!"

"Jolly particular for an African savage, ain't we?" sneered Townsend.

"Well, you can jolly well tell Bootles what you like, but we're not goin' back yet. You can come with us if you like. Do you smoke?"

"Nein, nein!"

"Oh, what a washy waster!" snorted Townsend. "Do you know how to play nap?"

"Nein."

"Then we'll teach you. You'll have to keep it dark, of course. Come on!"

"No come."

"Then go and eat coke! Come on, Towny; we'll chance it!"

Van Ryn stepped forward and grasped Townsend's arm with one hand and Topham's with the other. They glared at him.

"Let go, you cad! What do you want?" howled Topham.

"No know way to school. You come and show."

"Catch us!"

"Me caught you," said Van Ryn cheerfully.

"Leggo!"

"You gum wiz me, ain't it?"

"Will you let go?" said Townsend sulphurously. "We'll point out the way."

"No good enough. You tell lies."

"Why, you cheeky Hottentot——"

"Gum on!" said Van Ryn cheerfully.

He had linked his arms with those of the two Nuts, and, wriggle as they would, Townsend and Topham could not unlink them.

They exchanged furious looks across the Boer.

They were two to one, and Van Ryn was no bigger than either of them. But they were aware that he was a decidedly tough customer—their heads were still singing from the late concussion. Towny and Topy sincerely repented by this time that they had started ragging the junior from South Africa. They had caught a Tartar, as they realised too late.

"Look here, we're not comin'!" said Topham feebly.

"I tink you gum."

"Will you let us go?" shrieked Townsend.

"I tink not."

"You rotten Dutchman! Yow-ow-ow! Don't twist my arm like that, you ruffian!" yelled Townsend.

"You gum?"

There was no help for it. Towny and

Topsy had to "gum," as the new junior expressed it.

With feelings that were too deep for mere words, the Nuts of the Fourth started for Rookwood, their arms linked in those of the new boy.

Van Ryn walked along cheerfully between them, heedless of their black looks and mutterings of vengeance.

And he did not let go their arms till they arrived at the school and walked in at the gates of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 33.

Not a Hun!

TOWNSEND and Topham came back into the Fourth Form-room in time for last lesson. They had left Van Ryn in Mr. Bootles' study, and were glad to get rid of him there. Their arms were still aching from his grip, and each of them had a bump on his head.

The afternoon off had not been very enjoyable for the Nuts of the Fourth, after all, and they were feeling a deep and bitter animosity towards the new boy. Mr. Bootles glanced at them as they came sullenly in. They had no choice, but to turn up in the Form-room, as they had come back to Rookwood.

"You have met the new junior?" asked Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir. Left him in your study."

"Very good!"

Townsend and Topham went to their places. Some of the juniors looked at them anxiously. It was trouble.

"What's the giddy Colonial like?" whispered Higgs to Townsend as the latter sat down.

"A rotten beast!" growled Townsend.

"Been scrapping?"

"Ye-es. He's a rotten German."

"And speaks broken English like a German pedlar!" grunted Topham. "A rotten, rank outsider!"

"I believe he's a rotten German!" muttered Townsend. "He talks like one!"

"If he's a German, we'll jolly soon make Rookwood too hot to hold him," said Higgs. "I'll see that merchant after lessons and talk to him. He's got a Dutch name."

"Might be a German, all the same. He wouldn't come here with a German name, of course."

"Very likely," said Higgs.

Townsend knew very well that the South African junior was not a German, but it was his idea to put the bully of the Fourth on Van Ryn's track. There was only one fellow in the Fourth who could stand up to Higgs, and that was Jimmy Silver. If Higgs started on Van Ryn, the new boy was likely to suffer severely for handling Towny and Topsy in Coombe.

"It's up to you, Higgy," whispered Topham encouragingly. "You show the cad what we think of Germans here."

"What-ho!" said Higgs.

"We had a German here once before, and Jimmy Silver took him under his wing," said Townsend. "That was some time back. But you're not afraid of Silver. Of course, he will be down on you if you call the new kid over the coals."

Alfred Higgs flushed.

The mere suggestion of anybody opposing him was enough to make the bully of the Fourth angry and determined.

"You leave him to me!" he said. "I'll put him through it!"

Mr. Bootles glanced round, frowning.

"Someone is talking in class!" he said. That fact had just dawned upon Mr. Bootles.

The discussion ceased, but Towny and Topsy exchanged glances of satisfaction. They felt assured of vengeance now.

When the Fourth Form was dismissed, seven unfortunate juniors had to remain behind. The Fistical Four and the three Tommies were detained until half-past five.

The rest of the Fourth streamed out.

Mr. Bootles went at once to his study, where the new boy was waiting for him to be at leisure.

Several fellows gathered round Townsend and Topham to ask them how they had got on with the South African. Nobody at Rookwood had seen the new boy yet. The Nuts of the Fourth did not lose the opportunity of instilling prejudice into the juniors' minds against the new fellow. From their description of him Van Ryn might have been a hooligan of the deepest dye. And Townsend was convinced—or professed to be—that he was in reality a Hun.

"An ugly, prize-fightin' beast!" said Towny. "Talks broken English, German through and through—spy, very likely!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Dick Oswald. "Bootles said he was a Colonial."

"Wait till you hear him talk, then!"

"Wait till he comes out of Bootles' study," said Higgs. "I'll put him through it. I'll make him answer up!"

"Better let him alone," said Oswald.

"Oh, you go and eat coke!"

Quite a number of juniors gathered in the passage for Van Ryn to appear. Higgs declared that he was to be taken to the Common-room, and there put through his paces. And no one present cared to gainsay the heavy-handed bully of the Fourth.

Mr. Bootles' door opened at last, and the new boy appeared. Mr. Bootles signed to Tubby Muffin.

"Muffin, Van Ryn will share your study—No. 5. Kindly take him there. And show Van Ryn any little attentions you can, Muffin."

"Yes, sir," said Tubby Muffin.

Mr. Bootles retired into his study and closed the door. Tubby Muffin looked the new junior over critically, and, as he looked pretty prosperous, Tubby decided to be friendly. A study-mate with ready money was just what Tubby wanted, and Tubby would

have taken Hitler himself as study-mate, with plenty of cash attached.

"Come on, kid!" said Tubby politely.

But before Tubby could proceed any further with his friendly attentions, Higgs shouldered him out of the way, and Tubby Muffin collapsed on the floor with a yelp.

Higgs strode up to the new boy with his most bullying expression on his face.

"So you're the German!" he exclaimed.

Van Ryn stepped back a pace.

"Listen to his English!" jeered Topham. "You'll soon see whether he's a German or not!"

Van Ryn grinned.

"Me not German," he said. "Me Dutch!"

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

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Higgs. "What English! Haven't you ever been to school?"

"Ja, ja!"

"Ja, ja!" mimicked Higgs. "A German right enough. Bring him into the Common-room!"

The juniors gathered round Van Ryn, and he was hustled down the passage into the junior Common-room—a quarter generally safe from masters and prefects.

The new boy seemed inclined to resist at first, but he decided to go quietly. The juniors, Classical and Modern, streamed into the Common-room after him.

"Shut the door!" commanded Higgs.

Townsend closed the door, grinning. The new boy was going to pay the piper now. Towny and Topsy rejoiced.

"Now you're going to answer up," said Higgs.

Van Ryn looked at him quietly.

"My idea," pursued Higgs, "is that you're a German sneaking in here as a Dutchman!"

"Nein, nein!"

"Nein, nein!" roared Higgs. "Ha, ha, ha! That's German!"

"May be Dutch, too," said Oswald.

"Oh, rats! He's a German!" said Higgs positively. "Anyway, a Boer is the next thing to a German."

"You lie!" said the new boy directly.

"What?"

"You are a liar!" said Van Ryn calmly.

The juniors stared at him. There was no trace of his weird accent in his voice now. Townsend and Topham could scarcely believe their ears.

"Hallo! You can talk English when you loike, you gossoon!" exclaimed Flynn.

Van Ryn laughed.

"Of course I can talk English!" he exclaimed. "I was brought up to speak both Dutch and English at home. Those two fellows met me at the station, and, before even speaking to me, said that I should speak broken English. So I spoke broken English to pull their silly legs."

"Oh, by gad!" ejaculated Townsend.

"You spoofing cad!" exclaimed Topham savagely.

There was a loud laugh. Townsend and Topham, in their description of the new boy, had laid particular stress on the German accent and the broken English. It was one of the chief counts in their indictment against the new fellow. And it was not agreeable to discover that the South African had been "pulling their leg" all the time.

"Well, you silly gossoons, to be taken in by a new kid!" exclaimed Flynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you were pulling my leg, too, just now in the passage?" exclaimed Higgs.

Van Ryn nodded.

"Yes. As you seemed the same kind of silly ass I pulled your silly leg in the same way," he replied.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Higgy!" chuckled Jones minor.

Higgs flushed with rage. He was far too important a person to have his leg pulled—in his own estimation at least.

Van Ryn was showing no sign of uneasiness, though the burly bully of the Fourth fairly towered over him.

Higgs' hands were clenched and his eyes were gleaming.

"You cheeky cad——" he began.

"Same to you!" said Van Ryn cheerily.

"You called me a liar!"

"So you are a liar, if you say that I am anything like a German!" said Van Ryn coolly.

"Good for you," said Flynn, with a chuckle. "Let the kid alone. He's jolly well not such a German as you are."

"I'll make minciment of him," roared Higgs. "Do you think I'm going to let a blessed Boer cheek me?"

"Well, you have cheeked me," said Van Ryn. "One good turn deserves another, you know. I do not want to quarrel with you."

"You won't have much choice about that, if you don't mind your p's and q's," said Higgs darkly. "I'm going to ask you some questions, and, if you don't satisfy me, you'll be put through it."

"I do not mind answering questions. But about being put through it, I should have something to say to that."

"And so should I," said a cheery voice at the door. And Jimmy Silver came into the Common-room, followed by his chums.

CHAPTER 34.

A Fight to a Finish!

HIGGS scowled at Jimmy Silver. Jimmy's detention had given him a chance of bullying without being called to account; but Mr. Bootles had been occupied so long with the new boy, that Jimmy's detention was over before the bully of the Fourth could carry out his amiable intentions.

"Don't shove your oar in here, Silver," growled Higgs. "This cheeky young bounder is going to give an account of himself."

"Right-ho," said Jimmy: "We'll see fair play."

"You'll mind your own business," roared Higgs.

"This is my business," said Jimmy calmly. "Trust your Uncle James to keep an eye on you, Alfred, my boy."

Higgs snorted.

Jimmy Silver seated himself on the corner of the big table, and looked on. Jimmy rather liked Van Ryn's looks; but even if he had been as bad as Towny's description of him, Jimmy would have seen fair play. Jimmy looked on that as his duty as captain of the Fourth.

"Now, young shaver," growled Higgs. "What's your name?"

"Richard van Ryn."

"Oh! You're a beastly Boer; but you've got an English front name!" sneered Higgs.

"I am a Boer," said the new junior quietly. "Not beastly, that I know of. I have an English name because I am partly English."

"Where do you come from?"

"The Cape."

"A blessed rebel, I suppose?"

Van Ryn flushed.

"You are a cad to suggest that," he said. "My people fought against England in the other war. But we are one people now."

"Oh, they did, did they?" said Higgs.

"Certainly. My father was a Transvaaler, and he was with De Wet to the very last. Naturally, he fought for his own country."

"Of course he did," agreed Jimmy Silver. "We shouldn't think much of him if he hadn't."

"Hear, hear!" said Lovell.

"But now we are united, all true Boers are standing by England," said Van Ryn. "We are free under the British flag, and all we ever asked for was freedom."

"Sure, it's a Daniel come to judgment," said Flynn. "It's a broth av a bhoy ye are."

"Well, we've only got your word for all that," sneered Higgs. "I shouldn't wonder if your precious father was a rebel at this minute."

Smack!

Higgs staggered back with a roar of pain and amazement. Van Ryn's open hand smote him fairly across the face.

"That is my answer to that," said the Africander coolly. "You can have some more if you want it."

"Oh, by gad!" ejaculated Townsend. The astute Towny had planned to "set" the bully of the Fourth on Van Ryn. But the South African seemed quite willing to meet the truculent Alfred half-way, or more than half-way.

Higgs was too astounded to do anything but gasp for a moment or two. Then he rushed at Van Ryn like a bull.

Jimmy Silver jumped between, and Higgs staggered back from a powerful shove.

"Not so fast," said Jimmy.

"Get aside!" bellowed Higgs.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Not a bit of it," he said coolly. "You asked for that, Higgs, and you've got it, and you can put it in your pipe and smoke it. You're not going to handle a kid half your size while your Uncle Jimmy is around."

"Do you think I'm going to let him punch my face?" roared Higgs.

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes, if you insult his father," he said. "If you say anything of the kind again I'll punch your face myself, and hard."

"Get aside!"

"Bow-wow!"

Van Ryn dropped his hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

"Thank you very much," he said quietly, "but you need not protect me. I can stand up for myself."

"You can't!" said Jimmy doubtfully. "That rotter is head and shoulders too big for you."

Van Ryn smiled.

"Even if I cannot I shan't allow anybody to protect me," he said. "Let him come on, and we will see."

Jimmy Silver stepped aside.

"Well, you can have your own way, of course," he said. "You can go ahead, Higgs. Sing out when you've had enough, Van Ryn."

"No good his singing out," said Higgs savagely. "I'm going to hammer him black and blue, and make him beg pardon on his knees."

"You're going to do nothing of the sort," said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "As soon as Van Ryn's had enough you're going to leave him alone, or you'll get such a ragging you'll remember it the rest of the term."

"Better have some gloves on," said Lovell uneasily.

"I won't have any gloves," roared Higgs. "Let the cad stand up to me and I'll smash him."

"Gloves or not, as you choose," said Van Ryn, shrugging his broad shoulders. "It is all one to me."

"Take your jacket off, at any rate," said Lovell. And he helped the new junior off with his jacket.

Van Ryn rolled back his sleeves. It could be seen that his arms were strong and well developed. It occurred to Jimmy that he was not so bad a match for Higgs, after all.

But Higgs had no doubts.

He came on like a bull, with his big fists thrashing out.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on anxiously. They could not interfere in a fair fight, but they had a natural repugnance to seeing the Colonial knocked about on his first day at Rookwood.

But their fears were soon relieved.

Higgs' heavy rush did not move the young Boer. He stood like a column of stone, immovable. His hands were up, and Higgs came to a stop against them. His weight was almost twice that of the South African, yet it had no effect upon the boy from the Cape. Van

Ryn's fists lashed out like lightning. Crash!

The bully went over backwards.

"Right on the wicket!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Bravo, young 'un!"

Higgs sat up dazedly.

His nose was streaming with crimson, and he was feeling dizzy from the shock. He blinked stupidly at Van Ryn.

"Oh, crumbs!" he ejaculated.

Townsend helped him to his feet.

"You're not done yet," he said. "Go for him! You can lick him, Higgs!"

"Of course I can," gasped Higgs, "and I'm going to. Don't be a silly idiot, or I'll lick you, too."

Higgs stood panting for breath for some moments. The whole crowd of juniors were grinning. It struck them as comic to see the bully of the Fourth catch a Tartar in this unexpected manner.

But Higgs had not finished yet. He had plenty of bulldog pluck, and the mere thought of being knocked out by a new boy made him furious. He came on again with a savage rush.

"Go it, Dutchy!"

"Give him another on the boko!"

"Bravo!"

Van Ryn was holding his own steadily, without giving an inch of ground. But he did not get a chance of another knock-down blow.

The handsome, sun-tanned face was getting marked now.

But the South African took his punishment quietly, and all the time his fists were hammering upon Higgs of the Fourth.

The juniors looked on almost breathlessly.

It was evident that there was more in Dick van Ryn than met the eye, and that the bully of the Fourth had once more met his match.

There were no rounds to the fight, and it was a contest of endurance; and Higgs, tough as he was, was the first to weaken.

His savage attack slackened off, and he gave ground, the South African following him up grimly, hitting hard.

Higgs went down at last, with a heavy bump.

"Somebody'd better count," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver took out his watch.

He counted.

Higgs sat up. But he could not get on his feet. He sat and panted, blinking with half-closed eyes. Van Ryn waited quietly.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, out!"

Higgs was still sitting on the floor.

He had been counted out, and there was a ringing cheer in the Common-room for the victor.

CHAPTER 35.

Tubby Muffin is Hospitable!

VAN RYN leaned on the edge of the table, breathing deeply.

The fight had told on him.

And the juniors remembered that he had had a long journey that day. Yet he had stood up to the bully of the Fourth, and licked him in a fair fight. Jimmy Silver clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you, kid!" he said. "You know how to put up your hands."

Van Ryn smiled faintly.

"Is he finished?" he asked.

"He looks like it. Are you finished, Higgs?"

Higgs groaned.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!"

"Well, that sounds finished," remarked Flynn, and there was a laugh.

"Oh! Wow!" said Higgs. "What are you grinning at, you rotters? I can't go on at present. Yow! Wow! Oh, my eye! Oh, my hat! Grooogh!"

Van Ryn came over to the bully a little uncertainly. Higgs was struggling to his feet, almost blindly, and the South African reached out to him.

"Hands off!" panted Higgs. "I've given you best, you rotter!"

Van Ryn crimsoned.

"You duffer, do you think I was going to touch you? Let me help you up!"

"Oh!" gasped Higgs.

Van Ryn helped him to his feet. Higgs leaned heavily on the table and blinked at him. Van Ryn held out his hand.

"Give us your fist," he said. "It was a jolly good fight. You've damaged me as much as I have you. Let's forget all about it."

"Bravo!" said Jimmy Silver.

Higgs blinked coldly at the Colonial, and then slowly his big fist came out, and he shook hands with him.

"Well, I don't mind," he said. "Of course, I could lick you. I wasn't quite ready this time, you see. Another time——"

"Oh, don't let's have another time!" said Van Ryn cheerily. "We're both feeling rather rocky at present, and it isn't enjoyable, is it?"

"Nunno!" grinned Higgs. "I feel as if I'd been through a threshing-machine."

"So do I," said Van Ryn frankly.

"Well, you ain't a bad sort," said Higgs. "But you're jolly well not going to crow over me if you have got the best of it this time."

"If I should try to crow over you I hope you'll hit out hard," said Van Ryn quietly. "You won't find me that kind of cad, I hope."

"Well, that's all right. I—I—I——" Higgs made an effort. "I—I'm sorry I spoke as I did. It was only rot, you know. I know your pater must be all right or you wouldn't be here. I'm sorry, and I take it back. Not because you've got the best of me, though," he added hastily. "Just because I choose, that's all."

"All serene," said Van Ryn, smiling. "Will anybody tell me where I can bathe my eye?"

"What-ho!" said Jimmy Silver. "This way."

The Pistical Four marched Van Ryn out of the Common-room in their midst. Higgs followed them slowly. Townsend and Topham did not offer to lend them a hand. The bully of the Fourth had been licked, and he was no further use to the Nuts of the Fourth. Towny and Topy were disgusted, in fact.

"Silly ass to get licked by that blessed Boer!" growled Townsend. "I suppose the beast will be ridin' roughshod over us now."

Topham rubbed the bump on his head.

"He jolly well won't," he muttered. "Higgs can't tackle him, but there's more ways than one of killing a cat. The beastly savage isn't going to handle us as he likes. If the rotter can't be licked, he can be ragged."

Townsend's eyes glared.

"Good egg! Half a dozen of us

"That's the idea! We'll put him through it. And after that scrap he won't be able to put up much of a fight, either."

"Let's go and talk to the chaps," said Townsend.

And the Nuts of the Fourth gathered in war council in Study No. 4, and Towny and Topy, and Peele and Mornington and Gower put their heads together, with the idea of making matters exceedingly warm for the junior from South Africa.

Meanwhile, Dick van Ryn was bathing his damaged face in a bath-room. Jimmy Silver & Co. lent him what aid they could. Van Ryn looked the better for it, but there was a dark shade about one of his eyes, and his nose looked red and bulbous, and there were bruises on his face. His good looks had been sadly marred for the present. He had a good many aches and pains, too, but he bore them quietly.

Tubby Muffin joined him when he had finished.

"You haven't seen the study yet," he said. "We're going to have tea there. I suppose you're hungry—what?"

Van Ryn looked at the podgy junior with a good-humoured smile. Tubby was not exactly the study-mate he would have chosen, but he was prepared to be friendly.

"We shall have the study to ourselves," went on Tubby. "There were two chaps with me, but they've changed out. They said the grub went too fast with me there. I hope you're not that kind of mean beast, Van Ryn?"

"I hope not," said Van Ryn, laughing.

"Then we shall get on," said Tubby, with much satisfaction. "Come along to the study. We're going to have a topping spread."

"I say, Van Ryn's coming to tea in the end study," said Jimmy Silver.

Muffin shook his head.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, you're not going to collar my study-mate. I'm standing him a spread on his first day here."

"Oh, all serene!" said Jimmy. "You'll give us a look in another time, Van Ryn."

"Thank you," said the new junior. And he followed Tubby Muffin.

They met Higgs in the passage. Higgs had been repairing damages, but he still looked decidedly damaged. The two late opponents grinned at one another rather ruefully as they passed. Higgs of the Fourth did not seem to bear malice for his defeat. He could respect a fellow who could knock him out as Van Ryn had done.

"How's your eye?" he asked.

"Horrid. How's your nose?"

"Rotten!"

"Come on, Dutchy," said Tubby Muffin. "Here's the study. Ripping, ain't it? You sit down in the arm-

chair while I get the things in for tea. We're going to have rather a spread."

"You're awfully good," said Van Ryn.

"Not at all! Backing up the giddy Empire, you know," said Tubby affably. "I'm jolly glad to have a Colonial in my study. Look what the Boers are doing in East America now——"

"East Africa," said Van Ryn, laughing.

"Yes, I mean East Africa—I knew it was East somewhere. You sit down and take a rest, and leave it to me."

Van Ryn was glad to rest. Tubby bustled out of the room and scudded along to the end study, where the Fistical Four were getting tea.

"Ain't you fellows coming?" asked Tubby.

"Eh? Where?"

"I'm standing a spread to the new chap in my study. As you're friendly with him I thought you'd like to come."

"Hallo! Are you growing hospitable in your old age?" asked Lovell, in surprise. "First time I've heard of you standing a spread, Tubby."

"Ahem! You see——"

"We'll come," said Jimmy—"we'll come, if it's only to celebrate the fact that you're standing a spread, Tubby."

"Come on," said Tubby.

The Fistical Four followed him. It was rather a surprise for Tubby to be standing anything, as he was generally hard up, and what cash he ever had generally went at once to the tuckshop. In the passage Tubby tugged at Jimmy Silver's sleeve, and stopped him as the Co. went into Study No. 5.

"Hold on a minute, Silver," whispered Tubby mysteriously.

"Well, what's the row?"

"I want to do the thing rather decently, you know, as I've got guests," said Tubby, blinking at him. "It's rather a big occasion, isn't it?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Awfully important," he agreed. "What about it?"

"Well, can you—ahem——"

"Can I what?"

"C-c-can you lend me half a quid?"

Jimmy stared.

"The fact is, I'm run right out of tin," said Tubby confidently. "Merely temporary, of course; but it comes rather awkward just at this moment."

"Why, you spoofing villain!" growled Jimmy Silver. "You've asked five chaps to tea, and you've nothing to give them. Why couldn't you let Van Ryn come with us?"

"Ahem! You see——"

"I see that you're a spoofing porker!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Here's five bob, you fat bounder! I suppose we may as well pay for our tea in your study as in ours. It comes to the same thing."

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, if you put it like that——"

"Well, I do put it like that," growled Jimmy.

"All serene! I'll cut off to the tuckshop," said Tubby cheerfully. "I don't care how you put it—anything to oblige."

And Tubby cut off, and Jimmy, grinning in spite of himself, followed his chums into the study.

Tubby Muffin returned laden with good things, and in great spirits. He was standing a hospitable spread, and he was booked for the lion's share of it, and it did not cost him anything, so he had reason to be pleased.

But it was a very pleasant tea in No. 5 Study, and by the time the Fistical Four left they were on excellent terms with the new boy. Jimmy Silver & Co. were of opinion that Van Ryn was one of the best—an opinion in which most of the Classical Four soon came to concur.

CHAPTER 36.

Pals!

"THERE he comes!"

It was a whisper in the darkness as Dick van Ryn came out of his study late in the evening.

The gas had been turned out in the passage, and all was dark.

Van Ryn heard the whisper, and stopped, peering about him.

It was close on bed-time, and most of the fellows had finished their prep and gone down to the Common-room. A rush of feet followed the whisper.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Van Ryn. "What——"

He had no time for more.

Hands seized him on all sides in the darkness, and he was brought to the floor with a heavy bump.

He realised that it was a ragging, and he struggled fiercely.

But he was down, and fellows he could not see were swarming over him. There were at least four or five, and he had no chance.

"You rotters!" panted Van Ryn. "Let me up—oh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

Tubby Muffin blinked out of the study:

"Help!" gasped Van Ryn.

But the fat Classical was not a fighting-man. He only blinked. The light from the study glimmered on the struggling mass on the passage floor. Van Ryn was in the hands of Townsend & Co., and they were ragging him mercilessly.

There was a heavy tread farther down the passage, and Higgs of the Fourth came along.

The Fourth Form bully stopped, to stare at the peculiar scene.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "What the thunder——"

"Lend a hand, Higgy!" panted Townsend. "We're putting the cad through it!"

"Pile in, Higgy!" shouted Mornington. "Come and give him one while you've got the chance!"

Higgs piled in.

But his "piling in" came in quite

an unexpected manner to the merry raggers.

He rushed at them, hitting out right and left. Townsend & Co. had naturally expected that the bully of the Fourth would be glad to lend a hand, in revenge for his defeat at the hands of the South African junior. But that was not in Higgs' mind. It was upon Townsend & Co. that his terrific punches fell.

"Let him alone!" roared Higgs. "I'll mop up the lot of you! Take that! That's for you, Morny, you cad! Five to one, by gum! That's for you, Peele! You can take that, Gower! And that—and that——"

Higgs was hitting out like a steam-hammer.

The yelling raggers rolled right and left from his terrific drives, amid a chorus of howls and groans.

Townsend and Topham were floored, Mornington rolled across them, Peele was hurled headlong along the passage, and Gower fairly fled, barely dodging Higgs' heavy fist.

Higgs, like Cæsar of old, came and saw and conquered.

In about a minute the Nuts were strewn about the passage, and Higgs was glaring at them, ready to knock them down again as soon as they rose. But they did not rise; they sprawled and blinked at Higgs in anguish and fury.

Higgs gave a snort of contempt, and stooped down to help Van Ryn to his feet.

The South African junior staggered up, considerably dazed, and more surprised than hurt. The rescue astonished him more than it did the Nuts of the Fourth.

"Have they hurt you?" asked Higgs.

"Ye-es—a bit!" gasped Van Ryn.

"Help me kick 'em along the passage!"

"Good!"

There were furious yells from

Townsend & Co. as two pairs of boots started on them. The unhappy Nuts—no longer dreaming of ragging anybody—squirmed out of the way, and dodged, and fled. They did not stop till they were at the bottom of the stairs.

"There!" panted Higgs. "That's a lesson for the cads! They won't rag you again in a hurry, young 'un!"

"I think not," said Van Ryn, laughing. He looked curiously at Higgs. "It's jolly good of you to come and help me like that, after—"

"After our scrap?" said Higgs. "What rot! I like a chap who can stand up for himself. You can."

"I'm much obliged."

"Oh, rot! Of course, you didn't exactly lick me in that scrap. If I'd been—well, more ready for you, it would have gone a bit different."

"Any old thing," said Van Ryn, smiling.

"Still, you put up a good fight, and I had my hands full," conceded Higgs good-temperedly. "The fact is, I rather like you, young 'un, and if you want a pal in the Fourth, you needn't look any farther for one. I can't say fairer than that."

"Done!" said Van Ryn at last.

The Classical Fourth hardy knew what to make of it. The next day Higgs changed into No. 5 Study; No. 4 being quite pleased to get rid of him, as a matter of fact. But he was very welcome in No. 5. Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help thinking that Dick van Ryn had a queer taste in pals. But they agreed that a fellow who could take a licking as Higgs had taken his, could not be a bad fellow in the main, and the bully of the Fourth rose in their estimation. It was probable that difficulties would arise in No. 5 Study; but for the present all was peace and harmony in the quarters of the South African schoolboy.

CHAPTER 37.

An Amazing Mystery!

JIMMY SILVER jumped. Jimmy had come along to Study No. 5 to call for Van Ryn, the new boy in the Fourth, to take him down to the cricket.

There was a conversation going on in the study, and though the door was closed, the voices came quite distinctly to Jimmy's ears as he stopped. And this is what Jimmy Silver heard, with great amazement:

"Help yourself to the smokes, Towny, dear boy!"

"Thanks! Got a match?"

"Here you are."

"Rippin' fags, these!"

"Oh, toppin'!"

Jimmy Silver simply blinked. The voices were the voices of Townsend and Topham, the Nuts of the Fourth. Such a talk between the two Nuts was not surprising in itself—Jimmy knew their little ways. But it was going on in Van Ryn's study, and Van Ryn was not in the least nutty, and, moreover, he was on the worst of terms with Townsend & Co.

"Well, my hat!" Jimmy Silver ejaculated.

It looked as if Van Ryn had made it up with his foes in the Form, and adopted their nutty manners and customs with a vengeance. If the latter was the case, Jimmy Silver intended to speak a word in season—an emphatic word. He rapped sharply at the door and turned the handle.

But the door did not open. It was locked on the inside.

"Van Ryn!" called out Jimmy sharply.

The conversation in the study ceased suddenly at the first knock.

"Hallo!" called out the cheery voice of the new junior.

"Let me in, you young ass!"

"Certainly!"

The key turned, and the door opened. Jimmy Silver strode into the study. The sturdy South African

greeted him with a smile. He had been on the best of terms with the captain of the Fourth from the day he came.

"Time for the cricket?" he asked. "All serene."

Jimmy Silver stared round the study.

Townsend and Topham were not visible. Neither, to Jimmy's surprise, was there any aroma of cigarette-smoke in the room.

"What the thunder——" began the astonished Jimmy.

"Anything the matter?"

"Look here, Van Ryn," said Jimmy directly, "I heard Towny and Topy talking here! Where are they?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"What was the door locked for?"

"I've been studying."

"And you sported your oak because you were studying?"

"Yes."

"No smoking going on?"

"Smoking! Certainly not! I don't smoke!"

"Well, I hope you're not such a silly ass," said Jimmy Silver. "But I heard what was said. I couldn't help it, as I had just stopped at your door. I thought you were a straight chap, Van Ryn. But I tell you I know that Townsend and Topham are here, and you say you don't know where they are."

Van Ryn nodded calmly.

"I don't know where they are," he replied. "I haven't seen either of them since lessons."

Jimmy gave him a grim look.

"That'll do," he said. "It's no business of mine, of course. I thought you were straight, and I made a mistake. So-long!"

Jimmy Silver turned to the door.

"Hold on!" said the new junior quietly. "You think that Townsend and Topham are in this study at this minute——"

"I know they are—hiding somewhere."

Van Ryn smiled.

"Well, look for them," he said. "If you find them I'll eat them!"

"What the dickens do you mean?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "Do you think I was dreaming I heard voices?"

"If they're in this study you can use my head for a footer," said Van Ryn coolly. "You're caling me a liar, you know. Put it to the proof!"

"I'll jolly soon do that!" growled Jimmy Silver.

He dragged up the table-cover and looked under the table, naturally supposing that the smokers had dodged there out of sight. But there was nothing under the table. He looked behind the armchair, but the space behind the armchair was vacant. He pitched aside the screen in the corner, but there was nothing behind the screen. He looked into the study cupboard, though certainly there was no room there for two juniors to hide. The study cupboard was drawn blank.

Van Ryn watched him with a smile and a merry gleam in his eyes.

Jimmy gave up the search at last, thoroughly bewildered.

"Where are they?" he ejaculated.

"You said they were in this study."

"I heard them talking here!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Well, find them!"

"They—they must have got out somehow."

Jimmy looked from the window, but it was evident that Towny and Topy had not negotiated a thirty-foot drop. He even looked up the chimney, but there was no room in the chimney for Townsend and Topham.

Jimmy Silver looked bewildered.

"Well?" grinned Van Ryn.

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Jimmy Silver, rubbing his nose in amazement. "Unless I was dreaming, I heard their voices here. I—I couldn't have supposed that they came from this study if they didn't. But they're not here. How did they get out?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you Dutch image?"

"I'm waiting for you to find them," chuckled Van Ryn. "I told you they weren't here. Are we going down to the cricket?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"Well, I'm ready."

Van Ryn followed the captain of the Fourth from the study. Jimmy was in a state of utter amazement. Unless his ears had deceived him, he had heard Townsend and Topham talking in the study. Van Ryn's assertion that they were not there he had regarded as a palpable whopper. Yet they were not there.

As the two juniors left the School House they sighted three elegant juniors chatting in the quadrangle. They were Smythe of the Shell, and Townsend and Topham of the Fourth. Jimmy stared at them.

"Hallo, there they are!" smiled Van Ryn. "Not in my study, you see."

"Well, my hat!"

Jimmy strode up to the three Nuts.

"Have you been in Van Ryn's study ten minutes ago, Towny?" he asked.

Townsend sniffed.

"I'm not on speakin' terms with the cad," he said. "I'm hardly likely to go into his study."

"Or you, Topham?"

"No!" snapped Topham. "I sha'n't be goin' there unless it's to punch his nose. What are you drivin' at?"

It was evident that Townsend and Topham, though not always truthful youths, were speaking the truth on this occasion. Jimmy Silver did not explain. He walked on after Van Ryn, leaving Towny & Co. staring.

"Satisfied?" asked Van Ryn, as Jimmy joined him.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Yes, I'm sorry I doubted your word; but—but I could have sworn— Dash it all, I must have been dreaming! It's jolly queer! Blessed if I can understand it! Let's get to the cricket."

CHAPTER 38.

Beaumont is Wrathy!

"W"HEREFORE that worried brow, O King?"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question. The Fistical Four were at tea in the end study, after the cricket practice. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were ruddy and cheery, but Jimmy Silver, usually the cheeriest of the four, was plunged into deep thought.

"Anything wrong?" asked Raby. "You've been looking like a boiled owl for a long time, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"It's awfully queer!" he said.

"Are you alluding to your face?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy peevishly. "I tell you it's jolly queer! I'm not the sort of chap to imagine things, am I?"

His chums stared at him.

"Well, that depends," said Lovell. "You imagine you're better at hitting fours than I am, Jimmy. Pure imagination!"

"Fathead! Look here, listen to me, and give me your opinion."

"Fire away, my son! Pass the jam first!"

"And the pickles!"

"Listen to me, you frabjous asses, and dash the jam and the pickles!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Keep your wool on, dear boy! Go ahead; we're hanging on your words."

Jimmy Silver related the peculiar incident in Van Ryn's study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome listened in astonishment at first, and then with broad grins.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Jimmy.

"I think you're a bit off your rocker, old chap!" said Lovell judicially. "Does it run in your family, do you know?"

"Fathead!" roared Jimmy.

"It's a sure sign, when a chap hears voices!" grinned Raby. "Poor old Jimmy! But I must say I've seen it coming on for some time."

"Ass!"

"Next time the study's in funds we'll get you a strait-waistcoat, Jimmy," said Newcome comfortingly. "Rely on your old pals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver glared at his old pals.

"You howling asses! This is a serious matter! I tell you I heard Towny and Topsy talking in Van Ryn's study, as plain as I hear you now. But they weren't there!"

"If they weren't there, they weren't there," said Lovell. "That's a dead cert, like anything in Euclid. Ergo—that's Latin—you imagined it! I suppose it's old age coming on suddenly!"

"Unless you're trying to pull our leg," said Raby. "But if this is one of your little jokes, I'm blessed if I see the point!"

"It isn't, fathead! It makes me feel jolly uncomfortable!" said Jimmy. "They weren't there, right enough, and I as good as called Dutchy a liar over it. But I heard their voices!"

"You've been drinking too much ginger-beer, Jimmy."

"Br-r-r-r!" growled Jimmy Silver.

And the subject dropped, though the three juniors eyed their study-leader very curiously. Jimmy Silver, cool and clear-headed as he was, was the last fellow in the world to be afflicted by strange fancies. The door of the end study opened suddenly, and Higgs of the Fourth rushed in excitedly.

The Fistical Four jumped up. Higgs was the bully of the Fourth, though he had mended his ways very much since he had chummed with the new junior, Van Ryn. But Higgs was not on the warpath this time.

"Come on, you fellows!" he shouted.

"What's on?"

Higgs chuckled gleefully.

"Beaumont, you know—Beaumont of the Sixth! Ha, ha, ha! He's in an awful wax—"

"Well, I'm jolly well not going to leave my tea to see Beaumont in a wax!" grunted Lovell. "I've seen the cad in a wax often enough!"

"He can't get into his study!" shouted Higgs.

"Well, let him stay out!"

"Fathead! I tell you, it's awful fun! Knowles of the Sixth has locked himself in Beaumont's study, and won't let him in!"

"Gammon!"

"Honest Injun!" yelled Higgs. "I came to tell you chaps. Come on!"

Higgs rushed out of the study in great excitement.

"What rot!" said Lovell. "He's pulling our leg. Knowles wouldn't play a silly trick like that!"

"My hat! I'd like to see Beaumont and Knowles punching one another!" ejaculated Raby. "A pair of rotten bullies—"

"Let's go and see, anyway," said Jimmy.

The Fistical Four hurried out of the study. They found a number of the Fourth Form fellows hurrying the same way, to the Sixth Form passage. The exciting news had spread.

There was already a crowd on the spot when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived. Beaumont, the bully of the Sixth, the most unpopular prefect on the Classical side, was thumping at his study door. The door was evidently locked. Beaumont's face was red with rage.

He thumped and hammered furiously. The passage was crowded with fellows. Van Ryn and Tubby Muffin and Oswald and Flynn were leaning in a row on the wall opposite the door. Beaumont was hammering at, grinning gleefully. Van Ryn, new as he was to Rookwood, had felt the heavy hand of the Classical bully, and he was evidently enjoying Beaumont's curious predicament. The prefect was not enjoying it, to judge by appearances.

"Open this door, you rotter!" shouted Beaumont.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bulkeley of the Sixth came out of his study, and pushed through the grinning crowd.

"Beaumont, what on earth are you up to?" he exclaimed.

Beaumont turned round a red and furious face.

"That idiot Knowles has locked himself in my study, and won't let me in!" he shouted.

"Knowles?"

"Yes, Knowles."

"What an awful check—a Modern cad!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Bulkeley looked astounded.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "As if a prefect would play such a silly trick."

"I tell you he's here!" howled Beaumont. "He's been talking to me through the keyhole. Lots of fellows heard him!"

"He must be out of his senses, then, to play such a trick!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "Let me speak to him!"

Beaumont drew aside, panting, and Bulkeley knocked sharply on the door.

"Knowles! Are you there, Knowles?"

"What-ho! Here I am!" came a sharp, unpleasant voice, with a slight nasal sound—the well-known tones of Knowles, the Modern prefect.

"What are you doing in Beaumont's study?"

"Scoffing his tea."

Bulkeley jumped.

Such a reply from a cheeky fag would not have been surprising, but from a prefect of the Sixth Form it was simply astounding.

"Knowles, are you mad?" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What have you locked Beaumont out for?"

"Oh, I like to hear him ramp!"

"Open the door at once!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Knowles——"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bulkeley gasped.

"He must be out of his senses!"

he exclaimed.

"I'm going into my study!" howled Beaumont. "My tea's getting cold, and that Modern cad is scoffing it, too! I just went out for a minute to speak to Neville, and that rotter must have slipped in. Fancy a prefect japing like

a fag! Why, I'll hammer him till he yells, I tell you! Open this door, Knowles, you Modern cad!"

"Rats!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

CHAPTER 39.

Where is Knowles?

JIMMY SILVER & CO. looked on, highly amused, but greatly astonished. The Classical chums did not like Knowles, the Modern prefect. He was a bully, and he was a rotter generally, according to the juniors. But with all Knowles' faults, they would never have expected him to play a trick like this, like a cheeky fag of the Third Form. He might have been expected to have some sense of the dignity of the Sixth Form.

Beaumont was astounded, too, but he was still more enraged. Prefect or no prefect, Knowles was locking him out of his study and scoffing his tea, and Beaumont intended to take summary vengeance as soon as he could get at him.

He hammered on the door with growing fury.

"Better chuck that!" said Bulkeley at last. "You'll have the masters coming up here, Beaumont!"

"I don't care! Do you think I'm going to be locked out of my study?" shrieked Beaumont.

"Knowles must be mad!"

"I'll hammer it out of him if he is! Open this door, you Modern cad!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Somebody get me something to smash in the door!" roared Beaumont. "Silver—Lovell—Jones, get me a form or something!"

"What-ho!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

There was a rush to obey Beaumont's excited command. The smashing in of a Sixth Form study was quite a delightful prospect to the juniors, and there wasn't a junior present who wouldn't have given a week's pocket-

money to see the two unpopular seniors hammering one another.

The Fistical Four came rushing back along the passage, dragging a form with a terrific clatter.

"Here you are, Beaumont!"

Bulkeley interposed.

"Beaumont, you can't smash in the door."

"Can't I?" roared Beaumont. "Do you think I'm going to be kept out all the evening, then? I've got my work to do!"

"Blessed if I understand it!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "But you'd better get a Modern master here, and he'll order Knowles to open the door!"

"Oh, rats!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The heavy form crashed on the lock, and the door groaned and creaked.

"Look out, here comes Bootles!" called out Flynn of the Fourth.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, came rustling along the corridor, with a very angry face.

"What is this uproar?" he exclaimed. "Bulkeley, I am surprised that you allow this. Beaumont, are you out of your senses? What are you doing?"

"Knowles is keeping me out of my study!" gasped Beaumont. "He's locked me out. He's scoffing my grub!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir!" said Bulkeley.

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Bootles rapped sharply on the door.

"Knowles! Are you there, Knowles?"

The crowd in the passage listened breathlessly. They wondered whether Knowles would venture to reply to Mr. Bootles as he had replied to Bulkeley. But there was no answer from the study.

Mr. Bootles rapped again.

"Knowles! Knowles!"

No reply.

"You must be mistaken; Knowles is not there!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "It is quite inconceivable that a prefect would play such a trick."

"I tell you he spoke to us!"

"What—what? Nonsense! He cannot be there! Knowles, if you are there, I command you to reply!"

Silence.

"You see, he is not there," said Mr. Bootles severely. "Doubtless you locked the door yourself, Beaumont."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Probably you have the key in your pocket at this moment."

"I—I——"

"Doubtless this is sheer absent-mindedness on your part, Beaumont."

"But—but Knowles is in there, sir!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "He was answering us through the keyhole."

"Then why does he not answer now?" snapped Mr. Bootles. "You are mistaken. I am sure that a prefect would not play such a trick. Look in your pockets for the key, Beaumont."

Beaumont spluttered.

"If you please, sir," said Van Ryn of the Fourth, "there's a key lying on the floor."

He pushed it forward with his foot. Jimmy Silver gave him a quick glance. He had an idea that Van Ryn's foot had been on that key, concealing it, until that moment, but Van Ryn's face was quite innocent.

Mr. Bootles blinked at the key over his glasses.

"Is that your doorkey, Beaumont?"

"It—it—it looks like it, sir," stammered Beaumont, utterly taken aback.

"Try it on the door at once!"

Beaumont, like a fellow in a dream, stooped and picked up the key. He inserted it in the lock, and it turned. It was evidently the key belonging to the door. But how had Knowles locked himself in the study, while the key was on the floor outside?

Beaumont threw the door open.

He stared into the study.

It was empty!

"Where on earth is Knowles?" ejaculated Bulkeley.

"Hiding somewhere!" exclaimed Beaumont furiously.

He rushed into the study, followed by half a dozen fellows. Their impression was that the practical joker was hiding, to avoid meeting Mr. Bootles' wrathful eyes. But a few minutes' search was quite enough to prove that there was no one in the study, excepting the searchers themselves.

"I told you Knowles was not here!" snapped Mr. Bootles.

"But—but somebody was there!" gasped Bulkeley.

"Nonsense! The study must have been looked from the outside, or the key could not have been outside!"

Beaumont blinked round the study.

"He—he must have got out of the window," he stammered.

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Bootles rustled away, frowning.

"All the same, Knowles was here, and he must have cleared off by the window," said Beaumont, between his teeth.

"He hasn't touched your grub," remarked Bulkeley.

"No; I suppose that was only his rot." Beaumont stared at the tea-table. Nothing had been disturbed there. "He must have bolted by the window when he heard Bootles. Fancy a prefect playing such a fool trick! I'll jolly well go over and talk to him about this."

"But how on earth did the key get outside?"

"Might have shoved it under the door."

"There isn't room."

"The cad may have a key that fits, then. I'll jolly well teach him not to play tricks in my study!" snarled Beaumont.

And the Classical prefect, leaving his tea untouched, strode away, and hurried over to Mr. Manders' House to see Knowles. He came back in about ten minutes, looking rather dusty and rumpled. Evidently there had been a warm argument on the Modern side.

CHAPTER 49.

The Persecution of Mr. Bootles!

MR. BOOTLES was cross that morning.

As a rule, the Fourth Form master was a kind and good-tempered little gentleman. But there were times when he was cross, and this was one of them.

Some thoughtless youth had played a trick on Mr. Bootles that morning. When he sat at his high desk at the beginning of lessons, Mr. Bootles had reposed on his stool for about the millionth part of a second, and then leaped up with a yell that would have done credit to a cannibal. There was a bent pin on his stool, and Mr. Bootles had found it.

It was not surprising that Mr. Bootles was annoyed. The trick was a foolish and dangerous one, and was probably the work of Higgs. But the culprit did not own up, and the whole class was sentenced to an hour's detention. And Mr. Bootles' temper had suffered so much, that he was ratty all the morning, and, indeed, seemed to have changed characters with Mr. Manders of the Modern side. The Modern juniors were quite glad to get out of the Form-room; but the unfortunate Classics had to stand Mr. Bootles all the morning. And towards third lesson, he was beginning to have a wearing effect on them.

"Blow the silly ass who played that silly trick!" Jimmy Silver muttered wrathfully. "Bootles won't get over it for hours."

"Silver!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You were speaking to Van Ryn?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Take a hundred lines! You will take a hundred lines also, Van Ryn!"

"Van Ryn didn't speak, sir," said Jimmy meekly.

"Silence!"

"But——"

"Silence! Another word, and I'll——"

"But I didn't speak, sir!" protested Van Ryn.

"Take two hundred lines, Van Ryn!"

Mr. Bootles evidently was not in a reasonable mood.

"Right on the warpath, by gad!" grinned Mornington.

Mr. Bootles' ears seemed as sharp as needles that morning.

"Take a hundred lines for talking in class, Mornington!"

"Oh, by gad!" grunted Mornington.

There was no more talking in class. Mr. Bootles was in a dangerous mood, and had to be treated tactfully. But there was an interruption before last morning lesson was over. The big Form-room windows were wide open, to admit the fresh morning air. Mr. Bootles' voice was droning away, when a strange voice was suddenly heard, apparently calling in from the quadrangle.

"Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars!"

The juniors simply spun round towards the window, and Mr. Bootles ceased speaking suddenly, and blinked in the same direction.

"Hany ole rags an' bones?" went on the same sing-song voice. "Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

The juniors grinned.

It was the first time, in their experience that an itinerant merchant in rags and bones had called to ply his calling in the quadrangle of Rookwood School.

"Hany ole rags an' bones?"

Mr. Bootles strode to the window angrily.

"Go away!" he exclaimed. "How dare you come here? Go to the back door, if you have any business here!"

The Form-master came back to the class, quite supposing that the interruption was at an end. But it wasn't. Just as he began droning again, that sing-song voice floated in at the window.

"Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars! Hany ole rags an' bones!"

There was a chuckle from the Fourth. The Classical juniors were tickled by the persistence of the rag merchant, and they welcomed the interruption to the lesson in the thunder atmosphere of the Form-room.

Mr. Bootles did not welcome it. He breathed through his nose.

Once more he strode, rustling, to the window, and stared out angrily into the quad.

"Will you go away?" he shouted.

"Keep yer wool on, guv'nor."

Mr. Bootles blinked to and fro from the window. The rag merchant was not to be seen, though his voice sounded quite close.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"Hany ole rags an' bones, guv'nor?"

"Certainly not!"

"I'll give you a shillin' for that there gownd."

"What! What!" gasped Mr. Bootles, purple with indignation.

Mr. Bootles' gown had seen service, but certainly it was worth a good deal more than a shilling.

"Hany ole rags an' bones?"

"Where is the insolent knave?" exclaimed the exasperated Mr. Bootles. "I cannot see him! Where are you, man? How dare you hide behind that tree and call out your offensive remarks?"

"Eighteenpence for the gownd, guv'nor."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical Fourth.

Mr. Bootles spun round from the window.

"Silence! Silence immediately! There is no occasion for merriment in the absurd insolence of that intrusive person! Silence!"

"Hany ole rags an' bones!"

"Goodness gracious, this is unendurable!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, and he rushed from the Form-room to interview the rag merchant personally outside.

"My hat! What larks!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "The ragman is a boon

and play these tricks? I will have you flogged! I—I mean locked up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bootles spun round again.

"Boys, the class is dismissed! Kindly search the passages for that disreputable and insolent rascal, and bring him to me. You are permitted to use force!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!" chorused the Classical Fourth.

And they rushed out pell-mell, in great delight, to hunt for the rag merchant. They hunted high and low. But, to their astonishment, they did not find him. Not a corner was left unexplored. But nowhere within the walls of Rookwood was a rag-and-bone merchant to be found!

CHAPTER 41.

Very Mysterious!

"FAG!"

Beaumont of the Sixth called out from his study doorway. And the answer to his call was a scurrying of feet in various directions.

Nobody was anxious to fag for Beaumont.

"Fag!" roared Beaumont.

The bully of the Sixth came down the passage, with a frowning brow and his ashplant under his arm.

As ill-luck would have it, Jimmy Silver and Van Ryn were just coming downstairs. The prefect spotted them before they could dodge.

"Fag wanted!" he exclaimed. "Buzz off to my study, both of you!"

Jimmy looked rebellious.

"Just going out to the cricket, Beaumont," he demurred. "Flynn's your fag. Find Flynn!"

"Puzzle, find Flynn!" grinned Van Ryn.

Patrick O'Donovan Flynn had heard Beaumont's dulcet tones, and he was already at a safe distance.

"Don't give me any of your cheek," said Beaumont. "Get to my study at once!"

The ashplant slid down into his hand. "Anything to oblige, dear boy," said Jimmy Silver, as there was no help for it. "Come on, Dutchy!"

The two juniors walked in front of Beaumont to his study. The prefect did not intend to give them a chance of dodging round a corner. Beaumont's study was in a dishevelled state. Apparently some merry ragger had been there, for the cinders were over the carpet, the ink was spilt on the table, and books and papers were strewn about the floor. Some junior, upon whom Beaumont's ashplant had fallen, had "got his own back" in this peculiar manner.

"I dare say you young scoundrels did this, if the truth were known," said the Sixth Former, with a scowl.

"Not guilty, my lord," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Never thought of it, by gum!"

"Well, clear it up, and make the study tidy, and lay the table for tea—and look sharp about it!"

"Are we bound to do all that, Silver?" asked Van Ryn rebelliously.

Fagging at school was a new experience for the South African junior.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all in the game," he said. "When you're in the Sixth you'll be able to play the tyrant like Beaumont. Won't he, Beaumont?"

"Hold your tongue, and get to work," scowled Beaumont.

"But what about cricket?" said Van Ryn.

"You've got a lot to learn here, you young Hottentot," said Beaumont angrily. "That will teach you to do as a prefect tells you, without jawing!" And he gripped Van Ryn's ear and twisted it.

The new junior gave a yell.

"Yow! Leggo, you rotter!"

"Now pile in," said Beaumont; "and no more jaw!"

The South African junior clenched his hands hard and measured the senior with his eye.

Jimmy caught his arm.

"Cheese it, Dutchy! You mustn't hammer a prefect; against the rules of the school. Pile in! Can't be helped. Keep smiling!"

Beaumont sat on a chest under the window, ashplant in hand, to see that the fags did their work. Jimmy and Van Ryn busied themselves about the study. Suddenly the Sixth Former gave a jump. From the box beneath him there came the sudden, savage growl of a dog.

The senior rose hastily and stared at the box.

Gr-r-r-r!

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Beaumont, in amazement.

"My hat! Do you keep a dog in the study, Beaumont?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Beastly, to keep him shut up in a box like that!"

"There can't be a dog in that box!" exclaimed Beaumont. "It's locked!"

Gr-r-r-r!

"Sounds like one," grinned Jimmy.

Bow-wow-wow!

"My only hat!" yelled Beaumont. "Some young rotter has put the beast in there! My Sunday clobber's in that box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "I'm sorry for your Sunday clobber."

"Shut up, you young villain! I dare say you did it!" shouted Beaumont.

"Not guilty, your Majesty!" chuckled Jimmy, dodging round the table as Beaumont made a lash at him with the ashplant. "But it's a ripping idea—ripping!"

Beaumont tore at the lid of the box. As a dog was growling inside it, he naturally concluded that he must have left it, inadvertently, unlocked. But the lid was locked.

"Locked!" stuttered Beaumont.

Gr-r-r-r! Bow-wow! Br-r-r-r!

The prefect thrust a key into the lock and threw up the lid.

The big chest was almost full of clothes. Beaumont of the Sixth was a dandy, and his wardrobe was extensive. A neatly folded evening coat lay at

the top. Beaumont lifted it and looked under it.

He dropped the coat and jumped back.

"Some beast has shoved a dog under my clothes there!" he hissed. "I'll skin him! I'll smash him! I'll——"

Gr-r-r-r!

Beaumont flung himself at the box and dragged the clothes out, with the ashplant all ready to lash as soon as he saw the hidden dog. Van Ryn touched Jimmy's arm, and pointed to the door. Jimmy nodded.

While Beaumont was busy with the box the two juniors tiptoed out of the study and vanished.

The prefect tore out article after article, but the sweet canine voice was no longer heard.

He stopped at last.

It was evident that there was no animal, canine or otherwise, among the clothes in the chest.

"My only hat!" stuttered Beaumont. "I—I couldn't have fancied it! Those fags heard it, too! Silver, you heard——"

Beaumont became aware that the fags were no longer in the study. He rushed furiously to the door.

"Silver! Van Ryn!"

There was a patter of feet in the distance, and that was all. The fags were gone. Beaumont rushed to the window. Out in the quadrangle Jimmy Silver and Dick van Ryn came in sight sauntering cheerily along. Beaumont waved a furious fist at them.

"Silver! Come here!"

Jimmy Silver looked round and kissed his hand to the enraged prefect. Van Ryn raised his cap politely. Then they strolled on.

Beaumont panted.

He knew that the young rascals would be in cover before he could get along the passage and out of the door of the School House. It was not exactly dignified for a prefect of the Sixth to scramble through a window. But Beaumont was too furious to think about his dignity. He scrambled out, dropped

in the quadrangle, and started towards the juniors at a run.

"Look out!" yelled Van Ryn.

"My aunt! I didn't know old Beaumont was an acrobat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Run for it!"

The bully of the Sixth was bearing down on them at top speed. Jimmy and Van Ryn ran for it, speeding across to the Modern side. Owing to Beaumont's late troubles with Knowlies, they hoped that he would not pursue them into Mr. Manders' House. But Beaumont came on savagely, his coat-tails flying.

"Dodge in!" gasped Jimmy. "Tommy Dodd'll let us into his study."

The fleeing juniors "dodged" in, and unfortunately dodged right into Mr. Manders, the Modern master, who was just coming out.

"Oh! Ah! Yooop!" gasped Mr. Manders.

The lean, angular gentleman staggered back from the impact. Jimmy and Van Ryn reeled, too. Beaumont came to a sudden halt, and burst into a chuckle. He strolled away, more than content to leave the fags in the hands of Mr. Manders. That sharp-tempered gentleman was not likely to have much mercy on two juniors who had "biffed" him in that reckless manner.

The Modern master straightened up, gasping for breath.

"Boys! Silver! Rascals! How dare you!" he stuttered.

"Sorry, sir! Quite an accident!"

"Awfully sorry, sir!"

"Follow me to my study!" gasped Mr. Manders.

The two Classics had escaped Beaumont, but they had escaped out of the frying-pan into the fire. In great dismay they followed Mr. Manders to his study.

CHAPTER 42.

A Wonderful Parrot!

MR. MANDERS selected his stoutest cane, gasping the while. He was winded. Strictly speaking, Mr. Manders had no authority to cane

Classical juniors, who did not belong to his division at all; but he was assuming the right for the occasion. And it was plain that argument on the subject would not be any use.

Jimmy Silver and Van Ryn stood waiting while Mr. Manders pumped for breath. Van Ryn's eyes wandered round the study, and rested upon a parrot in a cage before the window. The parrot was cackling and blinking at the juniors with evil eyes, quite as if he understood and enjoyed their position.

Mr. Manders' parrot was very like his owner in temper. He delighted in bestowing sharp pecks upon anything that came within his reach—unsuspicious fingers that offered him sugar often received a savage pinch—and there were a dozen Modern fellows who had sworn solemn vows to wring Polly's neck at the first convenient opportunity.

Van Ryn's merry eyes glistened as he looked at the parrot.

"You young rascals!" gasped Mr. Manders. "I shall impress upon your minds that you must not——"

"Cut it short, cocky!"

Mr. Manders jumped almost clear of the floor.

"Wha-at? Who spoke?" he stuttered.

"Keep your wool on, cocky!"

The Modern master blinked at the parrot.

Jimmy Silver stared at the bird blankly. He knew that the Modern master spent hours in trying to teach that ill-favoured parrot to talk, but Polly had never got farther than "Good-morning!" and "Polly wants sugar!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Manders.

"Bless your boots!" came from the parrot.

"Dear me! Polly—it—it is the parrot! Bless my soul!"

"Cackle, cackle, cackle!" from Polly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Manders, laying down the cane and approaching the

parrot's cage. "This is extraordinary! My trouble has not been expended in vain. The parrot has learned quite suddenly to talk. This is very satisfactory."

"Oh, what a face!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Where did you dig up those features, Mandy?"

"G-g-goodness gracious!"

"Oh, what a chivvy! Cackle, cackle! What a benighted chivvy! Ha, ha!"

The expression on Mr. Manders' face was extraordinary. It was satisfactory to find his parrot talking with such facility. But Polly's remarks in themselves could not be considered flattering.

"Polly!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Oh, cheese it, old scout!"

"Goodness gracious!"

"What a voice! Oh, what a voice! Funny old file! Laugh at him!" came from the cackling parrot. "What a funny old file!"

Mr. Manders stuttered.

"I saw you, Mandy!" pursued the astonishing bird. "Who goes down to Coombe and ogles the milliner? Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed Jimmy Silver involuntarily.

Mr. Manders spun round, his face crimson.

"Silence! Someone has been teaching the bird to say those dreadful things!" he gasped. "Knowles"—Knowles was passing the door, and he stopped—"Knowles, are you aware of any—any junior having been in my study, teaching my parrot to—repeat atrocious expressions?"

"No, sir!" said Knowles, in astonishment.

"He has learned atrocious expressions from someone!" exclaimed Mr. Manders.

"I didn't know he could talk at all, sir," said Knowles.

"Nonsense, Knowles—nonsense! A very intelligent bird—very. But—but

he shall not be taught such vile expressions! I shall inquire very strictly——"

"Cackle, cackle! Polly wants sugar!" said the parrot.

"No harm in that, sir," said Knowles, "is there?"

"N-no; but he was saying something—something quite different—personal references of the most unpleasant kind. Strange to say, he has stopped it now," said Mr. Manders. "It is—is extraordinary! A few minutes ago he was speaking with astonishing facility, and—and repeating vulgar expressions. It is very strange that he should have ceased so suddenly."

Knowles looked at the master's reddened face, wondering whether Mr. Manders had been drinking. Knowles' opinion was that the parrot was a stupid beast, who would never learn more than "Polly wants sugar."

"It is extraordinary," said Mr. Manders, breathing very hard. He picked up his cane as his glance fell on the juniors. "Ah! I——"

"Draw it mild, Mandy-pandy!"

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Knowles jumped as that voice came from the parrot's cage, and Mr. Manders spun round again.

"My hat!" ejaculated Knowles.

"You—you hear him yourself now, Knowles."

"Hallo, Knowlesey! What a face! Got a smoke about you, Knowles?"

Knowles' face was a study.

"Some—some young villain has been teaching him that!" he gasped.

"Poor old Manders! What a face! What a phiz! Why don't they put Manders in the Zoo? Ha, ha!"

"Silence!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Oh, go and chop chips, funny face!"

"Bless my soul! I—I—I——"

"What a voice! Oh, what larks!" came from Polly. "I say, Mandy, old scout, kiss me and call me Albert. Who ogles the milliner—what?"

"My word!" murmured Knowles.

"There is no foundation whatever, I—I need hardly say, for the insinuation implied in that—that speech!" stuttered Mr. Manders. "Some depraved young scoundrel has taught my parrot those words——"

"Oh, of course, sir!" said Knowles, with a suppressed grin.

"Polly! Silence! Silence! Good heavens, what is he saying now?" stuttered Mr. Manders.

"Oh, Mandy! Naughty, naughty! What did you say to the milliner? Kiss me and call me Albert! Ha, ha!"

"You may go!" exclaimed Mr. Manders hastily, with a gesture to the juniors. "Go at once—do you hear? Go!"

Jimmy Silver and Van Ryn were only too glad to go. Knowles stepped discreetly out of the study. Mr. Manders blinked at the parrot, and mopped his perspiring brow. Someone must have taught the parrot those dreadful sayings—someone—some fellow in his own House, evidently. But who? Mr. Manders stared helplessly at the bird.

Strange to say, Polly did not make a single further remark after the juniors were gone.

"Well, that beats it!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver as the two juniors hurried out of Mr. Manders' House. "Fancy that silly parrot talking like that! Some of the Modern kids have been teaching him, I suppose. Letting poor old Manders' secrets out, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky for us, too!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Mandy didn't want us to hear any more."

"Jolly lucky, wasn't it?" agreed Van Ryn.

And the two Classics went down to the cricket in high good humour.

CHAPTER 43.

Mysterious Voices!

"HALLO, what's the row?" asked Jimmy Silver as he came into the Common-room that evening. "Don't keep it to yourselves."

"The blessed place is haunted, I believe!" growled Townsend. "I thought I'd sat on a dog! I heard it yelp distinctly. And—and——"

"And there was no dog there," remarked Van Ryn. "Wonderful!"

"Jolly queer," said Topham. "I could have sworn I heard a dog yelp when Towny sat down."

Townsend sat down in the armchair again, looking puzzled and disturbed. Jimmy Silver looked puzzled, too.

There had certainly been several queer happenings at Rookwood during the past two or three days—happenings that could hardly be accounted for. Jimmy Silver had been thinking about the matter a good deal.

Townsend and Topham, with one eye on Van Ryn, began a pleasant conversation on the subject of South Africa. Towny and Topy had found by experience that Van Ryn was a hard hitter, and they no longer thought of

ragging the new junior, but they were still as much down on him as ever.

Now they were holding an agreeable debate concerning Van Ryn's native land, for the South African to hear, Townsend averring that Boers were cannibals, and Topham suggesting referring the question to Van Ryn, as a fellow who ought to know. Some of the Classics expected to see Van Ryn break out, but the new junior only smiled. Towny and Topy's pleasant little talk was interrupted, however.

"Oh, you're a silly idiot, Towny!"

"Oh, am I?" said Townsend, staring at his chum. "You silly ass——"

"Eh, what's that?" asked Topham. "I didn't speak."

"Don't you tell whoppers!" growled Townsend. "I'll jolly well punch your silly head if you open your silly mouth again!"

"What!" yelled Topham.

"I—I——" Townsend stared about him in bewilderment. "I didn't say that——"

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Topham. "Don't tell lies! I'd like to see you punching my head, you tailor's dummy!"

"I—I didn't! You're a funk, Topham!"

"Look here, do you want a thick ear?" shouted the astonished Topham.

"I—I didn't say anything of the kind! I—I——"

"Are you off your rocker?" demanded Topham. "First you say a thing, and then you say you didn't say it!"

"I didn't! I—I never——"

"Oh, shut up! You're a rotten funk yourself!"

"Well, you two chaps are gettin' remarkably polite to one another, I must say," remarked Smythe of the Shell.

"I didn't say that!" howled Topham. "Somebody else—— Don't you shove your ear in, Smythey, or I'll dot your silly nose!"

"Oh, will you, by gad!" exclaimed Adolphus Smythe wrathfully. "I'll

soon show you who will get his nose dotted!"

"Here, hands off!" shouted Topham, as the indignant Adolphus rushed at him. "I didn't speak! I never! Yarooooh!"

Adolphus was not a fighting man as a rule, but Topham was a very easy opponent. Adolphus bowled him over at the first rush.

Topham blinked up at him from the hearthrug.

"Groo! Oh, my hat! I tell you I never said——"

"If you want a jolly good lickin', get up an' have it!" said Smythe.

"I tell you I never said——"

"Oh, rats!"

Van Ryn strolled out of the Common-room, leaving Smythe and Townsend and Topham engaged in a heated argument. Jimmy Silver cast a very peculiar look after the South African junior.

"Come on, you chaps!" he said to his chums.

"Hallo, what's on?" yawned Lovell.

"Follow your Uncle James, and don't jaw!"

"Oh, rats! All right!"

The Fistical Four strolled out of the Common-room. As they passed down the passage there was the sudden yap of a dog from a dark corner, and they jumped back.

"Look out!" ejaculated Lovell. "There's a blessed dog loose here!"

Gr-r-r-r!

The chums of the Fourth peered about them. But there was no dog to be seen. Lovell rubbed his eyes.

"Is the blessed place haunted?" he exclaimed.

"I rather think it is—in a way," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, we're going to lay the ghost!"

Van Ryn was on the stairs, and Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him up. The South African junior went into his study, and the four followed him.

"What the thunder have we come here for?" demanded Raby.

"To lay the ghost!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

"What the merry dickens——" began Lovell.

"Shut the door," said Jimmy.

"Hallo, what's the game?" asked Van Ryn.

"You are!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"You're going to get the bumping of your life, my son, for spoofing the end study! Collar the cheeky bounder!"

Van Ryn backed round the table. But Jimmy Silver's followers, for once, did not obey the order of their great leader. They stared at him blankly instead.

CHAPTER 41.

Jimmy Silver Solves the Mystery!

"JIMMY, you ass——"

"Jimmy, you fathead——"

"What the dickens are you driving at?"

"Didn't you say that Rookwood was haunted?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Well, we've come here to lay the ghost!"

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" said Lovell peevishly. "What has Van Ryn got to do with it?"

"Lots, I think."

"A little off your rocker, perhaps?" suggested Van Ryn. "You know you've been hearing voices and things——"

"Yes, I know I've been hearing voices," said Jimmy Silver grimly; "and I've found out where the voices come from, too!"

"Look here, what are you getting at?" roared Lovell. "If you're not talking out of the back of your neck——"

"Shush, and listen to your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver chidingly. "There's been too many jolly mysterious things happening lately, and your Uncle James has put two and two together. First of all, the day before

yesterday I heard voices in this study—Towny and Topy's voices—and they weren't here."

"Oh, you were dreaming!" said Lovell, while Van Ryn grinned.

"Then Beaumont heard Knowles' voice in his study, and Knowles wasn't there," said Jimmy.

"Wasn't he there?" said Raby.

"No, he wasn't. Then Bootles heard a rag-and-bone man hooting in at the window, and when we hunted for a rag-and-bone merchant, there wasn't one to be found."

"Well, he had cleared off!"

"He hadn't cleared off."

"You ass, he must have cleared off, as he wasn't there when we looked for him!" said Newcome, puzzled.

"He wasn't there, because he never had been there," said Jimmy Silver. "That rag-and-bone merchant hasn't been born yet."

"Wha-a-at!"

Jimmy's chums blinked at him, seriously alarmed for the state of his sanity. But Jimmy went on cheerily:

"Then there was a dog in a locked box in Beaumont's study, and Beaumont didn't find it—it wasn't there. Then Mr. Manders' parrot began to talk in a wonderful way—never talked like it before—and he said things that made old Manders anxious to get us out of hearing, and saved us a licking."

"Well, that was jolly lucky!"

"Yes, wasn't it? Then Towny hears a dog yelp when he sits down and thinks he's sat on a dog—which wasn't there! Then Towny and Topy begin to slang one another, and each of them declares that he never said what he said. And then we hear a dog in the passage—but there isn't a dog to be found. But your Uncle James has worked it out. Rookwood isn't haunted, and there is such a thing in existence as a ventriloquist, and that's what's the matter."

"A—a ventriloquist!" ejaculated Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded calmly.

"Yes; that's the only way of accounting for it."

"My hat! I shouldn't wonder," said Raby thoughtfully. "Blessed if there's any other way of accounting for it. But who's the chap? We should jolly well know if there was a tricky beast like that at Rookwood!"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "There certainly wasn't a ventriloquist at Rookwood before Van Ryn came; but there was one soon after he came. Putting two and two together, my sons, and making four of it, I conclude that Van Ryn is the giddy ventriloquist, and the time's come for him to own up."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Van Ryn laughed.

Jimmy Silver pointed an accusing finger at him.

"You're a funny beggar," he remarked. "You've been pulling our leg. You were studying, you told me, when I heard those voices in your study. I rather think you were studying to reproduce Towny and Toppo's voices—what? You have been on the spot every time these weird voices have been heard. You're the giddy Polonius behind the curtain, and you're bowled out!"

"Bowled out, by gum!" said Lovell. "Pulling the leg of the end study, too! Collar him!"

"Leggo!" roared Van Ryn, as the Fistical Four seized him. "I own up. I— It was only a joke. I— Yah! Yoop! Yaroop!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Yow-ow-woop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him another!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "He's a funny merchant, but he mustn't be too funny with the end study!"

Bump!

"And another to show our appreciation of the joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Leggo!" roared Van Ryn. "I own up, you silly asses! Chuck it!"

"Give him another for his cheek, and another for his neck——"

"Ha, ha!"

Bump! Bump!

Justice having been done—over-done, as it seemed to the unfortunate victim—the Fistical Four released Van Ryn. The South African junior sat on the floor and gasped.

"You silly asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silver! What is this? What—what?" It was Mr. Bootles' staccato voice at the door. "Silver, I am surprised—shocked! What—what?"

Jimmy Silver spun round.

"Only—only a joke, sir!" he gasped.

"Only a—— Why—what—where—where's Bootles?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Van Ryn.

Then Jimmy Silver understood.

"You japing bounder! Was that you again? Collar him!"

Van Ryn caught up a cricket-bat.

"Chuck it! Pax!"

"That's all very well——"

"Of course it is," said Van Ryn, laughing. "Pax, you duffers! I've pulled your silly legs, and you've bumped me, so we're quits! Chuck it!"

And the Fistical Four, on consideration, "chucked" it.

"So the bounder's a giddy ventriloquist," said Lovell. "I say, what larks we can have with the Moderns before they can find out!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. all together.

And that happy prospect quite reconciled the Fistical Four to the Rookwood ventriloquist.

ANIMAL ATHLETES

THE fellow who can run a hundred yards in ten seconds dead is a champion; and if he can clip another second off that he will be a world-beater. But even then he wouldn't beat the athletes of the animal world, for there are scores of animal species which can outstrip the fastest human runner.

Fastest of them all is the cheetah, or hunting leopard, which will keep up sixty miles an hour for short spurts. These long-bodied, long-legged giant cats are trained by Indian rajahs to hunt down wild deer, and a wealthy native prince will pay fabulous sums for a specially speedy one. A cheetah which was once "timed" against a motor-car to discover its maximum speed, kept up with the car until sixty-six miles an hour was reached.

High Jumps.

For jumping, the kangaroo has all other animals of its size beaten. The kangaroo's powerful back legs, which are perfect muscular springs, will flip it over the ground in thirty-five feet bounds, and at a speed that will easily outstrip a galloping horseman.

The greatest long-distance runner of them all is the wolf—especially the Siberian wolf which is found in North Russia. Cases have been known where these amazing creatures have travelled a thousand miles in less than a week.

Probably most of you would say that the elephant is the strongest creature in the animal world. That, however, is only true when size is not taken into account, for the gorilla, bulk for bulk, is many times more powerful than the strongest elephant. A gorilla can

break a six-inch diameter tree-trunk in half with its bare hands.

The ordinary ant deserves a medal in the "strong man" championship, too. Scientists who have studied ants say that they are capable of dragging about objects one hundred and forty times as heavy as themselves.

200 m.p.h. Birds.

The strength of birds is sometimes very remarkable, too. An eagle is quite capable of lifting a dead beast as heavy as itself into the air, and flying a considerable distance with it. The endurance of birds of prey is equally startling; the giant condors of South America are believed to spend whole days and nights on the wing, without ever coming to earth to rest.

But when it comes to speed, our British swifts have even the biggest birds licked hollow. Scientists who have timed them in-flight, by means of an apparatus similar to that used for gauging the speed of aeroplanes, have found that a swift can do two hundred miles an hour in a "power dive." The sixty miles an hour of a racing pigeon seems slow by comparison.

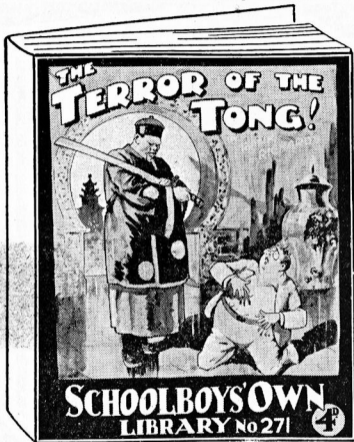
It is interesting to find that some fish can also do a mile a minute. The salmon is one of the fastest swimmers; others with approximately the same speed are the tarpon and the marlin, two giants from the Pacific Ocean.

The tarpon is also a pretty useful jumper. Big-game fishermen have seen a hooked tarpon weighing two or three hundred pounds fling itself ten feet clear of the water and clear a similar distance in its mighty leap through the air.

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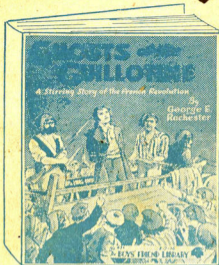
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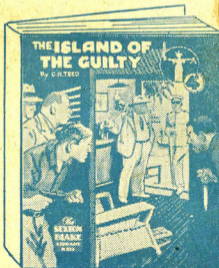
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