

ROOKWOOD CALLING!

By OWEN CONQUEST



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ROOKWOOD CALLING!

By OWEN CONQUEST



A tip-top yarn of exciting schoolboy adventure, starring **JIMMY SILVER & Co.**, the cheery chums of Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 1.

Rounding Up a Slacker!

GOWER—"Oh, let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't see it!" said Lovell.

"My dear man, come on—we're wasting time!" urged Jimmy Silver. "Gower will keep."

Arthur Edward Lovell did not come on. Instead of that, he frowned severely at Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

"Look here, Jimmy, this won't do!" said Lovell. "Duty first!"

"Fathead!"

"There's such a thing as duty," said

Lovell loftily. "You seem to have forgotten it. But there is."

Jimmy Silver grunted impatiently. Generally he was very patient with Lovell; in fact, a fellow could not have been Lovell's pal without possessing a very considerable gift of patience. But often and often Lovell tried the patience of his friends. Now he was trying their patience once more.

The lofty look on Arthur Edward's face showed that he was about to mount the high horse, so to speak. Lovell on the high horse was Lovell in his least fascinating role.

"Chuck it, old man!" advised Raby.

"Give your chin a rest, you know," suggested Newcome. "It's Jimmy's bizney, if it's anybody's. Leave it to Jimmy."

"Jimmy doesn't seem keen on it, though it's his business," said Lovell sarcastically. "Now, my opinion is—"

"Oh dear!"

Really, Jimmy Silver & Co., did not want Arthur Edward Lovell to bring them up in the way in which they should go.

It was true that football practice was on, that it was a compulsory day, and that Gower of the Fourth was slacking in his study and obviously seeking to dodge games practice.

Equally was it true that Jimmy Silver, as captain of the Fourth, was bound to round up the slackers on compulsory days, being answerable to Bulkeley of the Sixth therefor.

Nevertheless, Jimmy Silver had decided to give Gower a miss, and that should have settled the matter. But it did not settle it. Arthur Edward Lovell felt it incumbent upon him to see that Jimmy did not neglect his duties.

"Gower's a slacker!" said Arthur Edward severely. "He slacks all the time, and fairly works at it. Now he ought to be rounded up. It's bad for him to stick in his study, very likely smoking cigarettes—and bad for you to let him do it, Jimmy!"

"He's wound up!" said Raby, with a sigh.

"You're captain of the Fourth, Jimmy—"

"I thought you might have forgotten that little circumstance, old man," remarked Jimmy, with gentle sarcasm.

"Don't be ratty, old chap, because I'm keeping you up to your duty," said Lovell. "Gower's in his study. I'll go and rout him out for you, if you like."

"Oh, give him a miss, and let's get down to the footer," said Newcome.

"Duty first!" said Lovell.

"Well, I'm off!" And Newcome walked away, and Raby grinned and walked after him. They had had enough of Arthur Edward Lovell on the high horse.

"Come on, Lovell!" said Jimmy patiently.

"What about Gower?"

"Bother Gower!"

"I'm surprised at you, Jimmy!" said Lovell. "The fact is, I'm really shocked! This slacking—"

"Look here, ass!" said Jimmy. "Gower's told me he doesn't feel fit—"

"Malingering!"

"He looks a bit seedy!"

"He would—smoking cigarettes and hanging over a study fire!" agreed Lovell. "Games practice is what he wants."

"Well, I've let him off, so come on!" Lovell shook his head.

"It's your weakness, Jimmy, that anybody can pull your silly old leg," he said. "Gower's pulled your leg. Now, look here!"

"Uncle James" of Rookwood was very patient, but by this time he had arrived at the limit of his patience.

"Are you finished chin-wagging, Lovell?" he asked.

"Eh? No, I think—"

"Well, come along to the footer when you've finished!"

And with that Jimmy Silver walked away after Raby and Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted.

In the end study of the Fourth, Arthur Edward often seemed to consider it his duty to keep his comrades up to the mark. It was a thankless task. His comrades never expressed any gratitude; indeed, they frequently expressed feelings that were not in the least akin to gratitude. Even, on occasions, they had bumped Lovell on the study carpet—to such a length did they sometimes carry their ingratitude.

Really, it was too bad, and Lovell felt it so. He was simply pointing out

Jimmy Silver's duty to him, and keeping him up to it, and here was Jimmy walking away, as if Lovell's weighty words were like the idle wind which he regarded not!

"Well," said Lovell, "my hat!"

Jimmy had told Lovell to come along to the footer when he had finished "chin-wagging." Naturally, Lovell finished at once. It was useless to "chin-wag" without a listener—he was not disposed to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

But he was wrathful.

Instead of following his comrades to Little Side for games practice Lovell turned back and ascended the stairs.

He headed for the Fourth Form passage and stopped at the door of Study No. 1, which belonged to Gower, Peele and Lattrey. The last two were already on the football ground—unwillingly. But Gower, Lovell supposed, was still in his study—and Lovell's intention was to "rout" him out. Lovell was going to do his duty for him, like a faithful comrade. That this was a "cheek" on his part never occurred to Arthur Edward.

Lovell turned the handle of the study door and hurled it open.

"Now then, you slacker!" he shouted.

There was no reply from the study.

"Gower, you slacking bounder!"

Lovell strode in. He was prepared to pour scorn, and contumely on the slacker of the Fourth, and shame him into turning up for games. If that gentle method did not answer, Lovell was further prepared to take him by the scruff of the neck and conduct him personally to the football ground, helping him with a boot.

But as it happened the room was empty.

Lovell stared round it, but Gower was not there.

"Skulking in one of the other studies, of course," grunted Lovell.

And with increasing wrath, Arthur Edward marched along the Fourth

Form passage, looking into study after study in search of the skulker.

Study after study was drawn blank, till Lovell arrived at the last in the passage—the end study, which belonged to the Fistical Four. It seemed unlikely to Lovell that the slacker would have the nerve to skulk in his—Lovell's—own study, but he looked in.

"Gower!" he ejaculated.

Gower was there!

He was standing over Lovell's desk, in a corner of the room, and as Arthur Edward spoke he swung round, his face flushing a deep crimson. Then, as he stared blankly at Lovell, the colour ebbed from his face, leaving him ghastly pale. He did not speak. He stood as if rooted to the floor, staring at Arthur Edward as if the latter were a ghost. Lovell, with an angry snort, strode heavily into the end study.

CHAPTER 2.

Lovell on the Warpath!

"O H!" gasped Gower at last.

"You!"

"I've been looking for you!" said Lovell grimly.

"I—I came here to—to——"

Lovell grinned.

"I know why you came here, old bean," he said.

Gower of the Fourth started violently. His glance went for a moment to the desk, over which he had been standing when Lovell appeared. Then it returned to Lovell in a questioning, terrified way.

"You—you think——" he stammered.

"I don't think—I know!" snapped Lovell.

"It's a lie!" said Gower huskily. "I—I haven't touched your desk—I never meant——"

"I didn't suppose you had touched my desk, fathead!" Lovell burst into a laugh. "Ha, ha, ha! Did you think I thought you'd come here to burgle my desk? Ha, ha, ha!"

Gower stared at him.

"You—you said——"

"I said I knew why you'd come here. you silly owl," said Lovell contemptuously. "You're slacking, and you're skulking here because you expected to be rounded up for games practice. Like your dashed neck to slack in my study!"

"Oh!" gasped Gower.

He eyed Lovell rather curiously, and he seemed relieved somehow. Lovell did not observe it—he was not very observant.

He pointed to the door.

"Get a move on!" he said.

Gower obediently quitted the end study. He seemed glad to get out of it.

Lovell followed him along the passage. Gower stopped at his own study, and Lovell stopped, too.

"Keep on!" he said.

"I'm going into my study."

"You're not; you're going down to the changing-room," said Lovell. "I'm going to see that you do it, too! See?"

"I'm let off games practice this afternoon," said Gower sullenly.

"Rats!"

"I'm not going!"

Lovell drew back his right foot expressively. Lovell already had his football boots on, and Lovell took a good size in boots.

"Where will you have it?" he asked.

Gower backed away, eyeing him savagely.

"Jimmy Silver's let me off," he muttered. "I'm not fit! I—I've been feeling seedy for days."

"That's your rotten bad habits," Lovell explained. "Smoking cigarettes and slacking about, and breaking bounds after lights out, and so on. What you want is football practice, and lots of it. I'm going to see that you get it."

"Silver says——"

"Never mind Silver now—I'm attending to this for him," said Lovell. "Are you going down?"

"No!" howled Gower desperately.

"Then I'm going to take you!"

Gower dodged into the study and

slammed the door. His intention was to turn the key, but before he had a chance of turning it Lovell's hefty shoulder crashed on the door and it burst open again. There was a yell from Gower, as the door crashed on him and sent him spinning across the room.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

"Ow!" Gower sat dazedly on the study floor. "You beastly bully——"

"What?"

"Bully!" howled Gower.

"My hat!"

The imputation of bullying was too much for Lovell—when he was only doing his duty—or at all events, Jimmy Silver's duty. He made a rush at Cuthbert Gower, and grabbed him by the collar. Gower was jerked up from the carpet.

"Now, then!" growled Lovell.

"Ow! Leggo!"

Gower came out of the study like a bundle, in Lovell's powerful grip. The dutiful—perhaps over-dutiful—Arthur Edward propelled him along the passage to the stairs.

From that point Gower decided to go quietly. He was nothing like a match for the burly Lovell, and he really had no chance. He went down quietly to the changing-room, where he changed into football garb under Lovell's grim eye. His eyes burned with rage and resentment as he did so.

"That's better," said Lovell. "Now come on!"

"You rotter!" hissed Gower.

"If you want my boot——"

"I'm going, you cad!"

Gower evidently did not want Lovell's boot. He slouched out of the room, and Arthur Edward Lovell followed him out.

They walked down to the football ground together.

Gower's face was pale, and he certainly did not look like a fellow who was prepared to enjoy a game of football. The fact was that Gower looked, as he felt, seedy; but Lovell did not think of noting it. No doubt Gower's seediness was due to his bad

and slacking habits, as Lovell declared, and it was therefore a matter of no importance in Arthur Edward's eyes. Lovell was an extremely energetic fellow himself, and he had no compassion for slackers.

"Hallo, here comes Lovell!" grinned Raby, as the two latecomers arrived on Little Side.

Jimmy Silver glanced round.

"Oh, here you are, Gower!" he said. "I'm glad you've turned up, after all. Feel better?"

"No," growled Gower, "I'm seedy. I told you so. I shall jolly well complain to Bulkeley about this."

Jimmy stared.

"Eh? I've let you off, if you want to be let off," he said. "What the thump are you here for if you're seedy?"

"I've brought him," said Lovell loftily. "He's only malingering, and you really ought to have sense enough to see it, Jimmy."

"Oh, gad!" murmured Mornington, with a grin; and several of the Fourth-Formers laughed.

Jimmy looked rather fixedly at Lovell. Lovell was his chum, but there was a limit.

"You've yanked Gower down here after I'd let him off!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. You see——"

Jimmy raised his hand.

"You can cut, Gower," he said.

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"Don't be an ass, old chap," said Jimmy impatiently. "When you are elected captain of the Form, you can run the show just as you choose. Till that time, leave it to your Uncle James."

Gower, with a derisive grin at Lovell, turned and walked away. Arthur Edward Lovell grew crimson.

"You're letting Gower off, after I've rounded him up!" he exclaimed.

"I let him off before you rounded him up. Now, drop it, and let's get going!" said Jimmy Silver tersely.

"Look here——"

"Chuck it, old man!" said Raby.

"You're not captain of the Fourth yet, you know," sneered Cyril Peele. "Why can't you mind your own dashed business, Lovell?"

"Catch Lovell minding his own business!" grinned Lattrey.

Jimmy Silver turned away. He did not want an argument with Lovell; still less did he want a quarrel. But the wrath of Arthur Edward was too intense to be suppressed.

"Jimmy!" he roared.

"That's all right, old chap—football now!" said the captain of the Fourth soothingly.

"You silly ass——"

"Shush!"

"You cheeky dummy——"

"For goodness' sake, shut up, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy impatiently. "Now pick up sides, you fellows: we've wasted enough time."

Lovell was heeded no further. He stood with a crimson face, his hands driven deep into the pockets of his football shorts, and majestic wrath in his brow. Some of the fellows on the ground surmised that it would come to punching; but, fortunately, Lovell restrained his wrath. And he turned and strode away from the football ground.

"Lovell!" called out Newcome as he went.

Lovell did not heed.

He tramped away savagely towards the House.

"Slacker!" shouted Peele.

Even that did not make Lovell turn back to the football. He was feeling too furious to join in the game with his comrades. But it happened, unfortunately for Lovell, that a dozen yards away he met Bulkeley of the Sixth face to face. The captain of Rookwood was coming down to the junior ground to take charge of the practice.

He stopped Lovell.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Eh? Indoors!" snapped Lovell.

"What are you cutting games practice for?" asked Bulkeley. "This won't do, Lovell! Get back to the field!"

"I—I——"

"Can't have any slacking! Get back!"

Lovell's feelings were too deep for words as he tramped back to Little Side. The imputation of slacking was really the last straw. But the Head of the Games was not to be argued with. And Lovell went without a word.

CHAPTER 3.

The Marble Eye!

JIMMY SILVER compressed his lips. Football practice over, Arthur Edward Lovell marched away by himself, instead of walking off with his chums as usual. He did not give them a glance.

Evidently Arthur Edward was offended.

"Lovell!" Jimmy called out amicably. Lovell seemed deaf.

"Silly ass!" commented Raby.

In the changing-room Lovell seemed blind, as well as deaf. At all events, he did not appear to see his comrades.

He changed in silence, taking no part in the cheery buzz of talk in the crowded room, and was soon gone.

"Now old Lovell's got his back up!" sighed Newcome. "I suppose he's going to scowl about the study till he comes round. I've a jolly good mind to kick Gower!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, it really wasn't Gower's fault," he said. "I don't like the fellow, but he really is seedy, as he said. I dare say Lovell will be all right after tea."

And the Co. proceeded to the end study for tea—for which footer practice had given them a keen appetite.

Lovell was already there. He did not seem to be thinking of tea; he was sitting at a corner of the study table, with an account-book open before him and a stump of pencil in his hand. It gave the Co. a discouraged feeling. Lovell was at his accounts—and those accounts were a worry at the best of times in the

end study! Lovell being treasurer to the junior club, the accounts were one of his important duties. And he never failed to make the rest of the study realise how important this duty was!

When Lovell was at his accounts he expected deep silence. Fellows had to move about on tip-toe, or else receive an accusing and reproachful glare from Lovell. Lovell was not great at arithmetic, and his accounts were often in a tangle. And when he had to disentangle them, the task taxed heavily his intellectual powers. At such times his temper was not wont to be sweet.

The sight of his account-books, in fact, generally made his chums remember important engagements elsewhere.

But at tea-time they could not flee. "Tea now, old chap!" said Raby amicably.

Lovell glanced up coldly.

"You fellows can get your tea. I suppose I can have a corner of the table for my accounts?"

"You were doing your accounts yesterday!" grunted Raby.

"And the day before!" said Newcome.

"The fellows made me treasurer," said Lovell icily. "Probably they expected me to take proper care of their money. I should imagine so myself. Anyhow, I'm going to do it!"

"Well, keep on, old chap, and we'll get tea," said Jimmy soothingly.

"I'm going to tea with Putty; you needn't bother about my tea."

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome set about getting their tea. Lovell devoted his attention to his accounts.

The clink of a teacup, the bubble of a kettle, was quite enough to make Lovell look up with an expression of patient martyrdom. But hungry footballers had no time to consider that. They really wanted their tea.

Lovell rose at last and closed his account-book with an air of resignation.

"Finished?" asked Raby affably.

"No"

"Have some of these sosses and chips?"

"Thanks! I'm teeing in Study No. 2."

"Look here, Lovell——" urged Jimmy Silver.

Lovell walked out of the study. The three chums of the Fourth exchanged exasperated glances.

"Now the silly ass is sulking!" growled Newcome. "I'm getting fed-up with Lovell's silly rot!"

Lovell was quite unconscious that he was sulking, and he was far from regarding his line of conduct as "silly rot." With lofty dignity, he quitted the end study and walked along the passage to Study No. 2, where he expected to find Putty Grace. He had told his study-mates that he was "teeing" with Putty of the Fourth; that being his intention. But when he looked into Study No. 2 he found only three juniors there—Jones minor, Tubby Muffin, and Higgs.

"Where's Putty?" he asked.

"He's teeing with Conroy," answered Jones minor.

"Oh!"

Lovell stepped back from the study. He was not disposed to "tea" with Higgs & Co. even if they had asked him, which they did not. He stood in the passage rather disconcerted. Nothing would have induced him to return to the end study and claim a share of the good things there. He had told the Co. that he was teeing out, and he was going to tea out. But he could not very well follow Putty to Conroy's study as an additional guest unasked.

Tea in Hall seemed the only resource, and Lovell did not like tea in Hall—the last resource of hard-up juniors. But there was no alternative after his dignified exit from the end study, so down to Hall he went.

Weak tea and thick bread-and-butter compared very unfavourably with "sosses" and chips in the end study, and they seemed weaker and thicker than ever to Lovell now. He sat and glowered over his tea, feeling a very injured fellow indeed.

After tea he lounged out into the quadrangle.

The autumn dusk was falling, and it was close on time for all Lower fellows to be in their Houses. But Lovell was not eager to get back to the end study. He had to turn up there for prep, but he did not mean to turn up so long as he could help it. After his severe rebuff in the matter of Cuthbert Gower, Lovell felt like the prophet of old that he did well to be angry.

He tramped by the path under the old Rookwood beeches with his hands in his pockets and a deep frown on his face. The dusk grew deeper and deepened into dark; and Lovell glanced once or twice at the lighted facade of the House. But he did not go in. Really, it almost seemed as if there were some pleasure in a state of solitary sulkiness.

All the Rookwooders were in their Houses now—or should have been. Lovell tramped the path under the beeches in solitude and silence.

The silence near him was suddenly broken by a strange and unexpected sound. Lovell started.

It was a sob.

He stood rooted to the ground, amazed by the sound. Somebody, unseen in the shadows, was near him under the beeches and evidently in trouble.

After the first moment of surprise Lovell wondered whether it was some wretched fag, who had sneaked away into that quiet corner to mourn over some cuff from a bullying senior. Possibly some young scamp of the Third or Second, who had been licked—and probably had deserved it. Or, possibly, it was some "kid" who had had the ill-luck to fall foul of Carthew, the bully of the Sixth.

The sound was repeated.

Lovell stepped towards it, peering before him in the shadow of the trees. If it was some bullied fag crying over his injuries, Lovell was prepared to sympathise, and to take up the cause of the injured party, if there was anything to be done.

A shadowy figure was discernible, half sitting, half lying on the ground. The figure started, and a sob was checked and choked as Lovell loomed up in the gloom.

"Who's that?" exclaimed a startled voice.

Lovell jumped. He knew that voice.

"Gower!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 4.

The Way of the Transgressor!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL stared down at Gower's shadowy form. The junior did not rise. He seemed shrunk into a heap of hopeless dejection, and after the first startled ejaculation he stared up at Lovell, with a face that glimmered white in the gloom, in silence and without movement. Arthur Edward stooped a little nearer, staring at Cuthbert Gower.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"You've been blubbing!" said Lovell, with immeasurable scorn for a Fourth Form fellow who was guilty of blubbing. A Head's flogging would not have caused Lovell to blub.

"No bizney of yours, is it?" said Gower savagely. "Leave me alone."

Lovell relented a little. His brain did not work with great swiftness, but he realised that Gower must be in a very great and very unusual trouble to be knocked out like this. Even a slacker like Gower was not likely to "blub" unless something very serious was the matter with him.

"Feeling seedy?" asked Lovell, with some compunction.

"Yes—no! Let me alone."

"I say, has Carthew been bullying you? If he has, we'll jolly well take the matter up in our study."

"No—what rot! Do you think I should be knocked over like this by being bullied?" growled Gower. "If

you want to know, I'm going to be sacked from Rookwood. I dare say you're glad to hear it! Now leave a fellow alone."

"Sacked!"

"Yes. Get out, can't you? Can't you leave me alone, when you're going to see the last of me in a day or two?" hissed Gower.

Lovell did not go. Gower's statement had taken him quite by surprise.

"Has the Head found you out, then?" he asked, after a pause. "Look here, Gower, you've been a silly ass, and a good deal of a blackguard, but you're not half so bad as Peele; and I jolly well know that Peele's led you into more than half of your blackguardly scrapes. Of course, if you're up before the beaks you can't give a pal away, even a cad like Peele. But—but isn't there any chance? How did the Head know?"

Gower's lips curled sardonically.

"He doesn't know—yet," he said. "He will know to-morrow morning. Then it's me for the long jump. Why don't you laugh? You've told me often enough that I was heading for the sack. Now I've got there! Why don't you laugh?"

Lovell did not feel like laughing. He was not very reflective, and he certainly was headstrong and rather obstinate; but he had a kind heart, and he was not the fellow to be down on another fellow in the hour of trouble. There was something in Gower's white, pinched, worn face that appealed to Lovell, conscious of strength and firmness of character. He realised, too, that Gower must be in a very shaky state to break down utterly like this, and his heart smote him a little for the drastic measures he had used towards the wretched slacker that afternoon.

It was up to the strong to help the weak, and that, as a matter of fact, was the favourite role in which Arthur Edward Lovell fancied himself. He felt a keen desire to help Gower now, if he could—all the more because his prophecies had been fulfilled by the wretched fellow's downfall.

"Is it really so bad as that?" he asked, after a long pause.

"Yes—and worse! I'm going to be booted out of the school—bunked from Rookwood!" snarled Gower. "What a jest for the end study—what? You can all tell one another that you said so all along! A regular triumph for you—I hope you'll enjoy it! And I—I——" The tone of sardonic mockery died away as a realisation of his position rushed over the junior. He hid his face in his hands and sobbed. "Oh, what am I going to do? What can I do?"

Lovell stood in silence, looking at him. His contempt had given place now to compassion for the unhappy fellow, almost grovelling there in despair in the deep shadow of the beeches.

"Dash it all, kid!" said Lovell uneasily. "It's jolly hard cheese. What has the Head found out? About your breaking dorm bounds and going down to the Bird-in-Hand?"

"He hasn't found out anything yet."

"What?"

"He will know it all to-morrow morning—by the first post. It—it's in a letter! I'm done for!"

"But I don't understand," said Lovell, deeply perplexed. "Do you mean that somebody's going to write to the Head and give you away?"

"Yes," groaned Gower.

"But who—how? Not one of your pals here?"

"Of course not. A man—a rotter—a shady blackguard I was a fool ever to speak to," hissed Gower. "It was Peele's fault, too. Peele introduced me to him last term. I'd never have known him but for Peele. But catch Peele helpin' me out now! He says he can't—and I dare say it's true—but he wouldn't, anyhow! Peele don't care much for a lame duck!" Gower laughed mirthlessly. "I'm a lame duck now, and no mistake."

"How could Peele help you?" asked Lovell, puzzled. "Oh!" He understood suddenly. "Is it money?"

"Of course it is!"

"You're in debt?"

"Seven pounds," grunted Gower. "And—and I haven't sevenpence towards it, and if it isn't paid this evening Joey Hook is sending on my IOU to the Head."

"Phew!"

Lovell whistled softly. He understood at last how the matter was. It was this that had been weighing on Gower's mind for days, and making him look ill and seedy. It was no wonder—for, in case of exposure, the headmaster's sentence on the offender was certain to be short and sharp. There was no place at Rookwood for fellows who dabbled in betting on horse-races.

"Now you know," mumbled Gower. "You can tell all the fellows, if you like! It won't make any difference. As soon as the Head hears from Joey Hook I shall be called on the carpet, and then it will all come out—breaking bounds, and going to that den, and the lot of it. It will be the first train home for me—and serve me right. But—but what am I going to say to my father?"

Gower cowered in the shadows with a spasm of terror. Facing his father at home, after being ignominiously turned out of Rookwood School, was a more severe ordeal than facing even the Head. Truly, the dingy blackguard of the Fourth was finding the way of the transgressor hard.

"Seven pounds!" repeated Lovell. "My hat! If it was seven bob, I'd lend you the money. But, look here, Gower, is it straight? How did you come to owe that man Hook such a sum of money as that?"

Gower made an impatient movement.

"Part of it was a bet on a horse, and part was money that Hook lent me when I was playing cards at the Bird-in-Hand," he groaned. "I was fool enough to give him my IOU for the whole amount—and the Head will know my writing. I can't deny my own hand."

"Well, you precious blackguard!" exclaimed Lovell in disgust. "You've jolly well asked for what you're going to get, that's certain."

"Rub it in!" muttered Gower.

"Well, I don't want to do that," said Lovell, relenting again. "But really, you've been an awful rotter, Gower. Look here, Peele ought to stand by you in this—he's more to blame than you are."

"He can't—or won't!"

"Can't you make terms with the man?" asked Lovell. "It won't pay him to get you kicked out of the school. He will never get his money then. Your father's more likely to prosecute him than to pay him anything, I should think. Make terms with him, and pay him a little at a time."

"I—I've tried. He says he's waited long enough!" mumbled Gower. "So he has, if you come to that. He agreed to wait while I sold my bike and got the money. Only—only——"

"I know you sold your bike," said Lovell. "Didn't it raise enough to pay him?"

"Yes; but—but——"

"But what?"

"The—the money went," mumbled Gower.

"Well, my hat!"

Lovell turned to walk away. Gower whimpered as he crouched in the shadows, and Lovell's kind heart smote him, and he turned back. He looked down on the wretched fellow with mingled pity and contempt.

"The man's a scoundrel to have such dealings with a schoolboy!" he said. "But you seem to have taken him in, Gower. It's no wonder he's cut up rusty."

"I—I know. He's given me till nine this evening," mumbled Gower. "He's waiting for me in the road now, I think. He said he'd wait till nine, in case I came with the money. I—I can't pay him anything. I know I've been a fool—a rotter! I'm going to suffer for it now. If—if it wasn't for my people I wouldn't care so much. I've never

done any good for myself at Rookwood. But the—the mater, she'll be frightfully cut up——" Gower's voice trailed off miserably.

Lovell's face softened.

In that extremity of misery and fear, the wretched fellow could still think of his mother. It showed that he was not all bad, at all events.

"I'm sorry," said Lovell. "I—I wish I could help you out. You've asked for it, and no mistake. But you might have thought of your people a bit sooner, Gower."

"I know that."

"Well, I suppose you do. But, look here!" said Lovell. "Are you sure the man isn't simply frightening you? He mayn't intend to give you away at all."

"He does. He's awfully wild with me."

"Then take my tip and go to the Head first," said Lovell. "Make a clean breast of it, and he may let you down lightly. He's a tough old bird, but lots of the fellows say he's got a kind heart. Go to the Head before that man Hook can get at him."

Gower shuddered.

"I dare not! I—I couldn't."

"It's your only chance," urged Lovell.

"I can't! It wouldn't be any good if I did, and I can't! I—I'm not a fellow like you," groaned Gower. "I haven't your nerve. But look here, Lovell! If you wanted to help me you——" He peered up at Lovell's face in the shadows. "If—if you wanted to——"

"I'd help you if I could," said Lovell.

"Then—then if you went to speak to Hook——"

"Catch me speaking to a scoundrel like that! Besides, what good would it do?"

"I—I shall have some money next week," said Gower, in a gasping voice. "Hook won't take my word. But—but you will, Lovell. You know I wouldn't let you down. If you'd give him your word that the money would be paid, that might make it all right. He might

wait. He knows about you. He knows you're straight. Your word would be good enough for him."

Lovell stared down at the shadowy white face.

"If I give him my word it would have to be kept," he said. "He's a swindling rascal, but a promise is a promise."

"I shall have the money next week," whispered Gower. "I—I give you my word on that."

"You gave Hook your word that you'd pay him," said Lovell. "I couldn't make a promise on your word, Gower. And I couldn't go out of bounds after dark and meet a scoundrel like that. It's too thick. Why, it would mean a flogging or the sack if it came out."

"I knew you wouldn't help me!" muttered Gower. "Of course you won't! Why should you? We've never been friends."

"It isn't that. But——"

"Oh, let me alone, then—let me alone!"

Lovell opened his lips, but closed them again. It was useless to tell Gower what he thought of him, and too much like hitting a fellow who was down. There was nothing he could do to help, and any advice that he could give was unwelcome.

He turned away in silence.

The sound of a miserable sob followed him as he went, and that sound was still ringing in Lovell's ears as he came along a little later to the end study in the Fourth.

CHAPTER 5

A Friend in Need!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were beginning prep when Arthur Edward Lovell came into the study.

They hoped that, by this time, Arthur Edward had got over his "tantrums." But Lovell's face was dark and gloomy.

As a matter of fact, he was thinking

about Cuthbert Gower, not about his little tiff with his comrades of the end study. Gower's wretched white face and quavering voice haunted Lovell. He tried to dismiss the matter from his mind as no business of his. But he could not quite succeed. If Gower had been "up" for a flogging, Lovell would have regarded it as a good thing, and likely to do Gower good. But the "sack" was a terribly serious matter. From the point of view of a Rook-wooder it was almost the end of all things. Contempt and disgust were swallowed up in compassion for a fellow who had come so fearful a cropper.

Lovell sorted out his books, and sat down in silence. He worked at preparation, but Gower's miserable face haunted him all the time.

"Still got 'em?" asked Raby, after a time.

"Eh?" Lovell looked up. "Still got what?"

"The tantrums."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Lovell, old man," said Jimmy Silver mildly, "isn't it about time you chucked this? What's the good of sulking?"

"Who's sulking?" snapped Lovell.

"You are, old bean."

"Oh, rats! Let a fellow work!" growled Lovell. "This study is like a cage of magpies."

"That chap Gower really is seedy," remarked Newcome. "I saw him when we came in after footer, and he looked like a giddy ghost. Looks to me as if he's got something on his mind."

"Perhaps he has!" grunted Lovell.

"What the thump could he have on his mind?" asked Raby.

"Perhaps his latest gee-gee has run away with his money," grinned Newcome. "I know he's been going up and down the passage trying to borrow money for days and days."

"Blessed outsider!" said Raby. "He will get it in the neck some day when it comes out. It's bound to in the long run. And Gower isn't the fellow to face it out. He will just crumple up

and howl when the chopper comes down."

Jimmy Silver pushed away his books and rose.

"Finished!" he announced. "Who's coming down?"

Raby and Newcome jumped up.

"Lovell——"

"I'm not finished prep. You needn't wait for me."

"Oh, all serene!"

Three juniors strolled out of the end study. Lovell was left to finish his prep. Generally, he was careful with prep. Mr. Dalton was rather an exacting Form-master. But on the present occasion Lovell decided to let it slide. As soon as his comrades were gone he rose from the table, and, instead of working, he moved restlessly about the study, with his hands in his pockets. His boyish brow wrinkled in thought.

It was no business of his he told himself again and again. Gower of the Fourth had asked for it and got it, and that was all there was about it. He was a rank outsider, and Rookwood would be all the better without him. In fact, the sooner he was gone the better it would be for the school.

That was all true enough, and yet Lovell could not feel satisfied or at ease. Somehow, he could not dismiss the wretched fellow's tormented face from his mind. He wished he had never taken that walk under the dusky beeches. It was rotten to be loaded up with another fellow's troubles in this way. And that was all Gower's fault, too. But for Gower he would never have been on sulky terms with his chums, and would not have been avoiding them that evening.

The hands of the study clock pointed to half-past eight. Lovell remembered what Gower had told him—of Mr. Hook waiting in the road 'till nine o'clock, giving the hapless debtor a last chance. In half an hour it would be too late.

Lovell wavered.

It was risky to break school bounds at such an hour—terribly risky to meet

such a character as Mr. Hook, of the Bird-in-Hand! Why should he run such a risk for a fellow like Gower? If Lovell had been in trouble, would Gower have lifted a finger to help him? Lovell knew that he would not. And yet——

He left the study, and moved along restlessly to Study No. 1, at the staircase end of the passage. He looked in.

Cuthbert Gower was there alone. Lattrey and Peele had finished their prep and gone down—probably soon tiring of Gower's company in his present state of spirits. Gower was not working. He was sprawling in the arm-chair, staring at the opposite wall, and did not even turn his head as Lovell entered.

"Done your prep?" asked Lovell awkwardly.

Gower scowled.

"What's the good? I shan't be in class to-morrow morning."

Lovell paused. He called himself a fool for what he was going to do, but he proceeded to do it, all the same.

"Look here, Gower, are you absolutely certain about the money next week?" he asked.

Gower looked up quickly.

"Absolutely!" he answered.

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" repeated Gower.

"Well, there can't be any harm in telling the man so," said Lovell slowly. "I suppose I can take your word. Look here, if you think it will do any good, I—I—I'll go and speak to him."

Gower's face flushed with hope.

"I—I say, you're a good chap, Lovell," he said huskily. "If—if you can get the brute to give me time, it will make all the difference. Once I get out of this——"

"You'll promise me to keep clear of that kind of thing in future!" said Lovell sharply. "Otherwise, I'm keeping clear of you now."

"Of course I promise," said Gower. "Do you think I want this over again?"

"Well, I suppose not. Where is the man now?"

"He's waiting in the road—he said he would—five minutes' walk from the school gates," muttered Gower. "Walk down towards Coombe, and you'll see him."

"Nice if a Rookwood master happens to be coming along the same road about the same time!" muttered Lovell.

"It's not likely!"

"Well, I'll do my best," said Lovell ungraciously. "Blessed if I know why it matters to me whether you're sacked or not! But I'll do my best. Mind, I don't answer for anything, but I'll do what I can."

Without waiting for Gower's reply, Lovell left the study. Mornington and Errol were on the stairs, and the former called to Lovell.

Lovell affected not to hear. He went up the passage, past the end study, to the box-room. There was little time to lose if he was to make an effort to save Gower from the results of his folly. Having made up his mind to it, Lovell lost no time.

He slipped from the box-room window to the leads outside, and dropped to the ground. He was fully conscious that he might be missed, and his absence discovered. But he had to take that risk now.

With great caution he skirted the school buildings, and reached the wall in a dark corner behind the beeches. There he climbed the school wall and dropped into the road.

It was a quarter to nine. Lovell gave a hasty and uneasy glance about him, and hurried up the dark road towards Coombe. There was no time to lose now.

In the deep shadows by the roadside a spot of crimson glowed, and Lovell guessed that it was the lighted end of a cigar. He halted, and made out the figure of a squat man in a coat and a bowler hat. The crimson spot shifted as Mr. Joey Hook removed the cigar from his mouth and peered out at the schoolboy in the road.

"Jest in time!" came a husky voice. "Jest in time, young Gower! Ten minutes more and I'd have been gone!"

CHAPTER 6.

Lovell's Way!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL
breathed hard.

In the darkness Mr. Hook had mistaken him for the junior he was expecting—the wretched "sportsman" of the Fourth. But a moment later he realised his error. Lovell's sturdy figure was a good deal bulkier than the weedy Gower's.

The bookmaker muttered a startled exclamation.

"What's this here? Who are you?"

"It's all right!" whispered Lovell.

"I—I've come for Gower."

"Oh, you've come for Gower, have you?" said Mr. Hook surlily. "All right if you've got the dibs. Let's 'ave a look at you."

He struck a match, and the light flickered on Lovell's face. Joey Hook stared at him.

"I've seen you afore," he said. "You're young Lovell! I didn't know you was a friend of young Gower's—not that sort at all." His manner became more civil as the match went out. "Why, I'm glad to meet you, Master Lovell—very glad indeed! If there's anything in my line you're after, Joey Hook's your man, fair and honest."

Lovell's eyes gleamed.

"I'm not likely to want anything in your line!" he exclaimed. "I'm not that kind of a fool, or rascal, either."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Hook. "Then what may you 'appen to want, young Mister 'Igh-and-mighty? I never asked you to come along 'ere and talk to me, that I knew of."

"I've come for Gower——"

"Gower can come himself, if he's got anything to say," said Mr. Hook, evidently very much offended. "I don't

want to have anything to do with you!"

Lovell realised that he had been a little lacking in tact. But it was difficult to speak to this man without betraying the scorn and disgust that he felt.

"It's about his debt to you," he said, speaking as civilly as he could force himself to speak.

"If you've brought the money you can hand it over," said Joey Hook sullenly. "I ain't stopping you. I've got young Gower's paper here, all fair and square, and it's his'n when he's paid up. Where's the dibs?"

Lovell coughed.

"I haven't brought the money," he said.

"Then what 'ave you come for?"

"To ask you to give Gower time to pay," said Lovell. "He will be able to square next week——"

"I've heard that story before," said Joey Hook, interrupting rudely. "I've heard it several times. That's a chicken that won't fight, young Lovell. You needn't spin me that yarn. Hand over the dibs, or take yourself off. And that's that!"

Lovell gritted his teeth. It was hard to bear talk like this from a dingy loafer like Mr. Joseph Hook, and Lovell's eyes fairly blazed at the squat fat man in the bowler hat. But he tried hard to keep his temper.

"Gower says——" he began again.

"I don't want to 'ear what he says, or what you say, neither!" said Mr. Hook surlily. "I want seven pounds, and I don't want nothing else. Don't he owe me the money?"

Lovell's anger broke out.

"No, not honestly!" he exclaimed.

"A scoundrel who leads a kid like that to play cards and make bets ought to be in prison. That's where you ought to be!"

"Oh, that's the tune, is it?" exclaimed Mr. Hook, his hard face growing purple with rage. "Why, you cheeky young rascal, you dare to talk

to me! Why, I'll lay my stick round you——"

"I'd like to see you do it!" retorted Lovell contemptuously, quite forgetful by that time that he had come as an ambassador.

"Would you, by gum!" exclaimed Joey Hook.

And the squat man lurched out of the shadows, his walking-stick grasped in his hand, and made a cut at the Rookwood junior.

Lovell caught the stick with his shoulder, and gave a yell. The next instant he was leaping at Joey Hook with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

Crash!

"Ow! Oh, my eye! Yoooop!" spluttered Mr. Hook, as he reeled back from a terrific right-hander, which landed fairly on his red and bulbous nose. "Ow! Oh! My hat! Ow!"

Lovell's left followed up his right with terrific vim. Mr. Hook's fat legs doubled under him, and he was strewn along the lane. He smote the earth with a heavy thud.

Lovell stood over him, panting.

"Now, you scoundrel——"

"Ow! Keep orf! Wow!" gasped the astonished Mr. Hook. "You young 'ooligan! Keep your 'ands orf!"

"Do you want any more, you rascal?" roared Lovell.

"Ow! Ow! Keep orf!" yelled Mr. Hook.

He scrambled to his feet. His stick had fallen somewhere in the grass, but Mr. Hook did not stop to look for it. He dodged away from Arthur Edward Lovell in great alarm.

His bulbous nose looked more bulbous than ever, and a stream of crimson ran from it over his ragged moustache. One of his eyes blinked painfully.

Mr. Hook had had enough—more than enough! He gasped with rage and apprehension as he dodged away from Lovell.

"I'll make you sorry for this!" he spluttered. "Laying 'ands on a man!

You young villain, you, I'll make you
— Ow! Keep orf!"

Mr. Hook fairly ran as Lovell made another jump at him. As he fled, Lovell let out a hefty boot, which landed on Mr. Hook and sent him spinning forward. He very nearly went down again, but he just saved himself, and plunged on, disappearing in the shadows down the lane.

Lovell stared after him, frowning. He had dealt with Mr. Hook as that dingy rascal deserved; there was no doubts about that. But it dawned on Lovell's mind—rather late—that though Mr. Joseph Hook had certainly received his deserts, the cause of the hapless Gower had not been much improved thereby.

"Well, he asked for it!" muttered Lovell.

Mr. Joseph Hook was gone; his stertorous breathing had died away down the lane. Slowly Arthur Edward Lovell turned back towards Rockwood. From somewhere in the distance the hour of nine had chimed out through the autumn night.

Lovell hurried back towards the school.

CHAPTER 7.

The Return of the Ambassador!

"SEEN that ass Lovell?"

Three Rookwood juniors were asking that question up and down the Fourth Form passage as bed-time drew near.

The three were Jimmy Silver, George Raby and Arthur Newcome. They were the three who had the privilege—not always a happy one—of being the bosom pals of Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth.

They had asked the question a dozen times, and they were still asking it, without receiving a satisfactory answer. Sometimes they varied it a little; but always in a way that denoted an extremely disparaging opinion of Arthur Edward Lovell's intellect.

"Seen that chump Lovell?"

"Seen that frabjous fathead Lovell?"

"Anybody seen that burbling blitherer Lovell?"

Nobody had, apparently. Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, seemed to have disappeared; he was gone from the gaze of his comrades like a beautiful dream.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were growing exasperated, and very uneasy.

There had been a difference of opinion in the end study, and Lovell had been displaying a dignified reserve; which was his more pleasing name for what other fellows called "sulks."

While the dignified reserve, alias sulks, lasted, his chums were not specially anxious for his society. But it was close on bed-time now, and they wondered what had become of Lovell. He did not seem to be in the school at all, and Mornington had seen him slipping into the box-room at the end of the passage—and the box-room window was a way of egress well known to juniors bent on breaking bounds.

"The silly ass has gone out!" Raby declared. "He's broken bounds without saying a word to us! Just like him to get nailed by a prefect when he comes in."

"Oh, just!" agreed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver sighed.

"Old Lovell can't help being a silly ass!" he remarked. "Asses are like poet's—born, not made. But really, this is the limit—getting out of bounds on his own, just because he's on his silly dignity! We'd better bump him when he comes in."

"Good egg!"

"Oh, he'll come in with a prefect's paw on his collar!" said Raby. "He's bound to land in trouble, otherwise it wouldn't be Lovell."

"It wouldn't!" agreed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver was worried. Nearly every fellow in the Classical Fourth had been asked whether he had seen Lovell; but nobody had seen him since

Morny. In ten minutes, or less, Bulkeley of the Sixth would me shepherding the Classical Fourth off to their dormitory, and if Lovell was still missing then it would mean serious trouble for the headstrong Arthur Edward. Arthur Edward was rather a complacent fellow, with unbounded confidence in himself. But that confidence his chums were far from sharing.

Their opinion was, that if any trouble happened to be lying around loose Lovell was precisely the fellow to butt right into the middle of it, and stick there.

So they were anxious as well as exasperated. Lovell tried their patience often, and tried it hard. But, after all, he was their chum.

"If the blinking chump has gone out of bounds, he'll have left the box-room window unfastened," said Jimmy at last. "Let's go and see."

And the three juniors went into the box-room, which was near the door of the end study in the Fourth.

It was very dark in the room, only the window showing itself as a glimmering square against the starlight.

Against the starlit window there was a dark shadow, and the juniors started as they saw it.

"Somebody's here!" murmured Raby.

In the darkness a junior was standing by the box-room window, his face pressed against the glass, staring out.

Jimmy Silver & Co. could not see who it was; the figure was simply a black shadow on the glass. But as Raby murmured, it spun round, and they caught a gleam of startled eyes.

"Who—who's there?" came a gasping voice.

"Hallo! Is that Gower?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes!" gasped Gower. "What—what do you want? Has—has Lovell told you? Has he——" Gower broke off.

Jimmy closed the box-room door, and came across to the window. In the

dimness Gower's face showed pale and scared.

"Has Lovell told me what?" asked Jimmy very quietly.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Are you waiting here for Lovell?"

"No! Yes! Oh, yes!" stammered Gower.

"Then he's out of bounds?"

"I—I think so."

Raby gave an angry grunt.

"Is Lovell palling on with Gower?" he asked in disgust. "He never said a word to us about clearing out. Where has he gone, Gower?"

"I—I——" Gower stammered.

"If Gower's waiting here to let him in, we needn't trouble," said Newcome dryly. "If Lovell prefers a smoky, bettin' outsider for a pal, let him have Gower, and welcome. Let's get out of this!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver. "I don't quite catch on. Only to-day Lovell was ragging Gower for slacking in the games practice. That's what our little tiff was about, in fact. I don't see how he's become so pally with Gower all of a sudden. I think——"

Jimmy broke off as a shadow moved outside the window.

The rather burly form of Arthur Edward Lovell loomed up there, standing on the flat leads outside.

"Here he is!"

"Oh, good!" gasped Gower.

Cuthbert Gower hurriedly pushed up the lower sash of the window. There was a startled exclamation from the junior outside on the leads.

"What—Who's that?"

"It's me—Gower!"

"You ass! You made me jump! I thought it was a prefect for a minute!" growled Lovell. "What the dickens are you waiting here for, Gower?"

"I—I was anxious about you."

"What rot!"

Lovell climbed in. In the gloom of the box-room he did not see his three

chums. Gower caught him by the arm as he got in.

"Lovell—quick! Is it all right?"

"No!"

"Oh!" gasped Gower.

"I did my best," said Lovell. "I met Joey Hook where you told me. He was cheeky, and I knocked him down."

"What!" yelled Gower.

"He was cheeky, and I knocked him down," repeated Lovell. "I kicked him, too. I think very likely it's done him good, Gower."

"You fool!"

"What?" exclaimed Lovell.

"You fool—fool—fool!" hissed Gower.

"Is that your way of helping a fellow? I'm done for now!"

"You were done for, anyhow, if I hadn't interfered and helped you!" growled Lovell.

"How have you helped me, you silly idiot?"

"Well, I've knocked that scoundrel down. He will have a prize nose, I think. That's something."

"Oh, you fool!"

Gower was trembling from head to foot with rage and terror. Arthur Edward Lovell glared at him.

"Is that your thanks?" he bawled.

"Fool!"

"Do you want me to serve you the same as I served Joey Hook?"

"Fool!"

"My hat! I—I'll——"

"No, you won't!" interposed Jimmy Silver, catching Arthur Edward Lovell by the arm. "Come away, fathead!"

"That you, Jimmy——"

"Yes, ass!"

"Has Gower told you——"

"No—you have!" chuckled Jimmy. "Come away! Gower doesn't look as if he wants punching."

"I'm done for!" moaned Gower.

"Serve you jolly well right," said Lovell wrathfully. "My hat! I never expected any gratitude, but this is too thick. I've jolly well risked a flogging, going out of bounds to see that

scoundrel for you. Now you call me names."

"Fool!" groaned Gower. "You've done for me! Hook might have let me off, or given me time—now he will be in a frightful rage, and he will take it out of me."

"Well, you've asked for it, haven't you?"

"What on earth's the trouble?" asked Raby, in wonder. "Mean to say you've been out of bounds, Lovell, to see that billiards sharper of the Bird-in-Hand, that rotter Joey Hook?"

"I say, that's the limit," murmured Newcome.

"I'll tell you," exclaimed Lovell angrily. "That blackguard Gower has been betting with Hook, and borrowing money of him to play cards, and owes him seven pounds, and has given him a written promise to pay. He can't pay—and Hook threatens to send his paper to the Head."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gower got me to go and see the man, meeting him in Coombe Lane," pursued Lovell. "I was going to try to get time for the shady ass to pay, and all that. Gower thought it might do good. I was a fool to go——"

"You were!" agreed Raby.

"Well, I went, and the man was cheeky—in fact, insolent—and I knocked him down," said Lovell. "What else could a fellow do, with a blackguardly rotter like that?"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Newcome broke into an involuntary chuckle.

"Did you think that would make him go easier with Gower?" he inquired.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Newcome! I've no doubt it's done him good—he's wanted a lesson for a long time. I've jolly well knocked him down, and I kicked him when he bunched, too—and my opinion is that it will teach him a lesson. And all the thanks I get from Gower is—well, you've heard

him," exclaimed Lovell, in great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell.

"My hat! I shan't select you for an ambassador, Lovell, if ever I get into a scrape like Gower's!" chortled Raby.

"Fathead! I've done my best——"

"I'm ruined!" groaned Gower wretchedly. "He said he would send my paper to the Head by post to-night, unless I paid. He might have relented—now he won't—not now that fool has laid hands on him. I'm done for at Rookwood."

Gower limped out of the box-room trembling. Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort of disgust.

"That's the thanks I get!" he exclaimed.

"And about all you've earned, I think," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, ass—it's dorm now. We shall be missed in another minute. I suppose you don't want to have to explain to a prefect that you've been on an embassy to a loafer in the Bird-in-Hand. Come on."

And Jimmy Silver fastened the box-room window, and the Fistical Four hurried away after Gower—Lovell still fuming with indignation.

CHAPTER 8.
Lovell's Reply!

CLANG!

The rising-bell of Rookwood rang out in the hazy April morning. The Classical Fourth turned out of bed. There was one member of the Form who was so white and worn that it attracted many curious, and in some instances derisive, glances from the other fellows.

Cuthbert Gower had slept little.

He turned out of bed white and wretched, in a state of apprehension that he could not conceal, that he hardly thought of attempting to conceal.

More than once had the sportsman of the Fourth tempted Fate; and now it seemed that the "chopper" was coming down at last, in deadly earnest.

Jimmy Silver gave him a compassionate glance. He was disgusted with Gower's dingy blackguardism, but he could feel for a fellow who was down—and Gower was down and out now. Jimmy would have helped him if he could, but there was, of course, nothing to be done.

Arthur Edward Lovell, however, frowned at him. Lovell's view was that he had gone out of his way and taken trouble and risk, to help a measly outsider, and had been slanged for his pains. Naturally, Arthur Edward was indignant.

So he gave Gower a lofty look of disdain as he left the dormitory, which Gower answered with a glance of haggard reproach.

The Fistical Four walked out into the quad before breakfast to punt a football about. Gower came out soon afterwards and looked round for them, and joined them.

"I want to speak to you, Lovell!" he called out.

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped Lovell. "I'm fed-up with you, Gower!"

"Let him speak, all the same," said Jimmy Silver mildly.

"I—I think it's up to you to help me somehow," muttered Gower. "You've landed me in this, Lovell."

"I have?" bawled Arthur Edward.

"Yes, you! Why couldn't you let the man alone—keep your hands off him? He might have let me off—now he won't! If the letter's posted to the Head I'm done for, but if it isn't, there may be a chance—if I could raise the money!"

"Are you asking me to lend you seven pounds?" asked Lovell sarcastically. "I've got about three-and-six. Not that I'd lend you any money if I had it, to give to a man like that!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome followed the football. Lovell

would have gone after them, but the wretched Gower caught him by the arm.

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Lovell. "Look here, Gower! That brute Hook wanted knocking down. My belief is that it was the best way to deal with him. It was what he's been asking for. I think it's very likely that he'll let you alone now he's had a lesson. See? He won't want to be knocked down again!"

"You dummy!" muttered Gower.

"Well, that's what I think," said Lovell. "I don't believe he's sent on your paper to the Head. I think I've knocked the impudence out of him. That's the stuff to give a rotter like that—hard knocks and plenty of 'em! You should have tried it on."

Gower licked his dry lips.

"Look here, Lovell! If—if I cut down to Coombe on my bike before brekker I—I could see him. If I had the money——"

"No bizney of mine!"

"Lend me the money!" muttered Gower.

"Don't be an ass! I wouldn't if I could—and I haven't it!"

"You've got quite enough—in your desk in the end study——" Gower's voice was a hoarse whisper.

Lovell stared at him, not understanding.

"There's no money in my desk except the football funds," he said.

"I—I mean——"

Gower did not dare to finish, but his meaning dawned on Lovell. The brow of Arthur Edward grew thunderous.

"Are you asking me to embezzle the club funds to give you the money to pay betting debts?" he gasped.

"Only for a time—a short time. I—I—— Oh!" roared Gower as Arthur Edward's fist shot out.

Crash!

Cuthbert Gower sat down in the quad.

"That's my answer to that!" roared

Lovell. "Now get up again, and I'll knock you down again!"

"Ow!"

Gower did not get up.

Lovell, with a glare of contempt, left him sitting there and went after his comrades. Then the wretched fellow picked himself up and moved away limply.

CHAPTER 9.

The Sword of Damocles!

"WHO wouldn't be a jolly sportsman?" murmured Valentine Mornington in the Fourth Form Room that morning, before Mr. Dalton came in.

Some of the Fourth chuckled.

By that time Gower's disaster was very little of a secret in the Form. His wretched face gave away his trouble, and there were a good many fellows who knew his ways who had quite expected it to come to this in the long run.

Precise details were not known, but it was generally known that Gower had come a "mucker" in his sporting pursuits and was expecting to be called up before the "Beak."

His own pals, Peele and Lattrey, may have sympathised; but if so, they did not err on the side of being too demonstrative about it. They seemed to be leaving Gower rather severely alone.

Probably they were rather uneasy about their own little peccadilloes coming to light, and were very anxious not to risk being dragged down in Gower's fall.

Valentine Mornington had little sympathy to waste on Gower. A fellow who asked for trouble and lacked the courage to face it when it came evoked only contempt on Morny's part. The dandy of the Fourth, indeed, seemed to find something entertaining in Gower's long, dismal face.

"Who wouldn't be a merry old sportsman?" he repeated. "No end jolly

and excitin', and all that! Isn't it, Gower?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it, Morny!" murmured Erroll. "The chap's down on his luck, you know!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"He's makin' enough fuss about it!" he said. "Why, if this goes on it will be a standin' joke soon!"

Gower gave him a bitter look.

"It won't go on!" he said. "I'm gettin' the sack to-day—as you ought to have long ago, Morny!"

"Well, if it comes my way you won't hear me whinin'!" said Mornington contemptuously.

Mr Dalton came into the Form-room, and the juniors took their places in silence. Gower gave the Fourth Form-master an almost anguished look. By that time Dr Chisholm must have opened his morning's letters, and Gower fully expected Mr. Dalton to tell him that the Head wanted him.

But the Form-master did not address Gower or take any special notice of him.

Gower felt relieved, and yet he would have been glad to get it over, as it had to come. He wondered whether the Head was leaving the matter till after morning lessons. It was rotten to keep him in suspense like this, he thought. Or was it that Joey Hook had not posted the letter overnight, after all? Was it barely possible that he had been cowed by Lovell's drastic method of dealing with him?

Between fear and hope, Gower was not in a happy mood that morning. He was deeply thankful when classes were over and Mr. Dalton dismissed the Fourth.

Gower slipped quietly out of gates as soon as he was at liberty. He felt that he must know the worst, and the only way was to see Mr. Hook. Gower was prepared to eat "humble pie" to any extent to apologise for Lovell's conduct—to say anything, to

promise anything, to induce the sharper to hold his hand.

He hurried along Coombe Lane towards the village. At a short distance from the school he stopped suddenly. He had caught sight of Mr. Joseph Hook in the lane.

Gower stared at him. Joey Hook's occupation was a peculiar one. He was on his knees in the grass by the roadside, peering and blinking around him, with a red and angry face. Apparently he was looking for something that had been dropped, and his failure to find it was irritating his temper.

He glanced up and saw Gower looking at him, and rose to his feet with a black scowl.

"Oh, you!" he snapped.

"Lost something, Joey?" asked Gower, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Let me help you find it."

"You mind your own business!" said Mr. Hook sourly. "I don't want any 'elp from you, young Gower!"

"What is it, Joey?" asked Gower. "I'll find it for you."

"Never you mind what it is!" answered Mr. Hook. "You coming along to see me? You got the money?"

"No. I——"

"Then get out!" said Mr. Hook rudely. "Your pal last night punched me! P'raps you're going to try on the same game?" And the fat man came towards Gower with a threatening scowl. He did not care to handle a sturdy fellow like Arthur Edward Lovell, but certainly Gower could not have punched Mr. Hook with impunity.

The Rookwood junior backed away.

"No—no! I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I—— Lovell was a fool—a silly fool—I never meant——"

"You was a fool to send him to 'it a man," said Mr. Hook. "You'll be sorry for it, young Gower."

"I never meant——"

"Get out!"

"I—I say, Joey——"

"Don't say anything, unless you've

got the dibs," said Mr. Hook. "I ain't posted that letter yet, but it's coming along to-day if you ain't squared up. Now you get out!"

He made a threatening motion with his stick, and the hapless Gower turned away. There was evidently nothing to be got out of Joseph Hook. It was a relief to know that the tell-tale piece of paper had not yet been posted; but the blow was only averted. Gower tramped dismally back to Rookwood.

Joey Hook watched him out of sight with a scowling face, and then dropped on his fat knees again and resumed his search in the grass.

Hither and thither he went, peering and blinking, growling to himself as he searched. But his search was in vain. Whatever it was that Mr. Hook sought, the object eluded him, and he rose at last and slouched away towards the village muttering to himself

Gower came in at the school in time for dinner. He met Arthur Edward Lovell as he went into the House.

Lovell gave him a sarcastic glance.

"Chopper not come down yet?" he asked.

"Not yet!" muttered Gower.

"I told you so."

"Eh?"

"I've knocked the cheek out of that scoundrel, as I told you," said Lovell. "That's all there is about it."

"Fool!"

"My hat! I'll——"

Gower hurried into the House. Mr. Dalton presided at the Fourth Form table, and Cuthbert Gower eyed him uneasily, and was relieved when he failed to catch the Form-master's eye. Evidently Mr. Richard Dalton knew nothing so far. The Head had not received the letter from Mr. Hook. But—when it came——

Gower almost wished that it had come. The suspense was his hardest punishment. He felt like Damocles of old, with the sword suspended over

his head by a single thread. After dinner the wretched fellow slunk away by himself in almost a state of desperation.

CHAPTER 19.

Morny's Find!

COMIN' out, Gower?"

Valentine Mornington asked that question with a derisive grin. Erroll, who was the dandy of the Fourth, frowned a little. He quite failed to see anything funny in the hapless Gower's predicament, entertaining as it appeared to be to Morny.

Gower stared at them. He was "mooching" dismally under the old beeches, his hands driven deep into his pockets. Classes were over for the day, and it was a pleasant, sunny afternoon; but sun and storm were all the same to Gower that day.

"We're goin' out, old chap," went on Mornington. "Nothin' in your line, of course. There was a time when I looked on the wine when it was red, and the billiards-table when it was green, but Erroll has put a stop to all that—haven't you, Erroll?"

Erroll did not speak.

"Now, I'm like the Johnny on the tub at the street corners," went on Mornington. "I used to be everythin' that was bad, and now I'm everythin' that's good. An hour or two in my improvin' society will do you good, Gower. Come along!"

"Oh, cheese it!" muttered Gower. He was in no mood for Morny's airy badinage.

"After your plungin' and sportin' it will be a nerve rest," said Morny. "We're not goin' to the Bird-in-Hand or to the races. We're goin' to take a quiet and sedate walk, and talk seriously about Shakespeare—ain't we, Erroll?"

"Fathead!" said Erroll.

"We've got sandwiches in our pockets," went on Morny. "Sittin' under a peaceful hedge, we're goin' to

have our tea, and reflect what really nice and well-behaved fellows we are! Come on. It's just the stunt for a repentant sinner. I'm sure you're repentant now you've been found out."

Gower gritted his teeth, and turned his back on Mornington. Erroll caught his chum by the arm and dragged him away.

Morny laughed as he went.

"Did you ever see such a sickenin' funk?" he asked. "By gad! He's makin' himself a figure of fun to the whole school, with that face of his. Dicky Dalton will notice it soon, and ask him what's the matter. Then Gower will begin weepin' and wallin'. Who wouldn't be a jolly sportsman?"

"The poor beggar's got it," said Erroll. "For goodness' sake let him alone."

Morny laughed again.

"He looks as if he's taken the knock," he remarked. "But he hasn't taken it yet. What will he look like when he really gets it?"

"Poor beggar!" said Erroll.

The two juniors walked out of gates. Valentine Mornington was in a mocking mood, as his observations to Gower showed. As a matter of fact, Morny was still a good deal of his old self—the old Morny, who had been the most reckless fellow in the Fourth, and not a little of a blackguard. Erroll's serious influence over him had brought about a change, and the change had gone deep; but Morny was sometimes quite the old Morny. Left to his own devices, he would have preferred to spend his leisure hours that afternoon in some risky escapade—probably of a shady kind. With Erroll that was impossible.

But the idea of going out for a quiet ramble, and sitting under a hedge to eat sandwiches for tea, made Morny grin at himself. He wondered sometimes how he stood it, and why he did not throw Erroll over and chum up again with his former comrades—Peele and Gower and Smythe of the Shell,

and fellows of that kind. But he never did.

"Hallo, there's jolly old Joey!" remarked Mornington as the chums strolled down Coombe Lane.

Joey Hook appeared in a gap in the hedge, close by the spot where Gower had seen him that morning—the spot where Arthur Edward Lovell had met him the previous night. Hook was apparently on his quest again, whatever that quest was; he was rooting about in the hedge, obviously in search of something he failed to find.

Morny gave him a cheery nod. Joey Hook was an old acquaintance of his—an acquaintance he had long dropped, however.

"Lookin' for somethin', old bird?" he asked.

"Yes!" grunted Mr. Hook.

Mornington glanced whimsically at his chum.

"Let's help Mr. Hook," he said. "We're Scouts, you know, and it will be our good turn for the day—what?"

"Oh, come on," said Erroll.

"Don't you want to do a good deed, old chap?" mocked Mornington. "Good deeds are really more in your line than my own. Ain't you keen on playin' the Good Samaritan?"

Erroll dragged him on, and Morny went, laughing. Mr. Hook was left rooting about, his fat face growing blacker and blacker, till at last he gave up the vain search and rolled away towards the Bird-in-Hand for refreshment.

Mornington and Erroll continued their walk. In the pleasant sunshine it was agreeable enough to ramble in the fields and woods, and Erroll was quietly enjoying it. Mornington was bored almost to tears, though he tried hard to conceal the fact. It cost him a good deal sometimes, to play up to his quiet and sedate chum—more perhaps than Kit Erroll ever suspected.

They came back by a field-path towards Coombe Lane, and Erroll

stopped at a spot where a clump of willows shaded a green, sloping bank in the sunset. It was about a hundred yards from the spot where they had seen Mr. Hook, but there was no sign of Mr. Hook on the horizon now.

"Sit down here," said Erroll cheerfully. "I'm jolly hungry, Morny. Aren't you glad now we've brought the sandwiches?"

"No end glad," said Mornington gravely. "Ever so much better than tea in the study—in this fine weather and in the midst of these jolly pastoral surroundings. Listen to the bleating of the sheep and the mooing of the cows. Ever so jolly peaceful and elevatin', isn't it?"

Erroll laughed, and sat down on the grass. Valentine Mornington suppressed a deep yawn and followed his example.

However, he gave his attention to the sandwiches—the ramble had made him hungry.

The sandwiches disposed of, Mornington leaned back in the grass on the sloping green bank and stared at the sky, red in the sunset. A light wind ruffled the grass in the wide meadow, and the lights and shadows danced on it as it ceaselessly stirred. A crumpled fragment of paper was tossed on the wind here and there, and Mornington watched it idly. It dropped in the grass, disappeared, and he forgot it; but a gust of wind caught it again and fluttered it to his feet.

His idle glance became suddenly fixed.

There was writing on the paper. It seemed to be a letter, or something of the kind, lost or thrown away by the owner. Other people's letters had no interest for Mornington; but, as the paper lay crumpled by his feet, he caught sight of a name written on it.

Cuthbert Gower!

"Good gad!" murmured Mornington.

He stirred lazily and picked up the paper and glanced at it. Then he

laughed, and looked at Erroll. Erroll, his eyes fixed on the glorious sunset in the west, had not noted the incident.

"Erroll, old man——"

Erroll looked round at him.

"You remember seein' that man Hook rooting about yonder?"

"Eh? Yes!"

"He was lookin' for somethin'!"

"I dare say he was."

"I fancy I've found what he was lookin' for."

"No bizney of yours, Morny! You can't go and see that man if you've found anything of his," said Erroll. "If it's of any value you'd better hand it in at the police station."

Mornington chuckled.

"I don't know about it's value," he said. "The face value is seven pounds, but I don't feel at all sure that Hookey would ever collect the cash."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Look!"

Mornington held out the paper, to which the name of Cuthbert Gower was signed. Erroll stared at it and started.

"So that's what's the matter with Gower!" he exclaimed.

"That's it!" grinned Mornington.

And he laughed, and slipped the paper into his pocket.

CHAPTER 11.

The Limit!

"O H, my hat!"

"Sorry, old man!"

"Wow!"

Arthur Edward Lovell took a good size in football boots. The impact of a football boot upon a knee was never very pleasant—and when that football boot was one of Lovell's it was more unpleasant than ever.

Jimmy Silver gasped. He stood on one leg and gasped. The other leg felt as if it had been under a lorry.

Football practice was going on, but it had ended rather suddenly for Jimmy Silver.

"You got in the way, old chap," said Lovell "Awfully sorry, and all that, but what did you stick your knee there for?"

Jimmy gave him an expressive glance.

"You shouldn't have, you know," said Lovell, with a shake of the head.

"Fathead!" groaned Jimmy.

"Better get off quick and rub it, old chap," said Raby.

"Much better," agreed Lovell.

"Better still not to shove your knee in the way of a fellow's boot—prevention is better than cure. But, now you've done it, better get some Elluman's."

Jimmy Silver did not answer. Words were wasted when addressed to Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Keep on, you fellows," said the captain of the Fourth. "I'll chuck it for a bit."

"Shall I help you in?" asked Newcome.

"No—that's all right!"

Jimmy Silver limped off the football ground, leaving the pick-up sides still going on. He was glad to get to the changing-room and rub his damaged knee with embrocation. It was soon feeling better; but Jimmy was crooked for that day at least, and he went up to the end study, after changing, to rest.

The Fourth Form passage was deserted. Most, if not all, of the fellows were out of the House.

Jimmy limped along the passage to the end study. The door was closed, and Jimmy Silver threw it open.

The next moment he jumped.

There was a startled cry in the room, and Gower of the Fourth spun round from the desk in the corner. It was Arthur Edward Lovell's desk.

Jimmy Silver stared at Gower.

For a moment or two he did not understand. Then, as he saw that a chisel was clutched in Gower's trembling hand, he comprehended all of a sudden.

His brow grew black.

"You awful rascal!" he gasped. Clang!

The chisel dropped to the floor from Gower's shaking fingers. The wretched junior cowered away to the wall of the study, his dilated eyes fixed on Jimmy.

Quietly the captain of the Fourth crossed over to the desk, in which Lovell, who was treasurer of the junior club, kept the club funds.

There were two or three scratches on the wood, showing that Gower had already been attempting to open the locked desk. Fortunately, Jimmy Silver had arrived in time to prevent him from going farther than that. That clumsy kick of Lovell's on the football ground had had that good result, at least.

"You miserable rotter!" exclaimed Jimmy, turning his accusing eyes on Gower. "What's your game? Are you a thief?"

Gower cowered away and groaned.

"I—I—I——"

"You were trying to open Lovell's desk!"

"I—I asked him to lend me the money!" moaned Gower. "I—I—I'm up against it! I—I—I——"

He sank helplessly into a chair as if his spine had given way, and covered his face with his hands. Tears of terror and utter dismay trickled through his trembling fingers.

Jimmy Silver looked at him in silence.

His indignation was deep, but the utter surrender of the wretched fellow disarmed him.

"I—I don't care!" muttered Gower. "You can take me to the Head, if you like, and tell him! I don't care! May as well be bunked for this as for the other. I've got to go, anyhow!"

He sobbed.

"For goodness' sake pull yourself together!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You were going to rob Lovell's desk. My hat, that's a pretty pass for a Rookwood fellow to come to. You

silly rascal, do you think you wouldn't have been spotted?"

"I'm desperate!" muttered Gower. "I don't care! I'll be glad to go and get it over!"

"You're a precious sort of weak-kneed blighter, to kick over the traces, aren't you?" said Jimmy Silver. "Stop blubbing, for goodness' sake. I suppose it was bound to come to this—stealing is next door to gambling. If you had the sense to keep straight——"

"What's the good of telling me that?" groaned Gower. "I know that better than you do. If I get out of this I'll keep straight enough. But I can't get out of it. I'm done for here!"

"The sooner you go the better, I think!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "I jolly well ought to march you to Mr. Dalton by the scruff of your neck."

"Do!" mumbled Gower. "I don't care!"

He removed his trembling hands from his face, and blinked at the captain of the Fourth with wet eyes.

"Do you think I haven't been through it?" he muttered. "I've been a fool, but I've suffered for it. You wouldn't understand—you've never got into a scrape like this. That brute Hook has got me into his clutches—he's got my paper with my name on it. And the money he lent me he got off me again, at banker."

"Of course he did," snapped Jimmy. "You knew jolly well the sort of man he was. Why couldn't you keep clear of him?"

"I—I wish I had! I will if I get out of this! That fool Lovell knocked out my last chance by butting in. I could pay the man next week, only he doesn't believe me, and won't wait for the money. I—I say, Silver"—Gower eyed the captain of the Fourth timidly and eagerly—"if you'd help me——"

"After I've just caught you stealing?"

"I—I tell you I was desperate. I—I'd pay you back," moaned Gower. "I can manage it next week, I tell you. It's only seven pounds, and I'd get clear, and—and I'd swear never to touch anything of the kind again if——"

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Mornington looked into the end study.

"Gower here by any chance?" he asked. "I've looked in every dashed study along the passage—— Oh, here you are, Gower! You look as if you've been enjoyin' your jolly old sportin' self."

Gower gave the dandy of the Fourth a look of hatred, but did not speak. Jimmy Silver kicked the chisel out of sight under the table.

That last and deepest guilt of the wretched "sportsman" of the Fourth was not to be revealed, at least.

"Who wouldn't be a merry blade and a giddy plunger?" said Morny. "Gower's thrivin' on it. Looks like it, doesn't he, Silver?"

"No need to rub it in, Morny," said Jimmy Silver, rather tartly. "He's got it in the neck, anyhow."

Mornington laughed.

"Never sign your name to a paper, Gower, if you can help it," he said. "It's injudicious when you don't mean to meet the little bill."

Cuthbert Gower stared at him.

"What do you know about it?" he asked. "Has Lovell told you about meetin' the man for me and knocking him down? The fool! The idiot! But for that——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington. "That's Lovell's style. I thought Hookey's nose looked as if he'd run it against somethin' hard."

"You've seen him?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, rather! The dear man was rooting about in the hedges for somethin' he'd lost," grinned Mornington. "He never found it." He fixed his mocking eyes on Gower. "Dear old sport, suppose you got out of this

scrape, would you undertake to become a reformed character, like my noble self, and never be naughty any more?"

Gower's face flushed with eager hope.

"Will you help me, Morny?" he gasped.

"Certainly, old bean!"

"It's only seven pounds!" gasped Gower.

"And I believe I've got nearly seven shillin's," said Mornington with a nod. "I can see myself givin' you seven pounds, Gower, if I had it—I don't think. But I'm goin' to help you. You know it's my special line to play Good Samaritan and help lame dogs over stiles—what? And you're about the lamest dog I ever saw—not to say a lame cur." Morny chuckled. "How would you like me to fix it for you to pay Hookey when you like, and how you like, and on your own terms?"

"You—you can't."

"I can, old bean—an' will. Here you are."

Valentine Mornington drew a crumpled paper from his pocket and tossed it across the study to Gower. Then he turned, with a laugh, and walked away.

Gower, in amazement, caught the fluttering paper. He stared at it blankly.

"Oh," he stuttered. "My—my—my paper! My IOU! Then that was what Hook lost—what he was lookin' for! How the thump did Morny got hold of it? Oh, gad!"

Gower leaped to his feet. The sight of that tell-tale scrap of paper seemed to have given him new life.

"Your IOU!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Gower broke into a laugh. He could laugh now.

"I think I catch on!" he exclaimed. "Hook had this ready, of course, to hand over for the money, and then that fool Lovell pitched into him and Hook ran for it. Of course, he

dropped the paper, and never thought of stopping for it, with that idiot Lovell goin' for him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"That's what he was rootin' about for—that's why he never sent it to the Head!" Gower chuckled. "He jolly well won't send it now."

Gower struck a match and lighted the paper at the corner. He held it over the study fender till it was consumed.

"That's that!" he said. "Hookey won't have much choice about givin' me time to pay now. Of course, I shall pay him. But he'll have to wait till I'm ready to do it."

Jimmy Silver looked at him grimly. "And that's the last of your dealings with Joey Hook!" he said. "No more betting on geegees for you, Gower."

"That's my business," said Gower coolly.

"What?"

"When I want your advice I'll ask you for it."

Jimmy Silver picked up the chisel from under the table.

"Very good!" he assented. "Now come along and see Mr. Dalton. We'll take this chisel with us."

Cuthbert Gower stared at him, and his new-found courage oozed away with startling suddenness.

"I—I—I—I mean, I swear—I promise—" he stuttered.

"Oh, cut it out!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "If this lesson isn't enough to keep you straight, Gower, you're going to have another, and you'll get it from me. Keep that in mind! Now get out before I kick you."

And Gower got out.

CHAPTER 12.

The Last Lesson!

"HALT!"

It was the following Wednesday, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were out of gates for the half-

holiday. Cuthbert Gower of the Fourth left the school and walked away quite jauntily down the lane towards Coombe.

The sportsman of the Fourth was quite a new Gower—he could hardly have been recognised as the same fellow who had excited the derision of the Fourth with his long, dismal face a week ago—the trembling culprit whom Jimmy Silver had barely prevented from becoming a thief. Gower was merry and bright, and he sauntered down the lane towards Coombe with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head, whistling. Gower's trouble was gone, and it seemed to have left little trace behind it.

From the lane he turned into a path which led across a field to a back gate on the garden of the Bird-in-Hand Inn. The sword of Damocles was no longer suspended over Gower's head, and, like a moth, he was fluttering once more about the candle where he had singed his wings. But he had reckoned without "Uncle James" of Rookwood.

He was close on the garden gate, when four fellows strolled out from the trees into his path. And Jimmy Silver rapped out: "Halt!"

Gower halted, with a sneering grin. "Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"Looking for you, old bean," said Jimmy Silver. "You're going it again, what? Looking for more trouble, and another chance of disgracing your school."

"No business of yours," said Gower. "I'm jolly well goin' to do just what I jolly well like, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mister Meddling Jimmy Silver!"

"Beginning again, are you?" hooted Arthur Edward Lovell.

Gower gave the Fistical Four a vaunting look.

"Your bizney, is it?" said Jimmy Silver reflectively. "Ours, too, I think, just a little. Didn't I mention

to you, Gower, that if one lesson wasn't enough for you you'd get another?"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Gower.

"Didn't you promise——"

"Did I?" yawned Gower. "Well, promises are like pie-crusts, you know—made and broken! Now let me pass."

"Collar him!" roared Lovell.

Gower jumped back.

"Look here——" he shouted.

The chums of the Fourth closed round Gower. Four pairs of hands were fastened on him.

"This way!" said Jimmy Silver.

Cuthbert Gower was led away across the field. He resisted desperately. But his resistance did not count for very much.

Each of the Fistical Four secured an arm or a leg belonging to Gower, and walked off with them. The rest of Gower, naturally, accompanied his arms and legs. He was borne away, yelling and kicking, to the end of the field, where there was a deep, muddy, and rather malodorous ditch.

"Leggo!" roared Gower.

"Dear old sportsman," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "When we leggo, you won't be feeling fit for paying sporting calls. You won't feel at all equal to nap or banker. You won't, really."

"You rotter! I—I——"

"In with him!"

Splash!

"Ow! Woocooch! Groooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cuthbert Gower vanished into the ditch. Muddy water and ooze closed right over him. He came up, spluttering, gasping, and gurgling, and stood waist-deep in the ditch. He gogged at the slime in his eyes, and spluttered out mouthfuls of ooze.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "There's a picture for you!"

"Ooooooch! Gug-gug-gug!"

Gower scrambled madly out of the ditch. Certainly he was not in a

state now for calling at the Bird-in-Hand, or anywhere else. From the depths of the ditch he had dug up horrid odours, and the powerful aroma clung round him like a garment as he crawled out.

"Oh, my hat! This is too rich!" exclaimed Raby. "Keep your distance, Gower!"

"Keep to the windward of him!" gasped Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, 'ow! Gug-gug-gug! Ooooh! Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fistical Four, as they retreated from the malodorous sportsman.

"Ow! Groooogh! Ooooooch!"

"Let's get off; for goodness' sake!" gasped Lovell. "Gower is too rich for my taste. Good-bye, old sport!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four walked away rather quickly—the neighbourhood of Cuthbert Gower really was not pleasant. They chuckled as they went; but Gower, as he sat down and scraped at mud and slime, did not feel like chuckling. It was hours later when Gower slunk wearily into school, and he looked quite pale and worn. Jimmy Silver met him with a smiling face as he came in.

"I'm keeping an eye on you this term, old bean," he said. "You're going to have some more of the same whenever you ask for it. You've only got to ask."

And Cuthbert Gower, on reflection, decided that he wouldn't "ask" for any more.

CHAPTER 13.

Carthew's Catch!

"JUST come here, Silver!"

Carthew of the Sixth spoke in unusually polite tones.

Generally, Carthew did not waste

much politeness on juniors, especially on Jimmy Silver of the Fourth Form.

Now he seemed quite amiable, and he even smiled as he called to the captain of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver stopped very unwillingly. He had had many a trouble with the bully of the Sixth, and he did not trust Carthew, especially when he seemed amiable. And Jimmy was on his way to join Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who were waiting for him in the quad. It was a half-holiday, and the Fistical Four had planned quite an extensive bike spin for the afternoon, and they were anxious to get off as quickly as possible after dinner.

Perhaps Carthew of the Sixth was aware of it.

"What is it, Carthew?" asked Jimmy Silver as civilly as he could.

"No football match on this afternoon, I think?" asked Carthew.

"No."

"That's all right, then. I shouldn't like to interrupt a football match, fagging you," said Carthew agreeably. "I want you to take this note down to Coombe, Silver."

"I'm just going out."

"Quite so! Take it to the printer's office. You know, the office of the Coombe Times."

"Look here, Carthew——"

"Ask Mr. Oldface specially to put it in this week's 'Times.' It's an advertisement, you know," said Carthew blandly. "Here's the half-crown to pay for it. And you'll bring back the receipt."

"I say——"

"I'm selling my bike, you know," said Carthew. "I shan't want it any more this year. Mind you make it clear that the advertisement is to go in this week."

Jimmy Silver breathed hard.

How far the fagging rights of the Sixth extended over the Fourth was a question that had never really been settled at Rookwood. It was estab-

ished that games and games practice could not be interrupted by such duties. At other times there was no settled rule, which was quite convenient to a fellow like Carthew, who liked to make his power felt in the Lower School.

Jimmy was perfectly well aware that Carthew knew of the excursion the chums of the Fourth had planned for the afternoon. Likewise there was no reason why Carthew should not have sent his advertisement by post the day before, and there was no reason why he shouldn't walk down to Coombe with it himself. Nevertheless, it was difficult to refuse.

"Well, what are you waiting for, Silver?" asked Carthew cheerily.

"We're going out," said Jimmy. "We want to get as far as Bunbury this afternoon, Carthew. Can't you get another fellow——"

"'Fraid not," said Carthew, still bland and agreeable. "You see, a prefect has to be impartial in these matters. Can't let one fellow off all the time and pile things on other fellows."

"Look here, I can't go!"

"I think you can," smiled Carthew. "You see, otherwise you'll have to bend over and take six, and then you'll still have to go."

Arthur Edward Lovell put in his head at the doorway and bawled:

"Are you ever coming, you slacker? What are you keeping us waiting for?"

Jimmy Silver backed away from Carthew.

"Look here, Carthew," he said. "We'll go round through Coombe and drop your message at the printer's. I'll bring you the receipt when we get back from our ride. Will that do?"

Carthew smiled

That would have "done" quite well if Carthew's object had not been to pay off old scores against the end study. But that precisely was Carthew's object, so obviously Jimmy Silver's suggestion would not "do."

"Not at all," said the Sixth-Former. "Not in the least! You'd probably lose the receipt—a careless fag like you. You must learn to be careful in money matters, Silver. Bring the receipt back directly!"

Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

"Rats!" he retorted.

"What?"

"Do you think I don't know your game, Carthew?" exclaimed Jimmy angrily. "You want to muck up our half-holiday, and you're jolly well not going to. See?"

Carthew had his ashplant under his arm. Doubtless he had been prepared for objections on the part of the captain of the Fourth. He let the ashplant slip down into his hand.

"Bend over!" he said laconically.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Silver!"

"Rats!"

Carthew made a stride at the junior. Jimmy Silver jumped back and made a bolt for the big doorway on the quad.

"Stop!" roared Carthew. "Bulkeley, stop him!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth came in at the door as Jimmy Silver almost reached it.

He glanced at the junior and then at the prefect, and held up his hand.

Jimmy Silver halted in dismay.

Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, was not to be disputed with. As head prefect the matter was within his jurisdiction.

"What's the trouble?" asked Bulkeley quietly.

He gave Carthew rather a suspicious look. He was quite aware of Carthew's bullying proclivities and of the trouble that had long existed between Carthew and the end study.

But Carthew was not looking like a bully now. He was quite genial and good-tempered.

"I've asked Silver to take a message for me to Coombe," he said. "The

young rascal was scudding off instead of taking it."

Bulkeley frowned.

"This won't do, Silver," he said.

"You—you see, Bulkeley——"

"There's no game on?" asked the captain of Rookwood.

"No, but——"

"Then you can take Carthew's message. I'm surprised at you, Silver. You know very well that you're under a Sixth Form prefect's orders."

"Yes, but——"

"That's enough! Take Carthew's message at once, or you'll find yourself in trouble."

With that, and a frown, the captain of the school walked on.

Jimmy Silver suppressed his feelings.

It was useless to attempt to explain to Bulkeley, even if he had felt disposed to do so. Jimmy was quite sure that his old enemy had planned to "muck up" that half-holiday for the juniors he disliked, but he had no proof of any kind, and Bulkeley was not likely to believe a Sixth Form prefect guilty of such meanness without the strongest proof.

"You've heard the oracle, Silver," said Carthew, when Bulkeley was out of hearing. "Are you taking the message or not?"

Jimmy set his teeth.

He did not answer, but he held out his hand for the letter and the half-crown.

Carthew smiled as the junior walked out of the House. For once, at least, he had made Jimmy Silver knuckle under and realise that a prefect of the Sixth was a little too powerful for him. Bullying the end study had never been quite successful. Jimmy Silver & Co. had always been able to keep their end up against that. But petty persecution was more difficult for them to deal with, and Carthew had scored. As for the meanness of such a score, that did not trouble him in the least.

CHAPTER 14.

Petty Obliges!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL gave Jimmy a glare as the captain of the Fourth came out of the House.

"We're waiting!" he said acidly.

It was not uncommon for Arthur Edward to keep his comrades waiting. On such occasions he expected them to wait with patience. But personally he did not like waiting.

"Well, let's get off now you're here, Jimmy," said Raby.

"Can't!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"More waiting?" asked Lovell sarcastically.

"Fathead!"

"Well, why can't we get off, old chap?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy Silver held up the note and the half-crown and explained. There were exclamations of annoyance from the other three.

"Look here, it's too thick!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell hotly. "If we wait while you mooch down to Coombe and back we shan't get out to Bunbury to-day. You're not going?"

"Must!" said Jimmy. "Carthew don't matter, but we can't back up against old Bulkeley."

"Bother Bulkeley!" growled Lovell.

"Well, I've got to go. We'll make it a shorter run afterwards, unless you fellows would like to get off and leave me to it."

"Oh, rot!" said Newcome.

"We'll come down to Coombe with you," said Lovell. "But it's all a catch. Carthew could have sent that off by post, and, anyhow, it doesn't matter about bringing back the receipt for his miserable half-crown. It's just a catch to do us in the eye."

"I know that."

Jimmy Silver took his bicycle, which Raby was holding for him, and the four chums wheeled the machines down to the gates.

They were all in a mood of great exasperation.

The weather was exceptionally good that afternoon, and they had been looking forward to an agreeable excursion of unusual extent. Now that happy prospect was knocked on the head.

But that was not the worst of it. What rankled more deeply was the knowledge that their old enemy of the Sixth had "done them in the eye"—easily, completely, and without any prospect of retaliation.

Even Jimmy Silver, whose face was generally sunny and serene, looked moody and downcast.

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed wrath.

The Fistical Four mounted in the road, and pedalled away towards Coombe. On the stile in Coombe Lane a Fourth-Former of Rookwood was seated, reading the "Holiday Annual." It was Teddy Grace, better known at Rookwood as Putty of the Fourth. As a new boy at Rookwood, Grace had been named Putty because he was "soft." Later the Rookwooders had discovered that Putty was by no means so soft as they had supposed, but the name clung to him.

Putty of the Fourth glanced at the four frowning cyclists with a cheery grin.

"Hallo, old tops! Going to a funeral?" he called out.

Snort from Lovell.

"This isn't the way to Bunbury," added Putty. "Weren't you fellows going bike-pushing to Bunbury this afternoon?"

Jimmy Silver jugged off his machine. Quite a bright idea had flashed into his mind.

"Oh, come on!" growled Lovell.

"Let's get it over."

"Hold on a minute!"

"Oh, rot!"

"You're not doing anything special this afternoon, Putty?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Putty grinned.

"Yes, I am. I'm keeping out of Carthew's way."

"What for?"

"I fell on him coming downstairs just after dinner," explained Putty. "Carthew wouldn't believe that it was an accident."

"Was it?" asked Newcome.

"Hem!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I want to give him time to cool down before I see him again," said Putty. "So I've borrowed Morny's 'Holiday Annual,' and I'm spending a jolly afternoon out of gates. Anything I can do for you?"

Jimmy Silver held up the note and the half-crown. Once more he explained Carthew's device for "mucking up" the afternoon for the chums of the end study.

"You see, even Carthew couldn't find fault with another fellow taking his message, if you cared to take it," he said. "You can read that giddy 'Annual' any old time. Carthew's particular about the receipt being taken back, so if you don't want to see him——"

Putty smiled genially.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I'll buzz down to Coombe for you, and I'll see that Carthew gets his receipt. I'm getting a licking from him, anyhow, and that won't make it any worse."

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver gratefully.

"Not at all, old bean."

The Fistical Four brightened up. That ride to Bunbury was to come off, after all; and even Carthew could scarcely complain, so long as his advertisement appeared in the local paper, and the receipt was taken back to him at once. If he did, Jimmy had only to appeal to the head prefect. Carthew's real object, certainly, would be defeated. But he could not very well explain his real object to George Bulkeley.

"Leave it to me, old beans," said

Putty. And the Fistical Four, quite merry and bright now, left it to Putty and rode away cheerily, to take the first turning that led into the Bunbury road.

Putty of the Fourth sat on the stile, and looked after them with a smiling face.

He was on chummy terms with the Fistical Four, and glad to oblige them. But that had not been his only object in offering to take Jimmy Silver's mission off his hands. Putty's chief characteristic was a propensity for practical jokes, and he thought he could see an opening here with Mark Carthew as the victim. Jimmy Silver, in his keenness to get away on his bike ride, had quite forgotten Putty's peculiar propensities.

"I wonder——" murmured Putty.

He calmly tore open the envelope and looked at the contents. There was a brief message from Carthew to the printer of the local paper.

"Dear Sir,—Please insert the enclosed advertisement in this week's number of the 'Coombe Times.' The bearer will pay 2s. 6d., for which, please, send receipt.

"Yours truly,

"M. CARTHEW."

There was an enclosure as follows:

"FOR SALE—Enfield bicycle, in excellent condition. £5. or nearest offer. Communication, by letter only, to M. Carthew, School House, Rookwood."

Putty of the Fourth pondered over that advertisement, with a pucker of thought in his brow, and a gleam in his blue eyes.

Then he took out a fountain-pen.

For some time Putty of the Fourth was deep in the throes of composition. He was making a couple of trifling alterations in the advertisement.

Then he slipped off the stile and sauntered away down the leafy lane in the direction of Coombe.

He did not go at once to the printer's.

He dropped in at the post-office, which was also a stationer's, and bought an envelope there. In the new envelope he sealed up Carthew's letter and the advertisement.

Then he strolled along to the office of the "Coombe Times."

He found Mr. Oldface there, somewhat grubby and very busy, setting the type of his paper. The "Coombe Times" was not one of the larger undertakings in the newspaper world. Its circulation was limited, and its contents were chiefly advertisements.

The staff consisted of Mr. Oldface himself and one youth of sixteen.

Putty of the Fourth handed in the letter and the half-crown. He duly impressed upon the printer that the advertisement must appear that week without fail, and received an official receipt for the half-crown.

"I'm setting up the Sale column now, sir," said Mr. Oldface. "I'll put it in at once. It will be all right. You can tell Master Carthew so."

"I will," said Putty.

And he sauntered out of the dusky little office, and walked back cheerily to Rookwood.

A little later Carthew of the Sixth hastily put a cigarette out of sight as a knock came at his study door.

"Come in!" he snapped.

It was Townsend of the Classical Fourth who entered. He laid a receipt on Carthew's table.

"I've been asked to bring this to you, Carthew," he said.

"What?"

"All right, isn't it?" asked Townsend.

Carthew glared at the receipt. It was "all right," so far as that went. Still, the bully of the Sixth did not seem satisfied.

"Did Silver ask you to bring this here?" he asked.

"No. Young Grace of the Fourth."

"Oh!"

Townsend left the study, leaving Carthew glaring at the receipt. He jumped up and called after Townsend.

"Townsend, do you know where Silver is?"

"Out of gates, I think. I heard that they were goin' on a jaunt to Bunbury on their bikes," answered Townsend.

Carthew turned back into his study, picked up the receipt, and jammed it savagely into his pocket. He realised that he had not scored over the Fistical Four so successfully as he had supposed. Teddy Grace, apparently, had relieved Jimmy Silver of his task, and the Fistical Four had gone off to Bunbury, after all. Until they came back they were out of reach of reprisals. But Carthew put his ash-pipe under his arm, and walked out to look for Putty of the Fourth.

But he did not find him.

Putty of the Fourth was ensconced in a quiet corner of the Head's garden, with Morney's "Holiday Annual" to keep him company, and Carthew was not likely to see him again till roll-call.

CHAPTER 15.

"Bend Over!"

JIMMY SILVER & Co. wheeled in their machines cheerily just a few minutes before old Mack closed the school gates. The chums of the Fourth were rather tired and rather dusty, but they had enjoyed their spin. They had had an excellent tea at Bunbury, and a merry spin homeward in the autumn sunset. So they were feeling quite pleased with themselves and things generally; and they put up their bikes, and walked cheerily into the House in time for Roll.

Roll was being taken that evening by Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of the school. The last fellow to squeeze into Hall was Putty of the Fourth. He had left it till the latest possible moment from his desire to avoid a meeting with Mark Carthew. Carthew's eye was upon him the moment he entered Hall; but Putty nourished a hope of dodging away after

calling-over, and still keeping the bully of the Sixth at a safe distance. Putty's propensity for practical jokes often introduced an element of excitement into his career at Rookwood, and dodging some offended person was by no means a new experience to him. Falling on Carthew, in coming downstairs, was a little incident that required some time to blow over.

Bulkeley of the Sixth called the names, and when the roll was finished he gave the signal for dismissal. Putty of the Fourth scudded for the door at once; but Carthew was already stand-off of the crowd that poured out of Hall. "You can hold on, Grace," he said, with a sour grin. "You, too, Silver. Stay behind!"

Jimmy Silver and Putty stood out of the crowd that poured out of Hall Jimmy, who did not think that he had anything to fear, waited cheerily; but Putty of the Fourth did not look so cheerful. He realised that he was up against it now.

But Knowles of the Modern Sixth stopped to speak to Carthew, and Putty saw his opportunity. He mingled swiftly with the outgoing crowd and vanished, while Carthew's eye was off him for the moment.

Jimmy Silver waited. He smiled a little as Carthew stared round, and then gave him an inquiring glare.

"Where's young Grace?"

"I think he went out," said Jimmy.

"I told him to stay."

Jimmy Silver made no reply to that. That was no concern of his. The school marched out of Hall, and Bulkeley of the Sixth stopped behind, as he noticed Jimmy remaining with Carthew.

"What's the trouble now?" he asked.

"Silver did not take my message to Coombe, after all, this afternoon," said Carthew. "I'm going to give him six."

Bulkeley frowned at Jimmy.

"This is rather too thick, Silver," he said. "I told you myself to take Carthew's message to the printer. Why didn't you go?"

"Another fellow took it for me, Bulkeley," explained Jimmy. "The receipt was brought back to Carthew. It's all right. I suppose it didn't matter who took it, so long as it was taken."

"I suppose not," assented Bulkeley. "Has anything gone wrong with the message, Carthew?"

"Not that I know of," granted Carthew.

"You've got your receipt all right?"

"Yes."

"Then what's the matter?"

"I told Silver to go, and he didn't go!" snapped Carthew. "I did not authorise him to hand over my note to another fag."

Bulkeley compressed his lips.

"So long as the message was delivered, it didn't matter a hang whether Silver handed it over or not," he said quietly. "There's no sense in picking faults like this, Carthew."

"I gave him an order," said Carthew. "If he doesn't carry out an order, he takes six."

"He carried it out, to all intents and purposes. You've got no fault to find."

"Look here, Bulkeley——"

Bulkeley raised his hand.

"The matter's closed. You can cut off, Silver."

"Thank you, Bulkeley!"

Jimmy Silver walked cheerily out of Hall. Carthew watched him go with an almost livid face.

"Bulkeley," he muttered, "do you think I'm going to stand this? If you keep on interfering between me and the fags, I shall put it before Dr. Chisholm."

"Do so, as soon as you like," answered the captain of Rookwood. "I shall keep on interfering so long as you keep on bullying, that's a certainty. You've got a down on Silver, and that's the beginning and the end of it. Let him alone."

"I warn you——"

"Oh, that's enough!" interrupted Bulkeley, and he walked out of Hall, leaving Mark Carthew alone.

The bully of the Sixth breathed hard

and deep. So far from scoring over Jimmy Silver that afternoon his petty persecution had ended in a snub for himself from the head-prefect. That was not an outcome of the affair that was likely to please Mark Carthew.

There was only one consolation left for him—to look for Putty of the Fourth, and give him his due reward for that fall on the staircase. As it was Putty who had relieved Jimmy Silver of his fag duty, there was some satisfaction in the prospect of giving him six.

So Carthew proceeded to the Classical Fourth quarters, and looked in at Study No. 2. He found Jones minor, Higgs, and Tubby Muffin there, but the fourth member of the study was not to be seen. Carthew scowled in at the three juniors.

"Where's Grace?" he demanded.

"I saw him a few minutes ago, Carthew," answered Jones minor.

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

Carthew glared at the fat Classical. "What's that cackle about?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing!" gasped Tubby.

"Do you know where Grace is?"

"I—I think he's dodging you, Carthew," stammered Tubby. "I—I think he would be waxy if I told you where to look for him."

"Where is he?" roared Carthew.

"I—I don't think I—I ought to mention."

"Shut up!" said Higgs.

"Hold your tongue, Higgs!" snapped Carthew angrily. "Now then, Muffin go on! Where's Grace?"

"I—I think I ought not to mention that—that—that he was going over to Mr. Manders' House——"

"Oh, all right!"

Carthew left the study and the House, to cross over to the Modern side and continue there his search for Putty of the Classical Fourth.

Higgs closed the study door with a grin.

Then there was a movement under

the study table, and Putty of the Fourth emerged into view.

"Dear old Carthew!" he murmured. "How lucky that he never thought of looking under the table!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Tubby Muffin.

"I thought that fat villain was going to sneak for a minute!" growled Higgs. "I nearly punched him!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tubby indignantly. "I think I was jolly diplomatic. I said I thought I ought not to mention that Putty was going over to Manders' House. That was right, as Putty wasn't going there—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now he's gone rooting round the Modern side!" said Tubby, with a fat grin. "That'll keep him busy while you do your prep, Putty."

"Good old fat man!" said Putty, laughing. "Blessed if I ever thought you were so jolly deep!"

Tubby grinned complacently.

"I fancy I'm fairly wide!" he remarked.

"You are!" agreed Putty, with a glance at Tubby's ample circumference.

There was no doubt that Reginald Muffin was very wide; physically, at least.

"Leave it to me to pull the wool over Carthew's eyes!" chuckled Tubby, extremely satisfied with himself and his diplomacy. "Carthew's a silly owl, you know!"

"Is he?" said an unpleasant voice, as the door opened suddenly.

Carthew of the Sixth looked in again.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Putty of the Fourth.

"So you were here all the time!" grinned Carthew. "I thought there might be some trick going on. So I'm a silly owl, am I, Muffin?"

Tubby Muffin blinked at the prefect in utter dismay.

"Oh, no; not at all, Carthew!" he gasped. "I—I wouldn't call you a silly owl for—*for anything!* I—I—I'm too respectfull I—I wouldn't dream of telling a prefect what I thought of him, really!"

"What!" roared Carthew.

"Honest Injun!" gasped Tubby. "Lots of the fellows think you're a silly owl, Carthew, but I keep on telling them that fellows ain't always such fools as they look—*Yaroooh!*"

Whack!

Tubby roared and dodged away from the ashplant.

Carthew fixed glinting eyes on Putty of the Fourth. That too-humorous youth realised that he was "for it" now, and he waited for it.

"You fell on me on the staircase after dinner to-day, Grace," remarked Carthew.

"Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!" murmured Putty.

"You've been dodging me ever since."

"You're not always a nice person to meet, you know, Carthew," said Putty.

"Bend over!"

"You're not going to lick a chap for a little accident like that, Carthew!" urged Putty.

"Do you give me your word that it was an accident?"

"Hem!"

"I thought not! Bend over!"

There was no help for it. Putty of the Fourth bent over a chair, and the ashplant rose and fell.

"Six" was a light or a severe punishment, according to how the strokes were laid on. Where Carthew was concerned it was generally severe. On this occasion the bully of the Sixth put unusual beef into it.

Putty had to "bend over" many a time and oft; a propensity for practical jokes often led to such undesirable results. But he had seldom been through so painful a "six" as this.

His face was quite pale when it was over.

"I hope that will do you good!" remarked Carthew, as the hapless jester of the Fourth stood wriggling.

"I—I hope so!" gasped Putty. "Thanks for your kind wishes, Carthew!"

Carthew smiled grimly.

"You took on Silver's fagging job this

afternoon," he said. "I'd give you another six for that, only—"

"Only I should go straight to Mr. Dalton if you did!" interrupted Putty coolly. "Hand them out, if you like!"

Carthew did not seem to hear that remark.

"You seem to be fond of fagging," he said. "I'll see that you have plenty to keep you busy for some time, without taking on other fags' jobs! That's all."

And Carthew tucked his ashplant under his arm, and left the study.

Putty sat down to prep, but jumped up again rather quickly. That evening Putty of the Fourth did his prep standing.

CHAPTER 18.

No Trade!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL whistled.

"You fellows seen this?" he asked.

It was a few days later.

The Fistical Four of the Fourth were adorning one of the old oaken benches under the beech trees, and Lovell was looking through the latest issue of the "Coombe Times."

Lovell, as secretary and treasurer of the Junior Football Club, kept an eye on the advertisement columns of the local paper, with a view to bargains in the line of sports requisites. That was how he chanced on a rather surprising advertisement.

"What is it?" asked Jimmy Silver lazily.

"Carthew's selling his bike."

"Let him!"

"He's offering it for ten bob," said Lovell.

"Must be an ass!" said Newcome.

"Why, it's a ripping Enfield! I've seen it often enough. It's worth ten pounds!"

"It's a jolly good bike!" said Raby. "Carthew must be frightfully hard up if he's offering to let it go for ten shillings!"

Lovell looked thoughtful.

"Well, there it is!" he said. "Carthew must be an ass! Even if he doesn't want the bike for his own use, it would fetch a great deal more than that if he wants to sell it. Lots of fellows here would give him a fiver for it, at least!"

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Jimmy. "Let's look!"

The juniors read the advertisement. It was plain enough.

"FOR SALE.—Enfield bicycle, in excellent condition. Ten shillings, or nearest offer. Call personally only to M. Carthew, School House, Rookwood."

"That must be the advertisement Carthew wanted me to take down to the printer's the other day," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"That's it!"

"Well, he's an ass. The bike's worth five pounds, I should think, second-hand—anyhow, lots of fellows would give three or four."

"That's so," assented Lovell. "Now I think this is where I come in."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"The jigger's no good to you," he said. "Size's too big!"

"I know that, ass! But I could sell it again," explained Lovell. "If Carthew chooses to sell a first-class jigger like that for ten shillings, it's his own funeral! I could easily sell it again for five pounds or more the same day. don't mean that I'm after a profit personally. But it would raise some funds for our club—see? I'll buy it with the bob from the club money, and the profit will go to swell our funds. We can do with some new goalposts!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked dubious.

Speculating with the club funds was not the business of a club treasurer. Certainly, in this case, the speculation seemed to show a clear profit of so pounds without risk. Nevertheless the principle was bad.

Dubious looks from his comrades were quite enough to make Arthur

ward Lovell determined. Only opposition was needed to confirm him in any opinion.

"That's what I'm going to do!" he announced.

"It won't do," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "But I tell you what—we'll buy the bike with ten bob of our own money, and sell it again, and present the profit to the club."

"Where's the difference?" demanded Lovell.

"Well, there is a difference, old chap, whether you can see it or not. But I can't believe that this is genuine," said Jimmy. "Carthew must have had an accident with his bike, if he's offering to sell it for ten bob! The lamp alone is worth that."

"Let's have a look at it," suggested Raby. "We can see it in the bike shed."

"Good!"

The Fistical Four left the oaken bench and strolled round to the bike shed. There, among innumerable machines, they found Carthew's Enfield on its stand.

Apparently Carthew had not had an accident with it. The machine was, as the advertisement stated, in excellent condition. It was undoubtedly a good bike, and Carthew had taken care of it. It was well worth five pounds of anybody's money second-hand.

"Looks all right!" said Raby.

"My hat! It does!" said Jimmy Silver, greatly puzzled. "Carthew needn't have spent money on advertising if he wanted to sell that jigger for ten bob. Any fellow at Rookwood would have taken it off his hands at that price!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, we happen to have seen the ad.," said Lovell. "I don't suppose there's another copy of the 'Coombe Times' in the school—it's not a paper the fellows would read, except when there's a report of a First Eleven match in it. We're not missing this. I'm going to see Carthew about it at once. If he's fool enough to sell that jigger

for ten bob I'm the chap that's going to bag it!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked out of the bike shed, eager to strike the iron while it was hot and secure that wonderful bargain while it was still going.

Relations were very strained between the Fistical Four and Carthew of the Sixth. Generally, they avoided his study with sedulous care. But this was a matter of business, and Arthur Edward Lovell marched into the Sixth Form passage with cheery confidence, and tapped at Carthew's door.

Carthew was there, and he scowled at Lovell as the junior entered. Knowles of the Modern Sixth was with him, and Lovell did not fail to detect a scent of cigarette smoke in the study—though no cigarettes were visible.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Carthew.

"Your bike," answered Lovell with a grin.

Carthew stared, and then his face relaxed its expression. On a business matter he was prepared to be civil. The Enfield was well worth five pounds, but buying and selling are different matters, and Carthew was well aware that he might have to let the machine go below its value. If this junior was prepared to take it off his hands for five pounds, Carthew was prepared to meet him half-way, and with great civility. As he had not seen the "Coombe Times," Carthew had, of course, no suspicion of the trifling alteration that had been made in his advertisement. Certainly it never occurred to him that Lovell had come there to buy his valuable bike for ten shillings.

"Oh, you've seen my advertisement?" he said quite genially.

"That's it," said Lovell. "I've got the paper in my pocket. You needn't have paid for that advertisement, Carthew—I'd have taken the bike off your hands if you'd told me."

"Well, I couldn't guess that, could I?" said Carthew with a smile. "You've

got a jigger of your own. haven't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What the thump is the use of a Sixth-Former's bike to you, Lovell?" asked Knowles with a stare. "You can't ride it."

Lovell smiled cheerily.

"Never mind whether I can ride it or not," he answered. "I'm going to buy it, and that's near enough."

"Quite," said Carthew. "That is, of course, if you've got the money. I'm not selling things to a fag on tick."

"I'm not asking for tick—spot cash!"

"All serene, then."

Lovell was quite elated. Why Carthew should have advertised that handsome bike for sale for ten shillings was a mystery to him. He could not help entertaining a fear that, at the last moment, Carthew might think better of it, and cry off the offer. He was quite pleased to find Carthew open to do business.

"It's a go, then, Carthew," said Lovell. "You'd better draw up a receipt—that's business-like—and I'll go and take the machine off the stand. Here's ten bob."

Lovell drew a ten-shilling note from his pocket.

Carthew stared at it.

The genial look faded from his face at once.

"You're offering me ten bob?" he said.

"Yes."

"For my Enfield bike?"

"That's it," said Lovell.

Knowles burst into a chuckle. Carthew did not chuckle; he rose to his feet with a scowl on his face.

Neither of the seniors had the slightest doubt that this was a jape—that Lovell had come to the study to pull Carthew's leg over the sale of his bike. The offer of ten shillings, when Carthew knew that he had advertised the bike for sale at five pounds, could scarcely be looked on in any other light.

Carthew of the Sixth was not exactly

the fellow to be jested with like this. He picked up a cane and stepped between Lovell and the door.

"Jolly funny, no doubt," he remarked. Lovell stared at him.

"I don't see anything funny in it," he said. "I'm offering you ten shillings for your bike."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Knowles.

"Blessed if I see anything to chortle at," said the bewildered Lovell. "Here's the ten bob—spot cash! Wha-a-at are you going to do with that cane, Carthew?"

"I'm going to lay it round a cheeky young scoundrel," answered Carthew. And he proceeded to suit the action to the word without delay.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh!" roared Lovell. "Ow! My hat!" He dodged frantically round the study table, Carthew pursuing him with the lashing cane. "You silly ass—ow! You beastly bully—yooop! Don't you want to sell your rotten bike—yarcoooooh!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Oh crikey! Ow! Ow!"

Lovell reached the door and fled into the passage. A last hefty swipe of the cane caught him as he went, and Lovell's yell echoed through the Sixth Form passage from end to end.

Then he vanished.

Whether Carthew's bike went for five pounds or ten shillings it was certain now that Arthur Edward Lovell would not be the purchaser. He was fed-up with business dealings with Carthew of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 17.

Mad as a Hatter!

"WHAT——"

"Which——"

"What the thump——"

"Ow! Ow! Groogh! Moch! Ooooo gurgled Lovell. "He's mad—mad as a hatter! Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and N come simply blinked at Lovell. T

had waited in the changing-room for him to return from his visit to Carthew's study. Whether he would return the happy possessor of an Enfield bike, secured at a great bargain, they felt rather doubtful. But certainly they had not expected him to return like this.

Lovell came into the room wriggling and writhing and mumbling, breathless with anguish and fury.

"What on earth's happened?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver in amazement.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Had a row with Carthew?" asked Newcome.

"Moooooooh!"

"Blessed if I see what there was to row about!" exclaimed Raby. "I suppose even that bully could be civil when he's selling a bike."

"Ow, ow! My hat! I'll make him sit up for it!" gasped Lovell. "The beastly bully, pitching into a chap for nothing!"

"What's happened?" yelled Jimmy Silver impatiently.

Lovell spluttered.

"He wouldn't take my ten bob. He was civil enough at first—leading me on, I suppose, while he got between me and the door. Then all of a sudden he began swiping with his cane."

"Did you cheek him?" asked Raby.

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Then what does he mean by it?"

"I don't know—unless he's mad! I suppose he's potty!" howled Lovell. "I know I jolly well shan't buy his bike now!"

Jimmy Silver whistled. He was quite surprised by the occurrence. Unless Carthew was out of his senses, there really seemed no accounting for it. He had offered the bike for sale, and there was no reason why Arthur Edward Lovell should not turn up as a purchaser.

"Well, it's jolly queer!" said the captain of the Fourth. "I suppose Carthew wants to sell the bike, as he's advertising it for sale. Of course, he's doing it personally, but I don't see—"

"That's got nothing to do with a business matter," said Newcome.

"Nothing at all," agreed Jimmy. "I suppose the brute can't keep his beastly temper!"

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned Lovell. "I've a jolly good mind to go to Mr. Dalton about this! Ow, ow, ow!"

Jimmy wrinkled his brows. It was true that Carthew was a bully, and that he had a special dislike for the Fistical Four. But it was really very odd that even Carthew should have broken out like this. Apparently from sheer ill-temper he had driven away a purchaser of the bike he had offered for sale.

"It beats me," said Jimmy. "Anyhow, we're done with the thing. Carthew can keep his silly old bike!"

There was a tap at the half-open door of the end study, and a cheery junior came in. It was Teddy Grace, otherwise known as Putty of the Fourth. Putty's cheery face wore a bright smile.

"You fellows seen the local paper?" he asked.

"Yes—we've got it here," said Jimmy.

"Good! I want to look at it," said Putty. "I've been over to Rookham, and got back only just in time for lock-up—too late to get the paper, and I want to see it particularly."

He glanced down the advertisement columns, and chuckled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that Carthew's advertisement you're looking at?" asked Raby.

"Ha, ha! Yes." Putty of the Fourth carefully closed the door of the end study. "I can tell you fellows—you'll keep it dark. Of course, it will have to be kept dark—it's rather risky pulling a prefect's leg—especially Carthew's."

"What the thump—"

"I'll tell you. You remember Carthew sent you to the printer's with an advertisement about selling his bike, last Wednesday, Jimmy. I took it off your hands, as you were going to Bunbury."

"I remember," said Jimmy Silver.

"I'd been having some trouble with Carthew, and I got a bright idea for making him sit up," continued Putty brightly. "I altered the advertisement before I took it in."

"What?"

"You see, Carthew was offering his bike for five pounds——"

"Five pounds!" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes, and put in communications by letter only.' Of course, he didn't want people calling here about his old bike, perhaps during classes, too. His idea was to fix up appointments to show it to a buyer."

The Fistical Four stared at Putty.

The expression on Arthur Edward Lovell's face was really startling. He was beginning to understand.

"Catch on?" continued Putty, still merry and bright, and quite failing to note Lovell's expression. "I altered the five pounds to ten shillings, and put in 'call personally only.' Here it is, in the paper."

"You—you——" gasped Lovell.

"Bright idea, wasn't it?" grinned Putty. "You see, lots of readers of that paper will see the advertisement, and their will be a regular mob after an Enfield bike for ten bob. And they're told to call personally. They'll come all right. While Carthew is in class with the Sixth to-morrow, very likely. Catch on? Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared open-mouthed at the practical joker of Rookwood.

They comprehended now.

That surprising advertisement was quite explained—and so was Carthew's amazing conduct. Having—as he supposed—advertised his bike for sale at five pounds no wonder he was enraged when a junior dropped in to offer him ten shillings for it. No wonder Carthew had supposed that it was a "rag" on the part of the juniors, and had rewarded Lovell with the asplant.

"So—so—so that's it!" stuttered Raby.

"That's it!" grinned Putty of the

Fourth, beaming with glee. "No end of a catch on Carthew—what?"

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"Eh?"

"You howling dummy——"

"Hallo! What's biting you, Lovell?" asked Putty, in astonishment. "Don't you think it's no end of a jest on Carthew? Think of people coming here to see him in class—and Carthew not being able to make head or tail of it when they offer him ten bob——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Raby. "You silly ass, I suppose it never occurred to you that some Rookwood chaps would see that advertisement, and would take it as genuine."

Putty started.

"You don't mean——"

"You silly ass!" howled Lovell, jumping up. "You funny chump! I've been to Carthew, through that fat-headed jape of yours, and offered him ten bob for his bicycle."

"You have!" yelled Putty.

"Yes, I have, you blithering funny bandersnatch!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Putty. "What did Carthew do?"

"He thought it was a rag—I can see now why he thought so. He pitched into me——"

"Pitched into you?"

"Yes—whacked me right and left and——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And booted me out of his study" roared Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Putty.

"You think it's a laughing matter" bawled Lovell.

Apparently Putty did. He simply yelled with merriment.

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "I never thought any Rookwood chap would caught—never thought about that all. Fancy you, Lovell! Ha, ha!"

Perhaps it was funny. Putty evidently thought it was funny; Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome beginning to see the funny side of it. Not so Arthur Edward Lovell! He still aching and paining from his

and whirling experiences with Carthew. The humour of the situation was utterly lost on Lovell; and Putty's yell of laughter was the last straw.

Arthur Edward Lovell made a jump for Putty of the Fourth, catching up a bulky cushion as he jumped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Putty. "You must have been surprised! Ha, ha—Yah—oh! Yoooop! Wharrer you at? Oh, my hat!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Putty's merriment came to a sudden end as Arthur Edward Lovell swiped him right and left with the cushion.

Putty spun doorwards—still yelling, but not with laughter. His yells now were yells of anguish.

"You silly ass! Yoop! Keep off! Gerrooogh! Oh my hat! Why, I'll punch you— Yarooooooh—"

Crash!

A hefty swipe with the cushion sent Putty of the Fourth spinning into the passage. He collapsed there in a breathless heap, still yelling—and still not with merriment.

"Hold on, Lovell!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

But Lovell did not hold on. He was full of aches and pains that he owed to Putty's misdirected sense of humour. He was quite keen to give Putty his share of pains and aches, and he did—with energy.

He rushed after the sprawling Putty, still smiting with the cushion. The thwacks of the cushion and the yells of the hapless Putty rang through the Fourth Form passage.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Bump!

"Oh! Ow! Yaroooh! Gerroff! Keep him off! Oh crumbs!"

Putty of the Fourth scrambled up somehow and fled. Lovell, unappeased, pursued him along the passage, smiting frantically with the cushion. He did not stop till Putty bolted into Study No. 2 like a rabbit into a burrow, and slammed and locked the door.

Then Lovell returned breathlessly to the end study. He was breathless, but he was feeling better.

CHAPTER 18.

The Third Form Syndicate!

ALGY SILVER of the Third Form at Rookwood came into the Form room with a crumpled paper under his arm, and a cheery grin on his face. Prep in the Third Form room was over; Mr. Bohun, the master of the Third, had finished with his Form for that evening. After prep the fags had the room to themselves until nine o'clock; they preferred it to the junior Common-room, where they were in awe of the Fourth and the Shell. Generally, after prep, there was plenty of noise going on in the fags' quarters—the Rookwood Third had no idea at all of the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. The present evening was not an exception—there was plenty of noise going on, when Jimmy Silver's fag cousin strolled in.

Stacey and Wegg and Hawes were "buzzing" inkballs at one another. Lovell minor was arguing with Grant at the top of his voice, and Grant was arguing with Lovell minor with all the power of his lungs. Pipkin and Lucas and Wylie were gathered round the fire, cooking herrings for a fag supper—or perhaps scorching them would be more correct. There was a scent of herrings, and a smell of burning, and an aroma from Pipkin's boots, which had been too near the fire.

Algy Silver locked round the noisy Form-room, and signed to Lovell minor and Grant. His look and gesture indicated that something was "on," and the two fags ceased their argument, and joined him in a corner.

"What's up?" asked Lovell minor.

"A chance for us!" said Algy impressively. "Either of you fellows got ten shillings?"

"I've got sixpence," said Lovell minor.

"I've got half-a-crown," said Grant. "And I'm keeping it," he added, as an afterthought.

Algy frowned.

"I tell you this is a chance for us

young Grant," he said. "If you want to keep out of it, keep out, and be blowed to you! If you want a chance of turning your half-crown into a quid, say the word."

"A quid!" gasped Grant.

"Or perhaps thirty bob," said Algy.

"Gammon!"

"Look here young Grant——"

"What's the game?" asked Teddy Lovell. "Give it a name, Algy! If it's a sweep, you can leave me out."

"And me!" said Grant.

"It's not a sweep. Look here!" Algy held up the crumpled paper. "You know I went to see my cousin Jimmy in the Fourth, to see whether I could raise a few bobs from him. Well, Jimmy's gone over to Manders' House, to jaw about the football with Tommy Dodd—so Rawson told me. His pals have gone with him, and there was nobody in the end study."

"What about it?"

"I'm coming to that. It was no good waiting for Jimmy—you know what he is when he gets going on football-jaw. He won't be back till dorm most likely. But this paper was lying on the study table, and I had a look at it while I was waiting, before I asked Rawson where the silly chumps were."

"The 'Coombe Times,'" said Lovell minor. "I believe that's my major's paper—I saw him with it"

"Very likely—I've only borrowed it to show you chaps," said Algy Silver. "I suppose a fellow can look at the advertisements in your major's paper, can't he, young Lovell?"

"What the thump do you want to look at the advertisements for?" demanded Lovell minor. "Lots of bosh!"

"There's an advertisement here from Rookwood," said Algy: "Carthew of the Sixth is advertising his bike for sale, for ten shillings."

"Phew! Must be an ass! It's worth pounds."

"I dare say he's hard up!" grinned Algy. "You know Carthew—banker and nap in the study, and always two

or three IOU's knocking about among the Sixth and Fifth. I dare say he's in a hole for money."

The fags chuckled.

Apparently the young rascals of the Third knew more about Mark Carthew's manners and customs, than the prefect dreamed of suspecting.

"Anyhow, there it is," went on Silver II. "Now, you've seen that bike—a ripping Enfield, with three-speed gear, and in jolly good condition, just as Carthew says in the advert. He's a howling ass to sell it for ten bob; but that's his own business. Of course, we couldn't ride Carthew's size in bikes—but if we wheeled it over to Rookham, a dealer would easily give four or five pounds for it."

"Why doesn't Carthew, then?" asked Grant.

"Blessed if I know—silly ass, I suppose. Anyhow, look at the advert, and you'll see it's offered for ten bob."

Grant and Lovell minor looked, and were convinced. There was no doubting plain print.

"I've told you," resumed Algy Silver, "that this is a chance for us. I'm letting you fellows into it because you're pals of mine. And—and I haven't ten bob just now, as it happens. Of course, Carthew will expect cash."

The three fags looked at one another. Their faces were growing eager. A chance of bagging a handsome bicycle for ten shillings, to be sold the next half-holiday for four or five pounds, was the chance of a lifetime. It appealed to the business instincts of the comrades of the Third. It was a more extensive and more profitable operation than "swopping" postage-stamps and white rabbits.

"I say, that looks all right," said Grant. "If we can make up ten bob among us——"

"You've got half-a-crown," said Algy. "I've got two shillings."

"I've got sixpence," said Lovell minor. "That makes up to five bob."

"Five bob isn't enough."

Grant looked thoughtful.

"It says ten shillings, or nearest offer," he remarked. "If we're first in the field, and offer five shillings cash—"

Algy Silver shook his head.

"The bike's worth pounds," he said. "Carthew's a fool to let it go for ten bob. We don't want to risk losing it by offering too little. We shall have to take some other fellows into it."

"That means whacking out the profit," said Grant reluctantly.

"But we've got to get hold of the bike—that's the first thing. We can't raise the money by ourselves. We shall have to fix up a syndicate."

"A—a—a what?"

Lovell minor and Grant looked at Algy Silver with something like awe. The word syndicate was impressive—the more because the fags did not quite know what it meant.

Algy smiled the smile of superior knowledge. He knew all about financial syndicates. He had once read a novel in which a financial syndicate figured, and he fancied that there was not much left for him to learn on that subject.

"A syndicate!" he said. "They have them in the City, you know—lot of fellows get together, and pool their spondulics, and they whack out the profits according to the amount of rhino they put up. See?"

"I see. Then we're a syndicate," said Lovell minor.

"We are!" assented Silver II. "But we've got to let some more into it. We've got to raise capital."

Algy Silver glanced over the fags in the Form-room, debating in his mind which should be the lucky fellows to be admitted into the syndicate. By this time the confabulations in the corner had drawn a good many curious glances towards the three. The rest of the Third realised that something was on.

"Pipkin!" called out Algy. "You too, Wylie."

The two fags named came over to the corner.

"What's the game?" asked Pipkin.

"Have you got any money?"

"Not to lend," said Pipkin promptly.

"Don't be a young ass, Pippy! Have you got any money, or haven't you got any money?" asked Silver II severely. "If you haven't, you can clear. You can't come into this syndicate without any money to put up."

"That what?" ejaculated Pipkin.

"Syndicate," said Algy Silver, with studied carelessness. Pipkin and Wylie were duly impressed.

"I've got a shilling," said Pipkin.

"So have I," said Wylie. "But what—"

"That would make seven!" said Algy Silver thoughtfully. "We'll let these two chaps into the syndicate."

"Good," said Lovell Minor. "But how—"

"I say, Wegg," called out Algy Silver. "Come over here a minute, old chap!"

Wegg of the Third came over. Wegg was rather a big fellow, and he called himself captain of the Third.

By this time there was keen curiosity in the Third. Several fags drifted over towards the corner, anxious to know what the mysterious confabulation was about. But Algy Silver had no intention of letting out the valuable secret. This chance of a lifetime was to be reserved for the members of the syndicate—other fellows were not to be given a chance of butting in.

"You kids clear off," called out Algy. "This is private—strictly private."

"Rot!" said Smithson.

"Wegg, old man, kick Smithson, will you? We want you in this, but Smithson's out of it."

Wegg cheerfully kicked Smithson, and that youth retreated with a howl. The other curious observers backed off.

Privacy having been restored, Silver II proceeded to explain the matter to Wegg

Wegg listened, and looked at the advertisement, and nodded.

"Looks a good thing!" he commented. "Carthew must be off his dot to sell that bike for ten shillings. I cleaned it for him the other day—it's a ripping bike."

"That's where we come in," said Algy. "If Carthew's off his dot that's his own bizney. We shall make pounds on this"

"Have you got three shillings, Wegg?" asked Teddy Lovell.

Wegg of the Third went through his pockets. He produced two shillings, a sixpence, a threepenny piece, and three pennies.

"That does it!" said Algy, with great satisfaction.

"Good egg!"

"Shove the money on this desk, and let's count it, and I'll make up a list of shareholders," said Algy.

The word shareholders was impressive—almost as impressive as syndicate. With serious faces the six fags pooled their financial resources on the desk—quite a remarkable variety of coins. Lovell minor was the smallest shareholder—his contribution was sixpence, in pennies, and on examination it turned out that one of the pennies was a French penny. But after some discussion it was agreed that Carthew of the Sixth would not be likely to notice that French penny, among such a heap of small currency.

"We've got the money now," said Algy Silver, when he had made up the list of shareholders in the syndicate, with the subscribed amounts ticked off against each name. "Now about dividing the profits."

"Equal whacks all round, when we sell the bike," said Lovell minor.

Five separate and distinct glares were turned on Lovell minor.

"Cheek!"

"Look here——"

"Do you think you're going to bag as much for your measly tanner as I get on three bob?"

"Chuck it!"

"Equal whacks is the rule in a syndicate," insisted Lovell minor.

"Bosh!"

"Cut it out!"

"You're in a minority, Lovell minor," said Algy. "Shareholders whack out profits according to the amounts of their subscriptions."

"That's all very well," said Lovell minor warmly. "But——"

"There ought to be something extra for the biggest shareholder," suggested Wegg thoughtfully. "My idea is that I should take half the profits, and you fellows whack out the other half."

"Cheese it!"

"That won't do," said Algy Silver decidedly. "We calculate according to sixpenny shares. Lovell minor takes one share. Pipkin and Wylie take two each, for their bobs. And so on."

"That's fair!" said Pipkin.

"Only the chairman of the syndicate takes a double share," added Algy Silver hastily. "As the originator of the idea, I'm chairman of the syndicate——"

"Rot!"

"Think again!"

"Can it!"

"Now, look here!" said Algy hotly. "I've put you fellows up to this. I've had all the trouble of forming a financial syndicate."

"Bow-wow!"

"Rats!"

There was a hot argument among the members of the Third Form syndicate. Matters looked rather serious. Wegg introduced a knobby set of knuckles into the discussion, and Algy Silver picked up a ruler. But Grant poured oil on the troubled waters, by pointing out that if they talked much longer it would be bed-time and too late for the financial operation to be carried out that evening at all.

"And to-morrow Carthew may get a lot of offers for that bike," added the cautious Scottish fag. "Bound at that price!"

"That's so," said Algy. "Just like you fellows to waste time jawing and haggling about money and lose the chance of a lifetime! Look here! We'll decide about dividing the profits afterwards. We haven't got the bike yet."

There was general assent to that. The members of the Third Form syndicate realised that they were rather following the example of the hunters who divided the lion's skin before the lion was caught. The first and most important step evidently was to become the legal possessors of Mark Carthew's bike.

Algy jumped up.

"Come on!" he said. "We'll see Carthew at once before anybody else can butt in."

"Good!"

And the members of the syndicate hurried out of the Form-room in search of Carthew of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 19.

Declined Without Thanks!

MARK CARTHEW of the Sixth Form was in the prefects' room

He was chatting with Frampton of the Sixth, a Modern senior. Frampton had come over to see Carthew on a matter very important to the two of them. Most of the Classical prefects were in the room, including Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood—for which reason Carthew and Frampton were talking in low tones in a quiet alcove. Their subject of discussion was not one that they could let Bulkeley hear about.

"Monday will be in time!" Frampton was saying. "I've seen old Hook, and he will put the money on for us on Monday. It looks like a good thing, Carthew."

"The very best," agreed Carthew. "From what I've been able to get hold of, Sweet Lavender is bound to win!"

"We can get three to one against now," said Frampton. "Hook thinks we shall get the same odds on Monday. I'm goin' in to the tune of three pounds."

Carthew smiled.

"I'm hopin' to put up a fiver," he said.

"Phew! I wish I had fivers to throw about!" said the sportsman of the Modern Sixth.

"I'm sellin' my bike," explained Carthew. "I shan't want it any more this year, anyhow. I expect to get five quids on it. Anyhow, I shan't let it go under four-ten. And every quid I get on it is going on Sweet Lavender for the two o'clock on Wednesday at Rookham."

"Well, you're a plunger, old man," said Frampton admiringly.

Carthew looked complacent. The black sheep of the Classical Sixth liked to fancy himself as a plunger.

Bulkeley's voice was heard just then.

"Hallo! What do you fags want here?"

Carthew and Frampton glanced round. Six fags of the Third Form were looking in at the door of the prefects' room rather nervously. Fags were not supposed to enter that important apartment unless on messages for prefects or masters.

"We—we hear that Carthew's here," said Algy Silver. "We want to speak to Carthew, Bulkeley, if you don't mind."

"Speak to him, then," said Bulkeley, with a smile. "There he is, over in the corner."

Thus encouraged, Algy Silver & Co. entered the prefects' room.

Carthew stared at them.

He wondered what the fags wanted. Certainly he had no suspicion that this was a financial syndicate.

Frampton rose from his chair with a grin.

"Well, I've got to get back to my House," he said. "I'll leave you with your friends, Carthew."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Carthew. Frampton walked out of the prefects' room, and Carthew sat and eyed the half-dozen fags as they came across to him. His look was not pleasant. He was still feeling the annoyance of the supposed "rag" on the subject of his bicycle.

Carthew had not taken the trouble to get a copy of the local paper to look at his advertisement in it. He knew that the advertisement would be there. Naturally, it never occurred to him that the advertisement had been altered in transit to the newspaper-office by the misdirected humour of Putty of the Fourth. He supposed that his bike was advertised for sale at five pounds. That it actually was advertised for sale at ten shillings was not likely to occur to his mind.

Lovell's offer of ten shillings he had taken as a "rag" concerted among the juniors to worry him. He hardly thought that fags of the Third would venture into joining in such a rag on a prefect. Still, he would not have been surprised if it proved to be so when he recognised Jimmy Silver's cousin, and Arthur Edward Lovell's young brother in the party.

So Mark Carthew was quite prepared for drastic measures if these fags proved to be ragging.

Algy Silver and his comrades came over to where Carthew was sitting in the alcove. They noticed that he was scowling; but there was nothing unusual in that. The bully of the Sixth scowled much oftener than he smiled.

"Well," snapped Carthew, "what do you want?"

"It's all right, Carthew," Algy Silver hastened to assure him. "We have heard that you're selling your bike."

Carthew's teeth came hard together. "We've seen the advertisement in the 'Coombe Times,' you know," said Lovell minor.

"So you're in it, are you?" said Carthew unpleasantly. "I suppose

your major put you up to this, young Lovell?"

"Oh, no," said Lovell minor. "It was Algy's idea."

"Your idea, what?" said Carthew, fixing his eyes upon Silver II.

"Yes," said Algy Silver brightly. "We want the bike, Carthew. I couldn't raise the money personally, so we've formed a syndicate."

"A what?" ejaculated Carthew. "A syndicate. We're going Co. to buy your bike, if you'll sell it to us," explained Algy.

Carthew had half-risen to put into force the drastic measures he had ready. But he sat down again now. If six fags had combined their resources to purchase the bike, it was possible that this was not, after all, a rag—possible that they were going to offer him the advertised price. He decided to give them a chance, at least.

"Oh, you're a syndicate, are you?" he said, with a grin. "Well, you can have the bike if you can pay for it. I don't care who buys it!"

"What's the good of a Sixth-Former's bike to you little asses?" asked Neville of the Sixth, who was looking on.

"Well, we want it," said Algy Silver. "We're ready to pay for it, Carthew, and we've got the money here."

"Shell out, then!" said Carthew laconically.

Algy Silver proceeded to shell out. "Here you are!"

Carthew was quite good-humoured now. There was a rattle and a clink of coins as Algy sorted the funds of the syndicate out of his trousers-pocket.

"We shall want a receipt, you know," said Grant cautiously.

"That's all right. Carthew will give us a receipt, of course," said Algy Silver. "Here you are, Carthew!"

A grubby fist, crammed with coins—most of small denominations—was held out. Carthew received the money in his palm.

He stared at it.

The brief good-humour faded from his face. It was a "rag," after all—so it seemed to Carthew, at least.

"What's this?" he asked, in a grinding voice.

"Ten shillings!" said Algy Silver innocently.

"Ten shillings!"

"Yes."

"Now the bike's ours!" said Lovell minor.

Carthew looked at the fags for one expressive moment. Then he quite surprised them. He lifted his hand and hurled the handful of small silver and coppers at the syndicate.

"You young sweeps——" he roared.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow!"

"What——"

Carthew jumped up. Algy Silver and Lovell minor were nearest to him, and he seized those two hapless youths by the collars.

Crack!

Two fiendish yells rang through the prefects' room, as Algy's and Lovell minor's heads came together with a resounding concussion.

"Oh! Ow!"

"Yaroooh!"

"What——" gasped Pipkin.

"Look here——"

"Pick up the money!" gasped Grant.

But there was no time to pick up the scattered money. Carthew was on the Third Form syndicate like a whirlwind.

Yells and howls arose as he boxed their ears right and left.

Whack! Crack! Smack! Thump!

"Oh, crumbs——"

"Oh, corks——"

"Whooooop!"

The Third Form syndicate scattered, and scampered for the door. Even Grant did not think of lingering to pick up the money.

In amazement and terror, Algy Silver & Co. bolted through the doorway into the passage.

Algy was last to go; and as he went he received Carthew's boot, planted behind him with terrific energy. Algy Silver fairly flew into the passage, and sprawled over the rest of the syndicate.

"Carthew!" called out Bulkeley. "What—look here, chuck it——"

"Do you think I'm going to be cheeked by the Third?" bawled Carthew. "This is a rag—they're all in it—Third and Fourth and Shell! I'll jolly well show them they can't rag me!"

"Yaroooh! Oh, my hat! Run for it!"

"Hook it!"

Carthew rushed into the passage after the Third Form syndicate. They bolted in terror.

Scattered and breathless, the hapless syndicate found refuge at last in obscure corners, and Carthew tramped back, scowling, to the prefects' room. And later on, when the unfortunate syndicate foregathered again in the Third Form-room, there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

It was not till the next morning, when Lovell minor told his tale of woe to his elder brother, Arthur Edward, that the Third Form syndicate understood the cause of Carthew's amazing conduct. Then they looked for Putty of the Fourth.

It was no use looking for Carthew—they could not handle a Sixth Form prefect. But they could handle a Fourth Form practical joker.

And they did.

They ran the humorous Putty to earth in Little Quad, in a nice quiet spot; and after telling him what they thought of him, they proceeded from words to deeds. After they had finished with him Putty of the Fourth was left in a state of wreckage—and he dimly wondered whether it paid, after all, to be the brightest humorist

at Rookwood, and to think out these bright ideas. Certainly, judging by Putty's looks, the Third Form syndicate had had their ten shillings' worth.

CHAPTER 20.

Callers for Carthew!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. observed Carthew on his way to the Sixth Form room in the morning, and smiled.

Carthew noticed them, and noticed their smiling faces, and scowled. He had no doubt that they were smiling over the "rag."

Carthew, however, felt assured that he had knocked that "rag" on the head. The fate of the Third Form syndicate had been a warning to ragers, in Carthew's opinion.

Certainly, no other Rookwood junior had ventured near Carthew to make him a ridiculous offer for his bike.

Jimmy Silver & Co., as a matter of fact, were smiling, not over the past, but over the future. They were wondering whether Carthew would have any callers that day, on account of the bike advertisement. It seemed very probable. The way it had "caught on" at Rookwood indicated that it would "catch on" elsewhere—there must be plenty of people round about Coombe and Latcham who would be keen to bag the Enfield bike in excellent condition for the absurd sum of ten shillings. So the Fistical Four expected something to happen that morning, and they only regretted that they would be in their own Form-room at the time.

Putty of the Fourth was anticipative, too, though he was not smiling. The handling he had received from Algy Silver & Co. had deprived him of any desire to smile, for the present.

Most of the juniors by this time knew of Putty's trick with the advertisement; but no one dropped a hint to Carthew. Arthur Edward

Lovell, having recovered from his licking by this time, began to consider it quite a good joke on the bully of the Sixth, and he was prepared to punch any fellow who should enlighten Carthew. But no one wanted to enlighten him—Carthew was not popular.

Dr. Chisholm was taking the Sixth that morning in Greek. The Head was fairly launched when there was a tap at the door of the Sixth Form room, and Tupper, the page, looked in. The Head frowned at him. He detested any interruption in class.

"What is it, Tupper?" he snapped.

"Gentleman called to see Master Carthew, sir," said Tupper.

The Head stared, as well he might.

"A gentleman has called to see Master Carthew during class?" he exclaimed. "Nonsense!"

"Leastways, a man, sir," amended Tupper. "I don't know as he is a gentleman Rough-looking cove, sir."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Rough-looking cove, sir," said Tupper.

Some of the Sixth grinned. They wondered whether the Head knew what a "cove" might possibly be.

Dr. Chisholm looked at Carthew.

"Carthew! What do you mean by having callers during class?" he demanded. "What does this mean?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the surprised prefect. "I wasn't expecting any caller, sir."

"I should hope not," said the Head.

"Kindly tell this gentleman, Tupper, that he cannot see Master Carthew."

"Very good, sir."

Tupper retired, and the Sixth resumed the entrancing study of Sophocles. But Tupper came back in a few minutes.

"Please, sir——"

"You must not come here, Tupper, interrupting me."

"A gentleman says he wants to see Master Carthew, sir——"

"Have you not told him to go?"

"Please, sir, this is another gentle

man," said Tupper. "He hiked in, sir, just as the other cove was hiking out."

"Really, Carthew, this passes all patience!" exclaimed the Head. "I demand to know what it means."

"I don't know, sir," said Carthew, bewildered.

"Gentleman says it's about a bike, sir, to be sold."

"Absurd!" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh!" Carthew started. "He shouldn't have come here."

"Explain what this means, Carthew," said the Head tartly. "What is this about a bicycle?"

"I'm advertising my bicycle for sale in the local paper, sir. But I specially said correspondence only," said Carthew. "I should make an appointment to show the machine, of course. The silly fellow seems not to have understood."

"It is very annoying," said the Head. "Tupper, tell the man he must write to Master Carthew, and certainly cannot see him. Go to the porter's lodge and tell him to admit no one again to see Master Carthew."

"Yessir."

Timothy Tupper retired, and the Sixth Form room door closed. From a distance the Sixth Form heard the sound of an excited voice—apparently the gentleman had gone. The Sixth settled down again to Sophocles.

It was a mild and sunny spring morning, and the big windows of the Sixth Form room were open. A little later through those big, open windows there floated sounds, from the direction of the school gates. The Sixth-Formers looked at one another, and the Head's brow was observed to grow grimmer. At last the Head stepped to a window and looked across towards the gates, which were in view in the distance.

Old Mack, the porter, was standing there, in argument with a man whose voice was loud and whose gestures were excited. Apparently the man wanted to come in, and Mack was re-

fusing him admittance. A dusty bike leaned against the buttress of the old stone gateway; and the gentleman, who was rather dusty himself, looked as if he had made a long journey. Undoubtedly he was in a state of excitement. His powerful voice was borne on the breeze to the open windows of the Sixth Form room.

"Look 'ere, old man, I've rode all the way from Rookham to see that there bike, and I'm goin' to see it, see?"

"You can't come in now," said old Mack. "Ead's orders."

"I'm come 'ere to see Master Carthew, according to the advertisement," shouted the caller. "Do you think a bloke is going to push a bike ten mile for nothing?"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "This is really most annoying. Carthew, this is intolerable."

"I'm sorry, sir," gasped Carthew. "I—I never supposed anybody would have the cheek to call here, when I said communications by letter only, quite plain. I can't understand it."

The Head looked from the window again.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

An unexpected sight met the Head's view. It was the sight of a dusty gentleman climbing over the gate that old Mack refused to open.

The Head stared on blankly from the Sixth Form room window. He almost wondered whether he was dreaming. But it was no dream—the climbing gentleman came right over the gate, and dropped down beside the astonished Mack.

CHAPTER 21.

A Sturdy in the Sixth!

"ERE we are!" said the dusty gentleman.

He grinned at Mack.

He was a powerfully-built gentleman, with broad shoulders, and fists that looked like legs of mutton. Old Mack had spoken to him quite sharply

through the bars of the gate. At closer quarters, however, old Mack backed away eyeing him warily and uneasily. One hefty drive from those leg-of-mutton fists, and Rookwood would have been in need of a new porter. Old Mack had no desire whatever to reduce unemployment on those lines.

And the dusty gentleman looked quite ready to use his fists. He was quite a rough-looking gentleman, and his complexion looked as if he had stopped at the Red Cow and the Bird-in-Hand to refresh himself on his long and dusty ride.

"'Ere we are!" he repeated. "No offence, mate, but I'm 'ere on business. A bloke don't ride ten mile to be told he can't see the cove what he's come to see."

"You can't see Master Carthew now," gasped old Mack. "He's in class with the 'Ead."

"Then wot does he mean by telling a bloke to apply personal?"

"I don't know; but——"

"Where's this 'ere Carthew?" demanded the dusty gentleman. "I shan't keep him long—only long enough to 'and him ten bob and take hover the bike—if in good condition as stated. You go and tell 'im that Bill Biggins has called about the bike."

"I tell you I can't! I tell you——"

"Oh, stow it!"

The dusty gentleman looked round him, and started for the House, old Mack blinking after him helplessly.

The scandalised Head leaned from the Sixth Form window.

"Fellow!" he called out, as Mr. Biggins drew nearer the House.

The dusty gentleman stared round.

"Hallo, old gent!" he said.

"Leave these premises at once."

"Eh?"

"How dare you force your way in here?" thundered the Head. "Go at once, or the police will be called in."

"What's biting you, old gent?" asked Mr. Biggins. "You Master Carthew?"

"Eh! What? Certainly not!"

"Then 'old your row." said the dusty gentleman.

And Mr. Biggins walked on to the big doorway of the House, leaving the Head petrified. In all his scholastic career Dr Chisholm had never before been told to hold his "row"! He really looked as if he might never recover from the shock.

Mr. Biggins arrived at the door and banged twice, and thrice, till it was opened by the startled Tupper.

Tupper blinked at the dusty gentleman.

"Tell Master Carthew I've come about the bike!" said Mr. Biggins.

"Oh, my eye!" said Tupper. "You can't see Master Carthew now be——"

"Can't I?" said Mr. Biggins. "Not arter pushing a bike ten mile to see him personal, like he asked in his advertisement! I don't think! Look 'ere, you blooming menial, you tell him I'm 'ere—see?"

A large and knuckly fist was shaken at Tupper's startled face, and the page slammed the big oak door. But it slammed on Mr. Biggins' big boot, which was swiftly jammed in the way.

The next moment the big door was hurled wide again, and Mr. Biggins strode into the House.

He grasped Tupper by the shoulder.

"Now, then, no tricks," he said. "I've called on business, and I can tell you that I don't understand this 'ere treatment. I don't understand it, and I ain't taking it quiet, see? Where's this 'ere Carthew?"

"You can't—— Yaroooh!" roared Tupper, as Mr. Biggins shook him till the teeth almost rattled in his head. Mr. Biggins appeared to be losing his temper. Perhaps that was not surprising in the circumstances.

"You'll take me to this 'ere Carthew, you blinking menial," said Mr. Biggins. "Now, then, sharp's the word!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tupper.

He led the way to the Sixth Form room door, with Mr. Biggins' powerful grasp on his shoulder. Tupper did not

want another shake—the first hefty shake had left him with a semi-detached feeling, and he most decidedly did not want any more.

He knocked at the Sixth Form room door. It was opened by the Head in person. Dr. Chisholm's face was crimson.

"Fellow!" he gasped.

"Feller yourself!" retorted Mr. Biggins independently. "I ain't 'ere to see you. I'm 'ere to see Master Carthew. Think I'm frightened of an old donkey dressed up in an old woman's gown?"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head faintly.

Mr. Biggins shoved into the Form-room. Tupper, only too glad to be released from his iron grasp, disappeared promptly.

The Sixth were all on their feet now, in great astonishment. The dusty gentleman surveyed them.

"Which of you blokes is Master Carthew?" he asked. "That's the cove I'm 'ere to do business with."

"Carthew," gasped the Head. "I—I shall call you to account for this. Tell this man to go."

"What the thump do you mean by coming here, my man?" exclaimed Carthew indignantly.

"You Carthew——"

"Yes. I——"

"Then you're the blooming advertiser. Where's the bike?"

"You can't see it now, you fool!" shouted Carthew. "Haven't you any sense? Go away at once——"

"I've rode ten mile to see that bike. If it's in excellent condition, as stated, it's a blinking bargain, and I'm 'aving it," said Mr. Biggins. "I don't understand this treatment of a man calling on business, fair and square. I don't that! 'Ere's the ten shillings."

"The—the what?"

Mr. Biggins flourished a currency note.

"'Ere's the money! Now where's the bike?"

Carthew stared at him like a fellow

in a dream. The repeated offers of ten shillings for his bike from Rookwood fellows he had taken as a "rag." But he could not suppose that a rough character from Rookham was concerned in a schoolboy rag. He simply could not comprehend.

"Man!" gasped the Head. "Do—do—do you wish me to telephone for the police, and give you in charge?"

"Oh, 'old your row, old gent!" said Mr. Biggins contemptuously. "I was asked to call personal, and I've called personal. And 'ere I am, ready to do business. Where's the bike?"

"Shall we deal with this man, sir?" asked Bulkeley of the Sixth. The captain of Rookwood measured Mr. Biggins with his eye, and received a glare of defiance in return.

"The—the man must be drunk, sir," gasped Carthew. "I never offered my bike for ten shillings, and I never asked——"

"Wot's that?" roared Mr. Biggins angrily. "Trying to back out of it, arter a bloke's rode ten miles to see the jigger? Going back on your own advertisement, are you?"

"I never——"

"Carthew!" gasped the Head. "You are to blame for this. You—you had better hand over the machine to the man, and let him go."

"'Ere's the ten bob, as soon as I've seen the jigger, and seed that it's in good condition as stated," said Mr. Biggins.

Carthew spluttered.

"I'm selling that bike for five pounds——"

"Ten shillings, you mean——"

"Five pounds!" roared Carthew.

"Oh, dror it mild!" said Mr. Biggins. "Think I'd 'ave rode ten miles to buy a bike for five pounds? I can get 'em cheaper where I live. Ten shillings is what you said, and 'ere's the blinking advertisement to prove my blinking words."

And Mr. Biggins jerked a much soiled copy of the "Coombe Times"

from his pocket, and pointed with a grubby thumb to the advertisement.

"It's five pounds, and communications by post only—read it for yourself," hooted Carthew

"It's ten shillings, and call personal

"It isn't——" yelled Carthew.

"Ain't you got any eyes?" roared Mr. Biggins, thrusting the paper fairly into Carthew's face. "Look!"

Carthew looked—he couldn't help it. He stared blankly at Putty of the Fourth's second edition of his advertisement.

"Oh crumbs! It—it—it's a misprint," he gasped. "The silly fool of a printer has made a mistake——"

"Oh, come off!" said Bill Biggins surlily. "That's too thin. You've changed your mind about selling that bike for ten bob, wot—and you think a man's going to ride ten miles for nothing. Well, he ain't"

"Give me the paper!" said the Head, in a grinding voice.

Dr. Chisholm looked at the advertisement. Then he fixed a baleful glance on Carthew.

"The matter is precisely as this—this man states, Carthew. You are responsible for this interruption of lessons—for this disgraceful scene in a Rookwood Form-room."

"I—I—I——" stuttered Carthew helplessly. "It—it—it's a misprint."

"Nonsense! Either you will hand over the bicycle to this man for the sum stated in the advertisement, or you will compensate him for his waste of time."

"Now you're talking, old gent!" said Mr. Biggins, more amicably. "I ain't 'e man to drive a 'ard bargain. If the young gent's changed his mind, let him call it off; but a man ain't riding ten miles to be told that a young gent has changed his mind—not for nothing. Make it 'arf-a-sovereign."

"You cheeky rotter!" exclaimed Carthew "I'm not giving you any money. I—I— Yaroooh!"

Carthew roared as the enraged, dusty gentleman grasped him by the collar.

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Ow! Ow! Help! Yooop!"

"Calling me names, arter making me waste a 'ole morning, are you?" shouted Mr. Biggins. "I'll larn you!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Head. "Man—control yourself. Bulkeley—Neville—Lonsdale—control him."

Three stalwart Rookwood prefects collared the angry Mr. Biggins. He was dragged off Carthew by main force.

For some minutes there was a terrific scene in the usually quiet and scholastic precincts of the Sixth Form room. Then Mr Biggins went whirling through the doorway, and crashed in the passage.

"See him off the premises!" gasped the Head.

Mr. Biggins struggled up—still in a fighting humour. Really, he had cause to be angry; and undoubtedly he was very angry indeed. He charged into the Sixth Form room like a bull; and half the Sixth were needed to get him out again.

Then the dusty gentleman was escorted down to the gates, and he went struggling and shouting. Form-room windows were packed with faces, watching the amazing scene. Fighting-man as he evidently was, Mr. Biggins reached the school gates. Old Mack swung open the gates, and the dusty gentleman was hurled forth in a heap. Then the gates clanged on him.

For fully ten minutes Mr. Biggins stated, at the top of his voice, what he thought of Rookwood and the dwellers therein. Then, at last, he mounted his dusty bike, and disappeared down the road.

That morning, and that afternoon, there were many callers at Rookwood, to see Carthew and the ten-shilling bike. Every caller was turned away, old Mack so far departing from the straight line of veracity as to inform

them that the coveted bike had been already sold—as the easiest method of getting rid of them.

It was with the greatest difficulty that Carthew succeeded in convincing the Head that his advertisement must have been somehow misprinted. The Head allowed himself to be convinced at last—after Carthew had been reduced to a state of almost tearful apprehension.

In the Lower School, there were howls of laughter—Putty's jape was admitted to be the jape of the term. The jester of Rookwood came quite into the limelight, and bore his blushing honours thick upon him, but—

There was unfortunately a "but." For Carthew of the Sixth was keenly investigating the extraordinary misprint—with such success that Putty of the Fourth in the midst of his cheery satisfaction found himself called upon the carpet—and in the next scene the Head's birch figured prominently.

After which it was several days before Putty of the Fourth was in a mood again for jesting

CHAPTER 22.

Brag!

"I 'VE done it!"

That is Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Dodd came into his study in Mr. Manders' House at Rookwood with a lugubrious face, and made that announcement in a lugubrious voice.

Lugubriousness, indeed, was written all over Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth.

Evidently something had happened.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle regarded him inquiringly.

"You've done it?" inquired Cook.

"Yes."

"What may it happen to be?" asked Doyle

"I've fairly put my foot in it!" said Tommy Dodd. "It really wasn't my

fault. That ass Lovell was bragging about footer—"

"But what have you done?" inquired the other two Tommies together.

"You know Lovell's style," said Tommy Dodd, without replying to the question. "How his pals get on without punching his nose every day regularly is a mystery to me."

"Have you punched Lovell's nose?"

"No harm in punching a Classical duffer's nose."

"No," groaned Tommy Dodd. "I wish I had. Perhaps I'd better go over to the Classical side and punch his nose now. Not that punching his nose will do any good. You see, it's fixed now."

"What is?" roared Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd flung himself into a chair, drove his hands deep into his pockets, and regarded his comrades lugubriously and pessimistically. He seemed in the lowest of spirits.

"The worse of it," he said, "is that I shan't be able to make good. It's rotten all round."

Cook picked up an inkpot from the table. He was getting impatient.

It was clear that something very serious had occurred, and the two Modern juniors wanted to know what it was.

"Are you going to tell us what's the matter, you thumping ass, or shall I buzz this inkpot at you?" inquired Cook.

"I may as well tell you, now I've done it," said Tommy Dodd. "As I said, Lovell was bragging about footer. Those Classical asses seem to think they're the big noise in footer, because they happened to win the last House match on a fluke. Well, I got fed-up, and—and—and I said—"

"You said?"

"I—I said—"

Tommy Dodd paused. He seemed reluctant to state what he had said in the heat of a football argument with Classical fellows.

"Well, what did you say?" de-

manded Doyle. "Something fatheaded, of course, or it wouldn't be you. But what was it?"

"I—I said we'd beat the Classical Fourth at football——"

"So we will intirely."

"With Cuffy in goal," said Tommy Dodd.

"What?"

"Phwat?"

Cook and Doyle stared at Tommy Dodd, and he blinked at them dismally. That reckless offer he had made in the heat of argument. When the heat of argument had passed, and Tommy Dodd considered the matter coolly, he realised what he had done. Undoubtedly he had put his foot in it. He had "done it" with a vengeance.

"Cuffy!" repeated Doyle.

"Clarence Cuffy!" babbled Cook.

"That dummy——"

"That ass!" said Doyle.

"That frabjous chump!" said Cook.

"That blinking, burbling bandersnatch! Why, he doesn't know a goal-keeper from a goalpost!"

"He doesn't know a football from a fancy-dress ball!"

"That howling duffer!"

"That—that—Cuffy——"

"You ass!"

"You chump!"

It was a kind of chorus, strophe and antistrophe, and Tommy Dodd listened to it without a word in his own defence.

"Pile it on!" he said bitterly. "You can't call me a bigger ass than I'm calling myself. Keep it up."

"Play Jimmy Silver's team with Cuffy in goal!" roared Tommy Doyle. "It's potty ye are."

"Go it!"

"Cuffy can't keep goal. Why, he can't keep white mice!"

"I know he can't."

"Well, you ass!"

"Well, you chump!"

The three Tommies of the Modern side at Rookwood were great pals. Being great pals, they talked to one another with great frankness of speech.

But never had Cook and Doyle been quite so frank as on the present occasion.

"Of all the fatheads——" said Cook.

"Of all the blinking, blithering, burbling dummies——" said Doyle.

"Of all the chumps!"

"Of all the idiots——"

Tommy Dodd stretched his legs and nodded. He seemed almost to welcome this chorus of opprobrium.

"You've got it," he said. "I was an ass, a chump, a fathead—any old thing you like. I told you I'd done it, didn't I? You see, that ass Lovell was bragging, and he really drew me and made me play the goat. I told him we'd beat the Classical junior side, playing Cuffy in goal, just to shut him up and make him sing small. Of course, I never really meant it. But he took it seriously and closed on it, and then, of course, I couldn't back out. So there we are."

"Are we?" roared Cook. "We're jolly well not. I'm not playing in a team with Cuffy in it."

"Nor little me!" said Doyle.

"It's asking for a licking," said Tommy Cook, more calmly. "Putting swank aside, the Classicals are quite up to our weight at footer. Every House match is touch and go. They've got more men to select from than we have, being a bigger House. That's an advantage, and it's no good making out that they don't win more matches than they lose, because anybody can read it up in the records. And now you think of tackling them with a passenger in the team——"

"In goal, too!" said Tommy Doyle. "Might as well leave the chicken run empty. Better, in fact, than putting Clarence Cuffy in it."

Tommy Dodd nodded.

"We're for it," he said. "I've got to keep my word. We can't let those classical asses make out that we swank and then eat our words. Next House match Cuffy goes into goal."

"You ass!"

"You duffer!"

"Go it!" said Tommy Dodd resignedly. "I've asked for it, and you can sling it out all you want to. All the same, I'm keeping up the brag, and Cuffy goes into goal next match. And—and—and we've got to beat the Classics anyhow, all the same."

Tommy Cook jumped up.

"You're not landing us like that, you ass! I dare say Lovell was just pulling your leg. I'll go over and see Jimmy Silver."

"I'll come with you," assented Doyle.

"No good," said Tommy Dodd. "I tell you they're holding us to it. They want to make us look asses."

"Rats!"

Cook and Doyle, in a rather excited frame of mind, quitted the study. Tommy Dodd was left alone to reflect upon the imprudence of "gassing" in the heat of argument.

There was a gentle tap at the door of the study, and Tommy looked round irritably.

A kind and gentle face looked into the study.

It was the simple, benevolent face of Clarence Cuffy, who was admitted on all hands to be the biggest duffer inside Rookwood, or out of it.

He smiled sweetly at the frowning face of Tommy Dodd.

"My dear Thomas——"

Grunt!

"I trust, my dear Thomas, that nothing has occurred to disturb the serenity of your temper," said Clarence Cuffy anxiously.

Grunt!

"In the unfortunate event of any untoward happening having disturbed your equanimity, my dear Thomas, perhaps you would find relief in confiding the circumstances to me," suggested Cuffy.

Tommy Dodd blinked at him.

This was the fellow who, in a wild and reckless moment, he had engaged to play in goal in the next House match.

Tommy Dodd rose to his feet.

He picked up a cushion.

"My dear Thomas, what are you going to do with that cushion?" inquired Clarence Cuffy in mild surprise.

Tommy Dodd did not answer in words. He let his action speak for him.

Whiz!

Crash!

Bump!

The cushion flew, and it caught Clarence Cuffy upon the chest, and Clarence Cuffy flew. He sat down in the passage with a terrific concussion.

A yell rang through the passage.

"Yooooooop!"

"Now wait a tick till I get the poker!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

Clarence Cuffy did not wait.

It was only too clear that the serenity of dear Thomas' temper was very much disturbed.

Cuffy was not a bright youth. But he was far too bright to wait for Tommy Dodd to get on with it.

He picked himself up and fled for his life.

CHAPTER 23.

Nothing Doing!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were smiling as they sat down to tea in the end study in the School House.

Arthur Edward Lovell, especially, was grinning hugely.

The Fistical Four were in enjoyment of a great joke. Tommy Dodd's brag, which had caused so much dismay in Tommy's study, was causing great merriment among the Fistical Four.

"The silly owl, you know!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, for about the tenth time. "Swanking about Modern football—as if those Modern chaps can play footer! I told him that marbles was nearer his mark, you know. And then he said he'd beat the Classical side at Soccer, with Cuffy in goal! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome.

"Just swank, you know," grinned Lovell. "Of course, he didn't mean a word of it. But I nailed him down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fairly pinned him," chuckled Lovell. "You should have seen him wriggle! But I had him. What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Either he had to keep to it, or own up that he'd been gassing, and take it back. And he wouldn't do that."

"Couldn't, very well!" remarked Raby.

"Of course, he couldn't! But I fancy the Modern chaps will jaw him when they hear that he's undertaken to play a Soccer match with the biggest idiot at Rookwood in goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too much swank about these Modern chaps," remarked Newcome. "It will do them good to take them down a peg."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Raby.

"It's rather hard on Doddy, though," said Jimmy Silver laughing. "Of course, he spoke without thinking—"

"Time he learned to think, then," chuckled Lovell. "This will help teach him to think."

"Chap shouldn't brag, if he isn't prepared to make it good!" grinned Raby. "He's made the offer—it's a challenge to us—and we're bound to take him at his word."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A tap at the door interrupted the merriment of the chums of the Classical Fourth. Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle came into the end study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled at them.

They could guess the purport of the visit. Evidently Tommy Dodd had informed his comrades of his unfortunate little brag, and Cook and Doyle had dropped in to speak on the subject.

The two Modern juniors grinned rather uneasily.

"Trot in, old beans," said Arthur Edward Lovell hospitably. "Try these

muffins—they're good. I hear you've got a new goalie on the Modern side."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fact is, we came over to speak about that little joke of Doddy's," said Cook.

"Joke?" repeated Lovell. "Has Doddy been making jokes? What's the joke this time?"

"That little joke about Cuffy—"

"Is there a joke about Cuffy? Cuffy's rather a joke in himself, isn't he? But what's the joke now?"

The Fistical Four smiled—politely, but implacably. Cook and Doyle exchanged a glance.

"That little joke about playing Cuffy in goal in a House match," said Cook.

"Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed Doyle feebly.

"Oh, that's not a joke," said Lovell calmly. "That's a fixture."

"Oh, quite," said Jimmy Silver.

"You see—" murmured Doyle.

"We see," agreed Raby. "You're not satisfied with Doddy's choice of a goalkeeper. But Doddy's your skipper, isn't he?"

"Yes, but—"

"Has Doddy sent you over to climb down for him?" grinned Lovell. "Is he owning up that he was only bragging?"

"Backing out—what?" grinned Newcome.

"Well," said Doyle haltingly, "our idea is that it was just a joke, you know—"

"Cut it out!" said Arthur Edward Lovell cheerily. "If Doddy wants to climb down, and own up that he was gassing, let him go ahead. He said before a dozen fellows that he would beat the Classics at footer with Cuffy in goal. He's got to do it, or else swallow his jolly old words. No good telling us it was a joke."

"You're holding him to it, then?" asked Cook.

"Of course—unless he climbs down. He's only got to own up that he was bragging, and talking out of the back of his neck."

"You know he won't do that!" snapped Cook.

"Then let him go ahead, and beat us at footer, with Cuffy in goal."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four roared, and the ambassadors glared. That Tommy Dodd would consent to eat his words was not to be thought of—that was out of the question. But if he did not, it was evident that the football match, with Cuffy between the posts, was a fixture.

"Oh, cut the cackle!" exclaimed Cook. "After all, we can beat you all right, Cuffy or no Cuffy."

"We'd beat you with an empty goal!" snorted Doyle.

"Is that a challenge?" grinned Lovell.

"If you mean it——"

"Oh, go and eat coke! I'll jolly well bet you ten to one in doughnuts that we beat you, Cuffy or no Cuffy!" roared Doyle.

"Done!"

Arthur Edward Lovell jerked out a pocket-book and a stump of pencil. Doyle glared at him.

"Ten to one in dough-nuts," said Arthur Edward. "That's all right. Save up your pennies for Saturday, Doyle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You plunging, too, Cook?" asked Lovell hilariously. "What's your giddy wager?"

"Back up your own side, you know!" chortled Raby. "What's the odds?"

Tommy Cook opened his lips, but closed them again. Really, the ambassadors were making matters worse rather than better.

"Oh, we'll beat you all right!" said Cook at last. "But——"

"But you don't fancy backing your opinion?" grinned Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle exchanged a glance, and made a sudden rush at the Classical tea-table. As ambassadors they had failed, but as

raiders they were fairly successful. Before Jimmy Silver & Co. could make a movement the two Modern juniors had grasped the tea-table and up-ended it.

Crash! Clatter! Crash!

"Hook it!" gasped Doyle.

"Why, you rotters——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Collar the cads!"

Cook and Doyle dodged out of the study and fled. They went down the Fourth Form passage as if they were on the cinder-path. Jimmy Silver & Co. leaped up in the midst of the wreck of their tea-table.

"After them!" roared Lovell.

The two Moderns had only a few seconds' start. But they made the most of it.

They arrived at the staircase at top speed. It was unfortunate for Tubby Muffin of the Classical Fourth that he was coming upstairs just then. Cook and Doyle had no time to stop for him.

Crash!

"Whooop!" roared Muffin.

He sat down on the stairs. Cook rolled over him, and Doyle rolled over him and Cook.

They had intended to go down quickly. They went down much more quickly than they had intended. They arrived on the next landing, rolling, in a breathless state.

But they did not linger. They picked themselves up and fled, and vanished down the lower stairs just as Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived at the top landing. As they went they heard behind a sound of rolling and tumbling and bumping, which seemed to indicate that the Fistical Four also had come to grief on Tubby Muffin.

But they did not stay to listen. In a few seconds they were speeding out of the school House and sprinting across big quad.

On the staircase the Fistical Four disentangled themselves from Tubby Muffin and from one another. They

returned to the end study in a breathless state, leaving Tubby Muffin also breathless, but apparently with breath enough to roar. Tubby's roars awoke the distant echoes.

"The cheeky cads!" gasped Lovell.

"Look at our corks!"

"The blessed butter's in the blessed grate!"

"The teapot's gone west!"

"My hat! We—we—we'll——"

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh.

"Never mind! It's all in the game!" he said cheerily.

"That's all very well!" snorted Lovell.

"And they'll be playing us on Saturday with Cuffy in goal" said Jimmy Silver. "We shall put the ball in about fifteen or sixteen times!"

And the chums of the Fourth chuckled once more.

And there was chuckling all through the Classical Fourth when the news spread. Tommy Dodd's unfortunate predicament furnished food for merriment in all the studies in the Classical Fourth passage.

Junior House matches were always keenly contested at Rookwood, and generally they were looked forward to with keenness. But never had the Classical juniors anticipated a House match so keenly as on the present occasion, when Tommy Dodd was to make good his reckless words, and Clarence Cuffy was to figure as goalkeeper, and the Modern footballers were to be overwhelmed with defeat and confusion.

CHAPTER 24.

Coaching Cuffy!

"WE'VE got to pull it off!"

That was Tommy Dodd's decision.

While on the Classical side there had been chuckling and chortling without limit, on the Modern side there had been a considerable amount of grouching

Tommy Dodd, as junior captain of Manders' House, was very popular, and as a footballer he was greatly admired and respected. There was no doubt that he was as good a skipper as the House could have found anywhere within its ranks. But there was something very near rebellion among the Modern footballers when they learned to what Tommy Dodd had committed them.

Some of the fellows even went so far as to suggest that it was time that Doddy resigned. Some of them declared that they wouldn't be found dead in a team with Clarence Cuffy in it. All of them told Tommy Dodd what they thought of him in language that was frequent and painful and free.

Whereupon, of course, Cook and Doyle, like loyal chums, rallied round their leader, and backed him up for all they were worth. In private they told Tommy Dodd that he was every imaginable kind of an ass, a duffer, and a piffing fozzler. But in public they stood by him nobly, and even went to the length of declaring that Tommy's rash challenge to the Classicals was a jolly good idea.

It would, Cook declared, put the Classicals in their place if they were beaten by a team minus a goalie, for that was what it amounted to. It would, according to Doyle, show the Classic side what the Moderns thought of them, when they played them with such a howling dummy as Cuffy between the posts.

Tommy Dodd was grateful for this loyal support. It helped him to bear what Cook and Doyle told him in the study.

The fellows grouched, but they acquiesced. There was, indeed, nothing else for them to do, unless they sacked Doddy from the captaincy. That was a length to which no one wished to proceed.

But it was quite on the cards that it would come to that if the defeat

in the House match proved to be ludicrously overwhelming.

"We've got to pull it off!" said Tommy Dodd. "It's the only way. I admit I opened my mouth a bit too wide, talking to that silly owl Lovell. It can't be helped now. We've got to play those blighters, and play them with Cuffy in goal. Well, if we win the match the Classics will be laughed to death, especially after the way they've been chortling."

"If!" snorted Tommy Cook. "If the skies fall there will be catching of larks."

"We've got to," said Tommy Dodd. "To-day's Tuesday. Match on Saturday. We've got nearly a week. Cuffy's got to learn to play footer."

"In a week!" yelled Doyle.

"Yes."

"Make it ten years, and he might begin to commence to start to get an inkling of the game."

"He's going to learn in a week. After all, he's watched games, and he's done some games practice—not much, but some. We've got to coach him and keep him at it, and make him play up. Let's go and see him now about it."

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Oh, shut up and come on!" said Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle came on, but did not shut up. Tommy Dodd, in fact, had almost given up hope that Cook and Doyle ever would shut up again.

Clarence Cuffy was in his study when the three Tommies called. He was sitting at the table, gently poring over a volume his kind father had sent him on his birthday. It was entitled, "Gentle Georgie, the Boy Who Never Said an Unkind Word."

The career of Gentle Georgie was deeply interesting to Clarence Cuffy. His eyes were moist with emotion as he followed the adventures of that interesting youth. But he looked up

with a sunny smile as the three Tommies butted in.

"Busy?" asked Tommy Dodd grimly.

"Not at all, my dear Thomas, if there is any little service I can perform for you," said Cuffy brightly.

"There is. I'm going to play you in the House match on Saturday."

Cuffy started.

"My dear Thomas, I am very flattered at your selecting me," he said. "But I feel bound to warn you that I am not expert at this game. It is not one of the games I play well."

"Go hon!" gasped Cook.

"It would be false modesty on my part, my dear fellow, to deny that I am very expert indeed at noughts-and-crosses," said Cuffy. "I have had some success, too, at draughts and—"

"Draughts!" gurgled Doyle.

"But to games of a more strenuous, indeed rough, character, I have given little attention," said Cuffy. "To be quite frank, I have rather considered them beneath my intellectual powers. Projecting a ball across a field by the impact of a foot does not appear, to me, to be a form of activity adequate to my mental gifts. I trust, my dear Thomas, that you will not regard me as speaking in a boastful or vain-glorious spirit."

Tommy Dodd gazed at him.

"After all, he's got good wind," he said. "Must have plenty of wind, or he couldn't chin-wag like that."

"That's so," agreed Cook.

"Well, you're playing on Saturday, in goal," said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you know what a goalkeeper does?"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas. I have learned quite a good deal by watching games, though I have seldom take a personal part in them. The goalkeeper, I think, stands in the goal area—"

"You—you think?" gasped Cook. "You don't know? You only think?"

"I should be sorry, my dear Cook, to speak positively on a subject in which I am not well grounded. But I am somewhat keen on observation, and I think I may venture upon saying that the goalkeeper occupies the goal, and one of his occupations is to wave his arms about and thump himself on the chest. At least, I have often observed this."

"Oh, dear!"

"He also has to keep the other side from putting in the pill," suggested Doyle.

"Dear me! I did not know a pill was used in the game," said Cuffy.

"That is indeed news to me."

"The ball, fathead—the ball!" shrieked Doyle.

"My dear Doyle——"

"Come on, Cuffy," said Tommy Dodd. "We're going to make a goalkeeper of you. We've got an hour for practice this afternoon. You're putting in sixty minutes. Come down and change."

"My dear Thomas——"

Clarence Cuffy did not really seem keen on it. His glance lingered longingly on "Gentle Georgie." He really did want to pursue the enthralling, if somewhat mild, adventures of the youth who never spoke an unkind word. But the three Tommies persuaded him out of the study—Tommy Dodd took him by one ear, Tommy Cook by another. Cuffy's ears had to go down to the changing-room, and the rest of Cuffy had no choice about going with them.

So Cuffy changed for footer, and a few minutes later emerged from Mr. Manders' House, and walked down to the Modern practice-ground with a crowd of Modern fellows. They took half a dozen footballs with them.

Most of the footballers seemed to be in a mocking humour, apparently not expecting great things of Clarence Cuffy. But it was agreed that, as Cuffy was to play on Saturday, it was better to put him through his paces. Even Cuffy, they considered, ought to

be able to pick up a few tips about keeping goal, with plenty of coaching, and a little kicking and cuffing to brighten him up—though, of course, he could never expect to become so expert at footer as at noughts-and-crosses.

Tommy Dodd pointed to the goal. "That's the goal, Cuffy," he said patiently. "See?"

"I certainly observe it, my dear Thomas."

"Get into it."

Cuffy got into it.

"Now, you've got to keep this ball out," said Tommy Dodd. "We're all going to pile in shots, see? Every time you let the ball pass you're going to kick you hard. Catch on?"

"My dear Thomas!"

"Play up!"

"Look out in goal!"

Clarence Cuffy looked rather unhappy in goal. He thought it very, very hard that he should be kicked if he let the ball pass him. But he could see that dear Thomas was in deadly earnest, so he resolved to do his very, very best.

Tommy Dodd sent the ball whizzing in.

Clarence Cuffy blinked at it. He had to turn his head to finish blinking at it. It dropped, and there was a shout from Tommy Doyle.

"Kick him, bedad!"

"My dear Thomas— Yaroooooh!"

"Why didn't you stop that ball?" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Yow-ow-ow! My—my dear——"

"Chuck that ball out, and stand up to it!" howled Towle.

"My dear Towle——"

"Chuck that ball out, fathead!"

"Certainly, my dear Towle."

Cuthbert Cuffy hurled the ball out. It landed on Towle's nose, and there was a shout from Towle.

"You clumsy ass——"

"Really, my dear Towle——"

Towle rubbed his nose, and seemed disposed to charge into goal and commit assault and battery. But Tommy

Dodd pushed him back, and placed the ball for another kick.

"Look out, Cuffy! Mind you stop it this time."

"I will endeavour——"

"Shut up and look out!"

Whiz!

Clarence Cuffy had been kicked once. He did not want to be kicked twice. So he glued his eyes on Tommy Dodd and the ball, and as it came in, he jumped at it, and stopped it—with his features. There was a loud smack as the footer came on Cuffy's features, and there was a wild and dismal yell from Cuffy.

"Ha. ha, ha! Well stopped!"

"Bravo, Cuffy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Modern juniors roared and rained shots on the unhappy Cuffy. Some of the Classical fellows, who had heard that Cuffy was on the football ground, had hurried along to see the entertainment, and they yelled. The only fellow present who did not chortle was Clarence Cuffy. He yelled in quite a different way. The impact of the whizzing footer had hurt Cuffy's features. There was a little stream of red oozing from his nose, and one of his eyes blinked wearily. And he was feeling very startled and shocked and upset. He had always known that Soccer was a rough game. That was why his fond father had stipulated that he should be exempt from games practice. But he had never realised that it was quite so rough as this. More than ever, Clarence Cuffy realised how much superior noughts-and-crosses was, as a game.

Cuffy dabbed his injured nose, while the Modern juniors yelled. He blinked dazedly at Tommy Dodd.

"That's right!" said Tommy encouragingly.

"My dear Thomas——"

"You stopped it all right," said Tommy Dodd. "Do that again!

Every time you stop the ball you're let off a licking, see?"

"Oh, dear! But—but really, my dear Thomas——"

"Play up!"

Clarence Cuffy blinked at the juniors in dismay, almost in horror, as Tommy Dodd prepared to kick the ball in again. Apparently he had done right—by accident. But if it was the duty of a goalkeeper to stop a whizzing ball with his nose, Clarence Cuffy felt that he was not really up to a goalkeeper's duties. He was very, very sorry, but, really, he could not undertake duties like that.

So while Tommy Dodd was kicking, and the other fellows stood back laughing, Clarence Cuffy made a sudden bolt out of goal and fled across the field.

There was a roar at once.

"Stop!"

"Stop him!"

"Come back!"

"After him!" yelled Towie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Classics as the whole troop of Modern fellows rushed in pursuit of Clarence Cuffy.

Cuffy was not, as a rule, much of a sprinter. But circumstances alter cases. Fear lent him wings.

He was off the football ground almost in a twinkling. He was fleeing across the quad in a few seconds more. Puffing in breath in great gasps, he fled into Manders' House and raced up the staircase.

He bolted into his study like a rabbit into a burrow, and slammed the door and turned the key.

A minute later Tommy Dodd was rapping on the door.

"Cuffy!"

"Oh, dear! Go away!"

"Come out, you villain!"

"My dear Thomas, it is with exceeding deep regret that I resolve to refuse a request made by you, but in the circumstances I feel that I have no alternative but to do so," gasped Cuffy.

"You've got to practice!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"My dear Thomas——"

"Will you come out?" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

"The answer, my dear Thomas, is in the negative."

"I'll jolly well punch your silly nose!"

"I trust, my dear Thomas, that you will not yield unthinkingly to an angry impulse——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Tommy Dodd tramped away. Football practice on the Modern junior ground went on without Clarence Cuffy after that. It was not till dark that Clarence ventured to unlock his study door. The interval he spent in rubbing his damaged nose, and wondering how dear Thomas could be so very, very cross, and what dear Thomas could possibly see in so very, very rough a game as football—which, as a game, was so very, very inferior to noughts-and-crosses.

CHAPTER 25.

Gunner Puts His Foot Down!

"I'M putting my foot down!" Peter Cuthbert Gunner, of the Classical Fourth made that observation in emphatic tones to his study-mate, Dickinson minor.

Dickinson minor looked at him rather nervously.

"Hard!" said Gunner.

Gunner of the Fourth had a hefty size in feet. He could not have put his foot down hard without making the study furniture dance. Really, from Dickinson minor's uneasy look, it might have been supposed that he fancied that to be Gunner's intention.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Dickinson minor.

Gunner of the Classical Fourth was not a bully. But he had manners and customs almost indistinguishable from those of a bully. Certainly,

he made his study-mate walk in fear and trembling. Being always prepared to introduce an enormous fist into any discussion, Gunner was not a pleasant fellow to argue with.

Dickinson minor prepared to dodge out of the study. One of his chief occupations was evading scraps with Gunner.

"That silly ass Silver——" went on Gunner.

Dickinson minor brightened up. Apparently he was not the object of Gunner's wrath; the object of it was Jimmy Silver, captain of the Fourth. Dickinson minor was very glad to hear it. Jimmy Silver was quite able to take care of himself—the wrath of P. C. Gunner was wont to pass him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"I've been patient," said Gunner, "I've given him his head. I've waited to give him a chance to make up his mind to play me in a football match. He hasn't done it. He thinks I can't play footer. As if he knows anything about the game, the silly ass!"

Dickinson minor grinned.

A fellow did not need to know much about the game to know that P. C. Gunner couldn't play football. That fact leapt to the eye, as it were, when Gunner was seen at games practice.

"I've talked to him," said Gunner. "He can't say that I haven't mentioned my claims."

"He can't," agreed Dickinson minor.

"I've even pushed them," said Gunner.

"You have," said Dickinson minor. "Lots of times!"

"And yet he leaves me out. I'm putting my foot down now!" said Gunner darkly. "I'm going to give him his choice—he can play me in the next House match, or he can take a thundering licking. What?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Dickinson minor.

"That's what I've decided," said Gunner determinedly. "I'm fed-up with being passed over like this! Injustice is a thing that rankles. Mind, I wouldn't dream of pushing my claims if I didn't know that I was the best junior footballer Rookwood ever turned out. Being that, I'm entitled to play. What?"

"Oh!" gasped Dickinson minor.

"Don't you agree with me?" roared Gunner.

"Oh, yes, certainly!"

"Well, I hope Silver will, for his own sake," said Gunner. "Otherwise, I shall feel it my duty to smash him up. I'm fed-up with his cheek. I'm going to put my foot down, and put it to him plainly."

"I—I would!" gasped Dickinson.

"And I jolly well will!" said Gunner.

And Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in a mood of great determination, quitted the study, much to Dickinson's relief. Gunner went along the Fourth Form passage to look for Jimmy Silver.

It was Friday—the day before the House match—that match which was causing Tommy Dodd & Co. so much anxiety. Gunner felt that he had been patient too long. He had never figured in a match—even in a game with the Third Form his claims were overlooked. Being blissfully unconscious that he was as hopeless a fumbler at football as at everything else, Gunner naturally felt indignant.

The captain of the Fourth was not in his study—prep was over. Gunner went downstairs to look for him in the junior Common-room.

There he found Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were all there, and they all had smiling faces. They had been discussing the match of the morrow, in which Clarence Cuffy was to figure on the Modern side. During the week they had watched, with keen interest, Tommy Dodd's manful efforts to turn Cuffy into a footballer. They had not noticed

that Doddy had met with any success. And the feelings with which the Modern fellows anticipated the House match were a subject of great hilarity to the Classics. Tommy Dodd's unfortunate brag had come home to roost, as it were, and it was causing great stress of feeling among the Modern footballers.

"Silver!" bawled Gunner as he came in.

Every eye was turned on Gunner at once.

He was a truculent youth, and a great fighting man, and more than often in a row than out of one. If Gunner had known anything about boxing he would have been quite a dangerous character. Fortunately, his boxing was on a par with his football and cricket.

"Hallo, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

Gunner planted himself before the chums of the Fourth, with something of the air of Ajax defying the lightning. Undoubtedly, Peter Cuthbert Gunner was going to put his foot down.

"There's a House match to-morrow," said Gunner.

"That's so!" assented Jimmy Silver. "I believe I'd heard of it—but thanks for the information, all the same."

"You've not posted up the list yet."

"Not yet!" agreed Jimmy.

"I want my name to appear in it!"

"Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a general cackle from all corners of the room. Gunner and his claims to play for Form and House were a standing joke in the Classical Fourth. As Mornington had put it, Gunner and football were a contradiction in terms. Gunner stared round angrily.

"You can cackle!" he snorted.

"Thanks—we will!" said Conroy. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean it, Jimmy Silver! I'm fed-up with being passed over in this

scandalous way. The way you run football matters is a disgrace to the House and the School. I'm speaking plainly—I'm a plain chap!"

"You are," agreed Jimmy Silver—"frightfully plain. How your looking-glass stands it, without cracking is a giddy mystery."

"You—you silly ass! I don't mean that—"

"I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any rot!" howled Gunner in great wrath. "I'm giving you an ultimatum—either I play in the House match to-morrow or I give you the hiding of your life!"

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump the cheeky ass!" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth. "Say the word, Jimmy, and we'll rag him bald-headed."

A crowd of Classical fellows closed up round the group. Gunner was a lofty and dictatorial youth—qualities that had often landed him into trouble. But to claim a place in the Classic eleven, with the alternative of committing assault and battery upon the football captain, was really the limit—it was altogether too thick. At a sign from Jimmy Silver, Peter Cuthbert Gunner would have been subjected to the ragging of his life.

But Jimmy Silver did not make the sign.

He smiled.

"I didn't come here to be grinned at, Jimmy Silver!" hooted Gunner. "I want a plain answer. Do I play to-morrow, or do I thrash you till you won't feel like grinning again for a week—which?"

"Dear man!" said Jimmy Silver. "The fact is, you order me to play you—what?"

"It amounts to that!" assented Gunner.

"Well, if you order me, what's a fellow to do? To hear is to obey, isn't it?"

Gunner stared.

He had hoped, if not expected, to gain his point. But this surrender on the part of the junior football captain was rather surprising.

"Oh! You—you'll do it!" he stut-tered.

Jimmy smiled cheerily.

"How can I help it, when you order me?" he asked pleasantly. "Who am I to disregard your instructions?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that's a joke—" growled Gunner.

"Not at all. You play."

"Oh, good!" said Gunner, astonished but greatly gratified. "I'm your man, then. Where are you putting me?"

"Goal!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm good in goal, of course—in fact, I may say that there isn't any place on the footer field where I'm not worth my salt. But I think I'm rather better at centre-forward."

"Just as good, at least," assented Jimmy.

"Well, I'm glad you can see it."

"My dear man, I know you're quite as good in one place as in another in any game," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we specially want you in goal," said Jimmy. "I'll shove your name in the list at once, and you can pin it up."

"Well, I'll play in goal!" said Gunner graciously.

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver cordially.

Pencil and paper came out of Jimmy's pocket, and the name of P. C. Gunner was put on the Classical football list, much to his satisfaction. With his own large hand he pinned up the notice in a prominent position.

"That's good," he said. "I'm glad we've arranged this without my having to pitch into you, Silver."

"You've reason to be glad!" assented Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner walked out of the room with his nose well up in the air to carry the surprising and gratifying news to Dickinson minor that the name of P. C. Gunner was, at long last, down for a House match.

He left the room in a roar.

"Better have punched him for his cheek, though," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Why punch his nose?" smiled Jimmy Silver. "It's all right. We'd decided to play the biggest fool on the Classical side in goal, to make things even for Doddy having to play Cuffy. Gunner offered——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So it's all right."

Peter Cuthbert Gunner strolled into his study in the Fourth with an elated look. Dickinson minor eyed him rather uneasily. He had fully expected Gunner to return in a thoroughly thrashed state, and a terrific temper. Gunner's cheery equanimity surprised him.

"It's all serene," said Gunner. "Silver decided to toe the line. I'm down to play to-morrow."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Dickinson minor. "Gammon!"

"You can go and look at my name on the list."

"I will!" said Dickinson. And he did.

Dickinson minor almost fell down when he found P. C. Gunner's name in the football list in the Common-room.

"You're playing Gunner to-morrow, Silver?" he stuttered.

"Yes."

"That silly idiot?"

"That silly idiot!" assented Jimmy.

"That burbling jabberwock——"

"That burbling jabberwock!"

"Oh, my hat! What on earth for?"

"To make things fair all round, as Tommy Dodd is playing Cuffy. It's up to us to play our silliest ass if Tommy Dodd does."

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dickinson minor.

He understood then. But P. C. Gunner did not understand—and Dickinson minor, when he returned to the study to congratulate him, was careful not to explain. It would really have been a dangerous undertaking to explain to Gunner that he was being played on this special occasion because he was the silliest ass and the biggest idiot in the Classical Fourth. Dickinson minor wisely left him to make the discovery for himself.

CHAPTER 26.

Well Matched!

"WILL it rain?" murmured Tommy Dodd.

It wouldn't!

This was the very first time that Tommy Dodd had desired to see a heavy downpour of rain on the occasion of a football match. But that Saturday morning was quite bright and sunny, and the weather showed no sign whatever of obliging Tommy Dodd.

During the week Clarence Cuffy's career had been something like that of a hunted rabbit.

Tommy Dodd was determined to turn him into something distantly resembling a footballer. Although very, very anxious to oblige his friend and relative, dear Thomas, Cuffy had developed surprising gifts as a dodger.

Nevertheless, he had been dragged down to games practice several times, and each time Cuffy's sufferings had been enough to touch a heart of stone. But his knowledge of the great game had not perceptibly increased.

In fact, his preference for noughts-and-crosses, as a game, had been greatly intensified.

But hope springs eternal in the human breast, and with a few more days, or a week, to work in, Tommy

Dodd would not have despaired of turning Cuffy into a rather less hopeless ass. So a downpour of rain, postponing the match, would have been welcome.

And so, as Tommy said blithely to Cook and Doyle, it was bound to be fine! You could always depend on the British climate to play up in the wrong way!

Kick-off was timed for two-thirty, and it was not in cheery spirits that Tommy Dodd led his merry men down to Little Side in the sunny afternoon.

Clarence Cuffy was with them.

"Dearly would Cuffy have loved to dodge out of the gates or into a coal-cellar, or anywhere; but that afternoon there was no dodging for Cuffy. Tommy Dodd had to make his words good—he had said that he would play the Classics with Cuffy in goal, and that he was going to do. He had said also that he would beat them; but that was quite another matter.

Jimmy Silver greeted him with a cheery smile.

"Goalie going strong?" he asked affably.

Tommy Dodd snorted.

"Oh, cheese it!" grunted Tommy Cook. "If you ask me, it's rather mean to hold Tommy to it because he gassed a bit. Just like you Classics!"

"Oh, just!" said Doyle.

"Cut that out!" said Tommy Dodd morosely. "We're going to be as good as our word, and we're ready when you Classical chumps are."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We're ready," he said.

It was then that Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in shirt and shorts, as a member of the Classical junior team, dawned on the Moderns.

They blinked at him.

Gunner, with an air of great self-satisfaction, walked to the goal after the skippers had tossed. Tommy Dodd blinked after him, not understanding.

"I say, Silver——"

"Hallo!" smiled Jimmy

"You're not playing Gunner?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What on earth for?" asked the amazed Tommy. "He's jolly nearly as big an idiot at footer as our man Cuffy."

"My dear Thomas——" murmured Cuffy.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"That's why!" he said.

Tommy Dodd looked at him. He seemed slow to grasp the situation. But at last he grinned with relief.

"Silver, old man," he said with feeling, "you're a brick! You know I got myself into a scrape by opening my mouth too wide—and you're letting me off. You're a real brick."

That was all that was said; but Tommy Dodd lined up with his men in much better spirit. All the Moderns, in fact, seemed to be considerably bucked by the sight of Peter Cuthbert Gunner in the Classical goal.

Apart from the custodians, the teams were fairly well matched—ten good men aside. And the goalies were fairly well matched, too, if it came to that—for two worse goalkeepers could not have been found inside Rookwood or out.

Quite a crowd of Classics and Moderns gathered to see the game—a game without goalkeepers, for that was what it amounted to. And the Moderns generally agreed that Jimmy Silver was no end of a sportsman.

Tommy Dodd kicked off in great spirits. He had kept his word—he was playing Cuffy; and he was escaping the dire consequence of his brag. For Gunner was undoubtedly as heavy a handicap to the Classical side as Cuffy could possibly be to the Modern.

It was a match on fair terms after all, and on fair terms the Moderns were sure of beating the Classics. The Classics, on their side, were equally sure of beating the Moderns.

It was quite an interesting game. Arthur Edward Lovell put in the ball first, catching Cuffy on the chin with

it, and causing him to sit down with surprising suddenness.

But Tommy Dodd soon followed that up with a Modern goal, the ball missing Gunner's clutch by about a yard.

The full-backs had the duty of defending the goals; and at one end of the field Cuffy thumped his chest to keep warm, and at the other end Gunner stamped and thumped likewise, neither of them having anything else to do. For when the backs failed to keep the goal intact, the ball always went in—Cuffy generally seeking to dodge it as it came, and Gunner sprawling at it in vain.

In the peculiar circumstances the footballers expected a heavy score. It was heavy enough. In the first half, Classics led by four goals to three. After the interval the Moderns picked up, and for a time they led by seven goals to five. Then the Classics gave Cuffy some concentrated attention, and their figure jumped to eight. By that time it was getting near the finish, and almost on the stroke of time Tommy Dodd planted the ball on Gunner's chin, and Gunner sat down in goal apparently nursing it like a baby.

Then the whistle went.

"Eight all!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "It's a giddy draw! Well, Gunner hasn't beaten us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Cuffy hasn't beaten us!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "I was going to slaughter him if he did."

"My dear Thomas——"

"I'll kick him, anyhow."

"Yaroooh!"

Clarence Cuffy quitted the football ground, determined that wild horses should never drag him into so very, very rough a game again. Peter Cuthbert Gunner walked off, with his head up, apparently quite satisfied with himself and his performances. In the changing-room he called to Jimmy.

"I say, Silver! You've seen my quality now."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Satisfied, I hope?"

"Quite. One sample is enough."

"When are you playing me in a House match again?"

"Next time Tommy Dodd plays Cuffy."

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Which was not a promising prospect for Gunner.

Clarence Cuffy was quite, quite determined that he never would play in a House match again. But he was not quite so determined upon that point as Tommy Dodd.

CHAPTER 27.

Wet!

"It will be rather fun!" said Lovell. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked doubtful.

Lovell, of course, looked obstinate at once.

If another fellow doubted the wisdom of his opinion, that was quite enough to make Lovell absolutely certain that his opinion was well-founded.

"No end of fun," he said.

"Hum!"

"In fact, quite jolly," said Lovell. "Take my word for it."

"You see——" said Jimmy Silver.

"I see that you're going to argue," assented Lovell. "I never met such a fellow for arguing."

"But, you know——" began Raby.

"I know you're going to chin-wag, Raby. Doesn't your chin ever get tired?"

"Look here——" said Newcome.

"Oh, go it, the three of you!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in a tone of deep resignation. "I can see that we're going to spend this half-holiday in chin-wag. Rather a waste of time, if you ask me; but I don't mind if you fellows don't! Go it!"

Lovell leaned back in the armchair in the end study. His three chums looked at him, seemingly inclined to tilt him out of the armchair on to the

carpet, and bump him there. Lovell was quite a good fellow—one of the very best—but he often made his comrades feel like that.

Lovell was silent—but only for a moment or two. Indeed, it was but seldom that Arthur Edward Lovell was silent for more than a moment or two.

"It's a lot of fun," he said. "I've been to an auction before. You bid for things and run them up, you know, and it's exciting."

"Must be exciting, if you get landed with the goods and don't want 'em!" remarked Newcome. "I call that a mug's game!"

"You can call it what you like, Newcome. I've never expected any sense from you."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Can we play footer in this drizzle?" demanded Lovell. "Do you want to go biking in the rain? Do you want to stick in a stuffy picture palace, blinking at awful rot? Do you want to frowst over the study fire like Peele or Gower? It's a half-holiday, and we've got to do something. Well, there's that auction on at Latcham. Let's go!"

"But——" said Jimmy.

"We may pick up some bargains," said Lovell. "I heard of a chap once who bought something-or-other at an auction for a few shillings, and it turned out to be real genuine old thingummy, and he made pounds out of it. Pounds!" added Lovell impressively. "Now, I've an eye for a bargain."

"Quite an expert on genuine old thingummy, and well up in real antique what-do-you-call-it?" asked Raby.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Raby! The question is, are we going or are we not going?" said Lovell. "I say go. Now, then."

"After all, we want to get out of doors," said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "It will be a bit muddy walking to Latcham. Never mind—let's go to the giddy auction. I don't quite see

where the fun will come in; but Lovell seems to know all about it."

Lovell jumped up.

"Now you're talking," he said. "That's all right. The fact is, I'm quite keen on it. We want some new things for the study—the clock's never been the same since that ass Putty put the glue in it. And that sofa would disgrace a self-respecting dustbin. All the chairs are rocky——"

"Are we coming back to Rookwood carrying clocks and sofas and chairs?" ejaculated Newcome.

"Fathcad! They deliver the goods for you," said Lovell. "You just select what you want, bid for them, and they're knocked down to you, and you pay for them——"

"There's the rub. I don't like that part."

"Ass! Then they deliver them the next day, and—and there you are," said Lovell. "Now, sort out your mags and let's get going. We've wasted too much time in chin-wag already. I really never did see such fellows as you three chaps for talking!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. made up their minds to it. After all, something had to be done with the afternoon.

It was wet, it was drizzly, it was distinctly discouraging in every way. Footer was off, cycling was not attractive, and many of the Classical Fourth were at a loose end. Peele and Gower and Lattrey were playing banker in a quiet corner somewhere; but pursuits of that kind did not appeal to the Fistical Four. Tubby Muffin was snoozing over a study fire, but they certainly did not want to snooze. Erroll and Rawson were "swotting" Latin—but Jimmy Silver & Co. felt that they had quite enough Latin with Mr. Dalton in the Form-room—even a little too much, in fact. The Fistical Four sorted out raincoats and sallied forth from the House.

Anyhow, it was something to be out of doors, wet and drizzly as it was. They pulled down their caps, turned

up the collars of their coats, and plunged through the drizzle to the gates.

It was a long walk to Latham. The roads were muddy, the lanes muddier. Naturally, they took the short cuts; equally naturally, the short cuts were deeper in mire than the roads. After a mile or two three members of the party considered that they had been prize asses to start for Latham at all; but Lovell ploughed on with a determined, cheerful expression, resolved to enjoy the walk. Since it was his idea, it was a good idea. But had it been anyone else who had proposed that miry tramp to Latham, Lovell certainly would have told him what he thought of him, with more emphasis than politeness.

"Well, this is pretty thick, and no mistake," said Raby at last.

"What's a little mud?" grunted Lovell.

"It isn't a little—it's a lot!"

"Better to have gone by train!" grumbled Newcome.

"Railway fares are a waste, when we've got time to walk," said Lovell. "Buck up! I'm not grousing! Never mind a little mud."

"Oh, rats!"

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

Grunt—from Raby and Newcome.

"Of course, it would be nicer in a Rolls-Royce car!" said Lovell sarcastically. "I'm going to buy a motor-car some day, when some kind old gent will give me thirty thousand pounds for its upkeep. Just at present we've got to hoof it. Keep on!"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

The rain was coming down harder now; the drizzle had turned to a down-pour. Even Lovell's determined cheerfulness paled a little, and his three comrades began to look round for some kind of shelter. But there seemed no

shelter at hand save weeping, leafless trees—they were following a miry lane between meadows, drenched with rain.

Suddenly, from a narrow turning, there was a trampling, and a horseman rode out into the lane, splashing mud right and left. The Rookwood juniors jumped out of the way promptly.

The rider pulled in his horse as he saw them.

"Hi!"

"Hallo, it's a bobby!" said Lovell.

It was a mounted constable, with water streaming from his waterproof cloak. He waved his hand to the four schoolboys.

"Have you seen a man pass this way?" he called.

"No."

"Seen anybody?"

"No."

The mounted man rode on. He disappeared among weeping hedges and trees.

"He's after somebody!" remarked Lovell. "Pleasant job, in this weather—I don't think! Come on! We've got miles to do yet."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Raby, a few minutes later.

"What——"

"There's a shed."

"We're not looking for any dashed old shed!" exclaimed Lovell. "We're going to Latham."

"Go to Latham, or go to Jericho!" retorted Raby. "I'm jolly well going to get out of the rain."

And Raby plunged through a gap in a hedge and headed for the shed. Jimmy Silver and Newcome followed him.

Lovell stared after them.

"Look here, you slackers!" he shouted.

"Rats!"

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted, and followed his comrades. As a matter of fact, Arthur Edward was quite glad to get out of the rain.

CHAPTER 23.

A Startling Discovery!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. plunged into the shelter of the shed thankfully. The rain was coming down in torrents now, and their raincoats were streaming, their trousers were damp, and their caps wringing wet. Three members of the party were powerfully tempted to turn on the fourth and roll him in the mud for having led them on this hapless expedition. Perhaps Lovell realised that there was an electric atmosphere, for he did not turn his eloquence upon his drenched comrades.

"After all, it's jolly wet!" he remarked quite reasonably and amicably. "It's got worse since we started. Of course, a fellow couldn't foresee that."

"Of course, you couldn't, at any rate," said Newcome.

"Never mind, we're out of the rain, and it's too fast to last," said Jimmy Silver. "Thank goodness we found this shed!"

"Yes, rather!"

It was not an inviting shelter, really, but it was a case of any port in a storm to the Fistical Four of Rookwood. The shed was apparently used as a cattle shelter. One side was open to wind and weather. In one corner was a large stack of damp straw, not clean. Outside was a trough swimming with rain.

The four juniors stood well inside, looking out at drenched fields and trees. The rain came down in great splashes. They stamped their feet for warmth, and wrung out their caps.

"Nice, isn't it?" grunted Raby.

"Rotten!" said Newcome.

"Miles more to Latham, and miles back to Rookwood!" went on Raby.

"What a giddy half-holiday!"

"Oh, don't grouse!" said Lovell. "I'm as wet as you are!"

"To think that we might be in the study now, with a good fire!" said Raby.

"Bad for a chap to frowst over a fire!" said Lovell loftily.

"If I catch a cold, I shall jolly well punch your silly nose, Lovell."

"Well, I daresay you'll catch a cold — slackers and frowsters do, you know," remarked Lovell. "I must say it's chilly here. What about getting on to Latham?"

"In this rain, ass?"

"Well, we don't want to be late for the auction."

"Blow the auction!"

"Bless the auction!"

"Bother the auction!"

Auction sales, it appeared, did not seem attractive to Jimmy Silver & Co. just then. Lovell grunted.

"We came out to go to the auction," he said.

"We came out because we were silly asses, and let a sillier ass jaw us into it!" snapped Raby.

"And you're sticking in this shed because you're slackers, and afraid of a little wet!" said Lovell. It was really impossible for Arthur Edward to keep his eloquence bottled up for long.

Raby and Newcome glared. They were wet, they were muddy, they were fed-up to the chin. And Lovell, instead of showing any regret for having led them into this disastrous outing, was adopting his customary attitude of lofty superiority. Perhaps it was not surprising that Raby and Newcome became very cross, though Lovell did not seem to expect it.

"Well, if you like rain, have a little more of it!" roared Raby.

"Yes, rather!" concurred Newcome.

And Raby and Newcome collared Arthur Edward Lovell, and hurled him forth.

"Oh, my hat!"

Arthur Edward Lovell went spinning out in the rain.

He brought up against the horse trough, and pitched forward over it and there was a heavy splash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell lifted a dripping face from the trough.

He glared round at his comrades.

"You—you—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, then," interposed Jimmy Silver pacifically.

But Lovell did not heed. He came charging back into the shed with a terrific rush.

The next moment Lovell and Raby and Newcome were rolling over together in a struggling heap.

"Chuck it, you duffers!" shouted Jimmy.

"Buzz him out again!" roared Newcome.

"Outside, you fathead!"

"I'll jolly well——" panted Lovell.

Three excited juniors reeled and staggered to and fro. Lovell lost his footing and went down, bumping on the stack of straw in the corner of the shed, dragging down Raby and Newcome with him.

A yell rang through the shed, but it was not Lovell or Raby or Newcome who yelled. Loud and startled, that yell came from under the heap of straw on which they had crashed together.

"What——"

"Who——"

"Great Scott!"

Utterly amazed, the three juniors sprang to their feet, staring blankly at the heap of straw—now in motion. From the straw protruded a foot and part of a leg; from another spot a hand and sleeve projected. Evidently someone was hidden under the straw, and no doubt he had been startled when three schoolboys crashed down on him.

"Somebody's there!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my hat!"

The straw was tossed aside, and a man sprang to his feet. The four juniors stared at him blankly, and he stared back at them, with a fierce, savage, suspicious face. His eyes gleamed like those of a hunted animal, and it came to the minds of the astonished juniors that he was indeed hunted.

Only for a few seconds the man stood

panting and glaring. He was a short, thick-set man, with a bulldog jaw and a broken nose, and sharp, fierce little eyes set close together under thick brows. It was a face that, once seen, was not likely to be soon forgotten. But it was only for brief seconds that the Rookwooders saw it. The man turned from them, ran swiftly to the opening of the shed, and bolted out into the pouring rain.

Almost in a flash he disappeared from sight, running hard.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

The juniors stared after the vanished man, and then looked at one another. The sudden and unexpected happening had fairly astounded them.

"The silly ass, to clear out into the rain," said Lovell. "We shouldn't have hurt him, I suppose."

"What the thump was he hiding for?" said Raby. "He must have seen us coming here, and dodged under the straw."

Jimmy Silver looked very thoughtful.

"He had jolly good reasons for keeping out of sight, I should say," he answered. "You remember that mounted bobby we passed some time back—he was looking for somebody. Looks as if it may have been this chap he wanted."

Lovell whistled.

"Shouldn't wonder," he said. "He was scared at being found here, anyhow. If he's some rotter wanted by the police we ought to have collared him."

"Rather too late to think of that," said Jimmy.

The man had vanished, and the juniors discussed the matter for some time as they stood watching the rain. Fortunately, the surprising happening had restored peace in the Co. Lovell and Raby and Newcome did not renew their argument.

The juniors stamped about the shed, and waved their arms to keep warm, and waited dismally for the rain to stop. It did not stop. But after a time

it slackened, and they decided to get moving.

"Are we going on or going back?" asked Newcome.

"I'm going on," said Lovell gruffly.

"Oh, let's keep on, as we've come so far!" said Jimmy Silver. "We can get a train back from Latcham to Coombe, you know."

So they went onward, and tramped through dreary drizzle and deep mire to the town of Latcham, which they were very glad to reach.

CHAPTER 29.

Just Like Lovell!

"HERE'S the place!" said Lovell. The Fistical Four were feeling a little better now.

At the old inn at Latcham they had had some hot coffee and cake, and had been able to dry themselves at a glowing fire. So they were feeling better as they walked down the old High Street to the building where the auction was being held.

It was a large zinc building, and a poster outside announced that Mr. Bunce was holding the auction there that afternoon. The proceedings were already proceeding, so to speak; the Rookwooders were late for the start. They moved into the building among the crowd, which was not large, the weather probably having kept a good many people away. The auctioneer, a plump man with a rosy complexion, was already at Lot 37, and was tapping with his hammer.

"Gentlemen, this handsome rosewood cabinet — this splendid rosewood cabinet, in excellent condition—I am offered seven guineas for this first-class rosewood cabinet. Gentlemen, what improvement on seven guineas for this desirable rosewood cabinet?"

"Eight!" called out Lovell.

"You fobjous ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Dry up, you blithering chump!" hissed Raby.

Lovell did not heed.

If that handsome and desirable rosewood cabinet had been knocked down to Arthur Edward Lovell for eight guineas several problems would have arisen. First and foremost among them, where Lovell was to get eight guineas from to pay for it.

Fortunately, it was not knocked down to Lovell.

"Nine!" came from a podgy little gentleman with a large, hooked nose and a lisp.

"Ten!"

"Twelve!"

Lovell grinned at his comrades.

"All serene, you see," he said. "It's quite a game, you know. Only you have to keep your eyes peeled and not get landed with the stuff."

"And suppose you do get landed with it?" demanded Newcome.

"Oh, I shouldn't! But don't you fellows do any bidding. You're as likely as not to put your foot in it."

"And you're not?" snorted Raby.

"Not at all. I know my way about," explained Lovell. "I shan't get landed with anything I don't want. That's all right. Leave it to me!"

The chums of the Fourth had to leave it to Lovell, because there was nothing else to be done. Short of gagging Arthur Edward Lovell, there was no stopping him.

Lovell's confidence in his own perspicacity was unbounded. He was quite assured that he knew what he was about. He was going to bag some necessary things for the study, if possible, at bargain prices. And to while away the time he was going to help on the bidding, always taking great care not to be the fellow who made the final bid.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were very far from sharing Lovell's confidence. His perspicacity they regarded as a minus quantity. But there was no help for it, short of gagging their exuberant chum, which really was out of the question.

The rosewood cabinet was "knocked

down," and Lot 38 came on view. It was a large perambulator. The rosy-cheeked auctioneer tapped gently with his hammer, and proceeded with his psæan of praise.

"This beautiful baby-carriage, a triumph of the most modern construction, gentlemen, what offers for this handsome baby-carriage?"

"Ninepence!" came a voice, and there was a laugh. It was the tubby gentleman with the hooked nose and the lisp who made that offer, evidently in a spirit of humour.

The auctioneer grinned indulgently.

"Gentlemen, be serious. This handsome, reliable baby-carriage cost thirty guineas. What offers, gentlemen, for this most desirable lot?"

"Fifteen shillings!"

"A quid!"

"Thirty bob!"

"Thirty-five!"

There was a pause.

"Two pounds!" sang out Arthur Edward Lovell cheerily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged hopeless looks. Arthur Edward was "at it" again. But again Lovell came off scot-free.

"Two pounds ten shillings!"

"Three pounds!"

"Four!" rapped out Lovell.

The auctioneer glanced curiously at Lovell. Possibly he was puzzled by a schoolboy bidding for a baby-carriage. But Lovell had a right to bid if he chose, and he looked well-dressed enough to be good for the money.

"Gentlemen, four pounds I am offered," said the auctioneer. "Four pounds for this handsome baby-carriage, in excellent condition, hardly used. Are you making it guineas, Mr Isaacs?"

The hook-nosed gentleman shook his head.

"Gentlemen, this handsome baby-carriage going at four pounds. Going—going—"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed rather hard. What on earth he would

have done with a baby's perambulator, knocked down to him for four pounds, was a deep mystery.

But again he was in luck.

"Guineas!" came from the back of the crowd.

"Gentlemen, I am offered four guineas for this excellent baby-carriage. Going at four guineas. Going—going—gone!"

Rap!

Arthur Edward Lovell had quite a serious look. Four guineas was the top bid, and it had just saved him from being landed with a perambulator to wheel home to Rookwood.

"You thumping ass!" murmured Newcome.

It was an unfortunate remark.

Lovell's narrow escape from the perambulator might have been a warning to him. But Newcome's remark roused all his obstinacy again. He was quite determined to show his companions that he knew his way about, and that their uneasy fears were groundless.

Instead of keeping silent, therefore, he plunged into the game more recklessly than before.

Lot after lot was brought forward, and each time Lovell bid recklessly; but, considering that he was not bidding in earnest, he had amazing luck, for each time he was outbid by someone who really wanted the article.

Lovell grinned at his comrades from time to time, as if to say, "I told you so."

They began to watch him with interest now, wondering how long it would be before he got "landed." For such a peculiar game, kept up too long, was fairly certain to end in disaster. Lovell's fate was likely to resemble that of the lion-tamer, who put his head into the lion's mouth every day until he put it in once too often. It was certain to be bitten off at long last.

The only question in the minds of the Co. was, what sort of an undesired and undesirable article Lovell would

get landed with. They wondered whether it would be a perambulator or a suite of drawing-room furniture, or a grandfather's clock, or a dinner-set, or a carpet.

"Lot 54. Large leather trunk. A very strong trunk of very great capacity. Old-fashioned, but, gentlemen, the old trunks are of the stoutest make. Not one of your light, modern fibre about this. A genuine, strong trunk of solid leather."

There was no doubt that the trunk was solid and of great capacity. It was nearly five feet long, and its other dimensions were about two feet. The man who had built that trunk, long ago, had been a believer in the maxim that there is nothing like leather. Its weight must have been very considerable empty. Two men who had brought it forward looked rather tired when they had set it down. It was a trunk which a modern railway porter would have gazed at in despair and wonder. If in its youth that huge and heavy trunk had ever travelled by railroad, it seemed that there must have been giants on the earth in those days.

Many grinning glances were turned on the big trunk as the auctioneer extolled its value. No doubt a leather-dealer might have found his money's worth in it. Mr. Isaacs remarked that if he bought that trunk he would let it furnished—being evidently a humorist. He started the bidding with fifteen shillings.

"Pound!" said Lovell cheerily.

"Twenty-five shillings!"

"Twenty-six!"

"Thirty!"

"Two pounds!" called out Lovell.

"Gentlemen, this handsome trunk, this well-made trunk, this capacious travelling trunk of the most solid construction, is going at two pounds. What offers, gentlemen? Two pounds I am offered! Did I hear someone make it guineas?"

The auctioneer looked round.

If he had heard someone make it guineas his ears had deceived him, for there was silence.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, two pounds I am offered! Going at two pounds—"

Lovell had a cold feeling down his back.

"You've jolly well done it now!" murmured Newcome.

"Going at two pounds—going—going—"

Arthur Edward Lovell cast an anxious glance round him. Had he, indeed, "done it" at last?

He had!

"Going at two pounds—going—going—gone!"

"Yours, sir!" said the auctioneer, with a smile and a nod to the dismayed Lovell. "You will settle with that gentleman yonder. Next lot! Lot 55, a wireless set, complete with—"

Lovell was not listening.

He had not the remotest desire to join in the bidding for Lot 55. Lot 54 was enough for him—too much, in fact.

Arthur Edward Lovell was the happy possessor of a gigantic leather trunk, of no conceivable use to him or to anybody else, unless he should start in business as a leather-worker, and cut it up into boot-soles and saddles and such things. Which, of course, was quite impracticable for a fellow in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Lovell stood and stared at the trunk. His comrades stared at Lovell. He had "done it" now.

A rather dusty and olly gentleman nudged Lovell.

"You settle up now, sir, and, if you like, we can arrange for the delivery of the trunk, or you can send for it later in the day. Two pounds, please."

Lovell had the sum of two shillings and threepence in his pockets. It was obvious, even to Arthur Edward Lovell, that he had put his head into the lion's mouth once too often.

CHAPTER 30.

Back Up!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. looked very serious.

Lovell cast an almost haggard look at his chums.

He was landed now; there was no doubt about that. He could not repudiate his own bargain. Exactly how he would have stood legally, had he repudiated it, he did not know—as a minor and a schoolboy, probably he could not have been held to it. But an honourable fellow, of course, could not take advantage of that. The fact that the bargain could not possibly have been enforced on him made it absolutely essential for a decent fellow to stand by it. Perhaps the thought of backing out somehow crossed Lovell's mind for a moment; but, if so, it was only for a moment. He was "for it," and he knew it.

Mercifully, his comrades forbore to deal with him as he deserved.

At a time like this, when a fellow had landed himself in a scrape by his own wilful obstinacy, no doubt they would have been justified in leaving him to it, but that was not the part for loyal comrades to play.

Lovell had asked for it, and he had got it; and now it was up to his comrades to help him through. Among the Fistical Four there was frequently argument and dispute, and even punching was not quite unknown in their happy circle. But with them it was always sink or swim together. As a matter of course, the three backed up the hapless Lovell without even saying "I told you so!"—which certainly showed great forbearance and self-denial on their part.

"Two pounds!" said Jimmy Silver. "Wait a minute, my man—it's all serene. How much have you got, Lovell?"

"Two-and-threepence!" whispered Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I've got a ten-bob note," murmured Raby.

"Six shillings here," said Newcome.

The oily gentleman eyed the juniors rather curiously. Bidding for Lot 55 was going on briskly. Nobody was giving any attention to the happy possessor of Lot 54, excepting the oily gentleman, whose business it was to collect the hard cash. The juniors withdrew from the crowd. They were done with the auction now. Even Lovell had not the slightest desire to do any more bidding.

"That's eighteen-and-three altogether," murmured Lovell. "Have you got anything, Jimmy? Of course, I shall settle up."

Jimmy Silver suppressed a sigh.

He had a few shillings in his pockets, and a pound note which had been specially sent him by his father for some new football things.

But it was a case of all hands on deck, so to speak. Lovell had to be saved. The oily gentleman was already looking suspicious, and if Lovell had failed to take over his bargain, certainly there would have been a most unpleasant scene.

That had to be avoided at any cost. A Rookwood fellow was bound to be as good as his word, and it was a time for his friends to rally round him, reserving their comments till afterwards. Afterwards, no doubt, Lovell would hear what they thought about the matter and about him—at considerable length. But that was in the future; the present was a time for action.

Jimmy Silver produced a pound note and three shillings. There was more than enough to satisfy the oily gentleman.

"Taking it away with you, sir?" asked the man when his pecuniary claims had been satisfied. "Like to leave it till the morning? All goods 'ave to be cleared afore twelve to-morrow."

"Leave the blessed thing where it is," said Raby. "It's no good to you, Lovell. You don't want it at Rookwood."

"It's cost two pounds, Raby," said Lovell. "It must be worth something."

Somebody else offered thirty bob. Of course I'm not going to chuck it away."

"How the thump are you going to get it to the school, and what the dickens are you going to do with it there?" demanded Raby.

"Leave that to me!" said Lovell, with a touch of his old loftiness, which made George Raby breathe very hard.

"Well, sir, I shall be wanted in a minute," said the oily gentleman.

"Could you send it over to Rookwood for me?" asked Lovell.

"Where's that?"

The oily gentleman had apparently never heard of Rookwood.

"Near Coombe."

"Oh!" The oily gentleman considered. "I'll manage it, sir. Seven-and-six You'll pay now, please."

"You couldn't do it for fifteen-pence?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Course I couldn't!" said the oily gentleman warmly, and he turned away and left the juniors to deal with the gigantic trunk themselves.

"We've got just one-and-three left among us," said Jimmy, looking at his chums.

"It's a jolly good trunk!" remarked Lovell.

"Oh, blow the trunk! What are you going to do with it?"

"Take it to Rookwood, of course."

"It won't go into the study."

"I can put it in a box-room. I'll advertise it for sale in the local paper, same as Carthew did with his bike, and very likely sell it at a profit. There's a lot of leather in it, and leather's very expensive these days. The fact is, it's rather a bargain."

Arthur Edward Lovell was recovering.

"You frabjous owl!" said Raby.

"Don't talk to us about bargains! Of all the silly idiots——"

"Of all the crass dummies——" said Newcome.

"Look here, are you going to help me with this trunk or not?" demanded Lovell. "We can carry it among us."

"Carry it?" gasped Raby. "Carry

that back to Rookwood? I can see myself doing it!"

"Carry it out of here, anyhow," said Lovell. "We've got to get it away. We can get somebody to give us a lift with it to Rookwood. Or we can hire a horse and cart."

"For fifteenpence?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Well, we can leave it at the carrier's office," said Lovell. "We can pay carriage on it at the other end to-morrow. I'll borrow a few bob of Morny."

The chums of Rookwood looked at the big trunk. If Lovell was going to keep it, certainly it had to be got away from the auction-rooms. Taking it to the carrier's office was perhaps the best plan—but carrying it there was a big proposition. Even four sturdy fellows were likely to find that gigantic trunk difficult to negotiate.

"Lend a hand!" said Lovell briskly.

"Look here, leave it here!" growled Raby. "The rotten thing's no good—we've wasted the money, anyhow. What's the good of carting it away?"

"Don't be an ass, Raby!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Oh, let's lend a hand!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "It's not far to the carrier's office, anyhow."

Four pairs of hands grasped the great trunk. A good many grinning faces were turned on the Rookwood juniors as they bore it out into the street.

In the street they set it down, to gasp for breath. Undoubtedly it was a very heavy trunk.

"Can't we get a trolley or something somewhere?" gasped Raby.

"Where the thump are we to get a trolley?" snapped Lovell. "Put your beef into it! It's only a hundred yards!"

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver. "Up she goes!"

Up went the huge trunk. With a Rookwood junior at each corner it swung into the air, and the four corners rested on four shoulders. Thus

was it borne along the High Street of Latcham.

A light drizzle descended on the trunk and its bearers. But they did not feel cold now. Their exertions sufficed to keep them very warm. Some members of the rising generation of Latcham gathered and followed them, evidently interested in the trunk. One youth inquired whether it was a "moving job," and another asserted that they had "pinched" the trunk—and the latter suggestion caught on. With crimson faces the Rookwooders marched on with their burden.

"Look out!" yelled one of the urchins. "There's a copper!"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Jimmy.

The policeman at the corner looked very curiously at the Rookwooders and the trunk. But he did not suppose that they had "pinched" it. By the time they reached the carrier's office nine or ten youths of various ages were following them in a procession, all eagerly discussing the supposed "pinching" of the trunk, and the nerve of the "pinchers" in passing a "copper" with it.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad to hand that trunk over to the carrier. They came out of the office feeling that a weight was gone from their minds, as well as from their shoulders. Outside, the youth of Latcham greeted them.

"'Ere they are!"

"'Oo pinched the trunk?"

"For goodness' sake let's get out of this!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four walked off with burning faces, at a good speed.

CHAPTER 31.

The wanted Man!

"SHANKS' pony again!" growled Raby.
"We've got to hoof it! Oh dear!"

There was no help for it.

Fifteenpence remained to the Fistical Four, and fifteenpence would not cover the railway fares to Coombe for four.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had intended to take the train back. That intention had to be abandoned now. It was Shanks' pony, as Raby remarked; and their only consolation was that the rain had stopped at last.

By miry lane and muddy fieldpath the juniors tramped on, leaving Latcham behind. Lovell had declared that it would be "fun" attending the auction; but, so far, his comrades had failed to perceive any fun in it. Indeed, three members of the party agreed that, of all the utterly rotten ways they had ever spent a half-holiday, this was beyond doubt the rottenest. With muddy and miry miles before them, they did not leave Lovell in any doubt as to their opinion on the subject.

"Hallo! There's that bobby again!" remarked Lovell, perhaps glad to change the topic. A mounted constable, who looked very muddy, appeared in sight in the lane.

On a closer inspection, however, the juniors saw that it was not the same mounted constable whom they had seen earlier in the afternoon on their way to Latcham. Apparently, more than one officer was patrolling the countryside between Latcham and Coombe, and the Rookwooders wondered whether this search had anything to do with the broken-nosed man with the bulldog jaw whom they had surprised under the straw in the shed.

The constable was riding towards the juniors, and he pulled in his horse as they came up to him.

"Looking for somebody?" asked Lovell.

"Yes, sir. I suppose you haven't seen anybody dodging or hiding about these parts?"

"Man with a broken nose, by any chance?" asked Lovell.

The mounted man gave quite a jump. "You've seen him?" he exclaimed.

"My hat! Is that the man you

want?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We've seen him right enough."

"Oh, good! Where—and when? Quick!"

The Fistical Four explained about the meeting in the shed three hours or more ago. The constable listened very attentively, especially to their description of the man.

"That's Nosey Jenks, right enough!" he said. "He's still about here, then. We'll have him sooner or later."

"Nosey Jenks?" repeated Jimmy Silver. "What a giddy name! I suppose he's a criminal, as you're after him, officer?"

"Burglar," said the constable. "Six months ago he got away with a bundle of banknotes from the Latham County Bank. He was spotted and caught; but he got rid of the banknotes before our men laid hands on him. He got away before they could get him to the station, and vanished—and we never expected to see him in these parts again. But he was seen the day before yesterday—and again yesterday—so its pretty clear that he's come back to find the banknotes he hid somewhere before he was caught that night. He's got a face that's easily remembered, with that nose on it."

"I think everybody would remember his chivvy!" grinned Lovell.

"If you should happen to see him again, let them know at the nearest police station at once."

"Yes, rather!"

"He's taken to the fields, and he'll never get to a railway station without being nabbed," said the constable. "But he's giving us a hunt, and no mistake. Where's that shed exactly?"

The juniors pointed out the direction of the shed, and the mounted man rode away.

The Rookwooders walked on towards the school.

"Lucky we came out this afternoon, after all," said Lovell, with a glance at his comrades.

"How's that?" grunted Raby.

"Well, we've been able to give the police a tip about a man they want. May lead to his capture."

"Rats! I fancy he's a good ten miles away from that shed by this time. Must be, if he's got any sense!"

"Might be that shed where he hid the loot," said Lovell. "I remember seeing something in the local paper about the bank robbery now. It was rather interesting, too. The thief was spotted getting out of the bank by a top window, and they got after him on the roof, and he got through a window into an attic in the next house—a house belonging to a Colonel Thompson. It's really interesting—"

"Blessed if I see it! Why?"

"Because it was Colonel Thompson's stuff that was being sold by auction to-day," said Lovell. "He's gone abroad, and his household effects were sold by auction—we've bagged his old trunk."

"You have, you mean!" said Newcome. "I wish the giddy colonel had taken his dashed old trunk abroad with him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Raby.

"They caught the burglar a few minutes after he got away from Colonel Thompson's house—I remember reading it in the paper," said Lovell, unheeding. "It's near the bridge, you know and it was suggested that he threw the bundle of banknotes into the river before the bobbies collared him. But his coming back here looks as if he hid them somewhere where he could find them again."

"Shouldn't wonder," yawned Jimmy Silver. "Here's Coombe at last. Less than a mile to Rookwood now, thank goodness!"

"Might be fun hunting for those banknotes next half-holiday!" said Lovell.

"Yes; just about as funny as going to auctions and buying silly old trunks!" said Raby.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Put it on," said Jimmy Silver. "We

haven't too much time to get back before lock-up."

Tired and muddy, the Fistical Four reached Rookwood School just before old Mack shut the gates. They tramped into the House not in the best of spirits.

It was some time before they got rid of the mud they had brought home with them. Then they had a rather late tea in the end study, and felt much better.

Over tea Arthur Edward Lovell was quite himself.

"It's all right about that trunk!" he told his comrades.

"Is it?"

"Oh, yes! I've very little doubt that I shall get three pounds for it," said Lovell. "It's really a valuable trunk, though it's so jolly heavy. When I sell it—"

"When!" said Newcome.

"Yes, when!" snapped Lovell. "When I sell it I'll settle with you fellows—"

"You'll get your new footer boots, Jimmy, in time for football next winter perhaps!" remarked Raby.

"I'll settle up out of my allowance!" roared Lovell. "And when I sell the trunk I shall have three quid."

"Why not ask ten pounds for it?" inquired Newcome.

"I don't suppose I could get ten."

"I don't suppose you could get three. So you may as well ask ten as three," said Newcome amicably.

"You silly owl!"

And the subject of the unfortunate trunk was dropped in the end study.

CHAPTER 32.

Homeless!

"MASTER LOVELL!"

"Hallo, Tupper!"

"Which there's a big trunk come for you, sir, in the lodge, sir," said Tupper.

"Oh, good!" said Lovell.

It was the following day, after morn-

ing class. Jimmy Silver & Co. had come out of the Form-room and were sauntering in the quadrangle when Tupper brought his news.

Lovell had been talking about the trunk—apparently convinced, by this time, that he had made a great bargain. Even Lovell did not pretend that he had any use for the gigantic trunk; but he averred that, on a resale, he would make a handsome profit, the only question being to find a buyer.

That question, in the opinion of his chums, would remain a question without an answer.

Jimmy Silver was not listening very much to Lovell's anticipations, however; he was thinking about his football boots—for which the pound note had been intended. The trifling detail had quite escaped Lovell's memory.

"Let's go and get it," said Lovell. "By the way, I shall have to pay the carrier. I can borrow a bob or two of the fellows."

The Fistical Four walked down to Mack's lodge. By that time it had leaked out that Lovell had made a big bargain at the Latham auction the day before, and a good many of the Fourth were curious to see it. So quite a number of the Classical Fourth gathered to look at the goods now delivered by the carrier.

The carrier had landed the trunk at Mack's lodge, and he was wiping his brow. The exertion seemed to have tired him.

"There it is," said Lovell.

"Yes, 'ere it is," said old Mack. "This 'ere yours, Master Lovell? This 'ere is agin the rules."

"There's nothing in it," said Lovell, with a grin. "I'm not smuggling tack into the school, Mack. How much?"

That question was addressed to the carrier.

"Five shillings, sir."

"Give him the trunk, old man," advised Raby. "That's just about the value of it; and you don't want it here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell glared at Raby.

"Do shut up, you ass! Morny, old man, will you lend me five bob till Saturday?"

Valentine Mornington handed out the required loan. The carrier took it and wiped his fevered brow again.

"'Ot work, sir," he said. "That trunk's 'eavy, sir. I've 'andled lots of trunks in my time, but that there trunk, sir, is a regler corker!"

Lovell nodded.

"Makes a man thirsty, sir!" said the carrier.

Lovell looked appealingly at his comrades. Fifteenpence remained to the Fistical Four. Jimmy Silver, with a rather wry smile, handed out his last shilling, and Lovell tipped the carrier. That gentleman wiped his brow again and departed.

The trunk was left in the doorway of Mack's lodge. Old Mack stared at it disparagingly, and blinked at Lovell.

"This 'ere can't be left 'ere!" he said. "Blocking up a man's doorway. You see 'ere, Master Lovell——"

"I don't want it left here!" snapped Lovell. "I want it carried into a box-room."

Old Mack blinked again.

"Carry that!" he said. "I ain't a blinking giant, Master Lovell, neither I ain't a steam-crane, nor yet a blooming derrick!"

With that assurance, old Mack retired into his lodge, and closed his door on the trunk and its owner.

Lovell glanced round at a ring of grinning faces. That huge trunk, once the property of Colonel Thompson, of Latcham, now the property of Arthur Edward Lovell, of Rookwood School, had to be moved; but the question of transport was a serious one. Certainly old Mack would not have undertaken the herculean task without a very considerable tip—the threepence that remained to the Fistical Four certainly would not have induced him to do so.

Some of the juniors, with grinning faces, examined the trunk. Once upon

a time it had been a magnificent structure, there was no doubt of that. But time had told on it. The lock was broken, the key was gone; the inside lining was torn and ragged in many places and rather damp, as if the trunk had been stacked for a long time in a lumber-room—as doubtless it had. Putty of the Fourth jumped on the trunk.

"Gentlemen, what offers for this magnificent mouldy trunk? Going at twopence halfpenny——"

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

"Shut up, you ass!" hooted Lovell.

But Putty did not shut up. He ran on in the style of the Latcham auctioneer.

"Twopence halfpenny I am offered! Gentlemen, let me point out the advantages of this trunk! In a time of house shortage, gentlemen, a trunk like this is not to be despised! Divided into apartments, it could be let in flats——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owl!" roared Lovell. "Get off that trunk!"

"Any advance on twopence halfpenny? Threepence! Did somebody say threepence? Going at threepence, which is really below its value! It is worth fourpence of anybody's money——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Going at threepence! Going! Going! Gone! Yaroooooh!"

The humorous Putty was gone, too, as Lovell hooked his leg and brought him down off the big trunk.

"Now lend me a hand with the thing, some of you fellows!" said Lovell.

"Half a dozen of you——"

"Catch me!" grinned Townsend.

"Ask next door!" said Topham.

"Look here, you slackers! Bear a hand!" shouted Lovell. "It can't be left here!"

"Oh, pile in!" said Jimmy Silver. "Volunteers wanted!"

The Fistical Four collared the big trunk. Rawson and Errol and Conroy

lent a helping hand. With seven fellows holding it, the great trunk was swung up and borne away.

"Stop!"

It was Mr. Dalton's voice, as the juniors reached the House with Lovell's big bargain. The master of the Fourth stared at the party in amazement.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "To whom does this—this enormous trunk belong?"

"Me, sir," said Lovell.

"And where, in the name of all that is absurd, did you obtain possession of such an article?"

"I bought it at an auction, sir."

"Upon my word! You cannot bring that rubbish into the House, Lovell! Take it away!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Mr. Richard Dalton raised his hand.

"Take it away at once!"

"But, sir—"

"Take it away!"

"Oh dear! Come on, you chaps!" groaned Lovell.

The procession turned away from the House, Mr. Dalton frowning after it. A crowd of grinning juniors followed the seven bearers and the huge, shabby trunk.

"Whither now, O King?" asked Conroy.

"Perhaps Mack will take it in if I tip him?" said Lovell hopefully.

Back to the lodge went the procession. But old Mack, with an emphasis that was really uncalled for, declined to have anything to do with the trunk under any circumstances whatever.

"Try the sergeant!" grinned Putty of the Fourth.

"Come on!" gasped Lovell.

The trunk swayed on again to the school shop in the corner behind the beeches, kept by Sergeant Kettle. The sergeant stared at it with wide eyes. He stared still more when he was requested to take it in and give it shelter. His answer was as emphatic

as Mack's, and even more so. The trunk went on its travels again, its bearers panting and perspiring by this time, and their followers howling with laughter. Half the Lower School of Rookwood had gathered to look at "Lovell's Latest," as Putty of the Fourth had already christened the huge trunk.

"I—I say, I can't stand this much longer!" gasped Raby. "What the thump are we going to do with it, Lovell?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell panted.

"Shove it in the wood-shed!" he gasped.

"Oh dear! Go it!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

With a final effort, Lovell & Co. bore the enormous trunk to the wood-shed. And they found the wood-shed locked.

That was the last straw.

"Chuck it!" gasped Jimmy.

Crash!

The trunk was landed beside the wood-shed. The juniors mopped their brows.

"Look here——" exclaimed Lovell.

"Good-bye!"

"The trunk can't be left here!" hooted Lovell.

"Looks to me as if it can! Anyhow, we're leaving it!"

"You silly owls! You dashed slackers! You—you—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell was left alone with his great bargain. He stared after his comrades, then he stared at the big trunk. Then he sat on it and wiped his brow.

CHAPTER 33.

The Head is Surprised!

"W HAT—what is this?"
Dr Chisholm, headmaster of Rookwood School, seemed surprised.

He paused in his stately walk, adjusted his eyeglass upon his august

nose, and stared intently at the object which had attracted his attention, and caused his surprised ejaculation.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "It is a—a—a trunk!"

It was, in fact, a gigantic leather trunk, more than four feet long, and very high and broad—almost a mammoth trunk. It was a massive relic of the days when trunks were trunks.

Even considered merely as a trunk, it was rather unusual. In its present surroundings it was more than unusual—it was startling. It lay in the open air, not far from the wood-shed, behind some of the school buildings, and it was wet with recent rain. How that gigantic trunk had found a place within the walls of Rookwood was a puzzling mystery to the Head. He gazed at it in perplexity. As the poet has remarked:

"The thing was neither rich nor rare,

But how the dickens did it get there?"

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head.

He glanced upward, as if suspecting that the mysterious trunk might have been dropped in the school grounds from a passing aeroplane. Then he glanced round him, and sighted four members of the Classical Fourth Form—Jimmy Silver, Raby, Newcome, and Lovell.

The four were, as a matter of fact, watching the Head.

They had seen that the headmaster's stately walk was taking him along the secluded path by which lay the big trunk. They had wondered uneasily whether he would spot it, and what he would say if he did. So they kept him in sight, at a respectful distance, so they were in view when the headmaster glanced round.

Dr. Chisholm beckoned to them.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "He's seen it, and he's seen us. You ass, Lovell——"

"You chump, Lovell!" murmured Raby.

"You frabjous ass!" muttered Newcome.

The Head's beckoning finger was not to be disregarded. Reluctantly, the Fistical Four of the Fourth approached their headmaster.

Then Dr. Chisholm pointed to the huge trunk.

"What does this mean, Silver?" he asked.

"That—that trunk, sir?" asked Jimmy.

"This—this enormous trunk," said the Head. "Do you know anything about it, Silver?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"It is extraordinary that such a thing should be lying here," said the Head. "Does it belong to you, Silver?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"It's mine, sir!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

Dr. Chisholm's eyeglass turned on Lovell.

"This is your trunk, Lovell?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is not your school trunk," said the Head.

"Oh! No, sir."

"Then what is it?" demanded Dr. Chisholm. "How came you to be the possessor of this—this huge trunk, and why is it lying here, in the open air?"

Arthur Edward Lovell crimsoned under the steady gaze of the Head. He was feeling extremely uncomfortable.

"I—I bought it, sir," he stammered.

"In the name of all that is absurd, Lovell, why did you purchase this enormous and useless trunk?"

"I—I didn't mean to——"

"You purchased it without meaning to do so?" exclaimed the Head, raising his eyebrows. He was naturally astonished at such a statement.

"Ye-e-es, sir," stammered Lovell. "It was at an auction——"

"An auction?"

"That's it, sir. There—there was an auction the other day at Latcham—they were selling the goods of Colonel Thompson, of Latcham, who's gone

abroad, sir. We—we went, and—and I did some bidding for—”

“You did some bidding?” repeated the Head.

“Yes, sir, and—and got landed with the trunk. I—I didn’t expect it to be knocked down to me,” explained Lovell.

“Bless my soul!”

Dr. Chisholm fairly blinked at Lovell.

He did not know Arthur Edward so well as Arthur Edward’s chums knew him. So he was greatly surprised to hear that Lovell had entertained himself by bidding at an auction for goods he did not want to buy.

“Dear me!” said the Head at last. “This is very extraordinary! You seem to have acted very thoughtlessly, Lovell. In fact, very foolishly. I did not know you were so stupid a boy.”

Lovell’s face, already crimson, fairly burned. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome manfully strove to suppress their smiles. They had already told Lovell what they thought of him, more than once. Now he was hearing much the same from the Head, though in more polished language.

“I should not have expected you to act so recklessly, thoughtlessly, and foolishly, Lovell,” said the Head.

“Oh, sir!”

“You have wasted your money, probably ten or twelve shillings,” said the Head severely.

Lovell gasped. He was glad that the headmaster did not guess that the huge trunk had run into pounds.

“And why is the trunk brought here?” continued the Head.

“I—I had to bring it away, sir,” said the unhappy Lovell. “It—it’s worth something, sir.”

“Very little, I think,” said the Head. “It appears to be in a deplorable condition—the lock seems quite shattered, it is torn and generally dilapidated. You were extraordinarily stupid to purchase this trunk, Lovell.”

“Oh, sir!” mumbled Lovell. “I—I hope to be able to sell it again, sir. The—the leather’s worth something, sir.”

“It may be worth something to a person whose calling is in leather,” said the Head. “It can be worth nothing to you. Why is the trunk placed here?”

“Mr. Dalton told me it couldn’t be taken into the House, sir.”

“Quite so very right and proper. You must dispose of this trunk immediately, Lovell. It cannot remain here. Certainly it cannot be placed in the House. It must be disposed of. In fact, I will give instructions to the house-keeper to request the dustman to remove it on his next visit.”

“Oh, sir!”

“You should not have attended an auction, Lovell. You should not have joined in the bidding. Above all, you should not have made bids for articles you did not desire to purchase. Your conduct seemed to me to indicate the most crass stupidity on your part. You will take two hundred lines of ‘Virgil’ for this act of folly, Lovell.”

“Oh!”

“And unless you contrive, in some manner, to dispose of this trunk immediately, it will be removed by the dustman!” added the Head.

With that, Dr. Chisholm resumed his stately walk.

Arthur Edward Lovell was left staring at his trunk, and his comrades staring at Lovell—and smiling.

CHAPTER 34.

Unexpected!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL
grunted.

From every fellow in the Lower School at Rookwood, Lovell had received more or less chipping on the subject of his bargain at the Latham auction-rooms.

Truly, a reckless bidder at an auction sale could scarcely have been landed with an article more cumbersome and utterly useless than that enormous trunk.

Lovell had hoped to get his money back on the bargain. He had advertised the trunk for sale in the local paper at Crombe. There had been no replies, so far, and Lovell had given up expecting any.

Nevertheless, the idea of having his trunk taken away by the dustman as rubbish was very disconcerting to Lovell. He had paid hard money for it. It was a good trunk for anybody who wanted a trunk nearly large enough to live in.

Jimmy Silver had made the really useful suggestion that it should be put up at the next auction in Latham to go for what it would fetch. But Lovell did not like that idea. It was only too probable that the huge trunk would have to go for much less than Lovell had given for it.

Somehow or other Lovell still hoped to see his money back on that trunk. He longed and yearned to make a profit on the transaction—not for the sake of the money but so that he could turn on his chums with the simple remark: "I told you so."

Now the Head had butted in—which really Lovell might have expected to happen sooner or later.

The trunk reposed in a secluded corner, but even there it could not be expected to adorn the landscape for ever unobserved.

"Well, it's got to go!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "The sooner the better, old chap. There's been quite enough jokes made about that trunk!"

Snort from Lovell.

"Perhaps we shall hear the end of it when it's gone," assented Raby. "All very well for Lovell to play the goat like this but it lets the study down! Makes the fellows think the end study is a home for idiots, you know!"

"Look here!" grunted Lovell.

"I dare say a ragman would give a bob or two for it," suggested Newcome. "Though I don't know how he'd set it away if he did."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lovell. "That's

a jolly good trunk. I know it's heavy. That's because the leather's so jolly good. I know the lining is torn; but I suppose lining can be mended. The lock's gone; but locks can be put on trunks easily enough. I could get a good price for that trunk if I could get into touch with a chap who wanted such a thing."

"If!" grinned Raby.

"I may get an answer to my advertisement any day," went on Lovell. "I gave a full description of the trunk, and any fellow who wanted one like it would jump at the chance. That trunk must have cost twenty-five pounds at least—before the War, too!"

"Before the Peninsular War, I think, from the look of it!" said Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Lovell crossly. "My belief is that I shall sell that trunk for a fiver."

"Oh, my hat!"

"That is, of course, if the Head doesn't butt in and spoil it. It's rather hard on a chap to lose his money because of his headmaster butting in. Still, very likely he'll forget all about it. He does forget things," said Lovell hopefully. "I'm pretty certain he'll forget to ask for my lines. He's got his good points. As soon as I get my next allowance I'm going to tip Mack to shove it out of sight in the wood-shed. You can cackle as much as you like, but I shall see my money back on that trunk all right. You'll see."

Arthur Edward Lovell spoke with a conviction he did not quite feel. But it was quite impossible for Arthur Edward Lovell to admit that he was an ass. Though, as his chums had politely reminded him more than once, the fact was plain enough whether he admitted it or not.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked back to the House—three members of the Co. smiling, and Arthur Edward Lovell frowning.

Tubby Muffin called to them as they came in.

"Letter for you, Lovell."

"Oh, good!" said Lovell.

Perhaps Lovell hoped that the letter was an answer to his advertisement of the valuable trunk. He hurried across to the rack to take it down.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell a minute later.

"Remittance?" asked Raby hopefully. "Just in time for tea in the study!"

"Better than that," said Lovell.

He grinned cheerily.

"I think you fellows had an idea that I couldn't sell that trunk!" he said.

"Just a few," agreed Jimmy Silver.

"You fancied that I wasted half-a-crown in advertising it in the local paper?"

"You wasted exactly two-and-six if you spent half-a-crown on the ad," said Newcome.

"Look at that, then."

Lovell held out his letter to his three chums. Jimmy Silver, in some surprise, took it, and the three read it together. And then they stared.

For the letter ran:

"Dear Sir.—From your description of the trunk you have for sale, I think it is just the one I am in want of. Please let me know whether you will accept five pounds, or name your price.—Yours truly,

"JOHN SMITH.

"The Peal of Bells,
"Greenwood."

CHAPTER 35.

Lovell in Luck!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. blinked at that letter.

It fairly took their breath away. Arthur Edward Lovell grinned.

After all the chipping he had received over his curious bargain at the Latham Auction Rooms the week before, Arthur Edward Lovell felt that he was entitled to indulge in a triumphant grin.

Five pounds for the colonel's old trunk showed a handsome profit on the transaction—a profit of whole quids!

There were few fellows in the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood who could have picked up an old trunk at an auction sale and sold it the following week at a handsome profit. Or rather, there was only one fellow who could have done it. And the name of him was Arthur Edward Lovell!

"Well, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Newcome, in astonishment.

"It's a hoax!" said Raby.

"A what?" hooted Lovell.

"A hoax! Nobody in his senses would give five pounds for that rotten old trunk!"

"You silly ass, Raby!"

Jimmy examined the letter with care. So far as he could see, it was genuine enough. Mr. John Smith, whomsoever Mr. John Smith might be, had read the description of the trunk and decided that he wanted it. If Mr. John Smith had any use to put it to, no doubt five pounds was a reasonable price for the great leather structure.

"Looks fair and square," said Jimmy at last. "I'm jolly glad!"

"I fancy I told you I could sell that trunk," grinned Lovell. "I won't say 'I told you so!' But I did tell you so, all the same!"

Lovell took back his letter and read it through again with great satisfaction. His comrades were puzzled, but certainly pleased. They had lent Lovell most of the cash with which he had paid for his bargain at the auction. So they, as well as Lovell, seemed likely to see their money back much sooner than they had anticipated.

"Jolly good news—what?" smiled Lovell.

"Jolly good!" agreed Jimmy Silver heartily. The captain of the Fourth was surprised, but undoubtedly he was pleased.

"I'll tell you what," said Lovell. "I'll go over to Latham again for the next auction, and pick up some more bar-

gains. Fellow might make a lot of money that way—fellow with an eye for a bargain, of course. You fellows wouldn't be much good at it."

"Oh!"

"I knew that was a jolly good trunk, you know. You chaps didn't see it, but I did."

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

By this time, Arthur Edward Lovell had apparently persuaded himself that he had bought the old trunk purely and simply as a bargain, regardless of the fact that he had been bidding recklessly by way of a jest, and had had the big trunk knocked down to him quite unexpectedly. But that was just like Arthur Edward Lovell.

Still, the transaction seemed to have turned out well; the chums of the Fourth had to acknowledge that. Whether intentionally or not, Lovell had brought off a bargain.

Arthur Edward seemed to be walking on air, as he proceeded to the end study with his chums for tea.

Over tea he talked a good deal, chiefly on the topic of himself and his unusual perspicacity as a bargain hunter.

The offer of five pounds for the trunk was, indeed, a much-needed solace to Arthur Edward, after all the chipping he had received on the subject.

The news of the letter from Mr. John Smith spread in the Fourth Form passage, and a good many fellows came along to the end study to inquire about it.

Lovell laid the letter on the table for all to see.

The general impression at first was that the letter was a hoax. Mornington declared that nobody but Lovell could possibly be ass enough to buy that trunk at all.

But Morny, when he had read the letter, tried to admit that it looked genuine enough. Mr. Smith, of the Peal of Bells, apparently wanted just such a trunk for some reason of his own.

"Well, you're in luck, old man," said Mornington. "I've always heard that there's such a thing as fool's luck——"

"What?" ejaculated Lovell.

"And this proves it!" said Morny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Lovell.

"It jolly well does," said Putty of the Fourth. "This man Smith wants to buy the trunk for more than Lovell gave for it, which proves another thing——"

"What's that?" grunted Lovell.

"That you're not the biggest ass in Hampshire, as we've always supposed," said Putty blandly. "There's one bigger, and that's Smith."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Lovell, I'll go and see the man for you if you like," said Tubby Muffin. "I'll collect the money for you, and——"

Lovell grinned.

"I don't think!" he said. "You can go and eat coke, Tubby. I'm going over to Greenwood on my bike after tea, to see the man and settle up without delay. He can send for the trunk to-morrow. This man Smith seems to be a jolly sensible chap; he knows a bargain."

There was no doubt that Arthur Edward Lovell was in high feather. Certainly he "spread" himself a little; and howsoever the other fellows jested on the subject, they had to admit that, as Peele put it, "money talks." Lovell was the fellow who was going to capture a fiver for the old trunk, and that was a fact that could not be gainsaid.

After tea the Fistical Four wheeled out their bicycles. The village of Greenwood was only a few miles away, and there was time to bike across and see Mr. Smith before lock-up.

Lovell wanted to clinch the matter at once. Possibly he had a lurking doubt that Mr. Smith, given time, might repent him of his offer. For really and truly, at the bottom of his heart, Lovell could not quite understand why any man, presumably in his

right senses, should offer five pounds for that dilapidated old trunk.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome cycled over with him, rather curious to see Mr. John Smith, whose munificent offer had brought so much satisfaction to Lovell.

The four juniors pedalled along the country lanes at a great rate.

About half-way to Greenwood there was a sudden interruption.

A constable stepped out of a gap in the hedge, and held up his hand, and the four juniors jammed on their brakes and jumped down.

"Hallo, what's the trouble!" asked Jimmy Silver.

The constable scanned them.

"All right," he said, "you can get on!"

"But what the thump did you stop us for?" demanded Lovell, rather warmly.

"Dooty, sir!" said the gentleman in blue. "My orders are to watch this road. We're looking for a man, and he ain't far off, either."

Lovell whistled.

"Nosey Jenks?" he asked.

The constable gave him a quick look.

"What do you know about him?" he asked.

"Lots!" answered Lovell cheerily.

"We happen to be the chaps who found the giddy burglar hiding in a shed Latcham way, one day last week."

"Oh, I see. You've not seen him since?"

"No!" said Jimmy Silver.

The constable stepped back into the hedge, and the Fistical Four remounted their machines and rode on.

"So they haven't got Jenks yet," remarked Raby.

"Must be an ass to hang on around here, with all the bobbies after him," said Newcome.

Lovell grinned.

"He's after the loot he hid away in these parts, and he won't be happy till he gets it," he remarked. "I fancy they'll get him before he gets the loot, at this rate."

"It's queer!" Jimmy Silver remarked thoughtfully. "It's months ago that that man Jenks robbed the bank at Latcham, and got away with a bundle of banknotes. They suppose that he hid them somewhere, as he had nothing on him when the police collared him. As he's come back after getting away, it looks as if he hid the loot somewhere around Latcham; but it's more than a week since we saw him in that shed, hiding from the bobbies. It's jolly queer that he hasn't got hold of the stuff yet, if it's really hidden in these parts as they suppose."

"Jolly queer!" agreed Lovell. "It's jolly risky of him to come back, too. He'd be known anywhere, with his broken nose."

"I suppose he thinks it's worth the risk, with two or three thousand pounds in notes lying around," said Raby. "Must be a jolly exciting life for him."

"There's Greenwood," said Lovell, as they came in sight of the village.

The chums of the Fourth rode into the village. The Peal of Bells, a little old-fashioned inn, stood at the end of the little old rugged High Street. Greenwood was a quiet little sleepy place, with not more than thirty inhabitants, and it did not even boast a village policeman.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rode up to the inn, and jumped off their machines.

CHAPTER 36.

All Serene!

"MR. SMITH at home?"
Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question of the red-cheeked, rather sleepy-looking innkeeper at the Peal of Bells.

The innkeeper nodded.

"Yes, sir; he's always at home since he's been staying here," he said. "Here, George, tell Mr. Smith there's a young gentleman to see him."

A plump, red-cheeked youth blinked

at the Rookwood juniors, and disappeared upstairs.

He came back in a few minutes.

"Mr. Smith wants to know the young gentleman's name and his business," he said. "He's got a cold, he says, and can't come down."

"My name's Lovell, and I've come about the trunk, tell him that," said Lovell.

"Yes, sir!"

The lad went upstairs again.

The juniors heard a murmur of voices again, and George returned.

"You can come up, sir," he said.

"Right-ho! You fellows wait here," said Lovell.

He followed the boy upstairs.

"Ere you are, sir."

Lovell was shown into a back room, and George descended the stairs again, leaving him with Mr. Smith.

Lovell blinked about him.

Outside, the sun was setting, but most of the sunset was shut out by curtains across the little diamond-paned window. A candlestick stood on a table by the bed, but the candle was not lighted. Mr. John Smith seemed to prefer the gloom.

Mr. Smith was seated in an armchair, and he did not rise as Lovell entered. His face was swathed in a muffler, concealing nearly all his features, revealing little more than a pair of very keen, shifty eyes, closely set together.

There seemed to Lovell something familiar about those keen, shifty eyes as he looked at Mr. Smith.

The man fixed the shifty eyes on the Rookwood junior very keenly, and it seemed to Lovell that he gave a start. Somehow it came into Lovell's mind that he had seen the man before somewhere, and that the man had also seen him.

"Mr. Smith?" he asked.

"Yes." The man's voice was rough, but subdued. "You're Lovell, who was advertising a trunk in the Coombe paper?"

"That's so," said Lovell.

"Sit down."

Lovell sat down.

Mr. Smith had his back to the window, keeping his face out of such light as there was. Lovell faced him, puzzled by the familiar aspect of those keen, shifty, close-set eyes.

"Let us come to business, then," said Mr. Smith. "Your description of the trunk looks as if it will suit me. Four-feet-six long—"

"That's right."

"Leather, with leather handles and—"

"Right!" said Lovell.

"Nearly two feet high, and the same deep."

"Yes."

"The description is very like that of a trunk mentioned in an auction sale catalogue in a sale that took place at Latham last week," said Mr. Smith.

Lovell smiled.

"It's the same trunk," he said.

Mr. Smith's shifty eyes glittered.

"How's that?" he asked.

"You see, I bought the trunk at the auction," explained Lovell. "Not wanting to keep it, I've advertised it to sell again."

"I thought so," said Mr. Smith. "There's not many trunks knocking about that answer that description. I fancied it might be the same."

"That doesn't make any difference, I suppose," said Lovell rather anxiously. "I want to sell the trunk."

"Not at all. I'm ready to buy it," said Mr. Smith cordially. "But I want to know what I'm buying. If the trunk is the one that was the property of Colonel Thompson, of Latham, it's good enough for me."

"It's the one," said Lovell. "It was sold at the auction with the rest of the colonel's things when Colonel Thompson sold up on going abroad."

"That's all right, then. Where is it now?"

"At my school—Rookwood. You can send for it when you like."

Mr. Smith seemed to reflect for a moment.

"I'll send for it," he said. "That's all right. I'll ask my landlord here to tell the carrier to call for it to-morrow."

"You're going to buy it without seeing it first?" asked Lovell.

"It's all right, from the description," said Mr. Smith. "I can see you're a straightforward young gentleman, and I take your word about it."

"Thank you!" said Lovell, rather flattered.

"Now about the money?" said Mr. Smith.

Lovell's eyes danced. He already saw the fiver in his hands—and himself displaying the same to admiring eyes in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood. But Mr. Smith went on:

"Of course, I trust you, Master Lovell—I can see you're straightforward. Still, one doesn't pay for goods before delivery."

"How are we going to arrange it, then?" asked Lovell.

Mr. Smith reflected again.

"I'll send the money by the carrier," he said. "He'll hand you an envelope with the fiver in it, and you'll hand over the trunk to him. Is that all right?"

"Right as rain," said Lovell.

"That's settled, then," said Mr. Smith. "Good-evening!"

Lovell rose to his feet. Mr. Smith pulled the muffler a little closer about his face and coughed.

"I've got rather a bad cold," he said apologetically. "Shut the door carefully, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Lovell. "Good-evening!"

And he quitted the room and closed the door after him. It struck Lovell that Mr. John Smith was rather a peculiar man to do business with, but he was too pleased at the success of his visit to think much about that. He joined Jimmy Silver & Co. downstairs.

"Come on!" he said. "We shall have to buzz to get back before lock-up!"

"Is it all right?" asked Raby.

"Of course!"

"You've got the fiver?"

"Smith's sending it by the carrier to-morrow, when he sends for the trunk," explained Lovell. "It's all right; he's very keen to have the trunk. He knows it's Colonel Thompson's old trunk that was sold at the auction last week. I dare say he meant to be at the auction and bid for it; he seems to know all about it, anyhow."

"What's he like?" asked Jimmy Silver as the juniors wheeled their bicycles into the street.

"Blessed if I know! He's got a cold, and kept his face muffled up," said Lovell. "It struck me I'd seen him before somewhere; his eyes seemed familiar somehow. Let's get on."

And the Fistical Four rode back to the school, Lovell in high feather. The chums of the Fourth were just in time to escape being locked out. As they came up into the Fourth Form passage at least a dozen of the Classical Fourth greeted Lovell with questions.

"Sold the giddy trunk?"

"Where's the fiver?"

"I say, Lovell," bawled Tubby Muffin, "there's just time to change it at the tuckshop before they close! Shall I go for you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't got the fiver yet——" began Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses, it's all right!" howled Lovell. "The fiver's coming to-morrow, when Mr. Smith sends for the trunk."

"I don't think!" said Putty of the Fourth, and there was another laugh. "Jolly old Smith is a practical joker, and he's pulling your leg!"

"Fathead!"

"Two to one in doughnuts that the jolly old fiver doesn't come along to-morrow!" chuckled Mornington.

"No takers!" said Townsend.

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted, and strode into his study. His comrades smiled as they followed him there.

"Silly lot of asses!" growled Lovell. "They'll sing a different tune when the fiver comes to-morrow—what?"

"When!" murmured Raby.

Lovell glared.

"You silly owl! Do you think it isn't coming?" he bawled. "I tell you I've arranged it all with Mr. Smith."

"All serene—keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver. "Mr. Smith must be potty to give five pounds for a silly old trunk he's never seen—but he may be potty, for all we know! Anyhow, we shall see to-morrow."

"Seeing is believing," remarked Newcome.

Lovell snorted.

"Well, to-morrow you'll jolly well see what you will see!" he said.

And as that was a statement that could not possibly be controverted, the subject was dropped, and the Fistical Four settled down to prep.

CHAPTER 37.

Startling News!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL was in an expectant mood the following day

He was looking forward keenly to the arrival of the carrier, with a five-pound note to hand over for the trunk.

His friends were not quite so expectant.

But Lovell had no doubts. Old Mack, the porter, was instructed to deal with the carrier if he came during class, and to receive the payment for the trunk, and to hand over that enormous article in exchange.

But when morning class was over and Lovell hurried down to the porter's lodge, old Mack had no news for him.

The carrier had not called.

"I suppose he'll be here this afternoon!" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked to his comrades.

"Let's hope so!" said Raby.

Lovell sniffed a little, but he did

not doubt. Why on earth should John Smith, a stranger to him, bargain for the trunk and arrange to purchase it if he had no intention of keeping to his bargain? The thing was absurd. Lovell was quite assured that Mr. Smith intended to keep to his bargain, unless prevented by some accident.

But when classes were over for the day, and Lovell inquired again at the porter's lodge, there was still no news.

Lovell was puzzled.

"The carrier's not likely to come along later than this," he said. "Of course, his van may have broken down or something."

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled. They had not the slightest belief that the carrier's van had broken down. Really, it would have been rather too much of a coincidence.

"I suppose he'll come to-morrow!" said Lovell. "After all, there's no hurry that I know of."

"Quite so!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell waited till dark for the carrier—but there was no carrier. Then he was rather sorry that he had waited and had not cycled over to Greenwood to see Mr. Smith again. However, it was too late to think of that now, so Lovell had to wait till the morrow.

The Fourth Form fellows were all chuckling over the incident by this time—no one having the slightest faith in Lovell's sale of the great trunk—though why a perfect stranger had taken the trouble to pull his leg on the subject was a mystery.

Lovell's own belief was shaken; but he privately determined that if Mr. Smith had really made a fool of him he would pay another visit to the Peel of Bells, at Greenwood, and punch Mr. Smith's nose hard.

"Of course, there may have been some accident," Lovell told his chums the next morning after breakfast.

"Of course," smiled Jimmy Silver.

"Mr Smith may have fallen over his own feet and broken his neck," suggested Raby. "Or the carrier may have retired from business, or emigrated to Canada. You never know!"

Lovell glared.

"You silly owl! Lots of things may have happened——"

"Oh, lots!" said Jimmy Silver pacifically. "Hallo, Tubby, what's the jolly old excitement?"

Tubby Muffin came up to the Fistical Four in the quad, his fat face fairly blazing with excitement. He had a "Daily Mail" in his hand—probably Mr. Dalton's copy of that newspaper.

"You fellows heard?" he gasped.

"Heard what?"

"They've got him!"

"Lucid!" said Newcome. "Who's got whom?"

"The bobbies, you know!" gasped Tubby. "They got him yesterday—that man Nosey Jenks, who robbed the County Bank at Latham months ago!"

The Fistical Four were keenly interested at once. Lovell even forgot Mr. Smith and the big trunk. For more than a week, it was known, Nosey Jenks, the bank-robber, had been lurking in the neighbourhood of Latham and Rookwood. Jimmy Silver & Co. had actually found him in hiding, and others had seen him in various places. The news that he had been arrested at last was not surprising, but it was quite interesting.

"Well, I'm glad they've got him!" said Jimmy Silver. "I believe he was a jolly dangerous character. Where did they get him?"

"At an inn at Greenwood."

"My hat, there's only one inn at Greenwood!" exclaimed Lovell. "Mean to say they got him at the Peal of Bells, where we went the day before yesterday?"

"That's it!" said Tubby. "He's been living there two or three days, under

an assumed name. He called himself John Smith——"

"What!" roared the Fistical Four together.

"John Smith!"

"You silly fat duffer!" shouted Lovell. "Is that your idea of a joke? Sit down!"

"Yaroooh!" howled Tubby Muffin, as he sat. He sat down hard under Lovell's heavy hand.

"You shouldn't be so jolly funny, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "It isn't really in your line."

"Yarooogh! It's true, you dummy!" howled Tubby Muffin. "It's in the paper."

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Lovell.

"I tell you it's in the paper!" yelled Tubby.

Jimmy Silver jerked the "Daily Mail" away from Reginald Muffin. He looked at once at the column headed:

THREE MORE SUPER SCHOOL YARNS FOR MAY!

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY!

Nos. 370, 371, and 372.

"THE GREYFRIARS TOURISTS!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

"ASKING FOR THE SACK!"

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

"YELLOW MENACE!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Out on:

THURSDAY, MAY 4th.

Book Your Order in Advance.

"WANTED MAN ARRESTED AFTER SIX MONTHS!"

"Read it out," said Raby.

Jimmy Silver read it out, what time Tubby Muffin picked himself up breathlessly, glaring indignantly at Lovell. The news was rather startling to the Fistical Four—most of all to Arthur Edward Lovell. Lovell's face, indeed, was a study as Jimmy proceeded.

"John Jenks, alias 'Nosey' Jenks, was arrested yesterday morning at a village called Greenwood, in Hampshire. It will be recalled that Jenks was wanted in connection with a bank robbery at Latcham, in the same county. On the occasion of the robbery Jenks was discovered in the bank, and escaped by the roof and by forcing an entrance into an attic window of an adjoining house, belonging to Colonel Thompson, of Latcham. He was seized soon after escaping from a lower window of the house, but his plunder was not found upon him, and it was surmised at the time that he had thrown it into the river. He escaped again later, and has since been at large. Why he returned to the scene of the crime, where his face, disfigured by a broken nose, is quite well known to the local police, is not at present known; but it appears that he has been staying some days at an inn called the Peal of Bells at Greenwood, a few miles from Latcham, under the name of John Smith. He is now in the hands of the police."

"Well?" snorted Tubby Muffin indignantly. "Well, Lovell, you silly ass, what about that?"

Lovell did not speak.

He grabbed the paper from Jimmy Silver and read the paragraph over again. The news had come like a thunderclap to him—and, indeed to his comrades. They had wondered a good deal about Mr. John Smith, but certainly it had not crossed their minds that he was the man with the

broken nose whom they had seen the previous week—Nosey Jenks, the bank-robber.

"My hat!" said Lovell at last.

"This beats it!" said Raby, with a whistle. "But, I say, Lovell, you must be a thumping ass! You saw the man face to face the day before yesterday!"

Lovell breathed hard.

"That's why he kept the room dark and had a muffler over his face," he said. "I saw nothing but his eyes, and I remember they seemed familiar somehow. If I'd seen his nose I'd have known him at once."

"But what the thump did he want with the trunk?" said Jimmy Silver in great perplexity. "His offer to buy it can't have been a practical joke, after all."

"I knew it wasn't!" snapped Lovell.

"Well, it couldn't have been. A chap in such a scrape couldn't have been thinking of practical jokes. He really wanted the trunk," said Jimmy. "What the thump could he have wanted it for? It was risky for him to see anybody, even a schoolboy, who wasn't likely to be suspicious."

"It's a good trunk, and a bargain!" said Lovell. "I believe he meant to buy it, as he said. He wanted it. The bobbies seem to have nailed him before he could send the carrier for it. That's why the carrier didn't call yesterday. I—I'm rather glad he didn't. The brute might have paid for it with stolen money!"

"That's pretty certain. I don't suppose he has any other kind of money," said Jimmy. "But it beats me why he should have taken the risk of seeing anybody about a silly trunk."

"There goes the bell!"

The Fistical Four went into class.

No one else in the Classical Fourth, excepting Tubby Muffin, had yet seen the newspaper, so the news was not known yet in the Form. But during class, regardless of Mr. Dalton, Tubby Muffin spread the surprising informa-

tion, in a series of excited whispers.

Lovell sat very red and uncomfortable. The sale of the famous trunk was "off" after all; and his narrow escape of having dealings with a man "wanted" by the police was very disconcerting. That enormous trunk was still on Lovell's hands, and he scarcely expected any more answers to his advertisement. The dustman's cart seemed the certain destination now of Lovell's great bargain.

Lovell was quite pleased when Mr Dalton came down on some of the Fourth for whispering in class, and handed out lines right and left. It stopped the chuckling discussion of Lovell and his trunk.

Jimmy Silver was not joining in the whispering, however. Neither was he giving his usual attention to Mr. Dalton's valuable instructions. He was caught out several times that morning by the Form-master, and by the time the Classical Fourth were dismissed Jimmy Silver was the richer by three hundred lines. As a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver's mind was greatly exercised on a matter beside which Form work sank into insignificance. Never had the captain of the Fourth been so glad to escape from the Form room, as he was when the Fourth were dismissed after second lesson.

CHAPTER 33.

The Secret of the Trunk!

"COME on!" said Jimmy Silver.
"Where?" grunted Lovell.
Lovell was not in a good temper.

"I want to have a look at your trunk, old man."

"Oh blow the trunk!" said Lovell crossly. "The fact is, I'm fed-up with that dashed trunk. The sooner the dustman takes the dashed old thing away, the better!"

Raby and Newcome grinned.

"Never mind let's go and have a

look at it again," said Jimmy Silver. "It may turn out, after all, to be more valuable than we supposed."

Lovell stared at him.

"What the thump do you mean? It's a jolly good trunk—lots of leather in it, and good leather too. But if—"

"Come on!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

Somewhat mystified, Jimmy Silver's chums followed him. They walked round the buildings to the wood-shed, and came on the great trunk—still lying where the Head had seen it. It had not yet fallen a prey to the dustman; though that sad fate hovered over it, as it were, and was not likely to be much longer delayed.

Jimmy sat on the trunk.

"I've been thinking about this, you chaps," he said. "Just listen to me a few minutes. Why do you fellows think Nosey Jenks wanted to get hold of this giddy trunk?"

"Can't imagine," said Raby. "Must have been an ass to bother about buying old trunks, when he was hiding from the police!"

"He must have had a jolly strong motive."

"Well, he read the description of the trunk in my advertisement, you know," said Lovell. "He knew it was a good thing."

Jimmy Silver gazed at Lovell, and smiled.

"He read the description right enough," he said. "He was lying jolly low at the Peal of Bells; but, of course, he would have the papers brought to him to keep an eye on them, and read up any references that were made to the hunt that was going on for his jolly old self. That was how he happened to see the advertisement. I suppose; and he must have read, too, that Colonel Thompson's household effects had been sold by auction at Latcham. Certainly a man in his position wouldn't have been thinking about buying trunks if—"

"But he was," said Lovell.

"But he was interested in the big

trunk that had once belonged to Colonel Thompson, of Latcham," said Jimmy, unheeding. "From the description it struck him that it was very likely the same trunk. It's a bit uncommon, you know."

"He told me that when I saw him," said Lovell.

"Quite so, old chap. Well, why did he want to get into touch with Colonel Thompson's old trunk?"

"He knew it was a bargain——"

"H'm! Just recall what happened when the bank was robbed," said Jimmy. "Jenks was spotted there, and chased over the roof. He got into an attic window of the colonel's house, which is next to the bank. He had a bundle of banknotes with him, but the plunder was missing when he was collared soon afterwards in the street. Now, Jenks must have known that it was a hundred to one that he would be collared, with the police so close after him. That was why he got rid of the loot. It was supposed that he'd chucked it into the river; but his coming back here shows pretty plainly that he had hid it somewhere, and hoped to get hold of it again. Now, suppose he hid it somewhere in the colonel's house?"

"Phew!"

"Suppose," went on Jimmy, "that after getting into the attic window he shoved it into an old trunk that was stacked away there——"

"What?"

"My hat!"

"Jimmy!"

"The police got him soon afterwards," went on Jimmy. "He let them think he'd pitched the banknotes into the river. If he'd gone to prison he would have hoped to get his loot back when he came out of chokey. As it happened, he escaped, and after a time, when he thought it would be safe, he came back after the plunder. If it's as I've supposed, his game would be to get into the colonel's house, and get back what he's shoved into that old

trunk in the lumber-room. Only, as it happened, Colonel Thompson had gone abroad, and put his effects up to auction. That was rather a facer for Mr. Nosey Jenks—one right in the eye. Then he learns, from an advertisement, that the chap who had bought that old trunk at the auction was trying to sell it again——"

Raby and Newcome stared. Lovell grinned.

"Jimmy, old man, you're not built for a Sherlock Holmes," said Arthur Edward. "The actual fact is, that Jenks, thief as he was, had an eye for a bargain, and knew that it was a jolly good trunk——"

"Fathead!"

"Look here, Jimmy——"

"A man in his position, hiding from the police, could have taken an interest in the colonel's old trunk, for one reason only," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "It had something to do with the plunder he had hidden, and which he was risking his liberty in coming back to find."

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell.

"You don't think so?" asked Raby.

"Not in the least!"

"Then it looks as if Jimmy's right."

"Why, you cheeky ass——"

Raby chuckled.

"Let's look in the trunk," he said.

"Unless Jenks was potty, he must have had a pretty strong interest in this old trunk. I shouldn't wonder if Jimmy's got it right. Let's look!"

"Rot!" said Lovell.

Jimmy slid off the trunk.

The huge lid was raised, and the interior, with its torn lining, was exposed to view. The trunk, of course, was empty, but Jimmy Silver proceeded to examine the torn lining.

Raby and Newcome watched him with interest, Lovell with a derisive grin.

"I'll tell you what, Jimmy," said Arthur Edward. "I'll eat all the giddy banknotes you find hidden in this trunk."

"Ass!"

Jimmy Silver groped under the torn lining. Carefully and methodically he groped, shoving his hand through gap after gap in the lining. He gave a start as his hand came into contact with something that was certainly not lining.

In a remote recess, down in the corner of the trunk, at arm's length from a gash in the old lining, something was wedged in tight.

Jimmy Silver drew it out.

It was a wedge of crisp slips of paper, crumpled tightly together. He held it up in the sunshine.

Lovell jumped.

"I—I say, that looks like—like—like banknotes!" he gasped.

"It is banknotes, fathcad!" said Newcome.

"Great Scott!"

Jimmy Silver unfolded the wedge of crisp papers. Banknotes—Bank of England notes—met the startled eyes of the chums of the Fourth—banknotes of various denominations from five to fifty.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell. "Why, there—there's a thousand pounds there, or more!"

"Quite!"

"Great pip!"

There was no doubt about it. Jimmy Silver had discovered the secret hiding-place of Nosey Jenks' loot. Certainly, had any police-officer been aware of Nosey Jenks' interest in the colonel's old trunk, he would not have been long in arriving at the same conclusion that Jimmy had arrived at. But of Nosey's dealings with Lovell, on the subject of the ancient trunk, no one outside Rookwood was aware. But for Jimmy Silver, the old trunk with its hidden treasure, would have been consigned to the dustman.

"Better get those giddy banknotes to the Head at once," said Raby, rather uneasily. "That's an awful lot of money!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy. And the Fistical Four hurried away to the House.

Dr. Chisholm was astonished.

So was all Rookwood.

So was a police-inspector who came over post-haste from Latcham, called on the telephone.

So, probably, was Nosey Jenks, when, in the cold seclusion of the "stone jug," he learned that his loot had been found.

It was quite a triumph for the Fistical Four.

Most of all, it was a triumph for Arthur Edward Lovell—in the eyes of Arthur Edward, at least.

What would have become of the hidden banknotes had Lovell not had that old trunk "knocked down" to him at the Latcham Auction Rooms, was a problem. Certainly no one would have been likely to search behind the lining of the old trunk for hidden treasure. It was due to Arthur Edward's reckless bidding at the auction that the trunk had come to Rookwood—it was owing to his endeavour to get rid of it again that Nosey Jenks had learned where it was and had attempted to get possession of it, and it was through Nosey Jenks' attempt that Jimmy Silver had figured out how the matter stood. So it was Lovell who had brought the discovery about—at least, in Lovell's own opinion.

"Jolly lucky I bought that old trunk—what?" Lovell said to his comrades about a hundred times. "You fellows were against it, you remember? Suppose I'd taken any notice of your rot, where would those banknotes be now? This really ought to be a lesson to you chaps."

Whereat the Co. chuckled cheerfully.

It was Lovell's fixed opinion that the whole credit in this affair was his own, and he had that opinion wholly to himself.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE!

IT takes a man with plenty of nerve to face one of the wild beasts of the jungle alone, even when armed with a rifle that he knows will not fail him. Think what it means, then, to fight a lion with bare hands.

At Grips With a Lioness!

This almost incredible feat, the only one of its kind on record, was accomplished by a trooper of the famous Transvaal Mounted Police some years after the Boer War. With one companion he was patrolling in the Northern Transvaal when they came on an encampment of Dutch wagons. The owners had with them two newly captured lion cubs; so the two policemen were hardly surprised when, soon after resuming their journey, they met a lion and lioness following the wagon spur.

Cool and quick-thinking, the trooper unslung his rifle and fired at the lioness from the saddle, breaking her shoulder. The lion turned and bolted—the second policeman did the same—and one man was left to fight a wounded and raging lioness. Despite her broken shoulder, she sprang and knocked him out of the saddle, and then began the trooper's terrible fight for life.

Gripping the lioness round the neck, he got astride her back, inserted two fingers in each of her nostrils and forced her head back. Time and again the great cat wriggled him beneath her, inflicting ghastly wounds with her hind paws, but always the half-fainting Mountie kept her gleaming fangs from his throat.

For ten minutes the appalling struggle went on, until at last his screams of pain brought rescue from the nearby wagons. For fourteen days, showing vitality as strong as his courage, he made a magnificent fight for recovery, but against those terrible wounds it was hopeless. Hundreds of people attended the funeral of this hero.

In the Jaws of a Lion!

A man who was once in the jaws of a lion is still alive to tell the tale! At the time of his amazing adventure he was a ranger in the Transvaal Game Reserve,

and was returning to his station one evening at dusk when, without an instant's warning, a lion sprang at him from the side of the trail. One mighty paw knocked him clean from his horse into the path of another lion that had appeared from the other side of the path, and in a flash the ranger found himself seized by the shoulder and half-carried, half-dragged away.

Twenty yards from the trail the lion dropped him beneath a large tree and stood guard over him. Inch by inch he worked a hand towards his belt till it closed on his long sheath knife; then, with all his force, he thrust it again and again behind the lion's shoulder. To his amazement and relief the animal sprang aside, loped about a dozen paces away, and lay down.

It was the ranger's chance, and in a few minutes, crippled though he was, he had climbed the tree out of reach. There he stayed, strapped to a branch for safety, until his native carriers arrived and found the beast that had seized him stone dead.

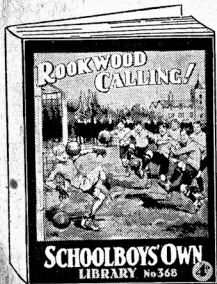
A Fight to a Finish.

Fighting a wild animal unarmed is an ordeal few men would face except in dire necessity, yet not long ago a young Hindu farmer deliberately took on a man-eating tiger in single combat—and won! This ferocious beast, the terror of the district, had killed one of the farmer's bullocks; so, with only a four-foot staff as a weapon, he went in search of the marauder. Finding it asleep in his field, he woke it up, and then, while the whole village watched in breathless suspense, stood ready to fight.

The farmer's tactics were simple. Again and again as the tiger sprang he darted aside and brought his stick crashing down on the animal's head. Only his almost uncanny sense of anticipation, his strength, and his amazing quickness of hand and eye saved him from falling a victim to those slashing claws, but he was still on his feet, though streaming with blood, when the man-eater at last fell dead.

Afterwards, when the carcass was examined, it was found that every one of the Hindu's blows had reached its head—no other part bore the sign of a blow.

DON'T MISS OUR GREAT COMPANION NUMBERS!

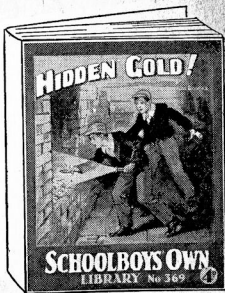


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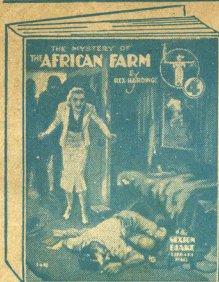
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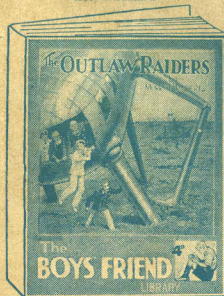
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