

THE ROOKWOOD RAGGERS!

By OWEN CONQUEST



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THE ROOKWOOD RAGGERS!

By OWEN CONQUEST



A Super School Story of Raggings and Reprisals, Starring JIMMY SILVER & Co., the Cheery Chums of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 1.

Taking Care of Gunner!

"GUNNER! Hold on!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner of the Classical Fourth condescended to turn his head and glance round.

But he did not hold on.

He was on his way to the gates when Jimmy Silver hailed him, striding along with his usual lofty stride and with an unusually determined expression upon his rugged face.

Jimmy Silver & Co., coming along the same path at a more leisurely pace, sighted Gunner ahead of them, and Jimmy called to him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome chimed in.

"Stop, you ass!"

"Chuck it, Gunner!"

"Come back, you chump!"

Upon which Gunner, after a scornful glance round, turned his back on the Fistical Four and marched on gateward.

It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, and many of the fellows were going out of gates on that sunny summer's afternoon. In ordinary circumstances, therefore, there would have been nothing surprising or perturbing in seeing Peter Cuthbert Gunner marching out.

But on that special half-holiday Peter Cuthbert was under detention.

Peter Cuthbert had been slacking in class—as, being so important a person, he felt himself fully entitled to do if

he chose. That morning he had slacked not too wisely but too well.

He had exhausted the patience of Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth Form. And he was detained for the afternoon, with a dismal prospect of two hours all on his own in the Form-room, grinding at Latin irregular verbs.

Verbs, irregular or regular, never did appeal to Gunner. Of all the nine parts of speech, there was not one he really liked—in fact, he detested them all with a deep detestation. But if there was a verb he disliked more than another verb, it was an irregular verb, and if there was an irregular verb he hated with a perfect hatred, it was a Latin irregular verb. And from the fact that Gunner was marching down to the school gates with a determined expression upon his bulldog face, it was clear that he was not going to spend a half-holiday with irregular verbs if he could help it.

He was going, in fact, to cut detention.

Hence the objurgations of the Fistical Four as they sighted his broad back on the way to the gates.

Gunner heard them, but he did not heed.

Deaf to the authoritative voice of his Form-master, he was not likely to heed mere juniors like himself—or, rather, juniors unlike himself, for Gunner was, in his own estimation, unique. Jimmy Silver was captain of the Fourth, his comrades were great men in the Form, but in Gunner's opinion they were very small fry. That was his opinion, and he never concealed it. He considered his opinions much too valuable and instructive to be kept dark.

So Gunner marched on, lofty and scornful.

"The silly ass!" said Lovell. "I heard him tell Dickenson minor that he was going to hook it; but I didn't think he would be ass enough!"

"Ass enough for anything!" said Raby.

"Gunner!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Gunner did not even turn his head at that fresh hail.

"Gunner, you chump!" yelled Newcome.

"Well, it's no bizney of ours," remarked Raby. "Dicky Dalton will lick him—and serve him right! Let him rip!"

Jimmy Silver frowned.

Mr. Dalton, master of the Fourth, was popular in his Form and much respected. Gunner's punishment was a just one; he had fairly asked for it. In fact, as Morny had said, begged and prayed for it. So there was something quite irritating in this reckless defiance of authority by a fathead like Gunner. It was treating "Dicky Dalton" with contempt; it was putting him under the necessity of inflicting a severe punishment, which all the fellows knew that he disliked doing.

For which reason the captain of the Fourth decided to intervene.

"Come on, you fellows!" he said. And he broke into a run.

"Stopping him?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yes."

"Oh, all right! It will save him a licking."

Still at a little distance from the gates, Jimmy Silver's hand dropped on Gunner's shoulder.

Gunner had to stop then. The grip on his shoulder swung him round, facing the captain of the Fourth.

"Let go, you ass!" he shouted.

"Hold on——"

"Rats!"

"You're not going to cut detention, Gunner."

"I jolly well am!" said Gunner, with emphasis.

"Now, look here, old chap," said Jimmy patiently, "you asked for what you got, and it's up to you to take it smiling. See?"

"Rot!"

"It means a licking if you hook it," said Raby.

Gunner snorted.

"I'm not afraid of a licking, if you fellows are."

"It's disrespectful to Mr. Dalton," said Jimmy. "It isn't as if he were a nagging old tick like Manders, or a pompous ass like Greely. He's a good sort, and——"

"I know he's a good sort. I like him," said Gunner. "But I'm not going to let him dictate to me."

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Lovell. "We never cheek Dalton."

"Quite right, too," said Gunner. "You fellows shouldn't. Fags like you ought to be respectful to your Form-master. It's a bit different with me. I'm not going to be dictated to. I've got my position in the Form to think of."

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's not much good talking to you, Gunner," said Jimmy Silver. "To cut it short, will you keep detention?"

"No!"

"Then we'll jolly well make you!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned the Co.

"Hands off!" roared Gunner truculently, as the Fistical Four grasped him on all sides.

Gunner was swept off his feet.

"You're going into the Form-room," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "Will you walk, or be carried?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Carry him!" grinned Lovell. "Give the silly ass the frog's march!"

"Good egg!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Gunner.

He struggled frantically. Gunner was a hefty fellow, but he was not of much use in the hands of four. With his arms and legs flying wildly, he was borne back along the path.

"Oh! Leggo! You cheeky asses, interfering with me—me! By gad! Why, I'll wallop you all round! Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

Gunner made a desperate effort, and the four juniors, holding him, swayed, and the whole party collapsed on the ground.

There was a wild yell from Lovell as he caught Gunner's elbow with his eye. He let go Gunner quite suddenly.

"Hold him!" panted Jimmy.

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

Gunner tore himself loose and leaped to his feet. Before the juniors could grasp him again he was tearing away towards the gates at top speed.

Jimmy Silver scrambled up.

"After him!"

"Ow!" gasped Lovell. "My eye! Wow! I'll pulverise him! Wow!"

The four rushed in pursuit. Gunner, with a terrific burst of speed, reached the old gateway well ahead, and went through it like lightning. Then there was a crash.

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, was returning from an after-lunch stroll. He had returned just in time to meet Peter Cuthbert Gunner in full career. Had he, indeed, timed his return with a specially accurate chronometer, he could not have done better.

Right into Richard Dalton crashed the fleeing Gunner, and the impact was terrific.

Richard Dalton staggered.

Gunner sat down.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. And the Fistical Four came to a sudden halt.

"Ow! Wow!" spluttered Gunner. "What the thump— Ow! Wow!"

"Gunner!"

"Ow! Wow!"

Mr. Dalton stooped, grasped Gunner by the collar, and jerked him to his feet.

"Gunner, you should not rush about in this reckless manner. Are you hurt?"

"Ow! Wow! Yes! Ow!" gasped Gunner.

"You should be more careful, Gunner. It is time now that you

should go into the Form-room for your detention. Come with me!"

For a moment the gasping Gunner hesitated.

He had declared loudly and emphatically that he would not be dictated to by Richard Dalton. He had meant it. But somehow or other, in the actual presence of Richard Dalton, Gunner underwent a change of spirit. For a single moment he hesitated, red-hot rebellion in his thoughts. Then, with the meekness of a lamb, he walked across the quad with Mr. Dalton towards the House.

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"So much for Gunner!" he remarked.

And the Fistical Four sauntered cheerily out of gates, three of them cheery at least. Arthur Edward Lovell was rubbing his eye rather painfully. Gunner's hefty elbow planted in a fellow's eye was no joke. And so far from sympathising with a fellow condemned to irregular verbs on a half-holiday, Lovell, as he rubbed his eye, only hoped that the verbs would be very irregular indeed.

CHAPTER 2.

William Henry Asks for It!

"SPARE a copper, sir!"

Jimmy Silver stopped at the sound of the whining voice.

"Oh, come on!" grunted Lovell.

But Jimmy did not come on. Uncle James of Rookwood had a soft heart—Lovell sometimes said that he had a soft head to match. Anyhow, a tale of woe always found a sympathetic listener in Jimmy, and he hated to refuse even the most unpleasant mendicant.

Raby and Newcome exchanged a wink as they stopped. That wink implied that this particular mendicant was going to get something out of Jimmy, and that they were going to chip him afterwards for being a silly ass.

The mendicant did not look very nice.

He loafed out of the shade of the beeches at the cross-roads in Coombe Lane as the four juniors came strolling by towards the village. He looked in hard luck. His battered hat would have disgraced a dust-heap; his clothes were dirty and torn; his boots were horrid. On his looks, he had not been able to afford to buy any soap for years and years and years. But his puffy cheeks and his red and bulbous nose hinted that he had found resources somewhere to expend in support of the drink traffic.

He breathed a horrid mixture of spirits and strong tobacco, and Uncle James, in spite of his kind heart, backed away a little.

"Spare a copper, sir—jest a copper!" said the man, eyeing Jimmy Silver. He seemed to realise at once that Lovell and Raby and Newcome were of no use to him. "A prosperous young gentleman like you, sir, I'm sure you can feel for a bloke out of work, sir."

Jimmy smiled faintly.

He was willing to believe the best of anyone, but he could not quite believe that this fellow had ever looked for work. If, indeed, he had looked for it, it was only as a man might have looked for a bull or a mad dog, in order to keep well out of the way of it.

But Jimmy fumbled in his pocket. He had had a remittance from home that morning, and sixpence out of five shillings was not much.

But Arthur Edward Lovell intervened. There were few affairs in which the Fistical Four were concerned, in which Arthur Edward Lovell did not feel bound to intervene personally.

"Chuck it, Jimmy!" said Lovell. "What's the good of giving the man money to sprint off with straight to the Bird in Hand?"

The man scowled.

"You say you're looking for work?" went on Lovell, fixing his eyes magisterially on the frowsy gentleman.

"Yes," grunted the tramp.

"What's your name?"

"Bill Dalton, sir—William Henry Dalton."

"Dalton!" repeated Lovell indignantly. "Same as our Form-master! Like your cheek, I think!"

"Dash it all, the man can't help his name!" said Jimmy.

"It's too good a name to be disgraced by a scarecrow like this," said Lovell. "Like his cheek, I think! Well, look here, Bill Dalton—if that's your name, which it very likely isn't—what sort of work can you do?"

"Wood-cutting," said Bill Dalton, after a moment's pause.

"And you're looking for a job?"

"Yes, looking 'ard."

"Then I can jolly well help you," said Lovell triumphantly. "There's a lot of wood being cut round about here, and a chance for casual labour. Trot along a bit and I'll point out Mr. Giles' house. They're cutting now on his woodland, near Coombe. Come on!"

William Henry Dalton did not stir.

The chance of a job did not seem to appeal to him, somehow.

Raby and Newcome grinned. Jimmy Silver frowned. Arthur Edward Lovell looked loftily indignant.

"Well, are you coming, Bill?" he said.

"I ain't so spry as I used to be since—since I was 'urt in an accident, sir," said William Henry. "And—and it's 'ot to-day, and—and—"

"And you're spoofing humbug and don't want a job," said Lovell contemptuously. "What you want is a wash, and there's a river handy—nothing to prevent you from washing yourself. Go and do it. And you keep your money in your trousers pocket, Jimmy, you ass!"

Jimmy smiled.

"Catch!" he said.

He tossed a sixpence to William Henry Dalton. The frowsy gentleman caught it with a dirty hand.

"You silly owl!" roared Lovell.

"Thanks, old man!"

"It's encouraging tramps and loafers and spongers!" snorted Lovell. "You're a howling ass, Jimmy!"

"Same to you, old man. Come on!"

The Fistical Four moved on, Bill Dalton eyeing them. He looked up the road and he looked down the road. No one was in sight. Then he picked up a stick from the grass and leaped into the lane in front of the Rookwood juniors. From the whining mendicant he had suddenly turned into a threatening rough.

"'Old on!" he said. "A tanner ain't much use to me. Make it five bob!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Raby.

William Henry flourished his cudgel.

"I mean business!" he said. "I've no time to waste! 'And over five bob or I'll cave in your nappers jest as if you was spadgers! Now, then, sharp's the word!"

Another flourish of the cudgel.

Bill Dalton undoubtedly was in a hurry. He was afraid that at any moment someone might come in sight tip or down the lane. As for the four juniors, he was not afraid of them. He took it for granted that a set of schoolboys would be afraid of a rough fellow with a cudgel.

Never had he made a greater mistake.

"Five bob!" he said. "You 'ear me? Sharp's the word, afore I knock you spinning! I—— Yaroooooop!"

Bill Dalton had no time to finish. Jimmy Silver came at him with a spring, dodging the flourishing cudgel, and his right fist landed on the ruffian's jaw with a terrible crash.

Bump!

William Henry Dalton went over on his back as if a cannon-ball had struck him.

The cudgel flew from his hand, and Raby promptly annexed it and sent it spinning away over the treetops.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered round the sprawling ruffian, grinning.

Bill Dalton sprawled, and put his hand to his jaw. He seemed to be rather doubtful whether it was still there.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" he mumbled.

"Have another?" asked Jimmy genially.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Bump him!" suggested Newcome.

"He's not clean enough to touch," said Lovell. "Roll him into the ditch."

"Good egg!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Good! All kick together," he said. "When I say three, leg out!"

"Right-ho!"

William Henry Dalton sat up. He blinked dazedly at the four grinning Rookwooders. He was not thinking of violence now. Only too clearly it had been borne in upon his dull mind that that was a chicken that would not fight.

"Ow! Let a bloke alone!" he groaned.

"One!" said Jimmy, counting.

The Fistical Four stood in a row and drew their right feet back.

"Two!"

He scrambled to his feet.

"Three!"

William Henry Dalton leaped away and ran for his life before the boots could reach him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Rookwooders.

Bill Dalton crashed through a hedge, rolled into a field, and ran. He had had enough of the cheery Rookwooders—more than enough. He vanished across the field, panting, and Jimmy Silver & Co. continued their walk to the village, having, as they supposed, quite done with William Henry Dalton. Not for a moment did they dream of the peculiar circumstances in which they were destined to hear of him again.

CHAPTER 3.

Out of Bounds!

"NO fear!" said Gunner.

And he added emphatically:

"No thumping fear!"

Gunner was not addressing anybody in particular. He was alone in the Fourth Form Room.

Before him, on his desk, lay his detention task—a nice little exercise in Latin irregular verbs. It did not seem to attract Gunner. Mr. Dalton had left him to it, and Gunner had left it to itself.

Gunner was detained; Gunner was in the Form-room; Gunner was seated at his desk. But he was not going to be detained, all the same. He was only waiting for Mr. Richard Dalton to get quite clear. Then Gunner was going!

"No fear!" he said into space, a dozen times at least. "No fear! All very well for fellows like Jimmy Silver, or that fathead Lovell! Not little me! No fear!"

He rose at last and crossed to the door. He opened it and looked into the corridor.

To his annoyance and dismay, two Form-masters were pacing there, in conversation. One of them was Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, the other was his own Form-master, Mr. Dalton.

Gunner drew back quickly and closed the door. Obviously he could not walk away under the eyes of Richard Dalton.

"Rotten!" he muttered.

He crossed to the windows next. The windows were open to let in the balmy air of summer. Gunner put his head out.

"Hallo, Dickinson!" he shouted.

Dickinson minor, of the Classical Fourth, was strolling across the quad with his hands in his pockets. He was Gunner's study-mate in No. 7, in the Fourth, and Gunner's pal and loyal follower, and no doubt he sympathised with the detained Gunner. Nevertheless, he was looking very cheery as he

strolled in the sunny quad on his own. Perhaps he could not help reflecting how quiet and peaceful a half-holiday was when Gunner was detained in the Form-room. From such pleasant and peaceful reflections he was roused by the voice of P. C. Gunner hailing him from the Form-room window.

"This way, Dickinson!" shouted Gunner.

Dickinson minor came over to the Form-room windows. He never dreamed of obeying his impulse to walk quickly in the opposite direction. Gunner grinned down at him.

"I'm detained here, you know, Dickinson," he said.

"I know. Sorry!"

"Dalton thinks I'm going to stay here."

"I suppose he does," assented Dickinson minor.

"Silly ass, you know!"

"Eh?"

"Fetch me my straw, will you? Dalton made me leave it in the lobby."

Dickinson minor stared up at the rugged, grinning face of Gunner above him. He did not see why Gunner wanted a straw hat in the Form-room.

"Your straw?" he repeated.

"Yes—quick!"

"But what—"

"I'm bunking, you ass! I'm going to drop from the window," explained Gunner. "Dicky Dalton's in the passage—can't get out that way."

"But, I—I—I say, it will mean a fearful row!" exclaimed Dickinson minor in dismay.

"What about it?" snorted Gunner.

"What about a Head's flogging?" suggested Dickinson.

"Rats! Fetch my straw."

"But I say, Gunner—"

"Are you going to fetch my straw, Dickinson minor, or are you not going to fetch my straw?" inquired Gunner categorically.

"Oh, all right!"

Dickinson minor disappeared into the House, and came back with Gunner's

straw hat under his arm. Gunner gave him a nod, and looked up and down, and round about before making his descent from the Form-room window. Gunner feared no foe, and he had little of the prudence which is the better part of valour. But even Gunner realised that if Bulkeley or Neville of the Sixth happened to be in the offing he would not be able to get clear.

A big Sixth Former was sauntering in sight, and there were some juniors about. The Sixth Former was Dickinson major, elder brother of Dickinson minor, and a Sixth Form prefect. Gunner eyed him dubiously. Any prefect was bound to stop a junior whom he found dropping from a Form-room window, that was certain, and there was little doubt that Dickinson major would do his duty.

"Dickinson, that's your dashed brother yonder," said Gunner. "Go and edge him off somehow."

"He wouldn't go for me," said Dickinson minor uneasily. "No good asking him, Gunner."

"I can't reach you from here," said Gunner. "I suppose that's why you're cheeky. If you want me to thump you in the study this evening, you've only got to say so, old bean."

Dickinson minor looked worried. He did not want to be thumped in the study that evening; Gunner had too hefty a thump for any fellow to want to sample it. But he was almost as nervous of his brother in the Sixth as he was of Gunner.

"Get a move on, dummy!" said Gunner.

"But I—I say—" stammered the hapless Dickinson.

"Go and get him talking, and get him to walk past the trees—turn his back, anyhow, while I drop out and clear."

"But—"

"If you really want a licking, Dickinson minor, say so at once, without beating about the bush!" exclaimed Gunner impatiently.

Dickinson minor walked away and approached his brother. The prefect met him with a frown. As a matter of fact, Dickinson major had already observed his minor in talk with a detained fellow at the Form-room window, a thing that was quite against the rules. At home in the holidays, Dickinson major was quite an affectionate big brother. At school, he was a prefect with a proper sense of authority and dignity, and never seemed aware that any relationship existed between him and Dickinson minor.

"You've been talking to Gunner?"

"Yes, I've——"

"Gunner's under detention?"

"Yes, but——"

"Take fifty lines."

"All right. But I say——"

"Cut off!"

Dickinson minor cut off. At the same moment Gunner, seeing the prefect engaged in talk with his minor, dropped from the Form-room window. He landed on his feet, fell, rolled over, and sat up—and jumped up again as soon as the Sixth Former started towards him. So far from the prefect's attention having been taken off Gunner, it had rather been concentrated upon him. He was within six feet of the cheery Peter Cuthbert, with his hand already outstretched to collar him, when Gunner jumped up.

"You young sweep!"

Gunner jumped back. He jammed his straw hat on his head and ran.

"Come back!" roared Dickinson major.

Gunner did not heed.

He was streaking for the school wall, at a distance from the gates. The prefect stared after him, scarcely believing that the junior would dare to disregard the voice of authority. But it was soon clear that Gunner was disregarding it, and Dickinson major rushed after him in great wrath.

But Gunner had a good start.

He reached the wall, behind the

beeches, and clambered up. His hands were over the top when Dickinson major reached him, and clutched at his legs.

Bang!

Quite by accident—Gunner, naturally, had no eyes behind him—the junior's heel crashed on the Sixth Former's chin.

Dickinson major gave a wild howl.

He staggered back, clasping his chin with both hands. The next moment Gunner was over the wall.

"Oh, gad! Oh! Ow! Ow!" gasped Dickinson major. "Oh, my hat! The young villain! Wow!"

Gunner dropped into the road, and sprinted. Dickinson major, still clasping his chin, turned back from the pursuit. He was not disposed to climb a wall and chase an elusive junior in the country lanes. He rubbed his chin ruefully, and proceeded to report the misdeeds of Peter Cuthbert Gunner to Mr. Dalton. And Richard Dalton, with a deep frown, proceeded to select his stoutest cane for the special benefit of Gunner of the Fourth, after roll call.

CHAPTER 4.

Gunner Makes an Amazing Discovery.

"GUNNER!"

"That ass!"

Gunner grinned.

He was really quite pleased to meet Jimmy Silver & Co.—quite pleased to let them see that he had not been detained, after all.

Gunner was sauntering cheerily along a narrow, leafy lane, with his hands in his pockets, whistling shrilly, cheerfully, if not tunelessly, when he came on the Co. Gunner was enjoying his freedom, and he was in great spirits. He had escaped from detention—escaped from Latin irregular verbs—escaped from Dickinson major, and shown the universe generally that he was not to be dictated to. He had said that he wasn't going to be detained that afternoon,

and here he was, free as air, undetained. True, there would be trouble to follow. But trouble and Gunner were old acquaintances; and on a fine, sunny afternoon, with irregular verbs at a safe distance, he was not inclined to meet trouble half-way.

He grinned at the chums of the Fourth.

"Hallo! Here we are again!" he remarked brightly. "Did you think I was detained?"

"Dicky Dalton let you off?" asked Lovell.

Gunner snuffed.

"I've let myself off," he explained. "I think I mentioned to you fellows that I wasn't going to let Mr. Dalton dictate to me."

"You silly ass!"

"Who's Dalton, anyway?" asked Gunner.

"He's our Form-master, you silly chump, and he will jolly well lick you, breaking detention," said Jimmy Silver.

From a clump of willows, close by which the Rookwooders had stopped, a pair of dull eyes blinked out wearily.

In the shade of the willows, William Henry Dalton—if that really was his name—had laid his weary limbs down to rest.

His eyes glinted at Jimmy Silver.

But he was very careful to keep in cover. His stubby jaw was still aching from Jimmy's knuckles, and William Henry did not want any more. In some matters, at least, the dirty vagrant knew when he had had enough.

He kept quiet as the voices of the Rookwooders floated to his ears.

"I've a jolly good mind to take you by the scruff of the neck, Gunner, and run you back to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, we're not going to carry Gunner a mile!" protested Raby. "Let's bump him, and let him rip."

Gunner laughed.

"Oh, don't play the goat!" he said.

"Look here, I've got a cake and a bag of tarts here, and a bottle of fizz. Sit down under these willows, and whack it out with me. You're welcome."

"Not a bad idea," said Newcome. "I'd rather whack out Gunner's tarts than carry him back to Rookwood."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"You're not a bad sort of an ass, Gunner, and I suppose you can't help being a born idiot," he said. "We'll let you off the bumping. Come on, you chaps!"

"Silly asses!" commented Gunner.

He moved off the path under the shade of the willows. Gunner had dropped into the tuckshop at Coombe, and he had a bundle under his arm. He was proceeding to unroll his bundle when he became aware of a shabby, grubby figure sitting up in the grass under the willows, and stared at William Henry Dalton.

William Henry eyed him.

He was debating in his mind whether to handle Gunner, now that Jimmy Silver & Co. were gone, and transfer to his own possession Gunner's handsome watch-chain, and the watch attached, and any loose cash Gunner might have about him.

But Gunner looked a very hefty fellow, and the ache in William Henry's stubby jaw was still painful. William Henry decided that it was not good enough.

"Hallo!" said Gunner. "Who the thump are you?"

"Name of Dalton, sir," said the vagrant civilly. "William Henry Dalton, sir—that's me."

"My hat!" said Gunner, staring. "Dalton—eh? That's my Form-master's name. Relation of his, perhaps? Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner roared at the idea.

William Henry blinked at him with sly eyes. The rascal was accustomed to "telling the tale" in every shape and form, according to the simplicity of his hearer, of which he was a good judge.

It depended on his hearer whether William Henry represented himself as an honest man looking for work, or a repentant convict with his past against him, or an old soldier broken in the wars, or an unhappy parent turned out of home by his unfeeling offspring. Shakespeare has remarked that one man in his time plays many parts, and undoubtedly William Henry had played very many indeed.

Gunner had a great opinion of his own intellectual powers, though upon what it was founded nobody in the Rookwood Fourth had ever been able to discover. The general belief in the Fourth was that Peter Cuthbert Gunner was an unmitigated fathead, and that belief was assuredly very near the facts.

William Henry, as he looked Gunner over with sly eyes, wondered whether he was ass enough to swallow a tale of a poor and neglected relation of his Form-master.

Certainly, he looked an ass. There was no doubt about that. William Henry resolved to try it on.

"The fact is, sir, you're right," he said.

"Eh?"

Gunner stopped laughing, and stared again.

"I wasn't always like you see me now, sir," said William Henry pathetically.

"No; I suppose you were washed once," remarked Gunner genially.

"I've come down in the world, sir."

"And you haven't much further to go, by the look of you!" agreed Gunner.

"I've got well-off relations, sir, and they've turned me down," said William Henry.

"Not proud of you—eh?"

"I've got a young brother, sir, a Form-master in a big school."

"Oh, come off!" said Gunner incredulously. "That's too thick, you know."

"I s'pose you'd 'ardly believe it, sir, seeing me now," said William Henry

sadly. "But it's true, sir. My brother Richard is a master in the big school yonder, on my davy, sir!"

Gunner jumped.

"Richard?" he repeated.

"Richard Dalton, sir—my brother Dick!"

"Great Scott!"

It did not occur to Gunner's powerful brain that the tramp, under the willows, had heard him talking with Jimmy Silver & Co. He did not recall that Lovell had alluded to the Form-master as "Dicky Dalton." So he was greatly struck by the fact that this man Dalton knew that Mr. Dalton's name was Richard.

William Henry saw that he had made an impression. Gunner not only looked an ass; he was what he looked.

"Mean to say that my Form-master, Dicky Dalton, has a brother a scare-crow like you?" ejaculated Gunner.

"I knew it sounds steep, sir."

"It does," said Gunner.

"He's turned me down," said William Henry sorrowfully. "They say that blood is thicker than water, but he's turned me down. I can see that you're a kind-hearted young gent. Seeing that my brother, sir, is your Form-master, p'raps you'd 'elp a man on his way, sir. It goes ag'in the grain to go up to the school and show Dick up afore all the folks, me being in this 'ere state."

"My only hat!" said Gunner.

He stared at the tramp.

Mr. Dalton had annoyed him that day—annoyed him considerably. Mr. Dalton had detained him, had insisted upon him keeping detention, and was undoubtedly going to lick him for clearing out of the Form-room. But Gunner was a generous fellow—quite chivalrous, in fact. If this frowsy man was a relative of Dicky Dalton's, and he showed up at Rookwood and claimed his relation, it would be simply awful for the master of the Fourth. Mr. Dalton certainly would never be able to hold up his head at Rookwood again.

Indeed, he would scarcely be able to stay in the school as a master.

"You mustn't do that!" exclaimed Gunner hastily. "If you're really a relation of Dicky Dalton's, for goodness' sake keep away!"

William Henry contrived not to grin. "A man must live, sir," he argued. "A young man ought to help his brother what's down on his luck. My brother Richard could afford it, him being your Form-master, sir, at a big school."

"That's all very well," said Gunner doubtfully. "But it's too thick, you know. Blessed if I can quite swallow it. Nobody's ever supposed that Dicky Dalton had relations like you. Look here, if you're really Mr. Dalton's brother, the most decent thing you can do is to keep clear of him. Take a railway ticket into the next county."

"Ain't got the railway fare, sir!" said William Henry.

"Well, if you tramped here, you can tramp away again, I suppose," said Gunner.

"I've tramped 'ere to ask my brother Richard for 'elp," explained William Henry. "I don't need much—a pound would see me through. I'm offered a job in Sussex, if I can get there. I don't want to disgrace Richard, but what's a bloke to do?"

Gunner's hand slid into his pocket, and the shifty eyes of William Henry Dalton glistened.

But the hand came out again empty.

"It's too thick!" said Gunner. "It's odd, I know, you knowing Dicky Dalton's Christian name, but—but——"

"'Arf-a-quid would 'elp me on my way, sir!" said William Henry. "But never you mind, sir—I'll go up to the school and see Richard."

"You keep clear of Rookwood," said Gunner uneasily. "It would mean the push for Dicky Dalton, if you turned up there claiming to be his brother—if it's true."

"Serve 'im right," said William Henry. "I'm goin'"

The tramp detached himself from the grass. Gunner eyed him doubtfully; half convinced. Far in the distance, the grey old tower of Rookwood School showed over the trees against the blue summer sky. It was in that direction that the frowsy gentleman turned his steps.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Gunner.

William Henry looked back. Quite unknown to Gunner, he was perfectly able to follow that obtuse youth's thoughts.

He shook his head.

"No, sir!" he said firmly. "You're going to offer me the money, but I ain't going to take it, sir. Thinking it out, sir, I ain't going to take it. I'm going to see my brother Richard."

Gunner hesitated no longer. He jerked a ten-shilling note from his pocket.

"Here you are!" he said. "I'll chance it! Dicky Dalton doesn't understand me, and never seems to realise my position in the Form; but I'm not going to see him disgraced before all Rookwood! Take it and go!"

Again, William Henry shook his head. He had quite taken Gunner's measure by this time.

"Thank you kindly, sir—but no!" he answered. "Richard mightn't like me to take it from one of his boys. I'm going to see Richard."

He turned again in the direction of Rookwood. Gunner jumped up, quite convinced now.

"Stop!" he exclaimed.

"Good-arternoon to you, sir!" said William Henry.

"Stop, I tell you! I'll make it a pound," exclaimed Gunner; "and if you show up anywhere near Rookwood, you rotter, I'll jolly well punch your face in, so take your choice!"

William Henry looked at him. Gunner had taken the pound-note from a well-filled leather purse; there were nine or ten of them there, and William

Henry's eyes fairly glistened with greed. But though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak; he did not dare to tackle the hefty Gunner. He stretched out a grimy hand to the proffered note.

"Well, to oblige you, sir, you being a generous young gentleman," he said. "I'll take it and go, sir, without seeing my brother Richard."

"Just you sprint for the railway-station," grunted Gunner. "The sooner you're a dozen miles from Rookwood the better."

William Henry slouched away, taking the direction this time of Coombe. Certainly, there was a railway-station there; but Bill Dalton did not walk so far as the station. Considerably nearer was the Bird-in-Hand Inn; and at the Bird-in-Hand the weary limbs of William Henry found repose once more, and his deep and perpetual thirst a temporary assuagement.

Gunner sat under the willows, staring after him till he was out of sight, almost forgetful of his cake, his jam-tarts, and his ginger-pop.

"Well, my hat!" said Gunner at last. "Fancy that—Dicky Dalton's brother! Frightfully rough on Dalton if it got out at Rookwood! I wonder what the Head would say? What a sensation for Masters' Common-room!"

Gunner whistled.

"Poor old Dalton! He's going to lick me after roll—when I know this about him! Lucky for him I'm not like some chaps, who would throw it in his face!"

And Peter Cuthbert Gunner gave his attention at last to his cake, his tarts, and his ginger-pop, with a feeling of great satisfaction and self-approval because he was not like some chaps!

CHAPTER 5.

Black Ingratitude!

JIMMY SILVER, as he went into Hall for roll that day with his chums, paused and glanced at Gunner.

Gunner had stopped on his way to roll, and was standing staring out of a window into the sunset in the quad, with an expression of deep thought on his face. He seemed to have forgotten that he was due in Hall with the rest of the Fourth; and Jimmy kindly tapped him on the shoulder to remind him of the fact.

"Wake up, old man," said Jimmy. "Roll, you know! Better not be late." "I was just thinking——" said Gunner.

"Oh, draw it mild, you know!" said Mornington of the Fourth incredulously, as he passed and caught Gunner's remark. And Morny walked on before Peter Cuthbert could make a rejoinder.

"I was just thinking," repeated Gunner. "Nothing to grin at in Morny's cheek, Silver. I was just thinking, you know. I've had a message that Dicky Dalton wants to see me in his study after roll."

"Naturally," assented Jimmy. "It means a licking for cutting detention."

"Of course it does." "Well, I don't think Dalton ought to lick me, in the circumstances," said Gunner. "Seeing what I've done for him."

"Eh! What have you done for Mr. Dalton?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver in surprise.

"I'm not going to tell you that," said Gunner. "It's a sort of secret, and not exactly my own secret, so I can't very well tell you, can I?"

The captain of the Fourth blinked at him. He wondered whether Gunner was wandering in his mind; indeed, he almost wondered whether Gunner had any mind to wander in.

"Come on, Jimmy!" shouted Lovell. "You'll be shut out."

Leaving Gunner and his mysterious remark unexplained, Jimmy Silver ran on and went into Hall. Gunner followed him in, just before the big oak doors were closed.

Mr. Mooney, master of the Shell, was taking the roll. He called Gunner's name twice before he received an answer; Gunner being deep in thought again on the subject of his coming interview with Richard Dalton. The nearer the licking came, the less Gunner liked the idea of it; and the more it seemed to him that, after what he had done for Richard Dalton that afternoon, he was entitled to be let off the licking.

"Gunner!" repeated the master of the Shell.

Oswald gave Gunner a poke.

"You ass, you're being called!"

"Oh! Adsum!" said Gunner.

Mr. Mooney glanced at him severely, and went on with the roll. Roll finished, the Rookwooders cleared off; Gunner still in a brown study. In the corridor Dickinson minor came up. Dickinson minor had, after all, had a quiet and peaceful half-holiday; Gunner having been out of gates ever since his break from the Form-room, till he came in for roll. But Dickinson was feeling a good-natured concern about his study-mate.

"You're for it, I suppose, old man," he said.

"I don't know," said Gunner.

"Haven't you got to see Dicky?"

"I've been told to."

"Better go," urged Dickinson minor, really anxious to save the headstrong Peter Cuthbert from making matters worse for himself. "No good cheeking a Form-master, you know. It will be six now; but if you get Dicky's rag out, you may get a Head's licking."

"Six!" said Gunner. "Pretty ungrateful of Dicky Dalton to give me six, I think, in the circumstances."

"Ungrateful?" repeated Dickinson minor.

"That's the word!" said Gunner, with a nod.

"Is it?" gasped Dickinson minor. He stared blankly at Gunner, as well he might. Like Jimmy Silver, he won-

dered whether Peter Cuthbert was wandering in his mind.

"I don't see why I should be licked," said Gunner.

"You broke detention, you know."

"Yes, but suppose I hadn't," argued Gunner—"what would have happened then?"

"Eh? You'd have done your detention task, I suppose."

"I'm not talking about that, fathead! I mean— But I'm not sure that I can tell you, Dickinson. You're a pal of mine, of course; but it's really Mr. Dalton's secret. A fellow's bound to keep it dark when he hears something shady about a man, isn't he?"

"Something shady about Dicky Dalton?" stuttered Dickinson minor.

"Yes, awfully shady."

"I—I say, Gunner, old man, I—I wouldn't talk like that, if I were you," urged Dickinson minor. "The fellows would rag you if they heard it. There isn't anything shady about Mr. Dalton, you know. There'd be an awful row if you were heard saying things like that about a Form-master." Dickinson minor was really getting anxious about Gunner.

"I'm not going to tell you what it is, Dickinson; but there it is—awfully shady," said Gunner. "I'm a fellow that can keep a secret. I shan't say a word—I feel bound in honour not to. But I can tell you this much—but for me, Dicky Dalton would have had a frightful showing-up this afternoon. His brother—"

"Has he a brother?" asked Dickinson. "Never heard of him."

Gunner chuckled.

"Not likely to hear of him, considering what he's like! Not that I'm going to tell you, or anybody else, anything about him, of course. I'm bound to keep perfectly mum on this subject."

"Have you met a brother of Mr. Dalton's?" asked Dickinson minor, staring at Gunner in bewilderment.

"I may have, and I may not have,"

answered Gunner mysteriously. "I'm not saying a word about it, as I've told you. But considering that I've saved Mr. Dalton from an awful show-up before all Rookwood, I think he ought to let me off the licking—what?"

"You'd better go and see him," urged Dickinson. "And—don't talk like this to him, Gunner—he would be waxy. I don't know what you've got in your head now, but the less you say about it the better, really, old chap."

"I'll see him," agreed Gunner.

Peter Cuthbert walked away to Mr. Dalton's study. Dickinson minor looked after him quite anxiously. Really, unless Gunner was a little loose in the top story, there was no accounting for his mysterious observations. Nobody, of course, ever expected Gunner to talk sense. Still, there was a limit.

Gunner knocked at his Form-master's door and entered.

Mr. Dalton glanced at him as he came in, and raised his eyebrows a little. Gunner never was a submissive fellow, and often his manner was lacking in the respect due to those placed in authority over him. But now there was almost a swagger about Gunner as he lounged into his Form-master's study that was distinctly displeasing to the eyes of Richard Dalton. It seemed to him that the delinquent was adding disrespect to disobedience.

Gunner really was a decent fellow, according to his lights. Not for worlds would he have made capital out of this shady secret he had discovered—as he supposed—in connection with Mr. Dalton. He would have disdained the mere idea of doing so. Nevertheless, one good turn deserves another. He had parted with a whole pound-note, out of sheer kindness of heart, to save his Form-master from a disgraceful show-up at Rookwood. The least Mr. Dalton could do was to let him off the licking in return. Certainly Mr. Dalton did not know what Gunner had done for him, and Gunner felt a natural delicacy about telling him. He felt,

indeed, that he could not tell him. It wouldn't be decent to rub it in. Still, there it was; he had done Mr. Dalton that generous service, and one good turn certainly deserved another. And, considering that by the mere mention of William Henry he could cover Mr. Dalton with humiliation as with a garment, it was rather cheeky of Mr. Dalton to be frowning at him in this lofty way, Gunner thought.

He stood before his annoyed Form-master with an air of independence that added to Mr. Dalton's irritation. The young master's hand closed on his cane.

"Gunner!"

"Yes, sir?" said Peter Cuthbert carelessly.

"You were detained this afternoon, and you left the Form-room without permission. You disregarded a Sixth Form prefect who called you to return."

"I don't think much of Dickinson major, sir," said Gunner. "I shouldn't take much notice of him."

"That is not the way to speak of a Sixth Form prefect, Gunner."

"Isn't it, sir?" said Gunner cheerfully.

"You seem to have very little sense of discipline, Gunner," said the master of the Fourth. "I am afraid that you are a very foolish and obstinate boy, and that only punishment has any effect on you. I shall cane you severely for breaking detention this afternoon; and your task which was undone, must be done on Saturday afternoon."

"Oh, must it?" said Gunner warmly.

Mr. Dalton rose to his feet.

"There is a chair, Gunner. Bend over it!"

Gunner eyed him, showing no disposition to obey.

"The fact is, sir, I think you ought to let me off," he said.

"What! What excuse have you to offer for your conduct, Gunner?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Well, as it turned out, it was jolly

lucky I did get out of detention this afternoon, sir," said Gunner. "I can tell you that something would have jolly well happened if I hadn't!"

"What do you mean, Gunner?"

"I'd rather not tell you what I mean, sir, but I think you can take my word for it," said Gunner, with a grin. "I can tell you, sir, you'd have been jolly sorry if I hadn't been out of gates this afternoon."

"I fail to understand you, Gunner," said Mr. Dalton, looking very attentively at the cheery Peter Cuthbert. "Your manner is impertinent, and, so far as I can perceive, your words have no meaning whatever. I have no further time to waste on you, Gunner. Bend over that chair."

Gunner breathed hard and deep.

"Look here, sir——"

"Will you obey me instantly!" snapped Richard Dalton.

"I jolly well think——"

"Bend over that chair!" thundered Richard Dalton; and Gunner jumped, and almost before he knew what he was doing he was bending over the chair.

The cane rose and fell.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

It was "six," and every stroke was well laid on. Richard Dalton disliked caning delinquents; but there were occasions when the cane had to come into the picture, and this was one of them. Mr. Dalton felt that it was his duty to be severe, and he did his duty conscientiously.

Gunner wriggled and squirmed under the caning. At the fourth stroke he was yelling; at the sixth he was roaring.

Mr. Dalton laid down the cane.

"Now, Gunner——"

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

"Your detention task will be given to you on Saturday afternoon. If it is not then done satisfactorily, you will be reported to the headmaster. Now you may go."

"Ow—ow—ow!"

Gunner limped to the door. At the door he turned and gave Richard Dalton a glare.

"Ow! Caning a chap, after what he's done for you!" he gasped. "Do you call that grateful? Ow! Wow! I jolly well wish I'd let that chap come up to Rookwood now! Ow!"

"I do not know to what you are alluding, Gunner, and I take no interest in the matter," said Mr. Dalton. "But your intention is evidently to be impertinent. You will take two hundred lines of Virgil."

"Oh, look here, Mr. Dalton——"

"Silence! Another word, and I shall cane you again, Gunner, and more severely. Leave my study at once, you unruly boy!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

His hand was on his cane again, and his eyes were gleaming. Even the headstrong and obstreperous Peter Cuthbert realised that he had better go. And he went, wriggling.

"Hallo, Gunner's had it!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell, as Peter Cuthbert came limping and wriggling along the corridor. "Poor old Gunner! Well, you asked for it, old bean."

"Ow—ow—ow!" groaned Gunner.

"Had it bad, old chap?" asked Dickinson minor.

"Ow—wow! Yes! The cheeky rotter!" gasped Gunner. "Caning a chap, you know—and two hundred lines—and detention on Saturday!"

"Well, what did you expect?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Have a little sense, Gunner. You asked for it."

Gunner snorted. He was in a state of anguish and anger and indignation—especially indignation.

"After what I did for him this afternoon!" he hooted. "Cheeky rotter—that's what Dicky Dalton is! I jolly well wish I'd let him be shown up, now, before all Rookwood! It would have served him right! I tipped his rotten relation a quid to keep away from Rookwood! Ow!"

"What?" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Eh?"

"Dicky Dalton's brother is a tramp—a regular rotter and blighter—an awful character—I met him this afternoon, coming up to Rookwood!" gasped Gunner. "Met him on the way, you know, and stopped him, and tipped him a quid to keep away—just to save Dicky Dalton from a show-up! And this is how he rewards me, after what I've done for him! Ow! Talk about ingratitude! Ow!"

There was a howl of astonishment.

"Mad!" said Mornington.

"Oh, quite!" said Jimmy Silver. "Mad as a hatter! But, mad or sane, Gunner isn't going to say things like that about Dicky! Bump him!"

"Here, hands off— Yarooooh!" roared Gunner.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

It was a dizzy and breathless Gunner that Dickinson minor helped to his study after Jimmy Silver & Co. had finished with him. Gunner collapsed into his armchair and groaned; and Dickinson minor, grinning, left him to groan.

CHAPTER 6.

Perplexing!

RICHARD DALTON frowned.

He was puzzled, and he was not pleased.

As a rule the face of the Fourth Form master of Rookwood wore a very cheery expression. He often smiled, and he seldom frowned. Even in the Form-room, when he had to deal with Tubby Muffin's orthography and Gunner's construe, he generally remained good-tempered and cheery.

On this particular morning, however, he was frowning, and his looks plainly indicated annoyance as well as perplexity.

He had reason to be perplexed. He was mystified.

It had started at breakfast—a meal which Richard Dalton took with his Form, sitting at the head of the Clas-

sical Fourth table. At breakfast, all the Classical Fourth fellows had looked at their Form-master—looked at him not once, or twice, or thrice, but dozens of times, almost as if his handsome and healthy countenance fascinated them somehow.

Now, it was quite true that Richard Dalton, the youngest and fittest and best-looking member of the staff at Rookwood School, was worth a second glance. It was also true that a cat may look at a king, and so, naturally, a Fourth Form fellow might look at his Form-master.

Still, there was a limit.

Fellows looked at Mr. Dalton incessantly and surreptitiously. For some minutes he really wondered whether he had a smut on his nose, or something of the kind. But it was not that. For some reason, inexplicable to him, he was an object of almost breathless interest to his Form that morning. And even Tubby Muffin did not devote his whole attention to food as usual, even the fat Tubby spared a glance or two for the young master sitting at the head of the table.

It surprised Richard Dalton, it perplexed him, and finally it irritated him, and his brows contracted.

He could not raise his eyes from his plate without meeting a stare, which was immediately turned away, of course, only to return! All along the long table fellows would glance up, and if they met Mr. Dalton's eyes would drop their glances in confusion. Nevertheless, they could not help looking again.

If it was a "rag," the whole of the Classical Fourth seemed to be in it—even Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Form. Jimmy, having met Mr. Dalton's surprised eyes, resolutely did not look again. Raby and Newcome, after a glance or two, did not look again. But Arthur Edward Lovell did not follow this good example of his chums. He stared at Richard Dalton, and

stared again and again, as incessantly and fixedly as Putty of the Fourth, Oswald, Conroy, Gunner, Dickinson minor, and other members of the Form. By the time breakfast was over it was growing quite uncomfortable and disconcerting for Richard Dalton.

After brekker the fellows went out, and Richard Dalton took his accustomed walk in the quadrangle before classes. Then it began again.

Not being in the presence of the whole Form at once, as at brekker, he was not subjected to a general broadside of stares. But he could not come within staring distance of any member of the Classical Fourth without getting a glance, and a second glance, and a third.

His frown deepened.

He could only imagine that it was a "rag"—quite an original and peculiar kind of a rag—and Mr. Dalton was not a master to be ragged with impunity. Mr. Wiggins of the Second might be ragged; sometimes Mr. Bohun of the Third; still more Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, and it was not unknown for even the majestic leg of Horace Greely, the master of the Fifth, to be pulled.

But Mr. Dalton was not the man to take any.

If this was a rag, it meant trouble for the ragers. And what else could it be?

There was no smut on Richard Dalton's face. He had not forgotten to put on his collar and tie that morning, as the absent-minded Mr. Mooney once had done. He was not taking about with him a nose battered by a punch-ball accident, as on the celebrated occasion when Mr. Greely had been the cynosure of all eyes at Rookwood. Nothing of the kind had occurred. Richard Dalton presented his usual aspect of healthy and cheery good looks and fitness. Yet no member of his Form seemed able to get near him without staring in a fascinated way at him.

Matters came to a climax when Mr. Dalton came on Gunner and Dickinson minor under the beeches. Gunner looked at him; Dickinson's gaze was fairly glued upon him.

Mr. Dalton walked up to them.

"What does this mean, Gunner?" he asked.

"What, sir?" asked Gunner.

"You two boys were staring in a very rude and objectionable manner," said Mr. Dalton sharply, his face flushing a little. He realised that there was something rather ridiculous in finding fault with his own Form for merely looking at him. Yet it was getting intolerable.

"Were we, sir?" said Gunner.

"You were!" snapped Richard Dalton.

"Sorry, sir! No offence meant!" said Gunner. "You licked me yesterday, sir, unjustly——"

"What?"

"Unjustly! But I'm not a fellow to bear malice, and I wouldn't hurt your feelings for anything, sir," said Gunner generously.

"You are a very stupid boy, Gunner! Dickinson minor, you have a little more intelligence than Gunner. What does this mean?"

"N-n-nothing, sir," stammered Dickinson minor.

"Is it what the boys call a rag?"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Dickinson.

"Then what does it mean?" asked Mr. Dalton. "Why are you and the others staring at me this morning as if I were extraordinarily remarkable in some way?"

"Well, so you are, sir, you know," said Gunner.

"What?"

"I mean, in the circumstances," said Gunner hastily.

"What do you mean? What circumstances?"

"Oh, nothing, sir! I'm not a fellow to rub it in!"

"To—to what? To rub what in?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I am to blame for questioning so obtuse a boy," said Mr. Dalton. "I address myself to you, Dickinson minor, once more. Tell me at once what this means."

"Nothing, sir."

"Each of you will take fifty lines!" said Mr. Dalton.

"Oh!"

The Form-master walked away, with a pink spot glowing in either cheek. It was seldom that he was angry; but Richard Dalton had a temper, though it was always kept in good control. He was angry now, and growing angrier.

Gunner looked at Dickinson minor and grunted.

"Fifty lines each!" he said. "That's rich! Like his cheek—what?"

"I—I suppose he's noticed that the fellows are looking at him," said Dickinson minor. "Dash it all, they can't help being surprised, if it's true what you've been saying, Gunner."

"If!" roared Gunner.

"I—I mean, if you've not made a mistake!"

"Do I make mistakes?" demanded Peter Cuthbert Gunner truculently.

"I—I mean——"

"Are you asking me to bang your napper against that tree, Dickinson minor?" inquired Gunner.

"N-n-nunno!"

"Then you'd better shut up."

Dickinson minor shut up. It was always safer to shut up than to argue with Peter Cuthbert Gunner of the Classical Fourth.

CHAPTER 7.

Moscoo Explains!

MR. GREELY coughed.

Horace Greely, master of the Rookwood Fifth, had a little, fat, important cough, generally the preliminary to fat, important remarks. Ponderous Mr. Greely looked more ponderous than ever as he approached

Richard Dalton in Masters' Common-room and opened his batteries, so to speak, with that fat, little, preliminary cough.

Richard Dalton's look was not welcoming. Often and often Mr. Greely weighed in to help his younger colleague with advice, in the majestic kindness of his heart. He had, perhaps, a dim perception that his homilies were not welcomed. But no doubt he put this down to youthful self-sufficiency and ingratitude on the part of his colleague.

"H'm!" said Mr. Greely.

Mr. Dalton suppressed an impatient ejaculation. He was not in the best of tempers that day. His sunny disposition had been rather sorely tried.

All day long, in class and out of class, he had been the centre of breathless curiosity on the part of the Fourth, and he knew that something or other must have occurred to account for this. It was no rag. It was something more than that.

But what it was he could not fathom.

It was useless to question the juniors. They evaded questions, they answered craftily or dodgily. They simply would not, or could not, tell him what the mystery was. He realised, indeed, that they dared not. And that made him wonder all the more what the matter was.

Really, it was growing intolerable, and he was getting decidedly "ratty." In that frame of mind he was not prepared to tolerate the ponderous Mr. Greely with his usual patience.

He had observed, too, coming into Masters' room after tea, a certain suppressed movement, an exchange of glances, among his colleagues. Mr. Wiggins had actually coloured, Mr. Bohun avoided his glance, Mr. Mooney spoke to him with an exaggerated cordiality. He knew that he had been under discussion, and that his entrance made all these gentlemen feel uncomfortable.

They drifted out one by one soon afterwards, with the exception of Mr. Greely. Horace Greely stayed, and approached the Fourth Form-master with a sonorous: "H'm!"

"H'm!" repeated Mr. Greely. "You will excuse me, Mr. Dalton—h'm——"
"What is it?"

"As an older man," said Mr. Greely, "as a master much senior to yourself, both in years and in standing——"

Richard Dalton interrupted. He had heard an exordium like that many times before, and he was feeling too impatient on this occasion to let Horace Greely progress, slowly and ponderously and impressively, from the exordium to the peroration.

"Yes, yes. What is the matter, Mr. Greely?"

"Your boys, sir," said Mr. Greely, with dignity.

"Kindly say no more, Mr. Greely."

"What?"

"I have no doubt your motives are kind," said Mr. Dalton. "But you must have observed, Mr. Greely, that I never interfere in the affairs of the Fifth Form, from motives kind or otherwise."

It was a snub, and Mr. Greely flushed. However, he had received snubs before, in his career as adviser-in-chief to the Rookwood staff, and he recovered.

"Really, Mr. Dalton, this is hardly what I should expect from you. As a master of senior standing——"

Mr. Dalton rose.

"You are not going, Mr. Dalton?"

"Yes, I am going."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Greely, much offended. "Very well, Mr. Dalton—very well. I will not say what I was about to say. I will not put you on your guard, as I intended. Very well, sir—very well indeed!"

Mr. Dalton walked out of Masters' room, leaving Horace Greely very much offended. The Fifth Form-master's last words had excited his curiosity a little, and he wondered whether, for once, Mr. Greely had been

going to utter something more useful than masked advice.

In the corridor Mr. Dalton came on Bulkeley of the Sixth, and Bulkeley's look was curious. Mr. Dalton noticed it, and he stopped to speak to Bulkeley. Whatever it was that had excited his Form, and had been the topic in Masters' room, had apparently reached the ears of the Rookwood captain.

But if Bulkeley knew, he did not care to refer to it.

He spoke to Mr. Dalton about the football, carefully avoiding any other topic, and got away as soon as he could.

Mr. Dalton breathed hard as he walked on.

Something was up, that was certain. Something or other was making him the talk of Rookwood, concentrating on him the curious attention of the whole school. What was it?

In the morning he had noticed it in his own Form only. But now he saw that it had spread. Bulkeley of the Sixth knew—the masters knew—Mr. Greely had probably been about to explain what it was when he was cut short. The Shell knew—Mr. Dalton had seen Smythe and Tracy and Selwyn, and some more of the Shell, whispering and regarding him with grinning glances. The Fifth knew—he had had unmistakable looks from Hanson and Lumsden and other Fifth Form fellows.

But what was it? What did it mean?

Really, it was beginning to get on Richard Dalton's nerves a little. The mystery of it was worrying.

He walked out of the House. Jimmy Silver & Co. were at footer practice on Little Side, and Mr. Dalton turned his steps in that direction. He often gave the Fourth Form fellows tips on footer, being a tremendous footballer himself. But now he paused and turned back. He did not feel that he wanted to be in the presence of his Form, the subject of surreptitious glances and suppressed whispers.

He began to wish that he had let Mr. Greely run on. But he did not seek Mr. Greely to give him another chance. He walked thoughtfully under the old beeches. Gunner and Dickinson minor were going down to the gates together, and they glanced at Mr. Dalton as they went, and then, as they caught his glance in return, hurried on.

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips.

These juniors knew—whatever it was—that was clear. He was tempted to question them and force them to explain. But, after all, how could he force them to repeat the gossip, whatever it was, that was spreading through the school? Such a proceeding would have been too undignified.

Monsieur Monceau, the French master, was taking a little walk under the beeches. Richard Dalton joined him, and the French gentleman greeted him with even more polished politeness than usual. Like many French masters Monsieur Monceau was a rather neglected and unregarded gentleman, but Richard Dalton had always been very kind and friendly to him, and Mossoo repaid a little thoughtful kindness with a very deep attachment. It was easy to see that Mossoo knew of the mysterious discussion that was going on concerning his friend, hence his particularly polite and cordial manner. It went against the grain with Richard Dalton to raise the subject of his own affairs, but he decided to do so.

"Can you enlighten me, Monsieur Monceau?" he asked rather abruptly.

"Comment?"

"Something seems to be going on—some discussion concerning me," said Mr. Dalton, colouring with discomfort. "I am quite mystified. If you are aware of what it is, it would be a friendly act to enlighten me."

"Zen you know him not?" asked Mossoo.

"I am quite in the dark."

"Vous voulez! You desire zat I tell you?"

"I shall be deeply obliged."

Mossoo hesitated.

"It is some talk," he said at last. "Vot're frere, n'est-ce pas——"

"My brother?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, in astonishment. He remembered Tubby Muffin's mysterious reference to his brother.

"Mais oui! You have one frere who——"

"I have a brother, certainly; but he is quite unknown here," said Richard Dalton. "He is in the Army, stationed in India. How can it be possible for my brother to be a topic here?"

"Un soldat—a soldier—in India! J'ai—dit—I have said zat it is all shine of ze moon, as you say in English," said Monsieur Monceau. No doubt the French gentleman meant moonshine.

"But what is it?" exclaimed Mr Dalton.

"It is said—of course, it is all shine of ze moon—but it is a topic zat you have a frere—one brozzer—who is about ze school—a bad character."

"What!"

"One verree bad character who is one tramp, and who hangs about ze school and ze houses of ze public," said Mossoo. "I speak as a friend in telling you zis, Mr. Dalton. I know zat zere is nozzings in it. Some boy has seen one tramp who say he is your brozzer, and ze story is talked over ze school. I have zink to myself, it is one duty as a friend to warn you of zis."

Mr. Dalton stared at him blankly.

He had tried to imagine what the mysterious topic might be; but certainly he had never imagined anything like this.

"Is—is—is it possible?" he stuttered.

"C'est possible! C'est vrai! So one says," said Monsieur Monceau. "Some foolish boy in your Form have started ze story."

"The young rascal!"

"Zere is nozzings in him, vrai?" asked Monsieur Monceau. "Your friends zink no worse of you, monsieur

if you have one relation who is not—vat you call—up to ze marks.”

“Thank you, monsieur,” said Mr. Dalton dryly. “But I do not happen to have any disreputable relations, that I am aware of. I am much obliged to you for telling me this. I shall investigate the matter at once.”

And Richard Dalton, with a grim brow, nodded to the French master, and walked away to the House.

CHAPTER 8.

Good of Gunner!

“THE awful rotter!” said Gunner indignantly.

“Eh?” said Dickinson minor.

“The swindling brute!”

Peter Cuthbert Gunner was indignant.

His indignation was just. It was aroused by the sight of a tattered, frowsy fellow sprawling in the shade of a hawthorn hedge, a tattered and battered tramp taking his ease in the grass and the shade in the warm summer afternoon.

“Know that rotter?” asked Dickinson minor in amazement.

“Yes, rather! That’s Dalton’s brother.”

Dickinson minor almost fell down.

Gunner’s story of his meeting with Mr. Dalton’s brother, the tramp, had spread like wildfire through Rookwood, little believed, but greatly discussed. It was too startling a story to be believed, yet many fellows wondered whether there was something in it. Gunner was every kind of an ass, but he was known to be very veracious. He stated facts so far as he knew them or understood them. He would have disdained to lie, and that quality of his was well known in the Fourth, and so gave some weight to his story. Indeed, as Morny pointed out, Gunner hadn’t the brains or the imagination to invent such a story. There was something behind it—whatever it might be.

Now Dickinson minor had a view of what was behind it—this frowsy tramp. He looked on, quite dazedly, as Gunner strode up to the frowsy man sprawling in the grass, and stared down at him angrily. William Henry Dalton, more commonly known as Bill, blinked up at him and grinned.

“You, sir?” he said.

He recognised the Rookwood junior. He was not likely to forget Gunner. The fellow who had been asinine enough to swallow his yarn of being a relation of Mr. Dalton’s was not easily forgotten. The similarity of name and the obtuse credulity of Gunner formed the foundation of the story, though Peter Cuthbert, of course, could not be expected to guess as much. He was far from being aware that he was obtuse and credulous. Indeed, his fixed belief was that he was a very keen and knowing fellow.

“You rotter!” roared Gunner.

“Eh?”

“You rascal!”

“What’s biting you, sir?” asked William Henry, grinning up lazily at Gunner.

“I tipped you a quid to clear off!” said Gunner. “You’re not gone! What do you mean by hanging about here after I tipped you a quid to go?”

Bill Dalton sat up.

“Wot’s a quid?” he said.

“Why, you thundering rascal—”

“Ain’t I got a brother doing well at your school?” said William Henry. “Ain’t it ‘is dooty to help a pore relation? I’m going up to Rookwood, I am, to see whether Richard won’t ‘elp a bloke.”

“You promised to clear off if I handed you a quid,” said Gunner, greatly incensed. “I handed you the quid, you rotter!”

“Now, you hand me another, if you don’t want me to walk into Rookwood School,” said William Henry, eyeing Gunner. “That’s business.”

William Henry spoke truculently.

Gunner did not doubt his claim to be Richard Dalton's brother—because of his amazing crass credulity, he did not doubt it. Gunner was standing between his Form-master and this disgraceful relation, who threatened to "show him up" at Rookwood. It was good of Gunner, considering that he was far from being a favourite of Mr. Dalton's. In fact, it was too good of Gunner! Had he not taken Mr. Dalton under his kindly protection William Henry would not have consumed a pound's worth of strong drink at the Bird-in-Hand, and would not have been lingering in the neighbourhood of the school at all.

That day William Henry had been sleeping off his potations under the hedges. Now he was thirsty again, and the sight of Gunner was like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years.

Whether the same chicken would fight a second time William Henry did not feel sure. But it was worth trying. Gunner, apparently, was fool enough to be "stuffed" to any extent. Stuffing fools was an old game with William Henry.

He drew himself out of the grass and blinked at Gunner.

"You mind your own business, young gentleman," he said. "It ain't for you to butt in 'tween me and my relations. I'm jest on my way up to the school, and I was taking a bit of a rest. I'm going up there now. What does it matter to you, I'd like to know?"

"Do you think I'm going to have my Form-master disgraced by a rotten outsider like you butting in and giving him away?" demanded Gunner. "Dicky Dalton is a good sort, and I'm looking after him, you see? You come up to Rookwood, and I'll knock your nose through to the back of your head, to begin with."

William Henry Dalton grinned. Certainly he had no intention of going anywhere near Rookwood. But he did not tell Gunner that.

"What's a man to do?" he asked. "A bloke's got to live! A quid would see me clear. I 'ad to pay that quid you gave me to a blooming innkeeper for—for food. Make it another quid, and I'll hook it!"

He eyed Gunner cunningly, wondering whether the chicken would fight.

Gunner glared at him.

He, on his side, was debating whether he should "pitch into" William Henry Dalton, and knock him right and left. There would be satisfaction in it; but would it keep the rascal from blackmailing Mr. Dalton at Rookwood? That was the doubtful point—to Gunner.

"How's a fellow going to believe you?" said Gunner at last. "You promised to go last time!"

"I mean it this time, sir! I'd have gone afore, only I 'ad a bill to pay—on my davy! I've got a job waiting for me in Sussex, if I could get there. Make it a quid, sir."

Gunner hesitated.

Dickinson minor said no word. He was staring on in blank astonishment. Astonishment deprived him of speech. Dickinson minor, being Gunner's study-mate, knew his friend's asinine qualities. He had supposed that he knew every kind of silly ass Gunner was. But this was a discovery to him. Evidently he had not quite known Gunner.

"Look here, my man!" said Gunner, making up his mind. "I'll give you another chance. I haven't the money about me now—"

"Oh!" said William Henry surlily.

"I'll come out again after tea, and meet you here, and give you the quid," said Gunner, "and I'll jolly well walk with you to the station and see you off the train. See?"

William Henry had his own ideas about that. But he nodded. The "quid" was the important matter, in William Henry's estimation.

"I'll wait 'ere for you, sir," he said.

"Wait till I come," said Gunner.

And he walked back towards Rookwood with Dickinson minor. That astounded youth found his voice at last.

"Is—is that the man, Gunner?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"He's really made you believe that he's a relation of Dicky Dalton?" gasped Dickinson minor.

"His name's Dalton——"

"Well, I suppose there are hundreds of Daltons, if not thousands," said Dickinson minor. "His name might be Gunner, but that wouldn't make him your brother, would it?"

"Don't be an ass, Dickinson minor! I suppose you don't think the fellow could take me in, do you?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Am I the kind of fellow to be taken in?" demanded Gunner.

"Look here!" gasped Dickinson. "That fellow's pulling your leg, Gunner. Why, I never heard of such a transparent yarn! He must think you're the biggest idiot in Hampshire to swallow a yarn like that. He must really. Ow! Oh! Leggo! Whoop!"

Gunner had grasped Dickinson minor by the collar, and was banging his head against a tree.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!" roared Dickinson minor, struggling frantically in Peter Cuthbert's hefty grasp.

"Say when!" said Gunner.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Do you think I'm a fool to be taken in—what?"

"Oow! Yes—no—yaroooooh! No! Oh, no!" yelled Dickinson minor.

"Good!"

Gunner released the hapless junior. Dickinson minor rubbed his head, and glared at Peter Cuthbert. Gunner strode on towards Rookwood, unheeding him further, having reduced Dickinson to a proper state of discipline.

Dickinson minor followed him, still rubbing his head.

CHAPTER 9.

Dicky Wants to Know!

"DICKY!—ahem—Mr. Dalton!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped up. The Fistical Four were at tea in the end study when there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Dalton presented himself. Most of the Classical Fourth had come in to tea, and there was a clatter of crockery and a buzz of cheerful voices along the Classical Fourth passage.

"Come in, sir!" said Jimmy Silver. "Very kind of you to come to tea with us, sir."

Jimmy Silver spoke hospitably, but a little uneasily. As a matter of fact he was well aware, from Mr. Dalton's expression, that Dicky Dalton had not come to tea in the end study.

"A certain matter has come to my knowledge, Silver," said the master of the Fourth. "I have come to you as head boy of my Form."

"Oh, yes, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "That ass Gunner!" murmured Lovell.

All the quartette knew now why Richard Dalton had called.

"I have known all day that something unusual was going on in my Form," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Now I know that I have been made the subject of a ridiculous and impertinent discussion. Some member of my Form has started an absurd story concerning me—concerning some supposed relation of mine. You are aware of it, Silver?"

"Yes, sir," stammered Jimmy. "We never believed a word of it, sir," murmured Newcome.

"Thank you! Some boy claims to have seen a disreputable tramp, I understand, whose name is Dalton, or who states that his name is Dalton, and who claims to be my relation."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"The boy's name?" Jimmy was silent.

Gunner desisted to be licked, if ever any fellow did, for his asinine credulity,

and for making such a sensation in the school, with Dicky Dalton as the victim of it. Still, the juniors were disinclined to give even the egregious Gunner away.

"I—I think the fellow meant well, sir," said Lovell. "He can't help being a born idiot, sir—the biggest fool at Rookwood!"

Mr. Dalton looked at Lovell.

"You prefer not to give me the boy's name?" he asked.

"If—if you don't mind, sir——"

"Very well. No doubt I shall find him."

Mr. Dalton left the study.

The Fistical Four exchanged glances.

"Isn't he a jolly good sportsman?" murmured Raby. "Lots of masters would have had the name out of us fast enough, or made us squirm."

"One of the best," said Jimmy. "Just like Gunner to fix his silly story on the best man at Rookwood!"

"Oh, just!"

"Dicky is sure to bowl him out," said Lovell.

"Sure to—now you've given him the clue!" chuckled Raby.

"Eh? What clue did I give him?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"You said it was the biggest fool at Rookwood."

Lovell grinned.

"Yes, Dicky might guess from that. "Ha, ha, ha!"

As a matter of fact, Dicky Dalton had guessed—possibly from Lovell's description of the unknown junior, but partly from the remembrance of some remarks Gunner had made to him, which he had not understood at the time. It was Peter Cuthbert Gunner, the most egregious duffer at Rookwood School, who was responsible for this amazing story. And Mr. Dalton proceeded along the Fourth Form passage in quest of Gunner. He looked in at No. 7, and found it vacant. Gunner and Dickinson minor had not yet come in. Inquiry in the other studies did not unearth Gunner.

Finally the Fourth Form-master left word that Gunner was to be sent to his study immediately he came in, and went down the stairs.

He left a buzzing crowd in the Fourth Form passage.

The Classical Fourth were highly excited. Whether there was "anything" in the strange story or not, it was fairly certain that there was trouble ahead for Gunner. Indeed, Peele remarked that the more truth there was in the story the more ratty Mr. Dalton would be, and the heavier would be Gunner's punishment.

"Here he is!" called out Mornington a little later.

Gunner came up the stairs, followed by Dickinson minor.

Dickinson minor was giving his head an occasional rub, as if it had lately come into rough contact with something hard.

"Here he is!"

"Here's Gunner!"

"You're for it, fathead!"

"Dicky wants you, ass!"

"Now you can go and tell Dicky about his brother."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner stared round at the hilarious juniors.

"What does that mean?" he demanded. "Some of you duffers been telling Dalton that we know all about his shady brother?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nobody's told him, but he seems to have guessed," chuckled Mornington.

"You're to go to Mr. Dalton's study, Gunner," said the captain of the Fourth.

"I don't mind. If Dicky Dalton has heard the story, it's not my fault. I was keeping it dark," said Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mind seeing Dalton about it! Not at all. I'll go! I'm going to have my tea first, of course!"

And Gunner went into his study.

"Isn't he the limit?" exclaimed Dickinson minor. "I say, I've seen the man."

"Seen Dicky's brother?" chuckled Lovell.

"It isn't his brother, of course! A frowsy tramp pulling Gunner's leg!" said Dickinson minor. "I told him so, and he banged my head on a tree."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The silly ass is having his silly leg pulled, of course," said Dickinson. "But he thinks he's keeping a shady relation of Dick's away, and he's agreed to meet the man again after tea and give him another quid to go."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Tell us all about it," said Jimmy Silver.

Dickinson minor gave a graphic description of the meeting with William Henry Dalton in the lane. The juniors listened—Jimmy Silver with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

"So the man's waiting there for Gunner?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"I know the man. We met him ourselves, I think," said Jimmy. "I remember a frowsy tramp who told us his name was Dalton. He didn't tell us he was our Form-master's brother, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only Gunner gets information like that!" chortled Mornington.

"If he's waiting for Gunner, we can drop in on him," said Jimmy. "Look here, you chaps! This story of Gunner's is simply silly; but some of it will stick to Dicky Dalton if it's not knocked on the head. That rotter, Bill Dalton, had better be made to own up."

"How?" asked Lovell.

"He's waiting for Gunner in the lane. We'll go instead of Gunner, and ask him to step in at Rookwood—to see Mr. Dalton."

"He jolly well won't come!" grinned Lovell.

"He won't be able to decline."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because we shall have told of his ears. Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're all in this!" chuckled Morny. "Come on! All the whole giddy family! We'll make it a procession, with Dicky's brother in the place of honour."

"Good egg!"

"Come on, Dickinson, and point him out," said Conroy.

"Right-ho!"

And a crowd of the Classical Fourth marched off to interview William Henry Dalton, now waiting in Coombe Lane for Gunner. He was not to see Gunner, after all, but an army of Gunner's Form-fellows instead, which would probably not be so satisfactory to William Henry. Meanwhile, Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in his study, finished his tea in leisurely comfort, blissfully regardless of the fact that his Form-master was expecting him. Tea finished, Gunner left his study—but not to visit Richard Dalton.

Mr. Dalton had left word for him to come, but Gunner could not help that. It was for Richard Dalton's own sake that he was negotiating with William Henry, and Gunner felt that it would be judicious to get finished with William Henry at once. Suppose the fellow, thinking Gunner had failed him, came on to the school? In the actual circumstances it was not probable. He walked out of the House—with the promised pound note in his pocket—and started for the gates.

"Gunner!"

It was Mr. Dalton's voice from his study window.

Gunner heard it, but he affected not to hear. He quickened his pace a little, that was all.

"Bulkeley, stop that junior, please!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth strode after Gunner, who was running now. His grasp dropped on Gunner's shoulder before he reached the gates. And Mr. Dalton, with a grim and frowning brow, came striding up from the direction of the House.

CHAPTER 10.

Own Up!

"GUNNER!"

"I'm in rather a hurry, sir!"

"You impertinent boy!"

"The fact is, sir, I've an appointment to keep," said Gunner. "Kindly tell Bulkeley to let me go at once, sir!"

"From certain words you have let fall in speaking to me, Gunner, I have reason to believe that you are the author of a wicked and ridiculous story now circulating in the school!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton sternly.

His voice was sharp and clear, and it drew a good many Rookwood fellows to the spot, exchanging curious glances. Most of them had wondered how long the story would take to reach Richard Dalton's own ears. Evidently it had reached them now.

Gunner glanced round.

"Better let it drop, sir," he said.

"What?"

"Dash it all, there's twenty fellows hearing every word you say!" urged Gunner.

"Do you suppose, you stupid boy, that I object to anyone hearing me?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Well, if you want to shout it all over Rookwood, sir——" said Gunner resignedly.

"You have invented a silly, stupid, and wicked story, Gunner——"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Gunner hotly. "I've done my best to keep it dark! I've tipped the man to keep away! A fellow couldn't do more!"

"What man?" roared Mr. Dalton.

"Your brother, sir, if you will have it out before all the fellows!" said Gunner.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bulkeley.

"My brother is in India," said Mr. Dalton, glancing round. "This incredibly stupid boy has been imposed upon by a tale of some charlatan, if he is not inventing the whole story himself!"

"Well, I like that!" said Gunner

indignantly. "I never expected any gratitude, sir. But this is really too thick. I stood the man a pound out of my own pocket to go. I'm going out to see him now, to give him another quid, to clear off. I really think, sir, you might thank a fellow for trying to save you from an awful show-up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Dalton's face was crimson.

"You stupid boy! You have been imposed upon! The man you speak of, whoever he is, is no relation of mine!"

Gunner winked.

"All right, sir. Let it go at that!" he said. "Can I go now?"

"No!" thundered Mr. Dalton.

"You'd better let me go, sir," urged Gunner. "For your own sake, really, sir!"

"For my own sake? How? What do you mean?"

"I mean that your brother may come up to the school this blessed minute, if I don't go and stop him!" exclaimed Gunner desperately.

"The man is not my brother, nor any relation of mine!" almost shouted Mr. Dalton. "Gunner, I shall report your insolence to the Head, and request Dr. Chisholm to flog you!"

Gunner snorted.

"I like that!" he said. "That's gratitude, is it, for saving you from a frightful show-up? Money out of my own pocket, too!"

"You, absurd, stupid boy——"

Mr. Dalton was interrupted.

There was a shout from the gates.

"Here he is! Here's Dicky's brother!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, staring at the crowd in the gateway. "What—what does this mean?"

"Really—really——" Mr. Horace Greely rolled up, portly and ponderous. "What—what is all this? Who is this man—this ruffian—this frowzy and disgraceful ruffian?"

Gunner gasped.

"My hat! It's Mr. Dalton's brother! And they've brought him here! The game's up now!"

"Let a bloke alone!" William Henry Dalton was yelling, as he was propelled into the gateway. "I ain't going in! Yaroooh! Leggo my years, will you, you young rip! Yoop! Stop kicking a cove! Ow, ow! It was all a joke! Ow! Wow! Leave off kicking a cove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In you go!" chuckled Lovell.

"All kick together!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooooh!"

William Henry rolled in headlong at the gates.

Mr. Dalton strode up, with a black brow.

"Silver—Lovell—Mornington—what—"

"What, indeed?" boomed Mr. Greely.

"Mr. Dalton, this is—is extraordinary! If this man is indeed your brother, sir, it is most injudicious—most injudicious—"

"Don't be absurd, sir!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"What—what—what?" Horace

Greely could scarcely believe his ears. "What—what did you say, Mr. Dalton?"

"Don't be absurd! In fact, don't be childish, sir!" snapped Richard Dalton.

Mr. Greely snorted, speechless with indignation.

"Now, Silver, tell me what this means!" exclaimed Richard Dalton.

"Why have you brought this disreputable man into the school?"

William Henry sat up.

"Ow! Let a bloke mizzle! Ow!"

"That's the man who told a fellow he was your brother, sir," said Jimmy.

"As the story's all over the school, we thought we'd round him up and make him own up it was a lie, sir."

"You silly ass!" roared Gunner.

"You've done it now! Didn't I warn you to keep it dark?"

"Oh, dry up, Gunner!"

"I did my best, sir," said Gunner. "I tipped the man to keep away. I should have kept it all dark, sir. I tried—"

"You crassly stupid boy! Is that the man who claimed to be a relation of mine?" thundered Mr. Dalton.

William Henry fairly quaked as he eyed the athletic young master, towering over him.

"Oh, gum!" he gasped. "You, Mr. Dalton, sir?"

"Yes, you rascal! And you claim to—"

"Nothink of the kind, sir!" spluttered William Henry. "Oh, no, sir! I beg your pardon, sir! Name of Dalton, sir, that's all, sir! That young cove, sir, fairly begged and prayed to be took in, sir, and him being such a fool, and me 'ard up. I did pull his leg, sir, that's all!"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Greely.

"Let a bloke mizzle, sir!" gasped William Henry. "I'll clear out of the county, sir, I will that, and glad to go, sir! Tain't my fault that the young cove was such a blithering idjit, sir, and fairly begging to be took in, sir. 'Ow was I to know he was silly enough to swaller such a yarn, sir? I put it to you, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar. Even Mr. Dalton's angry face relaxed. As for Peter Cuthbert Gunner's face, it was a study in changing emotions.

"You—you—you villain!" he gasped. "You—you took me in! You—you're not Mr. Dalton's brother! You—you—"

Words failed Gunner. He rushed at William Henry. And then words did not fail William Henry. He poured out a stream of words—very expressive words—as Gunner got to work with right and left.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gunner!"

William Henry scrambled away and fled for his life, and a yell of merriment followed him as he darted through the gates of Rookwood and vanished.

Gunner was not licked, as most of the fellows expected. Gunner, indeed, could not see that he deserved to be licked. Apparently Mr. Dalton shared his view, and Gunner escaped. Perhaps Richard Dalton realised that Gunner had meant to be good, though altogether it was too good of Gunner.

CHAPTER 11.

The Watch that Went!

"WHAT silly ass——"

"Eh?"

"What thumping chump——"

"Anything biting you, Tubby?" inquired Jimmy Silver, turning his head as he fastened his collar-stud.

"What blithering duffer has been larking?" roared Tubby Muffin.

"Where's my watch?"

Reginald Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, stood beside his bed in the Classical Fourth dormitory, with wrath and alarm in his face.

He had slipped a fat hand under his pillow for his watch.

His hand came back empty.

The watch was gone.

It was true, undoubtedly, that watches were made to go! But there are ways of doing these things—and the way in which Tubby Muffin's watch had gone was neither grateful nor comforting.

"Your watch?" said Putty of the Fourth inquiringly.

"It's gone!"

"Rot!" said Lovell.

"Gone!" roared Muffin.

"Fathead!"

"If it's gone," said Valentine Mornington, "I suggest a vote of thanks to the burglar. I was fed-up on that watch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin spluttered, while the Classical Fourth chortled.

As a matter of fact, much—too much had been heard and seen in the Rookwood Fourth of Reginald Muffin's new gold watch.

That gold watch had been presented to Tubby by his uncle, Captain Muffin. It did not keep very good time, perhaps because Tubby sometimes overwound it, and sometimes forgot to wind it at all. But it was magnificent to look at. It was a large size in watches, it had a tick that could have been heard in a thunderstorm, and when Tubby drew it out in the quad its golden glitter reflected the rays of the sun—and, indeed, almost outshone the solar luminary. The value of that watch, according to Muffin, was enormous—and, indeed, it looked as if it would have fetched a considerable sum sold merely by weight.

Unnumbered times had Tubby proudly displayed that new gold watch and informed uninterested fellows that it was a present from his rich uncle, Captain Muffin. He would draw it out in the quad to compare the time with the time—generally different—indicated on the clock in the tower. He would draw it out in the Form-room, he would draw it out in the Common-room, he would offer to time corridor races for anybody and everybody. In fact, it was impossible to be an inmate of Rookwood School without becoming closely acquainted with Reginald Muffin's new gold watch.

And now it was gone!

"If this is a lark," hooted Muffin, "the silly ass who has taken my watch had better own up at once! I can't afford to risk having that watch damaged. Who's got it?"

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver. "Where did you put it?"

"Under my pillow! I always do! Somebody's hooked it out while I was asleep! Where's my watch?" bawled

Muffin, addressing the whole dormitory in indignant wrath.

"Look in your bed," said Raby. "It's slipped somewhere."

"Might have rolled!" suggested Mornington. "It was rolled-gold to begin with, and it may have rolled again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it's a joke, I've had enough of it!" roared Tubby. "I'll jolly well go to Mr. Dalton if that watch isn't given up at once!"

"Fathead!" said Newcome. "It's in your bed somewhere."

"It isn't!" hooted Tubby. "Look here, Putty Grace, is this one of your silly larks? You're always playing rotten jokes! Have you got it, Gower?"

"You silly owl!" snapped Gower. "What should I be doing with your gold turnip?"

"Well, you're not honest, you know."

"What?" roared Gower.

"Well, the Head said the other day in his sermon that gambling was next door to stealing," said Tubby. "You gamble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A true bill!" chuckled Conroy. "Have you bagged Tubby's watch, Gower, to pay on some of your losers?"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Gower.

"Mind, I shan't take this as a joke if the watch isn't given back at once!" said Tubby. "I shall report it to Mr. Dalton. Most likely he will send for a policeman. If you've got it, Gower—"

Whiz!

"Ooooooch!" spluttered Tubby Muffin.

A wet sponge landed on Tubby's fat little nose so suddenly that he sat down on the floor.

"Goal!" chuckled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooogh! Ooooooch!" Tubby Muffin spluttered and scrambled to his feet.

"Ow! Wow! You beast, Gower—"

"Well, you asked for it," said Gower,

glowering at the fat Classical. "Ask again and you'll get the soap!"

"I want my watch!" roared Tubby. "I'm jolly well going to Mr. Dalton about it—"

"Hold on, fathead!" said Jimmy Silver, as the enraged Tubby turned to the door. "It's somewhere in your silly bed. Let's look."

"Let's!" said Putty.

Half a dozen juniors gathered round Tubby Muffin's bed and proceeded to dismember it.

Every article was taken off and shaken vigorously; and if the watch had been there undoubtedly it would have come to light—and equally certainly it would have come to grief.

But the watch was not there.

Bedclothes were scattered far and wide and the bed was bare, but there was no sign of Tubby's magnificent gold watch.

Tubby Muffin stood almost in tears between rage and apprehension as the search went on. His watch—which for a week had been the apple of his eye, the object of many envious glances in the Lower School—was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Well, it's not here!" said Jimmy Silver, puzzled. "Are you quite sure you put it under your pillow last night, Tubby?"

"Quite sure!" hooted Tubby.

"Look in your pockets, fathead!"

"I've looked."

"Well, it means that some silly ass has bagged it for a joke," said the captain of the Fourth. "The silly ass had better own up at once; it's a fool's trick to lark about with valuable things. Now, then!"

Jimmy Silver paused, like Brutus, for a reply. But no reply was forthcoming from the Classical Fourth fellows.

Tubby panted.

"It's been stolen! That watch was worth twenty-five guineas! There's been a thief here! I'm going to Mr. Dalton!"

"I should!" said Putty of the Fourth.

"Better lose no time, Tubby; the burglar may be hiring a lorry this very minute to carry the watch away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin, crimson with wrath, tramped to the door.

Putty of the Fourth stepped after him.

"Hold on a minute, Tubby! There's some dust on your jacket!"

Putty kindly brushed down Tubby's back. Then he stepped away, and there was a howl of laughter in the dormitory.

For Tubby Muffin's podgy back was now adorned by a dangling gold watch, deftly pinned to his jacket by a safety-pin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reginald Muffin, quite unconscious of his new adornment, rolled out of the dormitory and hurried downstairs to report his terrible loss to Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth.

He left the Fourth Form dormitory fairly rocking with merriment.

"Putty, you ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fool's game, playing tricks with watches or money or anything like that!" said Arthur Edward Lovell oracularly.

"My dear man, it's the jape of the week!" said Putty Grace. "Muffin loves showing off that watch! He likes all Rookwood to stand round gazing at it! Well, everybody will see it now without giving Tubby the trouble of keeping on lugging it out of his pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's gone to Dalton to complain!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Why not?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm really doing this to please Muffin," said Putty. "I don't expect any thanks. But he never was a grateful chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Classical Fourth were chortling as they streamed down from the dormitory.

CHAPTER 12.

Right Behind!

HANSOM of the Fifth stared at Reginald Muffin, glanced at his pal Lumsden, and tapped his forehead significantly.

Lumsden of the Fifth fixed his eyes, as if fascinated, on Muffin's back as the fat junior passed.

Tubby rolled by the two seniors in the lower passage, unheeding them or their glances. He was heading for Mr. Dalton's study, and he was in haste.

Even in the Fifth Form at Rookwood they had heard of Tubby Muffin's new gold watch. But they were simply astounded to see Reginald Muffin pass them with the watch pinned to the back of his jacket.

Often and often they had seen Muffin showing off that gold watch. But never, never had they supposed that even a born idiot like Muffin would adopt this method of showing off a watch, howsoever magnificent and expensive and impressive.

"Potty, I suppose!" said Hansom.

"Well, this beats it!" said Lumsden. "Here, Muffin, you young ass, what's this game?"

Muffin blinked round.

"Is this some sort of a jest?" asked Lumsden. "What game are you playing, you young ass?"

"Game?" repeated Muffin.

"Yes. Where are you going in that style?"

"I'm going to see Mr. Dalton, if he's down yet. Do you fellows know whether he's down?"

"Yes; I saw him go into his study," said Lumsden. "But you're not going to see your Form-master like that? Is it a jape on him?"

"Eh? I'm going to see him about my watch!" snapped Tubby Muffin, and he rolled on.

Hansom shook his head.

"Well, some of these Fourth Form kids are as full of tricks as a monkey," he said, "especially that young ass they call Putty. He's played tricks on me before now. But going to see your

Form-master with a watch pinned on your back is the limit. If it's a joke, I don't see the point of it, and I don't fancy Dalton will."

Heedless of the perplexed Fifth-Formers, Reginald Muffin rolled on, and passed some Shell fellows in the corridor. Adolphus Smythe of the Shell glanced at him, and stared at the ticking watch on Muffin's broad back.

"Oh, great gad, look at that!" ejaculated Adolphus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tracy. "That's a new way of showing off a watch! I say, Muffin, ain't you afraid you'll lose your watch?"

"Eh? What? Yes!" answered Muffin, looking back.

"What! You're afraid you'll lose it, are you?" exclaimed Tracy.

"Yes; and I'm going to take jolly good care I don't!" said Muffin. "Do you fellows know anything about it?"

He blinked inquiringly at Smythe & Co.

They blinked at him. Then it occurred to them that Muffin did not know that the watch was pinned on his back, and they chuckled.

"Somebody's bagged my watch," said Tubby. "It was missing from under my pillow this morning. I'm going to Mr. Dalton to complain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter!" exclaimed Muffin indignantly. "I can tell you that's a jolly expensive watch, and some fellow sneaked it from under my pillow, like a thief in the night, you know. Was it one of you fellows?"

"Eh?"

"Of course, anybody might have sneaked into the dorm and done it," said Tubby. "I didn't think of that at first. The Head says that gambling is next to stealing—"

"What?"

"And I know you fellows play banker in your study. I've seen you through the keyhole."

"The keyhole?" roared Adolphus

Smythe. This was news to the sportsman of the Shell, who had supposed, hitherto that his little peccadilloes were quite safe from observation when his study door was locked.

"Nunno! I—I mean, I should disdain to look through a keyhole, of course. I really mean— Here, you keep off!"

Tubby Muffin turned and fled. But he did not flee quite fast enough to escape the lunging boot of Adolphus Smythe.

Crash!

"Whoooooop!"

Reginald Muffin sprawled forward, and nearly went on all fours. Fortunately, he saved himself, and ran on, and the second lunge of Smythe's foot was a few inches short.

Muffin arrived, rather breathless, at Mr. Dalton's study door.

The door was half open, and Tubby could see Richard Dalton in the study sorting out books that he would need for use in the Form-room that day. A Form-master at Rookwood had plenty to do, and Richard Dalton was often busy before breakfast in the morning.

"Sir!" gasped Muffin.

The young Form-master glanced round.

"Well, Muffin?"

"I've been robbed."

"What?"

"Robbed!" panted Muffin.

"Nonsense!"

"My watch—"

Mr. Dalton smiled involuntarily. He also knew all about Reginald Muffin's new gold watch. Often and often he had seen it drawn out for comparison of time with the Form-room clock.

"What has happened to your watch, Muffin?"

"It's gone, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"Do you mean that you have lost it?"

"No, sir. I've been robbed—burgled! It's been stolen!"

"Nonsense!"

"I—I want you to send for a policeman, sir!" gasped Muffin. "You see,

sir, that watch is of immense value. It was given me by my Uncle Montague. It's worth about thirty pounds, sir. I can't afford to lose that, sir. I——"

Mr. Dalton held up his hand to check the flow of Reginald Muffin's breathless eloquence.

"Kindly tell me what has happened, Muffin."

"I put the watch under my pillow, sir, last night. I always put it under my pillow for safety, sir, as it's of such immense value and I wouldn't like to tempt anybody——"

"Absurd!" said Mr. Dalton. "I am sure that no boy in my Form could be tempted to so base a thing as theft!"

"But it's gone!" shrieked Tubby Muffin. "Some fellow sneaked into the dorm like—like a thief in the night, sir. I suspect Smythe of the Shell."

"What! Why?"

"He kicked me!"

"Kicked you?" said Mr. Dalton blankly.

"Yes, sir; a few minutes ago as I came along the passage."

"Upon my word! Is that a reason for suspecting him of taking your watch from under your pillow? You are an extremely stupid boy, Muffin."

"Oh, sir!"

"An unusually stupid boy," said Mr. Dalton. "I do not believe, for one moment, that your watch has been taken at all. Possibly it has been removed for a foolish practical joke; but it is more probable that you have forgotten where you have placed it. You should not make reckless accusations of theft in this manner, Muffin."

"But it's gone!" wailed Muffin.

"Nonsense! I shall inquire into the matter if you have not found the watch by breakfast-time. You will proceed to look for it at once, Muffin."

"But, sir, I—I——"

"Now you may leave my study!"

"But, I—I——"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Muffin, if you say another word I shall cane you!"

"Oh!"

Tubby Muffin backed to the door. There he turned to depart, Mr. Dalton glancing after him with a severe frown.

Then there was an exclamation—almost a shout. The big gold watch, gleaming on the back of Muffin's jacket, had caught the Form-master's eye, fairly making him jump.

"Muffin!"

"Oh! Yes, sir?"

"How dare you, Muffin!"

"Wha-a-at?" stammered Tubby, staring round at his Form-master. "I—I don't understand, sir. I——"

"Is this a jest?" shouted Mr. Dalton.

"A—a—a what, sir?"

"Take that watch off your back at once!"

"Eh?"

"Take it off!"

"Tut-tut-take it off?" repeated Tubby Muffin dazedly, blinking helplessly at his Form-master. He could only suppose that Richard Dalton was wandering in his mind.

"You incredibly stupid boy!" thundered Mr. Dalton. "How dare you come here and tell me that your watch was stolen, with the watch pinned on your back all the time?"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Dalton strode towards the dazed Tubby, grasped him by the shoulder and spun him round. Then he unhooked the safety-pin, and jerked the watch away. Tubby Muffin blinked at it dazedly.

"M-mum-my watch!" he stammered.

"Did you not know that it was there, Muffin?" demanded Mr. Dalton a little more mildly, as it dawned upon his mind that the fat Classical was the victim, and not the perpetrator, of this peculiar jest.

"Nunno, sir! Oh dear! Mum-mum-my watch! Then—then it wasn't stolen, after all!" gasped Tubby.

"Some beast——"

"You are an absurd boy, Muffin. Take your watch, and kindly do no

come to me again and talk such nonsense."

"I—I——"

Mr. Dalton whirled Tubby out of his study and shut the door on him. Reginald Muffin stood in the passage, watch in hand, blinking at his recovered treasure, scarcely able to believe his eyes. There was a sound of chortling from the corner of the corridor. Tubby Muffin blinked along the passage, and beheld half the Classical Fourth waiting there, evidently to see him emerge from Mr. Dalton's study.

"I—I say——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some beast had pinned this watch on my back, you know!" gasped Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"I wonder who it was?" ejaculated Putty, of the Fourth.

"You!" yelled Tubby. "You made out you were brushing my jacket—I remember now—you rotter——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you funny idiot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classical juniors roared. Mr. Dalton opened his study door and glanced out.

"What is this noise?"

The Classical Fourth faded away round the corner.

CHAPTER 13.

The Black Sheep!

CUTHBERT GOWER, of the Classical Fourth, went into his study after classes that day and slammed the door after him with a slam that rang along the passage as far as the end study.

He threw himself into a chair, with a sullen and wrinkled brow, and stared at his study-mates, Peele and Lattrey. They stared at him.

"Steady on!" said Peele. "Don't shake the pictures off the walls."

Grunt from Gower.

"What the thump's the matter with you, Gower?" asked Lattrey. "You've been like a bear with a sore head ever since we came back to school. Something happened in the vac?"

"No!" grunted Gower.

Cyril Peele grinned.

"Still stony?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, banging the door won't make that any better," said Lattrey. "And I can lend you half-a-crown, if you like."

"Blow your half-crown!"

"Well, that's jolly grateful," said Lattrey. "I'll keep my half-crown in my pocket, then. Ta-ta!" And Mark Lattrey walked out of the study, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Peele gave Cuthbert Gower a very curious look. Gower scowled at him in response.

"Take my tip, Gower, old man, and don't be a goat," said Peele. "You asked me to lend you a tenner. Is that it?"

"I want a tenner," growled Gower. "I want it particularly and specially. I can turn it into fifty in a week's time. I've got a special tip— What are you grinning at?"

"I've seen you chin-wagging with Joey Hook," said Peele. "Is this one of his winners?"

"Yes, it is," growled Gower. "But I've had information from other sources, too. I tell you, this time it's a cert, and if I had ten quid to put on a certain horse, it's fifty as safe as houses. Five to one on a certain winner, Peele. Look here, old man, if you can't manage ten, will you let me have five?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Peele contemptuously. "Haven't I been there myself? I know those certain winners—they come in about tenth or eleventh. Joey Hook wants your money, that's all."

"You bet with him yourself!" sneered Gower.

"But I don't take his tips."

"It isn't simply that," said Gower eagerly. "I heard something on Saturday—some sporting men talking at a place. They were men who know the game inside-out—friends of my elder brother—and they agreed that Chop Sticks was a sure snip, an absolute cert. They were backing him themselves, but they had to be awfully careful about it, not to let it leak out what a good thing it was. They said so."

"Bow-wow!" said Peele.

"I tell you it's so. The price then was ten to one against, and it's fallen to five to one," said Gower. "That sounds like it, doesn't it? I can tell you, it will be evens on the day of the race, or odds on. The horse has been kept dark, and he's going to win hands down. I tell you, if I could raise the tin to back him, I should be rolling in money all this term. And—and I'm next door to stony. It's the chance of a lifetime, and I can't touch it. I think a fellow's pal might stand by him at a time like this."

"I know these sure snips!" said Peele, but his look became serious and keen. "Anyhow, I couldn't lend you the money. Look here, are you sure you got it from a good quarter?"

"The men I heard were racing men—men who've spent their whole lives on the Turf," said Gower. "They know the horse, and they know the owner and trainer, and they know Chop Sticks has been kept dark; there's been specially bad reports of his form in trials to mislead the bookies. The whole thing is rigged, and anybody who knows is bound to rope it in. Something must have got out, because the odds have been dropping and dropping ever since. But you can still get five to one against. But, of course, I should have to put down the ready money, and I'm stony. Look here, Peele, lend me a tenner, and I'll go halves."

"I haven't a tenner, ass!"

"A fiver, then—I know you've a fiver."

"I happen to want it."

"Go and eat coke, then!" snarled Gower; and Cyril Peele shrugged his shoulders and left the study.

Cuthbert Gower remained alone, in dark and angry thought.

The black sheep of the Rookwood Fourth was feeling that it was very hard lines.

More than once he had risked being expelled from the school in his little sporting speculations, carried out by the aid of Joey Hook at the Bird-in-Hand. And ever and always those speculations had turned out disastrously; he had had his loss and his risk for his pains. Now he was "on to a good thing," as he considered it; he had spotted that extremely rare bird, a certain winner, and he could not back that winner for want of ready cash.

Mr. Hook was obliging enough to take bets from a schoolboy, but he was not obliging enough to take them on "tick." Joey Hook required cash in hand before he moved in the matter, doubtless aware that there would be difficulty in collecting debts that ran into pounds from a junior schoolboy of Rookwood.

Only through the medium of Mr. Hook could Gower get his money "on," and Mr. Hook's terms were cash.

Really, it was very hard cheese. That he was a shady young rascal, and that the transaction, if it came to light, meant his expulsion from the school, were considerations that Gower quite forgot in his eagerness to get something for nothing.

He was fairly dazzled by the thought of bagging such a sum as fifty pounds, with his own tenner returned to him into the bargain. But he hadn't the tenner!

"Rotter!" he murmured, mentally referring to Peele. Cyril Peele had a five-pound note, he knew that, and he refused to lend it to his pal in this emergency. Indeed, it would be quite

like Peele to take advantage of his information and back Chop Sticks himself, and net a small fortune, leaving Gower out in the cold. That was a very exasperating thought to Cuthbert Gower.

He left the study at last and loafed along the passage, with his hands in his pockets, turning over fellows in his mind, and wondering to whom he could apply for a loan.

The door of the next study, No. 2, was open, and he saw the fellows there at tea. Tubby Muffin, Putty Grace, Jones minor, and Higgs were gathered round the study table. And Jones minor was saying:

"What's the time, Muffin?"

Tubby's fat hand went to his celebrated watch, and he drew it out.

"Half-past five!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby's three study-mates chortled. The fat Classical snorted and jammed his watch back into his pocket, realising that the playful Jones had been pulling his leg.

"I say, Muffin," said Putty, a minute later.

"Well?"

"What's the time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This time Tubby Muffin grunted instead of pulling out his big gold watch. Captain Muffin's expensive present to his nephew was not brought into view again.

Gower walked on with a moody brow.

That fat ass, Muffin, had a gold watch, which would have pulled Gower through his present emergency. There was a certain gentleman who traded at Latham under the sign of the three brass balls who had sometimes obliged Cuthbert Gower with little loans on articles of jewellery, and Gower had only to pass a big gold watch like that across the counter to obtain more than the tinner he needed. If Muffin would have lent him the watch for a few days—

For Chop Sticks being an absolute "cert," bound to "romp home," it would only have been for a few days! The watch could have been redeemed out of the lavish winnings, and all would have been calm and bright! But Gower realised that it would be no use asking Muffin to lend him that valuable watch for a few days, or even a few minutes! Muffin would have been as likely to lend him his head!

Gower loafed sulkily along the passage and went downstairs. The thought of Muffin's big gold watch lingered in his worried mind.

That thought was followed by other thoughts—thoughts that made Cuthbert Gower start and colour, and glance about him uneasily, as if afraid that others might read his mind.

Suppose he borrowed the watch?

Muffin would make an awful fuss. But, after all, it would only be borrowing it. It would be returned unharmed when that absolutely certain winner had romped home!

Gower felt a tremble pass through his limbs. If—if by some evil chance Chop Sticks did not romp home a winner, but crawled home a loser, what then? What would Gower be then? A thief! And the thought of that hideous word made him tremble. He drove the thought from his mind. He forced himself to cease thinking of Muffin's watch.

But, in spite of himself, that gold watch danced before his eyes. It was all so certain—so safe—merely a matter of form, as it were—Chop Sticks being such an absolute cert! In his excited, greedy frame of mind, the wretched junior hardly realised that he was mentally taking the first step to crime. It was scarcely clear to him that even if he returned the watch he would be none the less a thief for having taken it.

All that evening Cuthbert Gower was thinking of one thing, and one thing alone—the temporary "borrowing" of Tubby Muffin's wonderful watch. That

night Tubby Muffin went to bed and snored in fat contentment; but certainly he would not have snored so peacefully had he dreamed of the thoughts in Cuthbert Gower's mind.

CHAPTER 14.

A Dog With a Bad Name!

"WHAT'S the time, Muffin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked the question when the Classical Fourth turned out of bed at rising-bell the following morning. And there was a chortle through the Classical Fourth dormitory.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Muffin.

And Reginald Muffin did not slip his hand under his pillow for the watch until he had finished dressing.

When he did so, however, he started.

"I say! You fellows been larking again? Where's my watch?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Are you going to tell us that blessed watch is still going?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It doesn't seem to be here," said Muffin; and he rooted through his bed, with an anxious face.

"Rats!"

"For goodness' sake, Muffin, let's hear the end of that watch!" said Mornington. "It's really getting too thick, you know!"

"It's gone!" howled Muffin.

"Bow-wow!"

"Putty, you cheeky ass——"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Putty of the Fourth.

"Gimme my watch!" roared Muffin.

"Haven't seen it," answered Teddy Grace. "Honest Injun, old fat tulip! Somebody else is japing you this time!"

"Who, then?" hooted Muffin, glaring round the dormitory.

"How the thump should I know?"

"Who's got my watch?" bawled Reginald Muffin.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"For goodness' sake turn up that watch, whoever's got it! I'm fed-up on that watch!"

"I think the whole Form's fed-up on it," said Gower. "You've shoved it somewhere and forgotten, Muffin."

"I put it under my pillow."

"Bow-wow!"

"Putty, you rotter——"

"I tell you I haven't touched your silly watch!" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth testily. "Give us a rest."

"Gimme my watch!"

"Look here, Putty, hand it over," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know. We don't want your japes twice over."

Putty turned red.

"Haven't you heard me say that I haven't touched it?" he demanded. "I don't know anything about it."

"That's all very well," said Lovell.

"But you touched it yesterday, and I said at the time it was a mug's game to play tricks with valuable things. Better give it to Muffin now and chuck it."

"If you haven't got it, Putty——" began Jimmy Silver.

"I haven't!" roared Putty. "And if you can't take my word you can go and eat coke!"

"That's all very well," said Gunner. "You had it last time."

"Last time isn't this time, fathead!"

"Oh, own up, and give Muffin his watch before he deafens us!" snapped Gunner. "Let's hear the end of it!"

"You silly ass——"

"Chuck it, Putty!" said Mornington. "Dash it all. It was a good wheeze the first time, but it's no joke now."

"Exactly what I think," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You've got the watch, Putty, and you'd better cough it up!"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Grace, and he stamped out of the dormitory with a very red face.

"Gimme my watch!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.

"Fathead!"

And Putty of the Fourth was gone.

Reginald Muffin looked as if he were on the verge of an apoplectic seizure.

"The—the—the awful rotter's going to keep it!" he gasped.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy Silver sharply. "It's one of his giddy japes, and you'll find the watch pinned on your back or in your trousers-pocket or something. The fact is, Muffin, there's too much of you and your watch, and you've asked for it!"

"All the same, a fellow shouldn't jape with watches and things," said Lovell. "It's a mug's game!"

"I'm going to Mr. Dalton!" hooted Muffin.

"I fancy Mr. Dalton's fed-up with your watch, too," said Jimmy. "Give it a rest. The watch is all right!"

"Of course it is," said Cuthbert Gower. "If Putty's got it, it's safe enough. He may keep it a few days to scare you."

"A—a—a few days!" gasped Tubby. "I'll give him keeping my watch a few days! He might lose it or drop it and break it, and—and—" Tubby spluttered with rage at the thought of the chapter of accidents that might happen to his watch in less careful hands than his own. "If he doesn't shell it out at brekker I shall go to Mr. Dalton. I'm not taking risks with my watch for the sake of Putty's silly practical jokes!"

"Well, it is rather thick," said Oswald. "Putty doesn't seem to know when a jape is worn out. He ought to chuck it!"

"Mr. Dalton will make him!" said Tubby savagely.

"Look here! That's all rot!" exclaimed Gower. "The watch is all right; but if Tubby makes a song about it we shall have fellows saying there's a thief in this dormitory. If the Modern cads get hold of it we shall never hear the end of it!"

"That's so," agreed Lovell. "You're jolly well not going to Mr. Dalton about it, Muffin. Let it rest till Putty hands it back."

"I'm going to Dicky Dalton——"

"You're not!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "There's been too much palaver about your dashed watch already. If you go to Dicky Dalton we'll jolly well rag you!"

"Do you think I'm going to lose a thirty-guinea watch?" shrieked Muffin.

"You won't lose it, ass! If Putty doesn't hand it back before class we'll jolly well make him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lovell.

And the juniors went down from their dormitory, Tubby Muffin in an enraged and alarmed frame of mind.

The Fistical Four found Putty in the quad, and Jimmy Silver came up to the jester of Rookwood with a very serious expression on his face. Putty met him with a rather war-like look.

"Do you think I've got that fat duffer's watch?" he demanded truculently.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy Silver. "I know you have! Look here, Putty, chuck it! Once is enough. You've jolly well got to give Muffin his watch back before class—see?"

"I haven't got it!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lovell. "I am surprised at you telling actual whoppers, Putty! I suppose you think it doesn't matter, as it's for the sake of a jape? But I can jolly well tell you that it does matter—a lie's a lie!"

Putty's face crimsoned.

"If you think I'm a liar, that's enough!" he snapped; and he turned on his heel.

"Putty, you ass," exclaimed Raby, "if you don't give Muffin his watch back he's going to Dicky Dalton about it!"

"Don't you understand you may be suspected of pinching it, you awful fathead?" exclaimed Newcome, in alarm. "For goodness' sake, chuck up this stunt before unpleasant things are said about it."

"You silly owl! I keep on telling you I don't know anything about Muffin's silly watch!" howled Putty.

"Gammon!"

"You cheeky ass!" breathed Putty.

"You're the only fellow in the Fourth ass enough to play japes with such things!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You'd jape with anything, and I told you it was a mug's game, you remember."

"I remember you're always talking some silly rot!" retorted Putty. "Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

And Putty stalked away in great wrath, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell equally wrathful.

"By Jove," said Lovell, breathing hard. "Blessed if it doesn't begin to look as if Muffin's right, and he means to keep the watch!"

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy.

"Well, I can tell you that fellows will jolly well think so if he doesn't hand it back pretty soon."

"He will hand it back all right," said the captain of the Fourth.

"We'll jolly well see!"

And they did see—or, rather, they did not see. For when the Classical Fourth went into their Form-room for the first lesson, Tubby Muffin was still minus his watch, and Putty of the Fourth had not owned up.

CHAPTER 15.

Drastic Measures!

JIMMY SILVER'S face was very grave and rather troubled when the Classical-Fourth came out after lessons that morning.

He glanced at Putty of the Fourth in the corridor very expressively, and Putty gave him a defiant look and walked away.

Generally the Fistical Four were on the best of terms with Putty, but there was a rift in the lute now. Even when they had been on the best of terms there had sometimes been trouble, owing to Putty's practical joking proclivities. Even among friends it was apt to cause exasperation when a fellow found another fellow's white

rabbit in his hat-box along with a Sunday topper, or when he sat down in an armchair that had been carefully prepared with seccotine and found it difficult to rise again. Still, Putty was a good fellow, and popular in his Form, and some of his japes were quite entertaining, especially to fellows who did not happen to be the victims of them.

But there was, as all the Classical Fourth agreed, a limit. On one occasion Mornington had missed a five-pound note, and found it in the lining of his hat—and, without asking questions, Morny had promptly punched Putty's head. Money was an article that could not be jested with; but the irrepressible Putty did not seem to realise that there was a limit. On the trail of a jest he was a good deal like a bloodhound on a scent. His little joke with Tubby Muffin's watch had been funny enough, but most of the fellows agreed with Lovell that it was a "mug's" game to play tricks with such things. And now that the watch had disappeared a second time, nobody had the slightest doubt that Putty of the Fourth was the cause of its disappearance.

Tubby was to find it again in some unexpected way, and merriment was to follow—that was the idea. Putty had passed the limit this time, but as usual he could not see it. In fact, in matters of jesting and japing, Putty of the Fourth was, so to speak, a dog with a bad name. It was taken for granted in the Classical Fourth that he had Tubby's big gold watch in his possession, and that he did not mean to own up till he had carried out his stunt, whatever it was. But the limit had been reached—Putty could not be allowed to keep the article for an indefinite period, with Reginald Muffin proclaiming far and wide that his watch had been stolen.

At dinner, Tubby Muffin sat with a glowering fat face. His loss did not affect his appetite, which was as gargantuan as usual. But for once his fat thoughts were not wholly concentrated upon what he was eating; he

was thinking of his missing watch. Like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

Putty looked grim and resentful; and Jimmy Silver, glancing at him, wondered whether, after all, his denials were well-founded. But, in that case, who had the watch?

It was possible, of course, that some other practical joker had been at work; but Jimmy could not help feeling that it was improbable. As for the possibility that the watch had actually been stolen, the captain of the Fourth did not entertain that at all. There were black sheep in the Rookwood Fourth; but there was no fellow whom Jimmy would have cared to suspect of stealing a fellow's watch from under his pillow at night. It was very much more probable that Putty of the Fourth was japing again.

After dinner, as the juniors came out into the quad, Tubby Muffin rolled up to Jimmy Silver with a determined expression on his fat face.

"What about my watch?" he demanded.

"Oh, bother your watch!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Hasn't that ass handed it back yet?"

"No; he hasn't!" growled Tubby. "Look here, I'll give him till class this afternoon; and then I'm going to speak to Mr. Dalton."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances. They were extremely unwilling for the matter to become public property; but it could not be denied that Muffin was within his rights. The Fourth Form jester had been given long enough to own up.

"It's rotten!" growled Lovell. "The Modern fellows will be in the Form-room this afternoon; they'll hear all about it. We shall have Tommy Dodd and that gang calling us pickpockets."

"I'm not going to lose my watch!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "My belief is that Putty's going to keep it."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "Putty's not that sort. It's one of his idiotic japes!"

"Time he chucked it, if that's all it is!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"No doubt about that. And we'll jolly well make him chuck it," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "We're not going to have the Modern cads making a song about watches being missing on the Classical side. We'd better look for Putty, and put it to him plain."

"Let's!" agreed Raby.

"He's gone into the Cloisters," said Tubby. "He's been scrapping with Jones minor, for asking him whether he meant to pinch the watch."

"Come on!" said Jimmy.

Several more of the Classical Fourth joined the Fistical Four in looking for Putty—Morrington, and Erroll, and Oswald, and Conroy, and Rawson, and Townsend and Topham. It was quite a representative body of the Form, and they all meant business. Every fellow felt that it was high time that the matter came to an end. Reginald Muffin could not reasonably be expected to keep silent any longer about such a loss; indeed, if by some horrid chance it turned out that the watch had been stolen, the Head would certainly reprimand him for not having reported the matter earlier.

But the bare idea of the Modern fellows getting hold of such a story was repugnant to the Classicals. It was felt on all hands that the only thing to be done was to deal with Putty drastically. And if—which was very unlikely—he was not after all the practical joker who had abstracted the watch, it was his own fault—he could not blame fellows for believing that he had done twice what he had admittedly done once.

The army of juniors marched into the Cloisters, and looked round for Putty. He was soon sighted. Putty of the Fourth was walking alone, with his hands in his pockets, not apparently in a happy mood, to judge by the expres-

sion on his usually sunny face. No doubt it had been borne in on Putty's mind, at long last, that there was a limit in the matter of practical joking, which could not be passed without discomfort to follow.

He gave the Classical juniors a dark look as they came up.

"Looking for you!" said Lovell.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Putty gruffly.

"Muffin's watch!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"My gold watch!" hooted Reginald Muffin. "My valuable watch——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Putty. "My belief is that it was only a rolled gold watch, anyhow, and you could buy another for fifteen bob."

"Why, you—you——" Reginald Muffin choked with wrath. Some of the juniors grinned.

"That's all very well," said Rawson. "But if it was made of tin or copper, it's Muffin's watch, and he wants it, Putty."

"Let him find it, then."

"Well, where have you hidden it?" asked Oswald.

"I haven't hidden it," said Putty, breathing hard. "Look here, I don't know anything about it. I did bag it yesterday, and pin it on his back, as you all know—it was a jape; and I'm willing to admit that it was a bit thoughtless. A fellow shouldn't jape with such things——"

"Oh, you can see that now!" said Arthur Edward Lovell sarcastically. "I told you at the time——"

"Yes, I can see it now, after this has happened," said Putty. "I don't blame you fellows for supposing it was me this time. But now I've given you my word that it's not you ought to be satisfied."

"Yes—if the watch comes home," said Lovell. "If you haven't got it, who has? Are you asking us to believe that there's another silly owl in the Form who's ass enough to jape with fellows' watches?"

"It's gone far enough, Putty," said

Jimmy Silver. "Have a little sense, old fellow, and chuck it."

"Then you can't take my word?"

"Well, I'd take it on any other subject," said the captain of the Fourth. "But the fact is, Putty, this japing is a sort of disease with you—and we know you've got the watch, you know. Hand it over."

"And quick about it," said Lovell. "Muffin's going to report the matter to Mr. Dalton——"

"Let him! If his watch is really missing, the sooner he reports it the better, I should think," growled Putty. "It looks to me as if some fellow has pinched it, knowing that you duffers would jump to the conclusion that it was another of my japes."

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Mornington. "Are we going to believe there's a thief in the Form, instead of a fatheaded practical joker? Is that the jape, after all—your idea of a joke, to get the Modern fellows chipping us about it, and cause no end of a fuss, and then let the watch turn up after all? If that's what you call a jape, I don't see it."

"I tell you——"

"Nuff said!" interrupted Arthur Edward Lovell. "You're going to hand over that watch, Putty, or tell Muffin where to find it, or else we're jolly well going to bump you till you do."

"That's it!" agreed Jimmy Silver. Putty, of the Fourth, backed away.

"I keep on telling you——"

"Collar him!"

"Hands off!" roared Putty. "By Jove! I'll hit out—I— Take that, you cheeky rotter——"

"Ow!" gasped Lovell, as he staggered back, under the impact of a set of hard knuckles on his nose. Arthur Edward Lovell sat down suddenly.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

Putty of the Fourth struggled in the grasp of six or seven pairs of hands. But he struggled in vain against such

odds, and he was collared and overpowered and swept off his feet.

"Now then, you duffer!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Are you handing over that watch, or not?"

"You silly ass!"

"Bump him, then!"

Bump!

"Yarooop!" roared Putty, as he smote the hard flag-stones of the Cloisters, with a somewhat hefty smite.

"Now, are you handing it over?"

"Leggo!" cried Putty, wriggling frantically. "I tell you—oh, my hat! You silly owls! Leggo! Ow, wow!"

Bump!

"Whoooop!"

"By gad, he's an obstinate beggar!" said Mornington. "You silly ass, Putty, is your silly jape worth this? Why don't you own up?"

"Fathead!"

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Putty, in anguish.

That frantic yell reached other ears—ears no less august than those of Dr. Chisholm, Headmaster of Rookwood, who was taking a gentle stroll in the Cloisters after lunch.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

And Dr. Chisholm's stately steps turned in the direction of that terrific yell. He came on the scene quite unexpectedly.

Bump!

"Whoop! Leggo! Ow—ow—ow! Wow!"

"Boys!"

The Head's voice was not loud, but it was deep. It had an electric effect on the Fourth-Formers. Putty of the Fourth was dropped as suddenly as if he had become red-hot.

"Oh, my hat! The Head!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"The Head!"

A second more, and the juniors were scudding among the stone pillars of the Cloisters, vanishing from the Head's stern gaze like so many spectres

at cock-crow. Putty of the Fourth was left sprawling breathlessly at the feet of his headmaster.

"Grace! What does this mean?"

Putty staggered up panting.

"N-n-nothing, sir! Only a—a—a lark!" he stuttered. And Putty backed away among the pillars, and disappeared as fast as he could from the gaze of the Head. But he did not disappear in the same direction as Jimmy Silver & Co.

Dr. Chisholm shook his stately head, and resumed his stately walk. And Jimmy Silver & Co. saw nothing more of Putty of the Fourth until it was time to turn up in the Form-room for class. Putty walked into the Form-room with head erect, and a defiant look on his face—heedless of the expressive glances turned upon him on all sides. Tubby Muffin rolled up to him.

"Will you gimme my watch before Mr. Dalton comes in——"

"Fathead!"

"It's your last chance——"

"Ass!"

And then the Master of the Fourth came into the Form-room.

CHAPTER 16.

By Whose Hand?

"PUTTY, you ass——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Putty, you rotter!" breathed Tubby Muffin fiercely.

Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Rookwood Fourth, glanced round, frowning.

Tubby Muffin was whispering to Putty of the Fourth, but his whisper was of the stage variety, and could be heard all over the Form-room.

"Shurrup, Muffin, you ass!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

But Reginald Muffin did not shut up. His fat face was red and excited, and his little round eyes gleamed with wrathful determination.

"Putty, you silly idiot, I tell you I'll——"

Tubby did not finish.

"Muffin!"

The deep voice of Mr. Dalton broke in.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" ejaculated Tubby.

"You are speaking to Grace, Muffin. You will take one hundred lines for talking in class."

Up jumped Reginald Muffin.

"I was giving him a chance, sir, before I spoke to you, sir! Grace has got my watch, sir."

"What?"

"My new gold watch, sir!" spluttered Tubby Muffin. "The magnificent gold watch, sir, that my uncle, Captain Muffin, gave me, sir. Putty—I mean, Teddy Grace, sir—he's got it, sir, and he won't give it up. All the fellows know he's got it, sir."

"Upon my word!" said Richard Dalton.

All eyes turned on Teddy Grace.

Putty of the Fourth sat with a crimson face.

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Dalton. "Grace, if you have taken Muffin's watch from him——"

"I haven't, sir!" said Putty.

"He has!" hooted Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth. "These Classics are pinching one another's watches! What a crew!"

"Look after your pockets, you chaps!" murmured Tommy Cook, and there was a chuckle from some of the Moderns.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton sternly. "Muffin, do you state deliberately that Grace has your watch?"

"Yes, sir."

"You deny it, Grace?"

"Yes, sir."

"He's got it!" hooted Tubby. "All the fellows know, sir. He took it from under my pillow in the dorm last night, sir."

"Silver!" Mr. Dalton glanced at the captain of the Form. "Do you know anything about this?"

"Well, yes, sir," said Jimmy

Silver reluctantly. "Muffin's watch is gone, and it was taken from under his pillow last night. It's one of Grace's practical jokes—at least, we all think so, sir."

"One of his rotten japes, sir," said Tubby Muffin. "Only if he doesn't give it back it's stealing, and——"

"That will do, Muffin! I am sure that the matter is only some foolish jest," said Mr. Dalton. "Yesterday morning, Muffin, you came to me with a story that your watch had been stolen, and it was pinned on the back of your jacket all the time."

Some of the Fourth Formers grinned. "That was a thoughtless jest," said Mr. Dalton. "Is it known who was the perpetrator of it?"

"Putty, sir—I mean, Grace——"

"I own up to that, sir," said Putty of the Fourth. "It was a jape on Muffin. He's always showing that watch off, and swanking about it, and I thought I'd take a rise out of him. That's all, sir."

"You should not play practical jokes with articles of value, Grace," said Mr. Dalton severely.

"I—I didn't think at the time, sir."

"Now, it seems, the watch is missing again," said Mr. Dalton. "Was Grace seen to take it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You deny it, Grace?"

"Yes, sir; I haven't touched the watch since I pinned it on Muffin's back yesterday morning."

"Gammon!" murmured several voices.

"Silence! Muffin, if Grace was not seen to take your watch, and he denies having taken it, for what reason do you suspect him?"

Tubby Muffin spluttered.

"Why, it's quite clear, sir. It was Grace took it the first time, for a rotten jape. Of course, he took it the second time."

"That does not follow, Muffin."

Mr. Dalton glanced over the class. He could see, easily enough, that the

Classical fellows were of Tubby Muffin's opinion. Putty, the jester of the Fourth, had jested once too often.

It was not surprising that the juniors had jumped to the conclusion that that irrepressible japer was "at it" again. But Mr. Dalton was not given to jumping to conclusions.

"That does not follow at all," he said. "I have several times had to punish Grace for playing absurd jests even in this Form-room. But I have always found him a truthful boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Putty.

"Have you, Silver, ever had reason to doubt Grace's word?"

"Oh, no, sir," said the captain of the Fourth at once. "Never, sir! Only, when he's playing a jape, he forgets everything else."

"He's got it, sir!" gasped Muffin.

"Somebody's got it, sir," said Peele.

"It's clear that it was taken from under Muffin's pillow last night."

"Then why was not the matter reported to me earlier, Muffin?"

"The fellows wouldn't let me, sir," stammered Muffin. "They were afraid the Modern cads——"

"The what?"

"I mean, the Modern chaps, sir—they were afraid the Modern chaps would chip us about watches being pinched in the House, sir."

Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern side, exchanged grinning glances. The Classics had been afraid, with good reason, on that subject. Undoubtedly, they were going to hear a good deal about it from the Moderns now. It was going to be a standing topic in Manders' House.

Mr. Dalton coughed.

"The matter should have been reported at once," he said. "However, let that pass. You are absolutely certain that the watch is missing?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"I trust that no one suspects that a theft has been committed?" said Mr. Dalton, with a very searching glance over his Form.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Gower of the Fourth, speaking up before anyone else could open his lips. "We all know it's only a jape, sir. Putty has hidden the ticker away somewhere."

"Someone has done so," said Mr. Dalton. "That much is clear. I see no reason to suspect Grace in connection with the matter, excepting his foolish jest on an earlier occasion. I have no doubt that this is a similar practical joke, and that the watch will be returned safely. Such jests must not, however, be played. The boy who has taken Muffin's watch must bring it to me in my study by seven o'clock. I will allow that time, as perhaps the watch is concealed in some remote spot. If the watch is not handed to me, personally, by the boy concerned at seven o'clock, I shall report to the Head that a theft has been committed, and the boy in question must take the consequences. We shall now resume."

"But, sir——" gasped Muffin.

"The matter is closed for the present, Muffin."

"But, sir——"

"Silence!"

And the matter dropped in the Fourth Form Room, and geography reigned supreme.

CHAPTER 17.

What Peele Knew!

CUTHBERT GOWER glanced at the sky as he came out of the House after class and scowled. A light rain was falling, and most of the Fourth were keeping in the House, where they had the topic of Muffin's missing watch to entertain them. But Gower, after a scowl at the wet sky, tramped away to the bike shed, and Cyril Peele, his study-mate followed him. In the bike-shed Cuthbert Gower was taking his machine off the stand when Peele followed him in. Gower eyed him rather surlily.

"Going out?" asked Peele.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" grunted Gower.

"Biking in the rain—what?"

"Blow the rain!"

"Not much like you, to go out in the wet," said Peele, with a very curious look at his chum. "Look here, Gower—"

"I've no time for chin-wag."

"An appointment to keep—what?"

"Find out!"

"How jolly civil you are!" grinned Peele. "Is it because I couldn't lend you my fiver, Gower?"

Grunt from Gower.

Cyril Peele glanced round. No one else had come to the bike-shed, and the two black sheep of the Fourth had it to themselves at present. But Peele spoke in a very low voice.

"Look here, Gower, don't play the goat! If you've been up to something—"

Gower gave him a fierce look.

"What do you mean? Out with it!"

"I mean what I say," answered Peele in the same tone. "Yesterday you tried to borrow money from me. You've got a tip that Chop Sticks is certain to win to-morrow—and, mind you, I believe myself it's a good tip. My belief is that he will romp home, and a man can get five to one against him still. It's worth a risk; but it's not worth landing yourself for the long jump, and perhaps a reformatory to follow. Look here, Gower, to put it plain, do you know what's become of Muffin's watch?"

Gower started, and a deadly paleness overspread his face. He seemed unable to speak for a moment.

"All the fellows think it's one of Putty's japes," went on Peele. "I thought so myself at first. But Putty wouldn't be ass enough to keep it up like this, with the Form-master brought into it, and the Modern cads getting hold of the story. Muffin's watch is worth thirty guineas, he says, and

it looks to me as if it has been pinched."

"You rotter!"

"No good slanging a fellow," said Peele coolly. "I'm warning you. You were in a jolly hurry to speak up and tell Dicky Dalton it was only a jape on Muffin, and you couldn't know. It jolly well looks to me as if some fellow has pinched Muffin's watch, expecting it to be put down to that ass Putty's japing—just what's happened, in fact. I don't care about him—he's asked for it with his silly tricks. But you're a pal of mine, Gower; I don't want to see you bunked."

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered Gower.

Peele eyed him very keenly and uneasily.

"Look here, Gower, if you've got it, for goodness' sake put it where it can be found before it's too late!"

"So you think I'd steal Muffin's watch?" said Gower, between his teeth.

Cyril Peele shook his head.

"No; but I think you're reckless ass enough to get hold of it and pawn it to raise the money to put on Chop Sticks, intending to redeem it afterwards and let Muffin have it back."

Gower started again.

"So that's it?" said Peele very quietly.

"And suppose it was?" sneered Gower. "Is it any business of yours? Are you settin' up as a censor of morals at Rookwood? Who was it first persuaded me to back horses, and laughed at me for jibbing at it? Who was it took me to the Bird-in-Hand and introduced me to Joey Hook there? It's a bit too late for you to set up to be particular, Peele."

"I don't know that I'm particular, but I'm not a silly ass!" said Peele contemptuously. "There'll be a frightful row if the watch doesn't come back. You'll be spotted for a cert, and kicked out of the school. Don't play the goat. You're not going out in the rain for

the pleasure of it. Don't be a fool, Gower. You'll get bunked!"

"And you're afraid you'll get bunked along with me?" sneered Gower. "You think I shall open my mouth too wide when I'm up before the Head?"

Peele gritted his teeth. It was very probable that some such fear was in his mind. Cyril Peele was the blackest sheep at Rookwood, and Gower had been little better than clay in his hands so far. But, if the crash came, Gower's very weakness of character, which had made him so amenable to Peele's evil influence, made him dangerous. It was only too likely that in the Head's stern presence he would blurt out all that he knew concerning others as well as himself.

Gower gave a sneering laugh.

"You needn't get into a blue funk," he said. "I'm not a sneak, even if I do go up before the Head. If you'd lent me that fiver——"

"I can't! I want it."

"Do you think I don't know why?" said Gower savagely. "I let out to you about Chop Sticks, and you're going to back him yourself, and leave me out in the cold. It's the first time I've ever had a sure snip, and this is a certain winner, and you're bagging the chance for yourself and leaving me out. And then you come and give me a sermon!"

"It's not that! It's the risk——"

"Well, I'm takin' the risk, not you!" sneered Gower. "Muffin's watch is safe enough. I know a man in Latcham who will lend me somethin' on it—he's got my own watch now. Muffin will have it back in a day or two, and no harm done. And if Putty gets into trouble on suspicion he will be cleared all right when the watch comes back—and it serves him right, anyhow, for being a practical joking ass. Now let me alone."

And Cuthbert Gower wheeled his bike out, leaving Peele standing with a very unpleasant expression on his face.

"The fool!" muttered Peele. "The fool!"

Cyril Peele's feelings, at that moment, were decidedly unpleasant. He knew now what had become of the missing watch; he was now an accessory after the fact! That was a rather dangerous position to be in, and it had always been Cyril Peele's care to keep out of danger.

"The fool!" he repeated.

Slowly Cyril Peele took his own machine from the stand. In a few minutes he was riding down to Coombe, heedless of the dropping rain. Gower's suspicion was well-founded; the astute Peele was taking advantage of that "sure snip" his too-confiding friend had told him of. When Chop Sticks "romped home" on the morrow he was going to romp home a winner for the black sheep of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 18.

Smart Work!

"GOWER!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth called the name.

Cuthbert Gower came in from his spin pushing a rather muddy machine. The rain had stopped, and there was a burst of sunshine on the old quadrangle at Rookwood.

Gower's face was white and furious when the captain of Rookwood called to him. The look on Gower's face had already drawn several curious glances upon him.

Gower did not heed the prefect's call, he did not seem to hear. Bulkeley swerved in his walk to interrupt the junior, and dropped a rather heavy hand on his shoulder.

Then Gower stopped. He seemed to wake, as it were, from a black and gloomy absorption, and he stared at Bulkeley.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the captain of Rookwood.

"Eh? Nothing."

"You don't look as if nothing was the matter," said Bulkeley, eyeing him sharply. "Now, then, out with it!"

Cuthbert Gower looked glum.

"There's nothing the matter with me," he said. "I'm a bit tired, that's all. I've had a rather long spin on my bike, and the rain came on, too."

"Have you been out of bounds?"

"We've leave to bike as far as Coombe," said Gower sullenly.

"It's not a very long ride to Coombe."

"I—I've been round a lot of the lanes."

The wretched junior shifted uneasily under Bulkeley's steady, searching gaze. With a head prefect like George Bulkeley, the way of a black sheep at Rookwood was a path set with thorns. The danger of discovery dogged the footsteps of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood.

Gower—for a reason which he certainly would not have cared to explain to Bulkeley—had returned to Rookwood in a state of almost hysterical disappointment and chagrin. He realised that his looks were giving him away, and he tried to compose himself under Bulkeley's eyes. The prefect was plainly suspicious.

"I've had an eye on you for some time, Gower—you and Peele," said Bulkeley quietly. "I want to know where you've been since classes."

"Only on my bike!" said Gower desperately. "I—I swear——"

"You needn't swear anything. I'd like to be able to take your word, but I can't! I warn you to be careful, Gower. It's a pretty serious matter for a fellow to be bunked from school, and if you head for it you'll get there. That's all now."

And Bulkeley of the Sixth walked on, leaving Gower trembling. Gower's shaking hand slid into his pocket, to feel there an article that would have earned him the "sack" had it been discovered, for it was nothing else than

Tubby Muffin's missing watch. A light laugh fell on his ears, and he spun round to stare at Valentine Mornington.

Morny gave him a cool and smiling nod.

"Lucky for you that jolly old Bulkeley wasn't brought up at the feet of Sherlock Holmes, Gower," he remarked.

"What do you mean?" snarled Gower. Morny pointed to the junior's boots.

"Where did you pick up that mud?" he asked.

"I had to walk my bike up a hill. What the thump does it matter?" growled Gower.

Mornington chuckled.

"A lot if old Bulkeley had the eye of a giddy detective," he answered. "That red clay was turned up where they've got the road up, on the hill this side of Latcham. Coombe mud isn't that colour. Dear old man, you've been to Latcham—miles out of bounds!"

"My hat!" breathed Gower. He stared in alarm at Mornington. "I—I say, Bulkeley never noticed——"

"He wouldn't!" grinned Mornington.

"Well, you needn't jaw about it!" snapped Gower. "I may have had a run out of bounds. No bizney of yours!"

"Not at all," assented Morny. "I'm simply givin' you a tip. Dicky Dalton may have sharper eyes than old Bulkeley if he sees you."

Gower grunted. But he was careful to take advantage of Morny's tip, and, after putting up his bike, he scraped his boots clean before he went into the House. He was glad of it when he passed the Fourth Form master in the hall, and Richard Dalton's eyes lingered on him for a moment.

Gower went to his study in the Fourth, and found Cyril Peele there. Peele put a cigarette out of sight as he came in, but it was produced again as he saw that it was only Gower.

There was a contented expression on Peele's face, from which Gower divined that he had already seen Mr. Joseph Hook at the Bird-in-Hand, and completed his betting transaction with that frowsy and disreputable gentleman. But Peele's look became anxious as he fixed his eyes on Gower's glum face.

"Oh, you've got back?" he said.

Gower flung himself into a chair.

"If you've got the sense of a bunny rabbit," said Peele, "you'll drop in and see Dicky Dalton before seven. You'll get a licking for playing japes with Muffin's ticker, but Dalton will take it that that was all it was. But I can jolly well tell you that if you wait till he's reported a theft to the Head, you'll find yourself in Queer Street. For goodness' sake, Gower, go and——"

Gower laughed scoffingly.

"Have you backed Chop Sticks?" he asked.

"Suppose I have?" grunted Peele.

"It doesn't do you any harm, I suppose? Why shouldn't I?"

"You've bagged my tip and left me out in the cold! Just like you!" said Gower bitterly. "Well, I'm fairly left, and there's no mistake about that. I haven't five bob to put on a horse."

"Then you haven't——"

"What?"

"Oh, come out into the open!" snapped Peele. "You haven't left the watch with the man you know at Latcham?"

A bitter look came over Gower's face, a look that was bitter and mocking and that Peele hardly understood. He did not answer.

"Well, have you?" demanded Peele.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," said Gower coolly. "What do I know about Muffin's watch?"

"Why, you practically admitted in the bike-shed——"

"What rubbish!"

"Do you mean to say that you never had Muffin's watch after what you as good as admitted?"

"You're talking rot!" said Gower. "Muffin's watch has been taken by some practical joker. All the fellows think so. Putty, most likely. The whole Form thinks it was Putty!"

Cyril Peele stared blankly at his comrade. He quite failed to understand Gower in this strange mood.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he ejaculated at last.

"Give us a fag and stop talking rot!" said Gower.

Peele passed him the box of cigarettes. There was a thump on the door, and it flew open.

"Putty here?" bawled Arthur Edward Lovell. "I can't find the silly ass, and I want—— Why, you smoky rotters!"

Arthur Edward stared in contempt at the two young rascals. The cigarettes were going strong. Arthur Edward was looking for Putty of the Fourth, to give him stern and severe counsel to turn up in Mr. Dalton's study before seven; but Putty, apparently, had had enough advice from the Fourth for one day, and he seemed to be keeping out of sight. But Lovell forgot Putty for the moment as he glared at the two black sheep of Rookwood.

"What sort of shady blighters do you call yourselves?" he demanded. "Like a prefect to catch you?"

"Have they made you a prefect by any chance?" sneered Peele.

"I've a jolly good mind——"

"Oh, hook it!"

"If you want that cigarette jammed down your back, Peele——"

"That's enough!" exclaimed Cuthbert Gower, jumping up. "Get out of this study, Lovell. We don't want your sermons here. Get out, or you'll be put out!"

Arthur Edward Lovell stared at Gower, and Peele stared also. Lovell burst into a loud laugh. Such a warlike demonstration was extremely unusual in Cuthbert Gower.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Why,

you couldn't put my little finger out of the study, Gower!"

"Couldn't I?"

Gower made a rush at Lovell. He grasped Arthur Edward with his arms round that sturdy youth, and they waltzed across the study. And then Peele understood, though Arthur Edward Lovell did not. From where he sat Peele caught a sudden gleam of gold. It was only for an instant, but he knew that Gower had slipped the missing watch into Lovell's pocket.

"Oh, gad!" murmured Peele. Bump!

Gower went to the floor. Lovell grinned down at him, in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that he now had the celebrated timekeeper of Reginald Muffin in his pocket.

"Have some more?" he grinned. Cuthbert Gower gasped for breath. "Oh, get out!"

"Sure you won't have another try?" "Get out, hang you!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled and got out.

CHAPTER 19.

An Astonishing Discovery!

"ANYONE seen Putty?"

Apparently nobody had.

It was half-past six, and most of the Classical Fourth had gathered in the junior Common-room after tea. They were discussing the one topic—Muffin's watch. A frightful bore, as Morny declared, and as all the other fellows agreed, but which was, nevertheless, the only topic in the Classical Fourth at present. For the time was getting close now. In half an hour more the practical joker had to take the missing watch to Mr. Dalton's study, or else his action would be adjudged a theft, and the matter reported to Dr. Chisholm.

Ample time had been given for the restoration of the watch. As for the punishment that awaited the japer, it

might be lines, or it might be "six." In either case, it was a trifle light as air compared with the awful seriousness of an accusation of theft.

The Classical Fourth agreed that, unless Putty was fairly out of his senses, he should own up while there was yet time.

Much had been said to Putty on the subject, and all of it of an oburgatory and emphatic nature. Putty, doubtless, was fed-up, for he had been invisible now for some time. It was for his own good, certainly, that the fellows wanted to talk to him; but Putty of the Fourth seemed to have had enough.

"The silly ass is hiding somewhere!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "I've looked in all the studies for him."

Jimmy Silver's face was very anxious. He had a very friendly feeling for Teddy Grace, and he was deeply concerned about him.

"The awful chump!" he said. "He simply must own up before seven. He doesn't seem to realise how matters stand."

"He means to keep the watch!" wailed Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, rot!"

"I'm dashed if it doesn't begin to look like it!" said Mornington. "He must be potty to keep it up like this, anyhow."

"Perhaps he's sold it already!" groaned Muffin. "Sold it, and got the thirty guineas in his pocket at this very minute."

"Rubbish!" said Raby.

"You jolly well wouldn't say rubbish if it was your watch!" hooted Reginald Muffin.

"Fathead!"

"We've got to find him," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got to make the silly owl understand that if he doesn't shell out the ticker he will be taken before the beak and accused of stealing it."

"There's one thing you seem to have

rather overlooked, though," put in Cuthbert Gower.

Arthur Edward Lovell sniffed. He had no use for Cuthbert Gower or his opinions.

"And what's that?" he asked sarcastically. "Have you thought of something jolly clever that we've all forgotten?"

"I've thought of what Dicky Dalton said in the Form-room," answered Gower. "He didn't think it was Putty more than any other fellow."

"Dicky's an ass sometimes."

"He may be an ass sometimes, but you're an ass always, you know," said Gower, and there was a laugh.

"If you want a thick ear——" began Lovell.

"I want that watch handed over before the Head begins," said Gower. "I think all the fellows will agree to that."

"Of course," said Jimmy Silver. "If you've got anything to suggest, Gower, get it off your chest."

"Well, Dicky Dalton generally knows what he's talking about," said Gower. "And I take Putty's word, for one. I know he's a japing ass, but his word is good enough for me. My belief is that some other fellow played this trick."

"And who?" snorted Lovell.

"You!"

Lovell jumped at that unexpected reply.

"I!" he stuttered.

"Yes."

"Why, I—I——"

Arthur Edward Lovell doubled his fists preparatory to rushing on Cuthbert Gower and exacting summary vengeance. But two or three fellows pushed him back.

"Hold on," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You can punch Gower afterwards, Lovell—let's hear what reason he's got to give for suggesting that it might have been you japing with Muffin's watch."

Lovell breathed hard.

"Yes, let's, and then I'll smash him," he said savagely. "Trot out your reason, you worm!"

"I think it's a fairly good reason," drawled Gower. "I'm not accusin' you of stealin' the watch. I'm accusin' you of baggin' it for a jape—just as you accused Putty."

"That's understood," said Jimmy Silver. "We all know it's not a question of theft."

"Do we?" murmured Cyril Peele.

"Yes, we do! Shut up, Peele! Now, Gower, what makes you think that Lovell was the practical joker—if you really think so?"

"Only because I heard a watch ticking in his pocket."

"What?" roared Lovell. "Of course there's a watch ticking in my pocket—my own watch! Any fellow can see it if he likes."

And Arthur Edward Lovell jerked out into general view the large silver watch he wore, which was not nearly so handsome as Tubby's gold ticker, and certainly did not look so valuable, but had the rather useful quality of keeping time.

"Hallo! Is that a watch?" asked Mornington.

"Eh? Yes! What did you think it was, ass?"

"Somethin' in the agricultural line, old bean. A turnip, for instance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "Is this a time for your funny business? Look at that watch, Gower! Is that Muffin's watch?"

"I wasn't alludin' to that watch. I heard a watch tickin' in your jacket pocket, unless I'm mistaken."

"No 'unless' about it; you're mistaken; or, rather, you're telling lies," said Lovell fiercely. "I'm not the kind of fool to play japes with watches, like Putty."

Gower shrugged his shoulders.

The juniors looked at one another, and Lovell stared round angrily. Sudden silence fell on the group.

Mornington held up his hand.

"Listen!" he said.

Tick, tick, tick!

In the tense silence, with all the juniors listening breathlessly, the tick of a watch became audible. And the sound of it certainly seemed to proceed from Arthur Edward Lovell; and it was not the tick of his silver watch, which was much more subdued, and, indeed, inaudible now that the watch was back in his pocket. It was a louder and more aggressive tick, and all the fellows knew that Tubby Muffin's big gold watch had a tick on it that was emphatic—indeed, Mornington had likened it unto an alarm-clock for that very reason.

Quite a queer expression came over Lovell's face.

"I say, this is getting rich!" yawned Mornington. "I never suspected Lovell of bein' such a funny merchant! Turn out your jacket pockets, old bean, and cough up the ticker!"

"I—I haven't— I—I didn't—"

"Turn your pockets out and let's see!" snorted Gower.

Lovell drove his hand savagely into his jacket pocket. His hand came out—with a shining gold watch in it—and the expression on Arthur Edward Lovell's countenance was simply extraordinary. He stared at that big gold watch as if it was the grisly spectre of a gold watch instead of the solid—extremely solid—article.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"My watch!" yelled Reginald Muffin. He clutched it from the hand of the dazed junior.

Gower walked away with a grin on his face, Peele followed him, laughing openly. But the other fellows gathered round Lovell.

"So it was you!" said Oswald.

"Lovell all the time!" exclaimed Raby. "You frumpitious ass, what do you mean by it?"

"You burbling chump!" said Newcome. "I suppose you were keeping it up to the last minute, and were going to take it to Dicky Dalton at seven? Is that your idea of a jape?"

"What an idea!" said Mornington, shrugging his shoulders. "For goodness' sake, Lovell, don't you start as a funny man. You're not built that way."

Lovell stood speechless.

Reginald Muffin was almost hugging his recovered watch; and Lovell was staring at it as if fascinated.

"Dash it all, this is too thick, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "It was an idiotic jape to begin with. But you've been saying all this time that it was Putty—why, you even lent a hand at ragging him over it! If this is what you call a jape, you'd better try to lead a jolly serious life."

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Mornington.

Lovell gasped.

"Who put that watch in my pocket?"

"What?"

"Eh?"

"Who put that watch in my pocket?" roared Lovell. "I never put it there! I never touched the dashed thing till I pulled it out! I suppose this is one of Putty's japes after all! He's planted the rotten thing on me!"

"Oh, my hat! Mean to say—"

stuttered Jimmy Silver.

Lovell glared at him.

"I mean to say that I never touched Muffin's watch!" he bawled. "It's been planted on me, and I'll jolly well smash up that idiot Putty into little bits."

"But—but—but—"

"Lovell all the time!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "And if Gower hadn't spotted him, I suppose he was going to keep it. Yaroooooh!"

Reginald Muffin rolled under the table.

"Ow! Wow! Help! Keep him off!"

"Come out!" roared Lovell. "Roll out, you fat rotter! I'm going to kick you black and blue! Come out!"

Reginald Muffin remained under the table. In the circumstances, it seemed the safest place for him.

"Hold on, old man!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Never mind Muffin! Of course, if you say you never played tricks with the watch, we believe you. But it's jolly queer."

"Nothing queer about it!" snapped Lovell. "That idiot Putty took it for a jape—and this is what he calls a jape. He slipped it into my pocket, of course."

"But when did he do it?" asked Jimmy Silver, puzzled. "You can't have had that watch in your pocket all the afternoon, in the Form-room, without finding it."

"I know that, ass."

"You haven't been near Putty since class. He's been keeping out of the way."

Lovell opened his mouth, and closed it again. It was borne in upon his mind that Putty of the Fourth had not, after all, slipped the missing watch into his pocket, for the simple reason that it was impossible for him to have done so.

"Then—then it was somebody else," he stammered.

"So the jolly old japer wasn't Putty after all!" grinned Mornington. "There's some other japing ass at large in the Classical Fourth. By gad, we ought to find him out and lynch him in time! One Putty is enough in any Form."

"But—but who——" said Raby, with a rather dubious look at Arthur Edward.

"If you can't take my word, Raby——" bawled Lovell.

"Well, you couldn't take Putty's, could you?" said Raby tartly.

And Lovell, for once, had no rejoinder to make, for the moment.

"Don't worry, old bean," said Morn-

ington. "If Mr. Sherlock Holmes were here, I think he would ask who first heard the giddy ticker tickin' in Lovell's pocket, an' drew attention to it."

"Gower!" roared Lovell.

"Nobody else seems to have noticed it," smiled Mornington. "Fancy Gower startin' as a funny merchant!"

"Gower, of course!" hooted Lovell. "Why, only half an hour ago he grabbed hold of me—of course, that was when he did it. I'll give him palming off his rotten japes on me! I'll pulverise him!"

Lovell rushed to the door, and Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, collared him at once and dragged him back.

"Enough of that, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver curtly. "There's been rather too much of jumping to conclusions and ragging chaps on suspicion. It turns out that we were wrong about Putty, and we may be wrong about Gower, too."

"I am quite certain——"

"And you were quite certain about Putty!" snapped Newcome.

And once more Arthur Edward Lovell found himself short of a rejoinder.

Gower's head was not punched, much as it deserved to be. Instead of that, Jimmy Silver & Co. marched to Mr. Dalton's study, with Tubby Muffin and the recaptured timekeeper, and the matter was explained to the Form-master. Mr. Dalton accepted Lovell's statement that the watch had been "planted" on him, and the whole affair was dismissed as a fool practical joke, as all but two members of the Classical Fourth Form fully believed it to be.

Jimmy Silver tapped Muffin on the shoulder as they left the Form-master's study.

"If that watch gets lost again, Muffin, look out for squalls!" he said. "We're fed-up with it—right up to the chin, and if you lose it any more you'd better lose yourself at the same time."

"I'm not taking any more risks with a valuable watch like this," said Tubby Muffin. "It's too valuable, really, to wear in the Lower School. I'm going over to Rookham to-morrow afternoon to sell it for thirty guineas. And I can tell you I'm going to have a jolly good time this term. All you fellows roll up to-morrow for the biggest feed on record."

And the Fistical Four grinned and said that they would.

CHAPTER 20.

All that Glitters is Not Gold!

"GOIN'?" asked Mornington, with a grin.

It was the following afternoon, and it was a half-holiday at Rookwood. Reginald Muffin rolled out of the House, in hat and coat. In his pocket reposed the big gold watch that had caused so much excitement in the Fourth Form of late.

Tubby Muffin nodded cheerily.

"Just off!" he answered.

"You're really going to sell the watch?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"That's it! I thought of popping it at first," said Tubby confidentially, and the juniors grinned. "But on second thoughts I'd rather sell it outright. It's too jolly valuable to carry about."

"Really?" asked Mornington.

"Yes, rather; might be knocked down for it by some tramp, you know—or I might lose it," said Muffin. "I shall buy a silver watch out of the money, and the rest will keep me in funds for the whole term. I shall explain it to my uncle when I see him again. He won't mind—at least, I hope he won't!"

Mornington eyed him curiously. Morny had his own opinions about that magnificent gold watch. Certainly it looked very big and imposing, and the juniors, of course, were not well up in such little matters as hall-marks. But Morny had had the pleasure—or other-

wise—of meeting Captain Montague Muffin, and he, somehow, did not think that the gallant captain was the man to give away thirty guinea gold watches, even to so fascinating a nephew as Reginald Muffin.

"All you fellows roll up for your feed!" said Tubby brightly. "I'm standing a spread to the whole Form. Something extra special."

"Good man!" said Lovell.

And Reginald Muffin rolled away, bound for the jeweller's at Rookham. Near the gates he passed Gower and Peele. Cuthbert Gower gave him a sour grin, and Peele called to him.

"Going to Rookham, Tubby?"

"Just off!" smiled Tubby. "I'm going to dispose of my magnificent watch, you know. You fellows can come to the feed, if you like."

"Don't take less than ten bob for it!" said Gower.

"Eh? I shan't take less than twenty-five guineas."

"I hope you'll get them," said Gower, as he turned on his heel and walked away, laughing. Tubby Muffin stared after him wrathfully.

"If you're going to Rookham, bring me back an evening paper, will you?" asked Peele. "You can get one at the station early."

"Certainly!" said Muffin obligingly. "I pass the station, and I'll get it as I go."

"Thanks!"

Muffin rolled out of the gates. He rolled away to Coombe, to take the local train to the next market town. He went in a joyous mood. Certainly, it was very agreeable to possess a big gold watch that had cost twenty-five or thirty guineas; it enabled Muffin to indulge in the swank in which his fat soul delighted. But really, Muffin had extracted from that handsome watch all that was to be extracted in the way of swank. Having served that turn, Captain Muffin's

valuable present was to serve as a source of wealth—a horn of plenty for the impecunious junior. Reginald Muffin, usually a hanger-on at other fellows' spreads, a picker-up of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, was going to stand spreads himself—he was going to revel in unlimited tuck, fatness and stickiness were to enwrap him like a garment. And that happy prospect brought happy smiles to Tubby's shiny face.

A good many of the Classical Fourth fellows were interested in Tubby's mission to the market town. A spread was a spread, and it was unusual for a spread to be stood by Reginald Muffin. Jimmy Silver was in possession of a remittance that day, but the Fistical Four decided to keep the cash in hand for a later occasion and honour Tubby's feast with their distinguished presence.

So at tea-time quite a number of Classical fellows loafed about the gates waiting for Muffin to come in.

He was rather late.

The fat Classical should have returned well before tea-time, but he had not put in an appearance yet. The Fistical Four were there, waiting for him, and Cuthbert Gower, with a cynical grin on his face, and Cyril Peele, anxious for his early evening paper. Peele was more interested in Chop Sticks' race than in Muffin's spread. He fully anticipated seeing the name of his winner in the evening paper. Putty, of the Fourth, was at the gates, too, and Mornington. Putty was on the old amicable terms with the Fistical Four once more.

"Hallo, here he comes!" said Mornington, as a fat figure was sighted in the road.

"Rolling in it, for once!" grinned Lovell.

"By gad! He doesn't look as if he were rolling in it."

"He doesn't, by Jove!" said Jimmy Silver. "What on earth's happened?"

He can't have lost that blessed watch again!"

All eyes were fixed on Reginald Muffin as he rolled in.

He did not look like a fellow who had just sold a valuable watch and returned with his pockets full of currency notes. He did not look in the least like it. On that point there was no doubt—no possible, probable, shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever. He rolled in dismally.

"Hallo, Muffin!"

"What's the trouble?"

"Got my paper?" asked Peele eagerly.

Muffin without a word jerked a crumpled paper from his pocket and threw it to Peele. Then he leaned on the gate and groaned, the juniors surveying him in great astonishment. What Reginald Muffin had to groan about was a mystery to them.

Peele, however, did not look at Muffin. He had opened the paper eagerly, and Gower was looking over his shoulder with equal eagerness. Peele was looking for his winner, Gower was looking for the sad news that he had missed the chance of a lifetime.

"There it is—the two o'clock!" whispered Gower.

"That's it! But what—what—what —" Peele stuttered.

The newspaper fluttered from his hands. Gower snatched it up and stared at the racing report.

Three names appeared at the top of the list of the two o'clock race, the winner, and the two "placed" horses. And then, in small type, appeared the following:

"Also ran:—Blue Bird, Bobby, Knock Out, and Chop Sticks."

"Also ran!" muttered Gower.

That sure snip, that absolutely dead cert, that tip straight from the horse's mouth—where was it now? Chop Sticks, the "dark horse" that was to have romped home, was not even

"placed"—he was at the tail of the "also rans." Wherever he had romped, obviously he had not romped home; only he had romped off with Cyril Peele's five-pound note. That was the net outcome—to Peele—of his romping!

"Also ran!" muttered Gower again. "Oh, gad!"

Peele tramped away, with a face like unto that of a demon in a pantomime. He had asked for it, and he had got it; and it was exactly what he deserved. But Peele derived no comfort from that fact. Cuthbert Gower stared hard and long, with a white face, at the report. Also ran! And if he had raised money on Muffin's watch and backed that elusive winner, what would have happened then? Also ran! No redemption of the "borrowed" watch. Instead of that a stern inquiry, discovery, expulsion, lifelong shame and disgrace. Also ran! Cuthbert Gower felt sick at his very heart. The fearfully narrow escape turned him almost giddy. Chance—unexpected chance—had saved him—saved him from what he could not endure to think of. And Cuthbert Gower made a resolve, as he stood there, shivering, with a white face, the newspaper trembling in his hands. Had he been able to raise money on Muffin's watch that watch would have been gone beyond recovery, and Cuthbert Gower would have been ruined beyond hope. Never—never again—was the wretched junior's resolve as he almost tottered away.

But no one—fortunately, perhaps—was looking at Gower. All the other fellows had fixed their attention upon Reginald Muffin.

Muffin leaned heavily on the gate and groaned. He gaped at the surprised faces of the Fourth Formers. They waited for him to speak, but he did not speak. Some unexpected misfortune seemed to have overwhelmed Reginald Muffin.

"Well, what's the name of this game?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell

at last. "What on earth's the matter with you, Muffin?"

Groan!

"Give it a name, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver consolingly. "Have you lost the watch?"

"No," groaned Muffin. "I've got it here."

"Didn't the jeweller johnny come up to your figure?" asked Putty.

"Nunno!"

"That's all right! You can try another."

"I've tried three, and they all say the same."

"What do they say?" grinned Mornington.

"Oh, dear!"

"They say 'oh, dear!'" asked Lovell in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass!" groaned Muffin. "The first jeweller offered me five shillings for the watch—"

"Five shillings!"

"The second one made it four-and-six—"

"What—"

"The last one was best; he offered to go to six shillings!" groaned Tubby Muffin. "He says he sells them at a guinea."

"Great pip!"

"It—it—it isn't what I thought!" mumbled Muffin. "My—my—my uncle must have been done. Or—or perhaps he wasn't giving me a valuable present, after all! Anyhow, it's rolled gold, and the works are no good—so the jeweller said. Oh, dear! Ow!"

Greatly to their credit, the Rookwood juniors did not chuckle, although they were aware that, like Gower's "dead cert," Muffin's "thirty guinea" gold watch had proved an "also ran," they reserved their chuckles till Tubby should no longer be in the offing. Jimmy Silver slipped his hand through Muffin's arm.

"Never mind, old chap—"

"Oh, dear!"

"Buck up, we're going to have a

spread in the end study," said Jimmy. "I've had a remittance. Keep smiling."

Tubby brightened a little.

"A big cake, and three kinds of jam——"

Tubby smiled.

"Come on, old fellow," said Jimmy kindly.

And Reginald Muffin had quite a comforted look as he came on.

CHAPTER 21.

The Head Looks In!

"CLEAR!"

"What?"

"No ingress!" said Bulkeley of the Sixth, with a smile.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the captain of Rookwood.

"They were surprised.

George Bulkeley, of the Sixth Form, was stationed at the end of the Classical Fourth passage—the staircase end. He leaned on the wall, with his official ashplant under his arm.

As the Fistical Four came upstairs after classes Bulkeley slipped the ashplant from under his arm and held it across the passage, barring the way of the chums of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. halted on the landing. Bulkeley's action was quite mystifying to them. Why they could not walk along their own passage to their own study they simply could not guess.

"Look here, Bulkeley——" began Arthur Edward Lovell warmly.

"Clear!" said the prefect tersely.

"Can't we go along to our own study?" asked Raby.

"No!"

"We've come up for tea!" said Newcome.

"Sorry!" said Bulkeley politely. "But orders are orders! I'm here to keep the passage clear! Cut!"

"But——" said Jimmy Silver.

"Hook it!"

"Well, my hat!"

Argument with a prefect of the Sixth, and captain of the school, was not feasible. The official ashplant that barred the passage would have furnished effective and somewhat painful answers to any arguments advanced by fags of the Fourth Form.

Besides, it was fairly plain, after a moment's reflection, that Bulkeley of the Sixth was acting on instructions. It could not have been simply for his own entertainment that he was doing sentry-go at the entrance of the Classical Fourth passage.

The Fistical Four retired across the landing to the stairs, where they waited. Valentine Mornington came up, passed them, and was about to walk along the passage, when Bulkeley stopped him.

"What on earth's the name of this game, Bulkeley?" asked Morny.

"Cut!" was Bulkeley's reply.

"Can't a chap go to his study?"

"No!"

"Oh, gad!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders, and joined the Fistical Four on the staircase.

"Anythin' up?" he asked.

"Looks like it!" said Jimmy Silver. "All the fellows are being kept out of their studies, it seems."

"Is it a Head's inspection, then?"

"Oh! Very likely."

Two or three more of the Classical Fourth came up. Bulkeley stopped them, and the little crowd at the head of the stairs grew and grew. Bulkeley, standing on guard, gave no explanation, and all sorts of surmises were started by the crowd of juniors. Lovell called out to Cyril Peele of the Fourth as that youth came up the staircase:

"Better mind your eye, Peele!"

Peele gave him a rather inimical look. The black sheep of Rookwood was on the worst of terms with the Fistical Four. Only that morning, in fact, Arthur Edward Lovell had held Peele's head under a flowing tap as a

punishment for having given a cigarette to Lovell's minor, Teddy. Arthur Edward Lovell had almost forgotten that incident already; but, naturally, it lingered longer in Cyril Peele's memory.

"What do you mean?" grunted Peele.

"Looks like a Head's inspection," grinned Lovell. "If you've got any smokes in your study, look out for squalls!"

Peele sneered.

"Thank you for nothin'!" he answered. "I'm not afraid of a Head's inspection. What are all you fellows hangin' about on the stairs for?"

"We're barred out of our studies," said Raby.

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, ask Bulkeley."

Peele crossed the landing, and Bulkeley waved him back.

"Hook it, Peele!"

"I want to go to my study."

"You can't."

"Why not?" demanded Peele.

"Orders!"

"Whose orders?" snapped Peele.

Bulkeley looked at him.

"You ask too many questions, Peele," he said. "Ask another, and I'll ask you to bend over!"

Cyril Peele did not ask another question. He grunted, and backed away, and joined the group on the staircase.

"Poor old Peele!" murmured Mornington. "If it's a Head's inspection it's rather rotten for you to be taken by surprise like this—what?"

Peele shrugged his shoulders.

Tubby Muffin came puffing up the stairs. He blinked at the waiting juniors, and blinked at Bulkeley, and rolled on, only to be stopped, like the rest, by the captain of Rookwood.

"I've got to go to my study, Bulkeley!" said Muffin.

"Cut!"

"It's tea-time!"

"Bosh! Get out of it!"

"But, I say——"

Bulkeley made a motion with the ashplant, and Reginald Muffin beat a hurried retreat. Bulkeley smiled, and resumed his easy posture against the wall.

More and more fellows came up, and the crowd on the stairs grew and grew. It was agreed now that it was a "Head's inspection" that was toward, and some of the fellows were rather uneasy. Once or twice in the term it was the custom of Dr. Chisholm to make an official and stately round of the junior quarters, and these visits were always paid by surprise. Had notice been given in advance, doubtless the Head would have discovered every study in a spick-and-span condition, and plenty of evidence that every individual fellow in the Form was a model character.

Surprise visits, on the other hand, enabled the Head to see things as they actually were, which meant trouble to untidy fellows who kept their football boots in the bookcase and Latin grammars inside out on the floor. It meant still more trouble to fellows who were foolish enough to transgress the strict rule against smoking at Rookwood, and who had cigarettes in their rooms to meet the awful glance of the Head. Once the Head had actually discovered a pipe in a Shell study, and the owner had had great difficulty in convincing Dr. Chisholm that he used it only to blow bubbles with.

Peele of the Fourth, whose dingy manners and customs were well known in his Form, might have been expected to feel very uneasy now. It was likely enough that there were smokes in his study, and possibly playing-cards, and even racing papers. But Peele, oddly enough, seemed quite at his ease, like a fellow who had nothing whatever to fear. Morny, eyeing him curiously, wondered whether Peele had somehow had a tip in advance regarding the visit of inspection.

"This is all very well," growled Conroy of the Fourth, "but a fellow wants his tea after games—what?"

"It's too thick!" agreed Lovell. "But we're in luck—our study is all right!"

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy Silver, feeling quite relieved as he thought of it.

Undoubtedly there were times when the end study was not right as rain. Sometimes it was untidy. There had been occasions when it had been very untidy.

Fortunately, on this especial day, the Fistical Four had nothing to feel uneasy about.

They had not been in their study at all that day, or only for a few minutes, and it was still in the state in which the "Boys' Maid" had left it early in the morning. At least, the chums of the Fourth naturally supposed that it was.

But other fellows were disquieted.

Gunner, for instance, remembered that he had had to give his study-mate, Dickinson minor, some correction that day in the study, and Dickinson minor had resisted. Dickinson minor had fled, with Gunner after him. Gunner remembered that all the chairs had been knocked over, that the table was on its side, and that there were broken crocks on the carpet. That was not the state in which a study should have been presented to the majestic eyes of the Head.

Other fellows had some grounds for uneasiness, too; few were in the happy state of satisfaction of the Fistical Four, and, apparently, Peele.

But there was no help for it.

No fellow could obtain access to his room until the Head's inspection had been carried out.

They could only wait on the staircase, and hope for the best.

"Here he comes!" murmured Oswald at last.

The majestic figure of Dr. Chisholm

was sighted on the lower stairs. He was accompanied by Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth.

The juniors backed away respectfully for the Head to pass, and Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Dalton moved on into the Fourth Form passage, and the inspection began.

CHAPTER 22.

Awful Luck!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. waited.

With all due respect to the Head of Rookwood, they wished that the stately old gentleman would "buck up," so that they could get to the end study to tea. Footer practice had made them hungry.

But "bucking up" was the last thought that was likely to enter Dr. Chisholm's mind. All his movements were slow and stately.

From the end of the passage—still barred off by Bulkeley—the juniors watched him enter the first study.

They watched him almost with bated breath, for that study belonged to Peele, Gower, and Lattrey, and Peele & Co. were the black sheep of the Form. If any unpleasant discovery was made in the quarters of the Classical Fourth, it was almost certain to be in Peele's study. But Peele and Gower and Lattrey seemed quite at ease.

"No smokes there, this time, what?" murmured Lovell.

Apparently there were none, for Dr. Chisholm's face was quite unmoved when he came out of the study.

"You fellows are in luck," grinned Raby. "What have you done with your latest copy of 'Racing Tips,' Peele?"

"I haven't left it for the Head to find, anyhow," answered Peele coolly.

And the juniors grinned.

Study No. 2 belonged to Higgs, Jones minor, Putty of the Fourth, and Tubby Muffin. Mr. Dalton entered with the Head, and looked out again.

"Higgs!"

"Here, sir!" said Alfred Higgs, in some dismay.

"Please come here!"

"Yes, sir."

Higgs passed Bulkeley, and went to Study No. 2. He almost cringed in the doorway, as he met the glance of the Head.

Dr. Chisholm pointed to the bookcase.

"Are these your boots, Higgs?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Higgs.

"Is it your custom to keep dirty boots in the bookcase among your books?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Do you generally leave your boots lying about in such an extremely muddy state?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"You will take five hundred lines of Virgil, Higgs."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stuttered Higgs.

"Perhaps you will kindly make a note of it, Mr. Dalton?"

"Certainly, sir."

The Head made a stately motion to the doorway, and Alfred Higgs jumped away as if the headmaster had been a steam-roller rolling down on him.

Dr. Chisholm progressed to Study No. 3.

That study belonged to Pons, Van Ryn, and Conroy, the three Colonials. Mr. Dalton glanced out of the doorway.

"Is Van Ryn there?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmy Silver. "I left him in the changing-room."

"Shall I send for Van Ryn, sir?" asked Mr. Dalton, turning back into the study.

"It is not necessary, Mr. Dalton," said the Head. "You will see that he writes out two hundred lines for leaving his dictionary on the floor."

"Certainly, sir."

Progress proceeded to No. 4, the study of Mornington and Erroll. This study passed muster, and so did Study No. 5, which belonged to Townsend and Topham and Rawson. Study No. 6,

the quarters of Oswald, Flynn, and Hooker, escaped criticism, but at Study No. 7 the Head halted in the doorway with a frown.

"This is a very untidy room," he said. "To whom does this room belong, Mr. Dalton?"

"Gunner and Dickinson minor, sir." "I have seldom seen even a junior room in so untidy a state," said the Head. "Perhaps you will name both Gunner and Dickinson minor, Mr. Dalton?"

"Certainly, sir," said the Fourth Form master.

"I like that!" murmured Gunner indignantly. "All through that young ass Dickinson minor being cheeky. He said I couldn't play footer for toffee, and, of course, I had to wallop him."

The juniors chuckled.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner's drastic methods with his study-mate were well known, and most of the fellows considered that a caning from Mr. Dalton was exactly what Gunner wanted.

Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Dalton progressed now to the end study. The view of inspection was almost over.

The Head stopped in the doorway.

To the surprise of the Fistical Four, who were watching him along the passage, thunder gathered on his stately brow.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Dalton.

Both masters stared into the study, apparently surprised and shocked by what they saw there.

"What on earth's the matter now?" murmured Raby. "Our study's all right, isn't it?"

"Something's up!" said Newcome.

Dr. Chisholm turned to the Fourth Form master.

"Whose study is this?"

"Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome," said Mr. Dalton.

"Kindly call them here."

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed Bulkeley, and walked up the passage in a state

of great astonishment. What fault the Head had to find with their study was a mystery to them.

Dr. Chisholm eyed them sternly as they came up.

"This is your study?" he asked in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

"You are head boy of the Fourth Form, I think, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this is the state in which you keep your study?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Jimmy in surprise. "Is—is there anything the matter with it?"

"How dare you ask such a question, Silver! I have never seen a room in such a state. In all my experience as a headmaster, I have never seen such untidiness, such slovenliness, such—such——" Dr. Chisholm paused, apparently at a loss for a word that would express his feelings.

The Fistical Four could only blink.

From where they stood, facing the two masters, they could not see into the study, but they naturally supposed that it was as they had left it. Dr. Chisholm stepped back, and pointed into the doorway of the end study.

"That," he said—"that is the state in which you, the head boy of your Form, keep your study!"

Then the chums of the Fourth looked in.

They jumped.

It was really difficult to believe the evidence of their own eyes for a minute or two.

The end study, which they had seen last in an unusually tidy state, was now in a state that almost beggared description.

If half the Form had been engaged in a free fight within its walls it could hardly have looked more wrecked and havocked. Gunner's study had been order itself in comparison.

The table was up-ended in a corner. The chairs were lying about on their

backs. Books were scattered over the floor; an upset inkpot had streamed ink over the carpet in a long black stream. Three or four jam-tarts were sticking to the carpet or the mantel-piece. The glass pane of the bookcase was broken, and a sooty kettle had been shoved in among the books. There were ginger-beer bottles in the fender and two or three lying about the room; torn paper was scattered all over the place. In the grate was a Latin grammar, torn in several pieces, as if for the purpose of lighting a fire. There was more disorder than could be taken in at a single glance.

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as he stared dazedly into the wrecked study.

"Oh!" stuttered Lovell.

Raby and Newcome were dumb with amazement and dismay.

What on earth had happened to their study during their absence at footer practice after class? It looked as if an earthquake had struck it.

"Mr. Dalton!"

"Sir?"

"Will you kindly send someone for a cane? I will punish these juniors myself."

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Dalton went along the passage, and returned with Bulkeley's cane. He handed it to Dr. Chisholm.

"Silver, I am shocked at this! I am shocked and surprised!" said the Head. "I have no alternative but to punish you severely for keeping your study in such a state—such a revolting state—such a disgusting state! Bend over that chair!"

"But, sir——" gasped Jimmy.

"Not a word!"

"But——"

"Bend over that chair!" exclaimed the Head, in a terrifying voice.

And Jimmy Silver bent over the chair.

The cane rose and fell six times.

"Six" was a punishment at Rookwood of a varying severity. It de-

pended on the degree of vigour with which the "six" was laid on.

On this occasion there was no fault to be found with it, so far as the vigour was concerned.

Indeed, the hapless captain of the Fourth might have supposed that the Head had been doing "physical jerks" specially to get his muscle up for the occasion.

Never had any fellow at Rookwood received so severe a "six."

Jimmy Silver was quite pale and breathless when the last stroke had fallen.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome stood in a dismayed group. Their turn was coming.

They realised dimly that some japer must have ragged their study in their absence; at the most unfortunate moment possible—just before a surprise visit from the headmaster.

They realised, too, that it was useless to attempt to make that clear to the Head. Dr. Chisholm judged by what he saw, and he was in no mood to listen to explanations.

"Lovell!"

"We never——" gasped Lovell hopelessly.

"Bend over that chair!"

Arthur Edward Lovell bent over, and received four hefty strokes. Jimmy, as head of the Fourth, had the distinction of receiving the severest punishment. Four each was deemed sufficient for his study-mates.

"Raby!"

"Somebody has——" began Raby.

"Bend over that chair!"

Four more hefty swipes were administered.

"Newcome!"

Arthur Newcome did not attempt to explain. He knew that it was futile, and he bent over the chair without a word.

Four times the cane rose and fell.

Then the Head handed it back to Mr. Dalton, who handed it back to

Bulkeley of the Sixth. Justice had been done!

Dr. Chisholm eyed the Fistical Four sternly as they stood wriggling with anguish.

"I am surprised and shocked!" he told them again. "I am disgusted with you! Put this study in order at once! Mr. Dalton, I recommend you to keep a very special eye upon this study. I should never have dreamed that such slovenly and disorderly boys existed at Rookwood at all. I have been very much surprised and shocked."

And the majestic Head sailed away, followed by Mr. Dalton and Bulkeley. The inspection was over.

CHAPTER 23.

Lovell Leads!

"OH!"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

There were sounds of woe and lamentation in the end study when the Head was gone.

Four voices were raised in anguish.

Classical Fourth fellows came along the passage and looked in. The Classical Fourth had hardly expected the Head's visit to pass off without trouble for somebody. But it was rather a surprise that the trouble had fallen chiefly on the Fistical Four.

Nobody would have been surprised by a flogging for Peele & Co. for having smokes or cards in their study. But Peele's study had been drawn quite blank, and it was upon Jimmy Silver & Co. that the vials of wrath had been poured.

"Well, by gad, you fellows asked for it!" said Valentine Mornington, as he glanced in at the suffering four. "What on earth's been going on here? Dog-fight, or a Labour conference, or what?"

"Ow! Wow! Wow!"

"Must be silly asses!" said Putty of the Fourth. "A man never knows when to look for a Head's inspection; but it's asking for trouble to keep your quarters in this state. Any prefect who looked in would have given you lines at least."

"Isn't this study supposed to set an example to the rest of the passage?" grinned Peele. "Isn't Silver head of the Fourth? Is our shinin' example lettin' us down?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owls!" said Arthur Edward Lovell savagely. "We never left the study like this. It's a rag!"

"Well, it looks a bit untidy, even for you, Lovell!" grinned Oswald. "Why didn't you tell the Beak it was a rag?"

Arthur Edward Lovell groaned.

"I tried to—but can a fellow ever tell the Head anything? Does he ever listen to a chap?"

"It's a rotten, sneaking rag!" said Jimmy. "Somebody came in here while we were at footer and mucked up the study. I don't mind a bit of a rag, but this is too thick. Spilling ink and breaking glass is outside the limit!"

"I suppose the fellow never knew that a Head's inspection was impendin'," said Putty of the Fourth.

"It was a rotten thing to do, all the same. The silly chump who mucked up this study is going to squirm for it!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Was it you, Putty?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"No, fathead! If I ragged a man's study I shouldn't muck it up like this."

"Might have been a Modern raid," suggested Peele.

"Oh, very likely!" said Oswald.

"Likely enough!" groaned Lovell. "My hat! If it was Tommy Dodd and his mob, we'll jolly well raid Manders' House in return, and make the cads sorry for themselves."

"Ow!" mumbled Raby.

"Wow!" murmured Newcome.

The Classical fellows went to their studies to tea, some of them sympathetic,

some of them grinning. Jimmy Silver & Co. were left to groan till their feelings had been relieved by a sufficiency of groans. It was quite a long time before they ceased to moan and mumble. The Head had not spared the rod.

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver at last. "Not much good squealing. After all, we can stand a licking."

"It's unjust!" growled Lovell.

"My dear man, if you're going to howl over all the injustices you ever butt up against you'll be busy howling all your life," said Jimmy. "The Head doesn't know any better. How's a headmaster to know everything?"

"Something in that," said Raby with a faint grin.

"Ow, wow!" said Newcome.

"That's all very well," said Lovell hotly, "but a headmaster ought to look into a thing before he hands out the whackings. Ow!"

"Well, he did look in. I wish he hadn't! How was he going to guess that some brute had ragged the study? Never mind grousing about the Head. He's not a bad old scout according to his lights," said Jimmy Silver tolerantly. "What we want to find out is the merry merchant who ragged the study, and we want to make him tired of life."

"Yes, rather! But who was it?" growled Lovell. "Looks to me like a raid of the Modern cads."

"I hardly think that Tommy Dodd and his pals would muck up a man's study like this," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "You see, this isn't just a little rag; it's thorough-going hooliganism. The Modern fellows are cheeky outsiders, if you like; but—"

"Oh, it was the Moderns all right!" said Lovell positively. A hint of opposition was enough to make Arthur Edward Lovell positive, especially just after a licking.

"Well, I don't think so," said Jimmy.

"That only shows that you're an ass, old fellow," said Lovell kindly. "I've told you before that you're an ass."

"I know. You're always talking out of the back of your neck, old chap," assented Jimmy. "Anyhow, we're going to find out who did it, whether it was Moderns or not. There are some fellows on this side who don't exactly love us, you know, nice as we are."

"I tell you it was a Modern raid, and we're jolly well going to raid the Moderns in Manders' House and get even!" hooted Lovell.

"Look round the place," suggested Raby. "We may find some proof of who did it. I remember that ass Putty once dropped a hanky here when he was putting gum in the armchair."

The Fistical Four proceeded to search about the wrecked study in the hope of finding a clue to the wreckers.

There was a sudden whoop from Arthur Edward Lovell.

He pounced on a book that lay on the floor, grabbed it up, and held it aloft in triumph.

"Didn't I say it was the Modern cads?" he exclaimed.

"What's that?"

"Rotten chemistry manual. Some Modern cad had it in his pocket, or under his silly arm, and dropped it here," said Lovell triumphantly. "Nobody in this House studies chemistry. They study 'stinks' over on the Modern side. Why, look here! Here's Dodd's name written in it!"

The chums of the Fourth looked.

There it was, "T. Dodd," written in the hand of Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth, on the flyleaf of the chemistry manual.

"That settles it," said Jimmy Silver.

"Didn't I tell you so?" hooted Lovell.

"You did, old man. Even you are right sometimes," said Jimmy Silver. "Not often. But accidents will happen."

"You cheeky ass!"

"It was a Modern raid," said Raby. "Those Modern cads are getting too cheeky. I saw Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle chasing Peele this morning.

They kicked him. Of course, it doesn't matter about Peele. He's a rank outsider. Still, he's a Classical."

"And that matters," said Lovell. "and our study matters a jolly good deal, I can tell you. I'm going over to Manders' House."

"What about tea?" asked Newcome.

"Blow tea! Tea can wait till we've given the Modern cads something to think about," said Lovell.

"That's so," assented Jimmy. "But hold on. You're too much like a bull at a gate, Lovell. We're going to rag Tommy Dodd & Co., but we don't want to wake up Mr. Manders or the Modern prefects."

"Blow Manders, and blow his prefects! Who cares for a sneaking science master and sneaking, smelling Moderns?"

"Fathead! If Manders catches us making a row in his House he will report us to the Head. I've had enough of the Head!"

"Same here!" concurred Raby and Newcome. They really felt that they had had too much of the Head that afternoon.

But Arthur Edward Lovell was not to be denied. Lovell was sore from a licking, and he was righteously indignant at the way his study had been mishandled. He was burning for reprisals.

"Blow the Head!" he snorted.

"You can't blow the Head, you silly ass! And Manders——"

"Blow Manders! I'm going!"

"Oh, blow everybody and everything if you like!" said Raby resignedly. "Lovell's bound to go off at the deep end, of course."

"I'm going to rag those Modern cads, and I'm not going to lose a single minute about it!" bawled Lovell. "You fellows can stick here worrying about Manders if you like. I'm going!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell went.

His three chums exchanged glances, and then they followed him. Arthur Edward was hot-headed and a little un-

reasonable, but he could not be allowed to venture into the lions' den alone. And the Co. were very keen on vengeance, too, and did not want to wait. Mr. Manders' House was like unto a lions' den for Classics on the war-path. But it was evident that Arthur Edward Lovell dared to be a Daniel, and there was no stopping him. So his comrades followed on.

They left the House and walked across the quad to the block of buildings which constituted the Modern side of Rookwood, and which went by the name of Manders' House.

"Hallo, Classical cads!" remarked Towle of the Modern Fourth, as the Fistical Four walked into the enemy's quarters.

Towle of the Modern Fourth was up-ended the next moment, and left, roaring indignantly, as Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried on towards Tommy Dodd's study.

CHAPTER 24.

A Slight Mistake!

THE three Tommies of the Modern Fourth—Dodd and Cook and Doyle—had finished tea in their study, and Tommy Dodd was going through his pockets.

"Anybody seen my blinking chemistry?" he asked.

"Lost it?" asked Tommy Cook.

"Sure, you're always losing something," remarked Doyle. "You'll be losing your head next. Luckily, there's nothing in it of any value."

"Fathead! Where's the blessed thing? I remember sticking it in my pocket when we were kicking Peele today. I want it after tea. You know we've got chemistry with Manders. The dashed thing's gone."

"Dropped it when you were kicking Peele, perhaps," suggested Cook.

"Perhaps. I'll kick him again when I see him. I thought at the time that I hadn't kicked him enough."

There was a sound of hurried foot-

steps outside the study. The door flew open.

The three Moderns stared at the open doorway. Four Classics, in a rather breathless state, appeared there.

"Hallo! What——" began Tommy Dodd.

"Here they are?" shouted Lovell. "We've found the cads at home."

"Go for them!"

There was a rush into the study.

Before the Modern trio quite knew what was happening, the rush of the Fistical Four overwhelmed them.

Dodd and Cook and Doyle went sprawling about the study, with the Classics sprawling over them.

Jimmy Silver hastily jumped to the door, slammed it, and turned the key in the lock. The Classical raiders were in the heart of the enemy's territory now, with any amount of reinforcements for the enemy close at hand. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not desire to see those reinforcements, howsoever much the three Tommies might have desired to do so.

"Now rag the cads!" panted Jimmy.

"You bet!"

"What-ho!"

"You potty Classical duffers," roared Tommy Dodd, "what the thump do you mean? Oh, my hat!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Rescue!"

There was a terrific struggle in Tommy Dodd's study.

The odds were four to three; but the three were first-class fighting men, and they put up a hefty resistance. Jimmy Silver & Co. found their hands very nearly full.

Jimmy, in close embrace with Tommy Dodd, crashed on the study table, and the table reeled into the fender. The crockery it bore went in a crashing stream into the grate.

Crash, crash—smash!

"Oh, crumbs! You Classical rotter! You——"

"You Modern cad——"

"Take that!"

"Ow! Take that!"

Crash! Bump!

The combatants rolled over, fighting furiously.

Newcome was down, with Tommy Cook sitting on him; but Raby sprang to the rescue, and Cook was dragged over, and Raby took a seat on his chest. Then Tommy Cook was reduced to impotence.

"Rag the cads!" roared Lovell, as he went down struggling with Tommy Doyle. "Here, sit on him, Newcome!"

Newcome sat on Doyle and pinned him down to the floor.

There was a buzz of voices outside the study now. The handle of the door was turned and shaken and the panels thumped.

"It's a Classical raid!" came Towle's voice. "Four of the cads—they're ragging in the study. They've locked the door."

"Let us in, you Classical worms!"

"We'll jolly well scrag them when they come out."

Heedless of the uproar outside, Arthur Edward Lovell proceeded with his task of ragging the study, in retaliation for the ill-usage of the end study on the Classical side.

Lovell's methods were not gentle. Indeed, they might almost have been called methods of barbarism.

Everything he saw he knocked over—everything that was breakable he smashed. Tommy Dodd's study soon presented an aspect compared with which the end study was orderliness itself.

The three Tommies were still struggling furiously; but they were well held, and they could not interrupt Lovell's reprisals.

In five minutes the study looked as if two or three cyclones had struck it all at once. The three Tommies looked little better, as Lovell lathered ink and jam and gum over them.

Towle & Co., outside the study, hammered on the door, and hissed ferocious threats through the keyhole.

But the avengers did not heed.

The locked door was between them and the Modern reinforcements, and there was no one to say them nay.

"That will do, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "We'd better get clear now."

"You won't get clear in a hurry!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "We'll jolly well scrag you for this! We'll lynch you! What sort of rotten hooligans do you call yourselves?"

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!" grinned Lovell. "If you don't like your own medicine, that's your look-out."

"I fancy we've done a bit more damage than they did on our side," chuckled Raby.

"I jolly well meant to," said Lovell.

"Who's done any damage on your side, you silly idiots?" bawled Cook.

"You have, you cheeky Modern rotters, and got us a Head's licking for the state our study was left in," said Lovell. "But you've got something a bit thicker than a Head's licking."

"We haven't touched your study, you fathead!" hooted Tommy Doyle.

"Gammon!"

"I'll give you gammon, when I get loose!" gasped Doyle.

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Lovell.

"Do you want to make out that you didn't rag our study this afternoon?"

"You frabjous ass, no!"

"Rot!"

"We didn't, but we jolly well will, after this!" roared Cook.

"You didn't!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver in dismay.

"No, you ass!"

"Gammon!" said Lovell. "Of course they did! I'm surprised at even you Modern cads telling lies about it."

Tommy Dodd gasped with fury.

"Lemme get loose!" he spluttered. "Let me get at him! Silver, you blithering idiot, gerroff, and let me get at him!"

"Don't be an ass, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy wouldn't tell lies

about it. If he says he didn't, he didn't."

"Then who did?" hooted Lovell.

"Honour bright, Tommy Dodd?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Didn't you fellows rag our study?"

"No!" yelled Dodd. "We've been out since classes, you chump, and only came back in time for tea, you frabjous ass, and we haven't been on the Classical side at all, you born idiot!"

"Oh, dear! Then—we're sorry——" "I'll give you sorry!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"We found his 'stinks' book there!" howled Lovell. "If they hadn't been there, how did Dodd's 'stinks' book get there?"

"My chemistry book, you ass! I lost it when I was kicking Peele this morning."

"Peele!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, and a flash of understanding came to him at once.

CHAPTER 25.

Not a Lucky Day!

JIMMY SILVER jumped up.

Raby and Newcome followed his example.

The three Tommies, dusty, dishevelled, jammy, inky, breathless, staggered to their feet.

Lovell's destructive hand was stayed. Even Arthur Edward Lovell was doubtful now, and realised dimly that his "bull-at-a-gate" methods were a little liable to lead him on a false scent.

The two parties stared at one another, while Towne & Co. still raged in the corridor outside.

"I—I say, we're sorry!" stammered Jimmy Silver at last. "What were we to think? We found the study ragged—and bagged a Head's licking for it—and picked up your book there, Dodd."

"You frumptious idiot, I suppose it was put there for you to pick up and make you make fools of yourselves, just as you have done!" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, my hat! Somebody pulling our leg, you know!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Easy enough to pull a Classical dummy's leg!" said Tommy Cook.

"Look here——"

"Peele!" groaned Raby. "Peele, of course! Lovell held his napper under a tap this afternoon, and Dobby says he's kicked him. And Peele wasn't afraid of a Head's inspection. Of course, he had nosed it out that the Head was coming, and had his own study all ready. I remember Morny thought so."

"And ours ready, too!" mumbled Newcome.

"We've been taken in!" said Lovell.

"You silly chumps, you've been taken in, and now you're going to be kicked out!" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"Well, we're sorry for the mistake, but——"

"Will that set our study to rights again?" roared Cook.

"Nunno! I suppose not. But then——"

"Will that get the jam and ink off me?" shrieked Tommy Doyle.

"N-no! But——"

Doyle made a sudden rush to the door and turned back the key. The door flew open.

"Collar the Classical rotters!" Doyle shouted.

Towie of the Fourth rushed in, with six or seven Modern juniors at his heels.

"Back up!" shouted Lovell.

It had been a ghastly mistake. But it was natural, in the circumstances, that the three Tommies were disinclined to make allowances for that mistake. They had been handled severely, their study had been wrecked, and they were excited and wrathful.

Lovell had not given much thought to a retreat after vengeance on the Modern enemy. The Classics had hoped to escape by a sudden rush from the study.

But that hope was frustrated now by the inrush of a crowd of vengeful Moderns.

All that the Fistical Four could do was to stand shoulder to shoulder, and attempt to fight their way out.

That attempt was quite hopeless.

Great fighting-men as the Fistical Four were, they were of no use against odds of two or three to one.

That attempt was quite hopeless.

They resisted gallantly, but they were fairly overwhelmed by the Moderns and strewn on the floor.

Fortunately, there was no jam or ink left—Lovell had used it all on the three Tommies. But the four unhappy Classical were ragged till they hardly knew what was happening to them.

Then they were booted out of the study.

Arthur Edward Lovell went first, with five or six boots to help him go, and he sprawled, roaring, in the passage.

Jimmy Silver followed, and then Raby, and then Newcome. After them the Moderns swarmed, still booting.

The hapless raiders picked themselves up somehow and fled for the stairs.

Fortunately, the Modern juniors did not follow them down the staircase, where an uproar would have drawn prefects to the spot. But, really, Jimmy Silver & Co. had had enough.

They scudded out of Manders' House breathlessly, and did not stop till they were half-way across Big Quad. Knowles of the Sixth, a Modern prefect sighted them, but they did not heed. They fled, and stopped at last, breathless and dizzy, under the beeches.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Jimmy Silver, leaning heavily against the trunk of a beech and gasping for breath. "What a life!"

"That ass Lovell!" groaned Raby. "Blessed if I think I'm still all in one piece! I feel as if I were in a dozen!"

"Oh, crumbs! That fathead Lovell——" mumbled Newcome.

"Well, I like that!" snorted Lovell. "If you fellows had stopped to think for a minute——"

"What?"

"Rushing at a thing like a bull at a gate!" said Lovell warmly. "After all, we might have known that Doddy wouldn't have mucked up our study like that. He's a Modern cad, but he's not a hooligan. But, of course, you fellows must act first and think afterwards!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at Arthur Edward Lovell.

It was Lovell who had jumped to the conclusion that the end study had been raided by the Moderns—it was Lovell who had taken the discovery of the chemistry manual as a final convincing proof—it was Lovell who had led the raid on Manders' House and refused to listen to words of prudence. And it was Lovell who, by mysterious mental processes known only to his own remarkable intellect, somehow regarded the whole disaster as due to the hot-headed impetuosity of his comrades.

That was really nothing new. It was, in fact, Lovell all over, so to speak.

Generally, Lovell's comrades were very patient with him. On the present occasion their patience was exhausted.

"Bump him!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look here——"

"Bump him!"

"Why, you cheeky, silly chumps—— Yaroooooh!" roared Lovell.

Bump!

Arthur Edward Lovell smote the earth under the beeches, and he was left there, gasping, as his comrades limped away towards the House.

"We've been made fools of!" groaned Raby. "I'm certain now it was Peele all the time. I dare say he listened at the keyhole when the Head told Dicky Dalton that he was going to inspect the Classical Fourth studies. He would, you know."

Jimmy Silver nodded dismally.

"We might have guessed it," he said. "A surprise inspection would jolly well have found out something shady in Peele's study. It wasn't a surprise inspection to him."

"Let's scrag him!" said Newcome. "Let's go to his study and jolly well scrag him bald-headed."

"Oh, don't let's put our hoof in it a second time!" groaned Jimmy. "It looks like one of Peele's tricky japes. But we've made thumping fools of ourselves once—at least, Lovell has! We don't want to jump on Peele, and then find out that it was some of the Shell fellows—Smythe and Tracy, perhaps—or Hanson of the Fifth. After what's happened, we'd better go slow."

There was wisdom in the words of "Uncle James" of Rookwood, and his faithful followers acknowledged it.

"But we're going to make somebody squirm!" growled Raby.

"Of course! But the right party next time," said Jimmy, with a faint grin.

The three juniors tramped into the House. A sharp voice called to them—the voice of their Form-master, Richard Dalton, in much sharper tones than they usually heard from him.

"Silver! Raby! Newcome!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You are in a disgraceful state! Your clothes are dusty—dirty; your collars torn— Upon my word, I have never seen Rookwood juniors in such a state! Only this afternoon the Head punished you for having the most slovenly study in the Fourth Form. And now I see you—"

"We—we—" stammered Jimmy Silver.

The chums of the Fourth realised that it would have been wise to repair damages a little before showing up in the House. But they had hoped to slip in unnoticed. Their luck was out. This was most emphatically not Jimmy Silver & Co.'s lucky day.

Mr. Dalton raised his hand.

"I am greatly surprised at this, Silver! You have, I suppose, been fighting—that is the only explanation."

"We—we—"

"I warn you, Silver, that you must be more careful!" said the master of

the Fourth sternly. "Each of you will take five hundred lines of Virgil, and bring them to my study to-morrow."

"Oh, sir!" gasped the hapless three. Five hundred lines was a very heavy impot.

"If the Head had not already caned you, I should do so now," said Mr. Dalton "Go!"

The three trailed away dolorously upstairs, followed by grinning glances from a good many fellows, who had heard Mr. Dalton's severe words. Mr. Dalton cast a frowning glance after them.

On the staircase the Co. came on Gunner of the Fourth. Gunner burst into one of his loud laughs at the sight of the dusty and dishevelled trio.

"Ha, ha, ha! You men just picked yourselves out of a dustbin?" he roared. "My hat, you look a regular picture! Ha, ha, ha!"

Three pairs of hands were laid on Gunner of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver & Co. were fed-up. They were in no mood for mockery from Gunner. They seized Gunner, and were in the very act of up-ending him, to tap his somewhat thick head on the stairs, when a stern voice came from below:

"Silver!"

"Oh!"

The hapless three realised that Mr. Dalton's eye was on them. He was looking up the staircase.

They released Gunner so suddenly that that burly youth sat on the stairs with a bump.

"Ow!" spluttered Gunner. "Wow!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. scudded up the stairs, and vanished from the severe gaze of Richard Dalton. They passed Cyril Peele on the landing, but they did not even kick him as they passed. They scudded on to the end study—still in a state of wrecked untidiness.

"We're up against it to-day!" groaned Newcome.

"Keep smiling!" mumbled Jimmy.

"Oh dear!"

They sat down dismally. About ten

minutes later Arthur Edward Lovell came in. He gave his comrades a grim look, and then stared round the untidy study.

"Not getting the place to rights yet," he said. "Slackers!"

"Oh, dry up, Lovell!" mumbled Raby.

Lovell rubbed his knuckles.

"I fancy I know who did this," he said. "I've just punched his nose."

"Peele!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm fairly certain now that it was Peele; but we're going to make jolly sure!"

"Smythe of the Shell," said Lovell. "He grinned at me as I came in, and I hit him on the nose. Depend on it, it was Smythe. I've tapped his nose; but that's not enough. Let's go and rag his study."

"What?"

"Come on!" said Lovell. "No good slacking about! Let's jolly well go and wreck Smythe's study, and if he's there, we'll wreck him, too!"

Lovell started to lead the way.

"Stop!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!"

"You silly chump——"

"Come on!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome jumped up, seized Arthur Edward Lovell, and whirled him back into the study. Lovell sat down with a bump. Jimmy slammed the door. The chums of the Fourth had had enough of Arthur Edward's leadership; a little too much, in fact.

"Now chuck it!" said Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "We'll make a little more certain before we rag any fellow's study, you frumpitious chump!"

"I'm going——"

"You're not!" roared Raby.

"I jolly well am!" Lovell jumped up and rushed for the door.

Bump!

Arthur Edward Lovell sat down again.

"Have some more?"

Fortunately, Arthur Edward did not want any more. And Jimmy Silver &

Co. set to work to put the end study to rights, postponing, for the present, reprisals upon the unknown study-ragger.

CHAPTER 26.

Nothing Doing!

"JIMMY, old fellow!"
Snort!

It was not like Jimmy Silver to snort when a fellow addressed him as Jimmy, old fellow.

But Jimmy Silver, for once, was really cross.

Generally, he was able to live up to his favourite maxim, and "keep smiling."

But he was not smiling now.

Neither were his comrades, Lovell and Raby and Newcome. Frowns were the order of the day in the end study in the Rookwood Fourth.

The Fistical Four were very busy.

The study looked a good deal as if an air raid or an earthquake had happened there. Jimmy Silver & Co. were putting it to rights.

Tubby Muffin, looking in at the doorway, grinned. Jimmy Silver & Co. felt like anything but grinning; but Reginald Muffin seemed to find something entertaining in the aspect of the end study. It was not his study!

Red and dusty, the four juniors laboured, putting things in their places, trying to evolve order out of chaos. They were in no mood for visitors—especially for Tubby Muffin.

Hence the impatient snort with which Jimmy Silver responded to the fat Classical's affectionate address.

"I say, Jimmy——"

"Hook it, Muffin!" growled Lovell.

"But, I say——"

"Oh, get out!" said Raby crossly.

"We've got to get this room in order before prep."

"Have you come to lend a hand, Muffin?" asked Newcome sarcastically.

"Eh? No!"

"Then travel!"

"And sharp!" snapped Lovell.

Reginald Muffin did not travel. He stood in the doorway and watched the Fistical Four at work.

"You fellows seem busy!" remarked Tubby. "But I suppose you can spare a few minutes, Jimmy?"

"No!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"Don't be ratty, old man! I didn't rag your study, you know!" remonstrated Tubby. "I want you to do something for me, Jimmy! It won't take you a few minutes."

"Oh, bother!" said Jimmy impatiently.

He paused in the task of scraping gum out of the armchair. Uncle James, of Rookwood, always was a good-natured fellow; and even when he was cross, his good nature did not quite desert him.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

"Look here, never mind Muffin!" hooted Arthur Edward Lovell. "Get on with it, Jimmy! It's jolly near prep, and look at the place."

"It won't take a minute," urged Reginald Muffin.

"Oh, buck up, and give it a name!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Peele, you know——"

"Bother Peele!"

"I want you to go to his study and——"

"What on earth for?" snapped Jimmy.

"And get him out of the room for a few minutes——"

"Eh?"

"Is it a jape?" asked Lovell, a little more amicably. Any kind of a jape on the suspected ragger was welcome to Lovell just then.

"Well, yes. That's it! Will you do it, Jimmy? It won't take you a minute! Just tell him the Head wants him——"

"The Head doesn't want him."

"Well, tell him Mr. Dalton wants him."

"He doesn't."

"Well, tell him anything!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin impatiently. "Tell him

his uncle's telephoned, and he's to go and take a call. Tell him anything to get him out of his study for five minutes."

Jimmy Silver smiled faintly.

Reginald Muffin had not been brought up at the feet of the late lamented George Washington, who—according to his own statement, at least—could not tell a lie.

Reginald Muffin could—and did!

And Reginald never quite saw the objections of other fellows to following his example. Jimmy Silver did not attempt to explain. Muffin and truth were such strangers that it was hopeless to think of making them better acquainted.

Jimmy resumed scraping gum from the armchair.

"Well, ain't you going, Jimmy?" asked Muffin.

"I'm not going to tell Peele lies, fat-head! That sort of thing is in his line—not in mine!"

"But what's the jape?" asked Lovell. "Peele's a cad, and it looks as if he ragged this study. I can get him out of his study all right. I'll go in and take him by the ears. But what's on?"

Tubby Muffin grinned.

"Thanks, old man! Get him out of his room before Gower and Lattrey come in. I just want to nip into the study; and, look here, I'll whack out the cake with you chaps."

"The what?"

"Cake!"

"Cake!" repeated Lovell.

"Yes. Peele's had a whacking cake from home, you know," said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "No end of a lark to bag it—what? I know he's got it in the study cupboard, and in a few minutes——"

"You—you fat rascal!" hooted Lovell. "You said it was a jape! Do you want me to help you pinch a cake from a fellow's study?"

"Yes, exactly. You see——"

Reginald Muffin broke off suddenly, as Lovell grabbed up a broom which

had been borrowed from below stairs for tidying the study.

"I—I say, Lovell, what—what are you going to do with that broom?" he ejaculated apprehensively.

There were grounds for Muffin's apprehension. Lovell did not explain what he was going to do with the broom. He did it! He charged at Reginald Muffin with the broom, like a knight of old with a trusty lance. The bristly head of the broom caught Reginald Muffin on his well-filled waistcoat, and hurled him through the study doorway as if a cannon-ball had smitten him.

Bump!

"Oh!" roared Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say— Yaroooooop!" yelled Tubby Muffin, as Lovell followed him out of the study, broom in hand, and fairly swept him away down the passage.

Reginald Muffin rolled over and picked himself up and fled frantically, helped on his way by a final lunge from the broom. He vanished at record speed along the Classical Fourth passage.

Lovell tramped back into the end study, feeling a little better. Reginald Muffin was feeling decidedly worse.

CHAPTER 27.

Tubby Muffin Makes Discoveries:

"O H, what luck!"

It was a quarter of an hour later, and Reginald Muffin, hanging about the head of the staircase, near the door of Peele's study, was keeping a watchful and wistful eye on that door.

In that study was Cyril Peele; and so long as Peele was there, Reginald Muffin's designs on Peele's cake were impossible of execution. Muffin had seen that cake unpacked—a large, rich, fruity cake, with marzipan on top, a cake that made Muffin's mouth water merely to look at it. It was a cake for a

fellow to dream about—at least, a fellow like Reginald Muffin.

It was useless to think of joining Peele & Co. when they dealt with that cake. The study was not a hospitable one. Tubby Muffin was not popular there, either. If Tubby had presented himself for a share in the cake with his most ingratiating smile, Tubby would have received the order of the boot, short and sharp. He was only too well aware of it—only too well aware that there was but one way of obtaining a "whack" in Peele's enormous cake—by raiding it. Tubby had no scruples about raiding another fellow's cake; he had very few scruples of any kind. All he wanted was a chance at the cake; he was not bothering about his conscience. Tubby, of course, had a conscience, and he never did anything of which his conscience did not approve. But his conscience was a remarkably accommodating one.

All of a sudden the door of the first study opened, and Cyril Peele came out. Peele, without even a glance at the fat junior, walked up the passage to the end study.

His own room was left empty.

Lattrey and Gower, his study-mates, had not yet come in. Perhaps Peele thought he would find a little entertainment looking in at the wrecked study at the other end of the passage. Anyhow, he was gone, and the coast was clear. Reginald Muffin, who had hung about the study door like a plump Peri at the Gate of Paradise, darted in before Peele was half-way along the passage. Fortunately, Peele did not turn his head.

Muffin closed the study door softly, and then scudded across to the cupboard.

He jerked open the cupboard door, and his eyes bulged with delight as he gazed at the cake. There it was, still in the cardboard box in which it had arrived, with shiny paper wrapped over

it. There it was, a gorgeous cake, as much as ever Reginald Muffin could have disposed of at one sitting.

"Oh, good!" breathed Muffin.

He grabbed up the cake. His idea was to bolt with it, to carry it off to some secluded corner where he could devour his prey at his leisure, so to speak. But Peele was in the passage; Lattrey and Gower might come up the staircase at any moment. It was quite probable that the raided cake might be stopped in transit. There was no time like the present; and the cake was tempting. Reginald Muffin hacked off a huge chunk and started.

He started on the cake standing at the cupboard. If the enemy caught him as he carried off his plunder and recaptured it, at least they would not be able to recapture the portion that Reginald Muffin had devoured. That was absolutely certain. And Reginald Muffin's podgy jaws worked with amazing speed.

It was a large cake, but Tubby Muffin travelled into it with such speed that half of it was soon missing. He was still going strong when he heard Peele's voice outside the study.

"Hallo! You chaps back?"

Evidently Peele was greeting Lattrey and Gower, who had been over in Manders' House, on the Modern side of Rootwood.

Tubby Muffin's fat hand, with a chunk of cake in it, was arrested on its way to his capacious mouth.

He shivered. Even the fruity cake lost its attraction for the moment.

Peele & Co. were coming in! If they found him there, with half the cake already gone—

There was no escape for Muffin. The enemy were at the door. Any second the door might open, and then—

That cake doubtless was worth a kicking. Still, Reginald Muffin did not want a kicking.

Almost without stopping to think, Muffin plunged into the lower half of

the study cupboard, under the wide shelf on which the cake lay.

He plunged in among foils and boots and boxes and other odds and ends, and drew the cupboard door nearly shut after him.

He was only just in time.

The study door opened, and Cyril Peele came in, with Lattrey and Cuthbert Gower following him.

Reginald Muffin crouched in terrified silence, breathing hard, and trying not to breathe at all.

He heard the study door slam and shut, and then there was a sound of laughter. Peele & Co. seemed to be entertained by some merry jest.

Muffin peered out through the crack in the cupboard door.

Unfortunately the three black sheep of the Fourth were in a hilarious mood. They chuckled and chortled loud and long. Muffin wondered what the joke was. Peele & Co. knew nothing, so far, about the raid on the cake; and when they knew they were certainly not likely to look upon that as a jest.

"They're at it now!" Peele said. "Mopping up their study! I've just looked in. Lovell shied a broom at me."

"They don't know—" began Lattrey.

"Of course they don't! I fancy they suspect." Peele shrugged his shoulders. "They can suspect as much as they like."

"But you haven't heard the cream of the joke," said Gower. "It's really too good to be true!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lattrey.

"They went over to Manders' House and had a fearful row with Tommy Dodd & Co.," chortled Gower. "We've just had it all from Towle, of the Modern Fourth."

Peele gurgled.

"I left Tommy Dodd's chemistry manual in their study when I ragged it," he said. "I thought they'd find it and jump to the conclusion that it was a Modern raid. And they did!"

"They did! Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've been over the way!" gasped Lattrey. "They fairly wrecked Tommy Dodd's study, without stopping to ask questions."

"And ragged those Modern cads, and inked them!" chortled Gower.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele.

"Then a mob of Moderns got hold of them and booted them out. They had a high old time altogether."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They seem to have found out that it wasn't Moderns who ragged their study—after the mischief had been done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three young rascals roared with laughter.

"Oh, my hat!" said Peele. "This is one on the end study, and no mistake! It was sheer luck, you know. I heard the Head tell Mr. Dalton that there was to be an inspection this afternoon—one of the giddy surprise visits, with a prefect keeping guard on the passage so that naughty boys couldn't get ready for it. While those footling asses were at cricket, I got their study ready for the Head to inspect——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The jolly old scout never asked a question—he never does, you know! Just gave Silver six and the others four each for having their study in such a state."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then they found Tommy Dodd's chemistry book, and never dreamt that it had been left there for them to find——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's really too good to be true!" gasped Peele. "Uncle James fell right into the trap! Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're not very bright in the end study, after all!" chuckled Gower.

"Not up to the weight of this study, at any rate!" said Lattrey. "They wrecked Tommy Dodd's study, and were simply mobbed by the Moderns when they'd done it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy they rather suspect me now!" grinned Peele. "Lovell looked like it when he shied the broom at me. But they can't prove anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cyril Peele wiped his eyes. This was, in his view, the jape of the term; it had worked like magic. All along the line, the Fistical Four had been baffled and beaten; and Cyril Peele had paid off a long list of ancient grudges at one fell swoop.

Generally, the end study was more than able to hold its own. But this time it had been beaten to the wide, there was no doubt about that. And Peele & Co. rejoiced accordingly.

"Well, what about prep?" said Gower at last.

In the study cupboard Tubby Muffin heard that remark with dismay.

He was getting cramped.

He had hoped that the three juniors might leave the study again. But clearly they had come to stay.

Still chuckling over their successful enterprise, Peele & Co. sorted out their books for prep.

Muffin was a prisoner!

He was a prisoner, with discovery certain now. For after prep it was pretty certain Peele & Co. would get out the cake for supper, and then——

Reginald Muffin suppressed a groan.

He was cramped in the narrow confines of the cupboard; he was getting pins-and-needles in his fat limbs. He knew that he could never last out till prep was over.

But as he crouched there, palpitating with apprehension, his fat brain was working.

It dawned upon him that what he had heard had placed Peele & Co. under his fat thumb.

Jimmy Silver suspected Peele; but there was no evidence! Reginald Muffin was in a position to supply the evidence! He was in a position to make terms with Peele & Co!

The three juniors had sat down to their work. Peele smoked a cigarette

over his prep—one of his little ways. There was silence in the study.

It was suddenly broken.

Crash!

Reginald Muffin, a prey to pins-and-needles, had been unable to keep still any longer.

He moved suddenly, involuntarily, and a couple of wooden foils and a pair of boots were displaced as he moved.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Peele.

He jumped up from the table and stepped across to the cupboard.

"Can't be a dog there!" said Gower.

Peele opened the cupboard door. The first thing that caught his eyes was the cake—unwrapped and half gone. Peele gave a yell of wrath.

"Somebody's been raiding this cake!"

He sighted Muffin in the lower half of the cupboard the next moment. And then Reginald Muffin, with a savage grip on his collar, came sprawling out into the room, yelling.

CHAPTER 28.

Under Tubby's Thumb!

"**W**HOOP!"

Tubby Muffin roared.

Peele and Lattrey and Gower gathered round him with furious looks. Muffin sprawled on the carpet and roared. He was not hurt yet, but he had a well-grounded apprehension that he was going to be hurt. He roared in anticipation, as it were.

"You've been bagging my cake!" yelled Peele.

"I—I haven't!" gasped Muffin.

"It's half gone!"

"I—I mean—" Tubby Muffin spluttered. "I—I mean, I—I—"

"My hat! I'll jolly well lam you for this!" said Peele. "Give me the shovel, Gower, and roll him over on the carpet."

"I—I didn't!" roared Muffin. "I never knew you had a cake! I never came in here for any cake! I haven't

touched it! Besides, I haven't taken much—only a bite or two! And I'll pay for it! Look here— Yarocooch!"

Lattrey and Gower rolled the fat Classical face down on the carpet. Peele flourished the shovel.

Whack, whack!

The fall of the shovel fairly rang on Muffin's tight trousers.

The yells of Reginald Muffin rang far and wide.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Whoop! Yarooch! Help! Rescue!" roared Muffin. "Oh, crumbs! Oh dear! Stop it! I'll tell Jimmy Silver! Yoop!"

"Tell him as soon as you like!" hissed Peele. "Tell him you bagged my cake, and tell him I skinned you for it! You've only had a taste so far! I'm going to give you six dozen!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And then I'll give him a few!" said Gower.

"Same here," said Lattrey. "Go it, Peele!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Peele went it, with great vim. Muffin roared and wriggled and yelled. There was no doubt that the fat Classical had asked for a licking, and that he deserved it; but really Peele was going too far. A Head's licking was a joke to what Reginald Muffin was getting now.

"Stop it!" shrieked Muffin desperately. "I'll tell Jimmy Silver that you ragged his study! Oh! Ow! Ooooh!"

"Wha-a-at?"

The shovel was descending again, and Peele arrested it in mid-career. Muffin's words had made him jump.

In his excitement, it had not occurred to him that Muffin, hidden in the cupboard, must have heard all that had been said in the study.

It occurred to him now. He lowered the fire-shovel.

"My hat!" murmured Gower. "That fat villain heard—"

"Phew!" Lattrey whistled softly.

"I jolly well heard everything you said!" howled Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to Jimmy Silver to tell him who ragged

his study! I'm going to Lovell to tell him! You just wait till Lovell knows!"

Cyril Peele dropped the shovel into the fender again. Lattrey and Gower released the fat Classical, exchanging a glance. Muffin sat up on the carpet.

"You rotters!" he gasped. "Making all this fuss about a cake! Suppose I sampled your cake? That's not like mucking up a fellow's study all ready for a Head's inspection, I suppose! You cad, Peele!"

"You fat rotter!" hissed Peele.

Muffin staggered to his feet.

"Yah! Wait till Lovell gets on your track!" he gasped. "I'm jolly well going to him now!"

Cyril Peele put his back to the study doorway. His face was a little pale now, and his eyes glittered. He had deemed himself quite safe; and his supposed safety had vanished all of a sudden. He was at Muffin's mercy. A word in the end study, and Peele was booked for the punishment of his offence. Muffin rolled to the door, and Peele pushed him roughly back.

"Stand back, you fat fool!" he said, between his teeth.

"Let me out!" roared Muffin.

"Shut up, I tell you!" muttered Peele. "Look here, Muffin, if you heard us sayin' anythin'—"

"I heard every word!" gasped Muffin. "You rotters! You got Jimmy Silver a Head's licking by ragging his study! Dirty trick! That's not a jape—that's a dirty trick! Worse than sampling a fellow's cake, I think. You're for it now, the lot of you!"

"I had nothing to do with it," said Gower hastily. "Peele told me what he had done, that's all."

"And I!" said Lattrey uneasily. "Peele told me afterwards—you know you did, Peele!"

Cyril Peele gave his study-mates a bitter look. The three black sheep were friends, but their friendship was not of a very reliable kind. Lattrey and Gower had been immensely entertained by Peele's knavish trickery, but they had

no intention whatever of sharing the consequences with him when the reckoning came after the feast. Peele had done it on his own, and he could take the consequences on his own. Lattrey and Gower were in a hurry to dissociate themselves from the affair, even before Muffin had reported his discovery in the end study.

"Better make that fat fool hold his tongue, Peele!" said Gower. "After all, it was rather thick, getting those fellows a Head's licking. It was over the limit; I thought so when you told me."

"You didn't say so!" sneered Peele.

"Well, I thought so," snapped Gower. "It's not a lark getting chaps into a row with the Head! It's a mean trick, if you ask me."

"Muffin won't talk about this," said Lattrey.

"Won't I?" hooted Muffin. "I've been whacked with a shovel! Won't I talk about it? I'm going straight to Jimmy's study! And if you don't let me out, Peele, I'll yell!"

Peele gritted his teeth. Apprehensive as he was of the end study's vengeance, he was boiling with fury, and could scarcely keep his hands off the Peeping Tom of Rookwood. His black look alarmed the fat Classical, and he retreated round the study table. Lattrey interposed.

"Don't be an ass, Peele! Muffin's had enough! If you want him to hold his tongue, you'd better be civil."

"Catch me holding my tongue!" jeered Muffin. "All this fuss about a cake, after what you've done!"

Cyril Peele made a great effort to control his rage. He realised that he had to placate Reginald Muffin somehow.

"Look here, Muffin, I don't want you to jaw about this," he said. "Look here, I—I'm sorry I pitched into you."

"I dare say you are, now," sneered Muffin.

"You can have the cake, if you like!" said Peele desperately.

Muffin's expression changed.

He was hurt and he was sore! But a cake was a cake! And he knew what a ripping cake it was, having half of it inside him already.

"Oh, well, if you're going to be decent, Peele!" he said mollified.

"Take it and go, and hold your tongue, of course," said Peele. It was unpleasant to have to part with that beautiful cake! Peele's only solace was the disappointed look on the faces of Lattrey and Gower. His study-mates had intended to help Peele dispose of that cake.

Muffin grinned.

He rolled to the study cupboard and calmly packed up the remains of the cake in the cardboard box. Peele watched him with glinting eyes.

"You're saying nothin', of course," he said, as Tubby Muffin walked to the door with the cake under his arm.

"I'll do what I can for you, Peele," said Muffin coolly. "I'll think it over."

"That's not good enough," said Peele savagely.

"It will have to be, old pippin! Keep off—I can hear Lovell in the passage!" grinned Muffin.

Peele clenched his hands in helpless rage. Arthur Edward Lovell's voice could be heard outside. The door of the study opened and Lovell looked in—Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome behind him. The Fistical Four had finished putting their study to rights at last, and they looked tired and cross.

"Well, what do you fellows want?" snarled Peele.

"Just a word with you, you cad!" said Lovell. "I believe it was you ragged our study to get us a Head's licking. I'd jolly well wade in and smash you, only —"

"Only you won't, fathead," interposed Jimmy Silver. "It's all right, Peele. We are going to find out who ragged our study, and if it was you, you can get ready for the time of your life. But we're going to make sure first."

"What's the good?" snorted Lovell. "I'm jolly sure it was Peele."

"You were sure it was Tommy Dodd, ass, and then you were sure that it was Smythe of the Shell, fathead! Chuck it!" said Raby.

"Get out of my study!" said Peele.

Tubby Muffin grinned at Peele. He rolled out into the passage with the cake under his arm. The Fistical Four looked at him. They could see that it was a cake in the cardboard box, and they remembered Tubby's request for assistance in raiding a cake from Peele's study. It was simply extraordinary to see him walking it off under Cyril Peele's very eyes, and Peele raising no objection.

"What have you got there, Tubby?" asked Newcome. "Is that the cake?"

"Oh! No! It—it's Peele's wireless—he lent it to me," stammered Muffin.

"You fat ass! It's a cake!"

"I—I mean, Peele's lent me this cake—"

"Lent you a cake!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I mean, he's given it to me. I suppose Peele can give me a cake if he likes!" said Tubby, and he rolled away to his study to escape further questioning.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver in astonishment.

Slam!

The door of Peele's study closed. Peele of the Fourth returned to his prep in a very unenviable frame of mind. He had played his knavish trick on the end study, and he had been successful all along the line, but—there was a but! The way of the transgressor is hard, and this was not the first time that Peele's transgressions had found him out. He was under Muffin's fat thumb now, till the affair blew over, at least, and that was an extremely uncomfortable situation. And he had no sympathy from his comrades.

"You'll have to keep that fat fool quiet somehow, Peele!" said Cuthbert Gower uneasily. "If those cads found out, they'd think nothing of wrecking

this study in return—and it's our study as well as yours."

"Just what I was thinking," said Lattrey. "It was a good jest in its way, but too thick, much too thick! We don't want those brutes ragging in this study, Peele. You'll have to keep Muffin quiet."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snarled Peele.

"Well, look here——"

"Just look here——"

"Shut it!" howled Peele angrily.

Prep that evening in Peele's study went on in a rather thundery atmosphere.

CHAPTER 29.

Shell Out!

REGINALD MUFFIN smiled cheerily. He nodded to Peele of the Fourth as he smiled.

It was the following day, after classes, and Peele had passed that day in considerable uneasiness.

The bribe of the cake had kept Muffin quiet; so far, not a word had been said of the discovery he had made. Jimmy Silver & Co., as Peele knew, were making inquiries up and down the Form, hoping to learn who was the ragger of the end study. But naturally, they did not suppose that Muffin knew anything about it, and the fat Classical had not told them. But Peele was only too well acquainted with Muffin's tattling tongue, and he had felt extremely uneasy all day.

Now, as Muffin met him on the path under the old Rookwood beeches, and smiled and nodded, Peele forced himself to grin in response. He would much rather have taken Tubby by his fat neck, and knocked his head against a beech. But that, obviously, was out of the question, Tubby was not to be treated in that disrespectful manner now. Peele's trickery had made it necessary for him to keep on good terms with Muffin, so he grinned in a rather ghastly fashion, and nodded, and would have passed on his way. But a fat paw on his arm detained him.

"Not in a hurry, old fellow?" said Muffin.

"Yes!" muttered Peele.

"Going to the tuckshop?"

"No."

"Well, I am," said Muffin. "Trot along with me, old chap! I'd really like your company."

Peele drew a deep breath, but he controlled his feelings, and dropped into step at Muffin's side. If the fat junior thought that he was going to chum with him, on the strength of the secret he was keeping, he was making a mistake, Peele told himself furiously. But he did not venture to tell Muffin so.

"The fact is, there's something I wanted to speak to you about, old scout," said Tubby affably.

"Well," muttered Peele.

"I think I've mentioned my uncle to you—Captain Muffin," said Tubby. "He often sends me remittances. I was expecting to get one from him this week—ten shillings, you know."

"Were you?" breathed Peele.

"Yes. But something very awkward has happened," said Tubby with great solemnity. "It seems that my uncle has gone on a cruise in his yacht with a party of aristocratic friends. Somehow or other he forgot to post the letter to me."

Peele did not answer.

"Now, he may be away quite a long time," went on Muffin, "cruising in the Mediterranean, you know. Looks to me as if I shan't get that remittance, what?"

No reply.

"So I was thinking," said Muffin cheerily, "that perhaps you'd like to lend me the ten bob, Peele, and I'd settle with you when I get the remittance from Captain Muffin. See?"

"Can't be done."

"I'd really like you to oblige me, Peele," said Tubby Muffin calmly. "Of course, I could ask Jimmy Silver or Lovell. I'm sure they'd lend me the money like a shot. I happen to want it specially this afternoon, as I'm

really stony, and there's nothing in the study for tea. I'm sure Lovell would lend it to me."

"Better ask him, then."

"Oh, of course, if you like! The difficulty is, that I don't feel I'm treating my friends in the end study very well," explained Muffin. "They're trying to find out who ragged their study, and I'm not telling them, and in these circumstances it seems rather thick to borrow from them, doesn't it? If I asked them for a loan I should feel bound to tell them what I know, and save them from a lot of trouble."

Peele gritted his teeth.

"I stood you that cake to hold your tongue!" he said furiously. "I'm not standing you ten bob as well!"

Tubby looked pained.

"That's a brutal, sordid way of putting it," he said. "Just like you, too, Peele. You're a sordid chap. Most of the fellows say you're a rank outsider, and I must say I agree with them. If I oblige you by keeping a secret for you, I hope I'm not the kind of chap to try to make anything out of it."

"What?"

"You judge others by yourself, that's what it is," said Muffin scornfully. "You're always on the make, and you think other fellows are on the make. I'm above it, I hope."

"Well, you'll make nothing out of me, anyhow," said Peele savagely. "I'm fed-up with you. Go and eat coke!"

Tubby waved a fat hand at him.

"That's enough!" he said. "You needn't say any more, Peele. If you offer to lend me the ten shillings now I shall refuse it. I can borrow it off Lovell easily enough. I'm sure he'll be glad to oblige me."

Muffin rolled on, leaving Peele standing still, biting his thin lip. After a moment Peele hurried on after the fat Classical.

"Look here, Muffin!" he panted.

"You needn't speak to me, Peele. You've insulted me!" said Tubby

loftily. "You've made out that I'm on the make, asking you for money to keep your sneaking secret. That's enough! I'd rather you kept your distance!"

"Are you going to tell Jimmy Silver about what you heard in my study?" hissed Peele.

"If Jimmy treats me as a pal, I'm bound to treat him as a pal in return," explained Muffin. "I don't expect you to understand that, Peele. You're such a rank outsider. I've got a sense of honour."

"I'll lend you ten bob, if you like!" breathed Peele.

"You needn't!" said Tubby. "I can get a loan, if I want it, in the end study."

Peele groped in his pocket.

"Here you are!" he muttered.

But Reginald Muffin did not stretch out his fat hand for the ten-shilling note, though his eyes glistened at the sight of it. Reginald's dignity had to be considered in the matter. Reginald's fat conscience would never have allowed him to screw money out of Cyril Peele for keeping his secret. The matter was not going to be on that footing at all. It was going to be on a much superior footing to that—on a footing that would satisfy Reginald's conscience.

"That's all very well, Peele," he said. "If you want to be friendly, I don't want to be standoffish. But if you lend me that ten-bob note, it's got to be understood that you lend it to me as a friend, without any of your caddish insinuations."

"Do you want it or not?" hissed Peele.

"That depends," answered Muffin calmly. "I'll take it as a loan from a friend, to be returned when I receive the remittance I'm expecting from Captain Muffin. Is that how you mean it?"

Peele breathed hard and deep. Really, it was hard to have to part with his ten-shilling note, and butter up the unspeakable Muffin at the same time.

But there seemed to be no help for it. He was under Muffin's fat thumb at present.

"Yes!" he gasped.

"You want me to accept that loan as a pal?" demanded Reginald Muffin categorically.

"Yes!" articulated Peele.

Tubby smiled again.

"Well, if you put it like that, old fellow, I don't know that I'll refuse," he said. "All serene, old chap! In fact, thanks!"

Reginald Muffin rolled on to the tuck-shop with Peele's ten-shilling note in his possession. Tea in Tubby's study that day was unusually ample.

Cyril Peele walked under the trees, biting his lips, kicking the fallen leaves savagely. Gower and Lattrey came on him, and grinned at the expression on his face.

"What's the jolly old trouble?" asked Gower. "Been backin' losers again?"

"That fat scoundrel Muffin's just got ten bob out of me!" hissed Peele.

"Phew!"

"The awful rotter!"

"If he tries to keep this up——" said Peele.

He kicked again at the fallen leaves, probably wishing that they were Reginald Muffin. Really, it was a dismaying prospect that opened out before the cad of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 30. Rough Justice!

"**N**OTHING doing!" said Jimmy Silver.

"That's all very well!" grunted Lovell. "But I'm not standing it, for one. Let's rag Peele, and chance it."

"Fathead!" said Lovell's three chums together.

Another day had passed, and on Saturday afternoon Jimmy Silver & Co. sat in the window-seat in the Classical Fourth passage, after footer practice. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, as a matter of fact, were not so keen now

on the subject of the study-ragger, but Arthur Edward Lovell seemed as keen as ever. According to Lovell, the end study could not, and should not, let the matter pass. Somehow or other, they were going to discover the "hidden hand," and inflict summary justice. The Co. were willing, if not specially keen, but they did not see how the discovery was to be made.

"We ragged the Modern cads on suspicion," said Raby, "then you wanted us to rag Smythe of the Shell on suspicion, Lovell. Now you want to lynch Peele. Peele's rather a cad, and just the fellow who'd play such a dirty trick, but we're not going to jump on any fellow without any proof."

"Hear, hear!" said Jimmy Silver.

There was a fat chuckle close at hand, and the Fistical Four glanced round as Reginald Muffin came rolling along from the stairs. Lovell gave him a glare.

"Well, what's the joke, Muffin?" he snapped.

Tubby grinned a fat grin.

"Nothing, old man. Are you still looking for the chap who ragged your study, days ago? He, he, he!"

"Perhaps you know who it was?" growled Lovell. "Perhaps it was you, what?"

Tubby jumped back.

"Oh, no! Not at all! I wouldn't, you know! I don't know anything about it! Don't you run away with the idea that I'm keeping anything dark. Nothing of the sort, you know."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" grunted Lovell crossly.

Tubby grinned again.

"I'm going to eat something better than that," he chuckled. "I'm going to tea with Peele. Fat of the land, my boy! He, he, he!"

And Reginald Muffin rolled to the door of the first study in the Classical Fourth with a cheery grin on his fat face, evidently in a state of great anticipation.

Jimmy Silver glanced after him curiously. Peele. His glance went to the study table, which was bare.

"Jolly odd, Peele standing Muffin study spreads," he remarked. "I remember he gave him a cake the other day. I never knew that Peele was a giddy philanthropist."

"Oh, blow Muffin and bless Peele!" growled Lovell. "The question is, who ragged our study? We got a Head's licking. We were mobbed in Manders' House. Somebody's got to squirm for it. If we let the rotter off, it let's down our study."

And Lovell pursued that topic, and worried it, as it were, like a dog, while his chums listened as patiently as they could. It was true that they desired to take reprisals on the unknown study-ragger; but it was not to be denied that they were getting a trifle fed-up with the subject.

Meanwhile, Reginald Muffin threw open the door of Peele's study and walked in. Peele of the Fourth was there alone. It was tea-time, but Gower and Lattrey were "teasing" in Hall. Of late, Peele's temper, never good, had been inexpressibly bad, owing to the peculiar position in which he found himself. If he could not venture to tell Reginald Muffin what he thought of him, he was under no such restraint with regard to his study-mates, and his language in the study was "frequent and painful and free."

He was so angry, so ill-tempered, so bitter and savage generally, that his chums had fallen into the way of avoiding him as much as they could. Peele's temper was, in fact, approaching boiling-point, and a less obtuse fellow than Reginald Muffin might have observed the danger-signals, as Cyril Peele's eyes glittered at him. But Reginald Muffin was thinking of tea, not of Peele's temper. Besides, he did not realise that a nice, friendly, fascinating fellow like himself could have such an exasperating effect on another fellow.

He nodded and grinned cheerily to

Peele. His glance went to the study table, which was bare.

"All alone, old fellow?" he said brightly.

Peele grunted. Merely being addressed as "old fellow" by Muffin had an intensely enraging effect on him. And he knew what was coming.

"What about tea, dear boy?" asked Muffin.

"I'm teasing in Hall!" growled Peele.

"Better tea in the study," said Muffin. "Why not, when you had a remittance to-day?"

"So you found that out, did you?" snarled Peele.

"I happened to notice you opening the letter, old chap. Like me to do some shopping for you?"

"No!"

"The sergeant's got some ripping cakes, and a fresh lot of tarts to-day," remarked Muffin. "Of course, don't fancy that I'm butting in here to tea, Peele. If you'd rather—really rather—that I went, just say the word!"

"Clear, then!"

"Oh, very well!" said Muffin cheerily. "I'll tea with Jimmy Silver. He's just outside in the passage now. I dare say I can tell him some interesting things over tea."

Peele set his teeth hard. His eyes fairly blazed at Muffin. He was not only fed up with Muffin and his exactions, but he was in almost a homicidal frame of mind. Anything that he had to fear from the end study was not so bad as this persecution by the greedy, remorseless Muffin. It was one of Tubby's little failings that he never knew when to stop.

Apparently the fat Classical had worked it out, to his own fat satisfaction, that he was going to "pal" with Peele for the rest of the term, on the strength of what he knew. "Palling" with Peele sounded better, to Tubby's fat conscience, than "sponging" on Peele, but evidently it came to the same thing.

Possibly, if Peele had kept cool, he

would have submitted once more. But he was not cool now; he was boiling with rage.

"Have it your own way, old chap," said Reginald Muffin. "Mind, I'm prepared to be friendly. You're rather a cad and an outsider, Peele; but I don't mind taking you up. If you ask me to tea, I'll stay. I shall expect something pretty decent. Now——"

Tubby Muffin broke off suddenly as Peele leaped to his feet.

"I—I say——"

Peele grabbed up a cushion. Even the fatuous Tubby could see the danger-signals now, and he made a jump forward.

Crash!

The cushion caught him as he jumped, and Reginald Muffin sprawled headlong on the carpet, with a roar that rang as far as the end study in the Classical Fourth passage.

"Oh! Ow! Whoop!"

Biff, biff, biff!

The cushion, in Peele's hefty hand, rose and fell, with amazing speed and terrific force.

Whack after whack descended on the struggling, breathless Tubby, as he squirmed and wriggled and yelled.

Peele was warming to his work now.

After what he had endured at Muffin's hands, there was a great solace in thrashing Muffin, and Peele enjoyed it to the full. Muffin wriggled and squirmed in vain, he could not escape the terrific swipes of the cushion. Peele seemed to be under the impression that he was beating a carpet.

Wild howls and roars rang from the study. The four juniors in the window-seat across the passage grinned.

"That doesn't sound like a tea-party!" murmured Newcome. "Tubby doesn't seem so welcome in Peele's study as he supposed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroo! Help! Rescue! Whoop! Yah! Oh, oh! Ow!" came in frantic yells from Peele's study.

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet.

"Mustn't slaughter him," he said. "We'd better look in."

The Fistical Four crossed the passage to Peele's door, and looked in. Cyril Peele was too busy even to heed them. With a crimson face and blazing eyes he whacked and whacked with the cushion, while the hapless Tubby yelled and squirmed and dodged in vain.

"Take that, you fat rotter, and that—and that—and that!" gasped Peele.

"Ow! Wow! Rescue! Help!"

Jimmy Silver ran into the study and caught Peele's descending arm. He jerked away the cushion.

"Enough is as good as a feast!" he remarked cheerily. "Chuck it, Peele!"

Tubby sat up dizzily.

"Ow, ow! Keep him off! Wow! Help! He's pitched into me because I know about him ragging your study! Ow, ow!"

"What's that?" roared Lovell.

"It was Peele!" roared the infuriated Tubby. "Peele all the time! I heard him say so! That's why——"

"Oh, that's why he gave you a cake!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, comprehending all of a sudden.

Peele made a quick movement to the door. But the doorway was promptly blocked by Arthur Edward Lovell's stalwart form.

"No, you don't!" said Lovell grimly.

Jimmy Silver grasped Reginald Muffin by the collar and jerked him to his feet. Muffin staggered breathlessly against the table.

"Now, out with it!" said the captain of the Fourth curtly.

Tubby Muffin babbled breathlessly, Peele listening with a savage, sullen scowl. It was all up now with the study-ragger; but the Fistical Four were not in a hurry. They extracted the whole story from the breathless Muffin.

"Well, you fat rotter!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "You knew it all along and you kept it dark, and it's pretty plain that you've been sponging on

peele on the strength of it. You ought to be scragged."

"Kick him out!" said Raby.

"I—I say. I wasn't going to keep it dark. I was just going to tell you chaps!" gasped Muffin, "You see—Leggo! Oh, my hat! Whoop!"

Reginald Muffin flew through the doorway.

Then the Fistical Four devoted their attention to Cyril Peele and his study.

The door was closed, and then the ragging began. Reprisals were the order of the day, and the reprisals were thorough.

The ragging of the end study had been severe. But it was a mere jest to what happened in Peele's study.

The cad of the Fourth watched the juniors at work without venturing to lift a hand. His brow grew blacker and blacker as he watched.

A quarter of an hour made an immense difference to the study. Nobody would have recognised it as the same room after that lapse of time.

Even Arthur Edward Lovell was satisfied as he glanced round.

"I think that will do!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"You rotters!" breathed Peele. "I'm going to the Head about this!"

"Do!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"The Head will hear the whole story. If you think he will be pleased to hear that he licked us because you'd ragged our study all ready for his giddy inspection, you can go ahead. Please yourself, old pippin."

Peele gritted his teeth. His threat was an empty one. He knew that he dared not let the Head know that he, the majestic headmaster of Rookwood, had had his leg pulled, and had, in fact, been made use of to wreak Peele's old grudges against the end study.

Having finished with the study, the Fistical Four began on Peele. Then there was a struggle, but Peele's struggles did not avail him much. In ten minutes he lay gasping on the carpet, in a sea of ink and gum and ashes and jam and marmalade, pro-

bably repenting by that time that he had ever started in business as a reckless ragger. It was evidently a game that two sides could play at, and the originator of the game was getting the worst of it.

Justice having been done, Jimmy Silver & Co. walked out. A few minutes later Gower and Lattrey arrived, and they fairly jumped at the sight of their wrecked study.

"What!" gasped Gower.

"How——" stuttered Lattrey.

Peele groaned.

"They've found out—— Ow! Ooooh! Ooooh! Grooogh! Oh, dear! Wow! I've been through it! Ow! Here, you keep off, you rotters—— Ow, ow, ow!"

But Peele's study mates did not keep off. This disastrous ending to Peele's career as a study-ragger enraged them too much. They fairly hurled themselves on Cyril Peele, and smote him right and left, and did not cease till he fled, yelling, from the study.

It was likely to be a long time before Peele of the Fourth ragged a Rookwood study again. He had found the way of the transgressor too hard!

CHAPTER 31.

Just Like Mr. Greely!

"LOVELL!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Hold up your shoulders, my boy."

"What?"

"And take your hands out of your pockets."

Arthur Edward Lovell, simply stared at Mr. Greely. Really, he could scarcely believe his ears.

Had his own Form-master addressed him in those words, it would have been Lovell's duty to sit up and take notice, so to speak, though it would not have been pleasant.

But Mr. Greely was not his Form-master. Horace Greely was master of the Fifth Form. Portly and ponderous, Mr. Greely was rolling across Big Quad like a galleon under full sail, and he had to heave to, as it were, to fix his

lofty glances on Lovell, of the Fourth, and admonish him in his deep, rich, fruity voice.

Perhaps Lovell had been lounging a little. Undoubtedly, he had his hands in his pockets. Fellows did lounge sometimes, and often they had their hands in their pockets. But Arthur Edward Lovell really was not a loungeur or a slacker. His own Form-master, Mr. Dalton had never considered it necessary to call him to order on this account. And Lovell, in a state of almost breathless surprise and fury, asked himself what the merry dickens business it was of "old Greely."

Mr. Greely gave him a severe glance. "You should not slack, my boy!" he said. "Slacking is a bad thing for men and boys alike. Slacking undermines the—ah—character; it is the beginning of a general—ah—deterioration."

This was a sample of Mr. Greely's trite wisdom, which he rolled out as impressively as if it were a new discovery, the fruit of long meditation.

"I'm not slacking!" shouted Lovell. "What! Moderate your tone, Lovell, moderate your tone! You should not raise your voice in addressing a master! It is exceedingly bad form to raise your voice in addressing a master."

Repetition of his remarks was another of Mr. Greely's ponderous and exasperating ways.

The general opinion at Rookwood was, that Mr. Greely's remarks were not really worth hearing once. Hearing them twice was altogether too thick.

"I am speaking to you for your own good, Lovell—entirely for your own good," said Mr. Greely severely. "It is shocking to see a boy slacking and loafing—yes, loafing! Hold yourself up, my boy; take your hands out of your pockets!"

And Mr. Greely, with a severe shake of the head rolled on, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell rooted to the gravel

path, and in a state of wrath that would have done credit to a Hottentot.

"The—the ass!" gasped Lovell. "The cheeky ass! The fat old duffer! Talking to me as if I were a fag of the Second! The—the—the priceless old ass!"

Luckily Mr. Greely was out of hearing.

Still like a galleon under full sail, he was pursuing his lofty course along the gravel path towards Little Quad—stately and solemn and slow. It was fortunate that he had passed out of hearing. Certainly it would have been a blow to his dignity to learn that a junior of the Fourth Form regarded him as a priceless ass.

"Priceless old ass!" repeated Lovell, finding solace in saying to himself what he could not venture to say to the Fifth Form-master.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell stared round.

That burst of merriment apprised him of the fact that the little scene had had witnesses and hearers.

Three juniors of the Modern Side were grinning at him: Tommy Dodd, and Cook, and Doyle. That they had heard Mr. Greely's ponderous admonitions, and thoroughly enjoyed them, was clear. If anything could have added to Lovell's exasperation, and put the lid on his wrath, that would have done it, to be grinned at by Moderns after being slanged by a priceless ass. He glared at the three Modern juniors.

"Don't slack, my boy!" said Tommy Dodd, with a cheery imitation of Mr. Greely's fruity voice that made his comrades yell with laughter.

"Hold up your shoulders!" gasped Tommy Cook.

"Take your hands out of your pockets!" shrieked Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies yelled.

"Funny, isn't it?" snorted Lovell furiously.

"Slacking undermines the—ah—general character!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"It is the beginning of a—ah—general deterioration!" hooted Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky Modern frumps!" roared Lovell.

Tommy Dodd held up an admonitory hand, quite in the style of Mr. Greely.

"Moderate your tone, Lovell——"

"What?"

"It is—ah—exceedingly bad form to raise your voice——"

Tommy Dodd got no further than that.

Arthur Edward Lovell, in a state of blind fury, rushed on the three Modern juniors, hitting out right and left. The roars of laughter changed to roars of quite another kind.

"Oh, my hat! Whoop!"

"Oh! Ow! Oh, crumbs!"

"Yaroooh!"

Lovell, in his wrath, did not count odds. But he soon discovered that the odds were there. The three Tommie's reeled right and left under his doughty punches, roaring; but they recovered, and hurled themselves upon him as one man.

And then Arthur Edward Lovell found himself collared, and swept off his feet, struggling and wriggling unavailingly in the grasp of three wrathful men of Manders' House.

"Duck him!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

They were quite near the fountain in the quad. Lovell, struggling wildly, was rushed to the fountain.

Splash!

His head went in, and Lovell gave a suffocated howl. It came out again drenched and dripping.

Splash!

In it went again, and out it came once more, streaming. Then, with a heavy bump, the Moderns sat him down on the ground, and walked away, laughing. And Arthur Edward Lovell

sat and spluttered, in a state of wild wrath, compared with which the celebrated wrath of Achilles was a mild joke.

CHAPTER 32.

The Vials of Wrath!

JIMMY SILVER came out of the school shop with Raby and Newcome, and glanced round for Lovell. Arthur Edward Lovell had left his chums in "quarter" to take a book back to the school library in Little Quad; and they had expected him to join them afterwards in the tuckshop. But he had not turned up.

"Seen Lovell, Morny?" asked Jimmy Silver, as Valentine Mornington of the Fourth came along.

"Yes—he's been taking a wash in the fountain. He looked quite cross when I spoke to him, though I only offered to fetch him some soap if he wanted it." And Morny went into the tuckshop, grinning.

"Something's happened to old Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you chaps!"

The three juniors hurried away towards the fountain.

There they discovered Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward was dabbing at his face and hair with a crumpled handkerchief, and his wet face was crimson, and his eyes sparkled. His cap was floating in the big granite basin.

"What on earth——" began Jimmy Silver.

"Where have you fellows been?" hooted Lovell. "Leaving a chap on his own to be ragged by a gang of Modern chumps."

"Oh, you've been ragging with the Moderns, have you?" said Raby. "I say, it's rather thick, ducking a chap's head in the fountain."

"Too thick!" agreed Newcome.

"Well, I jolly well punched them," said Lovell. "I fancy Tommy Dodd will have a prize nose to take into

his dashed science class, and Cook and Doyle got some knocks."

"You went for the three of them?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes," snapped Lovell, "and if you'd been here to back me up, instead of guzzling in the tuckshop—"

"But it was your idea to have some ginger-pop in the tuckshop," said Raby. "You asked us to wait for you there."

"For goodness' sake, Raby, don't argue! Blessed if you aren't enough to make a fellow wild with your silly arguing."

"Look here——" began Raby warmly.

"Shush!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Let old Lovell blow off steam a little—he's been ducked. Keep smiling."

"Oh, all right," said Raby resignedly.

"Go ahead, Lovell! Any other fathead thing you want to say?"

Lovell breathed hard.

"But what did you tackle those three Modern cads for?" asked Jimmy Silver. "What had they done all of a sudden?"

"They cackled."

"Mustn't a fellow cackle?" asked Raby, with an air of polite inquiry.

"I'll smash 'em! I'll——"

"Shush. We'll look for them after class, and rag them," said Jimmy Silver. "Moderns mustn't cackle at Classicals."

"It was that old ass Greely——" Lovell dabbed his face, and panted. "That priceless ass, Greely."

"Old Greely butting in again?" yawned Newcome. "Well, he's always fussing somehow. What did Greely do?"

Lovell, in tones of thrilling indignation, explained. To his surprise and wrath the three Classicals grinned. Apparently they, as well as the Modern trio, saw something funny in the episode.

"Oh, you think it's funny, of course!" snorted Lovell. "But I can tell you I'm fed-up with Greely—fed right up to the chin! Can't Dicky

Dalton manage his own Form without Greely's help? He's always gassing and butting in. He told Selwyn of the Shell the other day to give more attention to deportment—deportment, you know! Who but a priceless old ass like Greely ever used such a word? I wouldn't even put it into a Cross Word puzzle. And now to talk to me about slacking—me! Am I a slacker, I'd like to know?" hooted Lovell, with a challenging glare at his comrades.

"Nothing of the kind, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Anyhow it's no business of Greely's."

"There isn't a fellow or a master at Rookwood that he hasn't chinned at," said Lovell. "Blessed if I know how they stand him in Masters' room. I'd jolly well boot him, if I were on the staff."

"He means well," said Raby tolerantly.

Snort, from Lovell! He was not in the least prepared to give Mr. Greely credit even for good intentions.

"He told Bulkeley of the Sixth the other day that his hat wanted brushing," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "He did! He said he was surprised to see a prefect, and head prefect, too, setting an example of carelessness in—ah—attire. Lots of fellows heard him. You should have seen old Bulkeley's face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell grinned, in spite of his wrath. He could imagine the feelings with which the captain of the school had received Mr. Greely's kindly admonitions.

"Well, he can jaw the Sixth as much as he likes, but he's not going to jaw me," said Lovell. "Next time he butts in, I shall jolly well tell him what I think of him. Who the thump is Greely? Priceless old ass!"

"What?"

It was a deep, fruity voice behind Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

Lovell spun round.

Mr. Greely, purple and indignant, stood there, within a yard of him, fairly glaring.

Mr. Greely had completed his stately promenade along the quad, and was now on his return voyage, heading for the Form-rooms to take the Fifth in third lesson. His way lay by the fountain, and the chums of the Fourth had not observed his approach. Mr. Greely forgot all about third lesson, and the Fifth, as he heard Lovell.

The catastrophe had nearly happened before. Now it had quite happened. Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, the most dignified gentleman at Rookwood, was apprised of the fact that a junior of the Fourth Form regarded him, and spoke of him, as a "priceless ass!"

There was an awful pause.

The Fistical Four, of the Fourth, stood rooted to the ground, feeling as if they were on the very edge of an earthquake. Arthur Edward Lovell, bold youth as he was, felt an inward quaking.

Mr. Greely seemed bereft of the power of speech. He stood and glared at Lovell, purple with wrath and indignation. The silence could almost be felt.

Mr. Greely broke it at last.

"Lovell!" he gasped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"You were—ah!—alluding to me?"

Lovell wriggled. Certainly he would not have told an untruth; equally certainly an untruth would have been futile.

"Yes, sir!" he gasped.

"Follow me, Lovell!"

With a lofty gesture of command, Horace Greely sailed on towards the House.

Lovell looked at his chums.

"For it, now!" he murmured.

"Better go, old chap," said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

"He's not my Form-master."

"Better go, all the same."

Lovell nodded; he realised that he

had better go. Reluctantly he followed Mr. Greely towards the House, like a little skiff in the wake of the stately galleon.

They reached the House and entered. Mr. Greely headed for Mr. Dalton's study; but the Fourth Form-master was not there. He gave Lovell a glance of crushing contempt and resentment.

"Follow me, Lovell!" he snorted.

Again Lovell followed him, this time towards the Form-rooms. It was now close on time for third lesson, and the Rookwood fellows were gathering round the Form-rooms; and many curious glances were cast at the ponderous master of the Fifth, striding on with the hapless junior in his wake.

Mr. Greely did not head for his own Form-room; he sailed ponderously into the Fourth-rooms, where Mr. Dalton was busy with papers at his desk.

"Mr. Dalton!"

The Fifth Form-master's deep fruity voice echoed through the room, and along the corridor outside. The fellows in the corridor grinned, and even winked at one another. Disrespectfully, Hansom of the Fifth remarked to Talboys that old Greely had his rag out. In such terms did Edward Hansom allude to his Form-master's stately wrath.

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, glanced round from his desk and his papers. He looked surprised.

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"Lovell!" boomed Mr. Greely.

"Stand forward!"

"This boy"—Mr. Greely indicated Lovell with a plump forefinger—"this boy of your Form, Mr. Dalton—this junior—"

"Dear me! What has Lovell done?" inquired Mr. Dalton, with just the slightest trace of impatience.

"I regret, sir, to have to make a serious complaint," said Mr. Greely.

"I regret it very much. You will remember, Mr. Dalton, that as an older master, more—ah—experienced

than yourself, I have sometimes advised you——"

"Please come to the point, Mr. Greely. My class will be waiting for me in a few minutes."

"Very well, sir, very well!" said Mr. Greely with dignity. "I am not here, sir, on this occasion, to offer you advice, much as I may think it needed. This boy, Lovell, alluded to me, sir, in my hearing, by an opprobrious epithet."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"I heard him, Mr. Dalton," said the Fifth Form-master. "I have not taken his punishment into my own hands. I am reporting him to his own Form-master. But I consider——"

"Lovell, have you been impertinent to Mr. Greely?"

"Hem!"

"What expression did Lovell use, Mr. Greely?"

Snort, from Mr. Greely.

"I can scarcely be expected to repeat the ridiculous and opprobrious epithet applied to me by this insolent boy, Mr. Dalton."

"What expression did you use, Lovell?"

"I—I——"

"Answer me at once!"

"Priceless old ass, sir!" gasped Lovell.

Mr. Dalton jumped, and Mr. Greely turned more purple than ever. From the corridor came the distinct sound of a chuckle.

"You—you applied such an expression to a Form-master at Rookwood?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"You—you see, sir——"

"How dare you, Lovell?"

"Mr. Greely was butting in, sir. I——"

"Upon my word! Silence! Mr. Greely, I apologise most profoundly for this insolence on the part of a member of my Form," exclaimed Mr. Dalton, looking more perturbed and annoyed than he had ever been seen to look before.

Mr. Greely waved a gracious fat hand.

"I accept your apology, Mr. Dalton. I leave the matter in your hands with confidence—with full confidence."

"Remain a few moments, Mr. Greely, while this impertinent junior receives his punishment," said Mr. Dalton, taking up a cane. "Lovell, bend over that desk!"

Mr. Greely looked on with plump approval, while the Fourth Form-master laid on the cane.

Six successive whacks sounded like pistol-shots through the Fourth Form-room.

Lovell wriggled and writhed and gasped.

Mr. Dalton was not by any means a severe master. He was liked by all the Fourth, and especially by Lovell himself. But he could be severe on occasions. Often he had had to "shoo" off Mr. Greely, as it were, with his ponderous patronage and unasked and unwanted counsels. It was intensely annoying to him to receive a well-founded complaint from the Fifth Form-master, which would be a pretext, as he knew, for little lectures afterwards in Masters' Common-room, on the proper manner of conducting a junior Form.

Lovell had, in fact, fairly put his hapless foot in it this time, and he had to pay the penalty.

Those six whacks made Arthur Edward writhe with anguish.

"Now, Lovell——"

"Ow!"

"You will apologise to Mr. Greely."

"Yow!"

"You hear me, Lovell?"

Lovell, wriggling with anguish, looked at his Form-master and looked at Mr. Greely. He was on the verge of rebellion, in spite of the "six." Mr. Dalton had sunk very much in his estimation. What the thump was Dicky Dalton kowtowing to old Greely for in this fashion, Lovell savagely wondered.

He stood silent and rebellious. Mr. Dalton's face grew grimmer.

"You hear me, Lovell? If you do not instantly apologise to Mr. Greely for the offence you have given I shall take you to the Head, and request him to administer a flogging."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Lovell.

"Now——"

"I—I—I apologise, sir!" stuttered Lovell.

"I trust, Mr. Greely, that you are now satisfied?" said the master of the Fourth.

"Quite, sir!" Mr. Greely was gracious. "Oh, quite! I approve, sir—I fully approve, as you know, of——"

"Exactly! Good-morning, Mr. Greely!"

"Good-morning, sir!" said Mr. Greely rather stiffly. And he rolled out of the Fourth Form-room.

CHAPTER 33.

Lovell on the Warpath!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. were sympathetic.

Most of the Classical Fourth were sympathetic.

So far as sympathy went, Lovell was comforted in his affliction.

Unfortunately, any amount of sympathy, however sincere, did not make it possible for Arthur Edward Lovell to sit down that morning with any degree of comfort.

Like the young man of Hythe, who was shaved with a scythe, he did nothing but wriggle and writhe.

Third lesson seemed almost endless to Lovell that morning.

He had always liked Dicky Dalton. Now he felt that he quite disliked him. Towards Mr. Greely his feelings could hardly be described.

True, a Rookwood master could not be expected to like hearing himself described as a priceless ass. But then, Lovell had only been stating the facts, however unpleasant. All Rookwood knew that Horace Greely was the most priceless of asses. Moreover, he had

never wanted to have anything to do with Mr. Greely at all. He would never have let him know what he thought of him, even by accident, had not Mr. Greely butted into what did not concern him, in his usual exasperating style.

Lovell was quite a placable fellow by nature. It was very seldom that he let the sun go down upon his wrath. Perhaps he was sometimes rather quick to take offence, but he was equally quick in forgetting all about offences. Now he did not forget. That hefty "six" helped him to remember, of course. When the Classical Fourth came out after third lesson Lovell was walking quite painfully. Indeed, Smythe of the Shell, passing him in the corridor, stared at him, and asked him if this was a new thing in cake-walks.

In the quad the Fistical Four came on some Modern fellows—Towle and Lacy, and Leggett, and some more. They all grinned at Lovell and told him to hold his shoulders up, and take his hands out of his pockets, and warned him that slacking and loafing deteriorated the character. Evidently Tommy Dodd & Co. had told the story all over Manders' House.

Lovell breathed fury

"I'm fed-up with that ass Greely!" he told his chums. "Fed-up to the chin! I shall never hear the end of this."

Jimmy Silver smiled cheerily.

"Keep smiling," he said. "The fellows will forget about it in a day or two—a jest never lasts very long."

"I've had six from Dalton, bother him, and I've had to cough up an apology to that priceless old ass Greely. And now I'm going to be chipped to death by those asses from Manders' House!" hissed Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to take it out of Greely somehow."

"Better let it drop," advised Raby. "You can't really take it out of a Form-master, you know."

"I'm going to!"

"You don't want another six from Dicky Dalton?"

"Blow Dicky Dalton!"

"He was bound to come down heavy," said Jimmy Silver. "This has really given old Greely a pull over him, you know, and he doesn't like it."

"The old ass will be giving him advice about managing his Form," said Newcome. "He will trot you out as an awful example, Lovell."

Lovell gritted his teeth.

"Meddling old ass!" he said.

"Yes, but——"

"I'm jolly well going to make him sit up."

That seemed to be a fixed determination with Arthur Edward Lovell, and his comrades wisely did not argue the point. Arguing with Lovell only made him all the more determined, so they decided to let the suffering youth blow off steam and hoped that he would forget all about it when the pain had worn off.

Possibly Lovell might have done so, wrathful as he was, but the Modern fellows were not disposed to part with their little joke against a Classical man. They made the most of it, and some of the Classical fellows, too, thinking it funny, chipped Lovell on the same subject. Peele & Co., the slackers of the Classical Fourth, took it up with great heartiness. Lovell had never concealed his contempt for the loafers in Peele's study, and it was pure joy to that study to hear that Lovell had been called to order for loafing, howsoever unjustly. Peele & Co. rubbed it in, hard.

For which reason, and others, Lovell's wrath increased instead of diminished, and almost his sole thought was of making Mr. Greely "sit up" in some unpleasant manner. Even cross words took a second place now.

By the following morning Lovell had given the matter so much concentrated thought that he had evolved a plan of campaign. Jimmy Silver

noticed him grinning in second lesson, and he was glad to see it. For a whole day Lovell had been understudying that ancient king who never smiled again.

In "quarter" Lovell strolled out into the quad with his comrades, with quite a cheery expression on his face.

"You fellows on?" he asked.

"What, how, and which?" inquired Raby.

"Dicky Dalton's gone to speak to the Head," said Lovell. "A fellow can nip into his study and use his telephone."

"What the thump do you want to use his telephone for?"

"Greely!"

"Oh!"

"That old ass is jolly keen on department and things," said Lovell. "It hasn't occurred to him that he's in need of any instruction himself. Well, he's going to have some."

Lovell's chums looked mystified.

"What——" began Jimmy Silver.

"Come along," said Lovell. "Dicky Dalton will be with the Head now, and you know the old boy won't let him off under a quarter of an hour. We've got the whole quarter. Come on!"

Lovell led the way, and his comrades followed him in rather a gingerly manner: Lovell marched into Mr. Dalton's study, and with some hesitation his friends followed him in. It was probable that Mr. Dalton was safe with the Head for a time, but—— Lovell did not allow for "buts." He took a slip of paper from his pocket and sat down to the telephone. On the slip of paper were a number of names and addresses, with the telephone numbers opposite them, apparently selected and copied out of the local telephone directory.

Lovell rang up the exchange, while his chums stood in considerable uneasiness and watched him. Jimmy Silver kept the door ajar, with one eye on the corridor.

"Latcham, 101," said Lovell into the transmitter. A few moments later: "Is that Latcham 101—Purkiss'

Academy of Dancing and Deportment? Can I speak to Mr. Purkiss? It's rather important."

The Co. gazed at him in wonder. What business Lovell could possibly have with Purkiss' Dancing and Deportment Academy at Latham was a deep mystery to them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Purkiss!" Lovell, to the further surprise of his chums, was speaking now in a deep bass voice, obviously to give Mr. Purkiss the impression that a man not a schoolboy, was speaking to him. "I understand, from your advertisement in the 'Coombe Times,' that you are prepared to call and give personal instruction in deportment. Could you make it convenient to call this afternoon? Mr. Greely—Horace Greely—Rookwood School."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver blankly.

"The fact is, Mr. Purkiss, your instruction will—ah—be very valuable to me," went on Lovell in his deep voice. "My training has been—ah—somewhat neglected in this—ah—direction. No doubt we could arrange terms quite satisfactorily if you could call this afternoon. Would three o'clock suit you? Thank you very much! You will ask for Greely in the School House. Thank you very much!"

Lovell rang off and grinned at his chums.

"What price that?" he asked.

"You awful ass!" breathed Raby.

"Can it!" grinned Lovell, and he rang up another number.

"Mr. Montgomery Smith? Good-morning, Mr. Smith. I understand from your notice in the 'Coombe Times' that you give careful instruction in manners to backward boys. No, dancing lessons will not be required. But the personal training you allude to in your advertisement—exactly! Can you undertake to give the same instruction to a man of middle age? Yes, yes; Mr. Greely, Fifth Form-master, at Rookwood School. No doubt you are surprised, Mr. Smith, but you

will allow that I know my business, and it unfortunately happens that my training has been very much neglected in this direction. It is never too late for improvement, you will agree——"

"Lovell!" gasped Newcome.

"Shut up, ass!"

"But, you dummy——"

Lovell gave his chums a glare and went on:

"This afternoon, at half-past three, if you can arrange it, Mr. Smith. If you will give me this afternoon some instruction, we can then discuss terms for a whole course. Thank you very much! Half-past three. You will ask for Mr. Greely, in the School House."

Lovell rang off again.

He looked at his paper, evidently for another telephone number. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome fairly hurled themselves upon him and dragged him away from the telephone.

"Let go!" howled Lovell.

"You frabjous ass! You've done enough already to get you bunked from Rookwood," gasped Jimmy.

"I don't care. I——"

"Well, we do! 'Nuff's as good as a feast, or better. This way!"

"Leggo!"

"Bring him along!"

Three determined youths fairly hooked Lovell out of Mr. Dalton's study. Arthur Edward resisted all the way down the passage, but he had to go. The opinion of his comrades was that he had done enough, if not too much.

"You silly owls!" spluttered Lovell. "You cheeky chumps! I tell you I'm going to spring a dozen of them on Greely, and give him a busy afternoon——"

"You're jolly well not!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Leggo!"

Lovell tore himself loose and rushed back to Mr. Dalton's study. After him went his comrades in full chase.

"Lovell!"

Arthur Edward, in full career, reached Mr. Dalton's door just as Mr.

Dalton reached it from the opposite direction. He halted quite suddenly. Jimmy Silver, and Raby, and Newcome came whooping round the corner at top speed, and they also halted quite suddenly.

Mr. Dalton gave them a severe glance.

"Well?"

The four heroes of the Classical Fourth faded away without reply.

CHAPTER 34.

Department I

MR. GREELY, master of the Rookwood Fifth, took his accustomed stroll in Big Quad after dinner that day.

That day was Wednesday, a half-holiday; and on half-holidays Mr. Greely was accustomed to take his ease in his study, glad to have the Fifth off his hands. After his stroll in the quad he would settle down in a deep armchair, with a newspaper, and enjoy his leisure till the spirit moved him to drop into some other master's study for a little chat—the little chat being conducted by Mr. Greely, with feeble murmurs and interruptions from the victim.

As he walked ponderously in the quad on this especial afternoon, Mr. Greely became slowly conscious of the fact that he was attracting an unusual amount of attention from Lower boys.

He came on Jimmy Silver & Co., and they "capped" him quite respectfully, but they obviously regarded him with unusual interest.

Mornington of the Fourth smiled, and Townsend and Topham actually grinned as he sailed past them.

Other fellows looked at him, and even stared at him, and there were undoubtedly smiles, and even chuckles.

Mr. Greely began to wonder whether there was a smut on his portly nose, being quite perplexed.

That there was a rag on, of which he was to be the victim, did not occur to

him. He was far too tremendous a person for anyone at Rookwood to think of ragging him—at all events, so it seemed to Mr. Greely.

He dismissed the trifling matter from his lofty mind when he rolled back to the House and took his accustomed armchair in his study about half-past two. From his seat by the window he naturally could not see into the corridor upon which masters' studies opened, and he was quite unaware that a number of the Classical Fourth were gathering in the big bay window in that corridor, nearly opposite his door.

The Fistical Four came first, and annexed the window-seat; and then Morny arrived, and Oswald, and Towny and Topy, and several more fellows. Quite a little crowd had gathered there before three o'clock.

And they were all smiling.

Arthur Edward Lovell had started by telling two or three fellows about his little rag. The news had spread. By that time nearly all the Form knew that Mr. Greely was to receive unexpected visitors that afternoon, and they were deeply interested. They wondered what would happen.

From the bay window in the corridor they had a partial view of the quad; and just before three, they sighted a tall, lean gentleman, in a tight-fitting frock-coat and silk hat, advancing towards the House.

"That will be Purkiss!" said Lovell.

"He's really come!" murmured Raby.

"Of course he's come! Rather a catch for him, to get a Rookwood master as a pupil for his giddy department."

"What on earth will Greely say?" murmured Mornington.

"I wonder!" said Lovell. "Anyhow, we shall hear from this place—Greely's toot carries like a megaphone."

The juniors chuckled.

A few minutes later Timothy Tupper, the House page, appeared in the corridor, conducting the tall, lean gentleman. He conducted him to Mr. Greely's room, tapped, and opened the door.

"Mr. Purkiss, sir!"

Mr. Greely glanced up from his paper. He glanced in surprise at the lean gentleman, in his tight black coat, with his silk hat in his hand, and an aggressive smile upon his rather cadaverous features.

"Mr. Greely——"

The gentleman from Latcham stepped in, and Tupper closed the door and retired.

Mr. Greely rose politely; he was always polite in a ponderous way, though he was surprised and not very pleased by this visit.

"My card, sir!" said Mr. Purkiss.

The Fifth Form master glanced at the card, which informed him that Mr. Purkiss' academy at Latcham gave instruction in dancing, deportment, and drill. Not being, so far as he was aware, in need of instruction in those branches of knowledge, Mr. Greely was very puzzled.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Purkiss, but I do not quite understand——"

"Naturally, sir, naturally," agreed Mr. Purkiss. "A little instruction will make all the difference."

He placed his silk hat on the table and rubbed his hands. Mr. Purkiss was extremely pleased at having secured so distinguished a pupil as a Form master at Rookwood. It was probable that the fees to be extracted from such a gentleman would be rather more generous than the fees Mr. Purkiss was accustomed to receiving. Like many professional gentlemen, Mr. Purkiss arranged his fees rather in proportion to the means of his clients, than in proportion to the value of the instruction given.

"But I do not see——" recommenced the puzzled Form master.

"Quite so! I shall endeavour to make everything clear to you, Mr. Greely."

"Pray lose no time, then!" said Mr. Greely, with some asperity.

"My dear sir, we will begin at once, if you wish—not a moment shall be lost," said Mr. Purkiss. "Do not be dis-

couraged by the fact that you are—hem!—perhaps a little elderly."

"What?"

"Age is no bar, sir, to improvement, provided that the pupil be keen and painstaking."

"The—the pupil?"

"Exactly, sir?" said Mr. Purkiss, with an agreeable smile. "Even at your time of life, sir, deportment can be studied with the greatest advantage."

"Deportment!" said Mr. Greely dazedly.

"Deportment, sir!" assented Mr. Purkiss. "A very important subject, sir—very important! Now, sir, since you have asked me to lose no time, your present attitude——"

"Eh?"

"Defective, sir—very defective," said Mr. Purkiss. "Not a word, sir—without instruction, no one can be expected to master the important art of deportment. Now, sir, the chin up a little——"

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"Wha-a-t?"

"The right leg a little forward."

"Sir!"

"Your hands, at the present moment, hang at your sides in the most ungraceful way. Not a word, sir. Of course, you have not observed anything of the kind. How should you? It is my business, sir, to enlighten you——"

"What—what?" stuttered Mr. Greely, wondering dizzily whether he had a lunatic to deal with.

"Now, sir, the left hand——"

Mr. Purkiss advanced with the bowing grace of a dancing-master, and took hold of Mr. Greely's left hand.

The next moment Mr. Greely's right hand came into action.

With a violent shove, he sent Mr. Purkiss toppling back; and in his surprise the dancing-master of Latcham sat down on the study carpet with a heavy bump.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Purkiss.

Mr. Greely glared down at him.

"Are you mad, sir?" he shouted.

"What?"

"If you are not insane or intoxicated, what do you mean?" roared Mr. Greely. "How dare you come here, sir, and play such antics in my study?"

Mr. Purkiss stared up at him.

"What? What? What?" he stuttered. "Antics! Sir! I was instructing you—I was, upon my word!"

Mr. Purkiss picked himself up and backed away from Mr. Greely. He was feeling alarmed. This was not the reception he had expected from a middle-aged pupil who was anxious to study that important branch of knowledge, deportment.

Mr. Greely pointed to the door.

"Go, sir!" he hooted.

"Mr. Greely! I presume there is no mistake—you are Mr. Greely——"

"I am Mr. Greely! Go!"

"Then there is no mistake! Am I to understand, Mr. Greely, that you do not desire to receive instruction from me in deportment, in spite of your very evident need of it?"

"You are to understand, sir, that you are to leave my study this instant and take your absurd insolence elsewhere!" roared Mr. Greely.

"Sir!"

"There is the door, Mr. Purkiss, if Purkiss is your name!" snorted the Fifth Form master. "And there is your absurd card, sir!"

In his wrath, Mr. Greely hurled the card at the dancing-master, and Mr. Purkiss gave a yelp as he caught it with his nose.

"Sir! Sir!" spluttered the gentleman from Latcham. "This—this—this conduct—this rudeness—this—this brutality! Are you in your right senses, sir? I came here to instruct you——"

"Leave my study!"

"I will leave your study with pleasure, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Purkiss, quite enraged now. "I have no desire whatever, sir, to waste my instruction upon a man with the manners of a—er, er—the manners of a particularly savage bear, sir. But I have no intention, sir, of coming here from Latcham for nothing, sir! I shall charge you, sir, with my taxi fare, sir, and if you do not settle the account, sir, I shall bring a summons in the County Court, sir!"

And with that, Mr. Purkiss flung out of the study, slammed the door behind him, jammed on his silk hat, and departed.

CHAPTER 35.

Alarming!

"OH, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. Every word in Mr. Greely's booming voice had been heard by the merry group in the bay window in the corridor.

They chuckled long, but they did not chuckle loud. With great efforts they suppressed their merriment. They did not want Mr. Greely to step out and discover that he had a select audience from the Classical Fourth that afternoon.

"I say, it's rather a shame on Pur-

kiss," gasped Newcome. "He's had his trip over here for nothing."

"That's all right, if he summons old Greely in the County Court——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You heard him say he would!" chortled Lovell. "Greely's no right to phone a man to come all that distance for nothing! I fancy he will have to pay."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He might as well have had the lesson in department. He needs it—Purkiss told him so, and Purkiss is the man who knows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, there will be a giddy explosion when the next man comes," murmured Newcome.

"Let's hope that Greely will profit by his comin'!" grinned Mornington. "He needs instruction in manners—I'm sure Purkiss thinks so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited quite anxiously for half-past three, when Mr. Montgomery Smith was due to call.

Mr. Greely, in his study, was quite unaware that another visitor was almost due. He had almost collapsed into his armchair, in a state of wrath and astonishment, to which no words could have done justice. Unless this man Purkiss was a lunatic or wildly intoxicated, Mr. Greely could not comprehend this amazing episode at all. He rather regretted now that he had not knocked this man down for his insolence. True, he had pushed him over; but the fellow ought to have been knocked down—hard! Such amazing insolence—such incredible effrontery——

Mr. Greely breathed wrath; and it was quite a long time before he was able to settle down with his newspaper again.

He settled down at last, however; though occasionally he gave expression to an angry snort, indicating that all was not quite calm within.

He looked up angrily at a knock on his study door.

"Come in!" he snapped.

Tupper opened the door.

"Mr. Smith, sir!"

"Mr. Smith!" repeated Mr. Greely. "Kindly inquire his business before showing him in, Tupper. I do not——"

"He said it was an appointment, sir," said Tupper. "He's 'ere, sir."

Mr. Montgomery Smith bowed himself into the room.

He was a large, plump, portly gentleman, not unlike Mr. Greely himself in figure. He had a happy smile and a jocular manner.

Tupper retired and was closing the door when a foot stopped it. He stared round at Lovell.

"That's all right!" whispered Lovell.

And the page departed, leaving Mr. Greely's door ajar.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Montgomery Smith, bowing. "Mr. Greely, I presume?"

"Quite so, sir!" said the Fifth Form master. "But to what——"

"I was afraid at first, sir, that I should have to telephone and defer this interview," said Mr. Montgomery Smith. "Nevertheless, I am quite at your service, Mr. Greely. Dancing, I understand, you do not wish to study?"

"Dancing?"

"But general deportment——"

"Deportment?"

"Quite so. Reassure yourself, sir," said Mr. Montgomery Smith, with a wide wave of a large hand. "It is never too late to mend. I have had one pupil, sir, of a more advanced age than your own—a self-made man, sir, whose manners were, I regret to say, unspeakable, infinitely inferior to your own, my dear sir—but in a single term at my establishment the change was amazing! I made him, sir, into a gentleman! I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to do as much for you, Mr. Greely!"

Mr. Greely gasped.

From the corridor there came a suppressed sound.

"Backward boys, sir—rude little rascals—under my tuition, have become polished—absolutely polished," continued Mr. Montgomery Smith. "In your own case, sir, I have every hope of remedying the defects—somewhat obvious defects, no doubt—in your training."

"Are you a madman?" roared Mr. Greely.

Mr. Montgomery Smith jumped.

"Eh! What? What did you say, Mr. Greely? I—I do not quite follow—"

"Or are you drunk?"

"What?"

"In either case, sir, how dare you come here to play your pranks!"

"Pranks!" stammered Mr. Smith.

"Pranks, sir!" roared Mr. Greely, advancing upon him with a flaming face. "What do you mean by it? I repeat, sir, what do you mean by it?"

Mr. Smith backed away.

"Calm yourself, sir, calm yourself!" he urged. "My intention is to help you, to help you in every way! No man ever more needed my help, if I may say so. Sit down a few minutes, sir. Perhaps I can get you a glass of water—Calmness, sir—calmness, I beg."

Mr. Greely spluttered.

"I am bound to mention, sir, that you gave me no hint of this," said Mr. Montgomery Smith, rather warmly. "I was led to believe that your defective manners were simply due to neglect—to want of training. No hint was given me that I had an inebriated man to deal with."

"In-in-inebriated!" stuttered Mr. Greely.

"I should have been told so; it would have been more frank on your part, Mr. Greely, to warn me that I had to deal with a man unfortunately a slave to drink—"

"Sir!" shrieked Mr. Greely.

"Calmness, sir, calmness, I beg!" urged Mr. Smith. "For goodness' sake, sir, calm yourself! Allow me to ex-

plain! Although I should be very glad to take your training in hand, I must respectfully decline to do so. My establishment, sir, is not one for inebriates. I sympathise with you, sir, heartily, but I cannot undertake to deal with a man who is intoxicated at this early hour of the day."

Mr. Greely wondered whether he was dreaming.

Mr. Smith picked up his hat.

"I regret, sir, I deeply regret it, but it is impossible," he said. "If I may offer you advice, I advise you to consult a medical man. Above all, sir, to make at least an attempt to drink only water. I—Yaroooh!"

Mr. Greely suddenly interrupted him.

This man, whom he had never seen before, had not only butted into his study unasked, insulted him, but he was actually accusing Mr. Greely of being intoxicated! Really, that seemed the only possible explanation to Mr. Smith, in the peculiar circumstances. But Mr. Greely was not aware of that; and his just wrath burst all bounds.

He had regretted that he had not knocked down Mr. Purkiss. He did not make the same mistake with Mr. Smith. He knocked him down—with a mighty swipe that sent Mr. Smith spinning as far as the door.

"Whoop!" roared Mr. Montgomery Smith as he landed.

"Now, sir, take yourself off!" boomed Mr. Greely. "If you do not desire me, sir, to kick you out of this building, take yourself off and play your foolish pranks, sir, upon someone who is in a humour for ridiculous fooling! I am not, sir—I am not!"

"Oh dear! Ow! Wow!"

Mr. Smith felt his nose, to ascertain that it was still there. It felt as if it was not.

He limped to his feet, and Mr. Greely rushed forward to hurl the door open and, doubtless, to help Mr. Smith into the passage. But that terrific punch on the nose was rather more than Mr.

Montgomery Smith was disposed to take patiently. As Mr. Greely crowded him Mr. Smith in his turn hit out, and the Fifth Form master of Rookwood came down unexpectedly on his own carpet.

"Oh! Ow!"

Mr. Montgomery Smith tore the door open and hurried into the corridor. Mr. Greely was up in a second, blazing with wrath, and he fairly bounded after Mr. Smith.

"Rascal! Ruffian!" he spluttered. "Scoundrel! I—I—I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were almost in hysterics. They simply could not suppress their merriment now. They roared and they howled.

The sight of Mr. Greely chasing the astonished and alarmed visitor into the corridor was too much for them.

They shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!" panted Mr. Smith, as he rushed down the corridor, with the infuriated Mr. Greely on his track.

"Go it!" shrieked Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Keep him off! Keep that madman off!" roared Mr. Montgomery Smith, sprinting down the corridor as if he were on the cinder-path.

Behind him came Mr. Greely, raging.

Fortunately, fear spurred on Mr. Montgomery Smith faster than wrath spurred on Mr. Greely. What would have happened had the enraged Fifth Form master overtaken him cannot be said. Fortunately, Mr. Montgomery Smith won that exciting race.

He left the House, with his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other, and ran for the gates. Rookwood fellows, in the quad, stared blankly at the sight of a hatless gentleman apparently fleeing for his life.

Mr. Greely, perhaps recalled to a sense of propriety by the yells of laughter that echoed down the corridors, halted at last, and strode back to his study. Jimmy Silver & Co. melted away before his approach.

Mr. Greely strode into his study, and slammed the door with a terrific slam.

In amazement and wrath, he paced his study, utterly perplexed by these strange happenings, utterly shaken out of his usual ponderous composure. And when, later on, he rolled into Masters' Common-room to tea, he was conscious of lurking smiles on the faces of his colleagues—smiles that broadened when Mr. Greely excitedly described the weird happenings of the afternoon, and asked his colleagues what it could all possibly mean?

In the Fourth Form passage the Classical Fourth fairly rocked with laughter.

Putty of the Fourth, past-master in the art of leg-pulling, freely admitted that Arthur Edward Lovell was a great man.

For hours and hours the mere recollection of Mr. Greely bursting forth in wrath from his study, on the track of the gentleman who had undertaken to teach him manners, was enough to make the Classical fellows break into fresh yells of laughter.

For days and days it was a great jest; and Classics and Moderns chortled over it. The Shell and the Third chortled, and it spread even to the Fifth, and Mr. Greely's own Form chortled.

It was agreed on all hands that Mr. Greely had had just what he had asked for; and Lovell was no longer chipped—the great jest on Mr. Greely succeeding him as a general topic.

Which was very satisfactory to Arthur Edward Lovell; and it was still more satisfactory that Mr. Greely, much as he puzzled over the affair, never dreamed of suspecting that it was a Fourth Form rag. That was a relief to the end study; for undoubtedly Arthur Edward Lovell had risked a Head's flogging in going for Mr. Greely.

THE SIGN OF THE PIRATE

DICK TURPINS of the high seas had a fine old time, undeterred by gunboats, submarines, destroyers, long-distance-firing warships and aeroplanes—simply because these "avengers" did not exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is when the pirates were most numerous and daring. There were no speedier ships than their own afloat, and none with more blood-thirsty crews. Fighting was part of the average pirate's day's work. He joined a sort of trade union of high seas highwaymen when he shipped under the sign of the Jolly Roger.

The Pirate's Penalty.

Grim humour lurks in that name for the pirate's flag, which was flaunted mast-top high to set the chill fear of robbery and slaughter in the hearts of all peaceable seamen. Heavily laden merchantmen could not turn tail and flee when that flag poked up over the distant horizon. And if the merchantman happened to be armed—well, the odds were that its crew was not matched by a long way for a hand-to-hand fight with pirates, who knew no authority except their own skipper's.

The pirates' only fear "came on" when they, as captured criminals, were marched down to Execution Dock, on the Thames, there to pay the extreme penalty—and to hang in chains until a certain number of tides had covered their bodies.

There was never any modesty about the pirates and buccaneers. They hoisted their flag just as it pleased them to do so. In these days of wireless and thickly covered seas they would be hounded out of existence. But their flags then flew with impunity. The device of a skull above two crossed human bones, in white on an otherwise black flag, was sometimes varied by

having the skull and bones in blood red. Master-pirates, who thought that sign a bit commonplace, went a step further and hoisted a device of their own—a bony skeleton, full-length, holding a dripping dagger in one hand and a flagon of rum in the other—"Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

Flags of Fear.

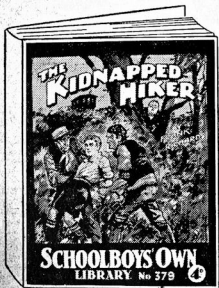
The figure of a rampant demon was sometimes used as the pirates' flag. He stood on two skulls—like sudden death in all its stark horror. A flaming sword in his hands completed the heart-fluttering picture.

Sometimes the flag was embellished with a battle-axe and an hour-glass in place of the crossed bones, with the symbolical skull grinning above. These special flags were usually the distinguishing mark of several ships commanded by one pirate chief. The "small" chief, who had only one vessel, kept to the conventional skull and cross-bones.

Combines of pirates thrived specially along the Barbary Coast of North Africa, where even shipbuilding ports were run by and for pirates, and the ships were financed on their far-roving expeditions by wealthy scoundrels who lived ashore, these receiving usually about one-tenth of the value of all captures made by the pirates with whose activities they were intimately concerned.

Sometimes British men-o'-war conveyed four or more merchantmen when these had to pass through regular pirates' strongholds, but even then the pirates would swoop down in force and boldly give battle for what they regarded as their "rights"—the fat prizes stored in the merchantmen's holds.

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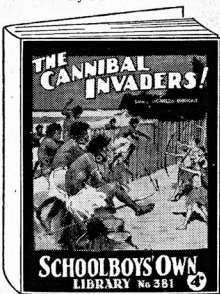


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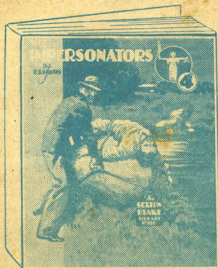
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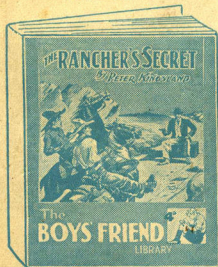
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