

"SKELETON'S TREASURE!"

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STORY BY

ERIC W. TOWNSEND INSIDE!

The BOYS' FRIEND 2d

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THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

[Week Ending October 3rd, 1925.]

THE RIVAL PRESIDENTS! BY DUNCAN STORM.



A LIVELY MORNING IN SAN CRISTOVAL!

(An exciting scene from the great new story of the boys of the school-ship Bombay Castle in this issue.)

ANOTHER OF OUR POPULAR TALES OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHUMS
OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL!



The 1st Chapter.
By Whose Hand?

An Also Ran!

By Owen Conquest.

(Author of the tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

Peele, Gower, and Tubby Muffin are the recipients
of bad news!

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.

The 2nd Chapter. 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 studymate, 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 twenty-five 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

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 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 Latham who will lend me something 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!"

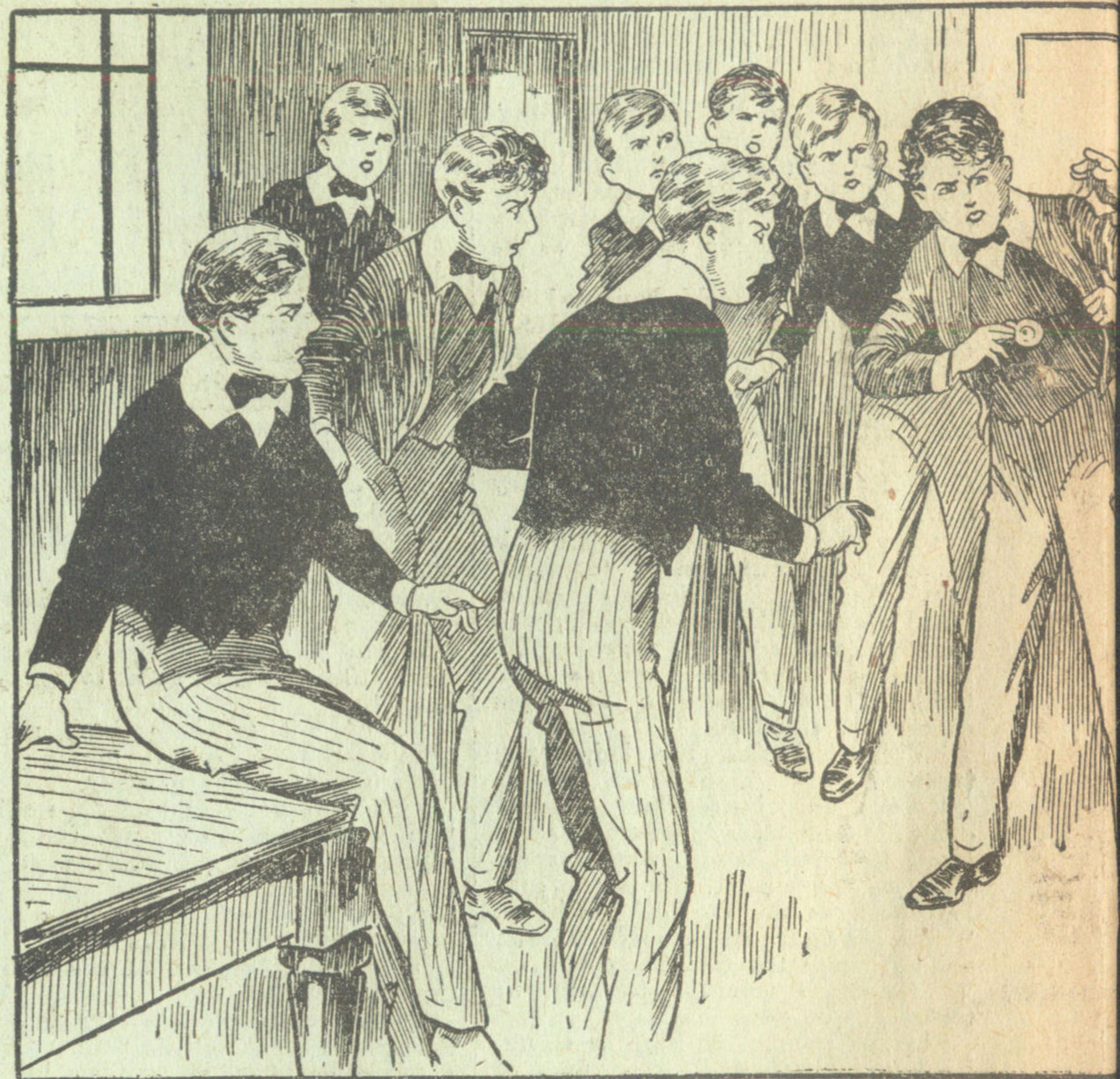
Cyril Peele's feelings, at that moment, were decidedly unpleasant. He knew now what had become of the missing watch; he was, now, an accessory after the fact! That was a rather dangerous position to be in, and it had always been Cyril Peele's care to keep out of danger.

"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.

Meanwhile, in the Classical Fourth passage, there was long and excited discussion on the subject of the missing watch.

In spite of Mr. Dalton's view, most of the Classics kept to the belief that that celebrated timekeeper was



A SHOCK FOR LOVELL!

"Turn your pockets out, and let's see if you've got your fiver in your jacket pocket. His hand came out with a simply extraordinary. "Oh!" he gasped.

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

in Putty's possession, and that its disappearance was one more of his peculiar japes.

Tubby Muffin was almost weeping with rage and alarm.

He was almost convinced, by this time, that, practical joke or not, his watch was being deliberately appropriated by the fellow who had taken it, and that he was in dire danger of never seeing it again.

For days and days, Muffin had

"swanked" about that watch, that magnificent gold watch that his uncle had given him in the vac. Its value was variously stated, by Muffin, at any figure between twenty guineas and thirty. He had been greatly irritated by Mornington's playful suggestion that that magnificent watch was, after all, made of rolled gold, value eighteenpence.

There had been a general feeling in the Classical Fourth that they were "fed-up" with Muffin's wonderful gold watch. Now that the fat Classical's impressive "ticker" was so prominently in the limelight, the fellows were more fed-up with it than ever. As Valentine Mornington remarked, it was worth at least as much as the watch itself to hear the end of it.

But that was not Reginald Muffin's view.

That valuable gold watch almost filled the horizon, to Reginald Muffin. It was a magnificent and impressive article in itself, and it was a reserve for hard times—and hard times often came Muffin's way. Like the gold reserve in the Bank of England, that big gold watch was to be drawn upon in time of emergency. Some day, Tubby had already decided, he was going to "pop" it, and stand a terrific spread with the proceeds. That idea was always at the back of Tubby's fat mind; the watch was not, indeed, merely a timekeeper, it was the outward and visible sign of the immense feed that Tubby could command at any time he chose to dispose of the present from Captain Montague Muffin.

And now it was gone! Not only the watch was gone, but also was the beatific vision of the unlimited tuck it represented if "popped."

No wonder Reginald Muffin was like unto a bear with a sore head; no wonder he mourned, and would not be comforted! No wonder he bored all the Form, almost to the point of tears, with his bewailings for his vanished treasure.

It seemed to Muffin that afternoon that seven o'clock never would come! At seven the missing watch was to be handed over to Mr. Dalton, or dire consequences would follow.

But would it be handed over?

Muffin hoped so; but he trembled! The fellow who had had it so long might never be able to make up his mind to part with that splendid article, that magnificent timekeeper! But if it was not handed over, the affair was to be adjudged a theft;

"It's stolen!" he told Jimmy Silver, for the twentieth time, if not the thirtieth. "I shall never see my watch again, Jimmy. You'll never see it again."

"No such luck!" said the exasperated captain of the Fourth.

"Why, you awful beast—"
"If only a fellow could never see you again, either," said Arthur Edward Lovell, "wouldn't that be top-hole—what? Life's scarcely worth living, between you and your watch!"

"My twenty-five guinea watch—"
"Give us a rest!" urged Newcome.
"You awful rotters—"

Raby picked up a loaf from the tea-table in the end study, and took aim. And Reginald Muffin rolled elsewhere for sympathy—without finding any! There was no doubt at all that the Classical Fourth were fed-up with Reginald Muffin and his magnificent gold watch, and almost wished both of them at the bottom of the sea together.

The 3rd Chapter.

A Change in the Programme!

"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 intercept the junior, and dropped a rather heavy hand on his shoulder.

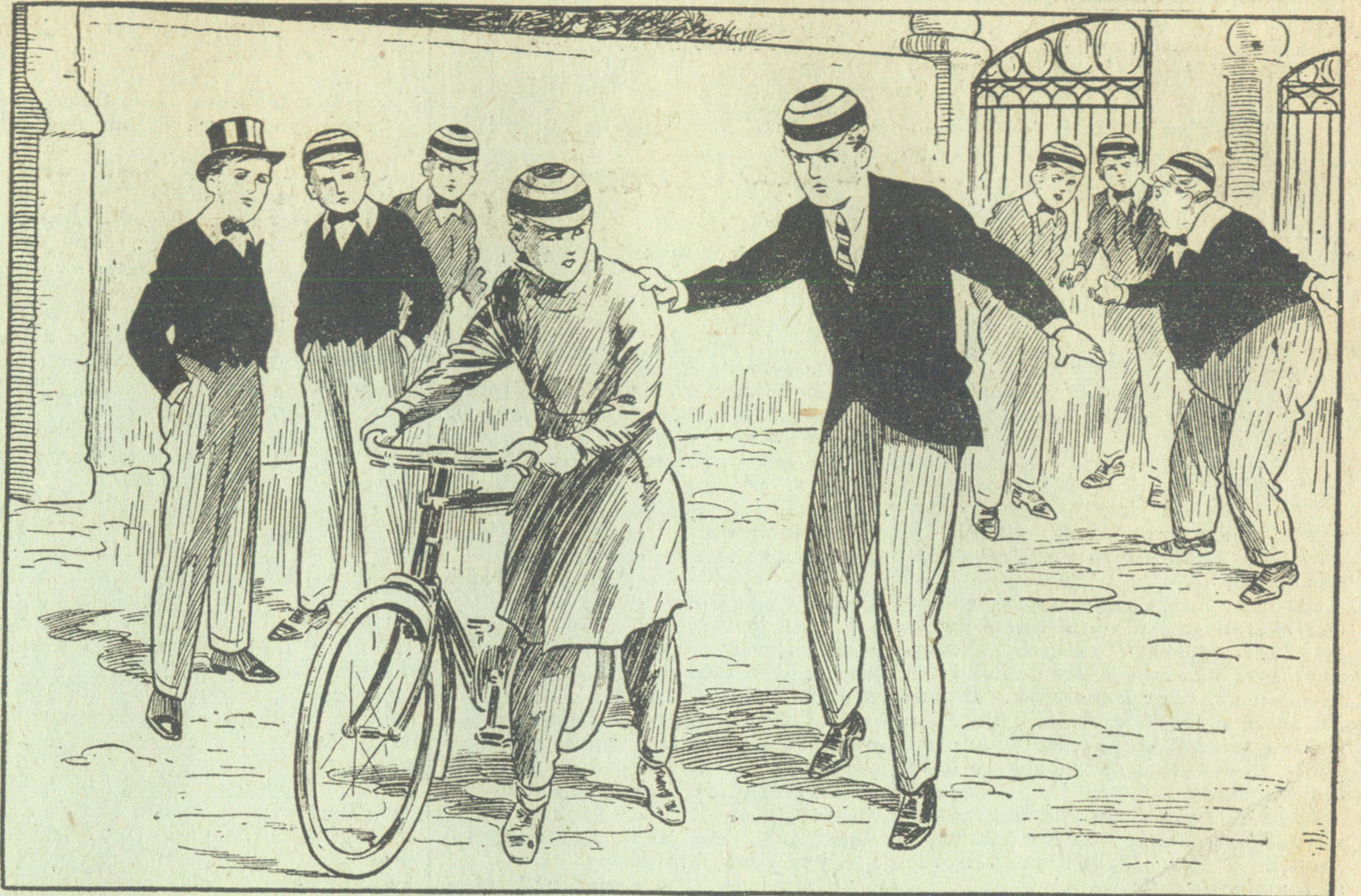
Then Gower stopped. He seemed to wake, as it were, from a black and gloomy absorption, and he stared at Bulkeley.

"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 sullen. "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."



GOWER IS WANTED! "Gower!" Gower of the Fourth did not heed Bulkeley's call; he did not seem to hear. Bulkeley swerved in his walk to intercept 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.

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 juniors' 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 to 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, 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!"

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.

The 4th Chapter.

An Astonishing Discovery!

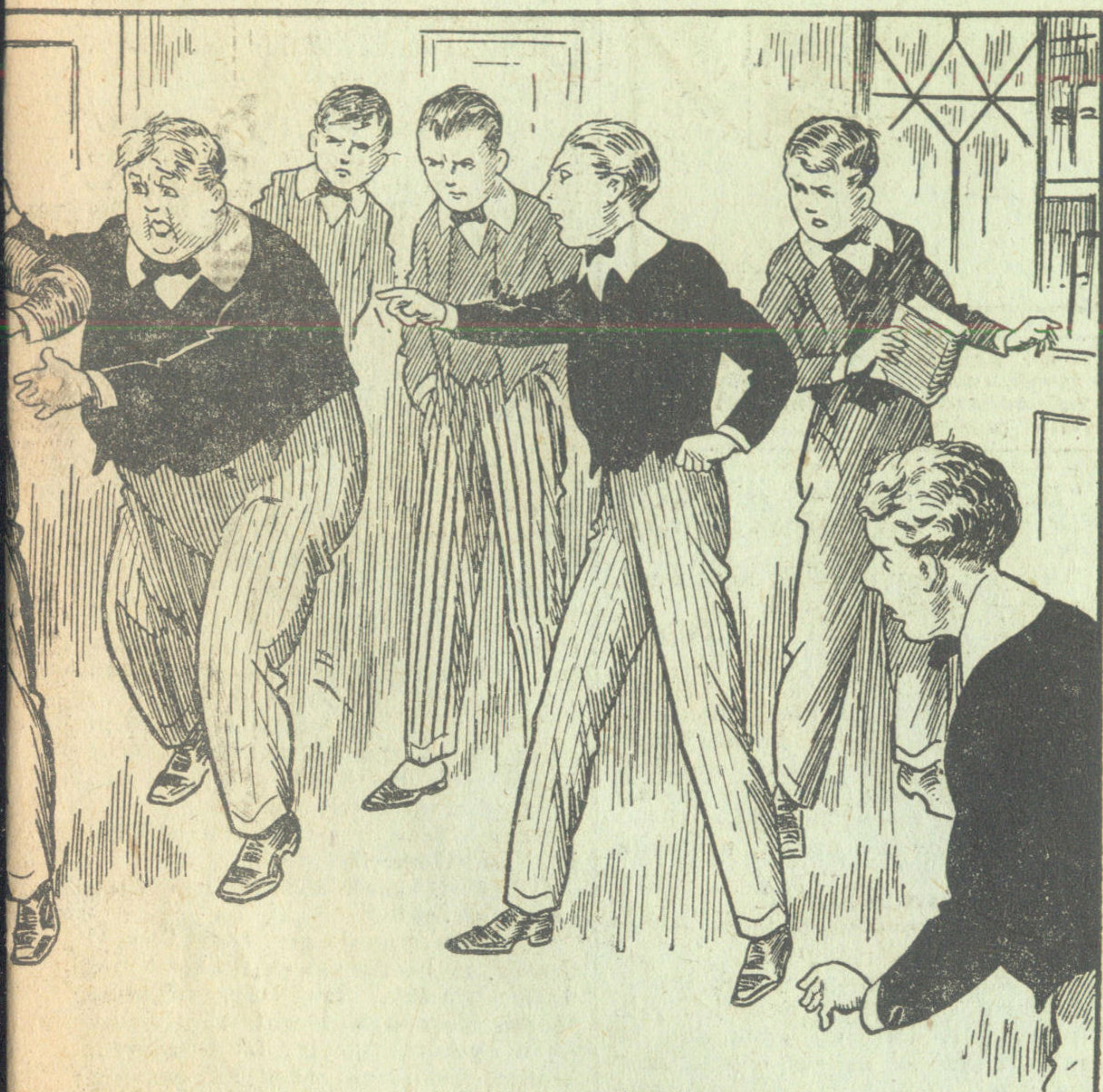
"Anybody seen Putty?"

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.

(Continued overleaf.)



"I got the watch, Lovell!" snorted Gower. Lovell drove his hand savagely into his pocket, and the expression on Arthur Edward Lovell's face was "My watch!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

somebody would be liable to expulsion from Rookwood School. That was all very well; but suppose he took the watch with him! Tubby Muffin was in an unenviable state of mind as he watched the hands crawling on the clock—he could no longer watch them on a watch! Would seven o'clock never come? At that hour he would know the worst, at the very least!

"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



An Also Ran!

By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from previous page.)

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 obdurate 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, lets, 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 accus-

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 speaking countenance was simply extraordinary. He stared at that big gold watch as if it had been 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 frumptions 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 hug-

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."

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 time-keeper, 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 foolish 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.

The 5th Chapter.

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. Mornny 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 Mornny had had the pleasure—or otherwise—of meeting Captain Montague Muffin, and he, somehow, did not think that the gallant captain was the man to give away twenty-five-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. My fellows can come to the feed, if you like."

"Don't take less than ten bob for it!" said Gower.

"Eh? I sha'n't take less than twenty guineas."

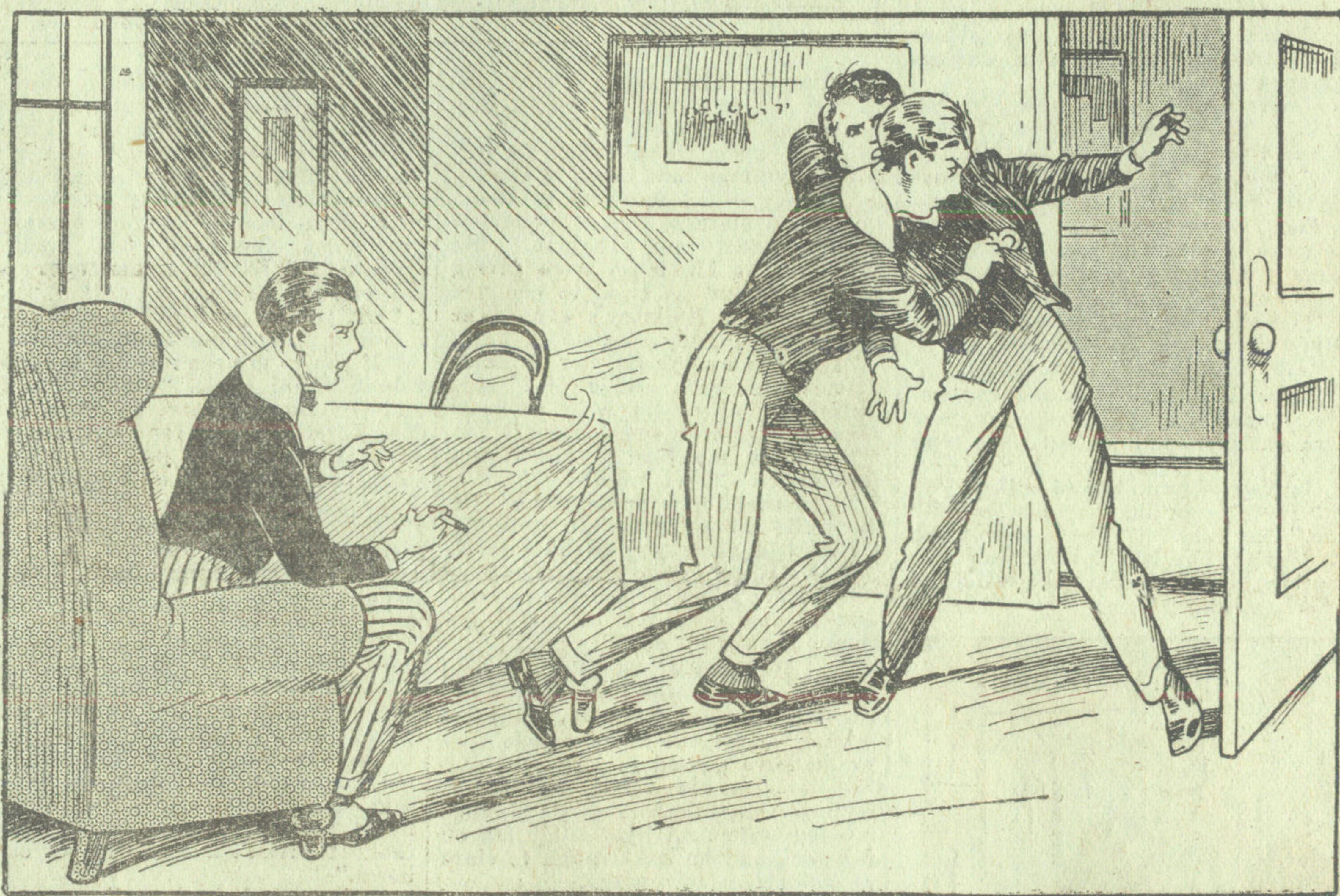
"I hope you'll get them," said Gower, as he turned on his heel and walked away, laughing. Tubby Muffin stared after him wrathfully.

"If you're going to Rookham, Muffin, 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

(Continued on page 224.)



GOWER'S RASCALLY ACTION! Gower made a rush at Lovell. He grasped Arthur Edward, with his arms round that sturdy youth, and they waltzed across the study. 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!

"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

ging 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

"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 beans," said Mornington. "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.



An Also Ran!

By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from page 218.)

swank. Having served that turn, Captain Muffin's valuable present was to serve as a source of wealth—a horn of plenty for the impetuous 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 being on 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!" murmured 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—"

wood 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.

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"Five shillings!"
"The second one made it four-and-six—"

"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—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 Rook-

"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.

THE END.

(Full of excitement—"The Study Riggers!" Next Monday's tip-top story of the chums of Rookwood School. Be sure you read it, pals. Order your copy of the BOYS' FRIEND in advance and avoid disappointment!)

HEALTH AND SPORT.

Conducted by Percy Longhurst.

Winter Swimming.

One of my correspondents has been asking me the question: "Is winter swimming advisable?" My answer is: "Yes; but only for those who are blessed with a good circulation."

If you shiver as you stand on the edge of the bath, hesitating whether to go in or not; if your exercise in the water does not bring the glow of warmth beneath the skin; if when you come out your hands and feet are blue, your teeth chatter, and you feel chilled to the bone, then cut winter swimming out of your exercise programme. Not only does it do you no good, but it is liable to do you a very positive harm. But if you happen to be amongst the fortunate ones who can stand the low temperature of the water without feeling any ill-effects whatsoever, then winter is the period during which you should be able, by means of regular practice, to improve your form, to get rid of those small imperfections in making the strokes which hardly any of us are without.

Just a word about those imperfections, the removal of which may make all the difference between just an ordinary swimmer and a coming champion. A swimmer doesn't always know what are his weak points; often it is necessary for his faults, of which he had no knowledge, to be pointed out to him. This is one of the handicaps under which a large number of young swimmers labour. They don't know that they are at fault, and there is no one at hand experienced enough to point out their errors and advise them as to how these are to be prevented. It is the fact that swimming in England suffers from a lack of thoroughly competent instructors. This, I think, explains why our men do not make a better showing at the Olympic Games competitions. Old methods are kept to and old faults perpetuated. In the United States it is very different; experiments are always being tried; improvements continually looked for. That is why Johnny Weissmuller, the American champion, holds more than fifty world's swimming records.

Mention of Weissmuller reminds me of the explanation he has recently been giving of the extraordinary speed that he is able to produce. It is not due to muscular strength; he admits that his two chief rivals, Arne Borg, the big Swede, and Andrew Charlton, the wonderful young Australian who captured a championship when he was but fourteen years of age, are stronger than he is. If they had his methods, they would beat him. And Weissmuller knows what he is talking about. He has met and beaten both of the others.

His methods are not a secret. Weissmuller is not afraid of revealing them, and there is no reason why any swimmer shouldn't profit by what he says. What one fellow has learned another may. The chief fault of both Charlton and Borg is want of muscular relaxation.

I need hardly remind any swimmer, though it's often forgotten, that any stroke made by the arms or the legs consists of two movements—the actual stroke which gives the propelling power and the return movement of the limb. During that return movement the whole limb, joints, and muscles ought to be completely relaxed. If there isn't this relaxation, there is loss of form. And, worse than that, want of relaxation means loss of power and energy. To set a muscle, or number of muscles, and so stiffen a joint, means an actual effort of the mind and the muscles. To make this effort—which does take place, though the swimmer may not be actually conscious of what he is doing—is sheer loss of strength. That means that a bit of power and energy is lost with every return movement of the arm. Count up the number of such movements that will take place in, say, a swim of 100 yards. The loss amounts to something considerable. It is sufficient, anyway, to produce tiredness of the muscles—especially is this so when racing—long before they should be feeling any fatigue. Absolute limpness and relaxation of the arm muscles is what the swimmer should aim at when making the return movement. It will come with practice; it can be learned.

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