

THE ROOKWOOD MUSICAL SOCIETIES!

A Grand Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of
Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A "Facer" for the Moderns.

"MY hat!" said Tommy Dodd. It was all he could say.

"Hear, hear!" said his chums, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle.

"A junior musical society!"
"Of all the nerve!"
"And we never thought of it!"
Tommy Dodd & Co. drew back into the deep shadows of the stone stair in the old tower, and looked at one another.

For a fortnight the Modern chums had been suspicious of the movements of the Fistical Four, and had noticed that the Classical chums appeared to be very weary during the daytime.

Suspecting that they had been carrying on some nefarious schemes at night, the Modern chums had decided to lie in wait after lights out that night at the end of the passage in which the Classical dormitories were situated.

Sure enough, as soon as everything had settled down for the night, the Fistical Four had stealthily emerged from their dormitory, and had made their way to the old tower, followed by Tommy Dodd & Co.

There, Jimmy Silver & Co. were joined by other Classics, and musical instruments were speedily produced, and the sweet strains of 'cello, violin, cornet, flute, and clarinet echoed through the ruins.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had heard every word of the conversation which had taken place in the room of the tower from which the music was proceeding.

They gathered that they had been listening to the "Classical Musical Society," and that practices had been taking place every night for the past fortnight.

Also, that on the following evening a concert was to take place, an announcement of which would be sprung on the school the next day.

Talboys of the Fifth, they learned, was going to officiate at the piano, but he was not present at the final rehearsal, as, of course, a piano could not be taken to the old tower.

"What a row they're making in there!" said Tommy Dodd.

The Modern chums had drawn back from the door, quite out of hearing, so far as their voices were concerned; but, of course, the strains of music were audible all over the old tower. Cook, who had rather a good ear for music, listened rather appreciatively to the youthful orchestra.

"I say, Doddy, old man, that's not bad!"

"Doddy old man" snorted.
"But it isn't," said Cook. "They're playing an adaptation of a march from 'Carmen,' and it's jolly lively—the opening of the last act, you know. They must have got somebody to score it for them for such a giddy, small orchestra, and it's jolly well to their credit to play up like that under such difficulties. They've only got five instruments there, and not



even a double-bass to give the thing a background. Yes, you can snort if you like, Doddy; but you can't teach me anything about music, anyway."

"I know I can't, Cooky," said Tommy Dodd, in a more subdued tone. "I wasn't snorting at you. Don't mind my ragging you just now. I feel this very much."

"Of course, I don't mind," said Cook instantly. "You can rag me as much as you like, old chap, and I won't say a word, if it relieves your feelings."

Tommy Dodd grinned a little.
"It's so jolly rotten, kids!" he said.
"You see, if the idea had only struck us, we could have worked it easily; and, without bragging, I think I can say that we could work it better than the Fistical Four."

"Rather!" said Tommy Cook.
"You are an awfully musical chap, and you can play half the instruments in an orchestra," said Tommy Dodd gloomily.
"And I can play the cornet better than that goat Raby, anyway."

"You play the cornet jolly well, Doddy," said the loyal Tommy Doyle.
"I won't say you keep perfect time, because you don't; but you're yards nearer the music than Raby is."

"Talboys would have punched the piano and conducted for us, and we could have got Smythe, with his clarinet, just as easily as Jimmy Silver," said Tommy Dodd. "I—I could kick myself! Why didn't I think of it?"

His chums offered no solution to the mystery this time.
"I ought to have thought of it," said Dodd. "But I didn't, and there it ends. We've got to sit down quietly, and let the Fistical Four gloat over us."

"Oh, I say, Doddy—"
"We've got to let them triumph, and sing small ourselves," persisted Tommy Dodd, in a vein of determined pessimism. "I know it's rotten. You can bang my head against the wall, if you like."

"Oh, rot, Tommy! After all, we've done them often enough. Besides, we may be able to get level yet, as we've found it out in time."

"But we haven't found it out in time,"

said Tommy Dodd; "it's too late. My hat! To think that they've been at it a fortnight or more, and we never got on to the wheeze till the last night before the performance! I ask you, kids, isn't it enough to make a fellow swear?"

"Quite so; but—"
"Oh, I'm not going to!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "To-morrow there'll be a notice up on the board, I suppose, announcing a grand concert by the Classical Musical Society. All the Fourth will go, and we shall be grinned at, and chipped to death."

"Couldn't we work something up against them? What about a rival show?"

Tommy Dodd shook his head gloomily.
"No time! That's the worst of it. If we had thought of the idea, we could have worked up a much better orchestra; but we didn't! Now there's no time. It's no good our starting a rival show with a cornet, a clarinet, and a 'cello. You can't play four or five instruments, like a giddy drummer in a cheap orchestra. An orchestra of three would be laughed at, and we've no time to beat up recruits—"

"There's Lacy, with his concertina —"
"The chaps would throw things at him."

"Well, I suppose they would. I've felt like doing it myself when I've heard him practising in his study. It's a cheap German concertina he's got," said Cook. "An English concertina you pay a good price for is all right; but a cheap German one is—well, it's like everything else German, rotten to the core!"

"It's no good!" said Tommy Dodd desperately. "We may as well knuckle under. I—"
"Hold on! They're stopping! They'll hear us!"

The strains of music died away. The voices of the Classical Musical Society were audible once more. The Modern chums, with gloomy faces, peeped into the lighted room again.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tommy Dodd Thinks It Out.

JIMMY SILVER laid down his bow, with a smile of satisfaction.

"I think that went better than the first bit," he remarked. "Of course, you can't judge of the full effect till you play along with the piano."

"I should say not," grinned Lovell.
"But so long as we get our parts perfect, it's all right. We know Talboys is a good pianist, and he can keep time to anything, and he's practising his part on and off."

"Oh, we can rely on Talboys," said Raby; "though, in case of doubt, you know, you can always follow the cornet!"

"Blessed if I know where it would lead us!" said Lovell, with a sniff. "I wish you had a double-bass instead of a 'cello, Jimmy. Even Raby could hardly get out if you were sawing away under his ear on a double-bass."

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"We ought to have both," said Jimmy Silver. "But it's no joke buying a double-bass, and we've nobody else to play the 'cello. My pater has come up pretty well as it is in standing this instrument. He's stood me the 'cello; and if I had the bass, there's nobody to take this instrument. Of course, later on, when we let the Modern kids into the society, Cook can play the 'cello, and then I'll try to work the dad for a bass."

"Good egg!"

"But at present we shall have to make it do," said the leader of the Fistical Four. "After all, when Talboys gets going on the piano that will give the thing a background. Raby will have to keep his cornet a little quieter."

"I'm playing up so that you can follow the instrument and keep in time," said Raby.

"Then don't! You must regard the 'cello as if it were the leader. Don't you worry about the rest of the orchestra, Raby. Stick to your cornet, and keep in time yourself."

"Well, I—"

"Get on to the next item," said Jimmy Silver. "We're limited to an hour, you know. I had some lines this morning for being sleepy in class. Bootles doesn't make allowances for these rehearsals."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Play up, then!" said Newcome.

"Just what I was going to suggest," said Lovell.

And the orchestra struck up once more. Out on the staircase Tommy Dodd & Co. listened with mingled feelings.

"It's jolly decent!" muttered Cook. "Of course, the piano takes the parts of the second violins and the viola. It will sound different when Talboys is doing his little bit. That's a dish-up of the third overture to 'Leonora'! Fancy that lot having the cheek to tackle Beethoven!"

"Oh, they've cheek enough for anything!" said Tommy Dodd despondently.

The chums were silent for some time. Tommy Dodd made a movement at last.

"Let's get back," he said. "We'll keep this dark. No need to let on that we're up to the game. We'll think it out, and I'll think of some wheeze for dishing them between this and to-morrow, or bust my brain-box!"

"I hope so."

"Come on!"

The Modern chums stole silently away. They entered the house as they had left it, and returned to their dormitory. They went to bed quietly, without awakening anyone, and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were soon asleep.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Modern Musical Society.

JIMMY SILVER and his musical society had an air of suppressed importance the next day, which would have aroused the suspicions of the Modern chums, even if they had known nothing of the nocturnal rehearsals in the old tower.

But the muttered talk of the musical society, their whispered consultations with Talboys of the Fifth, Jimmy Silver's examinations of the No. 8 Room, with an eye to cramming in a large audience, and the yelps of the clarinet from Smythe's study, all passed now without notice from Tommy Dodd & Co. For Tommy Dodd & Co. were lying low.

They made no sign, and, indeed, appeared outwardly to be thinking of nothing but the next cricket-match. They discussed cricket loud and long whenever they were within hearing of any member of the Fistical Four, and the Fistical Four chuckled gleefully to think how far Tommy Dodd & Co. were from getting on the track.

And the Modern chums smiled. Tommy Dodd had confided his scheme to Cook and Doyle before breakfast that morning. They had listened in astonishment, then with grins; and the grins had expanded into laughs, the laughs

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"I'm getting sleepy. I say, what piano is Talboys going to punch for us to-morrow? The Head's not likely to let us have the grand piano in the Hall."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"No. I asked for the grand piano and the Hall, through Mr. Bootles, but it can't be did. I don't think the Head regards junior musical societies with a properly serious eye."

"He would if he caught 'em at rehearsal!" said Raby.

"Besides, the Sixth are using the Hall to-morrow evening for a rehearsal of their rotten Latin comedy!" said Lovell.

"We've got No. 8 Room on the ground floor," said Jimmy Silver. "It's quite large enough for our purpose, and by arranging the seats we can make room enough for an audience of sixty or seventy. I don't suppose we shall have more than that."

"If there's more, there's standing room," said Raby, "and we can put up a notice outside, 'Standing room only' and it will look ripping. We might put up the notice anyway, to keep up appearances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a good idea."

"I reckon it's a ripping way to attract an audience!" said Jimmy Silver wistfully. "Now, let's get on."

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Not so their chum. Tommy Dodd lay awake, thinking it out. He had a problem to solve. How was he to "dish" the Fistical Four?

Meanwhile, the amateur orchestra progressed with their rehearsal, and finished it, with much satisfaction to themselves.

Jimmy Silver rose at last and returned the violoncello to its case.

"I think we're in pretty good form," he remarked. "We'll wake snakes to-morrow evening, my pippins!"

"Absolutely!"

The instruments were carefully packed away in a chest that had been smuggled into the tower for the purpose. In their nocturnal expeditions it would have been a little too risky to attempt to get a 'cello and a violin-case out of a window, to say nothing of the cornet.

Smythe, however, took his clarinet away with him. The juniors returned to the School House, having extinguished the light in the tower. Smythe went his way, and the Fistical Four climbed in at the box-room window.

All was silent in the dormitory when the chums entered it.

"Asleep, you fellows?" muttered Jimmy Silver.

There was no reply, save a faint snore from one of the beds. The Fistical Four returned to bed without a single misgiving.

into roars. And they roared till their ribs ached.

"Oh, my only hat!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

"What price that for a jape of the Fistical Four?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, it's too rich!" said Tommy Doyle.

"I fancy it will be a dot on the nose for young Silver."

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather rough on the musical society!"

"Can't be helped. If we had got up the musical wheeze, the Fistical Four would be hunting for a chance to bust our concert, wouldn't they?"

"Quite so!"

"Now the boot's on the other foot, and we're going to bust theirs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're giving a concert in No. 8 Room," said Tommy Dodd, grinning. "The partition between No. 8 Room and No. 7 Room is only lath and plaster. You remember, when we were at lessons in No. 7, we could hear the buzz from No. 8?"

"Quite so, rather!"

"If they give a concert in No. 8, why shouldn't we give one in No. 7?"

"Echo answers 'Why?'"

"If they've bagged all the good performers, why shouldn't we make up an

orchestra composed of bad performers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "If the partition's thin, and we make too much row for their performance to be heard, whose fault is it?"

"The chap's who built the partition."
 "Exactly!"

"But you'll have to get permission to use No. 7."
 "Easy enough. The Fistical Four got permission to use No. 8 from Bootles. I'll ask Manders to let us have No. 7. He doesn't know anything about the musical society, so he can't guess there's anything on. He'll let me have the room."

"Good!"
 "I'll ask him immediately after breakfast, to make sure."

And Tommy Dodd did so. Mr. Manders willingly gave the juniors permission to use No. 7 Room, which was not wanted that evening by anybody.

The Modern chums kept it very dark. Sometimes they chuckled irrepressibly; but whenever any of the musical society were near, Tommy Dodd & Co. were gravely talking cricket.

After school that day, the Fistical Four came out of the Fourth Form room in great spirits. Everything was going well for the musical society, and apparently there was no suspicion raised yet.

But as the concert was to take place after tea, it was time for the secret to be let out, and Jimmy Silver, accompanied by his chums, marched up to the notice-board in the hall, and fastened up a notice there.

There was immediately a rush of juniors to read it. Jimmy Silver was cricket captain of the Fourth, and the impression at first was that the notice had something to do with the junior cricket club.

There were blank stares of amazement when the notice was read, from all but Tommy Dodd & Co., who, of course, knew what to expect.

The programme was an ambitious one, including works by Beethoven; there were also several popular items, such as "The Broken Melody" and the "Intermezzo" of Mascagni.

"There will be more than one broken melody, I expect, to say nothing of broken harmony," remarked Leggett.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Lot of cheeky kids!" said Lacy. "I would have put in a concertina solo for them, if they had asked me."

"Perhaps they have carefully calculated how much the roof will stand!" remarked Hooker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I think Lacy's concertina would have been ripping," said Tommy Dodd.

"Yes; it would have ripped the ceiling!" said Jones minor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Lacy strolled away. Tommy Dodd & Co. strolled after him, and entered his study.

"Hallo!" said Lacy. "What do you fellows want?"

"You offered to play the concertina for us once—"

"You want a tune?" asked Lacy, who was always looking out for a victim.
 "Certainly. What shall I play you? The overture to Tannhauser arranged for the concertina, or a little thing of my own?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, for Lacy was already reaching for his instrument of torture. "I don't mean now, I'm thinking of giving a concert—"

Lacy grinned.

"Getting up a rival concert already?"

"That's it. Will you let me put your name down for a solo on the concertina?"

"Certainly. I'll give you as many as you like."

"Well, if you can manage half a dozen—"

"A dozen, if you like."
 "Good! I say, we're getting up an orchestra to rival the Fistical Four's rotten show, and, of course, we rush to secure you first thing."

"Well, I think I may say that you don't often hear a chap play the concertina as I do," said Lacy modestly.

"I quite agree with you."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "We're giving it to-night, at seven sharp, in No. 7 Room," explained Tommy Dodd.

Lacy stared at the Modern chums.
 "Why, they'll hear it in the next room!"

"Do you think so?"
 "I'm certain of it. The partition is only lath and plaster. You know, when that ass, Talboys of the Fifth, is playing the piano in No. 8, it's as plain as anything in No. 7."

"Well, that can't be helped," said Tommy Dodd. "I dare say, if we play

orchestra," grinned Tommy Dodd. "I shall have my cornet, and you can have your trombone," he continued, addressing Tommy Doyle. "Tommy Cook can play the 'cello, and then there's the bugle we use on a paper-chase, and the castanets, too. Every little helps. We want two more instrumentalists. I say, old Towle!"

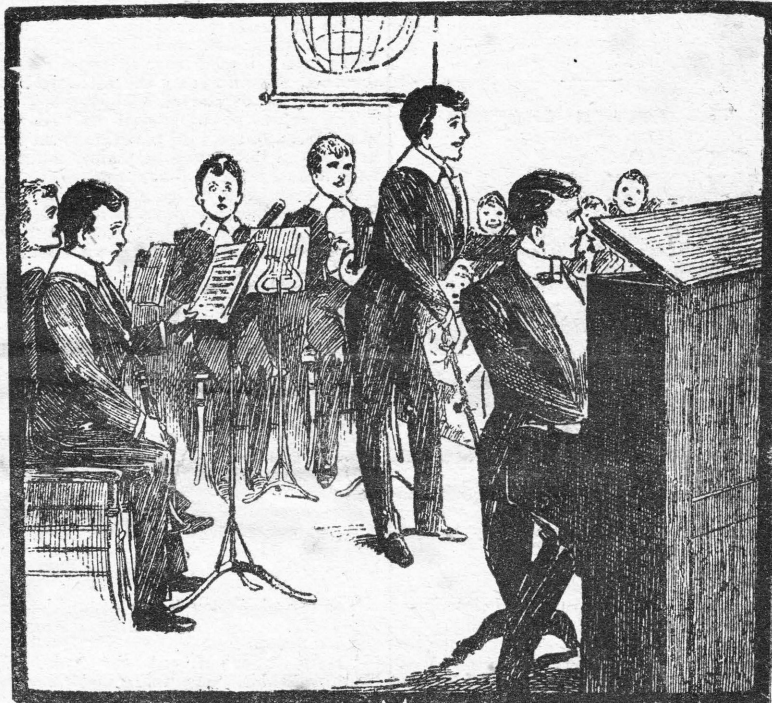
"Did you call me, Dodd?" said Towle, looking round.
 "Yes. Come into my study."
 "Right you are!"

Towle looked at the Modern chums rather wonderingly as he followed them into their study.

Tommy Dodd took the castanets out of the drawer.

"Can you use these, kid?"

"Yes; but—"
 "I'm giving an orchestral performance this evening, and I want you to play the castanets," explained Tommy Dodd. "Will you do it?"



"I am glad to see so distinguished a company gathered to listen to our modest efforts," said Jimmy Silver, gazing from the edge of the dais upon the crowded audience. "It is gratifying to me, as president of the 'Classical Musical Society.' The concert will now commence."

loud enough, their noise won't interfere with us."

"We may interfere with them."

"Of course, that's their look-out. We've got plenty to attend to, without attending to their business for them."

"Ha, ha! I suppose so. It's all right; I'll be there. We'd better lock the door before we start, though."

"I'll see to that. I can rely on you, then?"

"Yes, rather. They'll be sorry they left me out of the programme."

"Ha, ha! I think they will!"

And the Modern chums left the study eminently satisfied with themselves. They left Lacy practising on his German concertina; but whether he was playing the overture to Tannhauser arranged for that instrument, or a little thing of his own, it was impossible to tell by listening to it, and Tommy Dodd & Co. did not stay to listen, either.

"We've got to finish making up the

"But—but I've never—"
 "That's all right. All you've got to do is to keep them going, and make as much row as possible."

"Oh, I don't mind doing that!"

"Good! Be in No. 7 Room at seven sharp, then. Mind, not a word to a soul—it's a dead secret!"

"Right you are, Doddy!"

"And pass the word to Webb to come here."

Towle nodded, and departed, and a few minutes later Webb came in. Webb had scented a feed, and looked disappointed when he saw the table bare of everything but musical instruments.

"Hallo!" said Webb. "I—I thought you wanted me."

"So we do," said Tommy Dodd blandly.

"What is it, then?" said Webb.

"This is how it is," said Tommy Dodd.

"We're giving a concert this evening"

"And you want me to take part?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Webb. "I'm willing to do anything I can. I've never played any instrument, but I'm willing to try."

"Ha, ha! I want you to play this bugle."

"Blessed if I know how to, you know!"

"That's all right! It's going to be a classical concert, so it's not necessary to have any tune. You keep on blowing, that's all."

"But—but will that make any music?"

"It will make music enough for our purpose."

"Good! You can rely on me."

And Webb left the study looking decidedly pleased. The Modern chums grinned at one another.

"Now we'll look in on Leggett, and ask him to bring his mouth-organ!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Then I fancy the Modern Musical Society will be complete."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Rival Orchestras.

"GENTLEMEN—" "Hear, hear!" "I am glad to see so distinguished a company gathered to listen to our modest efforts," said Jimmy Silver, gazing from the edge of the dais upon the crowded audience in Room No. 8. "It is very gratifying to me, as founder and president of the Classical Musical Society. I am glad to see practically the whole of the Fourth Form present."

"Hear, hear!"

"I am also gratified by the presence of many members of our respected Fifth Form," continued Jimmy Silver, with a bow towards the row of seats where sat Hansom of the Fifth and his friends. "I had hoped to see the Sixth, but the Sixth are rehearsing a mouldy old Latin comedy, and so I suppose they cannot come. The loss is theirs."

"Hear, hear!"

"I am glad, however, that our honoured captain has managed to look in on us this evening," said Jimmy. "I propose to commence the proceedings by three cheers for Bulkeley, the best cricketer that ever belonged to Rookwood!"

Bulkeley laughed and coloured. The audience cheered the captain, and cheered themselves into the best of tempers.

Jimmy Silver waited for silence.

"And now, gentlemen, the concert will commence. You have doubtless read the programme in the hall. You are acquainted with the members of the orchestra, and can rely upon them to turn out really good stuff in a first-class manner. The first item will be by the orchestra, the overture 'Up North.'"

And Jimmy Silver bowed, and retired. The room was crowded, and the

audience were quite eager. They were prepared to laugh at a failure, or to cheer a success with equal impartiality. The Fourth Form were almost all there, and many youngsters from the Remove and the Third.

There were a dozen of the Fifth, with condescending smiles; and Bulkeley of the Sixth, the big, good-natured captain of Rookwood. None of the masters had accepted the kind invitation posted up in the hall.

There was a squeak from the violin, a groan from the cornet, and a rattle from the piano. The orchestra was beginning.

Talboys of the Fifth was at the piano, in evening-dress, as befitted the occasion, with a nice rose in his coat, and his hair brushed back from his forehead, and an artistic little curl straying carelessly over his brow—a careless curl that had taken him half an hour to arrange.

"Here goes!" murmured Hooker. "On the ball!"

"Play up, there!"

The orchestra played up. There was a burst of music, and a minute later there was a terrific roar in the air that drowned the efforts of the orchestra.

The audience started and stared. The crash of unmusical discordance came through the thin partition from the next room, but it was as plainly audible as if it had been in that room.

The members of the orchestra looked at one another in amazement and dismay. Exclamations of amazement were heard on all sides mingled with laughter.

The instruments stopped one by one. Still, from the adjoining room the crash proceeded. The tones of a trombone, a cello, a cornet, a bugle, a terrible concertina, and a mouth-organ were blended with the clucking of castanets and the stamping of feet.

Jimmy Silver jumped to his feet. He guessed now why the Modern chums were absent from the audience.

He strode furiously to the partition, and rapped on it with his knuckles. The audience, beginning to "tumble" to the little game, were going off into yells of laughter. But the members of the Classical Musical Society did not feel like laughing.

The rap of Jimmy Silver's knuckles on the wall was followed by the cessation of the pandemonium.

"Hallo!" called out the voice of Tommy Dodd. "Anything up?"

"Stop that row!"

"What row?"

"That fearful din you're making. We're giving a concert here."

"Rats! We're giving one here."

"You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're trying to bust our concert," said Raby.

"Rats!" called out Tommy Dodd through the partition. "We've got Mr. Manders' permission to give a concert in this room this evening. You can go and ask him. We are the Modern Musical Society, and this is our variety of music."

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

"We may not be quite in time and tune," went on Tommy Dodd. "That's because we haven't had time for rehearsals in the old tower."

The members of the Fistical Four stared at one another blankly.

"Then they knew!" muttered Lovell.

"I—I suppose so."

"Hold your row in there!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll scrag you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come and play up!" said Jimmy Silver desperately.

The audience were in convulsions. The orchestra, though with great misgivings, recommenced the overture. Hardly had the music started than a crash of discordance came from the next room.

The noise of all the instruments playing continuously, without any regard to time or tune, of course drowned the sound of an orchestra playing in tune.

The discordance was horrible, and every fellow there who had a musical ear was stopping it.

"My hat!" gasped Hansom of the Fifth. "This is rather more than a joke. I don't want my eardrums busted! Come on, you chaps, somewhere where we can get a laugh in peace!"

And the Fifth-Formers, shrieking with merriment, rushed from the room.

The orchestra, though viewing with dismay the rapid melting of their audience, played on grimly. And still from the next room came groan and crash and grunt and shriek and crash and bang. It was impossible to distinguish anything that Jimmy Silver's band were playing.

Talboys jumped up from the piano before the overture was finished.

"Oh, hang!" he exclaimed. "This is what comes of playing for you kids! I'm off!"

"Hold on, Talboys! I say, old chap. I—"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Talboys. "I'm not staying here to be deafened. I'm off!"

The audience, shrieking with laughter, followed rapidly. Jimmy Silver was desperate. But a rapid examination of the door of No. 7 showed that it was locked, and that there was no way of getting at the rival orchestra.

And the Classical Musical Society, with glum countenances, turned out the light and vacated No. 8. The performance had been a ghastly frost, and the honours remained with the Modern chums. And when the rival orchestra learned, from the silence in No. 8, that they had conquered, they laid down their instruments, and rolled on the floor, and simply yelled.

It was long before Rookwood left off laughing over the story of the rival orchestras, though it was some time before the Fistical Four could join in the laugh. But the Classical Musical Society was reorganised, with the Modern chums as members, and after that Jimmy Silver considered they would go ahead. And they did.

THE END.

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