

A SPLENDID BUDGET OF SCHOOL STORIES!

78

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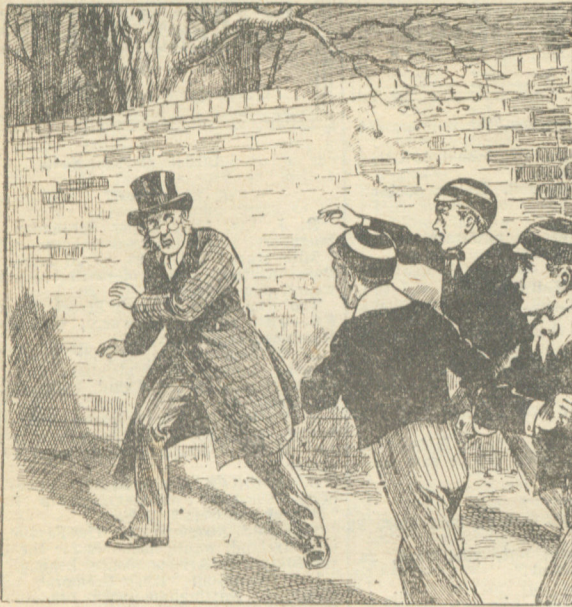
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SERIES.

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JUST IN TIME TO VOTE!

(A Remarkable Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Chopper Comes Down.

"TROUBLE for somebody!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

It looked like it.

All the Fourth Form at Rookwood, both Classical and Modern, were in the Form-room when Mr. Bootles entered.

There was a stern frown upon the brow of the Fourth-Form master.

A stern frown was so rare upon the kind face of the benevolent little Form-master that the Fourth were on the qui vive at once.

Somebody, evidently, had been "up" to something, and the "chopper" was about to come down.

There were quite a large number of uneasy consciences in the Fourth Form. Jimmy Silver & Co. and Tommy Dodd & Co. wondered whether it was their latest "scrap" that caused Mr. Bootles to frown. As a rule, the little rags between Modern and Classical were taken no notice of by the Form-master. But you never could tell. Form-masters were always an uncertain quantity.

Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, wondered whether any of his little money transactions had come to light, such as lending a shilling to a fellow who was hard-up at an interest of twopenny a week. Leggett kept his eyes on his desk, and quaked. He was always in dread of being found out.

Townsend and Topham, the dandies of the Fourth, surmised that perhaps Mr. Bootles had become aware of their "doggish" ways, and they sat looking very uneasy.

Then there was Peele, the pal of Towny and Topsy, one of the "nuts." Peele looked quite white as Mr. Bootles came in.

Mr. Bootles stood regarding his class with a grim look, little dreaming of the extraordinary number of guilty consciences before him. In the innocence of his heart, Mr. Bootles fancied there was only one guilty conscience in the Fourth—the one he had to deal with.

The juniors waited on tenter-hooks. Mr. Bootles seemed in no hurry to begin. He coughed his little dry cough significantly. A pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth-Form room.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd regarded each other with glances of eloquent sympathy. Classical and Modern ragged one another without merey out of class; but if the chopper was to come down, they could join in mutual sympathy.

"Peele!"

Mr. Bootles jerked out that name, and all the Fourth Form, with one exception, brightened more freely.

Peele was the delinquent.

The rest of the Fourth brightened up, and almost smiled. Peele did not smile, however.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"Peele! Stand out before the class!"

With dragging steps, Peele of the Fourth moved out, and stood before the grim, frowning Form-master.

"What on earth's the row?" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Peele hasn't been ragging Moderns; he's too slack."

"Betting on geegees, you bet!" murmured Lovell. "That's Peele's little game, and he's been spotted."

"Serve him right, if that's the case!" said Jimmy unsympathetically.

Mr. Bootles glanced round.

"Silence in the class!" he exclaimed.

There was dead silence. Mr. Bootles adjusted his glasses very carefully, and blinked at Peele.

"Peele!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"I have received a report from a prefect concerning you."

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Last evening," said Mr. Bootles, his voice growing deeper, "you were seen in conversation, Peele, with a man of the name of Hook—Joseph Hook—a person of the most disreputable character. This person, I understand, is a bookmaker, and is regarded as a bad character, even among men of his own profession. You were seen in conversation with him by Dickinson major. You ran away immediately, doubtless hoping to escape recognition. Dickinson major, however, recognised you. I have received this report. What have you to say, Peele?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Peele.

"I am willing to hear any explanation you have to make, Peele. Have you been engaged in any betting transactions with this man?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

"Has any money passed between you?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

"Then for what reason did you meet him?"

Townsend and Topham watched Peele with deep anxiety. They were in terror of their own little transactions with Joey Hook coming to light if Peele blurted out too much.

Peele drew a deep breath.

"I—I met him by chance, sir. He insisted upon stopping to speak to me. I—I didn't want him to—"

"Peele! You were seen in talk with him for more than five minutes—"

Peele gasped.

"I—I didn't mean to, sir, but—but he wouldn't leave me!"

"Have you ever spoken to him before, Peele?"

"No, sir!" gasped Peele.

"You have never had any dealings with him?"

"Oh, certainly not, sir!"

Jimmy Silver's lip curled involuntarily. If expulsion had been hanging over his head, Jimmy would not, and could not, have rolled

out falsehoods like that. But Peele was made of different stuff.

"I am glad of that, Peele. I accept your assurance," said Mr. Bootles, stroking his grey whiskers thoughtfully. "I trust you are speaking the truth. I cannot exonerate you, as you were greatly to blame for allowing such a character to enter into conversation with you. I shall cane you, Peele, but not severely. But, for your own sake, I shall keep you within gates for a considerable time. You will understand that you are not, for any reason whatever, to go out of school bounds until further notice. Now hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"You may go back to your place, Peele. I am glad the matter does not seem so serious as I at first feared."

Peele went back to his place without a word. His hand was tucked under his arm, and his eyes were burning.

"We will now proceed," said Mr. Bootles. And they proceeded.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Painful Duty Done.

JIMMY SILVER glanced at Peele when the Fourth Form came out of the classroom.

He was feeling a little sympathy now; to be "gated" indefinitely was a hard lot, though certainly the punishment was light enough, and most judicious. While he remained within school bounds Peele was removed from all danger of further attentions from the disreputable Mr. Hook.

Peele was looking savage and morose. "Cheer up, kid!" said Jimmy Silver, tapping him on the shoulder. "It's hard cheese, but it might have been worse, you know."

"Gated for the rest of the term!" muttered Peele.

"Oh, Bootles will come round!" said Jimmy. "Just think what might have happened if he'd known the facts."

Peele scowled.

"And I'll tell you what," said Jimmy. "Why not chuck it, and stick to games instead? Footer's better than slacking about betting on geegees, kid."

"Mind your own business!" growled Peele. "I'll do as I like, Bootles or no Bootles!"

And he stalked away angrily. Jimmy Silver looked after him, greatly inclined to take him by the scruff of the neck and mop up the passage with him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who had listened, burst into a chuckle in chorus.

Jimmy looked at them rather morosely. "What's the cackle about?" he snapped.

"Nangity boy, won't take the advice of his Uncle James!" grieved Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "The silly ass ought to be licked! He was lying to Bootles like a Prussian! We know all about his little gamings with Joey Hook, and Topham's and Topp's, too."

"Bootles will tumble some day, and make an example of them," said Lovell. "No need for you to get your wool off, Jimmy. Let's go and punt a ball about till dinner."

"What about our rehearsal for our play?" said Jimmy.

"Oh, bother the rehearsal! We can do that in the evening. Come out!"

And the Fistical Four went out. They punted a ball about in the keen air of the quadrangle, and soon forgot all about Cyril Peele. Meanwhile, Peele was surrounded by sympathetic friends. Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, and Smythe and Howard of the Shell, were full of commiseration. As Adolphus Smythe remarked, it might have happened to any one of them.

"But you should have been more careful," Peele said Adolphus. "You shouldn't have let yourself get spotted by a prefect. I never do, dear boy."

Peele grunted. "I didn't know Dickinson was coming along across that field," he said. "Confound him!"

"Yaas, confound him, certainly!" agreed Smythe. "Like his cheek, meddlin' in a fellow's private affairs. But prefects will do these things."

"It's rotten," said Townsend. "We shall all have to be pretty careful for a bit."

"Look here, you'll have to help me out," said Peele. "After what Bootles said, I can't meet Joey again for a bit—"

"By gad, you'd better not!"

"But I've got an appointment with him for this evening," said Peele.

"You can't keep it," said Smythe, with a shake of the head. "Too risky!"

"I know I can't! One of you fellows can go for me!"

The nuts of Rookwood exchanged glances. They were not unaccustomed to meeting the bookmaker on account of their own little speculations on the Turf. But the incident in the Form-room had scared them.

"There was a general shaking of heads. "Not good enough," said Adolphus Smythe decidedly. "Better give it a few days to blow over. I'm goin' to."

And Smythe and Howard strolled away, their minds evidently made up.

"Look here, Topham," said Peele angrily. "Joey Hook is coming to meet me this evening. It's a special appointment. He'll get waxy if I don't go—he may wait an hour for nothin'."

"Tain't safe," said Townsend.

"I owe him money, too," said Peele; "that's what we were talkin' about when Dickinson spotted us. You know what an uncertain beast Hook is—if he's kept waitin' for nothin', he may cut up rusty."

"You'll have to chance it," said Townsend decidedly. "It's too risky. I'm not goin' out of gates this evening."

"Same here," said Topham, with equal decision. "Don't be an ass, Peele. It's no good lookin' for trouble."

"If you fellows won't go for me, I shall have to go," said Peele. "It's more risky for me than for you."

"Well, it's your bizney, not ours," said Topham.

"And I—I can't go. I'm taking part in that rotten rehearsal."

"Bother the rehearsal!" said Townsend. "What do you take up such rot for, with those cads in the end study? I wouldn't waste time on it."

"Well, they haven't asked you to play a leading part," said Peele unpleasantly.

"Oh, rats! I'm not goin' to meet Hook, anyway."

His moody meditations were interrupted. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side came along, and they immediately surrounded Peele. The three Tommies and Towie and Lacy made a circle round the Classical junior, and he glared at them. He was in no mood for "rags" now.

"What do you want, you Modern fat-heads?" he growled. "Let me alone!"

Tommy Dodd shook his head. "Can't be did!" he replied severely. "We've got a painful duty to do."

"Let me pass!" shouted Peele savagely, striving to push his way through the circle of grinning Moderns.

But the circle stood fast, and he was pushed back.

"As top side of Rookwood," Tommy Dodd resumed calmly, "it's up to us to look after you Classical kids. You've been disgracing the Fourth, Peele. We're ashamed of you!"

"Blushing for ye, bedad!" said Tommy Doyle.

"We're shocked!" said Tommy Cook.

"Shocked isn't the word!" said Towie. "We're disgusted! Collar him!"

"Let go!" roared Peele.

"We've got a painful duty to do, Peele. I'm sorry, but England expects every Rookwood fellow to do his duty. Naughty Classical kids who talk to bookies and tell lies to their Form-masters have to be bumped, according to Chap. I., Paragraph II., Section II., Sub-Division IV. of the Suppression of Giddy Goats Act. You have broken the rules in a place within the meaning of the Act, and you are sentenced to be bumped according to law!" said Dodd solemnly. "The Court will now proceed to the execution of the sentence."

"Lemme go! Yaroooh! Rescue!" yelled Peele, as the grinning Moderns grasped him and whirled him off his feet.

Bump!

"Yow-ow-woop! Rescue!"

Jimmy Silver came up with a rush. He had spotted the little scene from a distance. His rush knocked the Moderns right and left, and they tumbled and rolled over Peele.

"Collar him!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "You Modern worms—"

"Collar the Classical ass!"

Jimmy Silver hit out valiantly, but the Moderns were too many. He was whirled off his feet in three or four pairs of hands.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"Bump him for not looking after his Classical duffers better!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "A Form-captain mustn't let silly kids go out meeting bookies. Bump him—on Peele!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele, who was scrambling up, received Jimmy Silver on his chest, and was flattened down again. Then the Modern juniors streamed away, yelling with laughter. Jimmy Silver sat on Peele's chest, dazed and gasping.

"Gerroff!" gurgled Peele. "Gerroff, you silly idiot!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Gerroff!" shrieked Peele.

Jimmy Silver scrambled off.

"Why didn't you put up a fight, you slacker?" he demanded indignantly. "We could have licked them between us!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Peele.

He shook an ungrateful list at Jimmy Silver, and limped away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Interrupted Rehearsal.

RHEARSAL after tea," said Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four came out of the Form-room after afternoon lessons.

Jimmy Silver was very keen about the rehearsal.

It was Jimmy who was the founder and moving spirit of the Rookwood Classical Players; and it was Jimmy who had written the great comedy with which the Players were shortly to stagger humanity.

Mr. Bootles had helped in that comedy—quite unconsciously. Mr. Bootles was a kind little gentleman, and Fourth-Formers liked him and respected him greatly. But it could not be denied that the little gentleman simply lent himself to caricature. He was not much taller than the juniors, though considerably wider. His grey whiskers and the glasses perched on his nose were the easiest things in the world to imitate. And Jimmy—rather thoughtlessly, perhaps—had introduced a comic character into his comedy, who was the lifelike image of Mr. Bootles.

Peele of the Fourth was to play the part. Peele was a slacker in most things; but he

had a taste for amateur theatricals, and he was clever at make-up. When he was in the "clobber" and make-up of the comic master in the play, he was as like Mr. Bootles as Mr. Bootles' twin-brother would have been, if he had had one.

And he could very cleverly imitate Mr. Bootles' way of poking his head forward like a tortoise, and blinking over his glasses, and saying "What—what!" in a high-pitched voice.

Peele did not get on well with the Fistical Four, but in making up a caste for the great comedy, entitled, "Nice Boys at School," personal considerations of that kind were banished. Peele was the cleverest fellow for the part, so he was selected, and as it was the "fattest" part in the piece, Peele naturally jumped at it.

When the play came off, Mr. Bootles was not likely to see it; but even if he did, he was not likely to recognise the caricature of himself. As Jimmy sagely remarked, Bootles hadn't the faintest idea what a funny merchant he was. He would probably have regarded the character as exceedingly comic, never dreaming that it bore any resemblance to himself. Which was all to the good, for the merry juniors would have sacrificed the most effective character in the play rather than have hurt the kind gentleman's feelings.

Amateur theatricals filled the long evenings very pleasantly, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were very keen about their play—though Lovell and Raby and Newcome agreed that Jimmy was an ass to assign the "fat" part to Peele. (Lovell and Raby and Newcome were quite sure that each of them could play it better; though they had doubts about one another. Oswald, too, felt quite equal to the part, and so did Flynn and Jones minor. But Jimmy Silver's word was law.)

Peele joined the Fistical Four in the hall, with a clouded brow.

"What about the rehearsal?" he asked. "Is it coming off this evening?"

"Yes, rather," said Jimmy, with a stare. "Rehearsals every day now; we've got to get into order, you know."

"That's all right," said Peele. "Suppose we have it early. I—I've got some extra French to do with Mossoo after tea."

"Well, I don't mind," said Jimmy. "What do you fellows say?"

"All serene!"

"Might have punted the ball about a little," said Lovell.

"Well, it's early or not at all, so far as I'm concerned," said Peele. "And I'm keen about the play."

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver proceeded to call together the other members of the caste of "Nice Boys at School." A box-room had been selected for the rehearsal—quiet and secluded, and not liable to interruption. Rehearsals in the Common-room were subject to merry interruptions from the Moderns.

The Fistical Four, and Peele and Flynn and Oswald and Jones minor were all there, and Townsend joined them.

Townsend had been offered a small part, which he had refused with disdain, but on second thoughts he had taken it.

Considering that they were only a junior club, the Rookwood Players had quite a large stock of effects. There were quite a number of beards and moustaches, and wigs and spectacles, and coats and trousers, and other articles, in the property-box.

It was a dress-rehearsal, and the juniors proceeded to make themselves up.

Peele's part was certainly the piece de resistance.

Clad in a man's clothes, padded out to a suitable size, with elevators in his boots, he looked as big as Mr. Bootles. With his face made up, and artistic wrinkles added, and grey whiskers, and glasses perched on his nose, he looked wonderfully like the Fourth-Form master, and with an old mortar-board belonging to Mr. Bootles himself, the resemblance was complete.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he watched him. "It's jolly good, Peele!" he said. "Blessed if a chap wouldn't almost take you for Bootles!"

"Yes, I must say it's rather good!" Lovell had to admit. "Not exactly as I should do it, but good."

A remark which caused Peele to sniff.

"Nice Boys at School" was in full process of rehearsal, when steps were heard outside, and a whispering voice:

"This is where the fatheads are!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Modern cads!" he muttered.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

It was a Modern raid. Tommy Dodd & Co. had evidently "nosed out" the secret retreat of the Rookwood Players, and were on the war-path.

"The rotters!" said Lovell. "If there's a rag here, the props will be mucked up."

Jimmy Silver turned out the gas.

"Quiet!" he whispered. "We don't want a scrap now, while we're in costume. Don't breathe!"

The Classical juniors remained quiet. The footsteps were still audible in the passage without, and the door suddenly opened.

"Not here," came the voice of Tommy Cook. "There's no light here."

"Faith, there was a light under the door, Tommy, a few minutes ago!"

"They've turned it out," said Tommy Dodd. "Somebody's here, anyway. Strike a match."

Scratch! The light flickered out. The Moderns crowded in the doorway peered into the box-room.

Peele, struck by a sudden inspiration, stepped forward into the dim light.

"Boys!" he exclaimed, in a high-pitched voice, in imitation of Mr. Bootles. "Boys! What does this mean? What—what!"

"Faith, it's Bootles!"

"Cave!"

The match went out instantly. There was a sound of gasping breath and scurrying feet in the passage, and then silence. The Moderns were gone.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had vanished with remarkable suddenness.

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

"My hat! Peele, old chap, that was a corking good idea! My aunt! They took you for Bootles! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused the Classics.

Peele grinned.

"Better shove a trunk against the door, as there's no key," he remarked. "They might come back."

"Good egg!"

A big trunk was backed up against the door; but the Moderns did not come back.

Having discovered their Form-master, as they supposed, in the box-room, they were not likely to venture there again intent on a "rag."

And the rehearsal of "Nice Boys at School" went through without a hitch to a successful conclusion.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Peele's Little Gams.

"WHY don't you change, Peele?" Townsend asked the question.

The rehearsal being over, Jimmy Silver & Co. were gone, but Peele, still in his disguise, lingered. He was seated on a trunk, apparently deep in thought.

Townsend remained with his chum after the others were gone.

Peele looked up, grinning.

"Those Modern cads took me for Bootles," he said.

"Yaas, in a bad light," said Townsend. Townsend was of opinion that he was a more suitable person to play the comic master in the comedy. "They wouldn't if the gas had been on."

"Well, they took me for him, anyway!" snapped Peele. "I'm almost his image in this rig."

"He lends himself to it, with his looks," remarked Townsend pleasantly. "Anybody could make up as Bootles, with a chivvy and whiskers like his!"

"Oh, rats! I'm not braggin', you ass!"

"What are you doin', then?"

"I'm thinkin', I've got to get out this evening to meet Hook, and it's risky."

"Too jolly risky for me!" said Townsend, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You're a fool if you go."

"I've got to."

"All the prefects will be keepin' an eye on you for days," said Townsend. "If you're seen out in the quad after dark, you'll be ordered back into the House."

"I know. But suppose I go like this?"

Townsend jumped.

"Like that?" he gasped.

"Why not?" said Peele argumentatively.

"Old Bootles has gone out this evening. He went out soon after lessons. It's his evening for whist in Combe, you know. So he couldn't see. Any chap who saw me would simply think it was Bootles."

"Naw, in a good light!" said Townsend obstinately.

"Well, I'd keep-out of a good light."

"Well, you-might risk it," said Townsend.

"Blessed if I'd like to go out of doors in that rig, though!"

"The PENNY POPULAR.—No. 43.

"It's after dark," said Peele. "I don't see there's much risk—less than going in the ordinary way, to."

"Well, that's so. But—but Joey Hook will take you for Bootles if he sees you, and he'll clear off."

"That would be all right. He'd know then it was impossible for me to get out, if he thought Bootles was on the watch. What I'm afraid of is the beast thinkin' I'm leavin' him hangin' up, and gettin' ratty."

Townsend burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Oh, my hat! Peele—his voice sunk to an excited whisper—"Peele, old chap, if he takes you for Bootles—"

"Well," said Peele, "what are you cackling at? Suppose he does?"

"Don't you see?" whispered Townsend excitedly. "If he takes you for Bootles, you could keep it up that you are Bootles—"

"What-a-at!"

"And make a bet with him as Bootles, and—"

and tell him to come up to Rookwood!" gasped Townsend. "It would make old Bootles' hair simply curl, and perhaps get him into a row with the Head!"

"By gad!" ejaculated Peele.

"You owe him one for gatin' you," grinned Townsend; "and I owe him one for likin' me the other day. We both owe him one. You can pay off both."

Peele's eyes gleamed behind the spectacles.

"What a wheeze!" he ejaculated.

"Now, I come to look at you; he's sure to take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "The Modern cads did, with a match alight. Well, Hook will see you in the dark—there's only a moon, and there's trees over the stile, you know. I don't see why he should have the least doubt. Bootles being supposed to be on the prowl there will be your excuse for not comin', and at the same time—"

Peele chuckled.

"Blessed if I don't try it!" he said.

"Just walk out of the House, and see if the fellows don't take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "That'll be a test."

"Good! You go and sneak one of Bootles' coats for me—that giddy ulster with the big check that can be seen half a mile on a dark night," said Peele. "He went out in a mac, so it's in his room."

"Right-ho!"

Townsend hurried out of the box-room, and returned in a few minutes with the check ulster. Peele slipped it on, still keeping on the mortar-board. Then he went down the stairs.

His heart was beating a little faster. But he had to pass through the junior quarters first, and detection meant no serious consequences. If he passed muster there, he had no doubts about going farther.

He made his way towards the big staircase through the Shell passage. Adolphus Smythe and Tracy and Howard of the Shell were chatting in the passage, and they stepped aside respectfully for him to pass. There was no suspicion in their looks. Peele stopped to speak to them.

"Smythe!" he said, in a high-pitched voice.

"Yaas, sir?" said Smythe.

"Have you been smoking?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"What about that packet of gold-tipped you had in your study this afternoon, Smythe?"

Adolphus started. He had supposed that that packet of gold-tipped was known only to himself and his friends.

"Oh, sir! I—I—" he stammered.

Peele chuckled, and spoke in his natural voice:

"All serene, Smythe; I'm not Bootles."

"By gad!" gasped Smythe.

"Peele!" exclaimed Tracy.

"Yes, rather! Bootles is out. I'm goin' to meet Joey. I think I shall pass now," said Peele, grinning. "Ta-ta!"

He walked on, with Mr. Bootles' solemn walk. He left the nuts of the Shell staring blankly.

"By gad!" said Adolphus. "What a nerve! Blessed if I didn't think it was Bootles, and he'd bowled me out! Give me quite a shock, by gad!"

Peele went down the big staircase, and hurried into the quad. He did not wish to linger in a clear light. Outside, in the dusk, Bulkeley of the Sixth passed him, coming in, and saluted him unsuspectingly.

Peele hurried on to the gates. He had intended to clamber out over the wall, but his confidence in his disguise was complete now. The gates had been locked since the real Mr. Bootles had gone out, and Peele called the porter.

Old Mack blinked at him. He had seen Mr. Bootles go out a couple of hours before, but had not seen him come in again.

"Kindly unlock the gates, Mack!" squeaked Peele. "I have mistaid my key to the side-gate."

"Yessir!" said Mack.

He brought out his keys and unlocked the gates, and Peele passed out into the dusky road. The gates clanged shut behind him.

Peele burst into a chuckle. After running the gauntlet in that way, he had no doubt whatever of passing himself off to Joey Hook as Mr. Bootles. And he walked cheerily down the shadowed lane to the stile.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Turf Transaction.

"MY heye!"

Joey Hook was leaning on the stile. He was smoking a big black cigar, the fiery end of which

glowed through the gloom. He was waiting for Peele of the Fourth, and growing impatient and bad-tempered. Peele owed him a little bill of money lost on geeges, and Mr. Hook was anxious for a settlement. He was inwardly resolving to make matters warm for Master Peele if he did not turn up soon, when he spotted a gentleman in an ulster and a mortar-board bearing down on him.

Mr. Hook had seen the Fourth-Form master of Rookwood many times, and he knew the little, portly figure, the gleaming spectacles, the little jerks of the head, and the check ulster.

He murmured "My heye!" and went on smoking his cigar. Joey Hook's connection with the sporting fellows of Rookwood was, of course, a dead secret from the school authorities, but it looked to Mr. Hook as if something had come out now, and the Form-master was coming to interview him—probably to threaten him. Mr. Hook's unprepossessing face set doggedly at that idea.

The new-come halted and peered at the scowling bookmaker over his glasses, in Mr. Bootles' well-known manner.

"Ah, you are Mr. Hook! What—what?" he asked.

"S'pose I am?" said Mr. Hook surlily.

"I have come out to see you."

"Which I ain't asked you to do, Mr. Bootles!"

"Pray do not misunderstand me, Mr. Hook! My object is not of an unfriendly nature."

"Wot?" said Joey Hook in surprise.

"I have reason to believe that a boy of my Form had an appointment here, and he is forbidden to leave school bounds."

"Ho!" said Mr. Hook, surprised to receive that information from the master of the Fourth. He had fully expected a "slanging."

"I took this opportunity of seeing you, Mr. Hook. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance—what, what?"

"My heye!" said Joey Hook.

"The fact is," went on the supposed Form-master, sinking his voice. "I have a fancy for a certain horse in the Snooker's Plate to-morrow. I understand that you are a bookmaker—what, what?"

"Yes, sir," said Joey Hook, astounded, but all civility now.

In an underhand way he had done business with Rookwood fellows of a sporty and shady character. But he had never dreamed of doing business with a Rookwood master. Naturally, the prospect delighted him. Mr. Bootles would probably be worth pounds, where his youthful dupes were worth shillings; and with a Form-master on his books his dealings with Smythe & Co., and Knowles and his set, would be on a much more secure footing.

"You are open to take bets?"

"This ain't a place within the meanin' of the Act, sir," said Joey Hook, with a grin. "But bless yer 'eart, sir, I'm always ready to do business with a real gentleman! Wot's your fancy for the Snooker Plate?"

"I really am not very well acquainted with racing matters," said the little gentleman.

"But a friend has given me a tip—a very valuable tip, he said. Why should I not make a little money—what, what?"

"No reason at all, sir," said Joey Hook, "and very pleased and honoured, sir, to 'cip you in any way. Which I take this werry kindly, sir! And I'm entirely at your service."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Hook—very kind! I understand that there is a horse called Wood Pigeon running in the Snooker's Plate?"

Joey Hook suppressed a grin. Mr. Bootles was quite correct; but Joey was aware that Wood Pigeon was a rank outsider, without the slightest prospect of getting anywhere near the winning-post. He was willing to take Mr. Bootles' money up to any figure on Wood Pigeon.



"'Ave me thrown out, will yer, you walehing old spadger!" yelled Mr. Hook. "Why, I'll make mincemeat of yer!" "Help!" shrieked Mr. Bootles, as the enraged Mr. Hook rushed at him. "Help!" (See page 19.)

"Yes, sir; and a fine 'orse he is!" said Mr. Hook mendaciously. "Is that your fancy, sir? I see you know somethin'!"

"Really, I know very little of the matter; but I have received a tip from a racing friend. I desire to lay a bet on Wood Pigeon."

"I'm your man, sir, though you'll rook me; I've no doubt about that. But Joey Hook never refuses a sporting offer."

"What are the odds against Wood Pigeon?"

Mr. Hook was aware that the odds were seven to one against, but he replied, with perfect composure:

"Three to one agin, sir."

"Dear me! I understood that the odds were larger!"

"It's leaked out that he's a dark 'orse, you see, sir," explained Joey Hook.

"What, what! Oh, I see! Very well. Are you prepared to take me at that figure?"

"Up to any amount, sir!"

"Ah! My means do not allow me to make large bets!" said the little gentleman. "I desire to lay ten pounds."

Joey Hook's eyes glistened. Ten pounds did not often come his way so easily as that.

"I'll take you, sir. 'And me the money, and I'll book the bet!"

"Ah! Is it necessary for me to put the money down? I did not think of that. I have had little to do with racing matters."

"Bless your 'eart, sir, I'll trust a genelman like you, Mr. Bootles!" said Joey Hook. "I'll make a note of the bet, and that's all right. It Wood Pigeon loses you pay me ten quid, if he wins I 'and you thirty!"

"Done!"

Wood Pigeon had no chance of winning the race. But Mr. Hook did not think it necessary to acquaint his client with that little circumstance.

"I'll see you again to-morrow, arter the race," said Joey Hook. "Where shall I see you, sir?"

"Oh, come up to the school! Come up as early as you can after the race. I shall be anxious to know the result."

Joey Hook started.

"Up to the school, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Ask for me—Mr. Bootles!"

"But—but—"

"Ah! Perhaps you will be busy to-morrow—is that it?"

"Nunno, sir; but—but it won't do you no good for me to come a-visiting you at the school, will it, sir?"

"Ah! Ahem! But I shall explain the matter. Let me see. I shall explain that you have called to assure me that you have no connection whatever with any Rookwood boys."

Joey Hook chuckled. He had never suspected the master of the Fourth, who looked so simple and innocent, of being so ingenious a rascal.

"That's good, sir—that's prime!" he said.

"He, he, he! I'll come, sir, with pleasure! Wot time would suit you?"

"Shall we say five? Lessons will be over before then."

"Rely on me, sir."

"Thank you so much! And—and you will bring the money with you—the thirty pounds—if Wood Pigeon wins? I am sure he will win!"

"Depend on it, sir!"

"Thank you! Good-night! I must hurry back."

"Good-night, Mr. Bootles!"

The little gentleman hurried back towards the school, and Joey Hook blew out a cloud of smoke, and grinned. If by any wonderful chance Wood Pigeon should pull off the race, Mr. Bootles had as much chance of seeing Joey Hook at Rookwood as of seeing the

Sultan of Turkey there. But Mr. Hook was not doubtful about that. He was booked to visit Mr. Bootles on the morrow to collect ten pounds. It was a very pleasant prospect for Mr. Hook.

It was a very pleasant prospect for Peele of the Fourth, too. Mr. Bootles would certainly have a most uncomfortable time. And Joey Hook, in all probability, would be kicked out of the place—a just punishment for worrying Peele for his little debts, in Peele's opinion.

So both parties were satisfied.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise Visit.

"H OLD on!" whispered Jimmy Silver. The Fistical Four were taking a sprint round the quadrangle before supper in their study.

The sound of someone dropping in from the school wall caught Jimmy's keen ear. The chums halted.

"What is it?" asked Raby.

"Some giddy kipper been breaking bounds!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "One of the Giddy Goats, I expect. Collar him and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Fistical Four rushed to the wall. A dark figure had dropped in there from the top of the wall, and was hurrying off. The four Classics closed round him.

"Not so fast!" said Jimmy Silver. "What—what—whitch—Mr. Bootles! I—I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

The figure had drawn back, panting with alarm. In the dusk the juniors recognised their Form-master, and they stood transfixed. For Mr. Bootles to enter the school by climbing over the wall like a truant fag was simply astounding.

"Jimmy Silver!" gasped the new-comer. "Peel!" yelled Jimmy, recognising the voice.

"Peel!" howled Lovell. "You've been out like that?"

"Let me pass!" panted Peel. "I want to get these things off before Bootles comes in."

"Well, you silly ass, what have you been up to?"

"Only—only a lark!"

Peel hurried away, the Fistical Four allowing him to pass. He disappeared round the back of the house. Peel was uncertain whether Mr. Bootles had yet come in or not, so he had not ventured to present himself at the gates. And he meant to get in by the box-room window and leave his theatrical "clobber" there.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another in astonishment.

"The duffer's been out in his Bootles' rig," said Newcome. "What on earth's the little game?"

"Something fishy!" growled Jimmy Silver. The chums of the Fourth had little doubt about that, though they could not guess what was the "little game."

They resumed their sprit round the quadrangle, very much puzzled.

When they came into the end study a little later they found Peel waiting for them there—in Etons, and with all traces of his disguise removed.

Peel gave them an anxious look.

"You needn't jaw about seeing me come in," he began.

"We're not going to jaw about it," said Jimmy Silver curtly. "But what rotten game have you been playing?"

"Nothing. I had to see somebody, and as I was gated I thought it safer to go out like that. That's all."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing."

"Rats!" said the Fistical Four, with one voice.

Peel shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, don't jaw about it, that's all," he said, and he quitted the study.

In the dormitory that night it was to be observed that Peel and Townsend were grinning at one another, seemingly enjoying a joke that was confined to their two selves.

"What's the giggle about?" Lovell asked them.

"Nothin'," said Townsend.

"Then what are you cackling like a pair of chattering monkeys for?"

"Just caught sight of your face, that's all," said Peel cheerily. "It always has that effect on me."

And Lovell snorted and dropped the subject.

The next morning the Nuts of the Fourth still seemed to be in a state of great hilarity. Topham was a sharer in the joke now, and Smythe & Co. of the Shell. But outside their own circle nothing was said.

The Giddy Goats of Rookwood were looking forward keenly to Joey Hook's visit in the afternoon. What Mr. Bootles would do when the rascally bookmaker came up to the school and claimed acquaintance with him, they could not guess. The poor little gentleman would certainly be in a wild flurry.

"An' he's bound to come," chuckled Peel. "The bet's laid on Wood Pigeon, and Wood Pigeon hasn't an earthly. Hookey will come up for ten quid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And there'll be a row if he doesn't get it," chuckled Peel. "He may dot Bootles in the eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fellow would slaughter him," said Smythe.

"Serve him right! He's a low beast, and he's been worryin' me for money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll keep a bit out of sight, though," said Townsend. "He might expect us to help him, and might get ratty and blow the gaff on us. But, my hat! It will be worth seein', I'm anxious for him to come."

Never had lessons seemed so long to the nuts of Rookwood as they seemed that day. But everything comes to an end at last; and at last lessons were over.

Then the Nuts waited about near the gate—waiting for Joey Hook. Jimmy Silver & Co. were punting a ball about near the gate, when a fat, red-faced man, with a bowler-hat cocked rakishly on his bullet head, came in. The chums of the Fourth forgot their footer in their astonishment at seeing Joey Hook within the walls of Rookwood.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 48.

"That boulder here!" ejaculated Lovell. Old Mack ran out of his lodge.

"Here, stop, you!" he called out.

"Whatever you want here?"

Joey Hook gave him a lofty glance.

"I've called to see Mr. Bootles, by appointment," he replied. "And jest you mind your manners, my man, or you can look for the sack!"

"My word!" murmured Old Mack, quite overcome.

And Mr. Hook, with a strutting gait, walked on towards the School House.

Eyes were fixed on him from every side. The disreputable bookmaker was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood, and most of the Rookwood fellows knew him by sight. At the door of the School House Bulkeley of the Sixth met him.

"Here, hold on!" said Bulkeley. "What are you doing here?"

"Called to see Mr. Bootles, that's wot I'm doing here," said Mr. Hook independently. "Gentleman's at home, I suppose?"

"He's in his study," said Bulkeley suspiciously. "You've got no business with him, I know that."

"That's all you know," said Mr. Hook. "I'll take it kindly if you'll show me where the gentleman's study is, and you can see for yourself, young 'opeful."

"I'll do that!" said Bulkeley.

The captain of Rookwood led the way in. Jimmy Silver stared at his chums, and gasped.

"Well, that beats the band!" he exclaimed. "That awful blackguard calling on old Bootles! Well, my hat!"

"Nice example to us!" chuckled Townsend. "I'm shocked at Bootles!"

"Shockin', by gad!" said Adolphus Smythe. "What's Rookwood comin' to, when Form masters do these things, dear boys?"

"There must be some mistake," said Jimmy Silver.

"He's gone in, anyway," said Lovell. "I can't catch on. I dare say it's pure cheek. Let's hang round in case Bootles wants him kicked out."

"Good egg! Come on, Smythe!"

"I wouldn't touch such a person for anything," dear boy," said Adolphus.

But the Fistical Four, and a crowd of other fellows, were quite keen to touch Mr. Hook, if they had half a chance; and they crowded round joyously, sincerely hoping that there was some kicking-out to be done.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Astounding Interview.

"WHAT—what!" said Mr. Bootles.

W Bulkeley had tapped at the Form-master's door and opened it. Mr. Hook stepped past him jauntily, and entered the room.

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet in blank astonishment. If the Kaiser had stepped into his room, instead of a lesser rascal like Mr. Hook, it could hardly have astonished him more.

"What—what! Bless my soul! You are—Shook—I mean Hook? Your name is Hook, I—I believe. What—what!"

"That there's my name, sir," said Joey cheerfully. "I've called on business, sir."

"If you want that person shown out, Mr. Bootles, I am here," said Bulkeley.

"Bless my soul!"

"Which I've called to explain to Mr. Bootles that there ain't no grounds for supposin' that I got any dealings with his young gentlemen," said Mr. Hook, with dignity. "The gentleman's goin' to give me a 'earin', and you needn't wait, you young spadger!"

"Oh, I—I see!" said Mr. Bootles. "I comprehend! Thank you, Bulkeley; you may leave the man here!"

"Very well, sir," said the Rookwood captain, and he retired and closed the door after him.

Mr. Bootles blinked nervously at Joey Hook over his spectacles. He felt decidedly uneasy at being shut up in the study alone with such a character.

"You have—or—called—" he began. He broke off, in sheer amazement, as Joey Hook winked at him.

Mr. Bootles could scarcely believe his eyes. But it was an unmistakable wink.

This frowsy, beery-looking, rakish ruffian was winking at the master of the Fourth in his own study! Mr. Bootles gazed at him open-mouthed.

"What—what!" he said feebly.

"Rely on Joey 'ook to play the game," said Mr. Hook affably. "I remembered wot

you told me, sir, and I've stuffed up that young spadger."

"What—what I told you?" stammered Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir; the tip you gave me last night. A nod's as good as a wink to Joey 'ook."

"I must be dreaming," said Mr. Bootles to himself.

"I got rather bad news for you, sir," said Mr. Hook. "I'm sorry to say as Wood Pigeon has lost."

"Wood Pigeon!"

"Yessir."

"You—you have lost a wood-pigeon?" said Mr. Bootles, unable to understand. "You have come here to look for a pigeon, do you mean? You—you suspect that some Rookwood boy has destroyed your pigeon with a catapult, perhaps. In that case, I am bound to hear your complaint."

Joey Hook wondered whether the Form-master had been drinking.

He looked very red and flurried, and his words were incomprehensible to the bookmaker. Joey Hook's were equally incomprehensible to the amazed Form-master.

"I ain't talking about no pigeon," said Joey.

"But—but you spoke of a pigeon—a wood-pigeon—lost, I think you said."

"I mean the 'orse."

"The—the horse?"

"Yes, suttin'ly."

"The horse is lost! What horse? Your horse? I do not understand you, Mr. Hook," said the little gentleman, trying to pull himself together. "I trust you have not come here with a misdirected sense of humour."

"Wot!" said Joey Hook, puzzled.

"You have stated that a pigeon was lost, and now you state that a horse has been lost. In either case, how does the matter concern me?"

"Blessed if I ketches on!" said the puzzled Joey. "It's your 'orse that has lost."

"My horse!"

"Suttin'ly."

"You are dreaming," said Mr. Bootles. "I do not possess a horse. It is many years since I have given up equestrian exercises."

"Wot!"

"If you have found a horse, and are under the impression that it belongs to me, I can only point out that it is a mistake. I do not possess a horse."

"What the 'oly smoke is he gettin' at?" said Mr. Hook. "Look 'ere, Mr. Bootles, there ain't nobody 'ere but our two selves. I come 'ere to tell you that your 'orse has lost."

"I must request you to retire from my study. I repeat that I have no such animal in my possession. I can only conclude that you are not sober."

"Your 'orse, Wood Pigeon!" howled the puzzled Mr. Hook. "He's lost! Have you forgotten? Wood Pigeon is the 'orse."

"Pray do not be so absurd, sir. How can a pigeon be a horse?"

"The name of the 'orse!" roared Mr. Hook.

"Oh, I—I see! Are you alluding to a racehorse?"

"Course I am! Your 'orse!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Bootles. "Do you think I am connected with horse-racing? I should be ashamed to have any connection with such a disreputable pastime. I have never possessed a racehorse, and should decline to do so if one were offered me as a gift."

"Orf 'is 'ead!" murmured Mr. Hook.

"Fairly orf 'is blooming onion!"

"And now, sir, as you seem to have made a mistake, I beg you to retire from my study."

"Not without the ten quid," said Joey Hook.

"What—what!"

"You owe me ten quid."

"Am I dreaming?" said Mr. Bootles, addressing space. "This—this person states that I owe him money! I must be dreaming!"

"Oh, come off!" said Joey Hook angrily.

He had been amazed at first, but he was growing suspicious now. It occurred to him that Mr. Bootles had already learned the result of the race, and intended to deny the whole transaction and refuse to pay up. That bare idea made Mr. Hook tremble with wrath. He had done a good deal of welshing in his time, but it was not palatable to be welshed himself.

"I request you to go!" said Mr. Bootles mildly.

"And I requests you to pay up," said Joey Hook. "You owe me ten quid. You'd 'ad took the thirty fast enough if the 'orse had won."

"What—what!"

"Wood Pigeon!" shrieked Joey Hook.

"I can only conclude that you are intoxicated. Unless you leave my study immediately, I shall have to call for assistance, and have you ejected!"

Joey Hook's beery face became purple.

"Ave me ejected!" he roared. "Oh, you will, will yer? Without paying me my money—wot!"

"I certainly shall pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing," said Mr. Bootles, with spirit. "I am astounded at your impudence!"

"So you want to deny making the bet—is that it?" shouted Joey Hook. "That's why you ain't no money with you yesterday—hey!—so that you could erag out of it if the 'orse didn't get 'ome! Weisler!"

"What—what!"

"I'm re for ten quids, what I 'ave won fair and square, a-risking of my hown 'ard-earned money," said Joey Hook. "And, wot's more, you spadger, I ain't a-goin' without the spondulies, so I can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Are you mad?" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "Are you drunk, sir? Do you mean to accuse me, a master of Rookwood, of making a bet—of having any concern whatever with so rascally a transaction as a bet?"

"Oh, come off!" said Joey Hook. "That won't do for me. You laid the bet fair and square—one agin three on Wood Pigeon for the Snooker's Plate. I reckoned as you was a gentleman, and would pay up. And I'm 'ere for the money, and I ain't goin' without it."

"You must be mad! Dare you assert that I have laid a bet with you?" raved Mr. Bootles.

"You know you 'ave, you fat little spadger!"

"Ruffian! Leave my study!"

"Not without the spondulies!"

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet, almost trembling with wrath and indignation.

"Insulting rascal! Go! Go at once, or I will have you thrown from the door!"

Joey Hook jumped up, too, as enraged as Mr. Bootles. The Form-master backed away as a dirty fist was flourished in his face.

"Ave me thrown out, will yer, you wetshing old spadger!" yelled Mr. Hook. "Why, I'll make mince-meat of yer!"

"Control yourself!" gasped Mr. Bootles, as a murmur of voices was heard under his open window. "How dare you make a disturbance in my study? Go! I command you! Go!"

"Har' you goin' to pay up, or har' you not?"

"I will pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing!" Mr. Bootles rang his bell violently. "Go, before I have you thrown out, you vile ruffian!"

"Then I'll take it outer yer 'ide!" roared the enraged Mr. Hook, and he rushed at the Form-master.

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Bootles, as he skipped round the table. "Help!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Little Liveliness.

"RESOLVE!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy Silver's idea of "hanging round" in case there was any klicking-out to be done had been a happy thought.

At the first call from the alarmed Form-master Jimmy came scrambling headlong through the open window.

He rolled into the study, head first, with a bump; but the captain of the Fourth did not care for a bump. He was on his feet again in a twinkling, and rushing to the rescue. After him, scrambling wildly through the window, came his chums, and half the Classical Fourth after them.

Well was it for Mr. Bootles that his devoted Form were at hand.

Joey Hook, almost blind with rage—for naturally nothing infuriates a swindler so much as being swindled, and Mr. Hook was fully convinced that Mr. Bootles was swindling him—almost stuttering with fury, the bookmaker chased Mr. Bootles round the study table, and caught him.

Mr. Bootles was not built for contests of that sort. He had no chance whatever against Joey Hook.

He fairly collapsed in the grasp of the infuriated bookmaker, and it would have gone hard with him had not rescue been at hand.

But just as Joey Hook grasped the Form-master, Jimmy Silver grasped Joey Hook.

He threw his arm round Hook's neck from behind, and dragged him backwards with the sudden attack.

The boy and the man crashed to the floor together.

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy. "Pile in, the Fourth!"

Jimmy and the furious rascal were rolling over on the floor, fighting furiously. But Lovell and Raby were in the study now, and they fairly jumped on Mr. Hook. Newcome was only a second later, and he piled in with both fists. Oswald and Flynn came next, all struggling to get hold of Mr. Hook. The unfortunate blackguard simply disappeared under the swarming juniors.

Mr. Bootles stood looking on, dazed and palpitating, almost thinking that the whole scene was some dreadful dream.

Outside, in the quad, fellows were shouting. The study window was blocked with active juniors swarming to the rescue. The door was thrown suddenly open, and Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, strode in, and nearly trod on the struggling head on the floor, and backed away just in time. The Head's face was like thunder.

"What does this mean?" he shouted. "Mr. Bootles, this scene in your study—this disgraceful scene—that man, sir, whom I saw enter—his voice, sir, could be heard all over the school! What does it mean, Mr. Bootles?"

"We've got him, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bootles gasped spasmodically.

"Dr. Chisholm, you cannot imagine I asked that man to come here! He has forced himself into my study, insulted me most dreadfully, and attacked me—assaulted me, sir! I—I am astounded—stunned! I—I presume he is violently intoxicated! I shall appeal to the police for protection! I—I—I—" Mr. Bootles' voice failed him, and he sank, palpitating, into a chair.

"Got him, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, looking up. He was seated on Mr. Hook's head, and the wretched Mr. Hook was gasping fearfully. "He insulted Mr. Bootles, sir, and we thought we had better interfere."

"Quite so—quite so, Silver! You have acted very well," said the Head. "This scene is unparalleled. The audacity of the man to come here! Bless my soul! He must be ejected at once, and I will communicate with the police."

"Groooogh!" came from Mr. Hook. "Yoop! You young villain—Yoop!"

"What language!" gasped the Head. "Bulkeley—Neville—Dickinson"—the prefects were hurrying up—"do you—do you think you would be equal to removing that drunken ruffian from the premises?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Bulkeley cheerfully. "Quite easily, sir! You can leave him to us, you kids!"

Somewhat reluctantly, Jimmy Silver & Co. allowed the Sixth-Formers to deprive them of their prey. Mr. Hook, stuttering and gasping, completely winded, was bundled out of the study in the grasp of the big seniors, and yanked bodily out of the House. There were loud cheers in the quadrangle as he was whirled down the gates, and pitched into the road.

In the Form-master's study the furred Mr. Bootles turned to Jimmy Silver & Co. with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

"My dear boys," he said, "thank you—thank you! I am sorry to see your nose is swollen, Silver. I might have been seriously injured if you had not come so promptly to my assistance. My dear boys, I thank you!"

"Not at all, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "You can always depend on the Classics, sir."

And the heroes of the Fourth marched off, feeling very pleased with themselves, and leaving Mr. Bootles still palpitating.

The strange affair caused quite a sensation in Rookwood. In Smythe's study, the Classical nuts howled with laughter over it, till they howled themselves almost hoarse. The other fellows were puzzled as to why Mr. Hook had come. But Peele and his friends weren't puzzled—they knew. But after some reflection, Jimmy Silver & Co. were no longer in the dark. From what they had heard the bookmaker say, they gathered that he had come under a mistaken impression—and they remembered Peele's expedition in disguise as Mr. Bootles—and they put two and two together correctly.

The result was that Peele did not find the affair so funny as he had supposed it at first, for he was collared by the Fistical Four and taken into the end study, where judgment was passed on him. As it was not in the game to give him up to punishment, the Fistical Four administered the punishment themselves—with the assistance of a cricket-stump—and then kicked the yelling Peele out of the study, and out of the Rookwood Players' Club at the same time. So that the humorous Peele for quite a long time afterwards felt anything but humorous.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood, next week, entitled: "BOUND BY HIS WORD!" By OWEN CONQUEST. Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

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