

This is the Stuff to Give 'Em!

The POPULAR

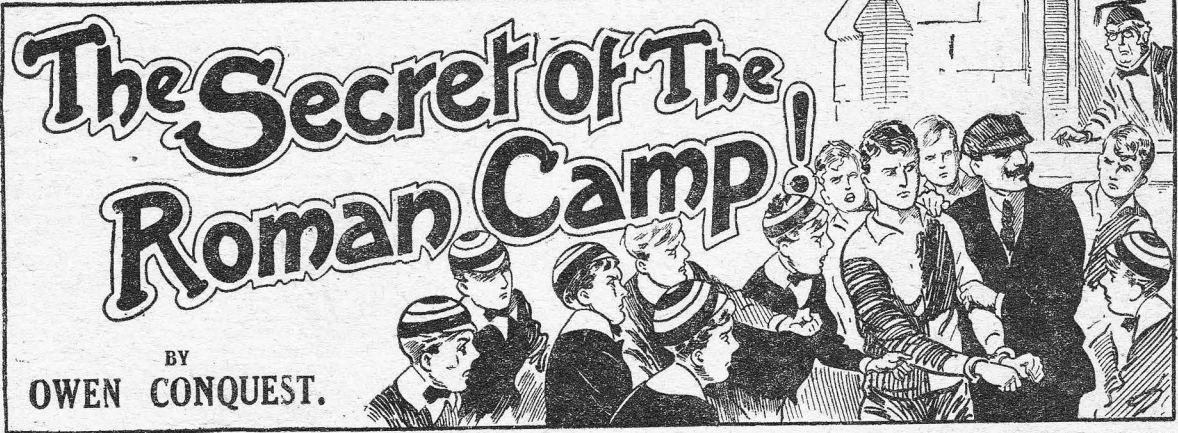
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"PLAY UP, THE BLUE CRUSADERS!"

Arthur S. Hardy's Great Footer Yarn

ROOKWOODERS TO THE RESCUE! Jimmy Silver hits upon the solution of the mystery surrounding the Rookwood footer-coach. All that remains now is to find proof to clear an innocent man. Jimmy Silver & Co. set out on the trail!



A Grand Long Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Under Arrest!

"SHAME!"
"Let him go!"

It was a roar of voices in the old quadrangle of Rookwood School. Dr. Chisholm started from his chair and stepped hurriedly to his study window. Never had the reverend Head of Rookwood been so startled.

"Shame! Let Mr. Wilmot go!" came the roar.
"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

He stared out of the study window. It was a strange enough scene that met his gaze.

Eric Wilmot, the new football coach of Rookwood, stood within a dozen paces of the Head's window. His handsome face was deadly pale, but calm. His hands hung helplessly before him; there were steel handcuffs on his wrists.

A hand was on his shoulder—the hand of Inspector Troope, of Scotland Yard. The inspector had been leading his prisoner towards the House, but he had been forced to stop as the crowd of Rookwood fellows surged round him. Every face in the crowd was excited and angry, and menacing looks were cast at the burly, grim-faced man from Scotland Yard. Those looks of menace did not affect Inspector Troope in the least; his hard face hardened a little more, and his grip on the shoulder of the young footballer tightened a little, that was all. But the surging of the excited Rookwooders round him forced him to a halt.

"Rescue!" bawled Lovell of the Fourth.

"Shame!"
Jimmy Silver caught Lovell's arm.
"Shut up, you ass!" he whispered.
"Rescue!" yelled Lovell, unheeding.
"Rush him!"

The Head threw up his window. It looked as if a riot was about to break out in the Rookwood quadrangle.

"Boys!"
The Head's deep voice rang through the excited buzz. All eyes were turned upon Dr. Chisholm.

"Perhaps you will command these boys to clear the way, sir!" said Inspector Troope, with unmoved calmness. "They are obstructing me in the execution of my duty!"
"Rats!" yelled Lovell.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Silence, at once! Neville, what does this mean?"

Neville of the Sixth turned a face flushed with anger towards his headmaster.

"It means that Mr. Wilmot is arrested by this—this man!" he said savagely. "He's just played in a match for us, sir, and helped us to beat Greyfriars. And this—this fool has arrested him on a silly charge—"

"Moderate your language!" rapped out the Head. "Inspector Troope is doing his duty. Mr. Troope, I apologise for this unseemly outbreak. Boys, disperse at once. Anyone raising a hand to obstruct Mr. Troope will be expelled from Rookwood."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Mr. Wilmot is innocent, sir!" said Neville of the Sixth. "The charge is simply ridiculous. It's a shame to treat him like this before all the school."

"I trust it may prove as you say, Neville; but that is a matter for the law to decide. Mr. Troope, please come into the House at once. Boys, stand back!"

The Rookwood crowd fell back, savagely and discontentedly. Probably, but for the intervention of the Head, Lovell's wild suggestion might have been acted upon, and a rush would have taken place. But the Head's command was law.

The arrest of Eric Wilmot had caused wild excitement. It had come suddenly, like a bombshell, upon the Rookwooders, and there was utter and contemptuous incredulity on all sides. Wilmot had been only a few weeks at the school; but he was popular, for there was hardly a fellow at Rookwood who did not like the handsome young footballer. And he had just played for the school in a first eleven match, and won the game for Rookwood.

Inspector Troope, grim and unmoved, marched his prisoner into the House, followed by a chorus of groans and hisses and catcalls. In their angry excitement the Rookwood crowd overlooked the fact that Mr. Troope was only doing his official duty. They believed that he had made a ludicrous mistake, and they resented the humiliation put upon the popular footballer.

Dr. Chisholm closed his study window with a bang. Through the closed win-

dow a buzz of angry voices still came to his ears.

He opened the door of his study. Inspector Troope entered, with the handcuffed footballer. Calm as Eric Wilmot looked, it was easy to read in his white face how keenly he felt the shame of his position.

Dr. Chisholm looked distressed. He had a liking for Wilmot, like the rest of Rookwood.

"I am sorry to see this, Mr. Wilmot," he said awkwardly. "You realise, of course, that the inspector is doing his duty. If you are innocent—"

"I am quite innocent, sir!" said Wilmot.

The inspector gave a slight grunt. "You think, Mr. Troope—" began the Head.

"I do not think—I know, sir!" said the inspector. "This man is James Stacey, the cracksmen, otherwise known as Dandy Jim. He is wanted for a dozen robberies, some of them with violence."

"Good heavens!"

"His last exploit was an attempted burglary at Deepden, in Berkshire, where the boy Silver almost caught him escaping," said Mr. Troope. "Since that affair he has been in hiding—we have lost track of him entirely. I confess it never occurred to us that he had obtained a post as football coach in a public school. It is very fortunate for you, sir, that I came here to-day."

"Undoubtedly, if the matter is as you state," said the Head, with a deeply-troubled look. "You—you are sure that there is no error—no possible error? It is—is amazing to me!"

"A dozen witnesses will identify him," said the inspector. "May I ask you for a conveyance, sir, to take him to the station?"

"Certainly! But—but—" The Head stammered. "I—I cannot help feeling. Mr. Troope, that there is some mistake!"

"I have shown you the official photograph of Dandy Jim, the cracksmen, sir. Is it not this man's photograph?"

"Certainly the resemblance is amazing. But—one moment! I will send for Silver. He has seen the actual criminal face to face, and his evidence should be conclusive."

"Very good, sir!"

The Head touched a bell.
THE POPULAR.—No. 403.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Innocent or Guilty?

"MASTER SILVER!"
 "Hallo, Tupper!"
 "Ead's sent for you, sir!"
 "Right-ho!"

Arthur Edward Lovell caught Jimmy Silver by the arm.

"You know why you're wanted, Jimmy," he muttered. "It's to identify Wilmot as the burglar you saw at Deepden in the vac."

Jimmy Silver nodded. He was quite well aware of the Head's reason in sending for him just then.

"You thought Wilmot was the man, Jimmy; but you made a mistake, you know," urged Lovell. "Don't say anything against him."

"I can't believe he's the man," said Newcome.

"Nobody here will believe it, I think," said Raby. "Anyhow, don't say anything you're not sure of, Jimmy. Be careful, you know."

Jimmy nodded again, and went into the House. His face was sorely troubled. If Eric Wilmot was not the cracksman he had seen escaping at Deepden, he was at least his living image. Yet Jimmy liked the young footballer, and felt somehow that he was to be trusted. His instinct was in conflict with his reason.

He tapped at the Head's door and entered. Whether Wilmot was innocent or guilty, Jimmy Silver would gladly have avoided taking a hand against him. But there was no help for it now.

Wilmot stood pale and silent, and did not look at the junior as he entered. The Head coughed. It was the grim-faced inspector who addressed the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

"Master Silver, look at this man."

Jimmy looked.

"Do you identify him as the man you saw escaping from Deepden Manor House after the attempted burglary?"

"He—he's very like him, sir," said Jimmy slowly.

"Is he not exactly like him, to the best of your belief?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Do you or do you not believe that he is the same man?" rapped out the inspector sharply.

"I—I did, sir," faltered Jimmy. "Now I—I—I can't."

"An explanation is required from you, Master Silver!" said Inspector Troope grimly. "You gave a description of the escaping cracksman to the Reading police. The description was that of James Stacey, alias Dandy Jim. When I showed you the photograph of Dandy Jim you recognised it as that of the man of Deepden. Yet this man has been two or three weeks at Rookwood. You have seen him every day, and on the very first occasion you could not have failed to recognise him. You did not tell your headmaster?"

"N-no, sir."

"Did you tell anyone?"

"Only my chums, sir."

Wilmot raised his eyes and looked curiously at Jimmy Silver for a second.

"And why," said the inspector, "did you keep such a secret? Are you aware that you were shielding a criminal from justice, and rendering yourself an accessory after the fact?"

Jimmy crimsoned.

"I—I wasn't sure," he stammered. "I thought he was the same man at first, but my friends laughed at the idea. Then, Mr. Wilmot seemed so decent that then I felt there must be some mistake somewhere. I—I simply couldn't believe that he was a criminal."

"You should have spoken to your

Form master, at least, Silver," said the Head severely.

"I—I was going to, sir; but—but the more I saw of Mr. Wilmot, sir, the more I felt that he couldn't be the man of Deepden."

"You have acted very injudiciously, to say the least!" snapped the inspector. "However, at the present moment, you are able to identify the man?"

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"I am sure there is a mistake, sir," he said steadily. "Mr. Troope calls him Dandy Jim. I know that there is another person who is called by that name."

"And how do you know that?" demanded the inspector gruffly.

"I have seen the man," said Jimmy quietly. "Last Wednesday I saw Mr. Wilmot meet a man in Combe Wood. He addressed him as Dandy Jim. The man threatened him, and Mr. Wilmot knocked him down."

Jimmy looked at the young footballer. "Mr. Wilmot, tell the inspector—" Inspector Troope looked a little startled.

"What was the man like?" he asked. "He was the same size and build as Mr. Wilmot, but he wore a moustache, and his face was very dark, and his eyebrows black and bushy," said Jimmy.

"That is not a description of the Dandy Jim known in the records at Scotland Yard," said the inspector dryly. He fixed his eyes upon the young footballer.

"You deny your identity as Dandy Jim Stacey?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wilmot quietly.

"Then you assume that there is another man in existence who resembles you so closely as to be mistaken for you and you for him?"

"Obviously."

"It is at least possible," murmured the Head.

"Are you acquainted with such a man?"

No answer.

"Have you a relation who closely resembles you?"

The young man's lip quivered, and his pale face seemed to grow paler. But he did not speak.

"Mr. Wilmot," said the Head in a moved voice, "you are bound to speak, if only for your own sake. You have not been long among us, but we are all your friends here. If you can clear yourself of this fearful charge—"

Wilmot raised his eyes to the doctor's. "I am innocent," he said. "In twenty-four hours I shall return to Rookwood with my name cleared, if you will permit me to return, sir, after this disgrace."

"If you are innocent, Wilmot, you will be welcomed back!" exclaimed the Head warmly. "But in what do you hope?"

The young footballer smiled slightly. "They have an almost infallible system of identification at Scotland Yard, sir," he said. "Finger-prints of criminals are taken and recorded. Mr. Troope, doubtless, can lay his hands upon the finger-prints of Dandy Jim, the cracksman."

"Your finger-prints—yes!" said the inspector grimly.

"Mine, sir, will be found different," said the young man. "No two human beings have finger-prints alike. The record will show that I am not the man you seek."

"Surely that is an excellent test, inspector!" exclaimed the Head.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "As nearly infallible as possible, sir," he answered. "But—"

"There are other circumstances," said

Mr. Wilmot quietly. "I was in the army, sir, through the War, as you know. I was not demobbed till six months after the armistice. The regimental records will prove that. But at that time Dandy Jim, the cracksman, was serving a sentence at Dartmoor."

The inspector started a little.

"That is true," he said. "If you can prove what you say—"

"The official records will prove it."

"And if you are speaking the truth, how do you know so much about Dandy Jim, Mr. Wilmot—you, an innocent man?"

"I am not called upon to explain that," said Wilmot composedly. "My business is to prove my own innocence, and that I shall do. In the meantime, sir, I am your prisoner."

The Head made Jimmy Silver a sign to leave the study.

Ten minutes later the Head's motor-car was bearing Inspector Troope and his prisoner away from Rookwood. But even in the grim mind of the inspector there was now a lurking doubt.

THE THIRD CHAPTER!

Light at Last!

"ROTTER!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark with emphatic disgust as the school gates closed behind the car.

The Fistical Four had watched Inspector Troope depart with his prisoner, as well as a crowd of other Rookwood fellows. There was angry and excited discussion on all sides. From the Sixth Form to the Second, all the sympathy of Rookwood School was with the inspector's prisoner.

"Wilmot will be back here in a few days," Lovell said, as the Fistical Four gathered to a late tea in the end study.

"He's right as rain. I know that, and he'll prove it. No need to mention about his being like the cracksman to look at, Jimmy. It won't do him any good."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Keep it dark," he assented. "Goodness knows, if he's innocent, I'm ready to back him up. It's pretty clear that if he isn't James Stacey, he's a near relation of that rotter."

Lovell grunted.

"Might be like him, without being a relation," he said.

"It's not likely," said Raby. "If there's two of them, they're relations right enough, and it won't do Wilmot any good to have it known here. So the least said, sooner mended."

"And that man he met in the woods?" said Newcome.

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"He spoke to him as Dandy Jim," he said. "That's the cracksman's nickname. It was the cracksman, of course, and he looked different because he was made up somehow. That's pretty clear now. He's some connection of Wilmot's—from the likeness and from the fact that Wilmot met him."

"He threatened to give Wilmot away at Rookwood," said Newcome. "We heard him. If Wilmot's all right, how can—"

"I think I understand that now," said Jimmy. "Wilmot isn't the cracksman, but a near relation, and that's his little secret. The real Dandy Jim was threatening to give him away as a connection of a criminal—not as a criminal himself."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"I don't know what view the Head would take if he knew that Mr. Wilmot was closely related to a well-known criminal," said Jimmy Silver. "He

might want Wilmot to go. Anyhow, naturally, a man would keep such a thing dark. That gives the brute a hold over Wilmot. I jolly well wish we could lay hands on him!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had little doubt that they had arrived at the correct solution of the mystery at last. From the moment when he had heard the inspector address Wilmot as "Dandy Jim," Jimmy Silver had guessed the truth, remembering the scene in Coombe Wood. And Eric Wilmot's confidence in the finger-print test had convinced him that, in spite of all appearances, the young footballer was not the man of Deepden. The man Wilmot had knocked down in Coombe Wood was the real cracksman, and Jimmy had not recognised him, for the simple reason that he was disguised. He was hunted by the police, and he had come to his relation at Rookwood in disguise for help in escaping them. To Jimmy Silver's mind, it was all clear now. And it was clear, too, that Eric Wilmot had no guilty dealings with the cracksman. That knock-down blow in Coombe Wood was proof enough of that.

"Poor beggar!" said Raby. "I suppose he's always been in danger of being taken for Dandy Jim. It must have given him a jump when he saw the inspector here. Perhaps it's all the better for him to have the matter thrashed out and cleared up."

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully. "Anyhow, you own up that you were wrong, Jimmy?" grinned Lovell. "You know now that Wilmot isn't the giddy burglar of Deepden?"

"Yes. But I don't blame myself. Inspector Troope has made the same mistake," said Jimmy quietly. "But now I know the facts—" He paused. "We know that Wilmot has some reason for not handing the rotter over to the police—he could have done it last Wednesday. The man wrote to him and asked him to meet him, as we know. Wilmot didn't go, and the fellow sent a message by Lovell. Wilmot could have taken a bobby with him, and landed the rascal. He didn't. But if we had a chance—"

"I jolly well wish we had!" grunted Lovell. "I'd make short work of him, I know that. He's not my relation, anyhow."

"That's what I'm thinking of," said Jimmy quietly. "Now, it's plain enough that the rotter came down here to get help from Wilmot, if he could. We heard him say as much. He's hunted by the police, and he's in straits. Wilmot refused to help him. But—"

Jimmy paused.

"Well?" said Lovell.

"Where is he now?" said Jimmy. "He's in hiding somewhere from the police. They've no suspicion, so far, that he's been in this neighbourhood, except that Mr. Troope thinks he's got him in our football coach. Suppose—suppose the rotter is still hanging about in this quarter—"

Lovell whistled.

"In the wood, do you mean?"

"It's likely enough," said Jimmy. "There are places in Coombe Wood where a man could lie hidden for weeks, if he chose. He would only want a supply of grub, and he might have brought that. Wilmot refused to give him help, but he may still hope to get something out of him, and he said something, too, about disgracing Wilmot at Rookwood if he came to the end of his tether. It looks to me—"

"My hat!" Lovell's eyes gleamed. "It would be doing Wilmot a good turn



THE WANTED MAN! Jimmy leaped out into the open air, panting for breath. He caught sight of a running figure just ahead. "There he is!" he shouted. He knew the man now, although the last time he had seen him the fugitive had been disguised. (See Chapter 5.)

if we could get the real rascal laid by the heels!"

"That's what I was thinking," said Jimmy Silver. "Dandy Jim has been in chokey once, and the sooner he goes back there, the better for all concerned. If he's anywhere near Rookwood—"

"What price a scout run, with the giddy cracksman at the end of it?" grinned Lovell. "Next half-holiday—what?"

"It's worth trying, anyhow."

Prep that evening was rather neglected in the end study. Jimmy Silver & Co. had something more important than prep to discuss.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Hunted Down!

ROOKWOOD School waited anxiously for news of Eric Wilmot.

Many of the fellows supposed that, as soon as the young footballer was at Scotland Yard, he would proceed to prove the mistake in identity at once, and take the next train back to Rookwood. They did not make allowance for the "law's delays."

Day followed day, and there was no news of the footballer.

It was obvious to Jimmy Silver & Co. at least, that the authorities would require a very clear demonstration that Eric Wilmot was not the "wanted" man, and that would take time.

In the meantime, the Fistical Four were making their own plans, and the

next half-holiday saw them on the war-path.

Four juniors in scout rig left the school gates soon after dinner that day, leaving the other fellows at football practice. They lost no time in getting into Coombe Wood.

The Chums of the Classical Fourth knew the wood pretty thoroughly, extensive as it was. It was a favourite hunting-ground of the Rookwood scouts. And Jimmy Silver, who had thought the matter out carefully, knew where to make a start. In the very heart of the wood there was a ruin which was called locally the "Roman camp," supposed at least to be a relic of an ancient Roman fortification.

It was overgrown with trees and thickets, and difficult of access, but the Rookwood Boy Scouts had rambled over it more than once. If the hunted cracksman was indeed lurking in the vicinity of Rookwood, the old Roman camp was his safest lurking-place, and that was the objective of the Fistical Four when they left the school that sunny afternoon.

It was a good mile by tangled tracks through the wood to the ruin. The Fistical Four tramped on cheerfully.

If nothing came of the search, there would be, as Jimmy Silver said, no harm done. But if by good luck they came upon the rascal, they were quite confident in their ability to lay him by the heels. Four sturdy juniors of Rookwood were a match for any cracksman. The Fistical Four were quite assured of that.

"Here we are!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell, at last.

Through the trees and thickets a fragment of an ancient wall loomed into sight. It was almost covered with moss and creepers. A few minutes more, and the Fistical Four were in the mossy old ruins.

A rabbit scuttled away from their footsteps, and there was a twittering of birds in the trees that jutted among the broken old brickwork. Save for that, all was silent and deserted. The juniors looked round them, and Raby grinned a little.

"No sign of the giddy cracksman here!" he remarked.

"If he's here, he's sporting his oak!" remarked Newcome humorously.

"Well, he wouldn't be sitting on top of the wall, waiting to be looked at," said Jimmy Silver. "There are cellars under this cracked old pavement. That's where he would be."

"Jolly cold down there, I should fancy."

"Not any colder than a cell at Dartmoor, perhaps. Anyhow, we've come here to look for him," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "From what we heard him say to Wilmot that day, I feel pretty certain that he meant to hang on near Rookwood. If he hides in the cellars, he has to come up—"

"Come up to breathe, like a whale!" chuckled Newcome, who seemed to be in a humorous mood that afternoon.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Jimmy Silver. "He would come up, of course, and dodge into the cellars if anybody came in sight. We're going to see if he's left any sign."

"Good!"

The Fistical Four proceeded to explore the ruins. The entrance to the stone cellars below was blocked by a mass of thorny thickets and creepers, through which it was difficult to force a way. Jimmy Silver examined that natural screen, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"You can see that this has been disturbed lately," he said. "Look! That twig was broken to-day some time—the break is quite fresh."

"Some village kid exploring the place!" murmured Raby. "The Coombe kids play along here sometimes, you know."

"Somebody, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going down."

"Ought to have brought a lantern for that!" said Lovell.

"I've got my electric torch."

"Oh, good!"

Jimmy Silver forced aside the thicket, and pushed his way into the opening. A broken brick stairway led to the old stone cellars, with weeds and brambles growing in every interstice. The Co. followed in Jimmy's footsteps, grasping their staves.

Their hearts beat faster now. So far, it had only seemed to them possible that the cracksman was hidden in the ruins of the Roman camp. But at every step they saw fresh proof that the tangled thickets over the steps had lately been disturbed. It was possible that it had been done by some schoolboy explorer that very day; but it was also possible, at least, that the signs were of the passage of the man they sought.

Black as midnight the cellar looked, as the juniors stepped into it. Jimmy Silver flashed the light of his torch round him, and the juniors, with thumping hearts, stood on their guard.

A sharp exclamation broke from Jimmy:

"Look!"

Almost at his feet two or three

ground-sheets and a rug lay on the damp stone floor.

Lovell caught his breath.

"Somebody's been camping here!" he muttered.

"Nobody would be likely to camp in this damp hole but—"

"Look out!" shrieked Raby.

Crash!

A fragment of stone whizzed from the blackness, and crashed on the electric torch in Jimmy Silver's hand.

In an instant the cellar was plunged into utter darkness.

From the impenetrable gloom there came a sound—the sound of a man moving.

"Good heavens!" breathed Lovell, his teeth chattering.

The Rookwooders drew close together in the dark, with throbbing hearts. For they knew now that Jimmy Silver's surmise had been only too well founded, and that within the narrow confines of the old cellar, in the thick darkness, they were shut up with a desperate criminal.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Face to Face!

JIMMY SILVER stood motionless.

In the darkness and the terrible silence he could almost hear the thumping of his heart.

But his courage did not falter.

The man he sought was there, lurking in the blackness, close at hand. He knew that an attack was coming—that the scoundrel, knowing that his hiding-place was discovered, would make a desperate attempt to escape; and the four juniors were between him and the stair that led upward to the daylight.

"Look out!" breathed Jimmy.

Perhaps at that moment the reckless juniors realised the recklessness of their search, and wished themselves safe above ground. But it was too late to think of that now.

In the dead silence that followed the crash of the stone, they listened, and a sound came suddenly.

"He's coming!" panted Lovell.

There was a rush in the darkness. Something crashed into Jimmy Silver, and he struck with his staff, and there was a cry. The next moment he was clutched in desperate hands, and was rolling on the stone floor, struggling for life.

"Help!" shrieked Jimmy.

"Back up!" panted Lovell.

The juniors could see nothing; but the sounds guided them. They grasped at the struggling forms on the floor.

But the unseen man had the advantage. The Rookwooders, in the black gloom, clutched at one another as well as at the enemy.

The hidden man drove savage blows on all sides. Lovell rolled over, half-stunned.

Jimmy Silver felt the man drag himself away. He struggled up breathlessly.

"Look out!"

There was a crashing of the thicket over the stair. The desperate rascal was forcing his way out to freedom.

"After him!" yelled Jimmy.

He dashed at the stair.

Above his head the daylight glimmered as he struggled through the tangled thickets.

His chums followed him, gasping and panting.

Jimmy forced his way free of the tangle, and leaped out into the open air, panting for breath. He caught sight of a running figure less than a dozen feet away.

"There he is!" shouted Jimmy Silver. He rushed in pursuit.

He knew the man. It was the man who had met Eric Wilmot in the wood a week before. It was the same figure, and the same shabby tweed clothes.

As the man half-turned to leap over the broken wall, Jimmy saw his face. The thick moustache and the bushy eyebrows were gone now. Evidently they were a disguise, and had been torn away in the struggle in the cellar.

And, in spite of the darkness of the skin the man's resemblance to Eric Wilmot was startling, now that the greater part of his disguise was gone. It was a face with well-cut, regular features—a face that would have been handsome but for the hard and savage look of desperation upon it.

"Collar him!" roared Lovell.

The Rookwooders were close on the heels of the fugitive as he clambered over the old wall. He disappeared from their sight, and they heard the sound of a heavy fall. The cracksman had lost his footing and rolled down on the other side.

"Quick!" panted Jimmy. "We've got him now!"

He scrambled furiously over the crumbling wall, followed fast by his chums. They were in time to see the fugitive leap to his feet and start at a run into the wood.

"After him!"

The man turned his head for a second, shaking his fist at the juniors. His eyes were blazing with rage, his teeth showed in a snarl like that of a wild animal. His face at that moment was the face of the cracksman of Deepden—the ruffian who, in the vacation, had struggled with Jimmy Silver at the camp in the Berkshire wood.

Its resemblance to Eric Wilmot was startling; even at that moment when it was convulsed with fury.

It was only for a second that the ruffian stared back. Then he dashed into the wood, running with almost the speed of a hare.

The Rookwooders rushed recklessly in pursuit. Through bush and briar they tore on desperately, guided by the crashing and rustling ahead of them. But the guiding sounds ceased at last; the juniors came to a halt in the thick wood.

The cracksman was gone. Jimmy Silver gritted his teeth.

"Keep on!" he said. "We won't give in while there's a chance!"

For an hour or more the juniors hunted, but the search was in vain. The cracksman was gone; and they gave it up at last, tired out and angry and disappointed.

"Well, he's got away!" said Lovell, as the Fistical Four tramped away in the direction of Rookwood at last. "But he'll be nailed all right as soon as the police know what we can tell them. And we can prove now that old Wilmot isn't the man they call Dandy Jim. That's something."

It was a tired and dusty quartette that arrived at the gates of Rookwood an hour later. Jimmy Silver & Co. started for the Head's house at once.

Tubby Muffin met them in the quad, with a fat, excited face.

"You fellows heard?" he exclaimed. Jimmy paused.

"Any news of Wilmot?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Tubby. "Where have you fellows been? All the giddy school's buzzing with it."

"What's the news?" exclaimed Lovell impatiently. "Get it out, you duffer!"

"Don't snap a fellow's head off!"

(Continued on page 22.)

"I suppose you've booked me as your star turn, Merry?" he said, in his superior way.

"There's something wrong with your supposer, then!" replied Tom.

"Eh?"

"You're dead in this act. When we want a performing camel we'll let you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Grundy was not to be put off so easily.

"I'm just the man for this sort of stunt," he declared. "Have you heard me sing?"

"We have!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Once heard, never forgotten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" said Grundy wrathfully. "I've got a voice that would do credit to—"

"The Bull of Bashan?" suggested Manners.

And there was a fresh peal of laughter.

"Look here," said Grundy, "this show of yours, Merry, will be a frost—a failure—a complete wash-out—if I'm not in it. And you can have my services for the asking."

"I'm not likely to go down on bended knees and implore you to join us!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, yes, I know you can sing—like a tin kettle! Your sort of singing would cause a riot in any audience!"

"When I was at Redclyffe," said Grundy, "I got second prize for melody!"

"And the kitchen cat got the first, I suppose?" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy was very red in the face by this time. He flourished his fist under Tom Merry's nose.

"For the last time, am I coming in?" he demanded.

"No; you're going out!" was the prompt reply.

The next moment Grundy felt as if he was in the grip of a whirlwind. He travelled through the doorway at express speed, and alighted with a crash on to the linoleum in the passage.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Fare thee well, Caruso!" sang out Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy picked himself up, and limped painfully away.

His mind was not very clear at that moment. But it was clear enough for him to realise the sad fact that Tom Merry's Merry-makers had no use for his services!

He wended his way down the Shell passage, muttering to himself.

He had suffered a great deal at the hands of Tom Merry & Co. in the past, and he thought it nigh time he had his revenge.

The glint in his eyes spelt disaster for Tom Merry's Merry-makers.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Rival in the Field!

BEEN wrestlin' with a steam-roller, Grundy?"

It was Aubrey Rakee who asked the question, as George Alfred Grundy came limping into view along the passage.

"Ow! Wow! That fathead Merry doesn't know a good singer when he sees one!" groaned Grundy.

Rakee grinned.

"Won't he let you join his mirth-makin' mob?" he inquired.

Grundy shook his head.

THE POPULAR.—No. 403.

"I went out of my way to offer him my services," he said, "and he rejected them with scorn! I tell you, Merry's blind and deaf to genius! It's just the same with footer. I ought to have been given a place in the eleven months ago!"

Rakee became sympathetic. He hated Tom Merry and his crew, and was always on the alert to find some way of getting even with them. Here seemed the chance he was waiting for.

"It's a jolly shame!" he said, with a show of indignation. "But you needn't upset yourself over it, Grundy! Merry's concert's not comin' off!"

Grundy stared at Aubrey Rakee in astonishment.

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"It's not comin' off!" repeated Rakee. He spoke in low but decisive tones. Grundy continued to stare.

"Who's going to prevent it?" he said.

"I am!"

"My hat!"

"I'm going to cut Tom Merry out," said Rakee, with emphasis. "I'm gettin' up a little show of my own—'Rakee's Revellers'—an' it's goin' to be the real goods!"

Grundy looked interested. At the same time, he was a little doubtful.

"I'm a good judge of talent," Rakee went on. "I know a good performer when I see one. An' I want you to join my party, old chap. It'll give a tone to it, you know."

The flattery was not wasted on Grundy. He looked quite affable.

"I'll join your show with pleasure," he said. "But when's it coming off?"

"Wednesday evenin', at eight, in the Public Hall."

"But—but that's the same time and place that Tom Merry's chosen!"

"True, O King! But, as I said just now, Merry's concert isn't comin' off!" Grundy reflected a moment.

"Dashed if I can see how you're going to wangle it!" he said at length. "Still, you say you can, and I'm quite prepared to row in with you. But no dirty tricks, mind!"

"Everythin' shall be perfectly straight an' above-board, I promise you," said Rakee.

"The proceeds of the concert will be given to charity, of course?"

"Yes—to the Cottage Hospital."

"Why not to Dick Mason?"

"Because it's far more sensible to help an institution than an individual," was Rakee's ready reply.

"Have you asked any other fellows to join yet?"

Rakee nodded.

"Crooke and Clampe and Scrope are comin' in," he said. "An' I've no doubt Wilkins an' Gunn will, when I ask 'em."

"I'll ask them for you," said Grundy.

"Good man!"

"And when shall we meet, to jaw things over?"

"After prep, in my study."

"Right you are!"

Aubrey Rakee passed on. His face wore a covert grin.

"Another giddy recruit!" he muttered. "It won't be very difficult to queer Tom Merry's pitch."

In spite of his statement to Grundy that everything would be square and above-board, Rakee was organising the concert-party in order to serve his own base ends. The fact of the matter was, he had been squandering money freely of late, and his father, the purse-proud profiteer, had temporarily cut off the supply.

Aubrey Rakee stood in sore need of ready money, and he saw a splendid

opportunity of making a good thing out of the concert, without the knowledge of his fellow-performers. Ostensibly the proceeds would be devoted to charity. But in reality Rakee would retain a portion—and not a small portion, either—for his own use.

The cad of the Shell told himself that he would be able to kill two birds with one stone.

St. Jim's received a surprise later in the evening.

A further announcement appeared on the notice-board, side by side with Tom Merry's. It was to the effect that "Rakee's Revellers" would give a grand concert in the Public Hall, Wayland, on Wednesday evening at eight.

When Tom Merry & Co. saw that notice they were more than surprised. What Rakee's game was they could not see; at all events, they knew it was another "stunt" to get at them, and they meant to be on their guard.

THE END.

(Look out for the next grand long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's, entitled: "Tom Merry's Concert Party!")

"THE SECRET OF THE ROMAN CAMP!"

(Continued from page 10.)

"Tell us what's the news?" roared Lovell.

"All right, old chap, I'm telling you, ain't I?" said the fat Classical. "Wil-mot's coming back! The Head's put up a notice on the board about it. He's proved that he isn't the man that old duffer of an inspector thought—proved it right up to the hilt."

"Hurrah!"

The Fistical Four hurried on to the Head's house. In a few minutes more they were in the presence of Dr. Chisholm, and giving him an account of their adventure at the Roman camp in Coombe Wood. The Head blinked at them over his glasses.

"You should certainly not have taken this risk!" he said severely. "I should have forbidden you if I had known. If you should ever do anything of the kind again—" Dr. Chisholm paused. "However, the discovery you have made will certainly be useful to the authorities. I shall telephone to the police at Rookham at once. You will hold yourselves in readiness to be questioned. You may go."

And the juniors went.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked quite pleased with themselves that evening. Their adventure at the Roman camp had to be related a dozen times at least in the Fourth, and even Bulkeley of the Sixth sent for them, to hear their account of the hidden cracksman.

Inspector Sharpe came over from Rookham, and the story had to be told again.

That evening telegraph and telephone were at work; and it seemed fairly certain that the "wanted" man, hunted out of his secret refuge, would not be long in falling into the grasp of the law. Which, as Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, would be good news for Eric Wilmot when he came back to Rookwood.

THE END.

(You will enjoy reading—"The Darling of Dandy Jim!" next week's splendid long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.)