

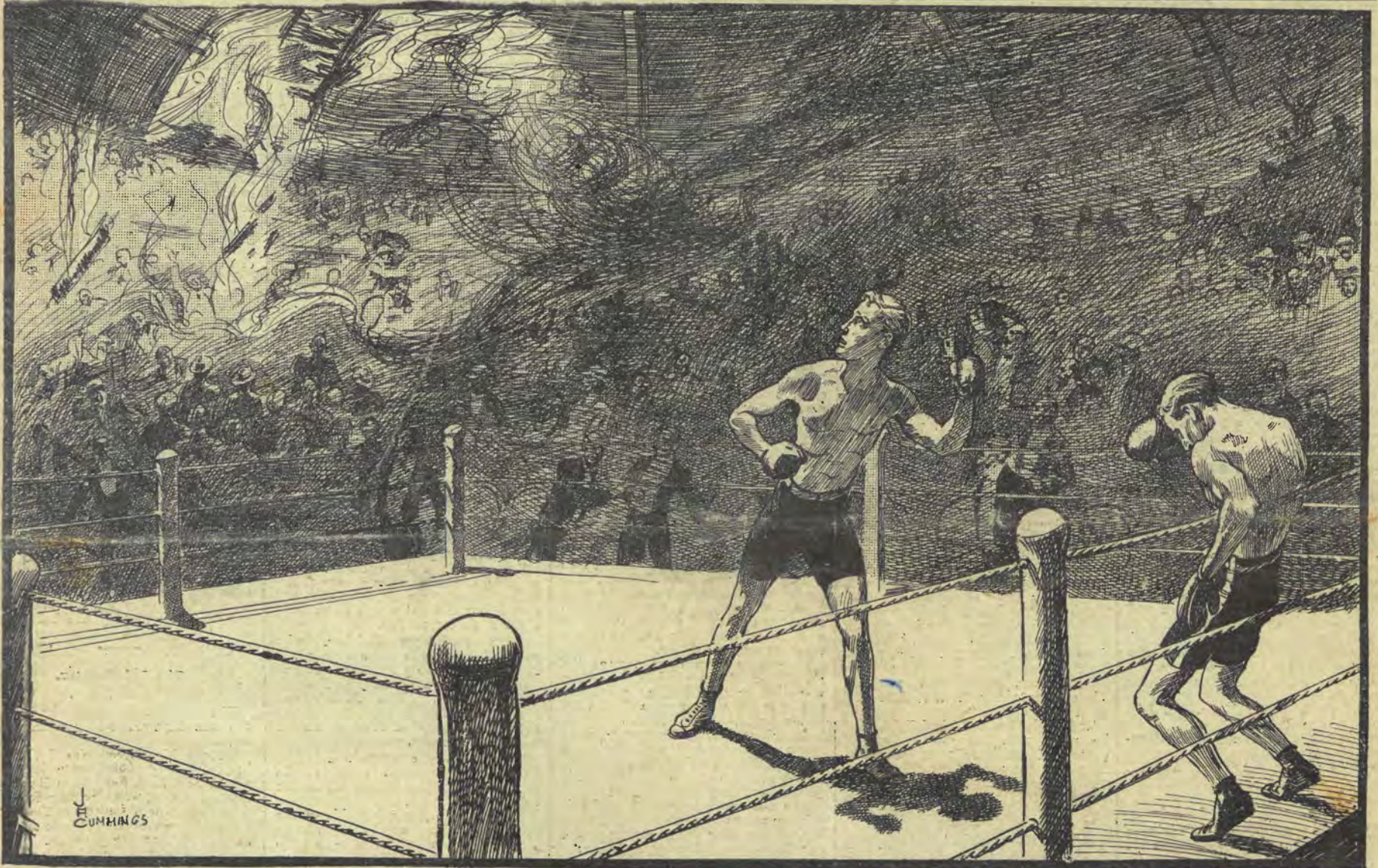
500 PRIZES! 500 PRIZES! 500 PRIZES!

The BOYS' FRIEND Id.

No. 724, Vol. XIV. New Series.]

ONE PENNY.

[Week Ending April 24th, 1915.



Tom looked up, gasping with horror, and saw that the roof was on fire. Flames were leaping about the rotten and dry woodwork of the old roof, and outside the blue lightning flashed and quivered.

A FORTUNE AT STAKE!

A Great New Long Complete Tale of Tom Belcher, the Boy Boxer.

BY ARTHUR S. HARDY.

The 1st Chapter.

A Promising Novice.

George Martin, promoter of boxing contests, and manager of the St. George's Boxing Hall, E., was in luck. Ever since the advent of that phenomenal young boxer, Tom Belcher, at the Star Boxing Hall, his fortunes had declined, and those of Bob Lewis, the rival promoter who ran the Star, had risen proportionately. George Martin had tried almost every device he knew to turn the tables on his rival, including many a foul and unscrupulous trick, but had failed to achieve any real success. And just when Martin was at his wits' end, and ruefully contemplating his diminishing receipts, a bit of luck

befell him. Another young and unknown boxer made his appearance in the East End. His name was Ryley. He came unbidden to the doors of the St. George's Hall, and diffidently asked that he might be allowed to see the manager. He was told that Mr. Martin was busy. However, he was persistent. He hung about the entrance of the boxing-hall, and bothered and badgered the attendants to such an extent that at last one of them told George Martin that there was "a kid outside who wished to see him." The promoter refused to see the youngster, but the unknown and unheard-of boy, refusing to take no for an answer, came into the hall, chose

a favourable opportunity, and confronted Martin. There he stood, an earnest-looking, pale-faced, and diminutive, though thick-set boy, twiddling his cap about in his fingers, and looking, as the promoter afterwards put it, "soulfully" at him. "Now, what do you want?" demanded George Martin impatiently. "I want you to give me a chance in the ring, sir," answered the boy. "Oh!" cried Martin, eyeing the lad with a fierce eye. "You do, do yer? I've got your sort badgering and bothering me every day. And there's no good in any of yer. Done any fighting?" "No, sir."

"Done any boxing?" "Only along of my brother, sir, and some of my pals. I've beat 'em all ends up. And I think I might do something if I got a chance in the ring." "Go and try Bob Lewis," was George Martin's none too kindly reply. "He's the sort of chap who likes to get hold of a raw novice. Maybe he'll give you a chance—you won't get one 'ere!" But even as he spoke the words, and as the boy was turning away, disappointed at last, the thought flashed across Martin's mind that it was because Bob Lewis had given Tom Belcher, an unknown boxer, a chance, that he had experienced a revival in his fortunes. What if, by rejecting this kid, he were to send another promising lad straight into Bob Lewis's arms? It was not to be thought of, and so George Martin called the boy back. "Come along into the office," said he. The boy obeyed with alacrity. "What's your name?" demanded George Martin, when they got there. "Jack, Ryley, sir." "Jack Ryley—eh? Not a bad sort of name for a fighter, either. Now, Jack, I'm going to try yer. Here, put those gloves on!" And he tossed a

pair of eight-ounce "pillows" over to the novice. "The eager-faced and shabbily-dressed lad slipped them on. George Martin also donned a pair. He then stood in front of the applicant. "Now," he said, "stand as you would do if you were going to fight." Ryley obeyed, and the promoter, eyeing him critically from head to foot, had little fault to find with either pose or stance. "H'm!" he cried. "That's not so bad. Now hit me on the nose." George Martin stood with face unguarded and jaw thrust forward. It looked such an easy matter to obey the order that the boy hesitated. "It's all right, sonny," said Martin, "you needn't be afraid. You won't hurt me. Now, hit me on the nose!" Ryley set his jaw, and there was an aspect of frightfulness about him when set for attack which would have done credit to a German soldier. He prepared to strike, and made the mistake of using his right-hand glove. Suddenly leaping forward, he thrust at the promoter's nose with all his strength and power. The result was hardly what he anticipated. A blow came from somewhere, Jack (Continued on the next page.)

A FORTUNE AT STAKE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

He began the fighting. For the first time he really assumed the aggressive, and Ryley, who was not prepared for it, fell helplessly back before a perfect avalanche of blows.

George Martin realised that it was all up. Ryley was beaten, and Tom Belcher, Bob Lewis, Ben Adams, and their lot were going to triumph again. It was more than he could stand. "Foul 'im, Jack!" shouted the manager of the St. George's Boxing Hall. "Foul him! Don't let him beat you!"

It was all very well for Martin to talk like that, but Ryley was so tired that he could not conjure up a single blow.

And Tom, measuring his man carefully, then let fly a tremendous left which hit Ryley clean across the ring and into the ropes.

And as Ryley struck them, his knees bent under him, so that he nearly fell. As Tom Belcher drew back, expecting to see Ryley fall for the fatal count, there was a sudden blinding flash of light, a terrific crash, and the lights danced up and down the wires above like living flame.

The portions of the roof came crashing down into the hall, and a second later the lights went out, leaving the audience and the boxers in almost total darkness.

Through the shattered roof the rain poured. It beat down upon Tom Belcher's unprotected flesh.

Tom looked up, gasping in horror, and saw that the roof was on fire. The wires had fused. Flames were leaping about the rotten and dry woodwork of the old roof, and outside the blue lightning flashed and quivered.

Cries of horror rang from all parts of the hall. The contest had been stopped, not by the ruling of the referee, but by a greater power than his.

The fight was over, and the victorious Tom Belcher had been robbed of his victory, clear-cut though it was. And, meanwhile, there was grave danger of panic within the hall.

The 6th Chapter. The Last of the Old Star.

The moment Bob Lewis realised that his hall had been struck by lightning, he rallied to the occasion.

He foresaw the panic which would inevitably follow, and before the lights went out, climbed into the ring.

Ben Adams joined him, and there the two of them stood shouting with their hands to their mouths to the audience to keep calm.

"Attendants," shouted Bob Lewis, "open all the doors, and direct the audience to the exits. There's no danger, gentlemen. Take your time—take your time."

It was all very well for him to say that, but then he was gifted with a natural calm. Some of the others were of a panicky temperament, and where one shows the way, others in a crowd inevitably follow. Chairs were overturned, and men fought, shouting for the exits.

This was while the lights still remained on. But when they went out scenes of indescribable uproar took place.

Weak men, youths, and boys, were flung down, and trampled on, as the madmen fought for the exit doors.

Fortunately the attendants were level-headed men. And luckily many new exits had been only recently added to the hall.

The cool, damp air which blew in from the street showed the people the way out. And through the doors they hurried in droves, being wet to the skin by the downpour before they had gone a dozen yards.

Yet they preferred water to fire. And word had gone round that the Star Hall was on fire.

It was only too true. Tom Belcher, leaning back against the ropes, gazed up with horrified eyes. He saw masses of woodwork being detached, and heard them come crashing down. It was an amazing sight.

Now the hall would be plunged in pitch darkness. The next moment it would be illuminated by the lightning. Soon the majority of the audience had managed to get clear of the hall,

and only a few bruised and injured men remained.

These were drawn by attendants to the doors, and put outside.

Ben Adams and Bob Lewis had leapt out of the ring, and had helped to quiet the panic-stricken crowd.

George Martin, Georgie, his son, and the rest of the men from the rival boxing establishment, had been among the first "brave souls" to make a bolt for safety.

They had literally fought their way out into the open, but had not cared a straw as to what became of Ryley, the lad who had fought so splendidly on their behalf.

They left him in the ring. By the time the audience had got safely outside, Ben Adams and Bob Lewis had time to think about Tom Belcher.

"Tom—Tom, lad!" cried Ben, turning and peering through the blinding smoke. "Are you there?"

"Ay, I'm here, Ben!"

"Then, come along, my brave lad. Let's get out of this. There's danger outside, but it's not as bad as the danger here. The hall is doomed."

Tom scrambled to the ropes, and diving under them, dropped to the ground.

Ben Adams gripped him by the arm. The smoke was now so dense that they could not see which way to go.

"This way, Ben—this way!" cried Bob Lewis, choking.

They made their way in the direction of the shout. And there they found Bob Lewis.

"The exit is here, close at hand," said he.

Onward they went, and presently, as they blundered over the fallen chairs, they felt the pure breath of the fresh air without upon their cheeks.

"Safe, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Ben gratefully.

Then Tom Belcher uttered a low cry of horror.

"Ben, I must go back!" he cried. "What for, Tom?"

"Ryley—he's in the ring. In the midst of the uproar. I saw a piece of wood strike him, and he fell. I know he was lying there. He'll be burnt to death, if I don't save him, Ben."

So saying, Tom Belcher turned, and dashed back into the burning hall.

Ben Adams did not attempt to detain him. Indeed, he followed. "Brave lad!" he cried.

Tom groped his way amidst the billowing clouds of smoke, now blood-red through the reflected light of the leaping flames above.

Crouching and stumbling over the impedimenta which strewn his path, Tom Belcher made his way to the ring, and gained it, Ben arriving a moment later. And there they found Ryley lying prone.

They dragged the boy out, and carried him between them through the burning hall.

And as they went, masses of flaming and charred debris came dropping down from the roof of the hall.

How they escaped they never knew. Tom fell four times during the short journey. But the fresh breath of air from outside, blowing in through the gaping exits, showed them which way safety lay, and at length they staggered, gasping, begrimed, but triumphant, into the open, Ben carrying the bare body of the insensible bantam-weight boxer in his arms, Tom Belcher, stripped as for the fight puddling along in the water which lay everywhere by Ben's side.

And the waiting crowd saw them coming, and raised a triumphant shout.

"Bravo! Bravo! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Eager hands seized them, dragged them to safety, and they were taken at once into a neighbouring house.

And from the windows of this, a little later on, when he had donned some borrowed clothes, Tom Belcher saw the Star Boxing Hall burn.

The old place was like tinder. Its timber burnt with incredible rapidity. Soon the whole roof, undermined by that lightning's flash, went crashing into the well, and a myriad of sparks rushed heavenward.

The flames leapt twice as high as the hall itself, and even the water

directed by the firemen upon them, failed to bear them down.

Then first one wall gave way, and crashed inwards. Soon another followed. Within an hour the hall was razed to the ground.

It owed its end, not to the torch of the incendiary, though Martin would have dearly loved to have set it alight, but to the act of Heaven. The storm destroyed it, and at the same time, robbed Tom Belcher of a notable victory over Jack Ryley.

Fortunately there were no casualties in the fire.

It came as a relief to every lover of the game to know that.

And it also gave George Martin an excuse to openly show his satisfaction at the destruction of the rival hall.

One morning he met Bob Lewis in the street.

"So, Bob," he cried with a malicious smile, "you've gone out of the business?"

"For a time," was the quiet answer.

"Go on. You'll never dream of rebuilding the Star?" said George Martin.

"No," answered Bob serenely. "I shall have it rebuilt for me."

George Martin started.



"Now hit me on the nose!" said George Martin. "You needn't be afraid. You won't hurt me!"

"What do you mean?" demanded George Martin.

"I am fully insured, George."

Martin rapped out something which sounded very like an oath.

"I'm going to build a new hall on the old spot, the finest in the East End," Bob Lewis went on. "And, by the way, the critics were unanimous in their verdict as to the result of the Tom Belcher—Jack Ryley contest, George."

"So they may be," answered Martin. "But the bout was never finished, and I don't pay!"

"You can keep your money," returned Bob.

And off he walked. And presently he met Ben Adams and Tom Belcher. Neither was looking as down in the mouth as might have been expected.

"Anything doing, Ben?" asked the boxing promoter.

"Yes," answered Ben Adams. "I can fix up half a dozen contests for Tom if I want to, but we've got to fix on the best. We're going to keep pegging away until you open your new hall, Bob."

The promoter smiled. "That's right," said he. "Good luck to both of you. And when that happy day comes round, Tom, I hope to find you champion of the world."

("Catching a Tartar" is the title of next Monday's story of Tom Belcher, the boxing marvel.)

THE PREFECTS' PLOT!

A Story of Jimmy Silver and Co. By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from page 768.)

enemies the Moderns, but to be howled at like this by their own side was a little too thick. Jones, almost weeping with mirth, cut the ropes at last, and the Fistical Four came down with a run. They bumped on the floor, and roared, and the Classical crowd roared.

"Go for 'em!" yelled Jimmy Silver, who would have gone for anybody at that moment.

The Fistical Four charged furiously, and the hilarious crowd roared—not with merriment this time. The Classical chums knocked them right and left, and ran for the School House. They did not halt till they were safe in the end study.

"Well, this is a go!" gasped Lovell. "Those Modern cads have scored this time!"

From the passage came a howl of laughter. There was no doubt that

"Got it?" asked his admiring chums.

Jimmy Silver's face was very excited, and his eyes had lighted up.

"Yes, I think so. You see, if Bulkeley got the tip now, it would be out. Knowles would hear of it, and warn Joey Hook off; that would make us look like liars. Bulkeley has got to have the tip just when Joey Hook gets here; and, at the same time, he's got to have proof that it was known beforehand that Hook was coming. Black and white, my sons—black and white!"

"Eh! What are you driving at?" Jimmy Silver jumped to the table, and jabbed a pen into the ink. His chums watched him breathlessly as he scrawled on a sheet of impot paper:

"Dear Bulkeley,—Joey Hook will call for you to-morrow in a car with a whopping cram about your uncle being seedy, to take you away from the match. It's all right; your uncle is all right. Don't be taken in. We heard him jawing it over with another villain. It's a jape.

"Yours affectionately,
"A FRIEND."

"There!" said Jimmy Silver, with great pride. "When Bulkeley sees that, and knows it was written to-day, he will know it's all spoof to-morrow, won't he? Because if Hook's yarn is true, how could a friend have known it in advance?"

"But—"

"Bulkeley won't get this till the car is here," explained Jimmy Silver triumphantly. "Then it will be too late for Knowles to change his plans."

"Oh!"

"You see, I'm going to give this to Neville of the Sixth."

Jimmy Silver sealed up the communication in an envelope.

"Neville?"

"Yes; he's Bulkeley's chum. You come with me."

Jimmy Silver rushed out of the study, and his chums followed him in amazement. Jimmy did not pause till he reached Neville's study in the Sixth-Form passage. There he tapped discreetly at the door, and Neville's good-natured voice bade him enter. The prefect looked inquiringly at the four excited juniors.

"I've got an envelope here," said Jimmy Silver. "It's awfully valuable—awfully! Would you mind putting it in your pocket till to-morrow, Neville?"

Neville laughed.

"Somebody been sending you banknotes?" he asked.

"N-n-not exactly. But it's awfully valuable!" said Jimmy Silver impressively. "I'd like you to put it in your pocket-book, if you will, and hand it over to me when I ask you for it to-morrow. It's sealed—I've done it up with wax!"

"Oh, all right!" said Neville, surprised, but good-natured. And he took out his pocket-book, and slipped the letter into it. "Now get off."

"Right-ho! I say, we're awfully obliged, Neville."

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Neville, laughing. "Clear off!"

The juniors scampered away. They had very cheery faces when they came up to the dormitory. They could not help chuckling as they thought of the scene on the morrow—when the car would arrive for Bulkeley, and Neville would be called upon to produce that letter, clear proof that it had been written the night before, and so that the story of Mr. Bulkeley's sudden illness was "spoof." The thought of Knowles's face, when Bulkeley did not go, made the Classical Four chortle.

"Hallo!" said Townsend, "what's the joke? Thinking how we found you strung up in the woodshed? Funny, wasn't it? Ha, ha, ha!"

But the Classical Four did not explain what the joke was. They hugged that knowledge to themselves, and looked forward with blissful anticipation to the morrow, and the defeat of the Prefects' Plot.

THE END.

(Next Monday's magnificent complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. is entitled "Backing Up Bulkeley." Don't miss it!)

Are you trying for one of our magnificent prizes? See the special announcement on page 770. There are 500 prizes offered, and every reader stands a fair chance!

THE PREFECTS' PLOT!

A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of

JIMMY SILVER & Co.,

By **OWEN CONQUEST.**



The 1st Chapter. Black Ingratitude.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were grinning joyously.

The four young rascals were leaning, in a row, against the wall in the Sixth-Form passage, near Bulkeley's study, on the "Classical" side at Rookwood.

The juniors had, of course, no business in the sacred precincts of the Sixth-Form passage. But they were there all the same.

They were interested.

From Bulkeley's study came the sound of raised voices. Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, the idol of the Classical side, had visitors. And from the sounds that proceeded from the study it was evident that Bulkeley and his visitors did not find themselves in agreement.

And Jimmy Silver & Co., instead of being shocked and pained, as they really ought to have been, seemed to regard it in the light of a "lark." There was not the slightest sign on their grinning faces to show that they were shocked or pained. They were enjoying it.

Bulkeley's visitors were seniors from the "Modern" side—Knowles and Catesby. The sharp, unpleasant voice of Knowles came distinctly from the study, backed up by the grumbling tones of Catesby. The pacific voice of old Bulkeley could hardly be heard.

The talk ran on cricket. And it was growing excited. In the passage Jimmy Silver of the Fourth pushed back his cuffs, as if to be in readiness.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome all followed his example, and pushed back their cuffs. Then they waited in gleeful anticipation.

"The rotten Modern cads!" said Jimmy Silver. "Awful cheek to come over here and worry old Bulkeley. He'll get fed up soon. What an awful lark to see Bulkeley slinging Knowles out on his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "They're two to one," said Jimmy Silver. "When Bulkeley gets fed up, he will want more help. We're backing up old Bulkeley."

"Hear, hear!" "We can't lay hands on prefects as a rule. But as soon as there's a row in old Bulkeley's study, that's where we chip in. He's bound to be grateful to see us ready to back him up like this."

"Oh, rather!" "My word! Knowles is going it!" said Raby, with a whistle.

The metallic voice of the Modern prefect could be clearly heard.

"I warn you, Bulkeley, that there will be trouble, if there isn't fair play for our side. We've stood about as much Classical bunkum as we intend to stand. If the Modern side doesn't get a fair show in the cricket this season, we shall make up our minds to leave the club."

Jimmy Silver & Co., of course, were not there to listen. They were there to back up their popular captain in case of need. It did not occur to them that the captain of Rookwood was not likely to "chuck out" his visitors like a fag, even if words ran very high. In their keenness to get a chance of laying hands on the Modern captain, they did not think of that. Any one of them, in

murmured Jimmy Silver.

But Silver was disappointed.

Bulkeley replied in a calm tone:

"That would mean ruin for the first eleven this season, Knowles."

"Well, it would be your fault!" came Knowles's snappish reply.

"We want to back up the school as much as you do. But three Moderns in the first eleven against eight Classics—it's a little too thick!"

"If you had the men, I'd play 'em."

"Well, we think we've got the men. I fancy we shall give your side a tussle to-morrow in the trial match, anyway."

"I hope you will, Knowles. But to see both sides play up. The fact is, your side have been slacking a lot—"

"I don't admit anything of the sort!"

"I suppose you don't think the Modern team will keep its end up against the Classics in the trial match?" said Bulkeley, a little irritably.

"Yes, I do," chimed in Catesby.

"Certainly," chimed in Catesby. "I think very likely our team will beat you to the wide, Bulkeley."

"Bulkeley surely can't stand that!" muttered Jimmy Silver, in the passage. "Get ready to chip in, you chaps!"

But Bulkeley's patience seemed to be inexhaustible. The "chucking-out" process, to the bitter disappointment of the four juniors, did not begin. Instead of that, the captain of Rookwood could be heard replying quite calmly:

"Very well, Catesby. If the Modern team beats us to-morrow, I'll admit that I've made a mistake in the selection of the first eleven. Beat us on the field, and you'll prove that

your men are better than I've thought."

"So you say now!" sneered Knowles.

"Oh, he can't stand that!" gasped Lovell.

But Bulkeley stood it.

"I say it now, and I will stand to it, Knowles. If the Modern team beats the Classic team in the trial match it will show that I've made a mistake, and I'll admit it, and prove it by putting six Moderns in the first eleven."

"It's a go?" said Knowles.

"Certainly!"

"No backing out after the trial match?"

"He can't—can't—can't stand that!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "He can't let a Modern cad doubt his word! What's the Classic side coming to?"

There was, indeed, a pause before Bulkeley replied. Knowles's last remark had been a little difficult even for the patient and easy-going Bulkeley to bear.

"I won't answer that, Knowles," he said at last. "We only ask for fair play, but we mean to get that. Come on, Catesby!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances of the deepest disappointment. Bulkeley had stood the Moderns' check, and they were going quietly. There was to be no chucking-out at all—their valuable aid was not required.

"What's the Classic side coming to?" said Silver, in deep disgust.

"I'm jolly well ashamed of old Bulkeley. I wouldn't have stood it!"

"No fear!"

"Give the cads a groan as they go," said Lovell.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four were intensely exasperated. The Modern prefect had been slinging their captain, the Classical idol, and Bulkeley had taken it all pacifically. They felt almost ashamed of Bulkeley. But they meant to let Knowles see that there were some fellows on the Classic side who had a proper opinion of his cheek. If they had been a little less excited, they might have hesitated to

"groan" a prefect in the Sixth-Form passage. But they were furious now.

The study door opened, and Knowles and Catesby came out. From Jimmy Silver & Co. there burst deep groans in chorus.

Groan!

Knowles stared at them.

"You cheeky young cads—"

Groan!

Knowles looked back into the study, with a bitter sneer on his hard face.

"So that's the outcome of all your talk about keeping the peace and pulling together, Bulkeley—planting a gang of fags in the passage to insult us as we go out!"

Bulkeley strode to the doorway, his face flushed and angry.

"What are you fags doing here?" he rapped out.

Bulkeley did not look so good-tempered as usual. The mere idea that a band of fags had heard raised voices in his study annoyed him. The thought that the dispute between the great men of the Sixth should become common talk to the Lower School was exasperating. The captain of Rookwood did not see eye to eye with the heroes of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. left off groaning. They blinked rather doubtfully at Bulkeley. They did not like his looks.

"Ahem!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Just so!" said Lovell vaguely.

"Ahem!"

"What are you doing here?" thundered Bulkeley. "Do you mean to say that you've been eavesdropping?"

The Fistical Four turned crimson. It was an unpleasant accusation—especially unpleasant from old Bulkeley, who ought to have known them better.

"Oh, draw it mild, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "Of course we haven't."

"You must have heard—"

"We couldn't help hearing Knowles yell, could we, when we were only six feet from the door?" demanded Lovell.

"And what were you doing six feet from my door?"

"Ahem!"

"Listening, the young cads!" said Knowles.

"We weren't listening!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Only a cad would think we would do such a thing!"

"The manners of the Classic fags are improving," said Knowles, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That's how you let your fags talk to a prefect, is it?"

"Will you explain what you were doing here, if you have anything to say, Silver?" asked Bulkeley, in a tone of concentrated anger.

"Well, we—we were going to back you up, Bulkeley," confessed Silver, seeing that there was no help for it.

"Back me up! What the dickens do you mean?"

"We—we thought you'd chuck out those cads for cheeking you, and—and we were going to lend a hand."

Jimmy Silver stole a look at Bulkeley's face as he made that explanation. He hoped to see some sign of gratitude there. But there was not the faintest sign of it. Bulkeley seemed to gasp for a moment. Then he turned into the study, and grasped a cane from his table, and strode out into the passage.

"Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Now, then—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Swish!

"Now the other—sharp!"

Swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now you other rascals—Lovell"—swish, swish!—"Raby"—swish, swish!—"Newcome"—swish, swish!

"Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

"Wow-wow-wow!"

"Now clear off!" said Bulkeley, "And if there's any more of your cheek, I'll give you a real licking next time."

Jimmy Silver & Co. cleared off. They felt as if they had had a real licking that time. Bulkeley went back angrily into his study; Knowles and Catesby walked away, smiling in a way that exasperated the Fistical Four even more than that unexpected licking.

Jimmy Silver & Co. retired to their own quarters, the end study in the Fourth, and squeezed their hands, and groaned in chorus.

"The awful beast!" gasped Raby. "After we were going to back him up, too!"

"Ungrateful rotter!" groaned Lovell.

"Ow, ow!" mumbled Newcome. "I always thought—ow!—that Bulkeley was a decent chap—yow!—but now I think—wow!—he's a beast! Groo!"

Jimmy Silver rubbed his hands hard, and for some time he said never a word. His loyalty to old Bulkeley had been put to a very severe test. But it stood the strain.

"It's rotten!" he said at last.

"Wow-ow!"

"But we're backing up old Bulkeley all the same!" said Jimmy Silver firmly. "Oh, my hands! He's rather a beast—oh, dear!—but you can't expect much sense from a Sixth-Former



The unfortunate Classics swung some distance from the floor, and whilst they struggled to get free, the Modern juniors shrieked with laughter.



THE PREFECTS' PLOT!

(Continued from the previous page.)

—wooh!—and we're backing him up all the same!"

The Co. did not answer. They only groaned.

The 2nd Chapter.

Knowles's Little Plot.

Knowles was smiling as he came into his study on the Modern side. Catesby followed him into the study, looking considerably puzzled.

Knowles kicked the door shut, and lighted a cigarette. He smiled at Catesby through a blue haze of smoke.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Catesby, "I'm blessed if I understand!"

"What don't you understand?"

"You seem to be jolly well satisfied," said Catesby.

"I am satisfied," said Knowles, with a nod.

"Well, I don't see it. It seems to me that we're beaten all along the line. When the trial match comes off to-morrow, the Classics will win hands down. We can say what we like over there, Knowles, but you know as well as I do that the Modern eleven will never beat the Classic team. It wasn't easy to scrape up a senior eleven on our side at all. We've got half a dozen good men, but the rest are very scrappy. And Bulkeley's team is nearly all good stuff."

"Between ourselves, I suppose we may admit that," assented Knowles.

"Well, then," argued Catesby. "The First Eleven is going to be picked from the best men on both sides. Bulkeley had already agreed to take three of us—yourself and Frampton and me. We've simply wasted time over there."

"Hardly. Bulkeley has agreed that if the Modern team beats him in the trial match, we get six men in the School Eleven."

"But we can't beat him, and you know it."

"I don't know it," said Knowles calmly.

Catesby stared at him. Catesby was hand in glove with Knowles, and prepared to back him up to any extent in securing the Moderns their rights, or a little more than their rights. To have a majority in the First Eleven was the keenest ambition of the Modern seniors.

But among themselves they had to admit that the Modern players did not equal the Classics in the field—at least, Knowles and Catesby admitted it in strict privacy. In making his plans and stratagems Knowles had no use for humbug.

The selection of the First Eleven was an important question. There was a great deal of keenness, too, about the Modern versus Classical match, though it was only a trial match to show the form of the various players. The rivalry of the two sides found its keenest expression on the playing-fields.

Bulkeley kept his men well up to the mark, and the Classical senior team was a very good eleven. The Modern senior team was nowhere near it in form. On the merits of the case, the Moderns should have been satisfied with having three men picked for the First Eleven, but they did not see it. Knowles saw it, but was determined not to see it, and all the Moderns were backing up the view Knowles chose to take.

"If you've got anything in your head, you may as well tell me," said Catesby, at last. "I'm quite in the dark. How can we beat the Classics? Not on our form?"

"So long as we beat them, Bulkeley will have to keep his word."

"I know that. But—"

"We're going to beat them," said Knowles. "A lot in cricket depends on the captain. If the Classics had to play under another skipper to-morrow, it would make a big difference."

"Of course it would; but they're not likely to give Bulkeley the go-by to please us."

"They may have no choice. Besides, Bulkeley is their best man. He is a good change bowler; a reliable field, and a whacking batsman. Their biggest score will come from Bulkeley. Without him I don't believe their score will even tie with ours."

"But they won't play without him!" almost shrieked Catesby.

"Why should they?"

"Not if they can help it, of course."

Catesby started.

"Dash it all, Knowles!" His voice faltered a little. "You don't mean to say you're thinking of some dodge for nobbling Bulkeley?"

Knowles ceased to smile; his face grew harder, and his eyes had an unpleasant greenish glint in them.

"This isn't a time to be particular," he said. "Of course, this is strictly between ourselves, Catesby."

"We're fairly in for it," pursued Knowles. "We've set out this term to do down Bulkeley. We're going to make our side top side of Rookwood. The fellows depend on us to keep their end up. We're all fed up with Classical swank. Every fellow on that side a swanking cad, from Bulkeley down to the littlest fag. They're up against us because we have more money, more brains, and generally because we're the Modern side, and their mouldy old side is going to the dogs. Well, we're going to help it get there."

"Hear, hear!" said Catesby heartily.

"This season, we're coming out strong on cricket. If we play our cards well, we may get the school games right in our hands, and we may be able to shift Bulkeley—"

"By gad!"

"That's the goal. You know very well I ought to be captain of Rookwood, and you ought to be vice-captain, Catesby."

"Of course, I see that. But—Bulkeley is a pretty good skipper; the Classics stand by him to a man, and a lot on our side back him up no end."

"We've got to alter all that, and we're going to begin by getting a good representation in the School eleven. Bulkeley was talking a bit too loosely this afternoon, but he will have to keep his word; I shall nail him down to it. If we beat the Classics in the trial match, we get six men into the first eleven. If they don't play Bulkeley we shall beat them. Well, then, the long and the short of it is, they won't play Bulkeley. I shall fix it."

"Oh, Knowles!"

"The game's worth the candle," said Knowles. "Of course, it will have to be kept awfully dark."

"I should jolly well say so!" gasped Catesby. "Why, the fellows on our own side would scrag us if they suspected."

"They won't suspect," said Knowles coolly. "I can fix it for Bulkeley to be called away just before the match on a fool's errand—and he's too fagged ever to suspect that I had a hand in it himself. If he did suspect he wouldn't dare to say so—there wouldn't be an atom of proof. Of course, I shall get a third party to do the trick."

"My hat!"

"Joey Hook is the man," said Knowles, "the fellow who drove us in the car to the races the other day—another little secret of ours."

Knowles grinned. "He can work it. When Bulkeley finds out he's been spoofer, he can think what he likes. As a matter of fact, he won't suspect me."

"He wouldn't suspect a Rookwood chap of playing a trick like that," agreed Catesby.

Knowles flushed a little.

"Well, never mind what he suspects. That's the little game. Without Bulkeley, we shall beat them. Bulkeley will have to keep his word all the same. I specially said there was to be no backing out after the match. You see, this idea came into my head the minute he'd spoken. We are going to win that match, and then we will have six men in the First Eleven. That's only a beginning—but there you are."

"But how—"

"No need to talk that over here. We shall have to see Joey Hook."

"I—I say, it's a bit risky meeting him near the school, or going to see him in Combe—in the daylight," said Catesby doubtfully. "If we should be spotted, you know the reputation he has—"

"We're not going to the Black Dog to see him," grinned Knowles, "and we're not meeting him near the school. I shall wire to him to meet us somewhere, where I've met him before, out of sight—the old barn."

"But—but is it safe to send a wire like that?"

"Fatehead! We've got a code, the same we use when it's a wire about horses."

"Oh, I see!"

Knowles sat down to the table, and drew pen and ink, and a telegraph-form towards him. Catesby read over his shoulder as he wrote:

"John Harris, Ivy Cottage, Lanchester. Six, C. K."

"That's his name for telegrams," explained Knowles. "And when I don't mention a place of meeting, he knows it's the old barn. See?"

"Oh, good!" said Catesby. "Puzzle anybody to guess anything from that?"

"If he's not at home, they'll phone him wherever he is, so that's all right—I've given him plenty of time."

Knowles opened the study door, and shouted: "Fag!"

Tommy Dodd of the Fourth came along.

"Take this telegram to the post-office, Dodd, and send it off at once. Here's a tanner!"

"But how—"

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"Take this telegram to the post-office, Dodd, and send it off at once. Here's a tanner!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said Knowles irritably.

"I'm going down to cricket practice this afternoon," said Tommy Dodd. "We're keen about it, you know. We're making Smythe put some new men in the junior team."

"Take that wire at once, you young sweep. It's important."

"Not so jolly important as our cricket practice," said Tommy Dodd, backing away as he spoke, however.

"Why, you—" Knowles caught up a cane.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "Anything to oblige a nice chap like you, Knowles. You're always so kind and considerate."

Tommy Dodd dodged away before Knowles could reach him with the cane. He went somewhat dismally to look for his chums, Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, and they heroically decided to cut the cricket practice and walk down to Combe with him. So the three Tommies started off together to take the telegram, little dreaming of the treacherous scheme to which they were unwittingly giving their aid.

The 3rd Chapter.

Taking Cover.

"Well hit!"

Jimmy Silver grinned as he watched the ball in its flight. He strolled off the pitch, tossing the bat to Jones minor, and joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome outside the pavilion.

The Classical juniors were at cricket practice. Smythe of the Shell was looking on, with an eyeglass in his eye and a somewhat disdainful expression upon his face. Smythe, the junior captain, had been constrained to agree to put players in the junior team who could play, as well as his own "nutty" pals who could not play. It had been difficult to bring Smythe to reason, but he had been brought. And when the re-formed eleven was selected, there was no doubt that Jimmy Silver would have a place.

Silver was a good bat, but it was in bowling that he excelled, and the Rookwood junior team was weakest in bowlers. The juniors were prepared to "scrag" Smythe if he left Jimmy Silver out of the next match.

"Nuff for to-day!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "What price a stroll out, my infants? We'll drop in for tea at Combe, a fresco—what!"

"Good egg!" said Lovell. "We've done our little bit. Those Modern cads have been cutting practice. They're all expecting places in the eleven, too."

"Cheeky cads!" said Silver. "Of course, Tommy Dodd will have to go in, he's a thumping good bat; but Doyle and Cook can go and eat coke. We shall have to keep an eye on Smythe when he's making up the team. He'll dodge us if he can. He doesn't like playing anybody outside the select family circle of nuts. Well, come on!"

The Fistical Four sauntered away towards the gates.

It was a sunny spring afternoon, and a walk through the green countryside was very pleasant. The chums of the Fourth had done their duty at cricket practice, and they had recovered from the licking received at the hands of Bulkeley. So they strolled out of the gates of Rookwood in great spirits.

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Three Modern juniors coming up the road met them in the lane. Jimmy Silver wagged an admonitory forefinger at Tommy Dodd & Co.

"You've been missing practice," he remarked.

"That ass Knowles sent us with a telegram," said Tommy Dodd, with a snort. "It doesn't matter, though, we don't need practice so much as you Classics mugs."

"Sure we could play your heads off any time," remarked Tommy Doyle.

"And not half try!" added Tommy Cook.

Jimmy Silver winked at his comrades, and they made a sudden rush. Three Modern caps went flying over the hedge, and three Modern juniors sat down suddenly in the dust, and the Classical chums fled along the lane laughing.

Tommy Dodd sprang to his feet, and shook his fist after them.

"You Classic worms!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aftier them!" yelled Doyle.

"Hold on! We've got to get some practice, or that cad Smythe will be trying to leave us out of the eleven," said Tommy Dodd.

So the Modern chums recaptured their caps, and went on, postponing vengeance till a future occasion.

Much inspired by that little victory over their Modern rivals, the Classical quartette sauntered on. They stopped in the ancient village of Combe for ginger-pop, by way of refreshment, and then started on a long walk across the heath. Jimmy Silver was a keen walker, and the Co. weren't going to admit that they were not just as good walkers as he, so they followed Jimmy's lead without demur, and left Rookwood a very considerable distance behind.

"Thinking of walking to London?" asked Raby at last.

"Or Manchester?" queried Newcome sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"If you're tired, little ones—"

"Oh, we're not tired," said Lovell. "Keep on to Inverness if you like."

Jimmy Silver stopped at last. From the high chalky uplands they had a view of the Channel in the distance, rolling in the afternoon sun.

"Looking for German submarines?" asked Lovell, very sarcastically. As a matter of fact, Lovell had had enough walking, and he was a little bit exasperated that Jimmy Silver showed no sign of fatigue.

"Let's get to Combe," said Silver. "I'm ready for tea now—quite. It's only three miles following the footpath."

"Blow the footpath!" said Lovell.

"You don't know anything about this district, you're only a new kid yet. There's a short cut in less than a mile; we go by that old quarry where you pulled me out once, and then pass the barn where those Modern cads tied us up the other day. I'm not tired, of course. But—but I'd like to have a look at that quarry again."

"Right you are," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, I'm feeling a big fagged myself."

Jimmy Silver was at once restored to popularity by that candid admission.

The Classical four followed a track, guided by Lovell, which led them past the old quarry, where Lovell had once had a narrow escape, and had been rescued by Silver. It was that incident that had healed the breach between them, and made them great chums. They both remembered it as they passed the quarry. A little later the old barn came in sight.

The Fistical Four had good reason to remember that deserted old building. They had been imprisoned there by the Modern juniors on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion when Tommy Dodd & Co. had japed them.

They were sauntering towards the barn, knee-deep in grass and ferns, when Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hook it, quick!"

"What's the row?"

"Into the barn, I tell you—sharp's the word."

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell by the arm, and rushed him at headlong speed into the old barn. Raby and Newcome, much surprised, followed at a run. They did not understand

in the least what Jimmy Silver was acting in that remarkable manner for, but they knew he must have a good reason.

Jimmy Silver panted as they stopped in the barn.

"Saved!" he ejaculated dramatically.

"What the thunder—" began Lovell warmly.

"Shush!"

"Look here—"

"Jolly nearly spotted," said Silver.

"If I hadn't seen them coming over the ridge, they'd have nailed us, as sure as houses."

"Who would?"

"Prefects, my son!"

"Oh!" said the Co. They understood them. The old Coombe quarries and their vicinity were strictly out of bounds for the juniors, owing to the dangerous nature of the locality. To be "spotted" there by prefects meant fines and a gating, and perhaps a caning.

"Blessed if I saw them," said Raby.

"Lucky for you you had your Uncle Jimmy with you, then," said Silver cheerfully. "Two rotten Modern prefects. No business to report Classics, of course; but they'd do it all the same, and Bootles would warm us."

The four juniors cautiously approached the old window, which was partly covered by a broken shutter, and peered out through the opening. Knowles and Catesby of the Sixth were in full view, crossing the heath towards the barn. They were talking together as they came, and evidently had seen nothing of the juniors. Jimmy Silver's prompt action in taking cover had saved the chums of the Fourth from a discovery that would have had unpleasant consequences. Knowles would have been delighted to report them for being out of bounds.

The juniors grinned as they watched the Sixth-Formers, from the cover of the barn.

"Poor old Knowles! He doesn't know what he's missed," remarked Lovell. "Might have got us a licking all round if he'd been a bit sharper. We'll lie low here till he's cleared off."

"I suppose he can't be coming here," muttered Silver uneasily.

"Why should he? He hasn't seen us."

"I know that; but they're coming straight towards the barn."

The juniors watched in silence from the window. There was no doubt of it. Knowles and Catesby had left the path, and were striking across towards the barn directly. It was clear that the old barn was their destination.

The Fistical Four exchanged extremely uneasy glances.

"Spotted after all, it looks like," murmured Raby.

"What in thunder are they coming here for?" said Newcome. "I know they haven't seen us—they're deep in jaw."

"They will when they get here, confound them!"

What the two Modern prefects could want at the old barn was a mystery. But the trouble was, that they were coming there, not why they were coming there.

"We're not spotted yet," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Get up into the loft."

"Good egg! If they don't hear us, it will be all right. They can't be going to stop long, I should think."

"We'll take good care they don't hear us."

Jimmy Silver swarmed up the rickety old ladder into the loft, and his chums followed him quickly. Knowles and Catesby were very close at hand now. Silver closed the creaking, cracked trapdoor over the ladder. The ancient boards under their feet creaked as they moved.

"Quiet!" whispered Silver. "If we're spotted, it means Saturday afternoon detention, and no cricket practice—as well as being marched back to the school by a Modern cad. Sit down and don't even breathe."

That command was a little difficult to execute. However, the chums of the Fourth sat down, and breathed softly. Through chinks in the dilapidated floor of the loft, they could see into the barn below. In a few minutes there was a sound of boots on the old brick floor, and Knowles and Catesby entered. Knowles looked round the barn.

"Not here yet," he remarked.

"We're early," said Catesby, looking at his watch. "It's only a quarter to."

"Better early than late. Have a fag?"

"Thanks."

The two prefects lighted cigarettes,

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THE PREFECTS' PLOT!

(Continued from the previous page.)

and stood leaning against the old door of the barn, smoking and chatting—and waiting.

The 4th Chapter.

A Startling Discovery.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances of deep disgust and indignation.

Smoking was strictly prohibited by all the rules of Rookwood, and if Knowles had caught a fag smoking, he would have been "down" on him like a hundred of bricks. Yet here he was smoking himself with Catesby. Knowles was evidently one of those authoritative persons whose maxim is, "Do as I say, not as I do!"

The scent of tobacco and the murmur of voices floated up to the juniors in the loft. Through the chinks in the floor, they could see the two seniors quite plainly.

They did not venture to make a remark—their own voices might have been heard. Now that they had seen Knowles smoking, it was more than ever necessary to keep their presence a secret. Knowles had a cane—a malacca—under his arm, and the Classical four had no desire whatever to make closer acquaintance with that malacca.

The juniors were in a state of dismay. It was not easy for four energetic young gentlemen to keep as still as mice for any lengthy period of time. And it looked as if Knowles and Catesby had come there to meet somebody, and there was to be an interview. There was no telling how long the Classical juniors might be kept shut up in the loft.

But there was no help for it. They had to grin and bear it.

The minutes passed very slowly. They saw Knowles look at his watch several times.

"Dash it all, it's well past six," said Knowles. "He ought to be here."

"I suppose he got the telegram?" said Catesby.

"If he didn't, they'd have telephoned to him. I know he's not away—I saw him yesterday."

Again the Classical juniors exchanged silent looks. That was the telegram Tommy Dodd had mentioned of course.

They began to be interested, and also uneasy. Knowles was evidently keeping a secret appointment—he would not have come such a long way without good reasons. But the Classical chums had no desire whatever to hear his little secrets, whatever they were. But there was no choice about the matter, if the interview was held directly below them in the barn. They could hardly be expected to hand themselves over to punishment, for the sake of Knowles's beastly secrets. And Jimmy Silver reflected grimly that Knowles had accused them of eavesdropping that afternoon. It would serve Knowles right!

They would gladly have got out of hearing, however, if it had been possible. But it was not possible. Anywhere in the loft they could have heard the voices below—and they could not even stir without risk of immediate discovery.

The Co. looked silently and inquiringly towards Jimmy Silver. Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. It could not be helped.

Knowles was uttering impatient exclamations every few minutes. But at last Catesby, who was looking out of the doorway, called out:

"Here he comes!"

Another minute or two and a man entered the barn. He was a man of medium height, with a horsey look, a gaudy tie, and a bowler hat cocked on one side of his head.

"You're late, Hook," said Knowles irritably.

"Sorry, Master Knowles, I 'ad to get 'ere, you know."

In the loft above Jimmy Silver exchanged eloquent glances. They had seen Joey Hook before, hanging

round the Black Bull and the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe. He was a gentleman of sporting proclivities, with a kindly predilection for helping anybody who wanted to put a "bit" on a geegee. Any fellow with that kind of sporting taste found a friend in Joey Hook; and to judge by the amount of liquid refreshment Joey Hook imbibed at the Bird-in-Hand, he did very well out of it.

"My only hat!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "Knowles—Catesby—a book-maker—a sporting tout! Oh, ye gods and little fishes!"

It was a startling discovery, and the Classical chums almost trembled at the bare thought of Knowles discovering their presence now.

"I s'pose it's somethin' on a 'orse—wot?" said Mr. Hook. "I reely came as soon as I could, Master Knowles. You 'eard somethin' for the Spring 'Andicap?"

"It's not that," said Knowles; "quite a different matter. You remember you picked us up in a car the other day—"

"Yes."

"I suppose you could bring the car out to-morrow?"

"Suttin'ly."

"You could come rigged out as a chauffeur, I suppose—respectable sort of chauffeur, with goggles and so on?"

Joey Hook stared.

"Suttin'ly I could," he replied. "But why—"

"I want you to do me a good turn," said Knowles. "It will be worth a quid to you, and the expenses of the car. It will take up to-morrow afternoon."

"I'm at your service, Master Knowles. I don't quite see—"

"I'm going to explain. You know Bulkeley of Rookwood—a big fellow in the Sixth Form?"

Joey Hook scowled.

"Don't I know 'im!" he said. "He punched my 'ead once 'cause he found me talkin' to young Master Leggett. Punched my 'ead, the scoundrel!"

"Then he knows you by sight?" said Knowles uneasily.

"Oh, yes! Wot about it?"

"I suppose you could rig yourself up in driving goggles so that he wouldn't know you?"

"Easy as winkin'. But—"

"Well, I want you to call at the school with the car to-morrow afternoon—"

"At the school!" ejaculated Joey Hook, his eyes opening wide.

"Yes—got up as a very respectable chauffeur, of course. You'll ask Mack, the porter, for Master Bulkeley. You'll give him a message that old Mr. Bulkeley, that's Bulkeley's uncle, has become seriously ill, and is sinking fast. You're old Mr. Bulkeley's chauffeur, and you've been sent in the car to fetch him quick."

"My eye!" said Joey Hook, in a

state of great astonishment. "Wot is it—a lark on that there Bulkeley?"

"That's it," said Knowles, "pulling his leg, you know. It will take him away from a game for the afternoon, and worry him no end. You don't object to that?"

Joey Hook chuckled.

"No fear! I'm your man!"

"Old Mr. Bulkeley lives at Shore-mouth—that's thirty miles or so. He lives at the Elms, a place outside the town. Well, you'll take as much time as you can getting there—to use up the afternoon, you know. Have a puncture, if you like, at some place where there's no railway-station en route—or, say, the road's up and go a long way round—anything you like, so long as you use up time. Finally, land him at the Elms. While he's gone into the house, and is finding out that his uncle's the same as ever, you can clear off in the car, and leave him there."

Joey Hook burst into a hoarse laugh.

"What a game!" he said.

"He won't know you again—he'll know somebody has spoofed him, and

borrow a chauffeur's livery easy enough, and look like an old family servant. I'll rig a spoof number on the car, in case he notices, too. You leave it to me!"

"Right! Get to the school not later than two. It's a half-holiday, you know, and stumps are to be pitched at two. Get there at half-past one to make sure."

"Arl-past one it is!" said Joey Hook. "That'll be a quid for me; and a quid for the car, Master Knowles!"

Knowles nodded. The prosperous banker's son had plenty of money. He would have spent much more than that to deprive the Classical seniors of Bulkeley's services for the afternoon if it had been necessary.

"Here's a quid," said Knowles. "I'll send you the other afterwards—a currency note to your address at Lancheater."

"Right you are, Master Knowles. You rely on me!"

"Time we got back," said Catesby, who had listened without speaking a word. "It looks to me like an easy catch!"

save for the four juniors silent in the loft.

The 5th Chapter.

"Mum's the Word!"

"Well!"

Jimmy Silver broke the silence at last with that ejaculation.

The Classical chums were trembling with indignation and horror.

The rascally plot had been unfolded under their very noses; they had heard every word from beginning to end.

"The cads! The rotters!" spluttered Lovell. "Let's get straight back to Rookwood and tell Bulkeley!"

"He'll lick Knowles for that, surely!" said Raby. "Even Bulkeley wouldn't stand that!"

"What a lark for old Bulkeley to lick that howling cad!" said Newcome. "And show him up to the whole school, too! Come on, Silver! What are you mooning about?"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!" said Lovell warmly. "Let's get back to the school. The sooner we tell Bulkeley this the better. The awful beast! You remember we heard old Bulkeley say that if the Moderns won the trial match he'd give in, and let Knowles have six men in the first. This is a trick to let the Moderns win. They'll win very likely if old Bulkeley's away. Knowles would pin him down to his word, all the same, though Bulkeley meant if he was playing, of course."

"We'll jolly well put a spoke in his wheel!" said Raby, with great satisfaction. "This will be a regular show-up for Knowles! Fancy letting all Rookwood know that the cad has plotted with a rascal like Joey Hook to nobble old Bulkeley!"

"Are you coming, Silver, you ass?" demanded Lovell, lifting the trap, and preparing to descend from the loft.

Jimmy Silver was standing silent, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his boyish brow. He was thinking hard.

"Wait a bit, Lovell! Give those cads time to get clear. We don't want them to spot us," said Silver.

Lovell gave a snort.

"I don't care much if they spot us now. They'll know we were here, anyway, when we tell Bulkeley what we've found out!"

"You do as your uncle tells you," replied Jimmy Silver. "This matter isn't so jolly simple as you think! We've got to be careful!"

"Blessed if I can see it! My idea is to go to Bulkeley at once, and tell him the whole yarn!" said Lovell.

"Suppose he doesn't believe it?"

"Eh?"

"You see," continued Jimmy Silver quietly, "Bulkeley knows we're up against Knowles, and he would find it jolly hard to believe that a Rookwood fellow would be such an utter cad. He would speak to Knowles at once, and Knowles would be on his defence. He would deny every word of it!"

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"And Catesby would back him up through thick and thin."

"But—but it's true!"

"We know that, fathhead, but Bulkeley doesn't. All Bulkeley will know is that we come to him with a very improbable yarn—"

"Improbable?"

"Well, it's improbable on the face of it," said Jimmy Silver. "If you hadn't heard it, and somebody told you, what would you think of such a story? We know Knowles better than Bulkeley does—we've got reason to—but we shouldn't have believed it even of Knowles if we hadn't heard it with our own ears!"

The Co. looked at Jimmy Silver in silence. It was true enough. Such a story wanted the most conclusive proof before it could be believed, and they knew that frank, unsuspecting old Bulkeley would be slow to believe evil of anybody.

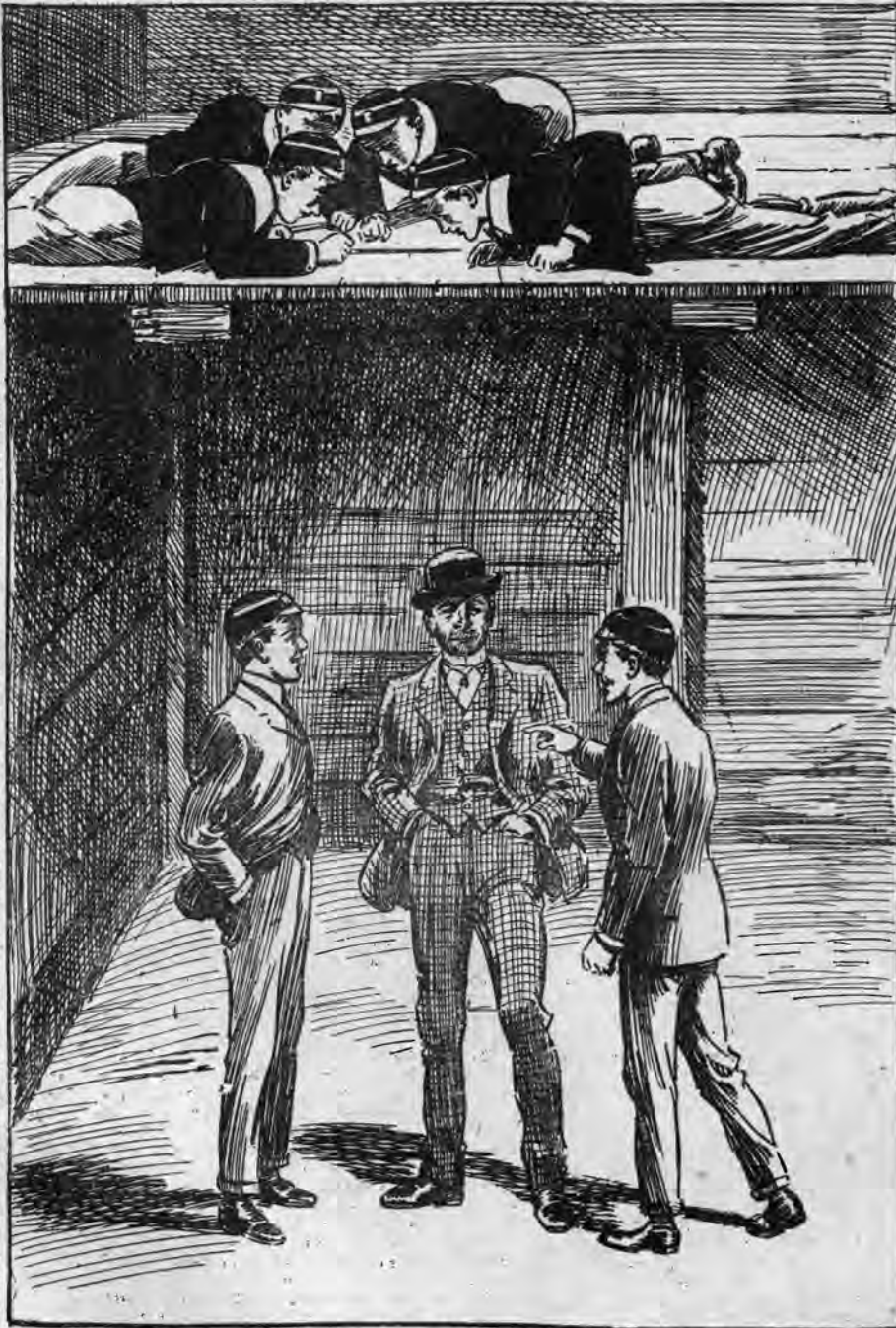
"It will be our word against Knowles's and Catesby's," said Silver, "and they're prefects; and we're only fags in the Fourth. And it's well known that we've got our knife into Knowles. There'd be no proof, for Knowles would get word to Joey Hook at once, and he wouldn't turn up with his blessed motor-car to-morrow. Knowles would say it was an infamous slander—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And he's got nerve enough for anything. He hates us already. He would be quite capable of taking the matter before the Head, just to prove to all Rookwood that he was innocent—"

"Innocent!" stuttered Lovell.

"Yes. And he'd prove it, too—"



"I want you to call at the school to-morrow," said Knowles to the book-maker. "You'll ask for Bulkeley, and give him a message that his uncle is seriously ill, and then take him off in your car." The juniors up above listened eagerly to the prefects' plot against the captain of Rookwood.

that's all," said Knowles. "You'll get away quite safely while he's interviewing his uncle, and finding out that the old gent isn't at death's door."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"He can get back from Shore-mouth by train. It's a cross-country journey, and he will have to change three times, so he won't arrive at Rookwood in a hurry—not before dark, I fancy. It's easy enough for you," said Knowles.

"Easy as winkin', Master Knowles. What a young gent you are! I'll be glad to serve him a turn, too—punchin' my 'ead, the scoundrel, for 'avin' a word with Master Leggett. You rely on me, Master Knowles. I'll be such a respectable chauffeur that you wouldn't know me yourself. I can

"Easy as winkin', Master Catesby."

"Good-bye, Joey! I shall see you on Saturday as usual!"

With a nod to the dingy black-guard, Knowles went out of the barn with Catesby. The sporting tout remained a few minutes to light a cigar and to let the Rookwood seniors get clear. It would not have done for Knowles to risk being seen in the company of Joey Hook.

Mr. Hook chuckled gleefully over his cigar.

"My eye!" he murmured. "What a lark on Mister 'Igh-and-Mighty Bulkeley! And wot a precious rascal Master Knowles will make when he grows up! He, he, he!"

And Mr. Hook departed in his turn, and the old barn was deserted—



THE PREFECTS' PLOT!

(Continued from the previous page.)

good enough for all the school, my boy. Imagine Dr. Chisholm's face when he heard such an accusation brought by fags against one of his prefects! I tell you Knowles has got nerve enough to report it to him, and demand our punishment as slanderers!"

"Slanderers!" said Raby faintly. "And the Head wouldn't believe a single word we said—he couldn't! Nothing would make him believe that Knowles, the head prefect of his side, was a thorough villain, and a pal of bookies. The Head, my sons, would remember the rows we've had with Knowles, and he would flog us—"

"Jimmy!"

"If he didn't sack us!" concluded Jimmy Silver.

"Mum-mum-my word!"

Utter dismay was in the faces of the Co. They stared at Jimmy Silver, dumbfounded.

But they could not deny that he was right.

If Knowles was cool and calculating a rascal enough to lay this plot against the school captain, he was cool and cunning enough to deny it when he was accused, and to turn the tables on his accusers. Indeed, he would have no other recourse, unless he was to be turned out of Rookwood in disgrace. Knowles would fight very hard to save himself from that. All that lying and cunning could do he would do.

"We've got our bare word, and it's not enough," said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head. "Knowles would simply down us. Bulkeley wouldn't believe it!"

"He—he knows we're not liars!"

"Not in ordinary things, but he would think this was a whopper. Why should he believe us rather than Knowles?"

"Oh, dear!"

"We can go to Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver, "and I'll tell you what'll happen. Bulkeley will think it's a yarn we've made up because that Modern cad has bullied us. He'll send for Knowles, and put it to him plain. Knowles will deny every word, and complain to the Head. We shall be flogged for saying such things about a prefect!"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"And then," added Jimmy Silver, "this little scheme being knocked on the head, Knowles will lay some other scheme to dish Bulkeley very likely, so we shall have done it all for nothing. He won't talk over the next scheme under our noses!"

"B-b-but what's to be done, then?" said Lovell quite limply. "You don't suggest letting him rip, and letting old Bulkeley be spoofed to-morrow?"

"No fear! We've got to think it out," said Jimmy Silver; "but it's no good starting by getting ourselves hauled up before the Head for slandering a prefect. My dear kid, if we told this to the fellows in the Fourth, they'd think it was gammon. Wouldn't you, if Jones or Townsend came to you with such a yarn?"

"I—I—I suppose I should," said Lovell, after a pause.

"Mum's the word," said Jimmy Silver. "Speech is silver, and silence is golden. In this case, Silver is silent!" he added, with a grin.

"We've got to have a pow-wow over this, and think it out. We've got to prevent Knowles dishing old Bulkeley; but we can't prevent it by getting ourselves into an awful scrape, and leaving Knowles free to lay another little scheme. Let's get out!"

In silence the Classical chums quitted the old barn, and took their way to Rookwood.

It was too late for tea at Combe now; they had only time to get in before locking-up.

Almost in silence they walked back to the school.

The Co. thought it over, and they realised that Jimmy Silver was right. If they had carried out their first im-

pulse to rush off to Bulkeley with the news of the rascally plot there was no doubt that the cunning Knowles would have "dished" them, and their attempt to "back up Bulkeley" would have recoiled on their own heads. Indeed, the three juniors shivered to think what might have happened to them but for Jimmy Silver's foresight.

"The fellow's a criminal—simply a criminal!" gasped Lovell at last. Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"He's not much better," he said. "But it's no jolly good saying so in public without a lot of proof."

"But what are we to do, then?" said Newcome helplessly.

"That wants thinking out. We'll have a pow-wow over tea."

But that "pow-wow" was not to come off so soon. Jimmy Silver & Co. entered just before old Mack came down to look the gates, thinking of their problem, and of anything but Tommy Dodd & Co.

But Tommy Dodd & Co. were thinking of them.

The three Tommies had not forgotten the encounter in the lane, and they were waiting for the Classical four to come in. And as the Classics entered and hurried across the quad towards the School House there was a sudden rush of feet under the old beeches.

"Collar the cads!"

Before Jimmy Silver & Co. knew what was happening they were surrounded by a horde of Modern juniors and swept off their feet and rushed away in the grasp of many hands.

The 6th Chapter. Trial by Jury.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bagged!"

"Bring 'em along!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. struggled desperately.

They were generally ready for a scrap with the Moderns; but just then, with that deep problem on their minds, they were in no humour for japes.

But their humour in the matter was not consulted.

There were a dozen Modern juniors round them, all holding on, and the four Classics struggled and wriggled in vain as they were rushed away.

Away under the beeches they went, and away round the gym, the Modern heroes taking great care to keep their little game out of sight of the School House. They reached the wood-shed, and there the prisoners were rushed in, and dumped down on the floor.

To secure them a heavy Modern youth sat on each of them, and the rest gathered round, laughing like hyenas.

The dusk was falling over Rookwood, and it was very shadowy in the wood-shed. Tommy Dodd lighted a bicycle-lamp to illuminate the proceedings. Tommy Cook carefully closed the door and bolted it. There was to be no chance of a rescue, if the other Classics got wind of the Modern raid.

"Look here, chuck it!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "We don't want any of your rot now, Tommy Dodd!"

"Yes, do chuck it!" said Lovell.

"We want to get in to tea. Besides, we've got something to do!"

The Classical chums were very anxious to have that "pow-wow" in the end study, and decide what was to be done. There was not much time to waste, for it was upon the morrow that Knowles's plot was to be carried out. But they could not explain all that to the Moderns—indeed, if they had made that accusation against Knowles to the Modern juniors they would have received a terrific ragging as a reward. Tommy Dodd & Co. were not likely to admit that their captain was so thorough a rascal.

"Safe as houses!" said Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "Keep quiet, you Classic worms, and leave off wriggling!"

"Look here, what's the little game, you fatheads?"

"It isn't a game," said Tommy

Dodd. "Nothing like it. A very serious matter. Form the court."

The grinning Moderns formed themselves into a circle, excepting the four who were sitting on Jimmy Silver & Co. They settled themselves a little more comfortably. There was not much comfort for the Fistical Four, but that couldn't be helped.

"Lacy!" rapped out Tommy Dodd.

"Adsum!" said Lacy.

"Fathead, this isn't roll-call! You're judge. No good being the hopeful son of a King's counsel if you can't judge. Get on the bench."

Lacy sat cross-legged on the bench. "Put on your wig, you ass!

What's the good of a judge without a wig? The wig is the chief part of the bizney. There's no difference between a judge and a criminal in the dock, excepting the wig."

"All right, keep your wool on, Tommy Dodd!"

Lacy adjusted his wig, which was nothing more imposing than the cover of a cushion, and gave Lacy a very striking appearance.

"Now, Webb!"

"Here I am!" said Webb.

"You're prosecuting liar—I mean, lawyer. Put on your wig."

Webb donned a cushion-cover. The Modern juniors had evidently prepared this little scene, and they seemed to regard it as very amusing. Jimmy Silver & Co. were not in the least entertained.

"Look here, will you gerrup?" growled Lovell. "We want our tea!"

"We're fed up!" grunted Raby.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said Tommy Dodd, "I beg you to note the contradictory statements of the prisoners on the floor. One says that he is fed up, and another states that he is fed up. I draw attention to this trifling circumstance, gentlemen, as a proof that Classical cads are habitual Prussians, and couldn't tell the truth if they tried."

"Hear, hear!"

"Will you lemme gerrup?" roared Jimmy Silver sulphurously.

"Sit on him tight, Green!"

"You bet!" said Green.

"What silly game are you playing, you duffers?" yelled Lovell.

"I appeal to the court for protection," said Tommy Dodd.

"Contempt of court," said the judge. "Knock his head against the floor."

"Rap! Rap!"

"Ow! Oh, I say! Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you silly idiots don't let me get up—" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Contempt of court! Knock his head on the floor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver gave a fiendish yell as his head was rapped on the floor. The floor was hard and unsympathetic.

"Oh, you rotters! Ow, you Modern cads! Yow-ow!"

"Silence in court!" said Judge Lacy. "This is a trial by jury, and if you don't know how to behave yourselves in court, you Classic worms, you'll be taught! Any interruption is contempt of court. Sit on his head, Green. Gentlemen of the jury, the court is now open, and the proceedings will—er—proceed."

"Hear, hear!"

And the proceedings proceeded!

"Your Worship, and honourable gentlemen," said Webb, pushing the corner of his wig out of his eyes. "I regret to say that this is a very serious case. I hope to prove that the prisoners at the bar—I should say, on the floor—are guilty of manslaughter, pocket-picking, petty larceny, and cheek."

"My learned brother may get on," said the judge.

Webb cleared his throat with quite a legal little cough. The gentlemen of the jury stood round grinning.

The Fistical Four, safely pinned down, glared. Trial by jury might be funny from the Modern point of view, but the four Classics entirely failed to see where the fun came in.

"Your Honourable Worship," pursued Webb, "these prisoners—known to be bad characters—"

"I rise to order," said a member of the jury. "Let the learned counsel state in what way these prisoners are known to be bad characters."

"The question is in order," said the judge.

"I hope to satisfy the court upon that point," said the prosecuting lawyer. "They are Classics—measly, mingy Classics! I trust the jury require no further evidence on that point."

"Hear, hear!"

The jury were quite satisfied. The prisoners on the floor looked daggers.

"these bad characters—these measly Classics—committed assault and battery upon three respectable citizens this afternoon. They attacked Messrs. Dodd, Doyle, and Cook, and deprived them of their caps, undoubtedly with the intention of purloining them. Owing to their great speed in retiring from the scene, Messrs. Dodd, Doyle, and Cook were unable to deal with them on the spot. Gentlemen of the jury know the great speed a Classical cad can put on when there is a Modern after him."

"Hear, hear!" said the jury.

"You rotter!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Lemme get up, and I'll mop up the floor with any three of you!"

"Rap! Rap!"

Green jammed Jimmy Silver's head on the floor without waiting for the judge to pronounce the interruption, "Contempt of court!"

"I will now call the injured parties," pursued the prosecuting counsel. "Mr. Dodd, kindly come forward!"

Mr. Dodd kindly came forward.

"State what occurred this afternoon, on the occasion of the assault, Mr. Dodd."

"We were coming along the lane," said the witness; "we noticed a bad smell in the atmosphere, so we knew there were some Classics hanging round. These Classics never wash their necks. The prisoners came up and rushed us. They actually had the cheek to lay their hands on us—us Moderns! That is lese-majesty and contempt of court by all the laws of Rookwood. The touch of a Classical cad is well-known to be contamination."

"The witness's statement is according to law," said the judge. "For a Classical worm to lay hands on a Modern young gentleman is lazy-majesty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court! The prisoners are guilty of lazy-majesty—"

More laughter in court. The learned judge's pronunciation of lese-majesty made even the Classics grin.

"I have other witnesses to call," submitted the learned counsel. "Messrs. Doyle and Cook will kindly step forward. They corroborate the statement of Master Dodd."

"Faith, and we do!" said Tommy Doyle.

"The prisoners on the floor laid hands upon you?"

"Yes, I had to burn my jacket afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I had to wash in Condy's Fluid!" corroborated Mr. Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" roared Lovell. "I'll jolly well—Yarooop!"

"Rap, rap!"

"Gentlemen of the jury, and learned judge, and your worship and honour, that is my case," said the learned counsel. "I demand a verdict of guilty against the prisoners on the floor."

"You thumping idiots—" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Sit on his silly head, Green!"

"I'm sitting on it! I—Yooowwwwwwwww!" shrieked Green, making a sudden spring into the air.

"Wooowwwwwwwww!"

"What the thunder—"

"Yurrrrrr! I'm bitten! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Great laughter in court.

Jimmy Silver had jumped up. But the jury piled on him as one man, and he was bumped down again. This time two jurymen sat on him—not on his head, however.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"Guilty, my lord!"

"Prisoners on the floor, you have been found guilty by a jury of your fellow-countrymen, sitting in the wood-shed, according to law. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"Wait till I get hold of you, and I'll say something!" gurgled Jimmy Silver.

"Rap, rap!"

"Ow! Oh, jiminy!"

"I shall now proceed to pass sentence," said the judge. "After a fair trial, the prisoners have been found guilty. Wretched, depraved, and hardened offenders, I need not enlarge upon the enormity of your conduct. You, measly Classics, belonging to the mouldy side at Rookwood, have ventured to lay your mingy hands upon the honourable persons of Moderns, thus contaminating them, and committing the crime of lazy-majesty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! No words can express the heinousness of the prisoners' conduct, so I will not enlarge—"

"No; cut it short, Lacy!" came from Raby. "Your voice gives me a pain!"

Some of the jury chuckled, and the judge glared.

"I shall now pass sentence," he said. "The prisoners on the floor are sentenced to be hanged, and as the regular hangman has gone to tea, I call upon the jury to carry out the sentence."

"Hear, hear!"

"Why, you silly jabberwocks," howled Jimmy Silver, as Tommy Dodd dragged four ropes into view, "what are you at?"

"Carry out the sentence!" said the judge severely.

The ropes were thrown over a beam above, and four nooses were made at the ends. The four Classics were dragged under them. They were a little alarmed now. To their relief, the loops were slipped under their arms. The whole crowd of Moderns dragged at the ropes, and the Fistical Four were swung off the floor.

They clutched at the ropes above them, to ease the strain, and hung on, glaring like basilisks at the yelling Moderns.

"Let us down, you silly duffers!" yelled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unfortunate Classics swung three feet from the floor. Tommy Dodd & Co. proceeded to make the ends of the rope secure. Jimmy Silver & Co. turned round on the ropes as they swayed.

The ropes being secured, the Moderns gathered round them. They turned them as if they had been on spits, taking care, however, to dodge the lunging boots of the enraged Classics.

"Will you let us down, you shrieking, fatheaded burlbers!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver kicked out desperately. He could not loosen the loop under his arms—his weight dragged it too tight. He could only hang on and kick.

The Moderns surged back, Doyle uttering a wild howl as Silver's boot caught him. Tommy Dodd picked up a long broom.

Keeping out of reach of the lunging boots, he stirred the swinging Classics with the broom, keeping them swaying and swinging. The unfortunate victims gasped and roared, but there was no help for them. The Moderns shrieked with laughter.

"Time we got in to tea," chuckled Cook. "Good-bye, Bluebell!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-night, Mary Ann!"

"Fare thee well, and if for ever, still for ever fare thee well!" sobbed Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you're not going to leave us like this!" hooted Jimmy Silver, as the chortling Moderns made for the door.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye, sweetheart—good-bye!"

The Moderns streamed out of the wood-shed. Their laughter died away in the distance, and Jimmy Silver & Co. glared unspeakable things. Jimmy made a wild effort to drag the rope loose. But his weight was too much—the loop was tight round him, and was not to be argued with.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

"The beasts! They can't leave us here like this! Oh, my only hat!"

"Oh, crickey! I'm getting cramped!"

There was a sound of footsteps outside the wood-shed a few minutes later. But it was not the Moderns returning. Jones, minor of the Classic Fourth came in, and after him a crowd of Classical juniors. They stared blankly at the four Classics swinging under the beam, and there was a shriek of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Townsend.

"Tommy Dodd told us we should find something funny here. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He was right!" shrieked Jones minor. "Oh, my hat! What are you fellows up there for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get us down!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "Loosen those ropes, you silly idiots! This isn't a joke, you fatheads!"

"Isn't it?" stammered Jones minor. "It looks like one! It looks a jolly lot like one! I should have taken it for a joke! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dummies—"

"You fatheads—"

"You chortling chumps—"

"You burling jabberwocks—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hanging Classics glared daggers and machine-guns at the yelling juniors. It was bad enough to furnish merriment to their old

(Concluded on page 761, cols. 4 and 5.)