

ASTOUNDING HAPPENINGS AT ROOKWOOD!

LOVELL, RABY, AND NEWCOME MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEAR!

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THEM?

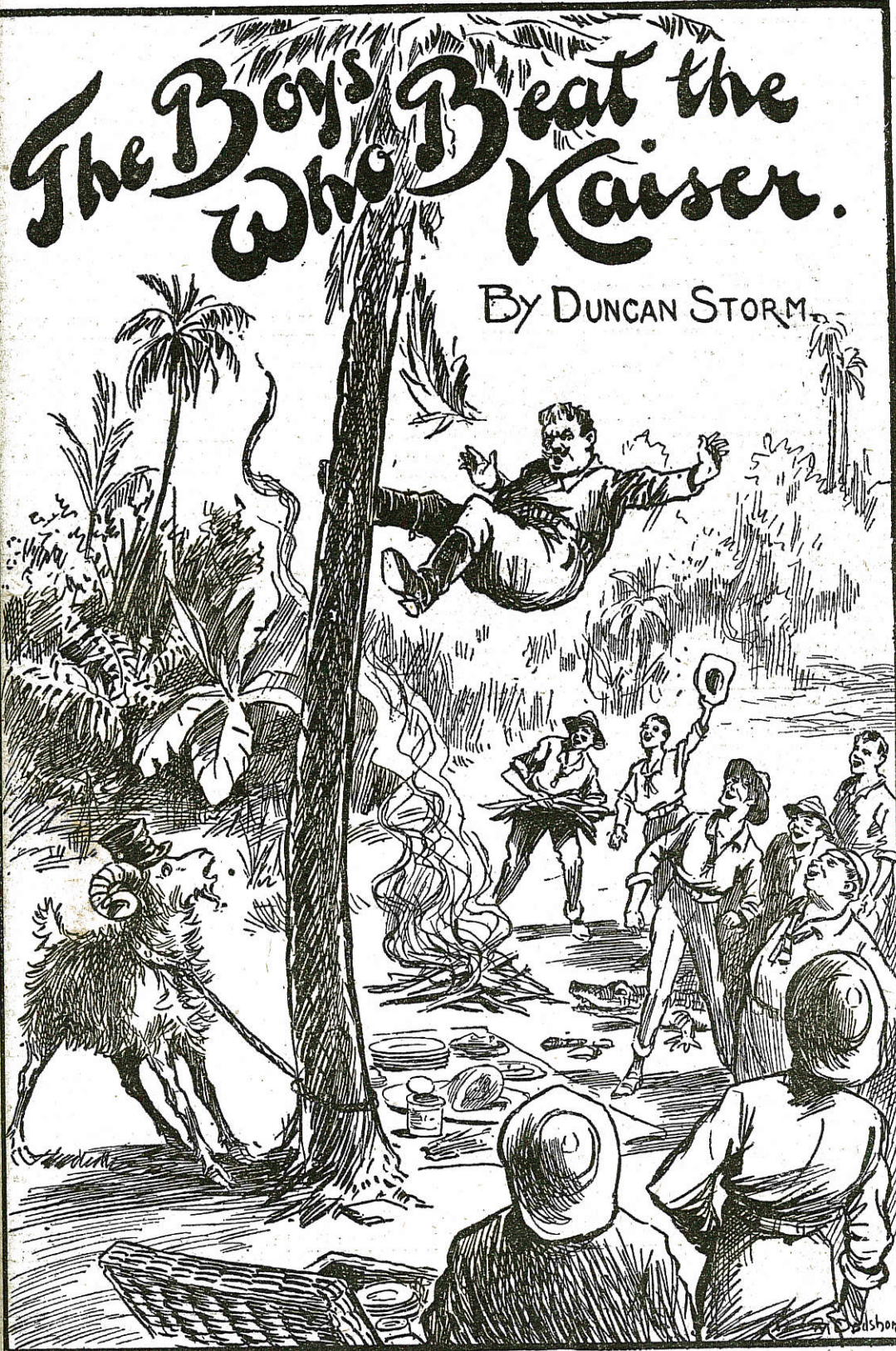
The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d} 1¹/₂

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending November 2nd, 1918.]



THE FALL OF BARON VON SLYDEN!

FOR NEW READERS.

THE KAISER is determined to obtain possession of the Mahdi's huge treasure which is hidden in the heart of the continent of Africa, and to do so, he employs three desperate Germans named BARON VON SLYDEN, CAPTAIN STOOM, and VON SNEEK. The papers, however, containing the secret of the whereabouts of the treasure are in the possession of CAPTAIN HANDYMAN and CY SPRAGUE, who decide to go in quest of the treasure, and to take with them the boys of the Bombay Castle, chief among whom are DICK DORRINGTON, CHIP, ARTY DOVE, SKELETON, PORKIS, and PONGO WALKER. LAL TATA, a cheery Hindu, TOOKUM EL KOOS, a native wrestler, FLINT PASHA, a member of the Sudan Police, are also amongst the party, as well as the boys' pets, CECIL, the orang-outang, HORACE, the goat, and GUS, the crocodile.

So far Baron von Slyden and his confederates have made several endeavours to secure the papers containing the secret of the Mahdi's treasure, and on each occasion have met with defeat. In last week's instalment the baron hired the services of a rogue named Saleeb, and when the boats containing the boys were travelling down the Nile he endeavoured to obtain his revenge. But something went wrong with the baron's scheme, and he eventually quarrelled with Saleeb. A struggle took place, and Von Slyden found himself in a perilous plight on the muddy bank of the river.

(Read on from here.)

The Rescue of the Baron.

Baron von Slyden was in as tight a position as he had ever been in his life. His heavy boots had sunk into a bank, half mud, half clay, more treacherous than a quicksand.

In vain he stretched out his arms to grab at the tall papyrus reeds.

In vain he called to Saleeb, his mutinous Askari, who, in blind rage and without any real intent to harm him, had slung him into the river.

But Saleeb had been scared by what he had done.

He had taken to his heels, bolting through the tall reeds like a rabbit.

Saleeb knew very well that his action in raising his hand against his master had signed his death-warrant.

He knew that if Von Slyden got hold of him he was as good as a dead man.

So he did not stop to assist his angered master.

He emerged from the reeds, and took to the bush behind, running as hard as he could go.

So it happened that the haughty Baron von Slyden was forced to appeal for help to the very crowd against whom, a few minutes before, he had been plotting murder.

"Ach, Himmel!" he yelled. "I am sinking! Help! Help!"

For a moment Captain Handyman, steering the long, slow-moving string of towing-whalers, hesitated.

"I've a mind to let the brute stick in the mud and go down in the mud!" he muttered. "Mud he is! Let him remain mud!"

But instinct is stronger than reason, and Captain Handyman was a British sailor.

He could not leave even a malignant enemy such as the baron was in the lurch, although he knew that he might be running into an ambush on that green bank by going to his assistance.

He shouted an order that the tow-ropes should be slipped, and as soon as the motor-launch was free of her tow she raced towards the spot where the hapless baron was slowly sinking in the black mud.

Free of the boats, the launch made good speed, and tore towards the shouting man, with a feather of spray at her bows.

Even then it seemed as though she would be too late for the baron, who, struggling and shouting, was sinking fast into the mud.

"Ach, Himmel! Oh, mein gootness! I

shall smother! Quick—quick, you good English!"

The German had forgotten all his hatred of the British when he saw himself face to face with death.

Like most Prussians of his stamp, he was an arrant bully and a coward; obsequious to anyone who could do him a good turn, an utter bully to all who, in his opinion, were useless to him.

So the baron yelled to his intended victims for help as the launch raced across the broad river, and his yells died away in a miserable gurgle as the launch raced up.

The Nile mud had got the better of him, and his fat face, streaked with mud and tears, was being pulled under the water as though he were being dragged down by some invisible string.

But Captain Handyman was a swift and ready boatman.

He steered the launch past the unhappy German, thrusting a long boathook down as though he were spearing him.

The boathook caught in the baron's braces, and with a kick of his boot the little captain set his engines running at full speed; whilst, with Cy Sprague and Flint Pasha, he clung to the boathook like grim death.

Luckily for the baron his braces held under the strain.

He was literally wrenched out of the bed of mud, and hauled into the deep water, where he was safe.

Then Captain Handyman slipped a bowline over his shoulders, and held him to the side of the launch, looking down contemptuously at the fat, blubbering face smeared with black mud.

There was nothing left now of the haughty emissary of the Kaiser in Baron von Slyden. His nerves had had a nasty jar.

"Take me on board your schippi!" he moaned.

Captain Handyman shook his head.

"No, sir," he replied firmly. "It was you, or one of your mates, who took that pot-shot at us just now. And I took too many chances in running in here to pull you out. I'll tow you to a bit of hard bank lower down, where you can crawl ashore. But I'm not going to take you on board my ship, you muddy, murdering ruffian!"

The baron said no more.

The launch, moving slowly, towed him to a spot on the bank farther up the river, where a projecting point of rock broke up the mudflats.

The whalers, taking to their oars, pulled after her, the niggers on board gazing wide-eyed at the miserable pile of black mud that towed behind her.

"Jimmy!" whispered Chip to his chums, as they contemplated this spectacle. "Doesn't he look a picture of a mudlark?"

Even the tow through the water did not wash the clinging, black mud from the baron.

When Captain Handyman gently brought the launch alongside the hard bank, and, loosing the bowline from under the German's arms, allowed him to climb up the bank, the scoundrel stood there, his white-duck suit converted into a pillar of black, slimy mud.

And as soon as the baron felt the solid ground under his feet again he once more became a true German.

Entirely ungrateful to the men who had saved his life, he stammered and spluttered, and shook his fist at his rescuers in impotent rage.

"Ach! So you will not take me into your boat!" he stammered. "Good!"

That I shall remember! Pig-dogs! British scum! You shall pay for your insults!"

The boys laughed, but Captain Handyman's eyes blazed.

The laughter of the boys seemed to irritate the baron more.

"You shall pay! I tell you all, you shall pay!" he stormed. "My so great master, the Kaiser, shall see that I have my vengeance on you all—"

"For pulling you out of the river, you lump of mud?" retorted Captain Handyman. "Get out of this, or I'll bump you in the neck!—Go home, and tell your rascally master that Jim Handyman made the mistake of his life when he pulled you out of the mudbank—you lobworm!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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The 1st Chapter. The Enemy at the Gate.

"Here they come!" Frank Richards was standing upon a pine-bench inside the barred gate of Cedar Creek School. His head rose above the level of the gate, and he was keeping watch on the trail that ran to the school from the direction of Thompson Town. Behind him, in the playground, a score of Cedar Creek fellows were engaged in excited discussion. From the doorway of the lumber school-house, Black Sally, the cook, looked out with an almost comic expression of amazement on her ebony face. The happenings at Cedar Creek since the headmistress, Miss Meadows, had been dismissed, quite dazed old Sally. The school was in revolt; an unheard-of thing in the history of Cedar Creek. Under Miss Meadows' rule, the school had gone on the even tenor of its way with cheerful contentment. But there was a change now, with a vengeance. Cedar Creek was on the war-path! As Frank Richards called out the alarm there was a rush of the fellows to join him at the gate. Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc jumped up on the pine-bench beside him, and looked over the gate into the trail. On the trail there was a clatter of horses' hoofs. A big and bronzed, with a grim brow under his Stetson hat, mounted upon a large-boned "American" horse, came Sheriff Henderson of Thompson. With him rode Mr. Gunten, the fat storekeeper, and Ephraim Peckover, the new headmaster of Cedar Creek, the gentleman whom his new pupils refused to admit to the school. Behind them trotted Big Dave Duckers, the sheriff's man, a terror to evil-doers in the Thompson Valley. There was a buzz from the schoolboys at the sight of the grim, bronzed face of the sheriff. Mr. Henderson represented law and order in the Thompson Valley, and he was not a man to be trifled with. Frank Richards & Co., determined as they were, knew very well that it would not be so easy to deal with Sheriff Henderson as with Mr. Gunten or Mr. Peckover. "I say, now the chunk is going to begin!" murmured Chunky Todgers, with some signs of uneasiness in his fat face. "I guess it is!" said Bob Lawless. He swept off his hat in salute to the sheriff as the latter drew rein outside the gates. "Good-morning, Mr. Henderson!" "Morning!" said the sheriff gruffly. "Nice morning, sheriff!" said Frank Richards, smiling cheerily over the gate. Grunt! "So glad to see you here this morning, sheriff!" said Vere Beauclerc, with great politeness. "Sorry we can't ask you in." "Order them to open the gate at once, sheriff!" snapped Mr. Gunten. The sheriff gave him a stare. Mr. Gunten, rich storekeeper, postmaster of Thompson, and school trustee, was a great man in his way, but Sheriff Henderson's opinion of him was not high, and he was not disposed to receive greetings from the fat Swiss. "You've asked me to come and restore order here, Mr. Gunten," said the sheriff, in his deep voice. "Yes, yes! Get on with it." "Leave it in my hands." "What?" "Nuff said!" grunted the sheriff. Mr. Gunten began to glare, but he checked himself. He could not "bull-doze" the sheriff, and he was aware of it. He choked back the angry retort that rose to his lips. Mr. Peckover did not speak, but his brown eyes glinted at the line of faces over the gate. If Ephraim Peckover's authority was once established at Cedar Creek, it was likely to go hard with the schoolboy strikers. But it was not established yet, and Mr. Peckover had to bide his time. Sheriff Henderson rode closer to the gate, and fixed his grim gaze on the sherry, youthful faces on a level with his own as he sat his big horse. "Now, what's all this?" he growled. "All what, old scout?" asked Bob Lawless. "I don't want any chin-wag, Lawless! What game are you playing here?" "It isn't a game, I guess. We mean business!" "Open that gate at once!" "Can't be did!" "Now, look here, youngsters," said Mr. Henderson patiently, "this gentleman here, Mr. Peckover, has been appointed headmaster, in place of Miss Meadows, by the Board of Trustees. You are under his authority. He must be admitted to

THE STRIKERS' TRIUMPH!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story, dealing with the Barring-Out at the School in the Backwoods.

- BY -

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

the school at once, and his orders obeyed.

"We don't recognise him as our headmaster," said Frank Richards calmly. "Miss Meadows is headmistress of this school."

"Hear, hear!" "But Miss Meadows has been dismissed by the Board!" said the sheriff.

Frank's eyes flashed.

"And why has she been dismissed?" he exclaimed.

"Because she turned Kern Gunten out of the school for being a blackguard and a rascal, and his father, Old Man Gunten there, worked it to get her dismissed by the Board so that his precious son could come back!"

"You insolent young rascal!" roared Mr. Gunten.

"Oh, you dry up!" said Frank Richards unceremoniously. "What is the Board, after all—you, and old Grimm, and my uncle, Mr. Lawless! Mr. Lawless stood up for Miss Meadows, and you know it. You and old Grimm had your way, because you're a pair of foreign cads, and hand-in-glove with one another!"

"That's straight talk!" grinned Bob Lawless.

Old Man Gunten had turned purple, and he seemed to have some difficulty in breathing.

Probably the wealthy storekeeper of Thompson had never listened to such direct remarks before.

But Frank Richards & Co. had no politeness to waste upon him.

"We're standing up for Miss Meadows!" continued Frank. "Miss Meadows is still Head of Cedar Creek School, so far as we're concerned. She's appealed against the decision of the Board, as we happen to know, and she may be reinstated by the authorities over the head of that fat Swiss bouncer! Whether or no, we refuse to admit any other Head to the school!"

"Bravo!"

Mr. Gunten spluttered. "Miss Meadows has put them up to this!" he gasped.

"That's not true!" said Frank Richards, at once. "Miss Meadows left two days ago, and doesn't even know that we have gone on strike. But we mean business, and we won't give in till Miss Meadows comes back!"

"Never!" shouted Tom Lawrence. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Gunten!"

The sheriff had listened quietly. As a matter of fact, he sympathised a good deal with the schoolboy strikers, as he knew Miss Meadows well, and respected that lady highly, and did not respect Mr. Gunten at all.

But the law was the law, and the sheriff had his duty to do.

As so often happens in human disputes, it was not a case of right against wrong, but of one right in conflict with another.

"You understand now, Mr. Henderson?" asked Beauclerc.

"I understand," said the sheriff, with a nod. "That's all beside the question. I'm here to uphold the law. The Board has power to dismiss a schoolmistress, and has done it. It has power to appoint a new schoolmaster, and has done it. I'm as sorry as you boys are that Miss Meadows has gone. But, as the matter stands, Mr. Peckover is master of Cedar Creek, and you must obey him."

"We won't," said Frank; "and there's an end of it!"

"I have my duty to do, Richards!" "And we have ours," said Frank. "Ours is to stand by Miss Meadows, and see that justice is done!"

"You bet!" said Bob Lawless emphatically.

And there was a cheer from the crowd of Canadian schoolboys lining the gate.

"Come, come, that's enough of chewing the rag!" said the sheriff. "Now, let in Mr. Peckover at once, and submit to proper authority, and I have no doubt that Mr. Peckover will pass over what has happened, and pardon you all if you return to your duty at once."

And the sheriff glanced inquiringly at Mr. Peckover for that gentleman to confirm his statement.

Mr. Peckover's reply came acidly from his thin lips.

"Nothing of the kind!" he said coldly. "Every boy who has taken part in this rebellion will be severely punished. The sheriff made an impatient gesture. By the promise of a pardon the matter might have been ended there and then—at least, the sheriff believed so.

But it was evident that nothing was further from Mr. Peckover's thoughts than a pardon for the rebels.

That way out of the trouble was closed up at once—it had been a way out, as Mr. Henderson thought.

The sheriff seemed at a loss for a moment, and the schoolboys grinned at him over the gate, rather amused by the rebuff the thin-lipped gentleman had administered.

That specimen of the new school-

master's nature, too, strengthened them in their determination to resist.

Severe punishment for what they had done already was not exactly an attractive prospect, and there was nothing worse than that to be expected if they made it a fight to a finish.

"Well," said the sheriff at last, "with that I have nothing to do. Mr. Peckover is your schoolmaster, my boys, and my business is to see him admitted here and placed in authority. Will you open this gate?"

"Sorry, sheriff. No!"

"We don't want trouble with you, Mr. Henderson, or with Dave there," said Dick Dawson; "but we're holding the fort till Miss Meadows comes back."

"Hold on, outee, you bet!" chimed in Yen Chin, the Chinese. "Punchee nose if tly to come in, sheriff. Oh, yes!"

"Will you open this gate?" roared the sheriff, his anger rising at this defiance of his authority.

The toughest "bad man" in the Thompson Valley trembled at the frown of Sheriff Henderson, and it was too much to be defied by a parcel of school-boys.

"No!" said Frank Richards. "We won't open the gate, sheriff! Sorry to row with you, but there it is."

"Force will be used."

"Same on this side."

"And I'll lay my trail-ropes about you, too!" roared the sheriff.

"Go ahead, then!"

The sheriff signed to his man to approach.

"Get in and open the gate, Dave," he said.

"I'm your man, sheriff!" said Big Dave cheerily.

And he rode his horse close to the gate and grasped the top to climb over.

The 2nd Chapter. Holding the Fort.

Dave Duckers was a big and powerful man, and certainly equal to any four of the Cedar Creek fellows in single combat.

down on Dave's Stetson hat, smashing it flat on his head, and considerably hurting the head.

"That's a hint!" said Bob. "Get back, or you'll get some more, and worse!"

"Let that man alone!" shouted the sheriff, while Old Man Gunten and Mr. Peckover looked on speechlessly.

"Call him off, then!" said Frank Richards.

"Get on with it, Dave!" rapped the sheriff.

"Yooop!" was Dave Duckers' reply, as two or three sticks rapped on his unfortunate cranium. "Oh, Jerusalem! Oh, gum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With really heroic fortitude Dave Duckers essayed to clamber on.

He released one hand from the gate to punch furiously at the schoolboys within.

But his arms were grasped by several pairs of hands and held, and he was helpless.

At the same time Bob Lawless leaned over and gave the horse below a flick with his whip.

Big Dave's horse started and reared, and another flick sent him jumping away. Duckers' legs were dragged from the saddle, and he bumped against the gate, holding on to the top with one hand.

His fingers, seized from within, were forced open, and he lost his hold, and dropped with a heavy bump to the ground.

There he sat and roared.

"Yah! Oh! Oooooop! Yooooop! Oh, Jerusalem crickets!"

A yell of laughter from above answered him.

Big Dave Duckers crawled away from the gate, with more bruises on his burly person than he had ever collected in a row with the Red Dog gang in Thompson.

The sheriff's face was a study.

Old Man Gunten rode close to the gate, his fat face purple, and slashed at the schoolboys with his riding-whip in his fury.

Bob Lawless howled as he received a lash, but the defenders of Cedar Creek were not slow to return it.

Three or four riding-whips slashed on Mr. Gunten's fat face and podgy shoulders, and the storekeeper retreated faster than he had come, spluttering with wrath.

"Come and have some more, you fat old coyote!" shouted Bob in great wrath.

But Old Man Gunten did not accept that invitation.

Big Dave Duckers picked himself up, and stood rubbing his injuries and blinking uncertainly at the sheriff.

He was ready to obey orders, if he could, but how he was going to do it was a mystery to him.

Mr. Henderson's face was dark with anger.

The rough handling of this man showed him that he had taken on a bigger order than he had supposed, but he did not even think of retreat.

"Come and have some yourself, sheriff!" yelled Chunky Todgers, much encouraged by the successful defence.

The two pairs of hands on the gate were mercilessly lashed, but in spite of the lashing the sheriff and his man came on grimly.

They got their chests on the gate-top, and each got a leg over.

The matter was critical then, for in a few more moments the two brawny men would have rolled over and dropped into the school enclosure.

But Frank Richards and Co. were ready.

The two legs, as they came over the gate, were grasped by many hands, and shoved up and back.

Dave Duckers overbalanced, and hung down outside the gate, his hands losing their hold, and he hung head-downwards, only held by the grasp of three or four fellows on his leg.

The sheriff clung on desperately, but he, too, was pushed over, still clinging.

A fierce rapping on the fingers loosened his hold at last, and he let go, and as soon as his hold was lost he fell back in a heap on his horse, and slid from the horse's back to the ground with a bump.

There he lay for a moment or two quite dizzy.

Dave Duckers, held by his leg, was howling with wrath and apprehension, as he anticipated every moment a fall on his head.

"Let up!" he yelled. "I mean, hold on! Don't you let me drop on my cazeza, you young varmints! Oh, gum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep him there for a bit," gasped Bob Lawless. "It will cool him down."

"How do you like it, Dave?" chuckled Todgers.

"Yaroo! Oh, gum! Oh, holy Moses!" howled Dave. "Sheriff, lend a man a hand! I guess I shall crack my cazeza if I drop! Oh, Jerusalem!"

Sheriff Henderson staggered to his feet, and grasped his unfortunate follower.

Then Frank Richards & Co. kindly let go the captured leg, and Dave Duckers was helped to the ground.

"Oh, holy smoke!" he mumbled. "Sheriff, I guess I've had enough of this. I really reckon I've had quite enough, sheriff."

Sheriff Henderson did not reply.

He glared speechlessly at the grinning faces over the gate.

"You young rascals!" he gasped at last.

"We warned you, sheriff!" answered Frank Richards.

"I guess you'll suffer for this!" roared the sheriff.

"We're chancing that."

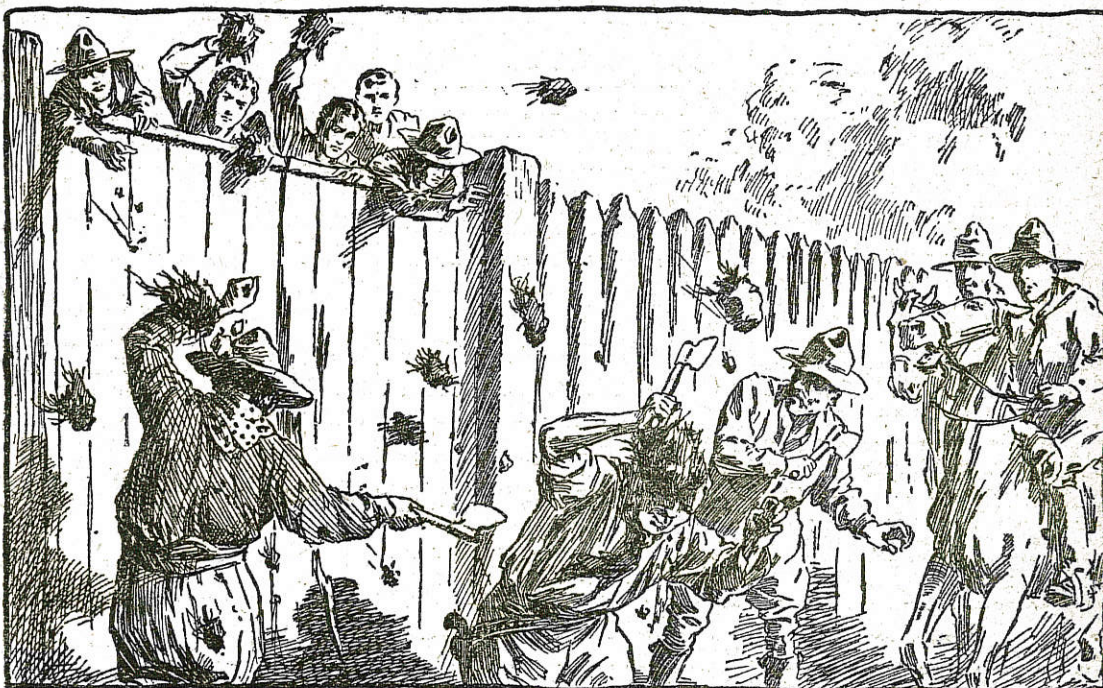
"Are you going to get that gate open, Mr. Henderson?" spluttered Old Man Gunten furiously.

"Can you tell me how to get it open?" hooted the sheriff.

"That's your business."

"Then leave it to me, and hold your tongue!"

And with that reply the sheriff turned his back on the spluttering storekeeper.



"Better keep your distance!" called out Bob Lawless. "This isn't a game, and any galoot that comes within range will get hurt!" "Cut down that gate!" roared Mr. Henderson.

He had not the remotest idea that the boys would venture to dispute his entrance.

But he was speedily undeceived.

As he grasped the top of the gate with his big, sinewy hands, Frank Richards and Bob Lawless produced their riding-whips and rapped on his knuckles hard.

Big Dave gave a yell.

"You young varmints! Let up!"

Rap, rap, rap!

The schoolboy strikers evidently meant business.

But so did Dave Duckers, and in spite of the rapping on his knuckles he threw a brawny leg over the gate to climb over.

"Will you get back?" shouted Bob Lawless.

"I guess not!" panted the sheriff's man.

"Then here goes! Look out for your cazeza!"

Crash!

The stock of the riding-whip came

"Shut up, Chunky!" said Frank. "Don't check Mr. Henderson. I hope you'll go back to Thompson now, sheriff. Nothing doing here."

Mr. Henderson squared his jaw.

"Will you open that gate?"

"No fear!"

"Come on, Dave!" said the sheriff.

"Back me up, man!"

"I'm with you, sheriff," said Duckers rather dismally.

Mr. Henderson rode up to the gate, and Dave Duckers climbed on his horse and followed him.

A line of determined faces met them.

"You'll get hurt, sheriff!" said Frank Richards, setting his teeth. "We don't want to touch you, but you're not coming in here."

The sheriff did not heed.

He grasped the top of the gate and essayed to pull himself over, Dave Duckers following his example.

"Go for them!" said Bob Lawless.

Lash, lash, lash!

The 3rd Chapter.

An Attack in Force.

Frank Richards & Co. looked watchfully over the gate, and waited.

So far they had been successful, and they were much encouraged thereby.

Sheriff Henderson seemed at a loss.

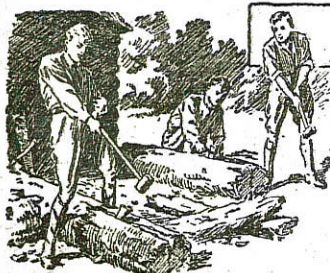
As for Old Man Gunten and Mr. Peckover, they waited for the sheriff to make some move, leaving him to solve the difficulty.

After a time the sheriff spoke to his follower in a low voice, and Dave Duckers rode round the fence of the school enclosure, evidently looking for some other mode of entrance.

But he found the other gate fastened, and whenever he looked over the wall he found that he was watched for.

Half a dozen of the rebels kept pace with him inside the high palisade, and they were ready for him if he attempted to clamber over.

The angry man made an attempt at



THE STRIKERS' TRIUMPH!

(Continued from the previous page.)

last, hoping to scramble down inside before he could be stopped; but as he came scrambling over the wall half a dozen sticks and stockwhips rained on him, and he was glad to fall back on his horse.

Then he gave it up, and trotted round to join the sheriff at the gate again. "I guess it's no go, sheriff," he said. "I reckon, sir, that I've got to let up! I'm feeling bad, I am," added Big Dave pathetically, rubbing his bumps.

Sheriff Henderson looked again at the grinning faces over the gate.

"This is a serious thing you're doing, young fellows," he said.

"I guess so," assented Bob Lawless. "Quite serious, sheriff! We mean business."

"I'll tell you what, sheriff," chimed in Chunky Todgers. "You fetch Miss Meadows back, and we'll all be as quiet as lambs."

The sheriff made no reply to that.

He turned to Mr. Gunten.

"I guess I can do nothing more at present," he said. "You've got the school into a state of riot among you, and there's no getting in now. I shall have to get more force."

"Get it, and don't lose time!" snapped Mr. Gunten.

Mr. Henderson signed to his man, and they rode away together at a gallop up the trail to Thompson.

A loud cheer from the Cedar Creek fellows followed them.

The retreat of the sheriff and his man was an acknowledgment of defeat.

Old Man Gunten shook a fat fist at the schoolboy strikers.

He was bitterly disappointed by the result of the sheriff's visit.

Not for a moment had he imagined that Cedar Creek would venture to resist the representative of law and order.

He had begun to realise that he had stirred up a wasp's nest, so to speak, at Cedar Creek School, and he began to have doubts as to how the matter would end.

But he was none the less determined to have his way.

As he shook a podgy fist at the rebels, a clod of earth from Eben Hacke caught him under his fat chin, and he nearly fell from his horse.

Mr. Peckover hastily rode back out of range, and the storekeeper followed him, spluttering.

They trotted away at last up the trail in the direction taken by the sheriff and his man.

"Looks like a victory for us, you chaps!" grinned Chunky Todgers.

"Hurrah!"

"So far," said Frank Richards soberly. "But you heard what the sheriff said. He's gone for more men."

"Let 'em come!" said Bob Lawless. "They'll find us ready for them. If they get in over the fence there'll still be the schoolhouse, and we can hold that against all the Thompsons!"

Frank Richards laughed.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But we can hold it against the sheriff and his men. We'd better get ready for a tussle."

Matters were growing serious for the schoolboy strikers, but there was no thought of surrender, only of preparation for the tussle to come.

It was probable enough that the enemy would effect an entrance at some point in the school enclosure, if they came in force, but the schoolhouse itself was a stronghold that was not likely to be taken easily.

In the interval before the sheriff could return, Frank Richards & Co. improved the shining hour, as it were, by making the schoolhouse ready for defence if the emergency arose.

Black Sally was politely, but firmly, requested to vacate her quarters, which she did, and the Chinese servant was also given notice to quit, and the schoolboys had the house to themselves.

Lumber was carried into the house by many busy hands, and boards nailed across windows inside, and logs piled against doors.

In the course of an hour the schoolhouse was turned into a veritable fortress, and only the main door was left open on the porch, all ready to be closed and barred if the rebels had to retreat into the house.

Every fellow obtained a stick, a whip, or a pole to defend the walls as soon as the attack came; and Bob Lawless appointed the defenders to their places with the skill of a born general.

Meanwhile, Yen Chin was left to keep watch at the gate, with his eyes on the trail.

All preparations were completed by the time the Chinese gave the alarm.

He was heard yelling at last: "Sheriff come! Gettee moves on!"

There was a rush to the gate.

Frank Richards jumped on the bench within, and looked over.

A bunch of horsemen came in sight, galloping towards the school.

He recognised them as men belonging to the town of Thompson, and observed that most of them were grinning.

They were the sheriff's "posse," citizens of Thompson who were called upon when necessary to maintain the law, to lay some "bad man" by the heels, or to run down a horse-thief.

From their looks it was evident that they regarded it as a joke their being

called up to quell a schoolboy rebellion at the section school.

Dave Duckers and the sheriff were not grinning, however; they had had some painful experiences already which convinced them that it was not a joking matter.

There were ten men in all in the party, and it was evidently a force that they could not deal with if they once got to close quarters.

Behind the party trotted Mr. Peckover and Old Man Gunten.

They were looking much more satisfied now, in the confident anticipation of putting down the revolt at Cedar Creek.

With a clatter of hoofs the horsemen stopped outside the gate, and there was a general chuckle among them at the sight of a row of schoolboy faces looking over at them.

But the sheriff was cold and grim.

"Richards! Lawless!" he rapped out. "Hallo, sheriff! Back again?"

"Open that gate!"

"Can't be done!"

The sheriff raised his hand, and pointed to the gate.

"Get over the gate, my men, and lay your ropes round those pesky young rascals."

"You bet, sheriff!"

There was a clattering and crashing as the horsemen rode close to the gate to clamber over.

But the task was not so easy as they had supposed.

The defenders were in deadly earnest, and their cudgels came into play without mercy, and there were loud yells among the sheriff's posse.

"Sock it to them!" shouted Frank Richards.

"Give 'em beans!" roared Bob Lawless.

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"You young rascals! Yarooooh!"

The reception was a little too hot, and the horsemen backed away from the gate, with a wild clatter of hoofs and jingling of bridles.

"Go on! Go on!" yelled Old Man Gunten furiously. "What are you backing out for? Get on with it!"

"Get on with it yourself, you fat coyote!" roared Dave Duckers. "Go and get your own silly cabeza cracked, if you like!"

"Yes, come on, Old Man Gunten!" shouted Bob, flourishing his cudgel.

"Come on, old sport!"

Old Man Gunten did not come on, but he addressed the sheriff's men in language that was more plain than polite, till Mr. Henderson gruffly told him to "shut his chin."

The fat storekeeper was jostled out of the way.

His warlike urgings were, in point of fact, a little out of place, as he was not taking any part in the fighting.

He resembled the famous Duke of Plaza-Toro, who led his regiment from behind, because he found it less exciting.

The sheriff rapped out an order to his men, who were not grinning now by any means.

Their first brush with the schoolboy strikers had convinced them that the matter was serious.

"Cut down the gate!" rapped Mr. Henderson.

Dave Duckers and another man unslung woodman's axes from their saddles; they had evidently come prepared for that last resource.

They advanced to the gate, and started on it with the axes.

The gate was thick and strong, but the splinters flew fast under the hefty blows that rained down.

"By gum!" said Chunky Todgers, in dismay. "This lets us out, you chaps!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

But the defenders were quick to retort.

From within, clods of earth and chunks of wood rained down on Duckers and his companion so hotly that they retreated at last.

"Better keep your distance!" called out Bob Lawless. "This isn't a game, and any galoot that comes within range will get hurt!"

"Cut down that gate!" roared Mr. Henderson.

He seized one of the axes, and rushed at the gate, and another man followed.

The crashing blows resounded again, and the gate creaked and rocked under the assault.

From above came a shower of missiles, and the sheriff's companion retreated, yelling.

But Mr. Henderson stuck to it, crashing blows on the yielding gate, while clods of earth struck him like snowballs from above.

"Get my trail-ropes, Franky," whispered Bob, as he sent clod after clod down on the angry, perspiring sheriff.

Frank Richards ran for the rope, and was back in less than a minute.

Bob noosed the end, and looked over at the sheriff labouring below with undiminished vigour.

"Look out, sheriff!" shouted Dave Duckers, as he saw the lasso whirl in Bob's skilled hand.

The sheriff did not heed.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The last blow sent the quivering axe-head fairly through the gate, and it stuck in the hard wood.

As the sheriff dragged at it fiercely to release it, the noose of the lasso dropped over his shoulders.

He released the axe then, and jumped back; but it was too late.

Half a dozen hands dragged on the rope from within, and as the noose slipped lower down round the sheriff it tightened, and his arms were pinned to his sides.

"Pull!" yelled Bob Lawless.

Three or four fellows threw their weight on the rope inside the gate.

The result was that the sheriff was dragged off his feet and bumped on the gate, suspended on the end of the lasso.

He was dragged free of the ground, and half-way to the top of the gate, and hung there gasping.

Bob Lawless took a turn of the rope round a post inside, and knotted it.

"You can let go now!" he gasped.

The schoolboys lined the gate again.

Below them, the sheriff was hanging in the lasso, which was taut round his arms and body, quite unable to release himself.

"I guess that puts the stopper on you, sheriff!" said Bob Lawless.

"Oh, ah, ow!" gasped the sheriff. "Let go! Let up! I'll skin you! Come and get me loose, you fools!"

His big boots beat a furious tattoo on the gate as he swung.

There was a rush of his men to help him, but it was met by a regular fusillade from within, and the assailants fell back again.

Dave Duckers rushed in, knife in hand, to cut the rope, but Vere Beaudere had a lasso in hand now, ready to cast, and Big Dave dodged back just in time to avoid being roped.

There was a pause, while the sheriff's heels tattooed on the gate like castanets, and the sheriff's voice resounded through the air like unto the tones of the Bull of Basham.

The 4th Chapter.

No Surrender!

Bob Lawless leaned over the gate, and tapped the raving sheriff gently on the shoulder.

Mr. Henderson glared up at him.

The grip of the rope round his arms and body, with all his weight thrown on it, was hurting him.

"You young villain!" he gasped. "Let me loose!"

"Soon as you like, sheriff, if you'll give your word to light out for Thompson and let us alone," said Bob.

"I'll skin you!" raved the sheriff.

"I guess I'm not looking out for a chance of being skinned, sheriff!" chuckled Bob. "Will you let up and light out if we cast you loose?"

"No!" roared the sheriff.

"Then I guess you can swing there till you get tired."

The sheriff was tired already, to judge by his wild wriggings and his flow of language.

"Will you come and let me loose, you pesky fools!" he raved to his followers.

"Come on," invited Frank Richards. "We've got no end of ammunition ready. If you like logs heaved on you, come on!"

"Surround the place, and get in where you can!" snapped Old Man Gunten.

He was not heeded, but the suggestion was good, and the sheriff shouted to his "posse" to do so, and the horsemen rode round the school fence in a wide circle.

"This is where we beat a retreat, I think," remarked Frank Richards. "We can't keep them out in a dozen places at once."

Bob Lawless nodded.

Over the high fence the heads of the riders could be seen, surrounding the school enclosure, and the defenders were not numerous enough to man the whole extent of the spacious fence.

On all sides hands were laid on the wall, and grim faces looked over.

Bob Lawless marshalled his men, and there was a retreat from the gate, but missiles flew thickly at the assailants, and more than one of them dropped to the ground outside, yelling.

But one dropped inside at last, and then another and another.

They came on with trail-ropes coiled in their hands, with the very evident intention of administering terrific thrashings to the schoolboy strikers as soon as they were within reach.

But by that time Frank Richards & Co. had retreated to the porch of the schoolhouse, and were ready to disappear from sight.

Bob Lawless saw all the others inside, and was the last to follow.

Big Dave was within a dozen feet of him, rope in hand, when Bob stepped inside the house, and the big door was slammed.

A bar rattled into place, securing it.

Dave Duckers came on with a rush, and hurled himself against the door, in the hope of bursting it open before it could be fastened.

But the bar was in place, and the big door stood fast, and Duckers reeled back from it with a gasp.

The sheriff snorted.

"Use your eyes!" he growled.

Old Man Gunten applied his eyes to the office, and snorted with wrath.

"The young scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "You should not have given them time to build up that barricade, sheriff!"

"How could I help it?" roared the sheriff. "Wasn't I roped at the gate?"

"You shouldn't have been. Do you call yourself a sheriff, and allow yourself to be beaten by a parcel of schoolboys?" raved the storekeeper, who was too enraged to care what he said. "What use are you, I'd like to know?"

"Calm yourselves!" urged Mr. Peckover. "Pray calm yourselves! The immediate business is to effect an entrance and bring those young rascals to order."

"It's got to be done!" snorted Mr. Gunten.

"I suppose you are responsible for the damage done, by your instructions, Mr. Gunten?" snapped the sheriff.

"Hang the damage! Get ahead with your work!"

The sheriff opened his lips for an angry reply, but he closed them again, and strode away from the porch.

"Break in a window!" he rapped out.

Dave Duckers took his axe and advanced to the window of the schoolroom nearest the porch.

The wooden shutters within were closed, but they were soon shattered by the powerful blows of the axe.

But as they splintered it was perceived that thick planks were nailed across inside.

"Oh, by gum!" gasped Duckers.

"Get on!" snapped the sheriff.

Crash, crash!

The axe smashed through one of the planks, leaving a wide gap.

But the defenders were ready inside.

Through the gap a long pole was suddenly shoved, and the end of it caught Big Dave under the chin.

With a wild howl Dave Duckers dropped the axe and staggered back.

The pole was instantly withdrawn, and there was a loud chortle within.

"Not this time, I guess!" called out Bob Lawless, from within.

"Oh, you pesky young varmint!" gasped Big Dave. "Open that door at once! You hear me?"

"Go and chop chips!"

Big Dave bestowed a tremendous kick on the door, which made it shake, but did no damage excepting to the paint.

Then he hurried away to the gate to release the sheriff, who was yelling to him.

Mr. Henderson, cut loose from the lasso at last, rubbed his aching arms, with a string of emphatic ejaculations.

His remarks grew still more emphatic when Big Dave reported that the schoolboys had barred themselves in the house, and were still holding out.

The sheriff strode towards the schoolhouse in a towering rage.

He struck with his clenched fist on the big pine door.

"Let me in at once!" he shouted.

"Not to-day, sheriff!" answered Frank Richards.

"The door will be broken in!"

"Go ahead!"

"Get the axes!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson.

"You're doing a lot of damage to the school, sheriff!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "Mind the trustees don't bring an action for damages against you."

"Buck up with those forms!" shouted Frank.

The garrison were dragging the forms and desks out of the big school-room to pile against the door.

Outside the axes were already sounding.

But inside a solid array of heavy desks and forms was piled up, and behind that pile was another pile, and behind that another and another, till the hall was one huge barricade.

A gleam of daylight came through the door as the blows were piled without and the stout wood was split.

As a panel burst open the assailants ceased to smite, and the sheriff applied his eyes to the opening.

"You can see it's no good now!" he exclaimed. "Now open the door before further damage is done!"

Then the sheriff gasped.

Instead of a crowd of schoolboys within, what he saw was a mass of desks and forms of heavy pine with iron legs, extending back to the depth of a dozen feet or more.

It was evidently impossible for his men to hew a way through such a terrific barricade as that, to say nothing of the damage to the school property that would have been entailed.

"By gum!" gasped the sheriff, quite taken aback.

"Aire we goin' on, boss?" inquired Dave Duckers.

Mr. Henderson shook his head.

"No good breaking in the door; we could never get through that," he said.

"Look at it, man!"

Big Dave looked through the split in the door, and ejaculated:

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

It was plain that the task was hopeless.

Old Man Gunten arrived on the scene now, with Mr. Peckover, both of them apparently under the impression that the trouble was over.

Mr. Peckover was rubbing his thin hands, with a cruel gleam in his eyes, in anticipation of the punishment he was about to inflict.

But a disappointment waited for the schoolmaster and Old Man Gunten.

"Why is not the door open?" exclaimed Mr. Gunten. "What does this nonsense mean?"

"Why have you not effected an entrance, Mr. Henderson?" exclaimed the schoolmaster.

The sheriff snorted.

"Use your eyes!" he growled.

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"The young scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "You should not have given them time to build up that barricade, sheriff!"

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BARKER, THE BOUNDER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

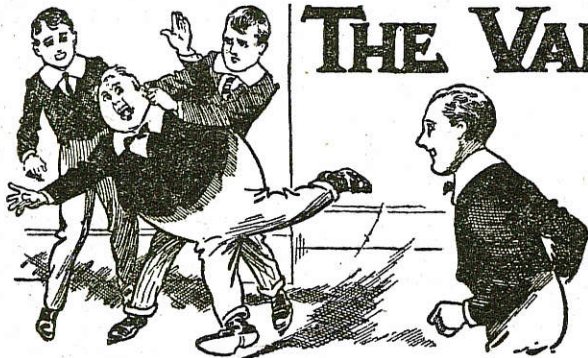
from the Hollies a little after six o'clock, and scudded back to Keddylife. They managed to enter the quadrangle by the same way as they had departed, and reached the window of the Form-room unnoticed. They climbed through the window, and immediately Bob Travers sniffed the air suspiciously. "My hat!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Somebody's been smoking in here. Can you smell it, you fellows?" Dicky and Jack sniffed the air. "My giddy aunt!" cried Dicky Turner. "I should think I can smell it, and—Look! The rotters have left the ends of their cigarettes round our desks!" "The cads!" said Bob Travers indignantly. "I guess I know who's responsible for this!" "Barker?" said Jack Jackson. "There's nobody else I know of who would be such a rotter!" said Bob quietly. "By gum!" roared Dicky Turner, his face flushing with anger. "I'll—"

roared Mr. Chambers, striding towards the juniors' desk. "What are those cigarette-ends doing on the floor, and your lines, where are they?" "Here you are, sir," said Dicky Turner, handing his lines to the master; "they're all there." Mr. Chambers grabbed hold of the lines. "Nonsense!" he ground out. "There isn't half of them here. This is terrible! To think that I should have a set of such unruly boys under my charge! Where have you been out of the afternoon? Tell me! Where were you at five o'clock?" "We—we—we—" "I will not listen to lies!" said the master, in a rasping voice. "I demand the truth! Have you been out?" "We—we—we left the room for something, sir," faltered Dicky Turner. "You left the school grounds?" "We—we—" Dicky Turner broke off abruptly. He was too flabbergasted by the strange turn of events to offer an explanation to the angry Form-master. "Bless my soul!" muttered Mr. Chambers. "It is hardly believable that boys could behave in such a blackguardly manner! To leave the school without my permission was a serious enough offence, but to indulge in the vile habit of smoking, and in the Form-room, too—" "We did not smoke!" exclaimed Bob Travers & Co., in indignant voices. "Nonsense!" thundered the master. "Nobody else has been here except you. You alone are to blame. You are a set

of young rascals, and I shall make it my business to see that you are expelled from the school! Follow me to the Head's study!" "Excuse me, sir," said Harcourt, stepping in front of the master. "What is it, Harcourt?" The captain held out a cuff-link before Mr. Chambers. "I have just found this on the floor, sir," he said. "If it does not belong to either of these juniors, it might help to throw some light on the affair." "H'm!" Mr. Chambers frowned seriously. "I think sufficient light has already been thrown on the matter," he said coldly. "Does this link belong to either of you boys?" Bob Travers & Co. replied in the negative, and held out their cuffs for inspection. "Now I come to think of it," remarked Harcourt quietly, "I remember seeing a link like this in a cuff belonging to Barker, of the Fourth, whom I was compelled to punish for insolence the other day." "I hope you are not attempting to shift the blame from these unruly boys," said the master acidly. "Not exactly, sir," replied the captain. "But I consider the matter should be thoroughly investigated before they are pronounced guilty. It seems strange to me that if this link was lost before this afternoon, somebody should not have found it." Mr. Chambers thought for a moment. "Very well," he said, at length. "Please be good enough to fetch Barker, and bring the boys who share his study, too. They may be useful as witnesses." Harcourt departed at once, and returned a few minutes later with Barker & Co. There was a gloating expression on the

bounder's face as he entered the Form-room. "Does this belong to you, Barker?" asked Mr. Chambers, holding out the cuff-link before the bounder. "I—I—I— Yes, that's mine," replied the bounder disrespectfully. "It happens that it has just been found in this room," said the master slowly and firmly. "I am wondering, therefore, whether you have been here since dinner." "Oh, no, sir!" replied the bounder promptly. "I've been out all the afternoon." "You haven't been smoking in this room?" "Smoking, sir!" said the bounder innocently, whilst Mason and Harris moved uneasily from one foot to the other. "I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing! I had no idea that boys at this school indulge in smoking. It's a disgusting habit—" "I am well aware of that," said Mr. Chambers icily. "You—" "Don't you think it would be best if you inspected the juniors' hands, sir?" suggested Harcourt. "Whoever has been guilty of smoking here is sure to have stains of nicotine on his fingers." "That is a good idea," said Mr. Chambers. "Each boy here will hold out both hands in front of him." Bob Travers & Co. immediately shot out their hands, and Mr. Chambers eyed them critically. But there were no stains on the fingers of Bob Travers & Co. The Form-master switched round at once in the direction of Barker & Co. The latter were looking decidedly uncomfortable, and they held their hands behind them. They had not expected anything like this.

"Hold out your hands!" commanded Mr. Chambers. Very slowly the three cads brought forth their hands, and next instant Mr. Chambers uttered an exclamation. "Bless my soul!" he cried, as he made a clutch at Barker's stained fingers. "You have been in this room, after all?" "N-n-no, sir! I—" "Then what are those stains doing on your fingers?" demanded the master. "Yours, too, Mason and Harris! Good heavens! This is amazing! You have had the audacity to enter this room and indulge in the disgusting habit of smoking, and not content with that, you have endeavoured to put the blame on three of your schoolfellows!" "No, sir, I—" began the bounder. "Silence!" rapped out Mr. Chambers. "I am convinced of your guilt. You three boys will follow me to my study at once. Travers, Turner, Jackson, you will do me another two hundred lines each for leaving the school without permission. You may go!" Bob Travers went willingly enough. They returned to their study, and when, a little later, they heard dismal moans coming from Study No. 2—the study occupied by Barker & Co.—they smiled with satisfaction. For those moans told them only too plainly that Mr. Chambers had punished the cads severely for their cunning plot. Once again Barker had endeavoured to obtain his revenge on Bob Travers & Co., and failed. But the bounder was not done with yet! (Another magnificent long instalment of this splendid new serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)



The is: Chapter.
Under the Shadow.

"Silver!" Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, spoke in a gentle tone. Jimmy Silver did not reply. The Classical Fourth were in the Form-room, and it was Jimmy's turn to construe; but Jimmy was thinking of anything but Latin just then. His usually sunny face was deeply overcast. His chum Newcome looked glum, too. The two juniors were giving no attention to lessons; they couldn't! They were thinking of their chums, Lovell and Raby, whose mysterious disappearance from Rookwood had caused a sensation in the school. "Silver!" Mornington nudged the captain of the Fourth, and Jimmy looked up, his face reddening. "Yes, sir?" he stammered. Mr. Bootles blinked at him very kindly over his spectacles. The Form-master was aware of the loyal friendship that united the Fistical Four, and he sympathised with Jimmy Silver's evident distress. "I am afraid your attention is wandering, Silver," said Mr. Bootles. "I—I can't help it, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "I—I can't help thinking about—about—" His voice faltered. "I understand," said Mr. Bootles gently. "If you choose, Silver, you and Newcome may leave the Form-room for the morning." "Oh, thank you, sir!" said Jimmy, in great relief. And Arthur Newcome echoed his words. Form work just then seemed a horror to the two juniors in their distress of mind. Gladly enough they quitted the Form-room, leaving the rest of the Classical Fourth to grind Latin. There was a cheery autumn sunshine in the old quadrangle of Rookwood, and the chums were glad to get into the open air. Save for themselves and one other the quadrangle was deserted. The other was a man with a scarred face, and an empty sleeve hanging by his side, who was pacing under the beeches amid the fallen leaves. "There's Captain Lagden, Jimmy," said Newcome. "May as well speak to him now. I don't know whether he knows what's happened to Raby—whether he knows he's missing as well as Lovell, I mean. He was very friendly in helping us to look for poor old Lovell." Jimmy Silver nodded. "He would help us if he could," he said. "But it's not much good looking for Raby, kid. He's nowhere near Rookwood. Newcome, old chap, what can have become of him and of Lovell?" "Goodness knows!" muttered Newcome. The mystery of the juniors' disappearance oppressed the two chums like a weight upon their minds and their hearts. They had had little sleep the previous night, since they had learned of George Raby's disappearance, following that of Arthur Edward Lovell.

The two juniors moved towards the beeches, where the captain was pacing to and fro smoking a cigarette. The grim scars on the captain's face gave him a forbidding look; but Jimmy Silver had found him very kind and helpful when the search for Lovell was going on, and they felt kindly towards Basil Lagden. The captain had his back towards them, and did not observe them. The two Fourth-Formers had nearly reached the beeches when, looking past the trees towards the gates, they observed a stranger who had just entered, and was speaking to Mack the porter. Captain Lagden observed the man at the same moment, and stopped in his pacing, his back still to the juniors, and stared towards the gates. The juniors could not see his face, but his sudden stop, and something in his attitude, showed that he was keenly interested in the man who had just come in from the road. The stranger was a short, fat man, dressed in tweeds, with a bowler-hat and a big walking-stick. He had a rather podgy face, and a straggling moustache, and shifty eyes of an uncertain colour. He looked as commonplace an individual as the chums of the Fourth had ever seen. "I wonder who that is?" remarked Newcome. "Captain Lagden seems to know him from the way he's staring at him." "Looks like it," said Jimmy indifferently. "Never mind him. We want to speak to Lagden." But Jimmy Silver did not have an opportunity of speaking to Captain Lagden just then. The captain, after a long, hard stare at the stranger at the gates, turned sharply, and strode away towards the School House. He passed within a few paces of the surprised juniors, and gave them a short nod, but did not stop to speak, even to bid them good-morning. He walked with a hurried stride towards the House, and disappeared in at the big doorway. Jimmy Silver had opened his lips to speak as the captain was passing; but Basil Lagden was gone before he could utter a word. Jimmy looked at Newcome, who returned his glance in surprise. "My hat!" said Newcome. "What the dickens—" "That's a man he doesn't want to meet," said Jimmy, with a slight smile. "The chap looks as if he might be a collector of bills. Perhaps he's got a little account for the captain." The podgy man had left the porter at the gate now, and was starting across the quadrangle. Jimmy Silver and Newcome had halted on the path, and the stranger eyed them as he came up, and stopped. "Good-morning!" he said pleasantly. "Good-morning, sir!" said the two juniors politely. "Not at lessons this morning—eh?" said the podgy gentleman, his shifty eyes twinkling at the juniors. "No," answered Jimmy, without adding any explanation of the circumstance. He

did not see that it concerned the podgy stranger in any way. "And so this is Rookwood?" went on the podgy man, in a chatty way. "Yes, this is Rookwood," answered Jimmy. "Fine place!" said the stranger, with a glance of his shifty eyes over the green quad and the grey old buildings. "Historic, and all that—what?" "Yes," said Jimmy, smiling. "I dare say that building's a hundred years old," remarked the podgy gentleman, with a nod towards the old School House. "Nearer six," answered Newcome, with some pride. Classics at Rookwood were very proud of the antiquity of the school. They assumed lofty airs on that account towards the fellows on the Modern side, in Mr. Manders' House; Mr. Manders' House being anything but ancient, like the Modern side generally. "You don't say so!" exclaimed the visitor, in great admiration. "Six hundred years old, and as good as new! Well, my word!" "Better than new!" said Jimmy Silver, smiling again. He found the podgy gentleman rather amusing. "Just as you say—better!" agreed the stranger. "Very interesting these old places to a man from the city—very! And you young gentlemen are going to play cricket, I suppose?" The young gentlemen grinned. "Next summer—certainly!" said Jimmy Silver. "Football happens to be on just now." "Quite so—quite so! My mistake! Many a long day since I was at school," said the podgy gentleman. "I never was at Rookwood—never; hadn't the advantage of attending a public school myself. Great advantage that! Lucky young fellows—what? Once a Rookwooder, always a Rookwooder! Never quite lose sight of the old school—eh?" Jimmy Silver nodded. The two juniors remained where they were, as the podgy gentleman seemed disposed to be chatty, out of politeness. "Lots of the old boys come down at times, I suppose? Old Boy matches, and all that—what?" "Oh, yes!" said Jimmy. "And you play the Old Boys at cricket—eh?" "The seniors do," said Jimmy, with a smile. "Juniors don't figure in the Old Boys' matches. We're in the Fourth." "I see—I see! Quite so! But you watch the games—eh?—and cheer the boundary-hits, and all that?" "Oh, yes!" "Very interesting—very! Charming old place! I dare say you young gentlemen come in contact with quite a crowd of Old Boys, coming down for one thing or another." "Sometimes." "Yes, yes; of course! In fact, I dare say you'd see any Old Boy who happened to drop in around the place." "Very likely." "Friend of mine was here some years back," said the podgy gentleman genially. "Name of Baumann. I dare say you've

seen that young gentleman here at times?" "Baumann!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "There was a fellow of that name here once. He was the chap who shut up Lagden in the abbey vaults, when they were juniors here. Years before our time." "Oh, yes! But no doubt he comes down sometimes with the other Old Boys—what?" "Never seen him!" said Jimmy. "He's never been to Rookwood in our time, so far as I know," added Newcome. "Perhaps you mightn't have heard the name, but might have seen him all the same," remarked the podgy gentleman. "Great friend of mine—very! Man like that to look at." To the astonishment of the juniors the podgy gentleman whipped a photograph from his pocket and held it up for them to see, his shifty eyes watching their faces keenly the while. They looked at the photograph. It was that of a man about thirty, with a somewhat heavy face, and rather unprepossessing features. "You know that face—what?" "No," said Jimmy, looking at it more closely. "There seems something about it a bit familiar—about the eyes, I think. But I've never seen the man that I know of." "Is that Baumann?" asked Newcome. "That's him; that's my friend Baumann! The fact is, I've lost trace of him, and thought I might get news of him here," exclaimed the podgy gentleman. "I'm calling on the Head for that reason—that very reason. You young gentlemen don't think you've seen a man like that about the place—hay?" "Sorry, no." "It's a pity—very. Never mind. Good-morning to you, young gentlemen!" The visitor slipped the photograph back into his pocket and started for the House, with his quick, jerky walk. "Well, my hat!" said Newcome. "That's a queer fish. Blessed if I know what to make of him! What are you thinking out, Jimmy?" Jimmy Silver's face was deeply thoughtful. "It's jolly queer," he said—"jolly queer! That man's after Baumann, who used to be here; and he's not a friend of his, either. Looks to me like a plain-clothes detective, Newcome. There was one came here about that affair of Bulkeley last term; and they all have the same look, I believe. He was pumping us, as plain as anything. He sprung that photo on us suddenly, to see in our faces whether we knew it." "A detective after an old Rookwood chap!" said Newcome, with a stare. "Well, Baumann was a Rookwooder; but it's a German name, and I dare say he was no class," said Jimmy. "Sergeant Kettle remembers him, and don't think much of him. And that trick we've heard he played on Lagden—shutting him up in the abbey vaults—was a dirty trick. Anyway, that fat fellow was pumping us, though he was ass enough to think we didn't see it. Let's go and see Lagden now." And Jimmy Silver and Newcome went

into the House and made their way to the captain's quarters.

The 2nd Chapter. The Veil of Mystery.

"Come in!" Captain Lagden's voice called out cheerily as Jimmy Silver tapped at the door of the Oak Room. The captain was stretched upon a sofa under the window, and he gave the juniors a friendly nod as they entered. "Not at lessons?" he smiled. "Mr. Bootles has let us off for this morning, sir," answered Jimmy Silver. "We—we're a bit worried." "I understand. Sit down! Very kind of you to give me a look-in." "We were going to speak to you in the quad, but—" "I had a sudden twinge," said the captain, with a nod towards his empty sleeve. "I always get it when the weather's damp. I shall have to lay up for a bit, I'm afraid." The juniors were sympathetic at once. They understood now why the captain had come indoors so suddenly. Jimmy felt a twinge of remorse as he remembered his idea that the captain had been avoiding the podgy stranger. "Nothing to speak of, of course," said Captain Lagden, making light of the matter. "But the loss of a limb makes itself felt, you know—you get bad twinges in the bad weather. But never mind that. You have something to say to me." "You were kind enough to help us in looking for poor old Lovell, sir—" "Yes; you had an idea that the poor lad might still be about Rookwood somewhere," said the captain, with a smile. "I think we made a pretty thorough search of the place." "Yes; I've had to give up that idea," said Jimmy. "But—but now Raby—" The captain became very grave. "I heard this morning that Raby has gone away suddenly," he said. "It is very extraordinary." "I suppose he's gone away!" admitted Jimmy Silver. "But I can't understand it." "Have his people heard?" "The Head's telephoned, but his people have heard nothing of him—same as Lovell's," said Newcome. "It's very odd. Why should the boy go?" said the captain. "From what I saw of him I should have thought he was happy here." "He never went of his own accord, sir," said Jimmy. "I can't even guess what may have happened, but there's been foul play of some sort." Newcome nodded assent. "That's rather a queer idea," said Captain Lagden thoughtfully. "What could have happened to Raby within the walls of the School House?" "The same that happened to Lovell," said Jimmy. "And that—" "I don't know," confessed Jimmy. "It beats me—beats me hollow! It makes me feel that my head's turning round. But there's been foul play of some sort, and we're going to get to the bottom of it somehow!" "I wish you luck, my boy! Have you found anything out yet, then, to give you any idea—" "That's what we wanted to tell you, sir. Last night we were making a sort of investigation. You remember poor Lovell, when he disappeared, had left the dormitory to come down here and play a trick on you?" Jimmy coloured. "I'm sure you've forgiven him for that, sir." "With all my heart!" said the captain. "It was simply a misunderstanding, but Lovell had taken a dislike to me. Never mind that." "Well, he had a can of ink that he was going to—play that trick with," said Jimmy. "We thought that getting about in the dark he might have spilled some, and we might find the traces. He came down by the little oak staircase that's hardly ever used. We traced it out, and found that he had split some of the ink, as we had supposed. He left

marks here and there, all the way this room."

Captain Lagden started.

"To this room?"

"Yes. It's clear that he got as far as a door," said Jimmy. "There was a mark of ink, just perceptible, close to the door-handle, and Lovell must have gone to the very door and taken hold of the handle. We'd found that much out last night, when, finding the door was locked, and not being able to make you up, we thought you must be ill, and set down to call Mr. Bootles. Raby had outside your door, and when we came up you told us he had been gone some minutes. Well, he never came to a dormitory that night. He's never been seen since. After leaving you he simply vanished!"

"Extraordinary!"

"We were going to tell you what we'd found out about Lovell, you see," went Jimmy Silver. "It's extraordinary that he had reached the door of this room, and then disappeared; and it only knocked us over when we found that Raby had done exactly the same thing. Is it possible, sir, that Lovell had entered this room the night before here?"

The captain looked very thoughtful. "I was asleep in the next room. I woke up and heard him. He could easily have entered without awakening me. I should think, I rather fancy he was up the idea of playing such a trick, and went back. Then he appears to have left the house. I hear that a shadow was found open in the morning," Jimmy Silver nodded slowly.

"But Raby, sir?" he said. "He didn't leave the house—at least, it can't be out that he did."

"But he must have gone, as he is no longer here!" said the captain, with a frown. "I am afraid it will turn out that there was some scheme between them for running away from school together—some romantic idea—and they will probably be found together in a day."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"They wouldn't run away, sir; and if they had any idea of that kind, they wouldn't have kept it secret from us," said the captain.

"Dr. Chisholm is of opinion."

"I can't guess what has happened, sir, but that there's been foul play," said Jimmy. "But we shan't rest till we've found out everything."

Jimmy's eyes gleamed as he spoke, and his jaw squared.

Amazed and perplexed as he was, there was no doubt of Jimmy Silver's determination to probe the mystery, and discover what had become of his missing friends.

"I wish you every success!" said Captain Lagden cordially. "Any assistance I can render I shall be only too happy to give. I've got to lie up here today, and I shall think the matter over as hard as I can, and if anything turns to me, I'll send you a message to me here."

"You're very kind, sir," said Jimmy dutifully.

"Not at all. I can feel for your distress, my lad," said the captain. "There's very little I would not do to help you. Might I ask you to take a message to the Head for me, to inform him that we do not feel quite well enough to come down to lunch to-day?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The two juniors left the Oak Room, Captain Lagden taking up a book.

Their faces were clouded as they went upstairs.

Captain Lagden had been so kind in giving them help before, that they had a vague hope that he might have some suggestion to make, but evidently it was at as great a loss as themselves.

They proceeded to the Sixth Form room to take the captain's message to Dr. Chisholm, and in the corridor they encountered Tupper, the page, with a dead grin on his face.

"He was coming away from the Sixth Form room."

"Is the Head there, Tupper?" asked Jimmy.

Tupper's grin widened.

"No, Master Silver, he ain't! I've just seen a gentleman's card to 'im, and he's gone to his study," said Tupper. "He was waxy, sir! He don't like being interrupted when he's on Greek and such, don't." Tupper chuckled. "But I 'ad to take the card in, seeing as the gent was very pressing, and him a detective, 'eh?"

"Oh!" said Jimmy, remembering the sly gentleman. "How do you know he was a detective, Tupper?"

"Wasn't it in print on the card?" asked Tupper. "Mr. Brown, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard. 'Ad there means a detective, don't it?"

"Oh!"

"And the 'ead was waxy!" grinned Tupper. "Oh, what a waxy!"

And Tupper went his way to the regions above, evidently with the intention of conveying to his friends there what a "waxy" the Head was in.

Jimmy Silver and Newcome proceeded to the Head's study, and Jimmy tapped, receiving a very sharp "Come in!" in response.

He opened the door a little timidly.

When the Head was in a "waxy," it was always advisable to give him as wide a berth as possible, but in this case Jimmy had no choice, as he had the captain's message to deliver.

The podgy gentleman was in the study, and his shifty eyes rested on the junior as the Head glanced sharply at Jimmy Silver.

"Well?" rapped Dr. Chisholm.

Jimmy delivered Captain Lagden's message in an instant.

"Very well!"

And Jimmy retired to the study, glad to go.

Dr. Chisholm's face was set, and it was only too evident that Tupper was right about the reverend gentleman being "in a waxy."

Jimmy and Newcome walked out into the quadrangle, where they discussed, for the fiftieth time, the mystery that puzzled and worried them, without coming any nearer a solution.

Lovell and Raby had disappeared from human ken as completely as if they had melted into thin air, and their chums were utterly baffled and mystified.

The 3rd Chapter. Wanted!

Mr. Brown's shifty eyes stole back to the Head as the door closed after Jimmy Silver.

The Head was very calm and self-restrained, but the "waxy" was quite apparent to the podgy gentleman's shifty eyes.

"Now, sir, you were saying—" said the Head abruptly.

"Sorry to be taking up your time like this—very!" said Mr. Brown cheerfully.

"Duty, sir! If you can give me any information—"

"If I can give you any information to assist you in vindicating the law, it is my duty to do so however unpleasant it may be," said Dr. Chisholm. "For that purpose, my time is at your disposal. I only beg you to be as brief as possible."

"Quite so, sir! To come to the point, there was a lad named Baumann at this school some years back."

"That is so."

"Not a lad of good character, I understand?"

"A lad of very bad character, sir," said the Head sharply. "He was compelled to leave Rookwood when his character became known to me. In short, he was expelled from the school for gambling and theft."

"Then I take it that he has never visited the school since?"

"Certainly not!"

"No old friends here, I instance—"

"Most decidedly not."

could lay his hands on; and he is wanted for theft, forgery, and desertion. That is Mr. Baumann's record, sir."

"A disgraceful record!" said the Head.

"Very!" assented Mr. Brown.

"Still, I do not quite see your object."

"I will explain sir. Although Baumann has not been heard of since, his work has been heard of. I have mentioned that he was sentenced once for counterfeiting banknotes. Lately, sir, there has been a flood of counterfeit paper money—banknotes and currency notes—and experts have recognised the undoubted hand of Mr. Baumann. He is at work again. Where, is a mystery; but he is at work, and turning out hundreds of pounds in excellent forgeries, which pass muster almost everywhere."

"Shocking! But—"

"I have twice had the pleasure of arresting Mr. Baumann," resumed the podgy gentleman. "I am looking forward to that pleasure a third time. In short, I am on the case, sir. That is why I am here."

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows.

"Surely, Mr. Brown, you have no expectation whatever of finding that this unmitigated rascal has kept up his connection with his old school?" he exclaimed. "Really, sir—"

"Not at all; but in the absence of any clue, a man must not neglect the slightest chances, sir. Baumann certainly was here in his school days, and he must have acquaintances among Rookwood men of his time. My object is to inquire whether you, sir, have heard anything of the man."

"Nothing whatever."

"Whether he has been seen in this neighbourhood—"

"I am certain that he has not."

"And whether you can give me the names of some Rookwood men of his time, who may possibly know something of his later movements?"

"I fear that I can give you no assistance there, sir."

Mr. Brown coughed.

least, here, and he may have been seen."

"I have heard nothing of it," said the Head, looking very distressed. "If he dared to present himself here I should, of course, immediately hand him over to the police."

"Naturally. But, under the circumstances, my work will naturally lie in this neighbourhood," said Mr. Brown. "I trust that you have no objection to my looking about me here—that you will, in fact, allow me the freedom of the place."

Dr. Chisholm pursed his lips.

"You will please yourself," he said. "It appears to me useless to look about you here, but you will do your duty. I am aware that you have the power to insist—"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Mr. Brown deprecatingly.

"In any case, I should certainly not place any impediment in your way. I will give instructions for you to come and go as you please."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"I have left the Sixth Form to see you."

"I will detain you no longer, sir," said Mr. Brown, rising, and taking his bowler hat. "I am very much obliged to you—very!"

And the podgy gentleman cheerfully took his departure, leaving the Head biting his lip.

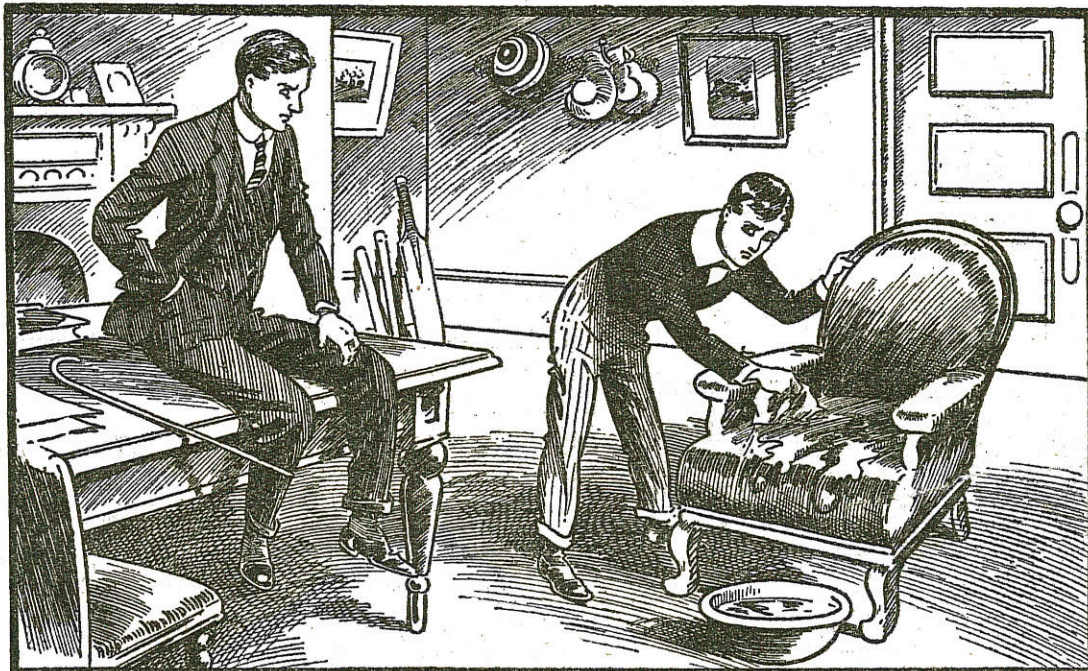
For with all Mr. Brown's politeness, it was quite clear to the Head that he fully expected to pick up some clue to the man he was seeking near Rookwood School, if not in the school itself.

Dr. Chisholm was very thoughtful as he returned to the Form-room, and the Sixth Form of Rookwood had the pleasure that morning of discovering for themselves that their headmaster was in a "waxy."

The 4th Chapter.

Mr. Brown is Busy.

"Jimmy, old chap, is there any news?" Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth,



Carthew sat on the corner of the table with his ashplant handy, whilst Jimmy Silver worked hard at the cleaning process.

"Not to your knowledge, of course, sir," said Mr. Brown. "Quite so! You cannot tell me, therefore, where to put my finger on Mr. Baumann?"

"I have not the faintest knowledge of his movements since he left Rookwood more than ten years ago. I heard something to the effect that he had gone to the bad, but I never knew the facts."

"The facts are simple enough, sir," said Mr. Brown. "Baumann did go to the bad—he became a hanger-on at races, a tout and welsher, and after that he served a sentence for forgery, and after that, sir, a sentence for manufacturing counterfeit banknotes."

The Head shuddered.

It was bitter enough to him to learn that a fellow who had once been at Rookwood School had had such a record in later life.

"This is news to me, Mr. Brown," he said, in a low voice. "I am shocked—very much shocked! However, I do not see—"

"Mr. Baumann had served his second sentence when the war broke out," said Mr. Brown. "He came very near serving another over a matter of trading with the enemy, though perhaps he did not regard the Germans as enemies, being of German descent himself. But he was still a free man when conscription was instituted, and he was taken into the Army."

"Hardly a profitable transaction for the Army, I should think," said the Head drily.

"Quite so!" assented Mr. Brown. "His military record was a bad one. His earliest exploit was to steal an officer's cheque-book, and pass false cheques upon tradespeople. He was at the Front when that was discovered, and he would have been dealt with in the usual way, but in an attack during the Somme fighting he was wounded. From that time it was not easy to trace him, but I have ascertained that he was sent home with a batch of wounded, put in hospital, and deserted from there. Three months ago he disappeared, taking with him all he

It was plain to see that the Head was shocked and annoyed by the whole story, and only wished to hear the last of Baumann, and to see the last of Mr. Brown himself at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Brown could understand that perfectly, but he had no intention of gratifying the Head on that point. Business came first.

"Quite so, sir," said Mr. Brown. "But a singular circumstance is, that the man has certainly been in this direction."

"Is it possible?"

"Banknotes and currency notes of the undoubted Baumann brand have been passed in certain places during the last week," said Mr. Brown calmly, "all at a distance from Rookwood. But—here is the singular circumstance—they have been traced in towns lying, as it were, in a circle round the school. The nearest is Lantham, to the west—ten or twelve miles away, I think."

"That is hardly sufficient to connect the rascal with Rookwood in any way."

"Quite so; but the notes have been traced in a town fifteen miles east—and, again, in distant towns north and south," said Mr. Brown. "The inference is that the man is working from some centre, and goes as far as possible afield to pass the products of his secret press; a very natural proceeding—very! The singular circumstance is that, tracing his movements on the map by means of the discovered counterfeiters, I find that the centre of his field of operations is Rookwood School."

"Bless my soul!"

"Not this building precisely, of course," said Mr. Brown, with an agreeable smile. "I mean, of course, this vicinity. Judging by the distribution of counterfeit notes within the past week, the rascal certainly has his headquarters within easy distance of this school—his old school, sir. That fact, taken in connection with the fact that he was formerly at Rookwood, has brought me here. He must be known by sight to several persons, at

asked that question when the juniors were released from lessons.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"What on earth do you make of it?" asked the Modern junior. "The fellows are saying that Lovell's run away from school, and that Raby's gone to join him."

"I don't believe it," said Jimmy.

"What do you think, then?"

"I don't know what to think."

Tubby Muffin chimed in:

"I think I've got it, Jimmy! I've been thinking it out."

Jimmy Silver smiled faintly as the fat Classical spoke.

He had little faith in Tubby's power to unravel a mystery which beat him, Jimmy Silver, hollow.

"Well, Tubby?" he asked patiently.

"Lovell's run away to become a pirate!" said Tubby Muffin impressively.

"What?"

"And Raby has gone to be his first mate!" said Tubby.

"You duffer!"

"Look here, Jimmy—"

"You silly, fat chump!" exclaimed Newcome, in disgust, "don't talk out of the back of your silly neck!"

Tubby Muffin frowned.

He did not like having his brilliant suggestion received in this cavalier manner, and Tubby had generously given the matter a great deal of thought, too.

And Tubby rather prided himself upon being a brainy chap.

"Well, that's how I look at it," he said obstinately. "Fellows do run away to be pirates, don't they? I've read about such things."

"Ass!" said Tommy Dodd politely.

"Oh, you're only a Modern duffer; you wouldn't be able to think it out," said Tubby. "I've thought it out. My belief is, that when Lovell and Raby are found, they'll be aboard a rakish schooner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy and Newcome, worried as they were, could not help laughing at the idea of their chums turning up as pirates, on board a rakish schooner.

Tubby sniffed.

"Well, you mark my words," he said solemnly. "It will turn out just as I say. I'm a brainy chap, you know; I think things out. And I shouldn't wonder if you chaps know it all the time."

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. And several juniors near by stared at Tubby Muffin in surprise.

"Well," said Tubby argumentatively, "you four chaps were always chummy, and never had any secrets from one another. If Lovell and Raby have run away, they wouldn't be likely to do it without telling you two."

"That shows they haven't done it, fat-head!"

"Well, they're gone. You can't deny that they're gone. Looks to me as if the lot of you are going, one at a time, to avoid being spotted and collared."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Mornington. "Go on, Tubby; this is really very bright."

Tubby grinned complacently; he thought himself that it was rather bright.

"That's it, depend upon it!" he said. "Mind, I don't say it's really possible to be a pirate these days, especially in war-time. But silly kids—"

"Who's a silly kid?" snorted Newcome. "Nothing personal, you know," said Tubby hastily, backing away a pace. "Speaking generally, silly kids do silly things. Chaps who go to the pictures, too, get all sorts of ideas in their heads, and try to be burglars and things. Now, you four were very fond of the pictures."

"We went to the cinema sometimes," said Jimmy Silver, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to punch Tubby's obtuse head. "But—"

"That's it!" said Tubby triumphantly. "I've read in the newspapers about chaps who go to the pictures, and then go and try to do likewise. I've got a strong suspicion, Jimmy Silver, that you four have arranged to bunk, one by one, and meet somewhere, and go and be pirates. Now, own up!"

"Own up to what, you howling ass?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Tubby gave him a fat wink.

"I've bowled you out!" he said. "Next thing we shall hear is that you've disappeared, or Newcome's disappeared. All through going to the pictures!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You crass idiot!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver wrathfully.

"Own up, old chap!" said Tubby reprovingly. "Now, I think—Yarrah!"

Jimmy Silver's patience was exhausted. He took Tubby Muffin by the collar, and instead of stating what he thought, the fat Classical uttered a wild howl as he was shaken.

"There, you ass!" said Jimmy. "Now, don't be a funny idiot any more!"

"Yarrah! I wasn't being funny! I've bowled you out, you know—Yooop!"

"Sit down!" growled Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin sat down; he couldn't help it.

He sat and roared, and Jimmy Silver and Newcome walked away. They had had more than enough of Tubby and his bright ideas.

"Hallo! there's that beggar Brown!" exclaimed Newcome suddenly. "He's still here."

The two chums had walked into Little Quad, feeling rather "down" and not in a humour for the company of the other fellows.

In Little Quad they sighted the podgy gentleman in tweeds, with his bowler hat pushed back on his bullet head, and his big walking-stick under his arm.

Mr. Brown was strolling round, his shifty little eyes very bright, apparently taking stock of his surroundings.

He smiled and nodded as he saw the juniors, and came towards them.

"Splendid old place, young gentlemen!" he said. "Quite a treat for me to be permitted to inspect such an historic place! I've been enjoying a little conversation with the school sergeant. Rare old character!"

"Oh, ripping!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Through the Boer War, and all that," said Mr. Brown. "Medals and things. Fine old specimen of the British soldier—what? And he remembers my old friend Baumann, who was here years before your time—long ago, very. Knew his photograph at once. Fine old character!"

"So you've been pumping the sergeant, as you were pumping me!" said Jimmy Silver deliberately.

Mr. Brown started.

"Pip-pip-pumping!" he stammered.

"Yes. I don't know whether it's struck you, Mr. Brown, that anybody could see a mile off that you are a detective!" said Jimmy.

Mr. Brown stood quite still, blinking at him.

"You—you think—" he mumbled.

"I don't think—I know! Your card was seen, for one thing. And anybody could see it, too!" said Jimmy coolly. "Anybody could see that you belonged to the police, Mr. Brown. You've got it all over you!"

"Well, my word!" said Mr. Brown, evidently taken aback.

The two juniors walked on, grinning; Jimmy feeling that he had repaid Mr. Brown for his attempt at pumping.

The podgy gentleman blinked after them for a moment or two, and then hurried to overtake them.

"Very sharp of you, young gentleman—very!" said Mr. Brown amiably. "The fact of the matter is, it's not a secret, my young friend, and I never had any idea of concealing the fact that I belong to the police. As you are so sharp, you have no doubt guessed that I want to find Mr. Baumann for professional reasons."

"Naturally!"

"You don't happen to know anything that would be of use to me?" said Mr. Brown persuasively.

"I don't know that I should tell you if I did," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "It's not my business to act the informer. But I don't know anything about Baumann,



THE VANISHING of NEWCOME!

(Continued from the previous page.)

and that's the fact, I don't believe he's ever been to Rookwood since he left ten or fifteen years ago."

"Nobody here who remembers him, excepting the masters and the school sergeant," murmured Mr. Brown.

"Captain Lagden does," said Newcome. "Baumann shut him up in the abbey vaults once, when they were boys here together."

"Captain Lagden!" repeated the detective. "A visitor to the school?"

"Old soldier, disabled!" said Newcome. "He's come here as football coach. He lost his arm on the Somme."

"Poor gentleman!" said Mr. Brown. "Splendid man, though! Splendid! And he knew Master Baumann when he was here. Friend of his, perhaps?"

"No fear!" said Jimmy Silver, smiling. "They were study-mates, not friends. Baumann was a bad lot, and Lagden is one of the best."

"Yes, he was a bad lot," said Mr. Brown, shaking his head. "I learn that he used to break bounds here at night and consort with low characters. A bad lot, very!"

Mr. Brown had evidently pumped Sergeant Kettle to some effect.

"And he used to get in and out of the school in a very cunning way," went on Mr. Brown. "Nobody quite knew how he did it, and it was never found out. Mr. Kettle says. Very extraordinary—very! And he shut up a boy in the vaults, did he? What vaults?"

"They're under the old Abbey, in the school grounds."

"I wonder whether you young gentlemen would care to show them to an interested stranger?" said Mr. Brown, with a smile. "I should take it as an act of kindness."

"Out of bounds for us."

"But I have your headmaster's leave to go where I like. With me—"

"Oh, all right!" said Jimmy Silver. He did not care whether he showed the stranger round or not; but time was hanging heavy on his hands, and he assented. "You'll want a lantern."

"I have a little pocket-lamp," smiled Mr. Brown.

"That will do, then. This way!"

Jimmy and Newcome led the way to the old Abbey, their companion chatting all the time with inexhaustible cheerfulness.

"You'll have to ask the porter for the key," said Newcome. "The vaults are kept locked."

Mr. Brown stopped at Mack's lodge, and the porter, who had received his instructions from the Head, handed him the key without question, but with a very curious look.

A few minutes more, and the door of the abbey vaults was unlocked, and Mr. Brown entered, flash-lamp in hand, followed by the juniors.

Mr. Brown's curiosity and interest were unlimited.

He explored the long series of vaults most thoroughly, and it was time for the juniors to go in to dinner before he was finished.

They left him still in the vaults, and went back to the School House.

After dinner, curious to see whether Mr. Brown was still exploring, they visited the abbey ruins; but the door at the bottom of the steps was locked.

"He's gone!" said Newcome.

The two juniors sauntered away, and near the gates old Mack called to them.

"Is the gentleman down with that there key?" he demanded. "I've got the 'Ead's orders to be careful with that there key."

"Hasn't he given it to you back?" asked Jimmy, in surprise.

"I ain't seen him."

"Well, the vaults are locked up," said Jimmy Silver. "He must have gone off with the key in his pocket."

"Careless lass!" said old Mack emphatically.

And, having delivered that opinion of the gentleman from Scotland Yard, old Mack retired, grunting, to his lodge.

Mr. Brown, apparently, had gone out, as he was not seen about Rookwood School that afternoon.

It was close on looking-up time when he tapped at the door of old Mack's lodge, and the porter opened it surlily.

Mr. Brown held out the key of the vaults, with an apologetic look.

"Walked off with it in my pocket," said Mr. Brown. "Careless of me—very! But here it is, Mr. Mack, and thanks to you!"

"Lucky as you 'ave'n't lost it!" said Mack, with a grunt. "I've 'ad trouble enough with that key, what with the young gents horroin' of it without asking leave, to risk their blessed necks exploring the vaults, and so forth. And if a man asks for that key, he's bound to carry it off in his pocket and forget it, and make a man worrit! They can't ever remember to bring it back!"

Mack was crusty; but Mr. Brown only smiled in a genial way.

"They!" he repeated. "You don't mean that some other visitor borrowed your key, Mr. Mack, and forgot to bring it back? That would be a queer coincidence!"

"Well, it was so!" snapped Mack. "Twice it's 'appened, and I hope that nobody won't want that blessed key any more!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Brown, his shifty eyes brighter than ever. "What a very curious coincidence, Mr. Mack—very!"

Grunt!

"You don't remember the other man who borrowed the key, did you say?" Mack stared.

"Course I didn't say anything of the kind!" he answered. "I s'pose I remember, when it only 'appened last week."

"I see! You lent it to a friend with a taste for exploration."

"I lent it to a gentleman what's staying 'ere," grunted Mack. "And a very nice gentleman, too, if you ask me. I ain't grumbling, am I?"

"Why, certainly not! The Head has several visitors staying here now, I believe."

"Not that I knows on," answered Mack. "There ain't nobody but Captain Lagden, that I'm awer of."

"Oh, I see! A splendid man, sir, Captain Lagden!" said Mr. Brown. "Disabled in his country's service—an old Rookwooder, too! Very natural for him to borrow your key, and revisit some of his boyhood's haunts—very!"

"Well, I ain't much of a taste for slugs and spiders myself," said old Mack. "And the captain forgot to return you the key, just as I did?" smiled Mr. Brown. "Quite a coincidence. Shell-shock, perhaps; bad memory."

"Nothing of the sort. He jest forgot, same as you did. Now, if you're not wanting anything else, sir, I'll just shut them gates."

"Quite so—quite so! Good-evening, Mr. Mack!"

Mr. Brown, with his stick under his arm, walked away in the gathering dusk, and the gates clanged behind him.

The shifty eyes were glittering.

His hand slid into his pocket and felt a key there—a key that was an exact reproduction of the key he had "forgotten" to return to Mack before he went out, and which Mr. Brown had made at a locksmith's that afternoon at Lantham.

It was for that purpose that he had "forgotten" to return the vault key, though old Mack was far from suspecting it.

"Curious!" murmured Mr. Brown, as he walked on in the dusk. "Odd! Very! Used to know Baumann—study-mates—hum! Forgot to return the key, just as I did. For the same reason? I wonder!"

Mr. Brown was deep in thought as he walked to his inn at Coombe.

And it was his intention, the next day, to make the acquaintance of Captain Lagden at Rookwood.

The 5th Chapter.

Jimmy Silver's Suggestion.

Jimmy Silver and Newcome had gone into the Form-room with the rest of the Fourth that afternoon.

They did their best there; and Mr. Bootles, who understood their worried frame of mind, was very easy with them.

That day there had been telegraphing to and fro between Rookwood School and Raby's home, the missing junior's father being very anxious about his son, but unable to come to the school, being detained by important war work.

But he could have done nothing if he had come.

The Head's belief was that Raby had left Rookwood to join Lovell, the two having planned the escapade between them; and the Head's feelings on the subject were of worry and anger.

There seemed no other explanation of the absence of the two juniors.

Indeed, in the Fourth, Tubby Muffin's theory was rather favoured.

The fellows did not, like Tubby, think that Lovell and Raby had bolted to become pirates, as a result of seeing the "pictures."

But they concluded that the two juniors had left the school of their own accord, possibly with some idea of trying to get into khaki.

Lovell, who was a big fellow for his age, had been heard to say once or twice that he believed he would be able to squeeze in if he tried; and that careless remark was remembered now.

Jimmy Silver himself wondered whether it was possible that his chums had gone with that wild idea in their heads.

It was barely possible, yet it was conceivable that they would have gone on such an escapade without letting him know.

He clung to his belief that there had been foul play; but when he tried to think out what it had been, and how, he was completely floored.

The chums were glad when lessons were over, and after tea they ventured to call upon Captain Lagden again, in the Oak Room.

The captain was there, sitting over his big map, on which he was moving the little flags which indicated the British front.

He seemed pleased to see the juniors.

"You—youn haven't thought of—of anything, sir?" said Jimmy, who had been nourishing a vague hope that the captain might have "thought it out," as he had promised, with some result.

"I'm afraid not," said Captain Lagden. "All I can think of is a remark young Lovell made to me one day. It may let some light in on the matter."

"What was that, sir?" asked Jimmy curiously.

"Lovell asked me whether I thought he was big enough to pass into the Army as a recruit if he gave his age as eighteen," Jimmy started.

"Did he?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I answered laughingly," said the captain, with a smile. "But it has occurred to me since that he was serious, and that he may have gone with Raby on an attempt to get into the Army."

"He would have told us, at least, sir," said Newcome, with conviction.

"I mentioned this to the Head, and he thought it probable," remarked the captain. "It is merely an idea, of course. You see, there is no possibility of foul play in the matter, as it seems to me."

"I feel sure of it, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "I'll find out yet somehow. I was going to ask your advice—"

"Go ahead, my boy."

"There is a detective chap hanging around Rookwood," said Jimmy. "I was wondering whether I could speak to him about it."

The captain's scarred face was very grave.

"I should advise not," he said. "You see, your headmaster is convinced that foul play is impossible—and I must say I agree with him. If he thought so for a moment he would, of course, call in the police. As he has not done so, you could scarcely do so on your own responsibility."

"No, I—I suppose not," said Jimmy reluctantly.

His face fell. He had felt encouraged at the idea of getting the opinion of a professional detective.

But evidently the captain was right. Dr. Chisholm certainly would have disapproved very strongly of the juniors taking measures he had not seen fit to take himself.

"I advised you before," went on the captain, "not to mention in the school your theory of foul play. It would make the Head very angry."

"We haven't spoken of it among the fellows, sir."

"That is right! It could do no good, and might do harm. We can work on that theory ourselves, without confiding it to others."

The two juniors nodded, feeling rather flattered at being put, in this way, on a footing of equality with the captain.

Captain Lagden asked a few careless questions regarding Mr. Brown, and the juniors told him all they knew of that gentleman, and rose to go.

Jimmy Silver's glance was wandering round the old, dark, oak-panelled walls of the room, and the captain noted it.

His eyes rested very sharply on Jimmy's face.

"What are you thinking of now, Jimmy?" he asked.

Silver coloured.

"Only—a thought that came into my head!" he said, stammering. "It—it's not, of course."

"But what was it?" smiled the captain.

"Well, we know that Lovell got as far as this room that night," said Jimmy. "I—I was wondering if—if—"

"Well, if—"

"There's an old story that there's a secret passage in the School House running from the house to the abbey vaults," said Jimmy Silver, his flush deepening, for he realised what a wild idea it was that had come into his head. "I—I was wondering—whether—if Lovell had foul play, it must have been somebody—some stranger—who collared him. How could he have got in?"

"The answer to that, I'm afraid, is that nobody got in," said the captain, smiling.

"Yes, but—but if somebody knew the secret passage—"

"Which is not even known to exist for certain?"

"Well, yes," Jimmy was crimson under the captain's amused smile. "But suppose it existed—suppose it was in this very room; and Lovell got as far as this, we know—"

Captain Lagden burst into a hearty laugh, and Jimmy broke off confused.

"I—I know it sounds rot!" he confessed. "My dear lad, you are letting worry prey on your mind," said the captain kindly. "But I will tell you what. Come up here this evening, and we will make a complete examination of the room together. Who knows but what those old oak panels may cover up some secret?"

He smiled. "It will amuse me for the evening, at all events. Don't mention it to anyone, however, or I am afraid we shall be thought three—ahem!—to be plain—three silly asses!"

"You're very good, sir," said Jimmy gratefully. "It's a shame to bother you and take up your time like this; but you're so kind—"

"Not at all, my dear boy. Goodness knows I would do anything in my power," said the captain. "Now I must get ready to dine with the Head, and after that I will come back here. If you come here, say, at nine—"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"But remember it's our little secret!" said Captain Lagden, laughing.

"Yes, of course, sir!"

Jimmy Silver and Newcome left the Oak Room.

Newcome grinned a little as they made their way to the end study in the Fourth.

"You are piling it on a bit, Jimmy," he said. "The captain looked as if he thought you were a bit barmy."

"Well, I know the idea's rot," said Jimmy. "But—but, you see, there simply isn't anything to take hold of; and there's a millionth part of a chance—"

"It's jolly good of the captain to take it seriously," said Newcome. "He's a good-natured chap. Let's get our prep done early."

And the two juniors sat down to prep in the end study.

The 6th Chapter.

The Mystery Deepens.

"Fag!"

Carthew of the Sixth was calling, in a very unpleasant tone of voice.

Jimmy Silver and Arthur Newcome were about to turn into the corridor leading to the Oak Room when the prefect spotted them.

"Buck up!" whispered Jimmy.

The Fourth-Formers had no desire to fag for the bully of the Sixth just then.

But Carthew had seen them, and he called to Jimmy to stop.

"Silver! Stop at once! You heard me call, you young rascal!"

Carthew was striding after them, and the two juniors stopped.

"Look here, Carthew, we can't fag now!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver irritably. "You can find somebody else!"

Carthew gave him a scowl.

"I've found you!" he answered. "Somebody has been playing tricks in my study. You're guilty, likely as not!"

"I've not been there!" growled Jimmy. "I've got something else to think of!"

"Well, my armchair's full of gum, and it's got to be cleaned!" said Carthew. "Cut along to my study, Silver!"

"Look here—"

"Are you going?" inquired Carthew pleasantly. He had an ashplant under his arm, and he let it slide down into his hand.

Jimmy set his lips.

It was impossible to refuse to obey the prefect, especially when the prefect was within reach, and Jimmy made up his mind to the inevitable.

"Cut along, Newcome!" he whispered.

"Tell the captain I'm kept away, and I'll come on and join you as soon as I can."

"Right-ho!"

"What are you whispering about?" demanded Carthew, in his most bullying tone. "If you don't get a move on, Jimmy Silver, I'll help you along!"

"I'm coming!" growled Jimmy. "You'd better!"

Jimmy Silver accompanied Carthew to his study, leaving Newcome to make his way alone to the Oak Room.

Carthew grinned as he shepherded in the reluctant junior, and turned on the light.

"Now wire in!" he said. "If you haven't got it done in a quarter of an hour, look out!"

"B-r-r-r!" was Jimmy's reply, not very intelligible, but expressive of the state of his feelings.

He set to work on the gummy armchair, a piece of handiwork that was due to the misplaced humour of Flynn of the Fourth.

Carthew sat on the corner of the table watching him, with his ashplant ready in case it should be wanted.

But Jimmy worked hard at the cleaning process.

He was anxious to get it finished, and to join Newcome with the captain in the Oak Room.

The armchair was cleaned at last, and Jimmy Silver was warm and a little breathless, and considerably gummy himself.

"That's better!" said Carthew approvingly. "You'll think twice before you gum my armchair again, my pippin! You can get out."

Jimmy Silver got out gladly enough.

He hurried down the passage to the staircase, to go up stairs and join his chum, but he paused as he saw Captain Lagden, standing in the lower hall in conversation with Mr. Bootles.

Evidently the captain was not in his room.

Basil Lagden glanced up the staircase and gave the junior a pleasant nod.

"You did not pay me the visit in my quarters, my boy," he said.

"I was wanted by a prefect, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "Newcome came, though."

"Did he?" exclaimed the captain. "By gad, then he must be waiting for me there! Too bad!"

He made a slight movement, but Mr. Bootles had not finished his little chat yet.

Mr. Bootles had his own ideas about smashing up the German Line, and he was letting the military gentleman have the benefit of them.

Mr. Bootles went on regardless, so to speak, and the captain had to hear him out.

Jimmy Silver, after waiting a moment or two, went up the stairs, and hurried to the Oak Room to find Newcome.

To his surprise the room was in darkness when he opened the door.

"You here, Newcome?" he called out. There was no reply from the shadowed room.

It was unlikely that Newcome could be there in the dark, and Jimmy Silver turned away, supposing that his chum had got tired of waiting for the captain to come up.

As the captain might come up any minute now, however, he hurried to the end study, expecting to find Newcome there.

The end study was dark and empty, however, and Jimmy Silver went down to the Common-room.

He glanced over the crowd of fellows there, but Arthur Newcome was not among them.

"Any of you fellows seen Newcome?" he called out.

"He was with us in your study twenty minutes ago," said Mornington. "Haven't seen him since."

There was a squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Newcome! I say, Silver, has Newcome bolted, too?"

Jimmy Silver gave a violent start.

The blood rushed to his heart, and his face became so white that two or three fellows stepped towards him in alarm. For the first time it came into Jimmy Silver's mind that something had happened to Newcome.

The bare thought of it that his chum had gone the mysterious way of the others—that some unknown and unseen hand had clutched him from all who knew him—struck Jimmy like a blow. Erroll caught his arm.

"Jimmy! Are you ill?" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?"

Jimmy panted.

"Newcome! I—I left him when Carthew called me! I—I haven't seen him

since! Where is he? Where's Newcome?"

"Good heavens!" muttered Mornington. "You don't mean to say—"

"He must be somewhere about!" exclaimed Oswald. "Let's look for the chap! Buck up, Jimmy, old man!"

There was a rush of the juniors from the Common-room.

The Fourth Form studies were visited at once, and then the other junior studies.

Other rooms, passages, every recess and cranny, was searched for Arthur Newcome, but searched in vain.

As the discovery was made, beyond doubt, that Newcome was missing, there was a buzz of excitement among the juniors. It spread from the Fourth to the Shell and the Third.

Two or three fellows cut over to Mr. Manders' house, and came back to report that Newcome had not been seen on the Modern side that evening.

He was not there; he was not in the School House; he was not in the quad.

Where was he?

Jimmy Silver pressed his hands to his throbbing temples and groaned aloud. Where was Newcome? Where were his other chums? What horrible thing had happened to them?

"A hand fell on his shoulder."

"Silver!"

It was Mr. Bootles.

Jimmy looked up with a haggard face, from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"Silver! What has happened? What is all this noise and excitement?"