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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending December 21st, 1918.]

RIVAL SCHOOLS!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
FRANK RICHARDS & CO.,
The Chums of the School in the Backwoods.

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

The Raid.

"Cover!" murmured Bob Lawless. The first glimmer of dawn was whitening the waters of Cedar Creek and the tops of the pine-trees.

It was hours yet before the gates of Cedar Creek School would open to admit the throng of girls and boys, but already three of the boys of the backwoods school were astir.

Frank Richards and his Cousin Bob and Vere Beauclerc were tramping up the bank of the creek, a good distance from their school.

Near the point where the creek widened as it flowed into the Thompson River the ground rose in an acclivity, and on the top of the rise stood the building known as Hillcrest.

It was surrounded by a fence and a hedge of clipped spruce, and over the gateway was a board adorned with gilt letters.

Gilt-lettering was simply unknown in the Thompson Valley. When any of the merchants of Thompson wanted to put up a sign, he generally daubed it himself with paint on a rough board.

But Mr. Peckover, the headmaster of the new school, was doing things in amazing style for a frontier section of British Columbia.

"Down East," in Ontario or Quebec, the gilt-lettered sign would not have attracted a second glance, but in Thompson Valley it was stared at blankly by every pilgrim who passed that way.

Indeed, curious "galoots" had tramped out of Thompson Town and Cedar Camp and Silver Creek just to look at that sign and comment upon it.

Here and there it was a little spotted, showing that playful cattlemen had let off revolvers at it in a humorous mood.

Mr. Peckover had had that sign painted at a town far, far away, and sent up by railway and post-waggon. There was no painter in the Thompson Valley who could have produced it.

The gilt letters shone brightly in the rising sun, as Frank Richards & Co. came up the hill.

The sign bore the legend:

"HILLCREST.
PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR THE SONS
OF GENTLEMEN."

It was Mr. Peckover's strong desire to mark a distinction between his private school and the "national" school at Cedar Creek.

He hoped by that means to attract pupils the sons of any of the settlers who felt themselves superior to their neighbours, doubtless expecting to find sabbish instincts as well-developed in the great West as in the towns he was accustomed to.

In that, probably, Mr. Peckover had made a miscalculation.

So far, Frank Richards & Co. knew only two of the pupils of Hillcrest—Keller and Gunten, the sons of Swiss emigrants.

Gunten had been turned out of Cedar Creek, and he, at least, fully appreciated the distinction of belonging to a school proudly announced as being for the "sons of gentlemen."

He had assumed a lofty and swanky manner towards his former school-fellows, which had a rather exasperating effect on some of them.

Gunten's absurd swank, in fact, had prejudiced the Cedar Creek fellows against the new school, and that was the reason why Frank Richards & Co. had left home before dawn that morning, and were approaching Hillcrest cautiously in the light of early dawn.

Bob Lawless had a can of tar, with a brush sticking in it, in his hand, borrowed on a shed on the ranch at home.

He had also lawless designs upon the handsome gilt sign that adorned the gateway of Hillcrest.

But just as the three chums came in sight of the glistening sign Bob halted,

with a whispered warning, and suddenly dragged his comrades into cover of the timber beside the trail.

"Cover, my infants!" he repeated. "Somebody's coming! We don't want to meet dear old Peckover just now."

"I didn't see—" began Frank Richards.

"Neither did I, my son; but I heard," answered Bob Lawless. "I guess there's somebody coming along from the school, and more than one. Look!"

He pointed through an opening in the thicket.

"Four of them!" murmured Vere Beauclerc. "Chaps belonging to the school, I suppose."

"Queer!" said Frank. "They're early up, like us. What are they doing here at this time in the morning?"

"Blest if I know! But we'd better keep deggo till they're gone by," answered Bob. "They wouldn't like what we're going to do to Peckover's sign."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Slush!"

Four youths of about their own age were coming down the path towards the creek.

They were sturdy-looking fellows, a good deal like Bob Lawless himself in general appearance.

Bob uttered a muttered exclamation as they came nearer.

"I guess I know those kids," he said. "That chap with the curly hair is young Bird—Dicky Bird."

"My hat! What a merry name!" murmured Frank Richards.

"I don't know him very well, but I've heard he's a good sort," said Bob. "His folk are ranchers, 'tother side Thompson. The other three are Watson, Fisher, and Blumpy. I've seen them before. Hush! They're close!"

The youth who rejoiced in the peculiar name of Dicky Bird glanced round, as if he had heard something, but the thickets screened the Cedar Creek fellows from view, and he passed on with his companions.

Their footprints died away in the direction of the creek.

"Gone!" said Bob. "Come on!"

The trio stepped out into the trail again, and went on their way towards Hillcrest School.

There was no sign of life about the buildings.

Dicky Bird and his comrades had evidently not come from the schoolhouse, though certainly they must have passed near it.

Bob Lawless halted before the gate and looked up at the sign over it, which formed a sort of wooden arch over the gateway.

It was nearly a dozen feet from the ground, and a good way out of reach of the chums of Cedar Creek.

"We ought to have brought a ladder," said Beauclerc, with a smile.

"I guess we couldn't have toted a ladder all this way, Cherub."

"I don't see how we're going to get at it, though," remarked Frank Richards.

"My dear chap, where there's a will there's a way!" replied Bob Lawless. "We've got to stand on one another's shoulders."

"Phew!"

"I guess I'm the strongest."

"Guess again!" grinned Frank.

"Well, the strongest chap has got to take the ground-floor," said Bob.

"You're the strongest, then, by heaps!" said Frank, laughing.

"Fathead! You get on my shoulders, and the Cherub can get on yours, and then he can reach the sign. I'll hand up the tar-pot when you're atop, Cherub."

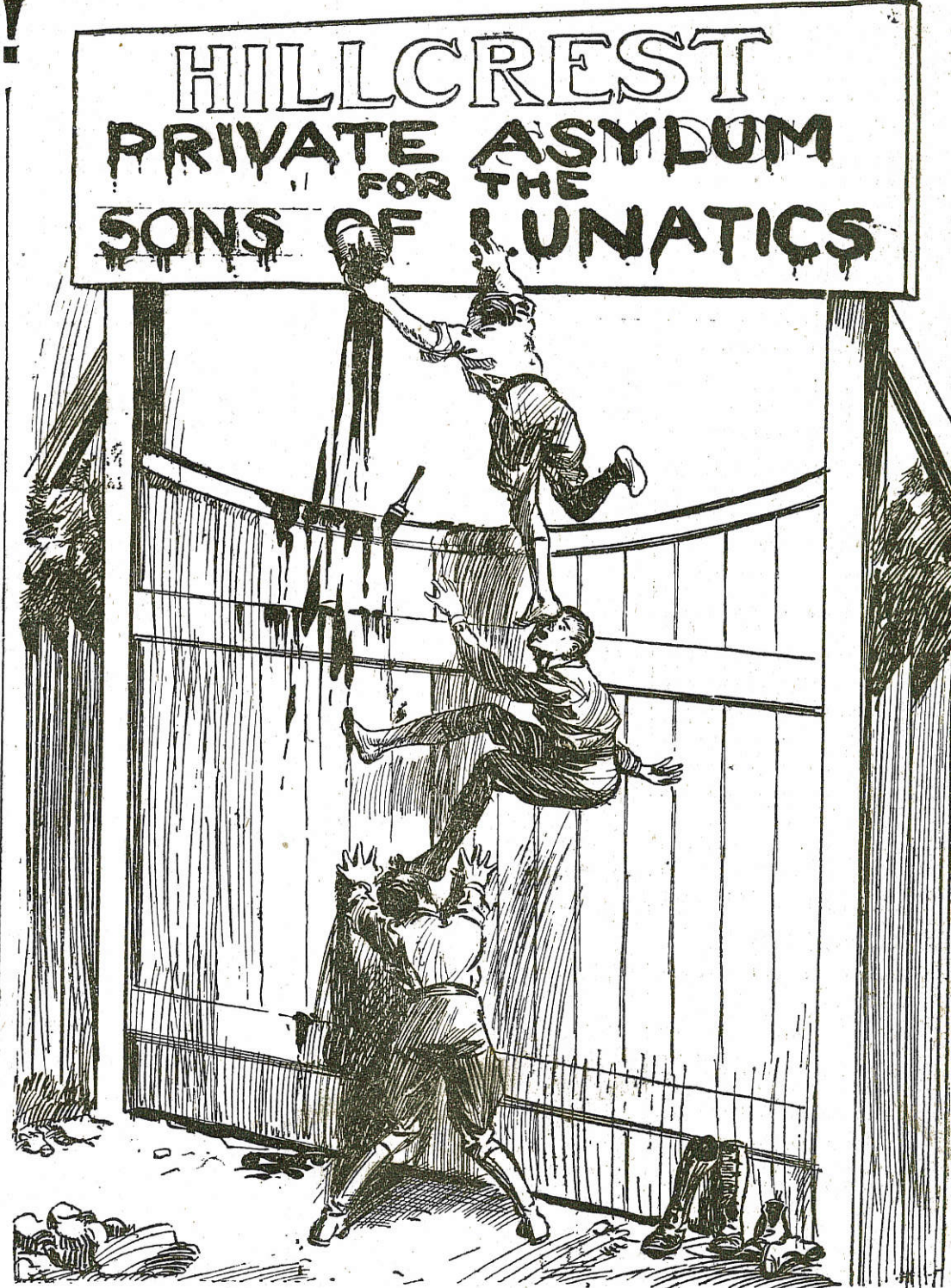
"Right you are!"

Bob Lawless braced his stalwart form against the gate, and Frank Richards climbed nimbly on his shoulders, first removing his boots.

Standing on Bob's shoulders, he held against the gate to steady himself.

"Ready, Beau?"

Vere Beauclerc had a more difficult



THE COLLAPSE OF THE HUMAN LADDER!

task in mounting to Frank's shoulders. But he succeeded, and held on to the sign itself.

Then the tar-pot, which Bob held ready in his hand, was carefully passed up, and Beauclerc took it.

Holding on with his left hand, the tar-pot slung by the handle on his wrist, he wielded the brush with his right.

The beautiful golden inscription was very quickly rendered indecipherable under the huge letters daubed over it in glaring black.

Only the name "Hillcrest" was left in gold lettering.

Under it appeared the startling announcement in black:

"PRIVATE ASYLUM FOR THE SONS OF LUNATICS!"

"I say, hurry up!" came from Bob Lawless. "Frank's hoofs are getting a bit heavy!"

"So are Beau's!" gasped Frank Richards.

Bob looked up anxiously.

He was feeling the weight, strong as he was, and he was anxious for the painting to be finished.

"Nearly done, Cherub?"

"Quite!" answered Beauclerc.

"Oh, good!"

"Yaroooo!" roared Frank Richards suddenly.

A drop of tar had alighted fairly in his mouth as he looked up, and he gave a sudden jump.

That jump was fatal to the human pyramid.

Beauclerc reeled, and Bob Lawless staggered; and Frank Richards, in the middle, collapsed.

"Oh, great gophers!"

"By Jove! Oh! Ah!"

"Yooooop!"

BUMP!

The 2nd Chapter.

After the Raiders.

Frank Richards sat up dazedly. He was on the ground, hardly knowing how he had got there, but knowing only too well that he had a collection of bumps about his person.

Bob Lawless was on his back, gasping.

"Beau!" gasped Frank.

(Continued on next page.)



RIVAL SCHOOLS!

(Continued from the previous page.)

Bird. "That's what they were up to here!"

"Check!"

Dicky Bird knitted his brows.

"I guess we're not allowing this," he said. "Kern Gunten told us we should have trouble with Cedar Creek, but I never took any stock of it. But I reckon Gunten was right. This is up against us."

"Old Peckover is an old jay!" said Watson. "All the Thompson Valley is chuckling over that silly sign. But this is up against our school, and we're going to make them sit up for it."

"They're gone," said Blumpy.

Dicky Bird looked round.

"They had a can of tar with them," he said. "I guess I know what we're going to do. They've gone to Cedar Creek now, and we can't catch them up on the trail. But I reckon we can get ahead of them on the creek in the canoe—and the canoe's ready. Come on!"

"What about the ladder?"

"Bring it back; no time now for what we were going to do. That blessed sign can wait till to-morrow."

"Right-ho!"

The four schoolboys ran back along the trail to the creek, ladder in hand.

Frank Richards & Co. were long out of sight.

The four hastily thrust the ladder out of view in the thicket near the creek, whence, evidently, they had taken it, and where it had been hidden in readiness for reasons best known to themselves.

On the bank of the creek lay a bark canoe, and the four rushed it down into the water and jumped in.

Four paddles flashed like lightning as they urged the canoe along against the current.

The canoe seemed almost to flash along till they came near the rapids, where it was necessary to land and carry the canoe up the bank.

The "portage" did not occupy them many minutes, however.

The canoe was launched again above the rapids, and they paddled on swiftly for Cedar Creek.

Cedar Creek School soon came in sight. A single column of smoke rose from the buildings, showing that someone was astir there.

But the gates were shut, and it was a considerable time yet before the school would open for the morning.

"I reckon we've headed them off!" said Dicky Bird, as the canoe was run ashore in the rushes.

The Hillcrest fellows jumped on shore. Dicky Bird's keen eyes swept the trail before the school, but there was no sign of Frank Richards & Co.

Three horses were tethered to the gate, but their riders were not to be seen.

Frank Richards and his chums had left their horses there when they started up the creek for Hillcrest, and evidently they had not yet returned.

"We're ahead!" grinned Watson. "I guess we can ambush them on the trail, Dicky."

Dicky Bird nodded.

"I reckon!" he answered. "We've beaten them easily in the canoe, and I guess we've got them dead to rights now. Come on!"

The four schoolboys ran into the trail that led up to the school gates, and took cover in the timber.

Thence they watched the trail for the arrival of Frank Richards & Co.

It was a good quarter of an hour later that the three chums came in sight.

They were chatting and laughing as they came along, Bob Lawless swinging the tar-can carelessly in his hand.

Dicky Bird's eyes glistened.

"Quiet!" he murmured. "Jump on them as soon as they come abreast! Take the jays by surprise!"

"You bet!"

Unsuspicious of the ambush ahead, the chums of Cedar Creek came swinging on along the trail.

There was a sudden rush as they came abreast of the ambush.

Before the trio knew what was happening they were rushed over and sent sprawling into the trail, and three Hillcrest fellows were sitting on them, and Dicky Bird had picked up the tar-can.

The 3rd Chapter.
A Black Deed.

"My hat!"

"Gerroff!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Hardly knowing what had happened, Frank Richards & Co. lay gasping on their backs in the grass, pinned down by Watson, Fisher, and Blumpy.

Their captors grinned down at them.

"Rather a surprise, I guess!" chuckled Dicky Bird.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"How the thump did you galoots get here?" ejaculated Bob Lawless. "We left you at Hillcrest."

"We're here, anyhow!" grinned Dicky Bird. "Keep them safe, you chaps! Don't wriggle, Bob Lawless. It's a cinch!"

"I guess it's our turn to do some tarring," said Fisher, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Bird was handling the brush in the can of tar with a businesslike air. The chums of Cedar Creek eyed him apprehensively.

"L-I-look here, what are you going to do with that tar?" demanded Bob Lawless uneasily.

"What have you been doing with it?" grinned Dicky Bird. "Painting the sign over our school gate! Well, we're going to paint you."

"Look here—"

"Won't it tickle the kids when they

come along to school and see you?" chuckled Dicky.

His companions yelled.

The expressions on the faces of Frank Richards & Co. were very entertaining to their captors.

Dicky Bird, having loaded the brush with tar, knelt beside Bob Lawless, who struggled under the weight of Harold Fisher—but in vain.

His hands were held, and a strong knee was planted on his chest, and Bob was powerless.

"Keep off!" he gasped. "Look here, you pesky gopher—Groooh!"

"Better keep your mouth shut," suggested Dicky Bird. "This is jolly good tar, but it's not really fit to eat!"

"Grrrrruuuh!"

"You're bound to get it in your mouth if you open it so wide, you know."

"Grrrrr!"

Bob Lawless, with an extraordinary expression on his face, closed his lips tight.

Tar outside was bad enough, but tar inside was a good deal worse—and there was some inside already.

Dicky Bird, with a methodical hand, proceeded to tar Bob's face, from the hair to the chin, laying it on quite thickly enough.

In a few minutes Bob Lawless was as black as the blackest Sambo in South Carolina.

The Hillcrest fellows yelled with laughter as they looked at him.

Bob mumbled faintly, but he did not open his lips.

He had had enough of that.

"What a picture!" said Dicky Bird admiringly. "Black but comely, you know! This will cause quite a sensation in Cedar Creek. Miss Meadows is bound to admire your complexion, Lawless."

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"You next, old scout!"

"Look here—"

"Oh! Ah! Ooooooh!"

He shut his mouth tight.

In a few minutes his eyes were gleaming wrath from a face as black as the ace of spades.

Then came Beaulere's turn.

Vere Beaulere did not speak; he submitted philosophically to the ordeal as it could not be helped.

It was only tit for tat, after all, though the "tit" was more severe than the "tat," so to speak.

"There, that just finishes it!" said Dicky Bird, as he completed the tarring of the Cherub's handsome face—which did not look handsome now. "I'd have given you necks to match, but there's no more tar. You oughtn't to have been so extravagant with this tar at Hillcrest, Lawless."

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"He's trying to talk Chinese or Kootenay," said Watson. "What does it mean, Lawless?"

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Frank Richards. "Let us go! It's not long to school now, and we've got to get cleaned, you beasts!"

"No jolly fear!" answered Dicky Bird emphatically. "You're not going to get cleaned, not by long chalks. You're going to school like that."

"What?" yelled Frank.

"Your cheery complexions will match our sign over the gate at Hillcrest, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you rotter! Oh, dear!"

Frank Richards & Co. began to struggle, but it was of no avail.

They were pinned down.

It was close on time for morning school at Cedar Creek now, and the crowd of scholars might begin to arrive at any moment.

There was a crash as Black Sam threw open the school gates from within.

Sam went back to his quarters without looking out, and unconscious of the peculiar scene in the trail a dozen yards from the gateway.

Frank Richards & Co. blinked at one another in dismay.

They had started out from home very early that morning for a "lark" on Hillcrest School, but they were feeling dimly that the lark had turned very much against themselves now.

There was a clatter of hoofs on the trail, and Dicky Bird looked round.

"Here they come!" he grinned.

Up the trail several riders could be seen—Tom Lawrence and his sister Molly, Dick Dawson and Kate Dawson, Chunky Todgers and Harold Hopkins, coming along to school together.

"I guess it's time we vamoosed," said Fisher. "Let's get back to the canoe!"

"Mosey on!" grinned Dicky.

Frank Richards & Co. were suddenly released, and the four Hillcrest fellows ran down to the creek.

They did not want to wait till Cedar Creek arrived in force. There would certainly have been severe reprisals.

In a couple of minutes they were in the canoe and paddling away at a great speed for safety.

In the trail Frank and Bob and Vere Beaulere sat up, gasping breathlessly.

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Frank.

"Groooh!"

"Yow-ow-ow! This pesky stuff's in my mouth! Wow-wow!"

The unhappy chums staggered to their feet.

There was a jingling of bridles as the oncoming party of school boys and girls halted in astonishment at the strange sight.

"Hallo! A gang of niggers!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "Where did they spring from?"

"Niggers!" said Dawson. "They've got white men's paws! And they smell of tar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Frank Richards!" shrieked Molly Lawrence. "Is it you, Frank?"

"Yow-ow! Yes, Molly! Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't a laughing matter!" howled Bob Lawless. "Look at us!"

"We're looking!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "Oh, Jemima! Oh, holy smoke! You look a lovely gang of sambos! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

Frank Richards gave Molly quite a reproachful look, but reproach could not be nicely expressed with a tarry face, and his expression was so queer that the girl shrieked with merriment.

"Oh, Frank!" she gasped.

"I suppose it's funny!" grunted Frank Richards.

"Ha, ha! Look at your reflection in the creek, and you'll think so. I'm sorry, Frank, but—"

"For goodness' sake get a move on!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "Don't let Miss Meadows see us before we get this awful stuff off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Other Cedar Creek fellows were arriving now, and they roared with laughter at the sight of the hapless three.

Perhaps the victims had expected sympathy, but for the present sympathy was quite forgotten, and only merriment reigned.

It was useless to think of getting the tar off in the cold water of the creek—hot water and soap, and plenty of them, were wanted, and indeed scrubbing-brushes as well.

The unhappy trio hurried in at the gates of Cedar Creek, followed by roars of laughter.

They hoped to get round to Black Sam's quarters, where they could clean themselves, without being seen by Miss Meadows or the masters.

But their hope was in vain.

As they tore across the playground they almost ran into Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd, taking a little walk together before lessons.

"Bless my soul! What—who—what is this?" exclaimed Mr. Slimmey, his glasses almost falling off as he stared at the black-faced three.

"Negroes!" said Mr. Shepherd in wonder. "Are they new boys in the school? Stop, my boys! Why—what—what—"

Lawless!"

"Yes, sir?" gasped Bob.

"Wha-a-at does this mean?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Bob.

"We—we—we—" stuttered Frank.

"You—you see—" mumbled Beaulere. "Boys!" Miss Meadows hurried out of the schoolhouse. She had seen the extraordinary trio from a window. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Oh, Miss Meadows!"

"Richards!" ejaculated the schoolmistress.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a wild roar from the crowd of schoolboys coming in at the gates.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "Richards—Lawless—Beaulere, this is—is—is amazing. You have deliberately tarred your faces and made yourselves look utterly absurd!"

"N-n-unno."

"You utterly foolish boys, why have you played this extraordinary prank?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

"We—we—we didn't!" gasped Bob Lawless. "We—we—we've been tarred by a gang of hobos for a lark!"

"Four horrid beasts tarred us, Miss Meadows!" groaned Frank. "We—we—we didn't want 'em to. We didn't, really!"

"I—I suppose so. Go and clean yourselves at once!" said Miss Meadows, and her lips were quivering as she went back to the house, though she did not laugh till she was indoors.

Frank Richards & Co. tramped away dolorously to the stables.

There the grinning Black Sam provided them with a tub of steaming water, plenty of soap, and scrubbing-brushes.

Black Sam's own complexion was a joke to those of the unhappy three.

In steaming water, Frank Richards & Co. rubbed and scrubbed at their faces, till they felt as if the skin were peeling off.

Round them stood a thick circle of schoolboys, howling with laughter, and passing merry remarks on their complexions.

The bell for lessons relieved the hapless victims of their audience at last, and the laughing crowd trooped away.

But Frank Richards & Co. were very late for lessons that morning.

When they appeared in the school-room at last, their faces were as red as newly-boiled beetroots, excepting where the tar still lingered, and a good deal of it still lingered yet.

There was a gust of chuckling as they took their places, and it was some minutes before Miss Meadows could restore silence.

And all through morning lessons grinning faces surrounded Frank Richards & Co.

In fact, there were only three fellows at Cedar Creek who could not see the humour of the affair, and those three were Frank and his comrades.

The 4th Chapter.
Friendly Rivals.

"I guess you jays make me smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's some lovely black spots on your chin, Bob."

"And on your ears, Richards."

Those remarks, and a good many more of the same kind, pursued Frank Richards & Co. after morning lessons at Cedar Creek.

The Co. were glad to escape into the timber, and stroll about there till dinner, to escape the clapping of the Cedar Creek fellows.

"I guess we shall be sniggered to death," said Bob Lawless dolefully. "Even that little Chinese beast Yen Chin is cackling at us! It's too bad! We couldn't help those galoots tarring our faces, could we?"

"We couldn't," agreed Frank.

"I suppose they think it funny," remarked Beaulere. "And—and I suppose it is, really."

"Well, we started out for a stunt on

Hillcrest, and we do seem to have come out at the little end of the horn," admitted Bob. "But one swallow doesn't make a summer. We're going to scalp those rotters who tarred us!"

"No doubt about that!" said Frank. "We'll ride over after lessons," continued Bob. "A jolly good walloping all round will do them good, and relieve our feelings, anyhow."

"The walloping may come our way, if we run into a crowd of them," remarked Frank.

"Oh, I guess they'll give us fair play! Dicky Bird is a white man," said Bob. "Fact is, I guess we've misjudged them a little, owing to that coyote Gunten spinning us yarns. But we've got to keep our end up, or we shall never hear the end of this."

And Bob's comrades assented.

The three returned to school just in time for dinner, and found grinning faces at the board.

In the interval before afternoon school they canoed on the creek, being quite tired of hearing about their misadventure in the playground.

There was another steaming wash before lessons, and that afternoon the victims of Dicky Bird's reprisals showed fewer traces of tar, though here and there a smudge still lingered.

As soon as school was dismissed for the day they took their horses from the corral, but instead of starting for home they followed the trail towards Thompson Town.

Near the town they turned off on the timber trail to Hillcrest.

The winter dusk had fallen on creek and river, but Bob Lawless knew all the trails by light or darkness, and they trotted on at a good speed.

They hoped to arrive while the Hillcrest fellows were still on the spot, or to meet them on their homeward way, but though they passed some of the boys of the new school, Dicky Bird & Co. were not among them.

"Hallo, there's Gunten!" exclaimed Bob suddenly.

Kern Gunten and Keller, the two Swiss, were walking back to Thompson, their satchels swung over their shoulders.

They grinned at the sight of the Cedar Creek trio.

Evidently they had heard the story of the tarring of their former schoolfellows. Bob drew rein as Gunten called out to him.

"What are you doing up here, Lawless? Looking for some more tar?"

"Oh, go and chop chips!" grunted Bob. "Going to Hillcrest?" asked Keller. "This trail leads nowhere else."

"Yep."

Gunten curled his lip, with a lofty expression of disdain.

"I guess you'd better keep clear," he said. "Your sort are not wanted here. I can tell you that Mr. Peckover has warned us to keep clear of your lot. We don't want to speak to Cedar Creek trash!"

"Low crowd!" remarked Keller.

Bob made his horse prance, and the two Swiss jumped out of the trail into the timber.

"Keep off, you fool!" roared Gunten, his lofty dignity vanishing all of a sudden.

Bob rode after him, with a grim brow, and Gunten fairly bolted through the trees, with Keller at his heels.

"Come on, Bob!" called out Frank Richards. "Never mind those silly asses!"

But Bob's usually sunny face was knitted in a deep frown as he rejoined his chums in the trail.

Gunten's absurd affectation of superiority seemed to have an irritating effect upon him.

"Come on!" he said gruffly. "We'll squash the next Hillcrest galoots we meet on the trail!"

Fortunately, they met no more of the Hillcrest fellows, and they came in sight of the new school at last in the evening shadows.

Lights glimmered from the building, but the schoolroom was closed; the last of the Hillcrest fellows was gone.

Bob looked puzzled as he dismounted near the gates and threw his reins over a branch.

"Where are those galoots?" he exclaimed. "They haven't left with the rest, or we should have passed them on the trail. Canoeing, perhaps?"

"They keep a canoe here, I think," said Frank. "In that case, they'll be coming back this way."

"We'll wait for 'em," said Bob grimly. The three horses were tethered in the thicket, and the chums took up their stand under the shadow of a tree near the gates.

In the glimmer of starlight they could see the board over the gate, which had been given a new inscription that morning.

Paper had been pasted over it, to hide the tarred inscription, and the name of the school had been freshly painted there, but only in common paint; the glory of the gilt letters had departed.

But though the sign was not so handsome as of old, it still announced to the pine-trees and the gophers that Hillcrest was a private school for the sons of gentlemen.

Bob grinned as he looked up at it.

"After we've finished with Dicky Bird we'll give that sign another touch or two!" he remarked. "Peckover must have been pleased when he saw it this morning. We'll please him again to-morrow morning, the old bunks."

"Shush! Here comes somebody!"

The three chums remained quiet in the shadow of the big tree, watching the trail of the gates.

Through the gloom, four dim figures came into view, and, to the surprise of the Co., they were carrying a ladder among them, just as when the Cedar Creek fellows had met them in the morning.

"What the dickens are they doing?" muttered Bob Lawless. "Hold on a bit! Let's see what they're up to!"

The chums watched in silence.

Beaulere had had the biggest fall, and for a moment Frank was alarmed at the idea that he might have broken a limb.

But as he glanced round he saw Beaulere on his feet, unhurt, and laughing breathlessly.

"All serene! I jumped clear!" said Beaulere. "I'm not hurt. How are you fellows?"

"Yoooop!" came from Bob.

"Hurt, old chap?"

RIVAL SCHOOLS!

(Continued from the previous page.)

Dicky Bird & Co. passed within a few yards of them, evidently without suspecting their presence.

The four schoolboys reared up the ladder in front of the gates, which were locked for the night.

It rested against one of the stout posts supporting the sign over the gateway.

Frank Richards & Co. exchanged surprised glances.

It looked as if Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest, had designs upon that sign himself, and they were puzzled.

"That's right!" It was Dicky's voice. "You've got the can of oil, Fisher?"

"You bet! Here it is!"

"And the matches?"

"I've got the matches," said Blumphy.

"Get some brushwood while I'm at work," said Dicky Bird. "Hard me that saw, Watson!"

Dicky Bird ascended the ladder, saw in hand, while his comrades proceeded to gather brushwood from the thicket.

The astonishment of the watchers increased.

What the object of the four Hillcrest fellows could be they could not imagine. They were soon to see, however.

Dicky Bird sawed away industriously at

the sign while his comrades piled brushwood in a heap a few yards from the gate.

The big board was sawn nearly through, first at one end and then at the other, till it was held only by an inch or two of wood.

Then Dicky Bird tied a rope to it, and descended the ladder.

"All O.K.!" he said. "I reckon a pull will do it now! Get the ladder in the trees first; hide it, and we can take it away to-morrow."

The ladder was thrust out of sight in the wood near at hand.

Then the four Hillcrest fellows returned to the gate, and laid hold of the rope that dangled from the sign overhead.

"By gum!" murmured Bob Lawless, in great amazement.

"They're going to yank it down!" said Beauchere. "What the dickens—"

"And burn it, that's clear," remarked Beauchere. "I'm blest if I catch on to this!"

The chums of Cedar Creek had quite forgotten now their hostile intentions towards Dicky Bird & Co. They were feeling only blank amazement at the peculiar proceedings of the Hillcrest fellows.

The four tugged at the rope; but the sign held on to the posts.

"Put your beef into it!" said Dicky. Bob Lawless stepped out of the shadows.

"Let us lend you a hand, old scout!" he said genially.

The Hillcrest fellows jumped, and spun round, letting go the rope.

"Hallo! You!" ejaculated Dicky Bird.

"Us!" smiled Frank Richards.

"What the thunder are you up to?" asked Bob Lawless. "Blest if I can make you out at all!"

Dicky Bird laughed.

"We're going to make a bonfire of that silly foolery!" he said, pointing to the sign. "Old Peckover doesn't know this section, and he doesn't savvy that he's making the school a standing joke in the town. That kind of thing doesn't wash in the Thompson Valley!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Frank Richards.

"It's making out that we put on airs over Cedar Creek, and so on," explained Dicky. "It's all very well in the East, of course; but I guess we're all on the same footing West, and we're not going to allow Peckover to make us look like asses, not if we know it!"

"Fellows in Thompson have been hooting at us over it," said Blumphy, with a snort. "They think we're putting on side, all because old Peckover is a thumping fool!"

Bob Lawless blushed.

These were the fellows against whom

Gunten had incensed him, and whose nonsense he had come over to knock out of them.

"Oh!" he gasped. "I—I—I see!"

"What are you fellows doing here, though?" asked Watson.

"Ahem! We—we came to—to—Never mind!" said Bob hastily. "We—we just came, you know to—to—Ahem!"

"I guess that's lucid!" remarked Dicky Bird. "Do you always express yourself as clearly as that?"

Bob grinned.

"All serene!" he said. "Never mind what we came for. Now we're here, we'll lend you a hand, if you like, and part good friends—what? We'll forgive you for the tar business, under the—the circumstances!"

"Done!" said Dicky Bird cheerfully. "We should have done this business this morning, if you hadn't come around. So it's only fair for you to help."

"Here goes, then!" said Frank Richards.

Seven strong pairs of hands were laid on the rope, and they dragged hard, keeping well clear of the gate, to give the sign—equally obnoxious to both parties—room to fall.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

With a terrific crash the big board came thundering down, leaving the two posts standing up bare and forlorn.

The fallen sign was seized, and dragged across the huge heap of brushwood.

Two or three blows of an axe separated it into parts, which were piled up on the brushwood; and then the whole heap was drenched with kerosene from a can.

A moment more, and a match was applied.

The schoolboys jumped back, as a sheet of flame soared up.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob Lawless. "That will wake up old Peckover, if anything will!"

"He's coming!" gasped Watson.

There was the sound of a furious voice within the gates, and the grating of a key.

The raiders rushed into the shadows of the wood, Frank Richards and Co. unhitching their horses, and leading them along with them.

The trees swallowed them up, as the gate was opened, and Mr. Peckover came rushing out, crimson and furious.

The schoolboys chortled as they fled, and their last glance back from the distance showed them a roaring bonfire, and Mr. Peckover dancing with rage in the lurid flare of the flames.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"UP AGAINST IT!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
DON'T MISS IT!



Pardoned by the Fourth!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
JIMMY SILVER & CO., the Chums of
Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter. Under a Cloud.

"Pub-haunter!"

It was Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, who squeaked out that unpleasant remark.

Tommy Dodd started.

Tommy was walking in the quadrangle at Rookwood, with a moody frown on his brow, and his hands driven deep into his pockets.

He was thinking, and his expression showed that his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

He started out of his grim reverie as Tubby Muffin squeaked.

Tubby grinned at him.

"What's the odds?" he proceeded. "Have you had a hundred up with Joey Hook lately? He, he, he!"

The Modern junior stared grimly at Tubby.

"You fat rascal!" he said, between his teeth. "What do you mean?"

Tubby gave a fat chuckle.

"Pub-haunter!" he said agreeably. "Yah! When did you last go to the Bird-in-Hand? He, he, he!"

Tommy Dodd strode towards him, his eyes gleaming.

The fat Classical promptly beat a retreat.

Of late Tommy Dodd had been rather under a cloud in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, and indeed there were few beside his own chums, Cook and Doyle, who did not believe that Tommy had taken to shady ways.

But being chipped on the subject in the quad by the fat and egregious Tubby was rather too much.

Tommy Dodd's look was quite Hunnish as he made for Tubby Muffin, and the fat grin died off Tubby's face as he fled.

Apparently he had not expected Dodd to cut up rusty at his agreeable remarks, but Tommy was cutting up very rusty indeed.

"Stop, you fat rotter!" panted Tommy Dodd.

He rushed in pursuit.

Tubby Muffin did not stop; he was as likely to stop as if a wild Hun had been after him.

But the fat and tubby youth was no runner, and Tommy Dodd gained on him at every step.

Tubby blinked round, and saw Tommy's hand outstretched, and gave a gasp of fright.

He dodged through the archway into Little Quad with Tommy only a yard behind.

There was a collision and a roar as Tubby came charging through the shadowy archway.

On the other side, in Little Quad, the Fictical Four of the Fourth were standing in a group, talking football.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not see Tubby till he arrived, and Tubby did not see them till he crashed into them.

Jimmy Silver received the full shock of Tubby's portly person, and sat down with a howl.

Lovell staggered back on one side, and Raby on the other, and Newcome just succeeded in dodging the charge.

Tubby reeled back from the shock and sat down.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"You fatidiot!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Where are you running to?"

"Yaroor! Help! Rescue!" yelled Tubby.

Tommy Dodd was upon him in a moment.

He grasped Tubby Muffin by the collar, and rolled him over on the ground.

Tubby yelled dolorously, as, with Dodd's iron grip on the back of his neck, his fat face was rubbed in the mud.

"Groogh! Hoogh! Yoogh! Help! Rescue!" spluttered Tubby.

The Classical chums stared at the scene in amazement for a moment.

Then they rushed to the rescue.

The Fictical Four were not likely to look on idly while a Classical was thus handled by a Modern.

They grasped Tommy Dodd on all sides and dragged him off.

"You Modern rotter!" shouted Lovell. "What are you up to? If you're spoiling for a fight, here's four to choose from!"

Tubby Muffin sat up and roared.

His portly face was almost unrecognisable from the mud in which Dodd had rubbed it.

"Gerrogh!" spluttered Tubby. "Oh, dear! Keep him off! Oh, crumbs!"

Tommy Dodd struggled in the grasp of the Classics.

He was so enraged that he did not seem to care for the fact that they were four to one, and they found it rather difficult to hold him.

"Let me get at him!" he roared.

"You're not getting at him at present, my pippin," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "What's he done, anyway?"

"Yow-ow-ow! I only called him a pub-haunter!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "He is a pub-haunter, ain't he? Yow-ow-ow!"

"You hear him?" panted Tommy Dodd. "Let me go! I'll smash the fat beast!"

Jimmy Silver tightened his grip on the enraged Modern.

"You won't do any smashing," he said. "I don't see that Tubby need howl it at you, certainly, but what he says is true. You are a pub-haunter, and a smoky blackguard, Tommy Dodd!"

"What?" panted Tommy.

"What's the good of telling whoppers?" demanded Lovell. "Haven't all four of us seen you smoking at the window of the Bird-in-Hand. Hasn't Bulkeley of the Sixth caught you there?"

"It's a lie!"

"Oh, rats! You know it's true."

"Every word of it!" howled Tubby Muffin, scrambling up, and keeping at a safe distance. "You're a pub-haunting rotter, Tommy Dodd! You go to the Bird-in-Hand to smoke and play billiards and back horses! Everybody at Rookwood knows it. Yah!"

"Will you let me go?" hissed Tommy Dodd.

"No," said Raby. "You're not going to touch Tubby for telling you the truth. If you don't like it, don't do it."

"Rescue!" roared Tommy Dodd, as Doyle and Cook of the Modern Fourth came out of the library. Towle followed them out.

The three Moderns rushed across at once.

They did not stop to ask for explanations; it was enough for them to see a fellow-Modern struggling with Classics.

They rushed into the fray at once.

Tommy Dodd had to be released then, and the Fictical Four were engaged at

once in a terrific combat with the four Moderns.

Tubby Muffin looked on.

But as Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, appeared in sight, Tubby discreetly dodged through the archway into Big Quad and disappeared.

The fighting juniors did not see the Form-master, however; they were too busily engaged for that.

Mr. Bootles strode upon the scene, with his eyes gleaming wrath over his spectacles.

"Boys!" he shouted.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "Bootles!"

The combat ceased.

Eight crimson and dishevelled juniors blinked at Mr. Bootles, panting and still furious.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the master of the Fourth angrily. "How dare you fight like—like hooligans?"

"Those Classical cads—"

"Those Modern worms—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Bootles. "I have no doubt you are all equally to blame. You will follow me to my study, and I shall cane you all!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Bootles whisked away, and the rival juniors, exchanging glares of defiance, followed him across the quadrangle.

In Mr. Bootles' study, a few minutes later, there was a sound of steady swishing that lasted several minutes.

When it was over, eight juniors limped away squeezing their hands, and not feeling, at present, inclined for any further scrapping.

But they glared at one another as they parted, their wrath unappeased.

The old rivalry of the juniors of Rookwood was growing bitter, and the bitterness that had crept into it was due to the strange stories that were afloat concerning Tommy Dodd.

That unfortunate youth was under a cloud, and there were few juniors at Rookwood, even on his own side of the school, who did not believe that the accusation against him was true, and the angry indignation he displayed was looked upon as so much "camouflage."

The 2nd Chapter. Spotted!

"Phwat was it all about, intirely?" Tommy Doyle asked that question, as the four Modern juniors moved away towards Mr. Manders' House, looking grim and discomfited.

Tommy Dodd grunted.

"That fat cad Muffin yelled at me, and I bumped him," he answered. "Those Classical cads stood up for him. He called me a pub-haunter."

"Oh!" ejaculated Towle, with a change of expression.

Tommy Dodd glared at Towle, while Cook and Doyle looked still more uncomfortable.

"Perhaps you agree with him, Towle?" said Dodd, in a dangerous tone.

"I don't hold with allowing Classics to slang Modern chaps," said Towle. "But all the same—"

"Well, what?"

"Oh, don't glare at me!" said Towle independently. "Bump the Classics as much as you like for calling you names, and I'll help you; but among ourselves we know what we know."

"And what do you know?" demanded Tommy Dodd fiercely.

"We know that Jimmy Silver & Co. say that they saw you at the Bird-in-Hand, with Joey Hook, the billiard-sharper!" retorted Towle.

"It's a lie!"

"And we know," continued Towle, "that Jimmy Silver isn't a liar. What's the good of giving us that?"

Tommy Dodd clenched his hand.

"And it's not only that crowd—it's Bulkeley," said Towle. "He fairly caught you there; it's pretty well known. He'd have reported you to the Head, only our prefect, Knowles, stood by you."

"I was fagging for Knowles in his study when Bulkeley said he saw me at that pub!" said Tommy Dodd, between his teeth.

"We know Knowles said so."

"Do you think our head prefect would tell lies to get a Fourth Form chap out of a scrape?"

"I think Knowles would do anything that he thought was up against Bulkeley," answered Towle.

"So you believe that I'm a pub-haunter, do you?"

"Of course I do, as you are one!"

Tommy Dodd clenched his fists, and advanced on Towle.

"You won't tell me so without putting up your hands," he said.

"Anybody else will tell you so," retorted Towle. "I'll back you up against the Classics; but I'm not going to pretend that I believe you when I don't. Nobody else believes you, either. You've been seen at the place more than once. If you don't like being called a pub-haunter, don't be one!"

"You lying rotter—"

"Easy does it!" murmured Tommy Cook, catching Dodd by the arm. "No good scrapping on our own side, Tommy. Keep that for the Classics."

"Do you think I'm going to let Towle or any other cad doubt my word?" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Cad yourself!" said Towle. "You're disgracing the Form, and you know it, and I can't see what you're putting on steam for; it's only humbug!"

Tommy Dodd would have rushed on him, but the other Tommies held him back.

Towle shrugged his shoulders, and walked away by himself.

Dodd gave his chums a look of passionate anger.

"What are you stopping me for?" he panted.

"No good scrapping. You can't fight every fellow on the Modern side, as well as the Classics," said Cook.

"Perhaps you believe Jimmy Silver's lies?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd fiercely.

"They're not lies," said Cook. "Jimmy Silver must have made a mistake, I suppose. It's queer that the four of them made the same mistake; and then Bulkeley of the Sixth goes and makes the same mistake. You don't blame fellows for believing it."

"Does that mean that you believe it?" said Tommy, between his teeth.

"No," said Cook slowly. "I don't believe it—I can't! But if you weren't my pal, Tommy, I should believe it fast enough on the evidence!"

Tommy Dodd breathed hard.

"Put it to yourself, Tommy," said Doyle. "If you heard that story about another chap, backed up by Bulkeley of the Sixth, and Jimmy Silver as eye-witnesses, wouldn't you believe it?"

Tommy started.

It had not occurred to him to look at the matter in that light before, and he was startled.

"Suppose it was Lacy, or Leggett, or Towle, and you heard the yarn, with such witnesses to prove it?" said Doyle. "What then?"

Tommy Dodd did not answer.

But his silence was as good as an answer.

"You see," said Doyle. "It's no good getting your rag out. We don't believe it; we know you too well. But—but it bates me intirely! I can't understand it at all, at all!"

"It's not true," said Tommy Dodd, at last. "I've never been to the Bird-in-Hand. I don't know Joey Hook except by sight, and I never smoke or play the fool with billiards or races. You fellows know I don't."

"We—we know, of course."

"I don't believe you half believe me!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"We—we do!" said Cook. "We're bound to. But it's jolly queer!"

"Awfully queer!" said Doyle.

Tommy Dodd gave them a lowering look.

It was plain enough that it was only their chummy loyalty that made them cling to their faith in him.

On the evidence alone they would have found him guilty, as the rest of Rookwood did.

"There must be some chap like you in Coombe," said Cook, at last, though with hesitation, for he realised how wild such a theory sounded. "Some other fellow who's like you to look at, Tommy. Some low cad, of course, or he wouldn't be hobnobbing with that gang at the Bird-in-Hand."

"It's not possible!" growled Dodd.

"Is there anybody—a relation, frinstance—who's just like you, that you know of?"

"Do you mean to imply that I've got a relation who'd hang round in pubs, with Joey Hook?" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, don't get your wool off!" exclaimed Cook impatiently. "Be reasonable! Some fellow was seen at that pub, and it was either you or a fellow who looked like you. That's certain. Have you got any relation just like you?"

Tommy Dodd sniffed.

"I've got a cousin who's like me," he answered. "My Cousin Ralph. He's at school in the North of England, a good hundred and fifty miles from here."

"Well, it can't be him, then. Anybody else?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, it's queer!" said Doyle. "But it's no good getting wild, Tommy darling! The fellows can't help thinking as they do."

"I know I won't speak to anybody who believes such a thing of me!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Then you won't speak to anybody at Rookwood excepting us."

"Oh, rats!" snapped Tommy.

He swung away, leaving his chums by themselves.

His face was dark and gloomy as he went out at the gates alone, not feeling in a humour for his chums' company just then.

As a reasonable fellow, Tommy Dodd could hardly help admitting that the evidence against him was strong, and that fellows could not be blamed for giving ear to it.

But he was not in a reasonable mood just then.

Innocent or guilty, he was intensely exasperated; and, like the prophet of old, he said to himself that he did well to be angry.

Cooke and Doyle exchanged glances, and then followed their chum slowly.

They still clung to their faith in their pal; but they admitted to themselves that they believed in him for no better reason than that he was their pal.

Against any other fellow, they knew, they would have accepted such evidence without hesitation.

That knowledge made them feel extremely uncomfortable, for it amounted to admitting that they were deceiving themselves, knowing all the time that Tommy Dodd was guilty.

Tommy Dodd was out of sight when they came out at the gates, and they walked slowly along towards Coombe, wondering where Dodd had gone to.

Both of them glanced at the Bird-in-Hand public-house as they came in sight of that unsavoury building.

That delectable resort was the quarters of Joey Hook, with whom Dodd was supposed to be on a friendly footing.

As they glanced over the fence which ran by the footpath beside the inn both the juniors started violently.

Some distance from them, in the inn garden, a fat and puffy man was standing, with a pipe in his mouth, in conversation with a junior in an overcoat.

"Tommy!" gasped Cook.

"Tommy Dodd!" said Doyle, in wonder and disgust.

They stared at the junior in the inn garden as if they could scarcely believe their eyes.

He was a dozen yards from them, and they could see every feature with perfect distinctness in the wintry sunshine in the garden.

"The thafe of the worruld!" ejaculated Doyle. "That's why he left us in a huff—to sneak off here without our knowing! He's put on an overcoat to hide his Ettons, the rotter!"



Pardoned by the Fourth!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"And taken off his Rookwood cap," said Cook.
"The sneaking thief!" exclaimed Doyle, with breathless indignation. "And we were sticking to him, against all Rookwood, and he was pulling our leg all the time."
The Irish junior ran towards the fence, and waved his hand to the two talkers in the garden.
"Dodd, ye rotter!" he roared.
Joey Hook glanced round with a start, and the boy with him removed a cigarette from his lips and stared at Doyle.
"Hallo!" he answered.
"Ye thafe of the worruld, we've spotted you now!" roared Doyle. "We know the kind of spalpeen ye are now, bad cess to ye!"
"Hallo! Is that chap potty?"
"Bodad, and I've a good mind to come in to ye, and mop up the ground wid yez intirely!" shouted Doyle.
"My hat!"
"Come away, Tommy!" said Cook, dragging his chum by the arm. "We're not going to kick up a shindy in a pub, you ass!"
"Sure, and I'll—"
"Come away!"
Cook dragged his excited chum away, and Doyle calmed down as they left the spot.
Angry as he was, Tommy Doyle realised that it would not "do" to kick up a shindy in a pub, as his chum expressed it.
"But we know him now, intirely!" he said. "The rotter! The awful spoofer! What he's doing is bad enough, but to tell us lies—"
Cook looked very troubled.
"I'd never have believed it!" he said.
"Sure, we knew it was true, though we wouldn't believe it," answered Doyle.
"I'm done with Tommy Dodd now, for one."
And Tommy Cook nodded assent to that.
The happy circle of the three Tommies of Rookwood was split up now, with a vengeance.

The 3rd Chapter. Outside!

Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the quadrangle when Tommy Dodd came in, as dusk was falling.
Dodd looked tired and dispirited.
The Fistical Four saw him, though he did not look at them.
They had their own opinion of Tommy Dodd, but they were not inclined to "slang" him in the style of Tubby Muffin.
What he was doing was bad enough, but he was no worse in that respect than fellows like Peele and Gower of the Fourth, and Smythe of the Sbell.
What seemed particularly iniquitous about Tommy Dodd's conduct was the fact that he assumed indignation at being regarded as a black sheep, after he had fallen to the level of Peele and Gower.
There was nothing to be indignant about in being regarded as what he was, and the other fellows looked on it as sheer hypocrisy, and despised him accordingly.
Tommy Dodd gave the Classical chums a bitter look, and was passing on, when he changed his mind, and stopped to speak.
"Just a word with you, Jimmy Silver!" he said abruptly.
"Go ahead!" answered Jimmy, civilly enough.
"What about the footer on Saturday? Am I playing in the eleven against Bagshot?"
Jimmy paused before he replied.
As junior football captain, he had been much exercised in his mind on that very subject.
"Will you be fit?" he asked at length.
"Why shouldn't I be fit?" asked Tommy Dodd, with gleaming eyes. "Don't I look fit?"
"Yes, but—"
"But what?"
"If you're fit you will play," said Jimmy. "It's not my bizney to set up as a censor of morals, I suppose. But you know Gower had to be dropped out of games because he cracked up through smoking."
"I don't smoke."
"Well, well, let it go at that. You'll be keeping up practice every day, and I shall see," answered Jimmy Silver, without arguing the point. "So long as you're fit, Dodd, other matters needn't interfere with football."
"Other matters? You mean that yarn that you started about me?" said Tommy, between his teeth.
"No need to go into that again," said Jimmy Silver drily.
Tommy gave him a fierce look, as if on the verge of an outbreak of temper; but he controlled himself, and stalked on moodily to Mr. Manders' House.
Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.
"Blest if I know how you can stand his humbug, Jimmy!" he exclaimed.
"What's the good of the fellow saying he doesn't smoke, when we've seen him smoking at a pub?"
"Not much good, certainly," assented Jimmy.
"We don't want that kind of rotter in the footer."
"So long as he plays up well for Rookwood—"
"How can he when he's playing the fool

as he does? Gower was a good man till he cracked up. Mornington used to crack in a game, when he played the fool as Dodd is doing now. He may go off colour in the middle of the Bagshot match, and let us down."
"Pretty certain to, I should say," remarked Newcome.
"You're a bit of an ass, Jimmy," said Raby, shaking his head. "You're taking risks with the eleven because you don't like to hurt the chap's feelings. It's soft."
Jimmy Silver looked worried.
"I shall keep an eye on him every day," he answered. "If he shows a sign of cracking up, out he goes. But you can't deny that he seems in jolly good form every time we see him at practice."
"It'll come, all the same."
"Well, let's wait till it comes," said Jimmy Silver. "I don't want to set up in judgment on him, though I've got my own opinion about his silly tricks."
"Well, I think—" began Lovell gruffly.
"You think it's time we went in to tea, old scout," said Jimmy Silver affably.
"Good! Come on!"
And the Fistical Four went in to tea, and Lovell dropped the subject.
Meanwhile, Tommy Dodd had gone to his study in Mr. Manders' House.
He found Cook and Doyle there, and the table showed that they had had their tea without waiting for him.
Tommy Dodd glanced at it.
"You might have given a chap a few minutes," he remarked gruffly.
His study-mates looked uncomfortable, and neither of them answered.
"I'm sorry I marched off in a huff this afternoon," added Tommy, with an effort. "I was feeling rather ratty."
No answer.
"I suppose that's enough for a fellow to say, isn't it?" demanded Tommy Dodd, his anger beginning to rise again.
"No need to say anything that I know of," said Cook. "In fact, the less you have to say to us, the better."
"What?"
"Don't I speak plain English?" inquired Tommy Cook sarcastically. "I'll say it over again, if you like. The less you have to say to us the better! Got it now?"
Tommy Dodd stared at him blankly.
"So you're siding with the rest against me?" he exclaimed.
"Yes; now we know,"
"Now you know what?" shouted Tommy Dodd.
"Now we know the kind of rotter ye are intirely!" exclaimed Doyle. "Ye're not going to thry and brazen it out now, are ye?"
"Brazen what out?"
"Faith, and I think it's potty ye are intirely. Didn't I spake to ye when we saw you there not more than an hour ago?"
"Where?" shrieked Tommy Dodd.
"You know where; at that pub, talking to Joey Hook in the garden."
Tommy Dodd panted.

"You say you saw me there an hour ago?"
"You know we did."
"It's a lie!"
"Oh, don't play the goat! Doyle called to you over the fence, and you answered him," said Cook. "What's the good of lying now?"
"I've been on the moor, not within a mile of the Bird-in-Hand."
"Cheese it! What's the good?"
"You don't believe me?"
"Of course not! We believe our own eyes."
"I don't know what this game means," said Tommy Dodd. "I never expected you two fellows to join in it against me. You're lying, both of you—lying like rotten Prussians, and if you don't swallow your own words this minute I'll give you something else to swallow! You first, Cook!"
"Come on if you like!" said Cook disdainfully.
Tommy Dodd came on like a hurricane. There was a terrific scrap in the study, and it finished with Tommy Cook on his back on the rug, gasping for breath.
Whether Tommy Dodd had taken to shady ways or not, it was clear that he was as good a fighting-man as ever.
He turned savagely on Doyle.
"Your turn now!" he snapped.
"I'm your man!" said Tommy quietly. And they went at it hammer and tongs.
Tommy Cook rose to his feet, dabbing his nose.
He had had much the worst of it, and he looked on glumly while Tommy Doyle was getting the worst of it, too.
Doyle finished on the carpet.
Tommy Dodd was pretty well spent by that time, and he showed signs of severe damage.
"Now, what do you say?" he gasped.
Doyle rose rather painfully to his feet.
"I'll tell ye what we say!" he answered, gasping. "We say that we won't have a pub-haunting, lying rotter in this study, and you can hop it, Tommy Dodd!"
"I say the same!" exclaimed Cook.
"Out you go!"
"Put me out!" sneered Tommy Dodd.
"We'll jolly soon do that!"
And they did.
Tommy Dodd, resisting fiercely, was humped into the passage, and the door of the study slammed on him.
The next moment it was flung furiously open, and Tommy Dodd rushed in again.
He was collared at once by his exasperated study-mates, and hurled forth with a crash.
The door closed once more.
It did not open again; even Tommy Dodd was "done" by that time.
His best friends had turned upon him, and in all Rookwood the once popular Tommy had not a friend to stand by him.

The 4th Chapter. The Marble Eye.

"By gum!"
It was the following day, and Tommy Dodd, after leaving Mr. Manders' science class, had stopped at the letter-rack, and found a letter there.
The other two Tommies were coming along the passage, but they were not with Tommy Dodd.
Since the "scrap" in the study the previous day they had not spoken.
All the Lower School knew that Tommy's two best chums had done with him now, and were against him with the rest.
The unfortunate Tommy was little better than an outcast in the Fourth Form at Rookwood.
Naturally, the fact that Cook and Doyle had abandoned him clinched the matter

for the other fellows. Anyone who had any doubts gave them up now.
It was quite certain that Tommy's own pals would not have turned against him unless they had proof-positive.
Tommy Dodd stopped, with his open letter in his hand, and he uttered that sudden ejaculation as he read it.
Evidently there was news in the letter—startling news, to judge by Tommy Dodd's expression.
"By gum!" he repeated. "Missing, by gum! So that's it!"
Cook and Doyle glanced at him and paused.
Tommy Dodd was speaking to himself, in sheer surprise at the contents of the letter, whatever they were, and he was not looking at them.
But the moody, troubled look that had haunted Dodd's face for the last day or two was gone now, and he seemed to be elated by what he was reading in the letter, as well as surprised.
He turned suddenly to Cook and Doyle.
"You silly idiots!" he said.
"What?" exclaimed Tommy Cook.
"You crass asses!"
"Look here—"
"You think you saw me at the Bird-in-Hand yesterday?" snapped Tommy Dodd.
"We don't think we did—we know we did!" answered Cook. "You can't stuff us up any more about it, Tommy Dodd. We know you now."
"You believe that, do you?"
"Certainly!"
"And you won't take my word that I wasn't there?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, glowering at them.
"No fear! Not against our own eyesight!"
"Keep your opinion, then!" said Tommy Dodd savagely. "Keep it, and be banged to you! I could prove it if I liked!"
"I'd like to see you do it!" answered Cook, with a curl of the lip.
"Well, you won't see me do it! You can go and eat cake! I'll prove it to you fast enough—when you come to me and tell me you are sorry for having acted like suspicious cads!" said Tommy Dodd fiercely.
"That's as good as saying never."
"Well, you go your way, and I'll go mine! I don't want to speak to fellows who can't take my word!"
With that Tommy Dodd turned on his heel and walked out into the quadrangle. Cook and Doyle looked at one another.
"Phwat does he mean, intirely?" muttered Doyle. "It looks to me as if he's going potty!"
"Blessed if he doesn't look like it!" agreed Cook. "He's denying things that everybody knows to be true! What's he doing it for?"
"He says he could prove it if he liked."
"Piffle!"
"Well, it must be piffle," said Tommy Doyle thoughtfully. "I know I'm not going to speak to him again till he owns up that he's played the giddy ox, and told lies about it!"
"Same here!"
Tommy Dodd, as he walked in the quadrangle, found himself left severely alone on all sides.
Public opinion in the Lower School was dead against him.
On his own side he was given the cold shoulder as much as on the Classical side. True, he had offers of friendship from other fellows, with whom he had never been friendly before.
Peele and Gower, of the Classical Fourth, were willing to welcome him as a man and a brother, so to speak, into their select circle, now that his reputation was as shady as their own.
To their surprise and wrath Tommy Dodd received their advances with scorn and contempt.

Apparently, though he was going their own way, he had no desire to go in their distinguished company.
Peele's invitation to him to "come up to the study for a little game" drew a reply from Tommy Dodd that made Cyril Peele stare.
"You dingy worm!" said Tommy Dodd, his eyes flashing. "Am I the kind of fellow to come and play banker in your dashed study?"
"Eh? I should jolly well say you were, from what I've heard!" answered the astonished Peele.
"Just what I think!" remarked Gower. "If you can play billiards at a pub with a bookmaker, where's the harm in a little game in the study?"
"I've said that that's not true!"
"You've told dashed lies, if that's what you mean! Here, hands off, you silly fool!" shouted Peele.
Tommy Dodd was coming for him with hands up, and a blaze in his eyes.
Peele and Gower jumped back, but Tommy came on, and in a moment there was a fight in progress, one against two.
But the two were weedy slackers, and not at all fighting-men, and Tommy Dodd was one of the best in the fistical line.
He left the two black sheep strewn on the ground, when he walked away with a flushed face.
Peele and Gower picked themselves up, blinking.
"Ow, the rotter!" gasped Peele, dabbing his nose with a handkerchief. "Yow! The lyn' cad! Ow!"
"Groogh! Look at my eye! Yow-ow!" mumbled Gower.
"Oh, dear!"
"Oh, crumbs!"
There were no more offers of friendship from Peele and Gower for the outcast of the Fourth.
And Townsend and Topham, the nuts of the Classical Fourth, who had intended to extend the right hand of friendship to the Modern black sheep, changed their minds when they heard what had happened.
It was clear that Tommy Dodd, whatever he did outside Rookwood, was desirous of keeping up his old reputation within the school—an impossible task, but one upon which he appeared to be obstinately set.
That evening, when he was coming in from the quad, Tubby Muffin stopped him outside Mr. Manders' House.
Tommy Dodd gave the fat Classical a glare, and clenched his fist, ready to administer punishment the moment an unpleasant word passed Tubby's lips.
But Muffin was very friendly, as it happened, and he looked very mysterious.
"Hold on, Tommy Dodd, old scout!" he murmured.
"What do you want?" snapped Tommy.
"I want you to do something for me, old fellow. I can't very well go to the Bird-in-Hand myself," whispered Tubby Muffin.
"What?"
"Too risky, you know."
"You fat idiot! What are you driving at?" exclaimed the Modern junior angrily.
Tubby Muffin sank his voice still further, after a cautious blink round into the shadows of the quad.
"I—I want you to put five bob on for me," he whispered.
"On what?"
"On a horse, you know—with Joey Hook. You'll do it, won't you? Strictly under the rose, of course. I can't very well go to that pub myself—might be seen, you know. But you're always there, ain't you? You see Hook for me, and put the money on for me, and I'll—Yaroooh!"
To his surprise and wrath, Tubby Muffin was interrupted by a powerful grasp on his collar.
He was shaken till he felt as if his teeth were becoming loose in his head.
"Yooop!" he spluttered. "Leggo! Yah! Oh! You rotter! Wharrer you at? I'm only asking you to put five bob on a horse for me—Yaroooh! Ow!"
Bump!
Tubby Muffin sat down in the quad with a terrific concussion, and Tommy Dodd strode on into Mr. Manders' House, leaving him there.
The fat Classical picked himself up, gasping, and limped away to the School House, mumbling dolorously.
Jimmy Silver tapped him on the shoulder as he came on him, going in.
"What's the row, old porpoise?" he asked genially.
"Yow-ow-ow! That beast Dodd!" groaned Muffin. "Yow-ow-ow! I—I only asked him to put something on a horse for me next time he goes to the Bird-in-Hand."
"What?" yelled Jimmy.
"Yow-ow!" he yelled into me!" gasped Tubby. "Bumped me over, you know. I say, Jimmy Silver, you ought to lick the Modern cad—you ought to—Yoooop!"
Tubby Muffin sat down again, hard, in the grasp of Jimmy Silver. And the captain of the Fourth walked on.
"Why, you beast," howled Tubby, "you're as big a beast as the other beast! Ow, ow, ow, wow!"

The 5th Chapter. Prefects on the Track.

"Silver!"
"Yes, Bulkeley?"
Jimmy Silver assumed his meekest expression as the captain of Rookwood called to him.
He wondered whether Bulkeley had observed his drastic reply to Tubby Muffin, and the bumping he had administered by way of helping the sportive Tubby to keep to the strait and narrow path.
But George Bulkeley was not thinking of Tubby Muffin.
"Cut across to Mr. Manders' House, Silver, and ask Knowles if he will step into my study after tea," he said.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of the BOYS' FRIEND. All readers who write to me, and enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply by post. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, the BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4."

FOR NEXT MONDAY!

"THE CHRISTMAS CAPTIVES!" By Owen Conquest.

The above is the title of next Monday's magnificent long complete tale of the Rookwood chums. It is a very amusing, and, indeed, an exciting yarn.
It deals with Jimmy Silver & Co., accompanied by Tubby Muffin, leaving the school for the Christmas vacation.
Before they reach the station many laughable incidents occur. Tubby Muffin supplies the first amusing item, and there is a tussle between the Classical and Modern juniors, followed by a little disagreement between Jimmy Silver & Co. and Smythe & Co., the nuts of the Fourth.
Smythe and his chums act like young bouncers on the local station, but Jimmy Silver & Co. upset their little game, much to the discomfiture of the nuts.
Then the journey to Jimmy Silver's home is commenced, but, strange to say, they never reach the Priory. The train is snowed up, and they decide to walk the last ten miles or so. On the way they meet with a most thrilling adventure, an adventure that is full of excitement, and when at the end of the yarn you find the Fistical Four, together with Tubby Muffin, in a most awkward predicament, you will, I am confident, long to read the following story, which will be in the nature of a sequel to "The Christmas Captives!"

"UP AGAINST IT!" By Martin Clifford.

Our next splendid story of the chums of Cedar Creek once again introduces Dicky Bird & Co., the chums of Hillcrest. It also introduces Mr. Peckover incidentally, in a very unfavourable light.
The master of Hillcrest accuses Frank Richards & Co. of an act they did not commit, and there is trouble for the three chums. They know the real names of the culprits, but their code of honour prevents them "splitting."
Nevertheless, they resolve to make Mr. Peckover suffer for his misdeeds, and set out for Hillcrest with such an intention firmly fixed in their minds.
Mr. Peckover does suffer, and so do Frank Richards & Co., in a way that will amuse you immensely.

"THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER!" By Duncan Storm.

You will obtain many a laugh from reading next Monday's grand instalment of our amazing adventure serial. Lal Tata and Skeleton have a bath, but not the kind of bath they would wish for, and poor old Lal goes through it with a vengeance.
Horace, the goat, lends his assistance in getting the unfortunate two out of the bath, and although he is successful, he certainly makes things worse for Lal. But there is a lot more fun in this instalment, and you will be bound

to vote it one of the best Mr. Duncan Storm has so far written.

"BARKER, THE BOUNDER!" By Herbert Britton.

Recently I have received many complimentary letters concerning our splendid school serial, and it has given me immense pleasure to know that the story is meeting with my readers' approval. Next Monday's instalment is every bit as good as those which have gone before.
You will read about a fierce tussle in the dormitory, how Bob Travers was sent to Coventry for standing by Jack Jackson, of an argument which took place between Barker and Jackson, how Bunny, the duffer, attempted to give the outcast junior good advice, and of the surprising results.

A NEW SERIAL.

In a few weeks' time it is my intention to publish a new serial. I have not the space to give you full particulars this week, but I will tell you that the story has something to do with the boys of the Bombay Castle and that arch-villain, the Kaiser.

Your Editor

"Right-ho!" Jimmy Silver went out again into the dusky quadrangle, and crossed over to the livery side on his errand.

In the hall, as he went in, he observed Tommy Dodd, with a look of moody anger on his face.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were going up the staircase without a look at their former chum.

Towle was going along the passage, and he gave Tommy Dodd a look, but it was a look of supreme disdain.

Leggett of the Modern Fourth was hovering near Dodd, and he was looking quite friendly; but Leggett was a cad of the first water, and Tommy Dodd took no notice of him, as was his custom.

"Daddy, old chap—" Leggett was saying as Jimmy Silver came in.

Tommy Dodd deliberately turned his back on him, leaving him with a furious face, and by that movement came face to face with Jimmy.

He gave Jimmy Silver a dark look.

"What do you want here?" he grunted. "Message for Knowles?" answered Jimmy cheerfully. He was passing on, but he paused. "Tommy Dodd, old scout?"

"Well?" snapped Tommy.

"Tain't my bizney, of course," said Jimmy Silver, in a low voice, "but—but you're in pretty hot water all round. The game isn't worth the candle, is it? You used to be a decent chap enough, in the name of common-sense, old scout, why don't you chuck playing the goat?"

"I don't chuck it because I haven't started it, you thumping chump!"

"Oh!" said Jimmy. "If you're keeping that up, it's not much good my saying anything, of course."

"Hold on a minute!" said Tommy Dodd, as he was turning away. "You're a silly fool, Jimmy Silver, but I admit that you can't help that. I'm not the fellow you saw at the Bird-in-Hand, and I can prove it."

Jimmy looked rather troubled.

"Oh, I'm not going to tell you any lies!" sneered Tommy Dodd. "I'm not the chap, and I could prove it if I liked. I've got a letter in my pocket that would prove it right up to the hilt, if I cared to show it."

"Why don't you, then?" asked Jimmy, in astonishment.

"Because I don't choose to!" said Tommy Dodd doggedly. "You've chosen to believe I'm a liar and a pub-haunting cad, and my own pals have turned against me. Well, I'm not going to say a word! When you've got the decency to admit that you were mistaken, then I'll prove it."

Jimmy Silver looked at him hard.

"If I thought I was mistaken I'd admit it fast enough," he said. "But I don't think so, you know. I saw you there. I heard that rotter Hook address you by your own name."

"Am I the only fellow named Dodd in the country, do you think?" sneered Tommy.

"I suppose there are some hundreds," said Jimmy Silver. "But they're not exactly like you to look at, I suppose."

"One of them is!"

Jimmy Silver started.

"Tommy Dodd! Do you mean to say you know for a fact that there's a fellow in Coombe just like you, and with the same name, who's been taken for you?"

"Too thick, isn't it?" jeered Tommy.

"Well, it sounds rather thick. But if you prove it—"

"You'd believe it, then?"

"Yes, if you proved it."

"But you won't take my word?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I can't!" he answered. "It's too steep!"

"Then you can go and eat coke!" said Tommy Dodd. And he turned and stalked away.

Jimmy Silver went on to Knowles' study, and tapped at the door.

Cecil Knowles, the head prefect of the Modern side, gave him a sharp look as he entered.

"Bulkeley would like to speak to you if you'll come in after tea, Knowles," said the junior.

"I'll come," said Knowles laconically.

Jimmy Silver returned to the School House with that reply.

Then, after delivering it to George Bulkeley, he went up to the end study to tea.

There he related to Lovell & Co. what Tommy Dodd had said to him in Mr. Manders' House.

"What rot!" was Arthur Edward Lovell's comment. "Half a dozen fellows have seen Dodd at that pub! Why, I've heard Peele and Smythe of the Shell complaining because he's so reckless about it, that a prefect might go there for him any day, and it makes it unsafe for any other shady cad to go there for a flutter. Smythe is quite indignant about it. He's kept away from the place for a week because of Tommy Dodd."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"But Daddy admits the fellow being there," he answered. "Only he says it wasn't he, but another fellow like him."

"Rot!" said Lovell tersely. "About the latest yarn I've ever heard!"

And Raby and Newcome nodded assent.

While the Fistical Four were at prep after tea Cecil Knowles sauntered over from the Modern side and looked into Bulkeley's study.

"Come in!" said the captain of Rookwood.

"Squat down, Knowles. I want to speak to you about Tommy Dodd."

Knowles yawned.

"There seems to be a lot of talk about that kid," he said. "I'm convinced that there's nothing in it."

"Nearly every junior in the school seems to think there's something in it," said Bulkeley quietly.

"The Head's had Dodd before him, and he doesn't know what to make of it all. He's asked me specially to do what I can, in concert with you. The thing's growing into a regular scandal!"

Knowles shrugged his shoulders.

"You told me you'd seen him at that pub a few days since," he remarked. "I

know that he was fagging for me at the time, and he could hardly have dodged out of my study and back again."

"He must have done so, Knowles, for I certainly saw him."

"A mistake, my dear fellow," said Knowles blandly. "It really wasn't possible."

Bulkeley bit his lip.

"Well, I've seen the Head," he went on, "and the Head's view is that Dodd should be kept under observation. If he should leave the school at forbidden hours, for instance—"

"He doesn't."

"If he does, he should be looked for. As a prefect on the Modern side, it's for you to keep an eye open for that. From what I've ascertained, Dodd has been seen at that pub half the evenings this week."

"Impossible!"

"I've been making inquiries, and it seems to be the fact," said Bulkeley quietly. "Will you keep yourself posted as to whether he disappears in the evening, and let me know? It's the Head's request."

"Oh, I'll do that, certainly! Rely on me!"

"That's all I want."

Knowles nodded, and strolled out.

He hardly disguised his belief that Bulkeley was prejudiced against Tommy Dodd, because the latter was a Modern, and Bulkeley certainly held the opinion that Knowles was stretching a point very considerably in Dodd's favour, for the same reason.

But Knowles, though not specially dutiful as a prefect, had some sense of the duties of that position, and he did not neglect to carry out the wishes of the Head.

Later in the evening he looked in at the junior study in Mr. Manders' House which was shared by the three Tommies.

He found Cook and Doyle there, but Tommy Dodd was absent.

"Where's Dodd?" asked Knowles abruptly.

"Sure, and I don't know," answered Doyle.

Erroll, or some other Classical fellow, when the door opened.

To his surprise, it was Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth who came in.

Tommy's face flushed as he caught the surprised looks the Fistical Four turned upon him.

Lovell turned back to his work grimly.

He had nothing to say to the hero of sportive exploits at the Bird-in-Hand.

"Come in," said Jimmy Silver hesitating. "What is it—something about the footer, Dodd?"

"No!" said Tommy, in a low voice.

"Well?"

"I—I've been thinking," said Tommy Dodd, his colour deepening. "I—I've been tramping about a bit in the quad, thinking it out, and I've made up my mind. I'm going to tell you the facts."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"About time you owned up, I think," grunted Lovell.

Tommy Dodd did not reply to that.

"I had a letter this morning from my pater," he said. "It let in a lot of light on what's happened lately. I didn't mean to tell a soul. But—but I won't speak to Cook and Doyle; they were my pals, and ought to have trusted me; but there's no reason why you fellows should, I suppose. I dare say you've a right to ask for proofs. Under the circumstances, it's natural enough you should have taken that fellow at Coombe for me."

"What fellow?"

"Read that!" was Tommy Dodd's answer. "That part I've marked."

He tossed a folded letter on the table.

The Fistical Four, in great surprise, read the paragraph marked with pencil.

It ran:

"I did not intend to acquaint you with the foolish action of your Cousin Ralph, but it has occurred to me that he may communicate with you, and in that case you must inform me at once. Ralph has done very badly at Low Moor, and has had the folly to run away from school. I am, however, afraid that he would have been expelled had he remained. He has been guilty of breaking bounds at night,

to Joey Hook by some other rascal he knew at his old school. Now I've thought it out, I don't blame you fellows for what you believed. It's only my own pals—" Tommy's voice faltered.

"Well, it's jolly steep!" said Lovell. "But if Jimmy believes it, I do. I'll tell you what, Tommy Dodd—let's go down to-morrow and rout that fellow out."

The door of the end study was burst open suddenly, and Tubby Muffin rushed in, breathless with excitement.

"They've got him!" he yelled.

"You fat duffer, what are you burling about?"

"They've got him—they've got Tommy Dodd!" spluttered Tubby, not observing the Modern junior in the study, for the moment.

"Bulkeley and Knowles, you know—they've caught him at the Bird-in-Hand, and brought him home. He, he, he!"

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four together.

"They've got him—come on—why—what—how—who—" Tubby Muffin's jaw dropped as his eyes fell on Tommy Dodd.

"Why—you—how—Tommy Dodd—h-b-but you're downstairs!" babbled the astounded Tubby.

"My only hat!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Have they collared a fellow who doesn't belong to Rookwood at all, and brought him here?"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Raby.

There was a rush from the study at once. Tubby Muffin followed the juniors, his round eyes open wide with amazement.

As they crowded down the staircase Jimmy Silver & Co. beheld a strange scene in the hall below.

The 7th Chapter. Two of Them.

Bulkeley and Knowles had returned.

They had entered the School House, with a boy of about fifteen walking between them, with a sullen, savage face.

Mr. Bootles had come out of his study.



"LET ME GET AT HIM!" SHRIEKED TOMMY DODD.

"Has he gone out?" asked Knowles suspiciously.

"He's gone out of the study."

"You don't know where he's gone?"

"No."

Knowles looked at them very sharply and left the study.

He looked into the other Modern junior studies, Shell and Fourth, but no one knew where Tommy Dodd was.

That was not surprising, as Tommy Dodd, not being on speaking terms with his old friends, was not likely to acquaint them with his movements.

But it certainly was odd that he was not to be found in Mr. Manders' House at all, and Knowles looked for him for a quarter of an hour in vain.

He was very suspicious indeed by that time, and, after some reflection, he crossed over to the School House to speak to Bulkeley.

"Dodd doesn't seem to be in the House," he announced. "Of course, he may be in the quad, or about the place somewhere—perhaps with some of the Classics."

Bulkeley shook his head.

"He's not on visiting terms with any of the Classical juniors," he said. "He's getting the cold shoulder on both sides of the school. I fancy it's pretty clear where he is."

Knowles knitted his brows.

"I'm willing to come with you if the Head asked it," he said.

"Then we'll go," said Bulkeley. "I haven't the slightest doubt where we shall find him, Knowles."

"I'll admit that I'm wrong when we do find him," answered the Modern prefect tartly.

Bulkeley nodded without speaking, and the two prefects left the School House together.

The 6th Chapter. A Strange Story.

"Come in!" sang out Jimmy Silver, as a tap came at the door of the end study. He expected to see Mornington, or

betting on horses, and consorting with low characters, and it had come to his headmaster's knowledge. His present whereabouts are not known, and his parents are naturally very anxious. If you should hear anything of him, please write to me at once."

Jimmy Silver looked at Tommy Dodd.

"Well?" he said.

"My cousin, Ralph Dodd, has bolted from school," said Tommy. "I thought he was at school up in the North, or I should have known at once who was that fellow at Coombe. He's as like me as a twin brother, but we're on bad terms; we never got on together. He was always a bit of a worm. Now that I know he's left school, and gone off on his own, I know that he must be that chap at Coombe. That's all."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He's been spoiled," continued Tommy Dodd. "He has lots of money from his father, who makes a fool of him. I don't know what's brought him into this neighbourhood; I shouldn't wonder if he's been rotter enough to plant himself near here, to give me trouble because we're so much alike. He's played tricks like that before, before I came to Rookwood. We never did pull together. I haven't seen the fellow at Coombe, but it must be Ralph. There can't be another chap so like me. Now do you understand?"

The Fistical Four looked very hard at Tommy Dodd.

His colour deepened to crimson.

"Don't you believe me now?" he exclaimed, panting.

Jimmy Silver jumped up.

"Yes, I do, for one!" he exclaimed.

"Dash it all, it's a queer yarn, Tommy, but I do believe it, every word. I was surprised at your turning out to be a silly fool like Peele or Gower, and I do believe you, old chap!"

"I—I'm glad you do," said Tommy Dodd, his face softening. "It's easy enough to prove, for that matter. The fellow is plainly putting up at the Bird-in-Hand. I dare say he was recommended

and a crowd of fellows—juniors and seniors—had gathered round.

Mr. Bootles peered at the delinquent over his glasses.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "It is Dodd! Where did you find him, Bulkeley?"

"Look here—" began the sullen-looking junior.

"Silence, Dodd!"

"We found him at the Bird-in-Hand public-house, sir," said Bulkeley quietly.

"Knowles and I were there together, meaning to inquire; but we saw him at once. He was in the billiard-room, playing billiards with a man named Hook, and the French-windows were open."

"Bless my soul!"

There was a rustle in the corridor, and the crowd parted respectfully as Dr. Chisholm came up.

He signed to Bulkeley to continue.

"We stepped in," went on the captain of Rookwood. "The man Hook wanted to interfere, but we pushed him away. He—ahem!—fell down. We took Dodd, and made him come out."

"He told us he wasn't Dodd of the Fourth," said Knowles. "He seems really to be a little wrong in his head, sir. He wanted to make us believe that he was not a Rookwood fellow at all."

"Bless my soul! Absurd!"

"Stand forward, Dodd!" came the Head's voice.

The two prefects released the junior, who stepped forward, with a sulky, sneering expression on his face.

The Rookwooders looked at him in wonder. Certainly the culprit, caught red-handed, as it were, did not look alarmed.

"You've no right to bring me here!" he said. "I don't belong to this school!"

"What?" exclaimed the Head.

"I suppose you're mistaking me for Tommy Dodd," went on the junior.

"Well, I'm not Tommy Dodd! Now let me get out!"

"How dare you, Dodd?" said the Head thunderously.

"I tell you I'm not Tommy Dodd!" shouted the junior savagely. "If you

want to know, I'm his cousin—and my name's Ralph Dodd! Now I'm going!"

He turned towards the door; but Bulkeley's hand dropped on his shoulder with a grip of iron.

He struggled for a moment, giving the captain of Rookwood a furious look; but Bulkeley's grip hardened, and he was quiet.

"Dodd—" began the Head.

There was a hurried scuttling of footsteps on the big staircase, and a murmur of voices that grew to a roar.

Dr. Chisholm turned his head angrily at the interruption, and then stared, dumb.

For, hurrying down the staircase, followed by Jimmy Silver & Co., was Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth!

The Head stared at Tommy Dodd on the staircase, and then at the sullen junior before him, dumbfounded.

But for the difference of clothes the two juniors were exactly alike; and it was clear enough now that the new-comer's tale was true.

"Dodd!" stammered the Head.

"Tommy Dodd!" stuttered Bulkeley dazedly.

"Dodd!" said Knowles, with a grin. "I think I was right, after all, Bulkeley. Dodd was indoors all the time, and this fellow—"

Tommy Dodd hurried through the amazed crowd in the Hall.

"Here I am, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Everybody can see now that it's not as they supposed. I haven't been out of gates this evening."

"Dodd!" gasped the Head. "Who—who is this boy?"

Tommy Dodd gave the sullen new-comer a glance of the strongest disfavour.

"He's my Cousin Ralph, sir," he said. "I heard from my father this morning that he had run away from school, and was missing; and then I guessed who it was that had been seen at the public-house."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

Ralph Dodd broke into a sullen laugh.

"Well, now you can see it's a mistake, you can let me go!" he sneered.

"I suppose you can see now that I'm not Tommy Dodd, and don't belong to Rookwood! Let me go, hang you!"

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head. "Dodd, you say that this boy has run away from the school he belongs to?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, he will be detained here till he can be handed over to his parents!"

"I won't!" yelled Ralph Dodd furiously.

"I—I—Let me go! Let go!"

"Kindly take charge of him for the present, Bulkeley."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Dodd!" said Dr. Chisholm, with a kindly look at the Modern junior. "I am very glad that your name has been cleared in this way! I am sure that your schoolfellows will do you justice now."

"Thank you, sir!" altered Tommy Dodd.

Dr. Chisholm swept away, followed by Bulkeley and his unwilling charge.

There was no more freedom to "play the goat" for the reckless fellow from Low Moor.

The roof of Rookwood was to shelter him that night, and on the morrow he was to be handed over to his father's charge, which was certainly the best thing that could have happened to him.

There were congratulations on all sides for Tommy Dodd, and requests for pardon for having doubted him.

Tommy Dodd answered cheerfully enough, but there were two fellows whom he did not answer—and they were Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle.

He went to his study in Mr. Manders' House without a word or a look to his former chums.

But he had not been there many minutes when the two Tommies came in.

Dodd looked at them grimly.

"Sure, we're sorry, Tommy darling!" murmured Doyle.

"How were we to know?" said Tommy Cook pleadingly.

"We take it all back!"

"Grunt!"

"We're really sorry, Tommy!"

"Grunt!"

"Tain't like you to bear malice, Tommy, old sport!" murmured Cook.