Ripping Long Yarn of the Cheery Chums of Rookwood

ALGY SILVER'S PAL

By OWEN CONQUEST

Algy Silver is only too pleased to welcome to Rookwood an old pal from his former school. And heedless of Jimmy Silver's warning, he allows himself to be led into serious trouble!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

JIMMY SILVER TAKES A HAND

"ALGY!"

"Can't stop!"

"I want to speak to you, Algy!"

"Oh, it will keep! Can't stop now!"

Algy Silver of the Third Form at Rookwood walked on towards the gates, leaving his Cousin Jimmy staring after him wrathfully.

Apparently Algy was in a hurry.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who were looking on, grinned.

Jimmy Silver's efforts to keep his young cousin in hand and look after him always entertained Jimmy's chums.

Jimmy glanced at their grinning faces, and frowned more darkly.

"Nothing to snigger at, that I can see!" he snapped.

"You wouldn't!" agreed Lovell. "It's a lovely afternoon for the river, Jimmy. Come on!"

"I'm going to speak to my cousin."

The captain of the Fourth followed Algy to the gates, hurrying to overtake him.

Lovell bawled after him wrathfully:

"Look here, Jimmy, we're not going to hang about while you play the goat! Let that silly fag alone!"

Jimmy did not heed.

He overtook Algy Silver at the gateway and clapped him on the shoulder.

Algy turned his head irritably.

"Hallo, you again!" he exclaimed. "For goodness' sake, give a fellow a rest, Jimmy! Can't you keep your sermon till another time?"

"Where are you off to, Algy?"

"I'm goin' to the station."

"I'll walk with you," said Jimmy quietly.

Algy sniffed, then halted.

"I don't know that I want you," he said sulkily. "If you want to know, I'm goin' to meet De Vere, who's comin' to Rookwood this afternoon. He's comin' alone, as it happens, so I specially want to meet him. I don't know how you'll get on with him."

"I thought so," said Jimmy. "Well, it's about this kid De Vere that I want to speak to you, Algy."

"Well, don't!"

"Are you coming on the river, Jimmy Silver?" bawled Lovell.

"No. I'm going along with Algy."

"More fathead you, then!"

"Better come, Jimmy," urged Newcome. "What do you want to fool around with a Third Form fag for?"

"Fag yourself!" retorted Algy warmly. "And for goodness' sake, take Jimmy on the river, or take him to Jericho, or anywhere you like! I'm fed up with him!"

"If that young rotter were my cousin," said Arthur Edward Lovell, "I'd take him by the collar and shake him till he couldn't yelp!"

"You'd jolly well get your shins kicked!" remarked Algy.

"Let's get on the river," said Raby.

"Well, I'm going!" growled Lovell. "Are you coming or not, Jimmy?"

"Not just now."

"Then you can go and eat coke!" grunted Lovell. "Come on, you chaps, and let Jimmy get on with his dry-nursin'. I'm fed up!"

Arthur Edward Lovell tramped away wrathfully.

Raby and Newcome hesitated a moment or two, looking at him and at Jimmy.

Then they followed him.

They were as fed up with Jimmy's cousin as Lovell himself was.

Algy grinned at his cousin.

"Well, why don't you go with your pals?" he asked.

"Never mind that. About this new kid, Algy——"

"I'm goin' to meet him now, and I've got to be in time for the train. Go on the river, old scout. Ta-ta!"

Algy started down the lane.

The fag was dressed with unusual care that afternoon.

He was in his best Etons, his collar was spotless, his tie neatly tied, and his boots shining.

Evidently Algy wanted to make a good impression upon De Vere, his old friend at his former school.

Jimmy Silver walked down the lane with him.

Algy's eagerness to greet his old pal, and his unconcealed delight that De Vere was coming to Rookwood, worried Jimmy.

He got no thanks—rather the reverse—for playing "Uncle James" to the wilful fag of the Third.

But, easy-going fellow as Jimmy was, he had a strong sense of duty.

Jimmy was well aware that Algy had been taken away from High Coombe School chiefly to get him out of the society of De Vere and his other friends there.

It was sheer bad luck, from Jimmy's point of view, that De Vere should be coming to Rookwood this term.

But Algy was delighted at the prospect.

Algy sniffed angrily as he found the Fourth Former walking at his side.

He could not shake Jimmy off.

"Look here, Algy," said Jimmy, after a long silence, "I wish you wouldn't be thick with young De Vere while he's here."

"You can wish!" answered Algy.

"You know very well that your father wouldn't like you to know him."

"Rats!"

"Why is the fellow leaving his own school in the middle of the term?" demanded Jimmy. "There's something fishy about it."

Algy laughed.

"I fancy he's made High Coombe too hot to hold him," he remarked, with some complacency. "Old De Vere is a goey chap. The Head had him up on the carpet last time—me, too. He jawed us both — but especially De Vere. Threatened not to let him come back at all, you know. All because of a few smokes and a sportin' paper! Rats! I fancy De Vere has been kickin' over the traces again, and his people have been asked to take him away."

"And now he's coming to Rookwood!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Is our school a refuge for young blackguards kicked out of other schools?"

"He hasn't been kicked out, you ass! His people are tremendous great guns! The Head wouldn't have dared to expel him. But I think he's been pilin' it on too thick, and he's been taken away quietly."

"A nice sort of a friend for you!" growled Jimmy.

"Oh, rippin'!"

"The less you have to do with him the better."

"Thanks!"

"That means that you're going to pal with him at Rookwood, I suppose?"

"Of course I am!" exclaimed Algy hotly. "I'm only too jolly glad he's comin'! He's just my sort. I fairly danced when I got his letter sayin' that he was leavin' High Coombe, and was goin' to wangle it to make his people send him where I was. It was toppin' of him!"

Jimmy walked on in silence, his brows knitted.

They came in sight of the village, and then Algy paused.

"Look here, Jimmy," he said, "I don't want you scowlin' at my old pal on his first day here. You cut!"

"I'll meet your friend with you," said Jimmy curtly.

"I don't want you!"

"Better make the best of it, then," said Jimmy. "I'm going to meet this specimen, and see what he's like. If he's at all decent, you needn't be afraid of me."

Algy breathed hard through his nose.

"Look here, as a matter of fact, we're not goin' straight to Rookwood!" he said savagely. "De Vere's arranged specially to drop his escort at Latcham, an' come on here alone, an' we're goin' to make somethin' of the half-holiday. See? An old sobersides like you will be in the way."

"I guessed as much," replied Jimmy grimly, "and I'm going to see that you go straight to Rookwood, both of you!"

"You shan't!" roared Algy furiously.

Jimmy did not answer that.

He waited for the fag to start for the station again, quite determined that he should not go alone.

From all that he had heard of Bertie de Vere, late of High Coombe,

Jimmy Silver surmised that he was a shady young rascal.

Algy's father, Commander Silver, was away at sea, and the gallant sailor was not going to receive bad news of his son at school if Jimmy could help it.

Algy stood for some minutes, with a lowering brow, evidently at a loss.

Jimmy waited for him to move.

"Look here, will you get off?" demanded Algy at last.

"No."

"You're an interferin' cad!"

"Good!"

"You're a meddlin' rotter!" howled Algy.

"Go it!"

The fag clenched his hands.

"By gad, if I were big enough I'd mop up the road with you, you sneakin' meddler!" he shouted.

"You're not quite big enough, Algy. But you may as well bear in mind that I'm big enough to give you a good hiding if you don't use better language."

Algy snorted, and stamped into the station.

Jimmy Silver followed him in.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

ALGY'S OLD PAL.

A PASTY face looked out of a first-class carriage window as the local train from Latcham stopped at Coombe.

Jimmy Silver and his cousin were standing on the platform.

At the sight of the pasty face Algy rushed across to the train, and dragged the door open.

"Hallo, old scout!" he exclaimed.

The pasty face looked down at him.

"Oh, gad, it's you, Algy!" drawled a voice, that sounded as pasty as the face looked.

"You bet!"

Bertie de Vere stepped from the carriage.

He tossed his rug to Algy, who received it as if it were an honour to carry a rug for the noble Bertie.

De Vere was a smaller fellow than Algy, but he looked older.

His face was not healthy, and his eyes were dull, and there was a peculiar bored, tired expression about him that was amazing in a lad so extremely youthful.

His tiredness, no doubt, was partly affectation, but as far as it was genuine, it was no credit to his way of life.

He looked as if he had been up late every night for weeks on end. Perhaps he had.

"This Coombe?" he asked languidly.

"Yes, Bertie."

"Dreary hole."

"Yes, isn't it," said Algy, whose policy was evidently to agree with every sentiment uttered by this model youth.

"There's a trunk somewhere," said De Vere. "I suppose they'll have sense enough to pitch it out, an' send it on. I'm not goin' to bother about it."

"I'll speak to the porter."

"Oh, do!"

The new fag stood looking about him, without betraying the slightest interest in his surroundings, however, while Algy was looking after his box.

Jimmy Silver looked at him across the platform.

He had wondered a little what the fellow was like of whom Algy had talked so much, and through whom Algy had been landed in disgrace at his old school.

The sight of the fag confirmed his worst impressions.

He came across the platform, and

De Vere's glance turned lazily on him.

"My Cousin Jimmy, De Vere," said Algy reluctantly.

De Vere nodded carelessly to Jimmy.

He did not offer to shake hands, for which Jimmy was glad.

He did not want to shake hands with the new fag.

"How d'ye do?" yawned the new fag. "Let's get out of this, Algy. You can leave that rug with the porter; you don't want to carry it round all the afternoon. We're goin' somewhere, I understand?"

"Ye-es," hesitated Algy, with a dubious look at his cousin.

"Oh, yes; you're going to Rookwood," remarked Jimmy.

De Vere stared at him.

"Perhaps we'd better get straight on to the school, Bertie," muttered Algy.

"What's the game?" said the new fag coldly. "I've dodged old Rooke at Latcham—left him stewin' in his own juice—to come on here an' meet you. You told me in your letter you were goin' to show me round the village before we got to the school."

"Ye-e-es."

"Good gad! It's bad enough when a chap does get there. Stick out till the last minute," said De Vere. "Now, where are we goin'?"

Algy gave his cousin a helpless, furious look.

But for Jimmy's presence, Algy's programme was marked out, and would have gone off swimmingly.

"Let go!" shrieked Algy. "Come along!" answered Jimmy. And with a grip of iron on Algy's collar, the captain of the Fourth marched him, kicking and struggling, up the lane.

That programme included some items which, if known to the school authorities at Rookwood, would have earned Master Algy the "boot" in a very short time.

Evidently such items could not be carried out with Jimmy Silver's grim face looking on.

The unfortunate Algy was in a fix.

"Well, what are we waitin' for?" asked De Vere sulkily. "I didn't come here to stand moonin' on a station platform, Algy. Might as well have stuck to old Rooke, by gad!"

"Somebody was sent with you to

Rookwood, then?" asked Jimmy Silver.

De Vere stared at him, as if not thinking it worth while to take the trouble of replying.

Finally, however, he answered.

"Yaas. Old Rooke, my old tutor. Sneakin' old worm! The pater put me in his charge, to be landed at Rookwood."

"And you dodged him at the junction?"

De Vere grinned faintly.

"I spoofed him about the time of the train, an' landed him in the buffet," he said. "I dare say he's still there. Poor old Rooke!"

Algy chuckled.

"For goodness' sake," said De Vere, "let's get a move on! Do you want me to take root to these dashed planks, Algy?"

"Come on, then," said the fag.

They walked out of the station, Jimmy Silver keeping them company.

Jimmy was grimly determined that Algy, at least, should go straight back to Rookwood.

Algy was quite aware of his determination, and he was puzzled and dismayed.

They walked down the village street together, De Vere's pasty face growing more sullen in expression.

He saw no signs, so far, of the exhilarating time Algy had promised him on his arrival.

As they came out of the village, Algy's pace slackened more and more, and his eyes gleamed fiercely.

He was in danger of angering Bertie de Vere—perhaps of losing his valuable friendship—and all through "Uncle James."

"You're leavin' us here, Jimmy," he muttered half-savagely and half-appealingly.

"Not at all," answered Jimmy calmly. "I'm walking to Rookwood with you."

"Look here, Jimmy——"

"Come on, kids!"

"We're not goin' to Rookwood yet!" exclaimed De Vere, with an angry, puzzled stare at the two of them. "We're goin' round the village a bit first. We're not bound to be in early."

"You're not going round the village, kid," answered Jimmy, as politely as he could. "You'd better go straight to Rookwood."

"Thanks, I don't choose to."

De Vere turned his back on Jimmy.

"Where's the place you mentioned in your letter, Algy—the Bird-in-Hand?" he asked.

Algy flushed a little.

"Just down the road," he muttered.

"Some of your friends are goin' to be there this afternoon, you said."

"Ye-es."

"Those fellows, Tracy and Gower, that you've told me about?"

"Ye-es," muttered Algy.

"What are you mutterin' about? Why can't you speak out?" exclaimed the other.

"The—the fact is——"

"Well?" snapped the fag from High Coombe.

"I—I—— Jimmy, you cad," exclaimed Algy savagely, "clear off, and leave us alone!"

"To go to the Bird-in-Hand?" asked Jimmy contemptuously.

"What business is it of yours, confound you?"

"Lots."

"Will you clear off?"

"No."

De Vere looked from one to the other. He began to understand.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "That's how the merry wind blows, is it?

You've brought your father-confessor along with you, my buck?"

"I didn't want to!" said Algy, almost crying with rage. "The cad's my cousin, but I don't want him! He's fastened on to me. I want to get rid of him!"

"Get rid of him, then!"

"How are you going to do that, my cheerful young friend?" asked Jimmy Silver.

De Vere looked at him.

"You won't interfere with me!" he said. "Come on, Algy!"

They walked on, till they came abreast of the Bird-in-Hand.

The inn, among its gardens, lay well back from the road.

"That the place, Algy?"

"Yes."

"Well, come along!"

De Vere started for the building, and Algy, hesitating a moment or two, followed him.

Jimmy Silver's grasp closed on his collar, and he was swung back.

"Let go!" shrieked Algy.

"Come along!" answered Jimmy.

And with a grip of iron on Algy's collar, the captain of the Fourth marched him, kicking and struggling, up the lane.

The time had come for drastic measures, and Jimmy Silver was not standing upon ceremony.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

ON THE RAZZLE!

"HALLO! What's the game, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver started.

He was so occupied with Algy, who was strenuously resisting, that he had not observed anyone approaching.

Bulkeley and Neville, of the Sixth Form at Rookwood, were coming down the lane together, and the two seniors stopped at the sight of the fag struggling in Jimmy's grasp.

Jimmy released Algy at once, colouring crimson.

The fag jumped away from him, and stood panting.

Bulkeley looked at the two rather sternly.

It looked, at first glance, like a case of bullying, and Jimmy's evident confusion added to that impression.

Jimmy stood dumb and confused.

"Well," said Bulkeley severely, "what are you up to, Silver? Do you usually drag your young cousin along by the neck?"

"Nunno!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Algy, panting, his fists clenched, looked at Jimmy with gleaming eyes.

He was very well aware that Jimmy would not tell Bulkeley the cause of the dispute. "Sneaking" was not in Jimmy's line.

"I shouldn't have thought this of you, Silver!" said Neville. "I've never seen you bullying a fag before."

"I wasn't bullying him!" exclaimed Jimmy hotly.

"What do you call it, then?" demanded Bulkeley sharply.

Jimmy was silent.

"He won't let me alone!" piped Algy. "He wants to make me go back to Rookwood! Can't I stay out of gates on a half-holiday, if I like, Bulkeley?"

"Certainly you can!" said the Rookwood captain. "I'm surprised at this, Silver! Let the kid alone!"

"I—I want him to go back to the school!" muttered Jimmy.

"Well, if he doesn't choose, he can please himself, I suppose?"

"Ye-es; but——"

"But what?"

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Jimmy.

"Well, let him alone!" said

Bulkeley, frowning. "Cut off, kid! And you can get back to Rookwood yourself, Jimmy Silver, and I'll see you start! Cut!"

"I—I——"

"Cut!" said Bulkeley tersely.

Jimmy Silver, with a crimson face, moved off down the lane.

There was no help for it.

He could not explain to Bulkeley.

The consequences to Algy would have been too serious if Bulkeley had known that the young rascal was being prevented from entering one of the shadiest resorts in the vicinity.

The two big seniors walked on, leaving Algy grinning in the lane.

The fag followed them slowly, and by the time he got back to the Bird-in-Hand they had disappeared into the village.

Algy looked round for his friend.

He was a little uneasy lest the captain of Rookwood might have seen De Vere lurking about the public-house.

But the new fag was astute in his way.

He did not know Bulkeley and Neville by sight, of course, but he guessed, when he saw them, that they belonged to the school, and he had taken cover at once.

He emerged from behind a fence as Algy looked round for him.

"Hallo! You've got away from your precious cousin!" he exclaimed.

"Bulkeley made him let me go!" grinned Algy.

"Who's Bulkeley?"

"Our captain," answered Algy. "He must have passed you, with Neville——"

"Those two fellows?" yawned De Vere. "Two spoony-looking merchants!"

"Old Bulkeley isn't a spoony!" exclaimed Algy rather warmly.

Even Algy was numbered among the admirers of the most popular senior at Rookwood.

De Vere shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"He thought Jimmy was bullying me!" grinned Algy. "So he was, too, for that matter. He made Jimmy let me go. You should have seen Jimmy's face when he went off!"

"Didn't he tell your prefect what he was stoppin' you for?"

"Of course not!"

"I don't see why."

"Well, it would be sneakin'! Jimmy wouldn't do that!"

"Quite a model character, your Cousin Jimmy!" sneered De Vere. "Perhaps you'd rather go after him, after all, instead of havin' a good time this afternoon?"

The fag coloured uncomfortably.

"Well, he is an interferin' cad, but he means well," he said. "Of course, it was like his confounded cheek to chip in as he did! I never take any notice of him, I assure you."

"Let him drop, for goodness' sake! I'm fed up with your Jimmy!" said De Vere. "Are you goin' in here?"

"Yes."

Algy, like Moses of old, looked this way and that way before he ventured into the inn garden.

The lane was deserted. Bulkeley and Neville had disappeared in one direction, Jimmy Silver in the other.

"Come on!" said Algy briskly.

He led the way into a path near the inn, from which they entered the garden at the back by a side gate.

There they were quite safe from observation.

At the back of the house, an open french window looked on the garden, and from it came the sound of the clicking of billiard-balls.

Algy looked in, rather cautiously,

and then signed to his friend to follow him in.

"Only Tracy there, with old Hook," he whispered, "and Gower!"

The fags entered.

Allen Tracy, of the Classical Shell at Rookwood, was playing billiards with Joey Hook, the sharper.

Gower was looking on, smoking a cigarette.

Mr. Hook gave Algy a very affable grin.

Mr. Hook knew what had become of a good deal of the fag's too liberal allowance of pocket-money.

Tracy and Gower greeted Algy in a very friendly way.

The Shell fellow and the Fourth Former, as a rule, looked down with a lofty eye on fags; but they made an exception in favour of the enterprising Algy.

Algy Silver presented his friend, with some pride.

Tracy and Gower had heard of De Vere, and they had heard that he was wealthy, so they were prepared to be civil.

The new fag, however, seemed perfectly unconscious of the honour he received in being taken notice of by the Fourth and the Shell.

He acknowledged the introduction in a most perfunctory manner, and there was more than a trace of superciliousness in his look.

"Did you ever see such a sickenin', conceited little cad?" Gower murmured in Tracy's ear a little later.

"I'm goin' to make him pay for his cheek," answered Tracy in the same tone.

"He looks jolly cute."

"He looks a nasty little scoundrel. Little beast who's been spoiled from birth," growled Tracy. "He wants a hidin', that's what he wants, and I shouldn't be surprised if he gets it before he's been an hour at Rookwood."

But, in spite of that unfavourable opinion of Algy's dear old pal, Tracy very amicably started a game with him, with two pounds on fifty up.

"Will you come, Algy?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "No!" howled Algy. "Then I'll make you!" exclaimed Jimmy, and Algy's grasp was torn away from the table and he was whirled to the French windows.

It was soon evident that De Vere was no dud with the cue. His score mounted up quickly, and Tracy was "left."

And when the new fag ran out thirty ahead, and pocketed his two pounds with a careless hand, Tracy felt very much inclined to give him, in addition, the thrashing he had predicted was in store for him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

BACKING UP JIMMY

"What's the merry trouble?"

"Anything wrong, Jimmy?"

Jimmy was tramping on to Rookwood, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a wrinkle in his brow, when he met Mornington and Erroll of the Fourth.

He paused, colouring a little.

"All the troubles in the world suddenly dropped on your shoulders?" grinned Mornington.

"Not quite," said Jimmy Silver, smiling. "Have you seen my pals?"

"Yes; catchin' crabs," answered Mornington, with a nod towards the river. "They've been rowin' with the Moderns over a boat, an' they've just started."

"Good! I can catch them, then."

"They're going down the river, Jimmy," said Erroll. "Cut across to the towing-path, and you'll see them."

"Right!"

Erroll and Mornington went on, and Jimmy Silver, leaving the lane, cut across the fields to the towing-path, without going on to the boathouse.

He ran out on the path, and sighted a boat on the river, with six fellows in it.

They were Lovell & Co. and the three Colonials—Conroy, Van Ryn and Pons.

The six seemed to be in great spirits.

"Hallo!" shouted Jimmy from the bank.

"Hallo, there's Jimmy!"

"Pull in," said Lovell.

The boat pulled to the bank, and bumped in the rushes.

"Changed your mind, Jimmy?" grinned Arthur Edward. "All serene! Jump in!"

"What on earth have you been doing to your nose?" demanded the captain of the Fourth.

Lovell rubbed his nose, while his companions chuckled.

"This is a Modern boat," explained Raby. "Tommy Dodd was just running it out. We mopped them up and collared the boat."

"We left 'em yelling on the raft," grinned Newcome. "You should have heard 'em yell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid Tommy Dodd got rather wet," remarked Conroy. "But we couldn't dip his head in the river without wetting him, could we?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Jump in, Jimmy," said Lovell.

But Jimmy did not jump in.

"The fact is——" he said.

"The fact is, we'd better get off, or there'll be an army of Modern cads coming along," interrupted Lovell. "Get a move on."

"I want you chaps——"

"Well, if you want us, here we are. Jump in!"

"Get out!"

"Get in!"

"Look here, you fellows, I want you to back me up this afternoon," said Jimmy Silver, with a worried look. "Do come along!"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Raby at once. "You chaps don't mind if we clear?" he added to Conroy & Co.

"Not at all," said the Australian junior politely; and Van Ryn and Pons nodded.

"Any old thing!" grunted Newcome.

Lovell snorted.

Arthur Edward Lovell had a most expressive snort, and now he snorted fortissimo, a great deal like an angry war-horse.

But he stepped out of the boat.

He was not proof against the demands of friendship.

Conroy & Co., rather puzzled,

pulled out into the river again, leaving the Fistical Four together on the bank.

"Well?" grunted Lovell, while Raby and Newcome eyed Jimmy inquiringly.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your row——"

"Oh, bother your sorrow!" said Lovell. "What the dickens does that matter? If you want us, here we are. What's the rumpus?"

"It's young Algy——"

"I thought so."

"If you don't want to help me, Lovell——"

"Don't be an ass!" was Lovell's gruff reply, apparently implying that he did want to help.

"Algy was to meet a young cad named De Vere at the station."

"Well?"

"He was taking him to the Bird-in-Hand——"

"Ye gods!"

"To have a high old time before they turned up at Rookwood," continued Jimmy Silver, still looking worried. "De Vere was sent here in charge of a tutor or someone, and he gave him the slip at Latcham, and came on alone. He's a sneaking, caddish, pasty-faced, vicious little beast."

"Oh, my hat! All that?"

"Well, that's how he struck me."

"Perhaps you're a bit prejudiced," grinned Raby.

"Well, they've gone to that show together," said Jimmy.

"You ought to have stopped them," growled Lovell.

Jimmy explained how old Bulkeley had unfortunately come upon the scene at the wrong moment.

His chums chuckled.

"Just like you, Jimmy," remarked Lovell. "Always putting your silly foot in it. You've made old Bulkeley think you a bully, now. Pity you didn't tell him the facts."

"Well, I couldn't, could I?"

"No, I suppose you couldn't; but it's a pity, all the same. But what the thump do you want us to do? You can give Algy a hiding without our assistance."

"That young cad is leading Algy into a rotten game already."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "It looks to me as if dear Algy's doing the leading."

"Well, he isn't."

"Oh, come on!" said Lovell. "Algy's taking him on to the place—he can't have heard of the Bird-in-Hand when he was at school in Devonshire. It's Algy who's the guide, philosopher, and friend in this instance."

"You're mistaken, all the same. The little beast has made some arrangement with Algy to show him round the village, but Algy's playing up. Algy isn't really a bad sort—only he's under the influence of that scrubby little beast."

"Always under somebody's influence—never a beast on his own," said Lovell sarcastically. "Lattery's influence once, then Peele's—and now this new kid's. None so blind as those who won't see."

"Well, I know it looks bad, but I'm convinced that De Vere is really the party to blame," said Jimmy. "But whether that's so or not, I can't leave Algy in a low pub with that young scoundrel. I promised his father to stand by him, and look after him all I could. I've got to interfere."

"But you can't," said Raby. "You're not proposing to raid the pub, and yank him away by the ears, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You want us to go into the Bird-in-Hand looking for him!" exclaimed Lovell incredulously. "Suppose we're caught there? It's a flogging."

"It might be worse than that for Algy."

"You want us to risk getting a bad name and a thumping licking for the sake of that little rotter?"

"He's not a rotter. He's under the influence——"

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Rats!" roared Lovell. "RATS!"

"Oh, all right!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver gruffly. "I'll go alone. You can go and eat coke, and be blowed to you!"

Jimmy, with a very grim face, tramped away.

But his affectionate chums tramped after him.

"Don't be an ass!" growled Lovell. "Or, if you can't help being an ass, don't be a silly ass! You're not going into that den alone."

"Well, come on, and don't jaw so much," said Jimmy.

"Of all the silly chumps——"

"Br-r-r-r-r! We can get into the garden from the towing-path, and there's no need for us to be seen."

Lovell & Co. exchanged a series of hopeless glances, but they made no further demur.

Jimmy Silver generally had his own way in the long run, and his loyal chums were quite ready to back him up, though their opinion was that he was a howling ass for his trouble.

To be discovered within the precincts of such a place as the Bird-in-Hand was a serious matter for any Rookwood fellow, and Lovell & Co. were not so reckless as Algy of the Third.

But they followed Jimmy Silver, as he opened the gate that led from the towing-path into the inn garden.

And Arthur Edward Lovell privately resolved that Algy of the Third should not get off without the licking he so badly needed.

Arthur Edward was prepared to see to that matter himself, and to see to it thoroughly and efficiently.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

GOING IT!

"ROTTEN little cad!"

"Regular billiard-sharper!"

Tracy of the Shell and Gower of the Fourth exchanged those complimentary opinions of Algy's pal as they walked away from the Bird-in-Hand in far from amiable tempers.

Bertie de Vere had given both of them fifty up.

Naturally, they had expected to walk over the new fag at the game of billiards.

They had had considerable practice.

To their surprise and mortification, the new fag had walked over them.

Master de Vere's skill in the game was further evidence of a misspent youth.

Even Joey Hook had opened his eyes, and had declined to play Master de Vere himself with money on the game.

Tracy and Gower could hardly conceal their irritation as they left.

Tracy had left three, and Gower two quids with the enterprising youth from High Coombe.

They could ill-afford to lose such sums, but they had noticed that De Vere had a wad of currency notes in his pocket-book.

They walked home to Rookwood in bad tempers, leaving Algy and his pal to their own devices.

De Vere put down his cue and yawned.

Partly from affectation, and partly because he sought pleasures only

suitable for a much older fellow, the fag seemed in a perpetual state of boredom.

"Pretty slow, this," he remarked to Algy.

Algy looked at him rather reproachfully.

"You've done pretty well, Bertie," he remarked.

"Oh, those fellows can't play!" said De Vere contemptuously. "They handle a cue as if it were a rake."

"Tracy rather prides himself on his game."

"Tracy's an ass!"

"H'm!"

Mr. Hook peered out of the door leading into the passage.

"There's some gents comin' in, I think," he remarked.

"Better clear, Bertie," said Algy. "We don't want to be seen here."

"Why not?"

"Might get heard of at Rookwood," said Algy uneasily.

"Are you funky?"

"No, I'm not," said Algy tartly. "But I don't want to be hauled up before the beaks."

De Vere shrugged his shoulders.

He looked curiously old when he did that, and Mr. Hook glanced at him very oddly.

Mr. Hook's opinion—which he kept to himself—was that he had never seen such a vicious young reprobate as Master Bertie de Vere.

"P'r'aps you gents will step into the next room," suggested Mr. Hook. "If you'd care for a game——"

"Hallo, here's the merry Colonials!" exclaimed Raby. "They'll give us a lift back with these fags." Jimmy Silver hailed the boat, and Conroy & Co. pulled in.

"Just the thing!" said Algy, at once.

"Oh, any old thing!" yawned De Vere.

Mr. Hook opened a door, and they passed through, the sharper following them.

A few minutes later loud voices and the clicking of balls sounded from the billiard-room.

Mr. Hook's sitting-room was a pleasant apartment enough, with french windows opening on the lawn behind the house, shaded by a big elm.

It was rather stuffy from the ancient fumes of drink and tobacco, but the windows stood wide open, letting in the sunlight and fresh air from the garden and the river.

Upon a card-table near the window stood a box of cigarettes, and De Vere helped himself to one, Algy following his example.

"P'r'aps you young gents would like somethin' to drink?" suggested Mr. Hook, who was still watching De Vere very curiously.

"Yes, rather! Ginger-beer for me," said Algy.

"Same for me, with a dash of whisky," said De Vere indifferently.

Algy started a little.

"Bertie, old chap!" he murmured.

Bertie did not seem to hear.

Mr. Hook gasped a little, but he went to the door and gave the word, and came back with a tray.

Algy looked rather scared as De Vere "dashed" his ginger-beer with whisky—and it was quite a liberal dash.

He watched his friend as if fascinated as the fag from High Coombe drank the concoction.

De Vere's pasty face flushed and his dull eyes sparkled a little.

He lighted another cigarette.

He felt that he was quite a hero and a man of the world in his friend's eyes; but, as a matter of fact, Algy was feeling very uncomfortable.

He felt that there ought to be a line drawn somewhere, and for a moment he regretted that he had not taken Jimmy Silver's advice, and gone straight on to Rookwood.

There was a distinction between wilful recklessness and downright blackguardism, in Algy's mind; though his friend did not seem to see it.

"Well, what's the game?" asked De Vere, seating himself at the card-table and carelessly shuffling the cards.

Nap was the game, and the three soon began to play.

Mr. Hook was in a very smiling humour, and he cheerfully assented to half-crown points—extravagance which rather alarmed Algy.

Sixpenny points seemed reckless enough to Algy Silver, but he gave way to his friend, as he always did.

He was very anxious that the peerless Bertie should not consider him "spoony."

Mr. Hook was congratulating himself.

It was somewhat beneath his dignity to be playing cards with two fags like this—even Mr. Hook had some dignity.

But he had caught a glimpse of the contents of Bertie's pocket-book, and he fully intended to annex a considerable share of the currency notes he had seen there.

That task, which he expected to be an easy one, was a little more difficult than he anticipated, however.

Bertie had not been an ornament to the Form he belonged to at his old school, but in other respects his education was very complete.

He more than held his own in the game for quite a long time.

In fact, his currency notes did not begin to pass over to Mr. Hook until that gentleman fell back upon certain devices to assist fortune, with which even the knowing fag from High Coombe was unacquainted.

Algy Silver was soon cleared out of money; he was not nearly so well provided as his friend.

"Not leavin' off?" asked De Vere, as Algy signed to him not to deal him any cards in the next round.

"Stony!" said Algy tersely.

"Oh, rot! Have some of my tin."

"Good man!"

The wealthy youth carelessly shoved half a dozen currency notes over to Algy, who resumed play with renewed zest.

The luck was quite with Mr. Joey Hook.

When the dealing fell to him he had remarkably good hands, and even at other times he occasionally improved his hand with a card from his sleeve.

Certainly the sharper would have reaped a rich harvest that afternoon had there been no interruption to the "little game."

But there was.

"Nap!" De Vere was yawning when a shadow darkened the open french window.

"Here they are," said a quiet voice.

Jimmy Silver rushed into the room, with his chums at his heels.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

THE STRONG HAND!

The Fistical Four had not found much difficulty in running down their quarry.

Jimmy Silver had glanced into the billiard-room, and seen there the marker and a couple of sporting gentlemen of Coombe—not the fellows he sought.

But he heard the voices through the open french windows of Mr. Hook's sitting-room, a little farther along.

He moved along, followed by his chums, and his eyes fell on the three at the card-table.

Jimmy's brows darkened savagely as he took in the scene—the cards, the bloated face of the sharper, the two flushed and excited fags, and the whisky-bottle on the side table.

Lovell gave a snort of disgust.

"My hat!" murmured Raby.

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

The three chums followed Jimmy Silver into the room.

Mr. Hook rose to his feet, considerably taken aback. His golden harvest had been interrupted.

Algy started up, his face crimson.

Bertie de Vere did not move. He lay back a little in his chair, staring at the Fourth Formers of Rookwood with a cool and insolent smile.

"This 'ere is a private room, young gents," said Mr. Hook, hardly knowing whether to bluster or to try civility. "Billiard-room's the next."

"We're not looking for the billiard-room," growled Lovell.

"I've come here for you, Algy," said Jimmy Silver quietly, and without looking at the sharper. "Come with me."

Algy set his teeth.

"I won't!"

"You'd better, Algy."

"I won't, I tell you!"

Jimmy compressed his lips.

He was very angry and very determined. He did not want a scene there, but Algy had to go.

He crossed over to where the fag stood by his chair, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Come!" he said quietly.

"I tell you I won't!" exclaimed Algy shrilly. "Let me alone! What

business is it of yours, you meddlin' cad?"

"Your father——"

"Oh, don't jaw about my father, you rotter!"

"Your father asked me to look after you, Algy," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "He took you away from your old school, chiefly to keep you away from that young scoundrel sitting there. I'm going to keep my word to him, Algy. Come away without making a fuss."

He drew Algy towards the window, but the fag clung to the table. There was a bitter sneer on De Vere's sallow face, and it goaded Algy to fury.

"I won't go!" yelled Algy. "Lend me a hand, Mr. Hook?"

Mr. Hook stood irresolute.

"He'd better," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You interfere, Mr. Hook, and you'll find your head in the coal-scuttle before you know how it got there."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome lined up between the bookmaker and Jimmy.

The fat sharper fell back a pace.

He did not relish the prospect of a tussle with those three sturdy young gentlemen.

De Vere did not move.

"Will you come, Algy?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"No!" bawled Algy.

"Then I'll make you."

"Bertie—help me!"

Algy's grasp was torn away from the table, and he was whirled to the french windows in Jimmy Silver's strong grasp.

De Vere started to his feet.

"Let him alone, you interferin' cad!" he shouted. "Hook, call in somebody to pitch them out—do you hear?"

Mr. Hook made a movement, and Lovell put his back to the inner door.

"Stay where you are, Hook!" he said curtly. "You'll get hurt if you come this way."

"Look 'ere, you ain't got no right 'ere," protested Mr. Hook feebly. "What call 'ave you to come interfering with a gentleman in his own rooms—hey?"

"You can call in the police, if you like," suggested Raby.

Mr. Hook did not think of acting on Raby's suggestion.

"Help me, hang you!" yelled Algy, as he was forced, struggling and kicking, towards the french windows.

De Vere looked at him, shrugged his shoulders, and sat down again.

"You should look after your merry relations a little better, old scout," he drawled. "I didn't come here for any fightin' with your relations, dear boy. My deal, I think, Mr. Hook."

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Joey Hook.

"Lovell," called out Jimmy Silver.

"Adsum!" grinned Lovell.

"Pitch that young cad out, too!"

"Right-ho, my lord!"

Lovell strode to De Vere, who glared at him with eyes that glittered like a reptile's.

"Don't you dare to touch me!" muttered the fag thickly. "Don't you dare, you low hound! You lay hands on me——"

He had no time for more, for Arthur Edward Lovell's hands were already upon him.

Lovell whirled him out of his chair, sending it spinning across the room.

"Kim on!" said Lovell grimly.

Algy was already outside, still struggling breathlessly in his cousin's grasp.

Lovell followed with De Vere, and Raby and Newcome brought up the rear, with an eye on Mr. Hook, in

case that gentleman showed a disposition to chip in.

But Joey Hook didn't.

The High Coombe fag was kicking, struggling, and scratching like a cat.

Lovell yelled as the nails scored his face.

"Out you go!" he panted.

He pitched the fag bodily out, and De Vere sprawled dazedly on the lawn.

Raby picked up two hats, and threw them out.

"There you are!" he remarked.

De Vere staggered to his feet.

His face was white with rage.

Jimmy Silver was half leading, half dragging Algy down the garden path.

The fag was still resisting furiously, but he had no chance.

Jimmy did not stand on ceremony with him, and the fag had to go.

De Vere stood panting, his eyes glittering at Lovell & Co.

"There's your way!" said Arthur Edward, pointing down the path.

"Do you think I'm goin' at your orders?" hissed De Vere.

"I do, my infant."

"Let me pass, you cad!"

"There's your way, I tell you. Get a move on, or I'll start on you with my boot!" exclaimed Lovell.

"You cheeky cad——"

"Are you going?" demanded Lovell impatiently.

"No, you hound!" yelled the fag.

"Then I'll jolly soon start you."

Lovell was more than fed up.

He grasped the fag by the collar, spun him round, and applied his boot.

De Vere dodged, but Lovell's boot followed, and he fairly ran down the path at last, Lovell after him, dribbling him, as it were, down to the gate.

Raby ran on, and opened the gate on the towing-path.

ROOKWOOD RHYMES—

ALGY SILVER

(the Scamp of the Third).

YOUNG cousins sometimes prove a snare,
And likewise a delusion;
They drive their elders to despair
And cause complete confusion.
These sentiments would be endorsed
By Algy Silver's cousin;
On Jimmy's shoulders he has forced
His troubles by the dozen!

The reckless rascal of the Third
Endeavours to be mannish;
And if the Head of Rookwood heard,
Then Algy soon would vanish!
His wild adventures prove a source
Of never-ending trouble;
And, but for some restraining force,
He'd exit—at the double!

The force in question emanates
From Rookwood's junior skipper,
Who steers his cousin through the straits
Of virtue with a slipper!
It's Jimmy Silver every time,
From whom a word or look would
Save Algy from a course of crime,
And keep him still at Rookwood!

And yet, in spite of wayward pranks
And japes most sly and skilful,
This wild Third-Former scarcely ranks
With rotters mean and wilful.
His nature is not really bad
Like some of Rookwood's beauties;
Although his antics largely add
To Jimmy Silver's duties!

Perhaps in future—who can tell?—
Spurred on by high ambition,
He'll rise, by working hard and well,
To some unique position.
His present failings may give place
To good that shall continue.
Go forward, Algy! Win the race,
And show the grit that's in you!

Jimmy strode through with Algy.

De Vere made an attempt to double back into the garden, and Lovell swung him off his feet, and pitched him out on the towing-path.

Then he slammed the gate.

In his little sitting-room in the Bird-in-Hand, Joey Hook gasped, and stared out after the Rookwood juniors.

The wind had fairly been taken out of his sails.

"By gosh!" murmured Mr. Hook. "By gosh!"

And Mr. Hook poured himself out an extra stiff helping of whisky to soothe his fluttered nerves.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

ALGY LOSES HIS PAL

JIMMY SILVER & Co. gathered round the two breathless and dishevelled fags on the towing-path.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were grinning. But Jimmy's face was sternly set.

"Now you're going to Rookwood, both of you," he said quietly. "Get a move on!"

"I'll do nothin' at your orders, you outsider!" said De Vere savagely. "By gad, I'll make you suffer for this!"

"I'm stickin' here," said Algy sullenly.

"Mind, I'm going to take you both to Rookwood," said Jimmy. "You can walk, or you can be dragged. That's the choice for you."

"Hang you!"

"Hallo, here's the merry Colonials!" exclaimed Raby, pointing to the river. "They'll give us a passage back."

"Good egg!"

Jimmy Silver hailed the boat.

Conroy & Co. had seen from the river the sudden exit from the inn garden, and they were watching the juniors rather curiously.

They pulled in, at Jimmy's call.

"Hallo, trouble in the family?" asked Van Ryn, with a smile.

"Will you take us along to the school boathouse?" asked Jimmy.

"Certainly. Roll in!"

"Get in, Algy."

"I won't!"

Jimmy bundled him in without ceremony.

Conroy & Co. looked rather surprised, but as they had seen the two fags yanked out of the garden gate of the Bird-in-Hand, they guessed pretty accurately how matters stood.

De Vere, after a quite ferocious look at Lovell, who was advancing upon him, stepped into the boat of his own accord.

The Fistical Four followed.

The Colonials shoved off, and pulled up the river with their passengers.

Algy sat up, gasping.

He clenched his hands hard.

"I'll make you pay for this, Jimmy, you rotter!" he muttered.

Jimmy did not heed.

The boat glided on, and stopped at the Rookwood landing-raft.

"Get out!" said Jimmy Silver briefly.

The fags got out, followed by the Fistical Four.

"Much obliged, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver, as the Colonial Co. were shoving off again.

"Oh, don't mench!" said Conroy, with a smile.

"Happy to oblige!" said Pons.

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched up to the school with the two sullen fags in their midst.

They passed in at the gates of Rookwood.

Both the fags cast a last look down the road, but they made no attempt

A pocket-torch gleamed out in the darkness, and the light showed a strange scene. Mornington was scrambling to his feet, while down the passage two dim forms were receding.

to bolt. They had realised by this time that Jimmy Silver was in deadly earnest.

Under the escort of the Fistical Four Algy Silver and Bertie de Vere were marched into the School House.

Several fellows glanced at them, wondering a little at the two sulky, savage faces.

"Now will you let us alone?" muttered Algy, his voice trembling with passion.

"You can cut now!" said Jimmy. "I'm going to take De Vere in to report himself to his Form-master."

Algy changed colour.

"You—you're not going to tell ——" he stammered.

Jimmy cut him short contemptuously.

"You know I'm not! Clear off!"

"I'll report myself when I choose!" said the new fag, between his teeth.

"You'll report yourself now!" answered Jimmy Silver, and he took De Vere by the collar, and led him on towards Mr. Bohun's study.

Algy gave his friend a last look, receiving a steely stare in response.

De Vere did not resist. Jimmy still had a hand on his shoulder when, with the other hand, he tapped at the Third Form master's door.

"Come in!"

Jimmy Silver opened the door, and Mr. Bohun looked up.

"De Vere, the new fellow, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh! Come in, De Vere!"

The fag entered the study, and

Jimmy Silver withdrew, closing the door after him.

He went slowly up the staircase, and to the end study in the Fourth Form passage, where he found his chums.

Lovell & Co. were getting tea, and they turned grinning looks upon Jimmy's sombre face.

"Well?" said Lovell.

"Well!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly.

"Ready for tea?" smiled Lovell.

"Hang tea!"

Jimmy Silver threw himself into a chair, his usually sunny face still glum.

He was worried and troubled.

He felt that he had acted for the best that afternoon, but he knew, too, that he had finally alienated Algy, and that he had only the bitterest aversion to expect from the fag afterwards.

What was the use of it all, after all?

And yet, could he have acted otherwise?

"Keep smiling!" said Raby. "Your own merry maxim, you know!"

But Jimmy Silver did not smile.

"You haven't thanked us yet for backin' you up, and fetchin' Algy out of the lions' den, like a brand from the burning!" smiled Lovell.

"Thank you!" said Jimmy.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Lovell. "Don't look like a sudden attack of thunder, Jimmy! Algy isn't the only pebble on the beach; and I fancy, too, that there will be a rift in his cheery friendship with that sporty De Vere after this. That goey young sportsman won't want to chum with a fellow who's got a cousin with such a terrific sense of duty, I opine!"

"Not likely!" grinned Raby.

Jimmy nodded thoughtfully, and his expression brightened a little.

"Well, there's something in that!" he assented. "They may break it off for good over this. That's so much to the good!"

"Here's your Yarmouth warrior, old man! Tuck in!"

The Fistical Four sat down to tea.

The meal was not finished when the door was flung violently open, and Algy of the Third glared into the study.

The Fourth-Formers looked round, to see a shaking fist, and a savage, sulky face behind it.

"You rotter!" howled Algy.

"Hallo, young hopeful!" grinned Lovell.

"Jimmy, you rotter, you cad, you beast!" Algy was almost crying with rage. Jimmy looked at him steadily. "You beast! You beast! De Vere won't speak to me now—he won't look at me! It's all your doing!"

"I'm glad of it!" said Jimmy quietly.

"You're glad, you rotter? You—you——"

Words failed Algy. He shook his fist in Jimmy's face, and stamped away, crimson with rage and chagrin.

"Tragic end to a valuable friendship!" yawned Lovell. "Might have lasted till Algy's pal was sent to a reformatory! Sad! But keep smiling, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

JIMMY SILVER IS NOT PLEASED

"SILVER!"

Jimmy Silver looked round cheerily as Bulkeley of the Sixth called to him from his study doorway.

"Yes, Bulkeley?"

He came towards the captain of Rookwood at once.

Jimmy Silver was captain of the Fourth Form, but it was an honour to fag for "old Bulkeley."

"Will you find De Vere of the Third, and send him here? You know him. A new fag who came last week."

"I know him," said Jimmy.

"Tell him I want him at once."

"Yes, Bulkeley."

Bulkeley was frowning a little, and Jimmy wondered whether the new fag was already in the black books of the captain of Rookwood.

He would not have been surprised at that.

"Waiting for you," said Arthur Edward Lovell, as Jimmy came out of the School House. "If we're going to get down to Coombe before dinner——"

"Seen that kid De Vere?" asked Jimmy. "Bulkeley wants him."

"Oh, bother!" said Raby.

"Bless him!" said Newcome. "But he's not far off. I saw him going into Little Quad a few minutes ago with——" Newcome paused.

"With?" repeated Jimmy, looking at him.

"With your Cousin Algy."

Jimmy frowned.

"I don't see what he's doing with Algy," he said gruffly. "I understood that they weren't on friendly terms now."

"You're such an innocent old duck, Jimmy!" was Lovell's remark.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Jimmy. "Didn't Algy come to our study himself, and tell us that De Vere wouldn't speak to him because I chipped in the other day when they were playing the giddy goat?"

"They've made it up since then," grinned Lovell. "I've seen them together."

Jimmy did not answer; but, with a frowning face, he started across towards Little Quad.

His chums looked after him, smiling.

"Poor old Jimmy!" murmured Raby. "He's got all his work cut out if he's going to keep up the kind uncle bizney with his precious cousin. Anybody but Jimmy would have noticed that Algy and that new cad were as thick as thieves again."

"Oh, Jimmy doesn't see anything!" grunted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver was thinking so himself as he went through the old stone archway into Little Quad.

Algy Silver and Bertie de Vere were seated on a bench near the fountain, deep in talk.

They did not see Jimmy as he strode towards them.

It was obvious that the rift in the lute had been mended, and that Algy was on the friendliest terms with his old chum from his old school.

"To-night's the night!" Algy was saying as Jimmy Silver came along. "It will be no end of a lark!"

"About time we got a move on, I think," grunted his companion discontentedly. "I was expectin' to have a good time here. I've been bored to tears. This isn't much like my old school."

"You had to leave your old school," answered Algy, rather tartly.

Jimmy gave a grunt, partly in expression of his feelings, and partly to warn the two fags that he was within hearing.

The two Third-Formers looked up quickly, silent at once.

Algy Silver coloured a little.

De Vere looked at Jimmy Silver with an expression half of insolence, half of bitter dislike.

"Bulkeley wants you, De Vere," snapped Jimmy.

"Bother Bulkeley!"

"You're to go to his study at once."

"I'll suit myself about that!"

Jimmy gave him a look.

He was greatly inclined to take the cheeky fag by the collar and start him with his boot.

But he refrained.

If the fag chose to disregard Bulkeley's order it was his own business.

"Better go, Bertie," muttered Algy Silver. "Bulkeley's head prefect, you know. You'll make him ratty!"

De Vere nodded sulkily, and rose to his feet, lounging away with his hands in his pockets.

He knew that he had to go.

Algy was about to follow, when Jimmy Silver stopped him.

"Hold on a minute, Algy," he said quietly.

"Goin' to jaw?" sneered the fag.

"You told me you had finished with De Vere."

"I told you he wouldn't speak to me, because my meddlin' cousin interfered with him, like a cheeky cad!" retorted Algy savagely. "We've made it up, though."

"I'd be sorry to interfere between you and your friends, Algy," said the captain of the Fourth. "Only——"

"Well, don't do it, then!"

"There's plenty of decent chaps in the Third for you to make friends with—Wegg and Grant and Stacey—all decent kids——"

"That's my business, isn't it?"

"You were saying something about to-night—about a lark," said Jimmy, looking at him sharply. "Does that mean that you are going to start playing the fool again?"

"Find out!"

"Algy, old chap——"

"Rats!"

With that, Algy of the Third marched off.

He was not in the mood of sweet reasonableness.

Jimmy Silver repressed his feelings with an effort.

It was not of much use giving Algy a licking, much as he deserved one.

Arthur Edward Lovell looked through the archway.

"Staying there all day?" he called out.

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums.

The Fistical Four started on their walk down to Coombe, but Jimmy's face was no longer as sunny as it had been that morning.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

THE CAPTAIN'S WARNING!

"SILVER says you want me, Bulkeley."

De Vere of the Third lounged into Bulkeley's study.

The new fag was certainly the only fellow in the Third Form at Rookwood who would have ventured to lounge into Bulkeley's study.

Fags generally came there with their most respectful manners on, if not in fear and trembling.

But the new fellow had his own manners and customs.

There was just as much impertinence in his manner as he dared infuse into it.

Bulkeley's eyes glinted as he looked at him.

"Yes, I sent for you, De Vere."

"Well, what's the row?"

"In the first place," said Bulkeley quietly, "don't speak to me like that. That isn't the way for a fag to address the captain of the school."

De Vere's lip curled, but he did not answer.

"Secondly, take your hands out of your pockets."

De Vere hesitated a moment, but he obeyed.

"And now stand upright, like a decent fellow, and don't slouch."

The fag's eyes glittered, but he pulled himself together.

"That's better," said Bulkeley, eyeing him. "I don't know how you got on at your old school, my boy, but I may as well tell you that cheek doesn't go down at Rookwood. You're new here, and you may not be aware of that. I suppose you know I'm a prefect?"

"I believe I've heard it mentioned," said De Vere carelessly.

"I've had an eye on you for some days."

"Thanks!"

"You've been here less than a week," continued Bulkeley. "You've been found smoking twice, and your Form-master took a sporting paper away from you yesterday."

The fag did not answer.

"Hold up your hands!" added Bulkeley sharply.

He inspected the hands as they were held up.

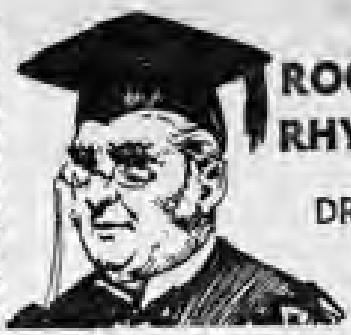
"I thought so!" he said. "Those stains on your fingers are from cigarettes, De Vere. You have been smoking again!"

No reply.

"Now, I want to speak to you kindly," said Bulkeley, as De Vere dropped his hands. "I fancy from your looks that you've been allowed to run wild at home, and you haven't found your feet here yet. You seem to have picked up bad habits at your old school, or at home. You must drop them here, and it will be all the better for you."

The fag looked sullen.

"Now, as to smoking," continued Bulkeley, in quite a kind tone. "You're not fourteen years old yet, and you must have sense enough to see that such a thing is ridiculous at



ROOKWOOD RHYMES—

DR. CHISHOLM

(the Head of Rookwood).

THE "Great White Chief" of
Rookwood School,
So scholarly and clever,
Is Dr. Chisholm, 'neath whose rule
May Rookwood flourish ever!
A grave and reverend master he;
No other stands above him;
He's just, yet kind; and that, you see,
Is why his pupils love him!

I often think (What duffer said
A rhymester doesn't do so?)
It's no great fun to be a Head;
I'd rather be a Crusoe!
For on a desert isle you're clear
Of all the many troubles
Which at a public school appear,
And then expand like bubbles!

To rule the roost, to sit in state,
Sounds absolutely topping;
To have good food upon your plate,
And give your boys a "whopping."
Yet note the furrowed lines of care
On Dr. Chisholm's brow, boys:
And don't be Heads, for I declare
It's better to be cowboys!

Yes, there are troubles in a heap
For every kindly shepherd
Like Dr. Chisholm, for his sheep
Are spotted, like the leopard.
He has to know and study boys,
Their follies, faults, and failings,
And flog each rascal who enjoys
A night spent "on the railings"!

Yet Dr. Chisholm seldom fails;
His aim in life, we trust, is
To evenly preserve the scales
Of fairness and of justice.
Then blessings on his massive brow!
And, lest he reads these verses,
I will resign myself right now
Unto his tender mercies!

your age. But that's not the worst. It's bad for the health. It will interfere with your growth and with your health generally. You must not suppose that the rules are made for nothing. There's a reason for them."

De Vere stared at him.

He had expected a "jaw" or a caning, but a kind appeal to his better sense and feelings surprised and took him aback.

"As for the sporting paper," went on Bulkeley, with a slight smile, "I'll take it that you were only looking at that out of curiosity. I can't suppose that a kid of your age could be really interested in such things. But keep clear of anything of that kind, my lad. It's easy enough to slide into wrong-doing from sheer thoughtlessness."

De Vere smiled.

"Now, I'll take it that you're going to think about this, and remember that you've got your bit to do in keeping up the good name of the school," said Bulkeley cheerily. "Now you can cut."

"Thank you!"

De Vere walked out of the study in rather a wondering frame of mind.

But in the passage a sneer curled his lip.

"Preachin' ass!" he murmured. "I suppose I shall have to be a bit more careful, though. Pah!"

He found Algy Silver in the quad.

Algy looked at him rather anxiously.

"What did Bulkeley want?" he asked.

"Only jaw."

"Licked?"

"No, you ass! He talked to me like a Dutch uncle," said De Vere, shrugging his thin shoulders. "Seems to be a good-tempered old sort, in his way."

"He's good-tempered enough," said Algy. "But he can be as hard as nails. I hope you won't get him down on you."

"Oh, I don't care!"

"But you must be careful, old chap. Things are a bit stricter here than they were at our old school," said Algy anxiously. "I've found that out."

"I seem to have landed in a nest of saints," said his chum, with a sneering grin. "Your Cousin Jimmy is quite a model youth. How pleased his aunts and uncles must be with him!"

"Jimmy's not a bad sort, in his way."

"I don't like his way, then. I think he's a meddlin' cad!"

Algy was silent.

"Now, about to-night," said De Vere, after a glance round to make sure that no one was near them. "What time do we start?"

"Don't you think we'd better put it off, as Bulkeley seems to have an eye on you just now?"

"Oh, don't be a funk!" said De Vere scornfully.

"I'm not a funk!" retorted Algy hotly. "I was thinkin' of you. Bulkeley must have noticed somethin' to call you into his study."

"Well, if you're not funky, don't talk about puttin' it off. I tell you, I'm bored to tears here! I'm fed up!" grunted De Vere. "I feel as if I've got dead and buried since I came to Rookwood. Hole of a place!"

"We'll go to-night," said Algy. "It's easy enough. We'll wait till the fellows are asleep, and put dummies in the beds, and sneak out by way of the leads."

"You've done it before?"

"I've been out with Tracy of the Shell," said Algy loftily. "I went out once with Peele, too."

"You're quite an old hand," yawned his friend. "Your pal Tracy doesn't

seem to get on with me. He didn't like me beatin' him at billiards, I think. This isn't much of a sportin' school."

He gave another yawn.

"Let's go an' get a smoke somewhere," he suggested.

"Just before dinner?" asked Algy, hesitatingly. "It spoils the appetite, you know."

"Ye gods! Are you poachin' on your Cousin Jimmy's preserves, an' takin' to preachin'?"

"Come on, then," said Algy. "We'll go into the old abbey; no danger of bein' spotted there."

"It's a quarter of an hour to dinner," said De Vere, as they walked away. "Time for a game of nap."

"I—I'll get the cards, if you like."

"My dear man, I've got some—never without 'em."

"I say, Bertie, it's a risky bizney carryin' cards about you. They—they're rather sticklers about such things at Rookwood."

"Do the prefects go nosin' into a fellow's pockets?"

"They might, if they suspected ——"

"Oh, rot!"

The Classicals rushed at the Modern juniors, smiting with pillows, amid gasps of suppressed laughter. Right and left the Moderns went rolling under swiping pillows. "Give 'em socks!" roared Lovell.

Algy said no more. He was very much afraid of being considered funky in the estimation of his sporting friend.

The interval before dinner was spent in smoking and playing nap in the abbey ruins; and when they came back to the House there were some new stains on De Vere's fingers, if Bulkeley had thought of looking for them.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

LOVELL IS WRATHY!

"WE'RE going on the war-path to-night!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark in the end study at tea-time.

Jimmy Silver started out of a brown study.

He had been very silent over tea.

"Eh! What's that about to-night?" he exclaimed.

"We're going on the merry war-path! Have you forgotten that we're going to raid the Moderns?" demanded Lovell.

"My hat! Yes!"

"What are you mooning about?" inquired Lovell. "Thinkin' of the dear dead days beyond recall?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, not exactly," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I was thinking of—of——"

"Don't say Algy!" groaned Lovell.

"Well, yes."

"Couldn't you find something a bit nicer to think of once or twice in a way?" asked Lovell. "I warn you, Jimmy, that you're in danger of growin' into a bore."

"I've noticed that," observed Raby.

"It's barely possible," remarked Newcome, in a reflective sort of way, "to hear too much and too often about Algy. I wonder whether that's ever occurred to you, Jimmy?"

Jimmy coloured.

"Well, Lovell asked me," he said. "I'm not talking about him, am I?"

"Don't think about him, either," grunted Lovell.

"Well, I'm rather worried."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I hoped he was off with that sneaking little scoundrel, De Vere! Algy's not a bad sort. He's easily led, that's all. I'm afraid that little brute will get him into some trouble, and then the chopper will come down—on Algy."

"He's had warnings enough."

"I know. But——"

"What price giving Algy a rest?" asked Newcome, with the air of a fellow suggesting a new and interesting idea.

"Well, give him a rest," said Jimmy Silver, rather gruffly. "I don't want to talk about him. Lovell asked me."

"Give him a rest all along the line. Let him go and eat coke. If he's determined to go to the giddy bow-wows you can't stop him."

"His father's at sea," said Jimmy. "He was worried about Algy, after getting his old headmaster's report. He asked me to do what I could for the kid. So did my pater. He's practically trusted into my hands here."

"What a charge!" groaned Lovell. "Well, I'll tell you what. We'll help you look after him."

"Oh, will you?" said Jimmy.

"Yes; we'll have him up in the study here, and give him a good thrashing with a fives-bat."

"Wha-at?"

"How does that strike you?"

"Hear, hear!" said Raby and Newcome together heartily.

"Ass!" was Jimmy Silver's reply.

"Well, to get back to the subject," said Lovell. "We're going on the war-path to-night, and I had a sort of an idea that it was up to the captain of the Form to make the arrangements. I may have been mistaken."

This was uttered with great sarcasm.

"Oh, the raid!" said Jimmy indifferently.

"Look here, Jimmy, if you don't want to raid the Moderns to-night ——" said Lovell.

"I—I——" faltered Jimmy.

"Do you want to raid them, or don't you?" demanded Lovell.

"Well, I happened to hear something those blessed fags were saying in Little Quad this morning," confessed Jimmy.

Lovell stared at him.

"What on earth have the fags to do with raiding the Moderns?" he asked. "We're not going to call up the Third."

"They—they were saying something about to-night, and—and a lark. I—I'm afraid they've got some scheme on for breaking bounds."

"Dingy little beasts!" said Lovell, in disgust. "I don't see what it matters, though. Where's the connection?"

"Well, if—if there's a shindy to-night, it may—might draw attention to—to—to——"

Lovell interrupted his study leader with a yell of wrath, jumping to his feet.

"Algy again! We're to put off a raid on the Moderns because that shady little beast may be out of his dormitory, and if there's a row he may be found out? Oh, my hat! Oh crumbs! Oh scissors!"

Jimmy Silver crimsoned.

Put like that it really did seem a little "thick."

Jimmy naturally could not expect other fellows to feel his own concern about the wilful fag of the Third.

His chums, indeed, were sympathetic, but, as they had very plainly hinted, it was possible to get fed up with Algy.

"I'm fairly fed up!" hooted Lovell. "That young rascal can't show the cloven hoof without you going about day-dreaming! He can't plan a dirty trick without you wanting the whole Form to toe the line, and act very carefully in case he gets found out! My hat!"

"Jimmy!" murmured Raby.

"I—I didn't mean exactly that," stammered poor Jimmy. "But if there's a row, and a prefect gets on the war-path, there might be something happen, and—and——"

"And Algy might be spotted out of his dorm, you mean?"

"Ye-es."

"All the better if he is. He'll get a flogging, and I hope it will be a lesson to him!" said Lovell savagely. "Look here, I don't consent to putting the raid off. I won't agree! And if you put it to the fellows, I'll jolly well tell them what your reason is!"

"Lovell!"

"I mean it!" hooted Lovell. "As if it isn't bad enough to be bothered all day long with that dingy little rascal, without having everything upset on his account! B-r-r-r-r!"

"Jimmy, old chap, it is really too thick," murmured Newcome. "Besides, the fags may not be goin' at all. You're not sure."

"No; but——"

"Oh, if they don't go to-night, they'll go some other night, and the Fourth Form can mark time till they've gone and come back!" exclaimed Lovell. "What's the Fourth Form for, except to stand waiting the convenience of Master Algy when he goes on the razzle?"

Raby and Newcome grinned.

"That will do," said Jimmy Silver.

"I was only making a suggestion."

"A dashed fatheaded one, too. That raid's coming off to-night."

"Agreed," said Jimmy. "And now, for goodness' sake, let the thing drop!"

Jimmy spoke with unusual tartness, and he left the study when he had finished.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER
ON THE WAR-PATH!

THERE was some suppressed excitement in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth when these cheerful youths went to bed that night!

The raid on the Modern Fourth was fixed and settled.

Nearly all the Classicals were in it, few preferring to remain in bed.

Tubby Muffin didn't mean to turn out; he was too fat and lazy.

Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower were too slack.

But everybody else was going on the war-path.

Pillows were to be taken, and the onslaught on the dormitory of the Modern Fourth was to be something quite terrific.

There had been such shindies before, and they were not approved of by the school authorities—which was not to be wondered at.

Dr. Chisholm could not be expected to see the necessity for giving the Modern juniors the "kybosh."

The Modern quarters were really a separate building, but there was a long passage—or, rather, there were several passages—connecting the two, Rookwood being a rambling old place full of the most unexpected passages and recesses.

In one passage there was a great oaken door, which was kept locked, and the key was kept by old Mack, the school porter.

One of the Fourth-Formers was quite a hero, he having raided the key successfully from the porter's lodge.

The way was open now, and there was no doubt that the enemy would be taken by surprise.

The kybosh having been duly administered to the Moderns, the Classicals would retreat to their own quarters, locking the passage door after them, and leaving the defeated enemy to rage.

It was quite an exhilarating prospect.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came in to see lights out for the Classical Fourth, and the juniors were very careful not to betray themselves.

Bulkeley heard some of them passing remarks on cricket and that was all.

But when lights were out, and there was darkness, and the prefect was gone, a buzz of voices broke out in the dormitory, subdued, but very eager.

"What time are we goin', Silver?" asked Mornington.

"Better make it early," remarked Conroy, the Australian.

"Ten!" said Jimmy.

"Good!"

"Ten's rather early, isn't it?" asked Kit Erroll. "The prefects usually haven't settled down at ten o'clock."

"Well, you see——"

"Half-past ten is safer!" boomed Lovell.

"Better make it half-past ten, Jimmy," remarked Van Ryn. "They don't put out the light on the staircase till ten."

"Oh, Jimmy's got his reasons!" snorted Lovell. "Never mind if we're caught and hauled up before Dalton in the mornin', or the Head! Never mind that, so long as it's all over before a sneakin' cad who's going to break bounds comes out of his dorm!"

"Shut up, Lovell!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"What on earth are you talking about, Lovell?" inquired Pons.

"Jimmy knows what I'm talking about."

"Blessed riddles," said Dick Oswald. "But I agree that it ought to be a bit later than ten. We can't raid the Moderns with the prefects raging on our track."

"Ha, ha!"

"Half-past ten, then," said Jimmy Silver.

"That's better!"

"Yes, that's so," said Mornington. "Wake me up at half-past ten, somebody."

"Somebody had better stay awake!" yawned Higgs.

"I shan't sleep," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

Jimmy was as good as his word.

Before ten o'clock all the dormitory was silent, save for the sound of deep breathing and Tubby Muffin's rumbling snore, but Jimmy Silver was wide awake.

He was troubled.

There was no doubt that Lovell was right; it was scarcely safe for the raid to begin before half-past ten.

Jimmy's conscience smote him a little.

He had not meant it, but he had really been going to risk trouble for all the raiders by fixing the hour too early.

It was the thought of Algy that worried him, and had nearly caused him to make that false step.

The more he thought of it, the more convinced he was that Algy and his precious friend were going out of bounds that night.

Algy had said plainly enough "To-night's the night," and that it would be a "lark."

And if they went, it was plain enough where they were going.

The new fag had already made the acquaintance of the sporting circle of the Bird-in-Hand.

It was not only the shady character of the thing—though that was bad enough—but there was the risk.

A fag in the Third was not likely to be expelled, but, in case of discovery, there was a flogging and the disgrace!

And Jimmy's opinion of Bertie de Vere was such that he had not the slightest doubt that, if discovered, the young rascal would do his best to save his own skin by throwing all the blame upon Algy, so far as he could.

In attempting to take measures to prevent the discovery, Jimmy had an uncomfortable feeling that he

Knowles jerked the coverlet off the bed, and bundles of clothing and bolsters were revealed. Bulkeley started. "My hat!" he exclaimed. "I think that settles it!" sneered Knowles. "Silver and De Vere are out!"

was becoming, in a measure, a party to their enterprise.

But what could he do?

Anyhow, the thing was out of his hands now.

He was pretty sure that if the fags went that night they would not venture to leave their dormitory much before half-past ten.

It was not safe for the raid on the Moderns to take place before that time, and it would not be safe for the fags to sneak out before then.

Jimmy was feeling very uneasy.

The raid was to be carried out without alarming masters or prefects, of course. But such plans only too often "ganged agley."

If there was a row—if there was disturbance, and prefects were brought on the scene—it might lead to a discovery.

Algy and De Vere might be coming out at that very minute, fully dressed for going out of doors.

The Third Form might be awakened, and miss Algy; or a prefect might go into their dormitory for some reason—any reason.

Jimmy's uneasiness certainly made him exaggerate the chances of a mishap to Algy; but it existed.

But there was no help for it.

At half-past ten Jimmy Silver slipped out of his bed, and called to his comrades.

There was a general turning out of the Classical Fourth.

The juniors slipped on their trousers and socks, and took their pillows—the latter to be used as weapons of offence.

"Got the key, Jimmy?" asked Mornington.

"That's all right," said Lovell. "It's put in the passage door ready. I saw to that."

"Good egg!"

"You fellows ready?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"What-ho!"

"Lead on, Macduff!" chuckled Flynn.

The dormitory door was silently opened.

Softly, in their socks, the Classicals crept out, and the door was closed again.

The staircase was quite dark; the passages black and deserted.

Almost on tiptoe the raiders stole away.

There was a sudden bump in the darkness, and an exclamation from Valentine Mornington.

Then there was the sound of a heavy fall.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

THE PILLOW FIGHT!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Who the dickens——"

"What!"

There were suppressed exclamations on all sides.

A sound of scuffling and struggling could be heard.

"Shush!" whispered Lovell.

"Quiet!"

"You duffers, do you want to bring the prefects here? Quiet!"

A sudden gleam of light flashed out in the darkness.

Somebody had turned on a pocket-torch.

The light glimmered on a strange scene.

Mornington was scrambling to his feet, his face red with rage.

Down the passage, in the shadows, two dim forms were receding.

Morny made a rush after them, and caught one by the arm.

"You cheeky young cad, Silver——"

"Let go, hang you!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy

Silver, pushing forward. "Show that light here, Rawson. So it's you, Algy!"

Algy Silver was wriggling in Morny's angry grasp.

De Vere stood close by him, startled and angry.

The two fags were fully dressed, even to their shoes.

"The young cad ran into me in the dark, and pitched me over!" exclaimed Morny angrily. "I'll——"

"Don't make a row, Morny," whispered Erroll.

"Put that light out!"

Rawson shut off the light.

"Let me go, Mornington, you fool!" muttered Algy, in suppressed tones. "I couldn't see you in the dark, you silly fool! I thought a prefect had got hold of me when I ran into you. Let go!"

"Let him go!" muttered De Vere.

"Let him go, Morny!" said Erroll. "We don't want a shindy here now. We may have been heard already."

Mornington grunted, and released the fag.

"What are you doing out of your dorm, Algy?" asked Jimmy Silver—not that it was necessary to ask. He knew only too well.

"What are you doing out of yours?" retorted the fag.

"We're going to raid the Moderns. Come with us, kid; it's fun, you know."

"Catch me!"

"Oh, a raid isn't good enough for him!" snorted Lovell. "He wants something a bit more exciting, such as playing cards in a pub parlour."

"Shurrup, Lovell!" murmured Newcome.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Algy, come with us, kid!" muttered Jimmy.

"Oh, rats!"

"Kick him back into his dorm!" said Lovell.

"Algy——"

There was no reply from Algy, save a sound of retreating footsteps.

The two fags were going.

Jimmy Silver stood, a prey to troubled emotion.

Here was proof positive, if he had wanted it, that the two young rascals were breaking bounds at night, and he was strongly inclined to take Lovell's advice and kick them back into their quarters.

But that meant a row, that was certain, and prefects coming on the scene and finding the raiders out of their dormitory.

The Classical Fourth would have had something to say to that.

Before Jimmy could decide what to do the fags were gone.

Faintly, in the distance, came the sound of an opening window, and in a minute more the two young rascals had dropped on the leads under the window.

The sudden meeting in the dark had startled and scared them, but the discovery that it was only the Fourth had quite reassured Algy and De Vere.

Whatever the Fourth-Formers might think of them, they were not likely to betray them.

"Well, are we moving on?" asked Conroy. "I've been listening, and I can't hear anything. It's all safe, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver was not thinking whether it was safe or not; he was thinking of his cousin.

But he roused himself.

"Right-ho! Let's get on," he said.

"We'll go after Algy if you like, and bring him back by the scruff of the neck," said Lovell.

"We jolly well won't!" exclaimed Higgs. "We're out to raid the

Moderns, not to look after sneaking fags!"

"Not so much row, Higgs!"

"Well, talk sense, then. Let's get on."

"Come on," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

He was almost relieved that the fags had got clear away.

Even if the raid led to a shindy, now, their absence was not likely to be discovered.

The raiders went quietly on their way into the winding passage that led towards the Modern quarters.

"Here's the door!" murmured Raby. "Show a light, Rawson!"

The electric torch glittered on the big oaken door.

Jimmy Silver turned back the key and the big door swung open.

Out went the light again, and the juniors marched through, along the passage past the door, coming out at last by the dormitory of the Modern Fourth.

Jimmy dismissed Algy and all his works from his mind.

He was the leader of the attack on the Modern stronghold, and he had to have his wits about him now.

He groped for the door of the Modern dorm, and turned the handle quietly.

All was silent there.

Starlight fell in at the high windows, and dimly showed up the row of beds, with the Modern juniors fast asleep in them.

"Not a suspish!" murmured Lovell gleefully.

"Get inside!"

The juniors tiptoed in.

Behind them, the door was closed to keep the noise in the dormitory, as far as possible.

It was certain that there would be some noise, perhaps a good deal.

Tommy Dodd, the chief of the Modern Fourth, was suddenly awakened by the bedclothes being stripped from his bed by a powerful jerk.

He started up.

"Here we are again!" sang Lovell softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Classical cads!" ejaculated Tommy Dodd. "Here, wake up, you fellows! Classicals! Line up! Yaroooh!"

Tommy yelled as he was rolled out of bed with a bump on the floor.

"Yah! Classical cads!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Oh crumbs!"

All the Modern Fourth were wide enough awake now.

They turned out of bed as one man, even Leggett and Cuffy backing up with the rest to repel the attack of the enemy.

But they had simply no chance.

The Classicals rushed them down, smiting with pillows, amid gasps of suppressed laughter.

Right and left the Moderns went rolling, swiped by the pillows, and tangled in their bedclothes.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Lovell, forgetting the necessity of caution in his excitement. "Down with the Moderns!"

"Yah! Classical cads!"

"Pile in!"

"Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Not so much row!" gasped Erroll.

But he was not heeded.

The juniors were warming to the work now.

The Moderns had grabbed up pillows and bolsters, and they were putting up a splendid fight, though at a great disadvantage.

In the dim light, however, it was easy to mistake friend for foe,

especially in the thrill of excitement, and several of the Classicals received terrific swipes that were intended for Moderns.

There was bumping and gasping and yelling on all sides.

Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, had taken refuge under a bed, and he was yelling at the top of his voice.

Leggett had no objection to bringing Knowles or Catesby on the scene—in fact, he rather wanted to.

Lovell groped under the bed, and brought Leggett out by the leg, and then Leggett's yells were louder than ever.

Bump, bump! Yell! Smash! Crash!

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Mornington. "We shall have the whole house up at this rate!"

Bump! Biff! Crash! Yell!

Erroll, in a whirl of the combat, found himself near the door, and he paused there to listen.

He opened the door an inch or two and then called out hurriedly:

"Chuck it, you chaps! They're coming up!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Retreat, you fellows!"

Footsteps could be heard on the lower stairs as the combat lulled.

It was no wonder that the alarm had been given, considering the noise that had been made in the pillow fight.

The Classicals crowded to the door at once.

Most of the Moderns were gasping on the floor. It was a victory, though not quite complete.

"Sprint for it!" rapped out Jimmy Silver. "If we're caught over on this side——"

He did not finish.

It was not necessary.

The Classicals did not need telling what would happen if they were

ROOKWOOD RHYMES—

TUBBY MUFFIN

(the Fat Junior of the Fourth).

ST. JIM'S may boast of Fatty Wynn,
And Greyfriars harbours Bunter;
And each, just after a tuck-in,
Is hungry as a hunter.
You marvel how each famished youth
Can stow such stacks of stuff in;
The same remark applies, with truth,
To Rookwood's Tubby Muffin!

For Tubby loves a study spread,
No matter who supplies it;
So long as he himself is fed,
He does not dare despise it.
Does Tubby eat to live? Methinks
That's quite a foolish question!
He lives to eat, and seldom shrinks
From pangs of indigestion!

Man wants but little here below,
But Tubby's wants are legion;
His great ambition is to show
A bulging waistcoat region!
No tempting feast could ever mar
His bright and beaming visage;
Of gluttons, Tubby is by far
The masterpiece for HIS age!

In heaps of other ways, as well,
He is a holy terror;
When Bulkeley in the river fell,
Young Tubby made the error
Of claiming that the captain's life
Stood solely to his credit;
But later on, 'mid scenes of strife,
He wished he hadn't said it!

Yes, Tubby Muffin is a snare,
And likewise a delusion;
If I'd a ginger-pop to spare
I'd drink to his confusion!
Although he often makes us smile
When spirits are at zero,
I feel assured it's not worth while
To class him as a hero!

caught raiding the Modern quarters at that hour.

The raiders crowded out of the dormitory, and as the heavy footsteps came up the stairs and a light gleamed, they vanished down the passage in the opposite direction, fleeing for their own quarters.

"I can see you!" roared Knowles of the Modern Sixth. "Come back, you young villains! I can see you!"

Passing the dormitory door, Knowles rushed after the fleeing raiders, lamp in hand.

From a dark corner a figure leaped out, and a pillow smote Knowles, and he went over with a crash.

His electric-lamp went flying, and smashed, and Knowles rolled on the floor with a howl.

Jimmy Silver raced after his comrades.

"Jimmy!" panted Lovell.

"Here I am!"

"You—you downed Knowles?"

"Did you want him to recognise us, fathead? Buck up!"

The Classicals sped on, and gained the passage door.

Jimmy Silver breathed more freely when they were on the safe side, and the big door was closed and locked.

"All serene!" he gasped.

Thump! Thump!

The next minute Knowles was hammering at the passage door.

But there came no reply from the Classical side.

Leaving Knowles to hammer at his own sweet will, Jimmy Silver & Co. scuttled back to their dormitory, and turned in in hot haste.

In two minutes they were in bed, and had all the appearance of enjoying innocent and balmy slumber, ready for any inquiring person who should glance into the room.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER
THE DISCOVERY!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

The Modern leader staggered to his feet dazedly in the dim dormitory.

There was wreck and confusion in the sleeping quarters of the Modern Fourth, and dismal howls and gasps came from all sides.

"They're gone, begorra!" panted Doyle.

"And Knowles is after them!" said Cook breathlessly.

"Turn in!" rapped out Tommy Dodd. "Get the beds tidy—quick! Turn in! We've got to be asleep when Knowles comes in!"

The Modern juniors set to work with breathless haste.

They had had the worst of the tussle with the Classicals; but Tommy Dodd & Co. always played the game

They did not intend to let the bully of the Sixth take a hand in the proceedings if they could help it.

In wonderfully quick time the Modern juniors were in bed and covered up, and trying to look as if they hadn't been disturbed.

"Why shouldn't we tell Knowles?" mumbled Leggett. "I think——"

"You tell Knowles, and we'll flay you to-morrow!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "Shut up!"

Leggett shut up.

The angry prefect was still hammering at the communication door.

But he gave that up at last, and came back, in a savage temper, to the Modern Fourth dormitory.

He expected to find it in a state of uproar, but when he strode in it was very quiet, and there was a sound of deep, steady breathing, artificially performed by Tommy Dodd & Co.

Knowles gritted his teeth.

"I know you're not asleep, you

youngsweeps!" he growled. "Don't try to take me in! Dodd!"

Silence.

"Dodd!" shouted Knowles.

Tommy Dodd yawned, and appeared to wake.

"Hallo! What's up?" he murmured drowsily.

"You know well enough who it is, Dodd. It's Knowles!"

"Tain't rising-bell!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "Anything up, Knowles? Fire?"

"You know it's not!" roared Knowles. "The Classicals have been here! Don't tell me any lies! One of them bowled me over in the passage."

"Great Scott!"

"Was it Silver, Dodd?"

"Eh?"

"Who has been here?"

"You have, Knowles!" answered Tommy innocently.

Knowles breathed hard through his nose.

"Will you tell me who has been here?" he hissed.

"Sure you haven't been dreaming, Knowles?" inquired Tommy Dodd. "What makes you think anybody's been here?"

"I'll talk to you about this in the morning, Dodd!" snarled Knowles; and he stamped out of the dormitory.

He was quite aware that he would not get anything out of Tommy Dodd, but he was determined to visit condign punishment on the unknown assailant who had pillowed him in the passage.

He realised that he had been wasting time questioning the Modern juniors, and, having wasted it, he hurried downstairs and strode out into the quad, hurrying over to the Classical side.

"We—we went out for a lark, sir!" panted De Vere. "I—I really didn't understand at the time what Algy was leading me into." Algy Silver started and his eyes turned upon his chum in horrified amazement.

There came a sharp knock at the door of Bulkeley's study, and Knowles strode in.

Bulkeley was chatting with Neville of the Sixth before turning in, and he looked surprised at the sight of Knowles at that hour in the evening.

"Hallo, Knowles!" he exclaimed. "Anything up?"

"Some of the juniors on this side are up!" snapped Knowles. "I want you to look into it, Bulkeley."

"What's happened?"

"I fancy it was a pillow fight in the Fourth dormitory on my side. What the fags call a raid."

"They can't get through now the door's kept locked in that passage," said the captain of Rookwood.

Knowles gave an impatient grunt.

"They did get through! One of them knocked me over in the passage with a pillow!"

"Phew!"

"They had just got through the door, and locked it again, when I reached it," added Knowles. "They had the key, of course. I've been knocked over by some junior. The matter can't rest at that."

"Certainly not!" said Bulkeley. "Come up with me, Knowles, and we'll see about it."

Bulkeley led the way up the big staircase at once, and Knowles followed at his heels.

They went to the Classical Fourth dormitory first.

The Rookwood captain opened the door quietly, and turned on the light of a flash-lamp.

It showed a row of white beds with Classical juniors in them, sleeping the sleep of the just—or, at least, appearing to be doing so.

"Looks all right here," said Bulkeley.

"Spoofing, of course!" snapped Knowles. "They're awake right enough!"

"They don't look awake. Let's try the other dormitories."

"Oh, all right!"

Knowles cast a last suspicious look at the Classical Fourth, and then followed Bulkeley out, and the door was closed.

Bulkeley led the way, and opened the door of the Shell dormitory.

He flashed the light in.

Knowles scowled into the room.

The Shell were all in their places, and Adolphus Smythe woke up and blinked at the prefects in the light of the flash-lamp.

"By gad!" he murmured.

"All right, there!" said Bulkeley, with a slight smile. "Are you sure, Knowles, that it wasn't some kid on your own side?"

"I tell you they ran away through the passage door!"

"Well, we'll try the Third, if you like. It may have been some fag."

"As likely as not!" grunted Knowles.

They moved on to the Third Form dormitory, and Bulkeley opened the door.

Knowles scanned the row of beds in the light of Bulkeley's lamp.

Grant of the Third woke up, and blinked at them, startled.

"Have you been out since bedtime?" snapped Knowles.

"Eh? No! Why should I?" said Grant with a stare.

"I really think, Knowles, that you were mistaken," said Bulkeley, with visible signs of impatience. "You can't question every junior on this side one after another. I——"

"I don't want to!" said Knowles, with a sour smile. "Look at this!"

Knowles' sharp, restless eyes had noted what escaped the more unsuspicious Bulkeley.

Two of the forms stretched in the beds were not quite convincing enough for Knowles.

The two dummies under the bedclothes were good enough to deceive a careless glance—but Knowles' glance was not careless.

He jerked the coverlet off one bed, and then off another.

Bundles of clothing and bolsters were revealed.

Bulkeley started.

"My hat!" he exclaimed.

"I think that settles it!" sneered Knowles.

Bulkeley stared at the empty beds.

Most of the Third were awake now, and the captain of Rookwood glanced over their faces.

"Two are out," he said; "Silver secundus and De Vere, the new boy."

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER
IN HIS TRUE COLOURS!

THERE was a silence in the Third Form dormitory.

The two prefects and most of the juniors were staring at the empty beds.

Bulkeley was very grave. For, now that his eyes were opened, he noted that the clothes of the two fags were missing, even to their collars and ties.

They had not dressed themselves so fully for a raid on the Modern quarters. It was more serious than that.

Knowles understood, too, and a sour smile curled his lips.

"We seem to have stumbled on somethin' we didn't expect!" he said, with a sneer. "The fags on your side, Bulkeley, seem to have manners and customs of their own, by gad!"

"Do you know where De Vere and Silver II have gone, Grant?" asked Bulkeley, without heeding the Modern prefect.

"N-n-no!" stammered Grant, looking scared. "I—I didn't know they were out, Bulkeley."

Bulkeley's face was very troubled.

"You can leave this in my hands, Knowles," he said, in a low voice. "I shall wait here till they come back. As for the pillow business, that can be investigated in the morning, if you want to carry it further."

Knowles nodded, and quitted the dormitory with a grin of satisfaction.

Bulkeley closed the door, turned on the light, and sat down on Algy Silver's bed to wait.

He had not the slightest hope that the fags were merely absent upon some harmless-fag raid.

He knew it was worse than that.

He had to wait till they returned and make them give an account of themselves.

It was a matter for the Head to deal with. And Bulkeley, who felt the disgrace keenly, had a heavy heart as he waited.

Most of the Third remained awake now, waiting with breathless suspense.

Midnight sounded dully from the clock-tower, and still the absent fags had not returned.

It was half-past twelve when a sound was heard at the door.

Bulkeley rose to his feet.

The door opened, and there was a gasping exclamation.

Algy Silver and Bertie de Vere, startled and terrified, stood blinking in the unexpected light.

"So you have come back?" said Bulkeley grimly. "I have been waiting for you."

The wretched fags did not speak. They could only stare at Bulkeley with terrified eyes.

"Go to bed now," said Bulkeley quietly. "I will see you in. It is too late to take you before the Head now. That will do in the morning. Turn in!"

In stony silence the two roysterers obeyed.

Bulkeley turned out the light and left the dormitory.

There was a breathless questioning from the Third, but the hapless fags answered not a word. It was long before they slept.

When the dawn glimmered in at the dormitory windows, and the rising-bell rang out over Rookwood School, Algy Silver turned out with a haggard face.

"We've got to go through it this mornin', Bertie," he whispered.

De Vere did not answer, save by a savage look, which startled Algy and made him draw back quickly.

At breakfast there was a subdued buzz at the tables.

Fellows glanced at Algy Silver and De Vere on all sides. The story had spread.

Jimmy Silver gave his cousin a miserable look.

What he had vaguely feared had happened. But Jimmy could only hold his peace. He could do nothing to help his cousin; and he would not "rub it in."

Algy glanced several times at his companion in disgrace.

If he had expected the dashing De Vere to carry the matter off jauntily, he was disappointed.

The new fag sat in stony silence, and did not meet his comrade's eyes once.

After breakfast Bulkeley called to them, and marched them into the Head's study.

He had already reported the facts to Dr. Chisholm.

The Head of Rookwood received the two culprits with a grim brow.

"Silver! De Vere!" he rumbled.

"Yes, sir," faltered Algy.

"You were out of school bounds last night up to a late hour. You did not return till long after midnight. Where had you gone?"

"We—we—we went out for—for a lark, sir!" panted De Vere. "I—I'm sorry I went, sir. I—I really didn't understand at the time what Algy was leading me into. He said it was a lark, and I—I—I went."

Algy Silver started as if he had trodden upon an adder.

His eyes turned upon his chum in horrified amazement and incredulity.

"I think I understand," said the Head, with a nod. "As a new boy here, De Vere, I can see some excuse for you. Naturally, you are not so much to blame as an older boy, well acquainted with the school discipline, who appears to have led you into wickedness. It was Silver suggested this excursion, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you go?"

"The—the Bird-in-Hand, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"I—I'd never heard of the place before, sir," whined the wretched fag. "I—I thought it was some place of entertainment. I—I know I did wrong, sir; but I thought it was a—a lark. I—I wouldn't have gone if I'd known what the place was like."

"I hope not," said the Head. "I trust not. Algernon Silver, I am aghast—simply aghast at your utter rascality. You deliberately led a new boy in the school into this shameful adventure, even deceiving him as to the nature of the place you were inducing him to visit. Do you deny it?"

Algy's face was white as chalk.

He did not speak. He could not.

Appearances were against him, even if he had chosen to enter into a wrangle of recrimination with his false friend.

He stood dumb.

"De Vere, I accept your excuse. As you are a new boy, under the influence of another who knows better, I shall pardon you this escapade. But take warning, sir. If anything of the kind should recur——"

"I—I—I never meant——"

"I understand. You may go!"

De Vere left the study.

"As for you, Algernon Silver," exclaimed the Head, rising and towering over the miserable fag, "I have a very great mind to expel you from the school on the spot! But for your extreme youth I should certainly do so. As it is, sir, I shall give you so condign a flogging that I trust it

will be a permanent warning to you. Bulkeley, will you kindly request the sergeant to step here?"

Algy Silver did not speak.

He was too overwhelmed with shame and horror and dismay to be able to say a word for himself—not that there was much to be said.

The flogging followed, and it was severe; but poor Algy did not feel it so severely as he felt the bitter blow of the betrayal of his friendship.

When the infliction was over, the wretched fag crept from the study.

With a face like chalk he crept down the passage and out into the fresh air of the morning.

Jimmy Silver touched him lightly on the shoulder, and Algy looked at him dumbly.

"I'm sorry, kid," said Jimmy softly.

Algy did not speak.

"De Vere seems to have got off scot-free," said Jimmy, looking at him.

The fag's lip curled bitterly.

"Yes. He made it all right for himself, Jimmy. I—I'm sorry, Jimmy. I—I'm sorry I—I was a fool, old chap. He got off. He put it all on me, after he'd been worrying and chipping me for days to take him to that place." Algy's voice broke. "I—I don't mind the flogging—'tisn't that—but he—he—he gave me away, and put it all on my shoulders!"

He panted.

Jimmy understood—he understood what his cousin was feeling at that moment.

And, sorry as he was, he was glad that Algy, at last, could at least see his false friend as others saw him.

"Poor old Algy!" said Jimmy softly. "Poor old chap! I understand!"

A sudden glitter shot into Algy's eyes.

De Vere of the Third came up to him, with a somewhat uncertain expression on his face.

"I—I say, Algy——"

Algy looked at him.

"I—I suppose you've been through it?"

Algy nodded.

"No good both of us goin' through it—what? I say, old top——"

De Vere got no further.

Algy's fist, with all the force of his indignation and scorn behind it, was planted fairly in his face.

It was a crashing blow.

The new fag went fairly flying, and he crashed on his back with a yell.

Algy stood looking down on him, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing. De Vere sat up dazedly.

"You cur!" said Algy. "You rotter! You speak to me again, and I'll give you some more!"

De Vere did not answer. He sat on the ground, his eyes glittering, and wiped his mouth, from which the blood was trickling.

Algy Silver turned his back on him, and walked away with Jimmy Silver.