

The Shadow of Shame! By

OWEN CONQUEST



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THE SHADOW OF SHAME!

In His Time of Trial the Captain of Rookwood Finds His staunchest Supporters in Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth Form.

A Powerful Story from the Pen of
OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER I. Fag Wanted!

"Rotten!"

Jimmy Silver glanced round as he heard that irritated exclamation.

Catesby of the Sixth Form was standing in the old gateway of Rookwood, with a letter in his hand and a decidedly ill-tempered expression on his face.

He did not observe the junior, his eyes being fixed upon the letter in his hand, the contents of which apparently did not please him.

Jimmy Silver was waiting for his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome; the Fistic Four being bound upon a little excursion that afternoon.

"Rotten!" declared Catesby. "Why the dickens can't he come here? And what does he want to spring it on me at the last minute like this for?"

And the Sixth-Former gave a dissatisfied grunt.

"Ahem!" coughed Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy thought it best to let the Modern senior know that he was there.

He didn't want to be made Catesby's involuntary confidant.

Catesby looked round quickly as he heard the cough, and scowled.

"What do you want here?" he snapped.

Jimmy smiled cheerfully.

"Waiting for some chaps," he answered. "What do you want here, if you come to that?"

The Modern prefect made a threatening gesture, and Jimmy Silver retreated with a wary eye upon him.

Catesby glanced at his letter again. He was evidently disturbed.

He looked at his watch, and frowned.

Jimmy Silver had seen a lad from the village hand that letter to Catesby ten minutes before, and he wondered whether it was from some of Catesby's sporting acquaintances at Coombe.

Certainly it had a worrying effect on Stephen Catesby.

The senior crumpled the letter in his hand at last, and turned to the Classical Fourth-Former.

"Silver!" he rapped out.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy.

"I want you to cut down to Coombe for me."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Sorry, Catesby, I'm going out for the afternoon with some chaps."

"You're going down to Coombe for me!" roared Catesby.

Jimmy's face set obstinately.

Modern seniors, prefects or not, had no right to fag juniors of the Classical side, and Jimmy Silver was a stickler for his rights.

Besides, he was booked for that afternoon, and did not feel inclined to throw over his own arrangements to please the bully of the Sixth.

"I want you to take a note," resumed Catesby. "I've got to get off now somewhere. I'll write the note here, and you can cut off with it."

"Better call some Modern fag!" suggested Jimmy.

"No time."

Catesby took out his pocket book, and scribbled on a page, and tore it out.

The junior watched him coolly.

Jimmy had no intention whatever of fagging that afternoon for the Modern senior.

If there was a "row" Jimmy was quite prepared for it.

The Sixth-Former folded the note, took a stump of sealing-wax from his pocket, struck a vesta, and sealed it.

Jimmy Silver's lip curled as he saw.

This was a precaution for keeping the messenger from reading the note, and that sign of distrust in his honour made Jimmy more determined, if possible, that he would not take the note.

"There you are," said Catesby, holding out the sealed note. "Take that down to Coombe, Silver. You'll find a man waiting by the stile—"

"I don't think I shall find him, Catesby."

"Eh! Why not?"

"Because I'm not going!"

Catesby gritted his teeth, and made a stride towards the Classical junior.

At the same time Lovell and Raby and Newcome came up and joined Jimmy in the gateway.

The Modern prefect paused.

"One of you kids can take this note, if you like," he said.

"Can't be done," said Lovell. "We're going out."

"Sorry!" added Newcome politely.

"Come on, Jimmy!" said Raby. "Time we were off."

"Stop!" shouted Catesby angrily.

The Fistical Four walked out of the gates.

They had no time to waste on Moderns, senior or junior.

Catesby made an angry rush after them, seized Jimmy Silver by the collar, and swung him round.

"You cheeky little cad! Stop when I tell you!" he shouted.

"Leggo, you Modern cad!" howled Jimmy.

"Take this note—"

"Bother your note! I won't take it!"

Shake! Shake!

"Let go, or I'll biff you, Catesby," exclaimed Jimmy Silver, clenching his hands hard. "Now, then—"

Shake!

Biff!

Jimmy Silver hit out, and Catesby received his clenched fist on the chest.

He gasped, and released his hold, staggering back.

Jimmy, with his hands up, faced him fearlessly, his chums rushing to his side at once.

Catesby, panting, sprang forward again.

But before he could hurl himself on Jimmy Silver—perhaps fortunately for him—Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding up, and interposed his stalwart form.

The captain of Rookwood pushed Catesby back.

"Now, what's the row?" said Bulkeley.

"Come, come!"

Catesby panted.

"That young cad has struck me!" he roared. "You must have seen him!"

"I saw you shaking him, too," said Bulkeley quietly. "What's the matter?"

"Catesby wants us to fag for him, and we're not going to!" shouted Lovell wrathfully. "Let him get Modern fags to take his blessed notes. There's lots of them—too many, in fact. He can't fag Classics!"

"No jolly fear!" said Raby emphatically.

"Is that the trouble, Catesby?" asked Bulkeley, frowning.

"Suppose it is?" snarled Catesby.

"Well, you are in the wrong, then, and you've no right to lay hands on Silver," said the Rookwood captain sharply. "You've no right whatever to fag the Classical side, and you know it. I've spoken to you about it before, and to Knowles, too. If you want Silver to do anything for you, you must ask him."

"I'll wring his neck!" howled Catesby.

"You won't!" said Bulkeley. He made a sign to the juniors. "Cut off!"

"You bet!" answered Jimmy.

The Fistical Four walked cheerfully out of the gates.

Catesby made a movement, and the Rookwood captain swung in the way.

"Don't be a fool, Catesby," he said quietly. "I shall not allow you to touch them."

The Modern prefect gritted his teeth.

"I'll remember this, Bulkeley!" he muttered.

He turned down the gateway and strode into the quadrangle.

Bulkeley went out of the gate with a frowning brow.

Catesby scanned the quadrangle for a fag.

He was in a hurry; and on that fine afternoon there were few fags to be seen about the school—most of them were out of gates.

He spotted Leggett of the Modern Fourth leaning lazily in the stone archway of Little Quad, and called to him.

Leggett came up sulkily.

He was only slacking about, but he did not want to fag.

Being a Modern junior, he had no share about the matter.

Catesby handed him the note with his instructions, and Leggett nodded and walked off with it.

Then the prefect looked at his watch again, and uttered an angry exclamation.

He had lost a good deal of time in the altercation with Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Uncle James will be ratty if I keep him waiting! Why the thunder couldn't he come here? Oh, rotten! Hang it!"

And in that amiable mood Catesby of the Sixth strode away from Rookwood, cutting across the fields at a great rate.

They did not want any fresh trouble with Stephen Catesby after the Rookwood captain was off the scene.

"Put it on a bit for a mile or so!" said Jimmy Silver. "I shouldn't wonder if that Modern cad waits till Bulkeley's gone, and then comes after us. He's mean enough."

"We could handle him!" growled Lovell.

"My dear ass," said Jimmy cheerfully, "we don't want to handle prefects. There's such agreeable possibilities as a flogging from the Head, if he didn't happen to agree with our point of view. And he mightn't. He doesn't always."

"Not always," grinned Raby. "Besides, as we're going out of bounds, Catesby could get his own back by reporting us, if he spotted us there."

"Exactly, my infant. So put it on."

And the Fistical Four kept up a steady trot, which got them over the ground at a good rate, till they had put half a dozen fields between them and Rookwood.

Then they dropped into a walk, but still proceeded at a good pace.

They kept their eyes well about them, too, for Rookwood seniors as they went.

Going out of bounds was an enterprise that was best kept dark.

Not that there was any harm in their little excursion, so far as that went.

Fellows like Peele and Gower would go out of bounds to visit questionable characters, such as Joey Hook, the billiard sharper, at Coombe.

But that kind of shady game was not in Jimmy Silver's line at all.

The chums of the Fourth were going to visit the scenes of a country-house fire, a couple of miles from the school.

And the reeling walls and tottering fragments of roof were decidedly dangerous to explore, for which reason the Head of Rookwood had placed Woodend Lodge out of bounds.

It was a wise decision of the Head: but the juniors, curious to see the effects of the fire, did not quite agree with him.

"Here we are," said Jimmy Silver at last.

The juniors had followed a footpath through the wood, and they came out on the ruins, glimmering in the afternoon sun of spring.

The house had been completely burnt out. Not one floor remained above another, and the vicinity was strewn with scattered

CHAPTER 2.

Cornered!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were proceeding at a trot, feeling it only judicious to keep at a respectful distance from Catesby that afternoon.

Bulkeley had taken their side in the dispute, and Bulkeley's word was law.

Still, the Modern fellow was a prefect, and it was a very ticklish business defying a prefect.

bricks and plaster, and broken beams and shattered glass.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "The fire made a pretty good job of it!"

The juniors entered through the great doorway of the house.

Inside, the sunlight fell on the broken masonry.

It was difficult to tell where the separate rooms had existed, so complete was the smash.

"Hallo, my hat! That Modern cad has stalked us down, after all!"

Jimmy Silver was glancing through a shattered casement.

From the footpath, in the distance, Catesby of the Sixth had come in sight, striding straight towards the ruined house.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Lovell, in dismay. "This means a report to the Head!"

"How on earth did the Modern brute guess we were coming here?" grunted Raby.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"Keep out of sight," he muttered. "He mayn't know we're here. He may only be coming to see the show, same as we did."

"Well, that's so," agreed Lovell, relieved.

The Fourth-Formers kept carefully in cover, peering out cautiously at the prefect as he came on.

They realised now that their excursion was rather a more serious matter than they had understood at first.

They had come there carelessly enough, but they realised that, if the matter was reported to the Head, he would regard it as an act of flagrant disobedience to his express commands.

So it was, in point of fact, but the somewhat heedless juniors had not intended it.

They watched Stephen Catesby anxiously.

The Modern prefect came on, looking about him, and they wondered whether he was looking for them.

But he hardly glanced at the ruins.

Jimmy Silver remembered now that he had heard Catesby muttering over his letter—something about somebody he was to meet, and who he thought might as well have come to Rookwood.

Was this the place of appointment?

Catesby stopped at last, a dozen yards from the shattered building.

He stood there, looking about him.

"He's waiting for somebody," Lovell whispered, with a perplexed look. "He's not after us, Jimmy."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Some appointment with his precious sporting pals," grunted Raby. "It's pretty well known that Catesby knows Hook and his gang at Coombe."

"Tain't that! Why should they come as far as this to meet Catesby?"

"Oh, I give that up."

"Well, he's not after us, that's one comfort," murmured Newcome. "So long as we lie low, like Brer Fox, it's all serene."

"Hallo, there comes the other Johnny!" muttered Lovell.

From a different path through the woods a man appeared in sight—a tall well-dressed, middle-aged man, whose silk hat gleamed in the sunshine.

Catesby waved his hand to him, and moved off to meet him.

"My word," murmured Lovell, in blank amazement. "That's Catesby's uncle. I've seen him at Rookwood, when he's visited the cad. What on earth are they making here for?"

"May have come down for Catesby to show him over these blessed ruins," suggested Newcome.

"Oh, rot! He wouldn't take the trouble."

"Blessed if I see what else it can be," said Lovell. "I think we'd better get out of sight, in case they come in."

"Mind how you move! That damned wall may come down!"

"Careful!"

"They're coming this way! Quiet—they'll hear you!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

In a very unenviable frame of mind, the chums of the Fourth stood quite still.

In the silence voices came clearly to their ears from without.

Catesby and his uncle had stopped just outside the shattered doorway, and only a few yards separated them from the four—with a tottering wall and a heap of broken bricks interposing.

CHAPTER 2. Mysterious!

CATESBY'S voice sounded irritable as it came to the ears of the four juniors.

The Rookwood prefect was not in a good humour.

"Couldn't you have come to the school, Uncle James? I really don't see the neces-

sity for coming here at all—miles out of the way."

A cold, quiet, silky voice replied—a voice that the juniors instinctively did not like.

"There was a reason for it, Steve."

"I'm blessed if I see it!"

"I did not wish anyone to be aware that I had visited you, Stephen."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another uncomfortably as they heard that.

"But why ever—" began the Rookwood prefect, in astonishment.

"There is a reason. You told me in your letter of the fire at this place, and so I thought it would be a good place to meet, as you mentioned that it was placed out of bounds for the school."

"Yes, that's right enough, if you don't want any Rookwood fellows to see you," answered Catesby, in wonder. "But I don't see why not. You've visited me at Rookwood before."

"The matter is different now," answered James Catesby quietly. "But take a glance into the building, Stephen; someone may be there."

"Oh, the place is quite deserted," answered Catesby carelessly. "I've been here more time, and I've seen no one."

"Take a glance round, all the same."

"Oh, all right," said the Rookwood prefect, with ill-concealed impatience.

His footsteps were heard crunching the broken bricks.

Jimmy Silver & Co., after a startled glance at one another, ducked down among the masses of fallen brickwork.

They had not the slightest desire to see or hear anything of Catesby and his uncle; but they did not want to be spotted there by the Modern prefect.

Well they knew that it would mean being marched in to the Head as soon as they returned to Rookwood, to receive a severe caning, and possibly a "gating" for two or three half-holidays.

That was not "good enough."

They ducked among the ruins, and almost held their breath, as the Sixth-Former crunched in at the shattered doorway.

Catesby gave a perfunctory glance round, and returned to his uncle.

"Nobody there, uncle."

"Very good! Step into the doorway," said Mr. Catesby.

"It's very rough there."

"Never mind that."

They crunched over the fallen bricks and beams, so that the remaining portions of the doorway hid them from view from without.

Catesby was growing more and more surprised and impatient.

But he had to keep his feelings within bounds, so far as expressing them went; he did not care to quarrel with his relative.

Mr. Catesby was a wealthy gentleman, director of half a dozen companies, and was good for generous "tips."

"I dare say you are surprised, Stephen," said the banker, breathing rather hard after clambering over the debris.

"Well, yes, uncle."

"Never mind that. You are to keep secret the fact that you have met me to-day. Mention it to no one—in fact, forget it yourself."

"You gave me a hint in your letter," said Catesby. "I've not spoken to anyone about it. Why didn't you write in the usual way?"

"I thought it safer to send a lad from the village with the note," answered Mr. Catesby. "The post is sometimes unreliable, in these days, and one cannot be too careful."

"You speak as if it were some awful secret, uncle," said Catesby, in growing astonishment.

"It is not an awful secret, Stephen; but it is a secret. A great deal depends upon it—how, I need not explain to you. You have, I believe, a study to yourself at Rookwood?"

"Yes; all the seniors have."

"Quite so. You have some receptacle in your study that is perfectly safe, and never opened by anyone but yourself?"

"Yes, there's a locker, where I keep some things."

Catesby had nearly said "cigarettes," but he stopped in time.

"Only one key?"

"Yes."

"And you keep it about you?"

"Yes."

"Good! I wish you to take charge of some papers for me, Stephen, and place them in a safe place, and keep the place locked very carefully."

"Oh!" said the Rookwood prefect, in astonishment.

"They are rather valuable papers, Stephen, connected with some business I have in

hand, and I do not care to keep them in London, in case of destruction by fire."

"By—by fire!"

"Yes."

"Uncle!"

"Well?" he said grimly.

"Won't the papers be safer in a bank's vaults?"

"I have reason to believe that they will be safer at Rookwood."

"But—but Rookwood may catch fire as much as any other place," said the Sixth-Former.

"I did not come here for an argument, Stephen," said Mr. Catesby coldly.

"Well, why can't you be candid with me, uncle?" exclaimed Catesby. "I don't mind taking charge of the papers—I'd do anything you asked me. But fire isn't the reason."

There was a short silence.

"I have no other reason to give you," said Mr. Catesby, at last. "You should not ask questions, Stephen. Will you take charge of the papers?"

"Of course."

"That is enough, then."

"Uncle!"

"Well?"

"I—I—" Catesby stammered. "I—I— There's nothing fishy about it, I suppose?"

"Fishy?"

"I—I mean wrong!" stammered the prefect.

"Stephen!"

"You—you're so jolly mysterious about it," muttered Catesby. "Of—of course; I know there's nothing wrong about it."

"I trust so," said Mr. Catesby. "I am simply asking you to render me a little service for a few weeks. If you do not care to undertake it—"

"I'll do it with pleasure, uncle."

"Very well, then. Here are the papers."

The banker handed his nephew a thick, sealed, heavy envelope.

"By gad, it weighs a bit!" said Catesby.

"Only papers?"

"Yes, legal papers. Put it out of sight."

Catesby slid the large envelope into the inside pocket of his coat.

"It's safe there, uncle."

"Very good. Mind, no eyes but your own are to see it, and get it locked up as quickly as possible. The consequences might be serious if you are not discreet. How are

you off for money, Stephen?" asked Mr. Catesby, changing the subject abruptly.

"Hard up, as usual," said Catesby, with a smile. "Everything's so jolly dear—"

"No reason why you should be pushed for money, my boy. I suppose two fivers would be very useful to you?"

"By gad, I should say so!"

"Well, I have brought them for you."

"I say, you're awfully good, uncle!" said Catesby, in amazed delight.

He had expected two or three pounds at the most.

"Not at all, my boy. By the way, how do you get on with George Bulkeley? He is in your Form, I believe?"

"Yes; he's head of the Sixth and captain of Rookwood," said Catesby. "I don't pull with him very well."

"Really, you should try to do so, as his father is your uncle's partner," said Mr. Catesby, a little severely.

"Ye-es, but—"

"You don't like him?"

"Well, no. You see, he's a Classical, and we Moderns are rather up against the Classical side. My pal, Knowles, is generally against Bulkeley, and I back him up. We don't consider that we get a fair show at games, for one thing. Some of us think that Knowles ought to be captain of Rookwood."

"If Bulkeley left—"

"Oh, Knowles would get in as skipper then," said Catesby. "I wish he would. It would be ever so much better for me and my set."

"Such a thing may happen," said Mr. Catesby.

"Eh? Why should Bulkeley leave?" exclaimed Catesby. "Is his pater thinking of taking him away?"

"Possibly he may have to do so," answered Mr. Catesby drily. "Of course, not a word about this, Stephen. I know I can rely on your discretion."

"Yes, rather," said Catesby.

"I will get back to the station now. Don't leave here till I have been gone ten minutes. It will be better. Good-bye, my boy! If you find yourself in need of money, let your uncle know."

"I will, uncle. Thanks. Good bye!"

Mr. Catesby walked quickly away, and disappeared in the wood.

Catesby of the Sixth stood staring after him blankly.

"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated. "This beats it—beats it hollow! What's all the dashed mystery about?"

The Rookwood senior shook his head over that question.

He was puzzled, but he was feeling very contented.

Ten pounds meant quite an extensive little run among the sporting fraternity at the Bird-in-Hand, and there was more to come if he wanted it—and he was very likely to want it.

Stephen Catesby was looking very bright when he sauntered back at last from the ruined house, with the mysterious package safely concealed inside his coat.

CHAPTER 4.

Rather a Puzzle!

"GREAT Scott!"
Arthur Edward Lovell relieved his feelings with that exclamation as Catesby vanished in the distance.

The Fistical Four emerged from the dusty ruins.

They were amazed—or, rather, that word did not express their feelings.

They were, as Raby put it, simply flabbergasted.

They were feeling very uncomfortable, too.

They had been forced into the position of listening to the secret interview between Catesby and his uncle quite against their will.

For Mr. Catesby's mysterious communications with his nephew they did not care a rap. They were not curious, and they were not interested.

They would much rather have warned the speakers of their presence, and so escaped hearing the talk, but as that meant placing themselves at the mercy of the malicious prefect they could scarcely be expected to do so.

To do Catesby a good turn, and to be reported by him to the Head in consequence was not quite good enough.

"Anybody guess what all that means?" asked Lovell, looking at his chums inquiringly.

"Don't ask me!" said Newcome. "It

beats me hollow! It seems to beat Catesby hollow, too, from what he said."

"The merry old gent seems to have taken to play-acting late in life," grinned Raby. "Secret meetings and mysterious documents, like a blessed heavy villain in a drama."

"He's a banker, I believe," said Lovell. "I wonder whether he's been pinching some of the bank's funds, and brought 'em to Catesby to hide."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It's jolly queer," said Jimmy Silver.

"But it's no business of ours. I'm sorry I heard their silly burbling, but it couldn't be helped."

"Well, I don't see how it could. We couldn't be expected to show up and ask to be reported to the Head for breaking bounds, I suppose."

"No jolly fear!"

"I say, he's a deep old codger," said Raby thoughtfully. "This is the very best spot for a secret meeting, only we happened to be here out of bounds. If he had to inquire his way to the place, he would only be taken for a sightseer who wanted to see the damage. I—I suppose we'd better say nothing about all this."

"Not a word!" said Jimmy Silver. "The old duffer wants it kept dark that he's met his nephew. Besides, if we spoke about it, Catesby would know that we'd been out of bounds. A still tongue makes a wise head."

And with that the Fistical Four, puzzled as they were, dismissed the matter from their minds, and proceeded to explore the ruins.

Having risked their limbs half a dozen times, and covered themselves with dust, they were satisfied.

On their way back to Rookwood, late in the afternoon, they met Tommy Dodd & Co. in Coombe Lane.

The three Tommies were looking wrathful.

"Hallo, you fellows been to the ruins?" asked Tommy Dodd, stopping.

"Ruins!" said Jimmy Silver. "What ruins?"

"The house that was burnt out, fathead. We were going, and we met that worm Catesby, and he turned us back. I believe he'd been there himself, too!" exclaimed Tommy wrathfully.

"What, a prefect out of bounds!" said Lovell, looking shocked.

"Well his boots and bags looked jolly

dusty," said Tommy Cook. "Same as yours do, you bouncers!"

"Sure," remarked Tommy Doyle, "if you haven't been to Woodend, you'd better dust yourselves before you go in, or they'll think ye have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. acted upon that excellent advice, and carefully removed the dust, which was just as well, for they passed Catesby in the quadrangle when they went in.

The Modern prefect looked at them, and gave Jimmy Silver a scowl.

Jimmy gave him a smile and a nod in return, which had the effect of blackening Catesby's scowl still further.

Bulkeley and Neville were chatting in the hall when the Fistical Four came into the School House.

Bulkeley seemed in very cheerful spirits, and the juniors heard his remarks on the coming cricket season.

Bulkeley was laying great plans for cricket that season, apparently, and Jimmy Silver could not help glancing at him curiously, remembering what Mr. Catesby had said concerning the possibility that Bulkeley might be leaving the school.

If that was a real possibility it was evident that George Bulkeley knew nothing about it.

Jimmy was rather thoughtful when he went into the end study to tea with his chums.

The Rookwood captain was so popular that all the juniors would have felt it as a blow if he had left Rookwood.

Why should Mr. Catesby have referred to it as a possibility?

Mr. Bulkeley, perhaps, might have confided such an intention to his partner. But why should he think of taking his son away before his time was up?

Jimmy was puzzled.

It was odd enough that he should know more about the Rookwood captain's future prospects than Bulkeley himself knew, and he wished he did not know.

But that could not be helped.

"That old merchant was talking out of his hat!" Lovell remarked suddenly, as he was scraping the last fragment of marmalade out of the jar.

"Eh? What old merchant?" asked Jimmy.

"Old Catesby. He was burbling some rot

about Bulkeley leaving. Bulkeley isn't leaving!"

"You don't know, old scout."

"But I do know!" said Lovell. "I've heard Bulkeley speaking about the footer next term. He expects to be here then. I suppose he knows as much about his own business as old Catesby knows."

"Well, he ought to," admitted Jimmy.

"That old merchant don't like Bulkeley. I could tell that by the tone of his voice," added Lovell. "They're a pair, uncle and nephew, I think. Catesby's a cad, and his uncle's much the same. I shouldn't wonder if that precious packet was some swindle or other."

"Oh, draw it mild, old chap!" said Raby.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder!" snorted Lovell. "What's all the mystery about if there's nothing fishy in it?"

But that was a question to which no answer could be found in the end study.

CHAPTER 5.

The Shadow of Trouble!

"I 'VE got an idea!"

Jimmy Silver made that remark a few days later, as he was sauntering in the sunny quadrangle with his chums after lessons.

The Fistical Four had forgotten by that time about the mysterious meeting at Woodend.

They had other things to think about, and the meeting of Mr. Catesby with his nephew had passed from their minds.

Jimmy had been thinking, but not about that affair, which did not interest him in the least.

"Go ahead!" yawned Lovell. "Don't say it's another pillow-raid on the Moderns. I'm fed up with Knowles jumping on us."

"Better the Moderns! I'm thinking of lines!"

"Lines?"

"Precisely. Bulkeley has given me a hundred lines."

"Rotten!"

"Considering the way we back Bulkeley up against the Modern cads, it's rather ungrateful," continued Jimmy Silver. "He might have known that it was an accident my sending a cricket-ball in at his study window. Besides, how could I help the blessed ball knocking his inkstand over?"

"Perhaps he thinks accidents like that ought not to happen?" grinned Raby.

"Well, accidents will happen; but I don't want the lines to happen. You know how Mr. Bootles has been jawin' us about not wasting any paper. Well, it seems to me a sinful waste of paper to do impots."

"Ha, ha! So it is!"

"It's a sin and a shame," pursued Jimmy Silver. "I was thinking of pointing that out to Bulkeley instead of doing the lines. I'm sure he'd see it, as a sensible chap, and perhaps thank me for the suggestion."

"And perhaps give you some of the ash-plant."

"Well," said Jimmy thoughtfully, "I'll keep rather near the door while I'm making the suggestion. You never do know how to take a prefect. Hallo, Erroll, you're a sensible chap. What do you think of this idea?"

Erroll and Mornington came along, and Jimmy explained his bright idea to them. They grinned.

"I'd certainly keep near the door," said Erroll.

"And don't try it on Carthew, anyway," advised Mornington. "You can generally depend on Bulkeley's good temper, though."

"Isn't it a good idea?" demanded Jimmy. "Oh, rippin'!"

"Well, I'm going to put it to Bulkeley. It's a half-holiday to-day, and I don't see wasting it in doing lines."

And Jimmy Silver—not very hopefully, perhaps—proceeded to Bulkeley's study.

Tubby Muffin met him in the passage.

"I say, Silver, something's up," said Tubby. "Bulkeley's had a letter."

"Did he show it to you and ask your opinion about it, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

"He looked jolly queer when he was reading it," said Tubby. "I was watching him—I mean, I happened to see him. His father's coming down to-day."

"Br-r-r-r!" grinned the captain of the Fourth. "Why don't you learn to mind your own bizney, Tubby?"

"Well, you know, I rather like old Bulkeley," said Muffin. "I'll be sorry if he leaves Rookwood."

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Leaves Rookwood! What are you talking about, you fat duffer?"

"Well, I heard him say to Neville this afternoon, you know——"

"You hear too much, Tubby. Come here, and I'll pull your ear!"

Tubby Muffin did not accept that invitation. He scuttled off to find someone more interested in his news and surmises.

Jimmy Silver tapped at Bulkeley's door. There was no reply from within, and he opened the door and glanced in to see whether the Rookwood captain was in his quarters.

Bulkeley was there, but he did not look up.

He was sitting at his table staring at the open window on the quad.

His face was pale and troubled, and he was evidently sunk in deep and painful thought.

Jimmy Silver started as he looked at him.

He had never seen the head of the Sixth looking like that before.

Bulkeley had not heard his knock, and had not noticed his entrance.

He was deep in a troubled reverie.

Jimmy Silver coughed loudly.

Then the captain of Rookwood started and looked round quickly.

A slight flush came into his face.

"Silver!" His voice was unusually sharp. "What do you want? You shouldn't come in without knocking."

"I did knock, Bulkeley."

"Oh, I didn't hear you!" said Bulkeley. "What is it? Don't bother me now. I—I'm expecting my father."

"I—I'll get off; it doesn't matter, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver hurriedly.

It went straight to Jimmy's heart to see old Bulkeley looking like that.

Bulkeley passed his hand across his forehead.

"I—I'm rather worried," he said. "Never mind. What is it, Silver? Didn't I give you some lines? Lay them on the table, kid."

"I—I haven't done them."

"You needn't do them. Shut the door after you!"

"Yes, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver very softly.

He went out, and closed the door very quietly.

His chums were waiting for him in the quadrangle, and they grinned as he rejoined them.

"Any luck?" asked Lovell.

"Did you get the ash-plant?" grinned Newcome.

"Hallo! You're lookin' jolly serious," remarked Mornington, noticing the expression on Jimmy's face. "Anythin' up?"

"Bulkeley's let me off the lines."

"By gad! What for?"

"He—he's worried about something, I think," said Jimmy. "I'm sorry I went in. He's expecting his pater here, too."

"Nothing to worry him in that, surely?" said Erroll.

"I suppose not."

Jimmy Silver walked along with his chums, his brows knitted.

The Fistical Four strolled through the gates, three of them eyeing Jimmy very oddly.

"What's the row?" asked Lovell.

"Eh?"

"Fathead! Is there something up with Bulkeley?"

"I—I'm afraid so," faltered Jimmy. "He was looking awfully worried when I went in. That fat bouncer Muffin says he was looking queer over a letter to-day, and that he said something to Neville about leaving Rookwood."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Leaving Rookwood!" repeated Newcome, with a stare. "Then there's something in it, after all."

Jimmy looked quite miserable, as he felt.

"I don't understand it," he said. "There may be something wrong at home; and, if so, old Catesby knew about it that day at Woodend. Poor old Bulkeley! It gave me a regular twinge when I saw his face."

The chums of the Fourth walked on in silence, perplexed and troubled.

If old Bulkeley was in any trouble, there were many fellows at Rookwood who would feel it, and the Fistical Four were among them.

The captain of the school was a tremendous big gun in the eyes of the Fourth, but with all his great dignity as captain and head prefect, Bulkeley was so kind and good-hearted that the fags liked him as much as they respected him.

There was a rattle of wheels on the dusty road, and the station hack from Coombe came jolting by.

The juniors glanced at it, recognising the somewhat stately gentleman who sat within.

It was Mr. Bulkeley, the father of the Rookwood captain.

The juniors had seen him a few weeks before, when he was visiting Rookwood, and they were struck by the change in his appearance now.

The handsome old gentleman seemed to have aged years in those few weeks, and there was an expression of haunting trouble on his lined face that he could not control.

They raised their caps to him as the hack passed, but he did not even see them.

As the vehicle rolled on in a flutter of dust they stared after it.

"That's Bulkeley's pater," said Lovell, breaking a long silence.

"He looks rotten!" muttered Raby. "I—I say, there must be some bad news for Bulkeley. But—but what—"

The Fistical Four had intended to spend that afternoon in a rag on the Bagshot fellows.

But they were not feeling inclined for a rag now.

The shadow of Bulkeley's trouble, whatever it was, had fallen upon them.

CHAPTER 6.

Black Shame!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were hanging about the lane aimlessly, feeling disturbed and bothered, when Tubby Muffin came out at the school gates.

Tubby spotted the Fistical Four, and joined them.

"I say, Jimmy, it's pretty thick, ain't it?" he said breathlessly. "Yow-ow-ow!"

"What are you yow-ow-owing about?" snapped Jimmy crossly.

"That beast Neville kicked me!"

"Serve you right, I dare say!"

"The beast thought I was listening," said Tubby, with an injured expression. "Of course, I wasn't!"

"Of course, you were!" granted Lovell.

"But ain't it queer about Bulkeley?" pursued Tubby, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "What's his pater done, Jimmy?"

"You fat idiot, he's done nothing! What do you mean?"

"Then what's he going to be arrested for?"

"Arrested!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"I thought that would make you jump!"

grinned Tubby Muffin, with great satisfaction. "Hallo! Wharrer you at? Leggo! Oh, crumbs!"

Jimmy Silver grasped the fat Classical by the collar and shook him forcibly.

"You fat fool!" he roared. "How dare you babble such rot! How dare you, you fabulous ass!"

"Yow-ow-ow-wooop!"

"Chuck him into the ditch!" growled Lovell.

"I've a jolly good mind to!" panted Jimmy savagely.

"Yow-ow! I—I say, wharrer marrer?" gasped Tubby. "I'm sorry for old Bulkeley, ain't I—in fact, I'm awfully sympathetic! It will be the finish for him at Rookwood if his father goes to chocky. Here, you keep off, you beast!"

"What are you driving at?" shouted Lovell. "Are you drunk or dreaming?"

"Well, I only know what he said himself!" gasped Tubby. "I suppose he knows. He said distinctly to Bulkeley, 'It may come to my arrest. I felt that I must see you, my boy, to give you my last assurance that I am innocent—as innocent as a baby.' Those were his very words!"

The Fistical Four stared at Tubby Muffin. It was evident that the fat Classical was speaking the truth.

He had heard Mr. Bulkeley utter those words to his son.

Jimmy Silver felt utterly sick at heart.

What terrible misfortune was hanging over Bulkeley's head, then?

"Good heavens!" muttered Lovell, his ruddy face quite pale.

"It—it can't be true!" stammered Raby.

"Well, he said so himself," said Tubby Muffin. "Old Bulkeley gave a sort of gasp. He seemed hard hit, I thought. The old gent went on to say that he didn't know what had become of the bonds."

"The bonds?" repeated Jimmy mechanically.

"Yes, I believe bonds are those valuable papers and things they have in banks," said Tubby vaguely. "Must be jolly valuable to be worth twenty thousand pounds. That's the amount Mr. Bulkeley mentioned. I say, Jimmy, how could he lose twenty thousand pounds without knowing it?"

"Oh!" muttered Jimmy, amazed and aghast.

"I suppose he was responsible for the bonds, being a banker, perhaps," surmised

Tubby Muffin. "Perhaps somebody's pinched them, and old Bulkeley doesn't know how they went. They must think he pinched them if they're going to arrest him. Do you think Bulkeley's pater would pinch them, Jimmy?"

"Oh, shut up!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "Poor old Bulkeley! Poor old chap!"

"Well, if he pinches bonds and things, he ought to be collared," said Tubby Muffin judicially. "Must draw a line somewhere. I say, fancy Catesby's uncle turning up such a trump, too!"

"Eh? What has Catesby's uncle to do with it?"

"He's the old chap's partner, you know—and Mr. Bulkeley said that his only comfort had been the way James Catesby had stood by him and expressed the firmest faith in him, and something like that."

"Shouldn't have expected it of that silky old merchant, anyway!" muttered Lovell.

"Hallo! There's Tommy Dodd! I've got to speak to Duddy!"

Lovell caught the fat Classical by the shoulder.

"You sneaking, eavesdropping worm!" he said savagely. "I suppose Mr. Bulkeley didn't say all this to our skipper in the passage where anybody could hear him?"

"No fear! They were in Bulkeley's study, of course; and the door jolly well closed!" grinned Tubby.

"Then how did you hear them?"

"I—I say— Leggo!"

"How did you hear them?" roared Lovell fiercely.

"I—I— It was rather curious," stammered Tubby. "I—I happened to stop near Bulkeley's door to—to admire the view from the passage window, and—and being near the keyhole, as it happened, I—I—"

"You fat sneak!"

"I say—leggo! I wasn't listening, of course! That beast Neville thought I was listening when he came along the passage, and he kicked me—jolly hard! I wanted to hear the rest—I mean, I—I hadn't finished looking at the view—when that brute suddenly landed out and sent me fairly sprawling."

"And now I'll do the same!" growled Lovell.

"Yaroooh!"

Tubby Muffin gave a terrific howl as Lovell spun him round and planted his boot on his fat person.

The fat Classical bolted along the lane yelling.

And it was a quarter of an hour before he confided his startling story to any other fellows—in strict confidence, of course.

Before bed-time it was pretty certain that all Rookwood would have been taken into strict confidence by Tubby Muffin on the subject of Bulkeley's father.

The Fistical Four looked at one another grimly and miserably.

If old Bulkeley had been their elder brother, and the shadow of shame and ruin had extended to themselves they could hardly have felt the blow more keenly.

"That'll be all over the school soon!" muttered Lovell. "That fat idiot won't keep his tongue between his teeth. I—I suppose it's true."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"It's bound to come out, Tubby or no Tubby," he said. "As far as I make out, there's twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds missing from the bank, and Mr. Bulkeley is suspected of making away with them."

"He didn't do it," said Raby.

Jimmy was silent.

Whether Mr. Bulkeley was innocent or guilty was a question the juniors had no means of deciding, or even forming an opinion on.

They were naturally prejudiced in his favour by the fact that he was George Bulkeley's father; but they knew very well that a gentleman in his position would not be suspected without very strong reasons.

It was of Bulkeley they thought chiefly.

He would have to leave Rookwood—under a cloud of disgrace and infamy.

His father a thief—old Bulkeley's father a thief!

It was incredible and almost too horrible for words.

Well they knew how the Rookwood captain would be bowed down under the shame and misery of it, whether it was true or false.

The bright sunshine was on the road, but to the chums of Rookwood the whole earth seemed to have become suddenly clouded.

Poor old Bulkeley!

That was all that they could say or think.

A man came up the road from the village, and paused as he saw the juniors near the school gates.

They hardly observed him but as he

approached them the four gave him some attention.

He was a quietly-dressed man in a dark coat and bowler-hat, with a thin, sharp face and very keen, ferrety eyes.

"Excuse me," he said, and his voice was as sharp as his face. "You belong to this school, I think—Rookwood?"

"Yes," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Are you acquainted with a boy named Bulkeley?"

Jimmy started.

"He's our captain," he answered.

His eyes glinted at the man. It came into his mind that the stranger was a plain-clothes policeman; he hardly knew why.

"Can you tell me whether he has had a visitor this afternoon?" asked the man civilly enough. "I have a reason for asking."

"His father's come to see him," said Raby, without thinking.

"Thank you!"

The man turned towards the gates of the school.

Jimmy Silver's face became quite pale as he understood. He wondered that he had not understood at first.

He gave his chums a look of terror.

"You—you see?" he breathed. "It—it's a policeman!"

"Jimmy!"

"After Bulkeley's pater!" stammered Lovell.

The Fistical Four stared dumbly after the man.

Knowing what they did, they could guess the rest. Mr. Bulkeley, under suspicion already, had suddenly left London—and his arrest had been determined on at once. And this man—evidently a detective—had followed with a warrant in his pocket.

The juniors were almost frozen with the horror of it.

To this hard-faced man the task was simply part of his usual work—a job he had to do.

But to Bulkeley—to all the Rookwood fellows!

An arrest in the school—the Rookwood captain's father taken away in custody!

Jimmy Silver panted.

"Keep that man back a minute, you fellows," he whispered. "I'm going to cut in and warn Bulkeley. It—it shan't take place before all Rookwood if I can help it. Keep him a minute."

"Right! But how?"

"Bump him over and chance it."

"All right! Serve him right, too—hang him!" said Lovell.

It was a reckless proceeding enough. But the chums of the Fourth did not stop to think. There was no time for thinking.

The detective had nearly reached the school gates when they overtook him.

Jimmy, in his excitement, caught him by the arm, and the man stared at him in astonishment.

"You've come here for Mr. Bulkeley?" panted Jimmy.

No answer.

"You're a detective?"

"I am a detective," said the man quietly, "and you young fellows had better let me get about my business. Hands off, you young fools!"

The juniors were round him threateningly.

"Answer me then!" said Jimmy. "Are you after Mr. Bulkeley?"

"Yes."

"That's enough."

Jimmy Silver ran on to the gates, and the detective strode angrily after him almost as quickly as he ran.

But a foot came in the way, and the man from London rolled over in the road with a gasping howl.

Lovell & Co. ran in, grasped the heavy bronze gates, and closed them with a rush.

The next moment the angry man's face was staring at them between the bars, and the three juniors were holding the gates shut against him.

CHAPTER 7.

The Blow Falls!

JIMMY SILVER ran breathlessly into the School House.

His face, white and excited, drew many glances on him as he ran.

Jimmy did not heed.

As he dashed into the House he fairly collided with his Form-master, Mr. Bootles, who was moving along at his usual slow and stately pace.

Mr. Bootles staggered.

"What—what—Silver!" he gasped.

The Fourth-Former did not even stop to apologise to Mr. Bootles.

He rushed on to Bulkeley's study in the Sixth Form corridor.

"Bless my soul!" stuttered Mr. Bootles.

"Is the boy mad? Bless my soul!"

Knock, knock!

Jimmy's fist crashed on Bulkeley's door.

Without waiting for an answer from within he threw the door open, and entered the study breathlessly.

Mr. Bulkeley was there in the Rookwood captain's armchair, looking pale and worn.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was standing before him. But he swung round with an exclamation of fierce anger as Jimmy Silver burst in.

"You young rascal!" he shouted. "How dare you? Get out!"

He advanced on Jimmy with blazing eyes.

"Hold on, Bulkeley!" panted Jimmy.

"I'll—"

"I—I came to warn you! He's coming!" stuttered Jimmy, gasping for breath. "He will be here in a minute! I came to tell you—"

"He? Who? What do you mean, you young fool?"

"The detective!"

Bulkeley staggered back.

"The—the detective!" he stammered.

"A detective! What—"

Mr. Bulkeley rose to his feet, his lips trembling.

"I feared it, but I did not look for it here, George," he said in tremulous tones. "They have acted quickly. My boy"—his voice was quite kind as he spoke to Jimmy Silver—"how do you know what you have just stated?"

Jimmy explained breathlessly.

Bulkeley stood as if turned to stone.

His face was ashen.

"Father!" he muttered brokenly.

"Father! Father, where are you going?"

"The man is detained at the gates," said the old gentleman hurriedly. "I will go there at once, George; I will save you what disgrace I can. Heaven knows I would not have come here if I could have foreseen this."

"Father!"

"Good-bye, my boy!"

"Father! You—you can't—you shan't!" Bulkeley's look was almost wild. "They're keeping him out! You—you can get away, father—escape—"

"George!" The old gentleman's voice was severely rebuking. "It is for the guilty

to attempt escape, not the innocent. Good-bye, my boy!"

He grasped his son's hand, and strode from the study.

The unfortunate man had only one thought now—to save a scene of disgrace at Rookwood School that would never be forgotten.

Bulkeley looked after him dazedly, and then, with a groan, he covered his face with his hands.

Jimmy Silver slipped from the study. His eyes were full of tears.

In the quadrangle there was a buzz of voices, and Jimmy ran to the door.

Across the quad came the hard-featured man in the bowler hat, with knitted brows.

He had entered in spite of Lovell & Co.—old Mack had come out of his lodge at the furious ringing of the bell, and the juniors had been forced to give way.

He was half-way across the quad when he saw Mr. Bulkeley advancing to meet him, and he smiled grimly and quickened his pace.

Fellows were looking on from all sides. Who the man was, and what he wanted, they did not know, but it was clear that something unusual was in progress.

A hundred pairs of eyes were upon the two men as they met in the old quadrangle of Rookwood School.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding out, his face white, his eyes glinting, and he ran to join his father.

Upon that father's shoulder the hand of the man from London had lightly fallen.

"You are my prisoner, Geoffrey Bulkeley!" he said in a low, distinct voice.

There was a gasp from the Rookwood fellows.

Jimmy Silver set his teeth hard.

He could have struck the man down with pleasure—yet, after all, the detective was only doing his duty.

Amazement and consternation were written in every face now.

"By gad, what does it mean?" gasped Smythe of the Shell, blinking on at the scene in utter astonishment.

Knowles and Catesby of the Modern Sixth were looking on, equally astonished with the rest.

At that moment Cecil Knowles felt almost sorry for his old rival, so terrible was the expression of grief and horror and indignation in poor George Bulkeley's face.

"For mercy's sake get me away from this!" Mr. Bulkeley was muttering in the detective's ear. "You need not have inflicted this on me."

"I had my orders, sir, when you left London—"

"Let us go! I am your prisoner. For mercy's sake—"

"We shall take the hack."

"Let it follow us, then."

The detective hesitated a moment, but he was not perhaps so hard as he looked.

"Very well, sir—Stand back, boy! What do you want?" he added sharply.

Bulkeley's fists were clenched, and his eyes blazing. He was no master of himself at that moment.

His father pushed him back.

"My boy, calm yourself! You cannot help me! Calm yourself! Go in—go in!"

The detective hurried his prisoner away to the gates, and the driver of the hack followed with his vehicle down the gravel path.

The crowd of fellows watched them go, and then all eyes were turned on Bulkeley.

Knowles tapped him on the arm as he stood dazed.

"Bulkeley! What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

The captain of Rookwood burst into a wild laugh.

"Mean! It means that they're mad—hang them! It means that some rogue has stolen bonds from the bank, and they're fools enough and villains enough to say that my father did it!"

"Bonds!" repeated Catesby. "From the bank!"

"Your father!" Knowles, to do him justice, was shocked. "Bulkeley, nobody here will believe it! Buck up, old fellow!"

Bulkeley turned away without replying, and moved away blindly towards the house. Neville of the Sixth ran to him and gave him his arm. The stalwart captain of Rookwood was moving with uncertain steps, as if all his strength had deserted him.

In the quadrangle the crowd broke up with a buzz of amazed and horrified comment.

The hack had rolled away towards the station; Mr. Bulkeley was gone.

He was gone to the prison gates that would be shut on him till he stood his trial.

That evening all Rookwood was in a buzz

with the news—from the Head down to the smallest fag nothing else was thought of. And Bulkeley?

The captain of Rookwood remained shut up in his study.

He had refused admittance even to his chum, Neville.

During the long, black hours he was alone.

Jimmy Silver late in the evening ventured near the study; he heard from within the monotonous tramp of feet—to and fro, to and fro.

A steady, tireless tramp, telling of the unresting misery shut up in the gloomy room.

And when, before bed-time, Jimmy came to the study again, his heart aching for the kind fellow upon whom this fearful misfortune had fallen, he heard still the unwearied tramp of Bulkeley's feet within.

The dull, monotonous sound haunted Jimmy Silver in his dreams that night.

CHAPTER 8.

The Testimonial!

"WHEREAS——"

"That's a good word!" said Lovell approvingly.

"Jolly good!" said Raby.

And Newcome nodded approval.

"Whereas——" recommenced Jimmy Silver.

"Sounds well," said Lovell. "Makes it a bit like a legal document. Still, it's impressive."

"Don't interrupt, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. "Let a chap finish. 'Whereas——'"

The door of the end study opened as Jimmy Silver reached that point once more. Tubby Muffin looked in.

"You chaps having tea?" he asked.

"No!" hooted Jimmy Silver. "Scoot!"

"I was going to offer you a whack in my sardines," said Tubby, in an injured tone. "I've got a whole tin."

"Oh, bless your sardines! 'Whereas——'"

"Hold on, though!" said Raby. "Tea's pretty skinny to-day, and if Tubby wants to stand some sardines, no reason why he shouldn't. He's generally scoffing a fellow's grub instead of whacking it out."

"Look here, am I going to read out this

testimonial, or am I not going to read out this testimonial?" roared Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose you're going to, as you've made it up," answered Arthur Edward Lovell calmly. "In fact, I don't believe that all the King's horses and all the King's men could prevent you doing it. We may as well have the sardines, all the same."

"Whereas——"

"Got the tin with you, Tubby?" asked Newcome, showing more interest in Tubby Muffin's sardines than in Jimmy Silver's testimonial.

"Here they are, old chap."

"Then come in and have tea with us," said Lovell. "We've got a cake!"

"Oh, good!" said Tubby Muffin.

And the fat Classical rolled in.

Jimmy Silver gave a snort.

He had been busy with pen and paper while his three chums were getting tea, and now he was going to read out his composition, the Co. politely letting tea wait while he did it.

Still, they were hungry.

"Go on, Jimmy!" said Lovell encouragingly. "You can read it out while I open the sardines, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," grunted the captain of the Fourth. "Listen to this, then: 'Whereas——'"

"Seen the tin-opener, anybody?"

Jimmy Silver shrieked. He really seemed fated to get no farther than "Whereas."

"Will you shut up?"

"I want the tin-opener."

"Blow the tin-opener! Dry up! 'Whereas——'"

"I can't open a tin of sardines with my fingers, Jimmy. If you can, you're welcome to try."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Here it is," said Newcome, laughing.

"Thanks! Go on, Jimmy."

"Whereas——"

"Yaroooo!"

"You shrieking ass, what are you yelling for?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"I've jabbed this dashed tin-opener into my dashed thumb all through listening to your dashed testimonial instead of seeing what I was doing with this dashed tin!" howled Lovell.

"Serve you right! Shut up! 'Whereas——'"

"Yow-ow!"

"I won't read it out!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "You silly chumps can sign it without reading it at all!"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Raby, with a chuckle. "You needn't say 'Whereas' any more. We know that bit by heart. Get a move on!"

"Whereas," said Jimmy Silver, with a ferocious glare at his chums—"whereas, the Rookwood Fourth, Classical and Modern, feel shocked and indignant at the accusation brought against Bulkeley's pater, and whereas they feel sure that it is all a silly mistake, and Bulkeley's pater is as innocent as a baby, and that his accusers are a set of silly idiots, they hereby—"

"Who? The silly idiots?" asked Raby.

"No, ass! The Fourth Form. They hereby testify that their confidence in George Bulkeley of the Sixth Form, captain of Rookwood School, is boundless and unshaken, and they are prepared to back him up to the last shot in the locker."

"Bravo!"

"That all?"

"No, it isn't all. Listen! They beg Bulkeley of the Sixth, their respected captain, not to think of leaving Rookwood, as some cads have suggested he should, but to stick it out. They are further assured that his pater's innocence will be proved in the long run, and all will be serene. In witness whereof—"

"Oh, good!"

"In witness whereof, they herewith append their hands and seals."

"Topping!"

"Ripping!"

"Bravo!"

Jimmy Silver smiled, a little complacently, quite mollified by that praise from his study-mates.

Jimmy flattered himself that he had drawn up that testimonial rather well.

Certainly, it left no doubt as to the opinion of Jimmy Silver & Co., and all the Fistical Four agreed that it ought to please Bulkeley no end.

The Rookwood captain, being under a cloud—and such a cloud—could not fail to be bucked by learning that the Fourth Form—Classical and Modern—still reposed the most unbounded faith in him.

At least, the chums of the Fourth were sure of it.

Tubby Muffin blinked up from his sardines. He was busy with them already.

"Chaps going to sign that, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Every chap in the Fourth," answered Jimmy. "It will let all Rookwood know what the Fourth Form thinks of old Bulkeley. Knowles and Catesby and Cartwright and other rotters will see that they're in a minority."

"But they're in the Sixth," said Tubby. "They won't take much notice of the Fourth, will they?"

"Fathead! Get on with your sardines, and don't talk rot!"

"Besides, how do you know Bulkeley's father is innocent?" persisted Tubby. "He's been arrested for stealing a lot of bonds from the bank."

"He didn't do it."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, you're a silly ass! We know Bulkeley, don't we? Well, it stands to reason that old Bulkeley's pater wouldn't do a dirty trick like that."

"The police think he did!"

"Who cares what the police think?" answered Jimmy Silver disdainfully. "Aren't they always arresting the wrong people for wrong things?"

"Not that I know of. Are they?"

"Well, perhaps not always," said Jimmy, modifying his somewhat sweeping statement. "But sometimes. It happens occasionally, and this is one of the occasions. Here's a pen. Sign here, you fellows."

The Fistical Four signed in turn.

They had no hesitation whatever in testifying to their faith in the honour of Mr. Bulkeley, mainly because Bulkeley of the Sixth was a fine fellow, a good-natured prefect, and a tremendous man at games.

Fourth-Form reasoning was not, perhaps, very logical, but the Fourth-Formers were satisfied with it.

"But, I say," began Tubby, who seemed to be in an argumentative mood, "Peele and Gower were saying—"

"Sign here, Muffin!"

"But I don't think—"

"That's no news; you never do. Sign here."

"You jolly well shan't have any cake if you don't sign!" exclaimed Lovell warmly.

"Oh, gimme that pen, Jimmy, old chap!" said Tubby Muffin. "Of course, I believe that old Bulkeley's pater is innocent, come to think of it. There you are! I'll sign it twice if you like."

"You fat duffer! Now, after tea we'll take this round the Fourth," said Jimmy Silver. "Every chap will sign it, I know. He'll jolly well get his nose punched if he doesn't. I say, these are good sardines. A good idea of yours to whack them out in this study, Tubby."

The door opened again, and Flynn of the Classical Fourth put a somewhat excited face into the end study.

"See that thafe of the worruld, Muffin?" he exclaimed. "Oh, there you are! You thaving young sweep—"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Lovell. "Let Tubby alone. He's the founder of the merry feast."

"Sure, he's pinched me sardines!" roared Flynn.

"What?"

"Me illigant sardines; and by the same token I've got nothing for me tea but the bread. I'll scalp him!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell.

Flynn rushed after Tubby Muffin, who dodged him wildly round the table.

"Keep him off, Jimmy!" he yelled.

"You young villain!" shouted Lovell. "They're Flynn's sardines you've brought here, are they?"

"Yaroo! Keep him off!"

Tubby Muffin roared as Patrick O'Donovan Flynn collared him.

The Fistical Four glared at him in wrath.

They understood now that unexpected generosity on Tubby's part.

He had "whacked out" the sardines in order to get protection when their owner came after them.

"You young spoofer!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Yaroo! Help! Stand by a chap when he's stood you a feed!" howled Tubby.

"Yah! Draggimoff!"

The Fistical Four were not proof against that appeal.

They seized the infuriated Flynn, and dragged him off.

"Arrah! Leggo!" shouted Flynn. "Sure, I'm going to slaughter him intirely! Me illigant sardines—"

"Kick him out!" said Lovell.

"Yes," panted Tubby, "kick him out, the beast! Oh—ah—yah—yaup! Wharrer you kicking me for?"

It was Tubby that Lovell was alluding to, not Flynn, and he promptly suited the action to the word.

The fat Classical departed with a series of fiendish yells, and his place at the tea-table was taken by Patrick O'Donovan Flynn, who was grinning now.

Tubby Muffin's masterly scheme had not been very successful, after all.

CHAPTER 9.

Knowles' Chance!

KNOWLES of the Sixth glanced at his study door, to make sure that it was shut, and lighted a cigarette.

"Help yourselves!" he remarked.

Catesby and Frampton followed his example.

The three Sixth-Formers of the Modern side were met in Cecil Knowles' study for a consultation.

There was an unusually satisfied expression on Knowles' hard face.

Matters were going well for the Modern captain.

"Of course," said Knowles, with a slight smile, "nobody wants to hit a fellow when he's down."

"Oh, not at all!" said Frampton.

Catesby did not speak.

"Bulkeley's down," continued Knowles.

"He's carried his head jolly high, and has always been pretty lofty towards the Modern side. We've always held that Bulkeley, being a Classical, did not give our side fair play in games, or in anything else. That being the case, we're entitled to get our own back, without being too jolly particular."

"Hear, hear!" said Frampton. "These are good smokes, Knowles."

"Glad you like them. Now, as the matter stands, Bulkeley's father has been arrested on suspicion of robbing the bank. It looks a clear case. The police wouldn't act like that without jolly good grounds to go upon."

"That's a cert."

"I don't know," said Catesby slowly. "Mistakes have been made before now."

"Rot!" answered Knowles decisively.

"My uncle seems to believe that his partner will be able to clear himself," said Catesby. "You know my uncle is Mr. Bulkeley's partner. He seems to be standing by him."

"Well, innocent or guilty. Mr. Bulkeley

"s under arrest," said Knowles. "To come to the point, we don't want as captain of Rookwood a fellow whose father is arrested on a charge of stealing!"

"No fear!"

"Bulkeley ought really to leave the school. But the least he can do is to resign the captaincy."

Frampton nodded and grinned.

"I believe a lot of fellows think so on the Classical side," resumed Knowles. "They're bound to. I know Carthew agrees with me. Well, if Bulkeley gets out, there'll be a new election for captain, and that's where we come in. I think I ought to get in as captain of Rookwood."

"You ought, old chap."

"And that will make things a bit different for the Modern side," said Knowles, with a smile. "We shall get a fair show in the cricket and footer if I'm captain. The Classics can learn what it is like to be always in a minority in the eleven."

"I shouldn't mention that too soon," remarked Catesby. "You'll have to depend on a good many Classical votes to get elected. They're a majority."

Knowles laughed.

"That's between ourselves, of course," he said. "In public I spin the same yarn as Bulkeley—strict fair play, no favour to either side, shoulder to shoulder for the good of the school, and so on, and so forth. I know the game. It goes down from Bulkeley. No reason why it shouldn't go down from me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, my idea is to call on Bulkeley and put it to him gently," said Knowles. "He ought to resign. It's some days since his pater was noddled by the hobbies, and it's simply a shoutin' disgrace for the school! Fancy pointin' out Bulkeley to a visitor and explaining: 'That's our skipper! His pater's in prison!' Not quite good enough for Rookwood—what?"

"My hat! No!"

"I—I shouldn't wonder if old Bulkeley's innocent, all the same," said Stephen Catesby hesitatingly.

"Look here, Steve. What are you backing up the Bulkeleys for all of a sudden?" demanded Knowles irritably. "You've said that a dozen times at least!"

"Well, I—I think——"

"You'd better think about making the most of this opportunity, if you want to

think at all!" snapped Knowles. "Dash it all, didn't Bulkeley pitch you neck and crop out of the footer eleven? Ha said you weren't fit. I backed you up for all I was worth, and it did no good."

Catesby's eyes gleamed.

"You're right, Cecil. I'm with you all the way," he said. "I'm fed up with George Bulkeley as captain of the school, and if we can shift him out, let's do so."

"That's better. Now, shall we call on him personally, or shall we put it in a note?" asked Knowles.

"A note, I think," said Frampton slowly. "Might be a row otherwise."

"I don't object to a row, with Bulkeley in the wrong. We should keep our tempers."

"Still, it's better avoided. Make it a polite note, pointing out that for the good name of the school, etc. You know what to say."

"All right."

Knowles drew a paper and pen to him, chewed the handle of the pen for a moment or two thoughtfully, and then began to write.

He smiled as he wrote, not a pleasant smile.

The Modern prefect had said that he did not want to hit Bulkeley when he was down; but that remark was perhaps intended humorously.

There was no doubt that Knowles intended to make the fullest use of the misfortune that had fallen upon the captain of Rookwood.

He had his own personal dislike of Bulkeley to consider, as well as the keen rivalry between the two sides of Rookwood—Modern and Classical.

He showed his note to his two companions when he had written it, and they nodded approval. The epistle ran:

"Dear Bulkeley,—I feel bound to draw your attention to opinion in the school on a certain matter, and I feel sure that you will receive this hint in the spirit in which it is meant.

"Under the present painful circumstances the general opinion seems to be that, for a time at least, you should resign your position in Rookwood. Nothing at all personal is meant by this; it is simply the fitness of things.

"You have my fullest sympathy, and I

sincerely hope that your father will succeed in clearing himself from the cloud that rests upon his name. Until that is done, however, you must feel yourself that it would be more judicious for you to take up an attitude less in the public eye.

"I should be glad to hear your views."

"Yours sincerely,

"CECIL KNOWLES."

"Jolly good!" said Frampton heartily. "That's putting it plain—and nicely, too. I really wonder Bulkeley hasn't seen it himself and resigned already."

"Call in a fag to take this note, old scout," said Knowles, throwing his cigarette into the grate.

Frampton went to the door. Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth was in sight, and the Sixth-Former hailed him.

"Fag!"

"Hallo!" said Tommy Dodd. "What's wanted?"

"You are. Come here!"

Tommy Dodd approached rather cautiously.

Knowles' study was not a pleasant place for fags to visit sometimes—the three Sixth-Formers were sometimes given to bullying.

But Knowles & Co. were in high good-humour now.

"Come in, Dodd! Take that note," said Knowles, tossing it to the Fourth-Former. "Take it over to Bulkeley, and wait for an answer."

"Right you are, Knowles!" answered Tommy Dodd, and he trotted off.

CHAPTER 10.

Backed up by the Fourth!

"JUST in time!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were in the Sixth Form passage when Tommy Dodd arrived in the School House, note in hand.

Jimmy Silver had the testimonial to Bulkeley in his hand.

It was quite a long document, and was made by pinning together a number of sheets of impot paper.

In size, at least, it was imposing.

Every name in the Fourth Form, Classical and Modern, was appended, so there was a tremendous list of signatures.

The Fistical Four were about to present the testimonial, when Tommy Dodd came over with his note from Knowles.

Tommy glanced at the testimonial admiringly.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Yes; every blessed name's down," answered Jimmy Silver. "We're going to post it up on the notice-board after presenting it to Bulkeley. That will show all Rookwood what we think of our captain."

"Good!" said Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver tapped at the study door.

"Come in!"

The juniors entered.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was not alone.

Neville, Jones major, and Lonsdale of the Classical Sixth were in the study.

The four seniors had been talking. Bulkeley was wearing a troubled and harassed look.

The captain of Rookwood had never looked his old self since that terrible scene in the quadrangle, when his father, while on a visit to Rookwood, had been arrested in the view of all the school.

That blow had hit Bulkeley hard, and his anxiety for his father added to the bitterness of it.

Not that his loyal faith in his father faltered for one moment.

He felt that the truth must come out when Mr. Bulkeley stood his trial; and the truth, he was sure, was that his father was innocent.

But the misery and shame of the accusation and the arrest cut him to the very heart.

He gave the juniors a good-humoured glance, however, as they came in.

His troubles had not embittered his kind temper.

"Hallo! What do you kids want?" he asked.

"Ahem!"

In the presence of four prefects of the Sixth Jimmy Silver felt a little abashed.

"What on earth have you got there?" asked Neville, glancing at the roll in Jimmy Silver's hand.

"Ahem! You see—"

"Back up, kid!" said Bulkeley.

"The—the fact is—"

"Arrah, and why don't ye come to the point!" exclaimed a voice from the passage.

"Sure, it's a testimonial, Bulkeley darling."

"Horray!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

George Bulkeley glanced at the doorway in astonishment.

A dozen or more juniors had gathered there.

"What on earth—" began the Rookwood captain.

"It's a testimonial, Bulkeley," explained Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, gad! What does it mean?"

"May I read it out?"

"Yes, if you like, but buck up!"

Jimmy Silver proceeded to read out the testimonial.

Bulkeley listened in amazement.

Neville and Lonsdale and Jones major grinned.

Apparently they saw something amusing in that exposition of the firm faith and loyalty of the Fourth Form of Rookwood.

From "whereas" to the last of the signatures, Jimmy Silver read it out, at every pause a cheer coming from the crowd of juniors in the passage.

Bulkeley did not interrupt him.

He smiled slightly.

Perhaps he was not quite displeased by that display of fervent faith and loyalty on the part of the juniors, though doubtless it was a "cheek" on their part to take the captain of the school under their wing in this way.

"Is that all?" asked Bulkeley patiently, when Jimmy Silver had finished at last.

"That's all, Bulkeley."

"I suppose all that's meant as a compliment," said Bulkeley. "I'm much obliged to you. Now run away."

"Oh!"

"Speech!" howled Flynn from the passage.

And there was a roar.

"Speech, Bulkeley!"

"You young asses!" exclaimed Neville.

"Cut off!"

"Speech!"

"Come, clear off, you kids!" said Bulkeley. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know. Run away!"

"Ahem!"

"Oh, come on," said Lovell. "We'll stick it up on the board, anyway."

Bulkeley jumped.

"That's nonsense—ahem, I mean that testimonial!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't do anything of the sort!" ex-

claimed Bulkeley sharply. "You young donkeys, I suppose you mean well."

"Oh, really, you know, Bulkeley—"

"Leave it here," said Bulkeley.

"Oh, all right!"

"And clear!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. cleared, not feeling wholly satisfied.

The testimonial had not evoked nearly so much enthusiasm in Bulkeley's study as among the Fourth.

Tommy Dodd lingered behind, and Bulkeley pointed to the door.

"Note for you, Bulkeley," said Tommy, with a grin.

"Oh, run away, kid!"

"It's from Knowles."

"Oh, Knowles? Give it to me, then."

"I'm to wait for an answer," said Tommy Dodd, handing over the Modern prefect's note.

Bulkeley nodded, and opened the envelope.

His brows came together darkly as he read, and he tossed the note to his friends.

"Read that!" he said.

"The cheeky cad!" exclaimed Neville wrathfully.

"Confound his nerve!" said Jones major.

"There's no opinion of the sort in the school—I know that. There may be on the Modern side."

"They're cads enough for anything!" growled Lonsdale.

"Oh, draw it mild!" interjected Tommy Dodd warily.

"Shut up, you cheeky fag."

"Well, don't you slang the Moderns, then," said Tommy Dodd independently.

"Lots of cads on this side, I can tell you. I'll give you the names, if you like."

"Dry up, kid," said Bulkeley. "I'd better send an answer to this, you fellows."

"Put it plain," growled Neville. "Tell him what you think of him."

"Well, I must be civil. Besides, I dare say Knowles is only acting from what he thinks is a sense of duty."

"I don't think!"

"Well, I'm bound to take that for granted," said Bulkeley. "I'll let him have his answer."

He scribbled a hasty note, folded it in an envelope, and handed it to the waiting fag.

"Take that to Knowles," he said.

"Right-ho!"

Tommy Dodd left the study

Bulkeley's face darkened as the door closed behind him, and his lips trembled a little.

"I—I wonder——" he began.

"Don't take any notice of what that Modern cad's said!" exclaimed Neville. "We all know what Knowles is after—the captaincy, if he can get it."

"There's a lot in what he says."

"Rats! Bosh!"

"But I can't resign the captaincy," said Bulkeley quietly. "To do so would be like admitting there was possibly something in the charge against my father. I can't do that. Unless a majority of the Sixth ask me to resign, I shall go on."

"And that's not likely to happen," said Jones major. "You're jolly well not going to resign, anyway. Hang Knowles!"

"Knowles don't count, anyway!" said Neville.

But Bulkeley's friends were mistaken there. Cecil Knowles did count, and he was not finished yet.

CHAPTER 11.

The Classics are Wrathful!

TOMMY DODD presented himself in Knowles' study, on the Modern side, and found Knowles & Co. waiting there.

There was an atmosphere of smoke in the study, which Tommy judiciously affected not to notice.

"Well?" said Knowles.

"Here's Bulkeley's answer," said Tommy Dodd.

"Did he say anything?" asked Frampton.

"Bulkeley didn't say much," answered Tommy. "The others did."

"Oh, Bulkeley wasn't alone?" asked Knowles, with interest.

"No; three Classical Sixth chaps with him."

"What did they say, then?"

"Neville said 'Cheeky cad!'"

"What?"

"Jones' major said 'Confound his nerve!'"

"You cheeky young rascal!" shouted Knowles. "Do you want me to give you a hiding?"

"You asked me what they said!" replied Tommy Dodd, in an injured tone. "I'm only telling you what you asked me."

"Hold your tongue!"

"Oh, all right! Can I clear out?" asked Tommy.

"Wait!" snapped Knowles.

Tommy Dodd waited, with an exaggerated expression of resignation on his face.

Knowles opened Bulkeley's note, and the three Modern seniors read it together.

It was brief, but to the point.

"Dear Knowles,—I had already considered the question of resigning the captaincy, but decided not, as to do so might imply that I had some, even the faintest, doubt of my father's innocence. Thank you, all the same, for your suggestion, which, of course, I take in the spirit in which it is meant.—Yours,

"GEORGE BULKELEY."

"Rather a sting in that last sentence," remarked Catesby, with a grin.

Knowles gritted his teeth.

"It's a refusal," he said.

"Well, you might have expected that."

"Can I go now?" murmured Tommy Dodd.

"No!" shouted Knowles. "Wait till you're told, you young rotter! You've got to take an answer to Bulkeley."

"Well, I was thinking of prep.," said Tommy Dodd resignedly. "But anything for a quiet life."

Knowles reflected.

"I think I'll go personally, you chaps," he said. "You can cut off, Dodd. You two fellows come with me."

"But—I say——" murmured Catesby.

"If there's a row, let there be a row," said Knowles. "We're in the right, and we're bound to make a stand. Come on, I tell you."

The three seniors left the study together, and Tommy Dodd looked after them, as he followed, with a perplexed look.

"I wonder what's on?" murmured the junior. "Something up against old Bulkeley, I suppose! Yah! Rotters!"

Which was a testimony to the estimation in which Cecil Knowles was held by the juniors of his own side.

Knowles & Co. crossed to the School House, in the dusk, and made their way at once to Bulkeley's study.

Some of the Classical juniors spotted them, and gave them grim looks.

Knowles & Co. were not liked on the

Classical side, and Cecil Knowles was more than suspected of wishing to make capital out of Bulkeley's misfortune.

Knowles knocked at the study door, and Bulkeley's voice bade him enter.

The three Modern seniors marched in.

Bulkeley and his companions rose to their feet.

It was evidently not a friendly visit.

"Well, Knowles?" asked the Rookwood captain quietly.

"I've read your answer to my note, Bulkeley," said Knowles curtly.

"I hope it satisfied you."

"Not in the least."

"Sorry!" said Bulkeley politely.

"It's a painful matter," said Knowles, "but it's best to speak plainly. There's a big section of opinion in the school, Bulkeley, that thinks that a fellow whose name is under a cloud ought not to be captain of Rookwood. I thought it would appeal to you in that light."

Bulkeley coloured deeply.

"I've explained my motives and intentions in my note," he said.

"That is not quite good enough."

"It will have to be good enough."

"That matter can't rest here," said Knowles, biting his lip. "Of course, we all feel sympathy, and all that. But, to put it plain, it's a disgrace to the school."

"What?" exclaimed Bulkeley.

"It's a disgrace to Rookwood to have for captain a fellow whose father has been arrested for theft. You've made me speak plainly, Bulkeley."

Bulkeley's eyes blazed.

"You cheeky cad!" shouted Neville.

"Bulkeley, shall I kick him out of the study for you?"

Knowles turned quite pale. He had expected a row, but not quite so much as that.

Fisticuffs in the Sixth were unheard of, or nearly so.

"Quiet, old chap," said Bulkeley.

"Knowles, my father is under arrest, but he has not been tried yet. The case is sub judice, as the lawyers say. I am convinced that at the trial he will be completely cleared. How dare you suggest that he is guilty before he has been tried!"

Knowles shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not say he was guilty. I said he had been arrested for theft," he answered.

"You ought to resign. You ought to get

out of Rookwood, as a matter of fact, if you want it in plain English. That's my opinion."

"Well, now you've told me your opinion, you can leave me alone," said Bulkeley.

"You still refuse to resign?"

"I see no reason to alter my decision."

"Not even the fact that someone else is waiting to step into his shoes, Knowles," said Neville bitterly.

"I despise insinuations of that kind," said Knowles loftily. "I'm thinking of the good name of Rookwood. What are people to think of the school when they hear that the captain is a thief's son?"

Bulkeley made a stride forward, his fists clenched hard, his eyes blazing.

Knowles involuntarily stepped back.

"Knock the cad down!" shouted Lonsdale.

"Get out, Knowles," said Bulkeley hoarsely. "I can't answer for myself if you stay here. You've said what you came to say—now go!"

"And said it for all Rookwood to hear," said Jones major, with a glance at the open door. "The fags out there have heard every word."

"All Rookwood can hear me," said Knowles. "I've nothing to conceal. As you refuse to do the right thing, Bulkeley, I shall see that steps are taken to make you do it. The Sixth Form will make representations to the Head on the subject. That's all."

With that, Knowles strode from the study, followed by Catesby and Frampson. Neville slammed the door after them; he would gladly have kicked Knowles down the passage, too.

There was a roar in the passage.

The loud words in Bulkeley's study had been heard.

Jimmy Silver & Co., and a dozen more fellows, knew what Knowles had come for.

As the three Modern seniors went down the passage a crowd of angry and indignant Classical juniors surged round them.

"Cads! Modern rotters!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell furiously.

"Cads! Sneaks!" yelled Conroy.

"Yah! Modern cads!"

"Kick 'em out!"

"Bump the Modern rotters!"

"Stand back!" shouted Knowles furiously, as the angry juniors closed round.

"Collar them!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"Down with the Moderns!"

All respect for the high and mighty Sixth, and the rank of prefect, was forgotten now.

The insult to Bulkeley, their popular captain, was more than Jimmy Silver & Co. could stand.

They fairly swarmed on Knowles and Catesby and Frampton.

In a minute more the three prefects would have been down, and bumped on the floor by the excited juniors.

But Bulkeley's study door was hastily opened, and the captain of Rookwood strode out.

"Stop!" he shouted.

"Oh!"

"You young rascals!" shouted Bulkeley angrily. "How dare you! By Jove, I'll lick you all round for this! Let Knowles alone at once!"

The juniors reluctantly fell back.

Bulkeley remained watching, with a frowning brow, while Knowles & Co. walked out of the School House, unmolested now.

George Bulkeley's intervention had saved them from a severe ragging, but they were not feeling grateful—Knowles least of all.

Bulkeley went back into his study when the Modern seniors were gone.

The juniors dispersed, angry and dissatisfied.

"Bulkeley's a silly ass!" said Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four went into the end study for prep. "Why couldn't he let us mop up those cads? Fancy letting Knowles come and ride the high horse on our side! Br-r-r-r!"

"Bulkeley won't resign, though," said Lovell.

"No fear! That's Knowles' game, but it won't wash," grinned Jimmy Silver. "I dare say our testimonial bucked Bulkeley a good bit, and made him firm."

"Ahem!"

"He knows that the Fourth back him up, anyway."

"He don't seem to care much whether the Fourth back him up or not," Newcome remarked candidly.

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "Of course he does!"

"But—"

"When you've done butting, we'll get on with prep."

And the Fistical Four got on with prep.

CHAPTER 12.

Bulkeley is Wanted!

"JIMMY!"

Morning lessons were over the following day, and the Fistical Four were in the sunny quadrangle, when Tubby Muffin rolled up in great excitement. Tubby's fat face was simply ablaze.

"I say, Jimmy—" he gasped.

"Oh, get out!" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't tell us you've got a tin of sardines you want to whack out, you fat fraud!"

"Tain't that! There's a bobby—"

"A what?"

"A bobby!" gasped Tubby excitedly.

"Do you mean a policeman, fathead?"

"Yes—a bobby, and that detective chap who came here the other day and arrested Bulkeley's pater when he was visiting Bulkeley. I know him again. He's got a face like a saw."

"What the thump do they want here?" growled Lovell.

"Leggett says he thinks they've come for Bulkeley!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

"Let me hear Leggett say so!" said Jimmy Silver, with a gleam in his eyes. "I'll give him something else to talk about, the cad!"

"But, I say, you know, do you think they've come for Bulkeley, Jimmy? Leggett thinks perhaps he was hand in glove with his pater—Yarooooop!"

Tubby Muffin found himself suddenly sitting on the ground before he could state the rest of Albert Leggett's charitable surmises.

The Fistical Four left him sitting there, gasping, and hurried towards the School House.

A policeman was visible there, with a quietly-dressed man, whom they recognised as Mr. Screw, the detective.

They were going into the House as the Fistical Four spotted them.

Mornington came towards the drums of the Fourth, with a knitted brow.

"What the dickens does this mean, you fellows?" he exclaimed. "What does that rat-faced boulder want here again?"

"Can't be anything to do with Bulkeley."

"He's come to see Bulkeley," said Kit Erroll, joining them. "He asked for Bulkeley. Mr. Bootles is taking him to the Head, and the bobby is waiting in the hall—looks as if he's on the watch."

"My only hat!" said Jimmy blankly.

The Fistical Four were astonished and dismayed.

What could a detective from Scotland Yard possibly want with George Bulkeley?

"The—the fools!" muttered Mornington. "They can't suppose that Bulkeley knows anythin' about it, even if his pater did it."

"His pater didn't do it!" snapped Lovell.

"No. But even if he did, Bulkeley, couldn't know anythin' about it. They must be potty!"

The news that the detective had returned and had asked to see Bulkeley, was very quick in spreading.

A crowd of fellows gathered about the doorway, and glances were cast on all sides at the stolid policeman standing in the hall.

Smythe of the Shell even ventured to ask the officer what he had come for; but he received only a stare by way of reply.

Whatever the policeman's intentions were he did not think fit to confide them to Adolphus Smythe.

Bulkeley was on Big Side, with some of the Sixth and Fifth.

The news soon reached the fellows looking on at the practice; but no one ventured to mention to Bulkeley that a "bobby" had come for him.

There was a buzz among the crowd outside the door, when the detective was seen again.

The Head came into view with him.

Dr. Chisholm's face was set, and indicated clearly enough the anger and annoyance he was keeping under strict control.

Mr. Screw was murmuring some apology, and the Head of Rookwood interrupted him.

"You have your duty to do, sir," he said stiffly. "I am astonished that it should be considered needful; but if it is your duty, you must do it. I will take you to Bulkeley's room, and send for him."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You will find nothing there, Mr. Screw, that should not be there," said the Head coldly. "But you shall satisfy yourself, Silver!"

"Yes, sir?" said Silver.

"Do you know where Bulkeley is at present?"

"On the cricket-ground, sir."

"Kindly tell him at once that a gentleman has called to see him, and that I request him to come to his study immediately."

"Certainly, sir!"

Jimmy Silver hurried down to Big Side.

"Bulkeley!" He called out breathlessly.

"Don't bother now, kid!"

"The Head wants you, Bulkeley."

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy delivered his message, and he saw Bulkeley's face brighten.

"News about my pater, I expect, Neville," he said. "They may have found out the facts by this time."

"I hope so, old chap," said Neville.

Bulkeley hurried away to the house, and Jimmy Silver followed, with a clouded brow.

He knew very well that if the Rookwood captain was anticipating good news he would be disappointed.

Whatever Mr. Screw had come for, it certainly was not to give Bulkeley good news of his father.

The Rookwood captain passed through a silent crowd, and entered the house.

He stared a little at the sight of the constable.

But his eyes were fixed upon the Head, calmly and inquiringly.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, step into your study with me, Bulkeley, please."

"Certainly."

Dr. Chisholm entered the Rookwood captain's study with Mr. Screw, and Bulkeley followed them in.

The door closed, much to the disappointment of the Rookwood fellows.

Whatever the transaction might be, it was evidently going to take place behind closed doors.

"Bulkeley didn't look scared," remarked Townsend of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver gave Towny a fierce look.

"Why should he look scared?" he demanded.

"Well, the bobby's come for somethin', I suppose!" said Townsend tartly.

"What's all this fuss about?" Catesby of the Sixth had come over from Mr. Mander's house. "Was that a bobby?"

"You bet!" said Leggett. "He's after Bulkeley."

"Shut up, you Modern cad!" roared Lovell furiously. "You say that again, and I'll shut you up fast enough!"

Leggett, feeling safe in the presence of a Modern prefect, sneered.

"He's after Bulkeley," he repeated. "He's gone into Bulkeley's study with the Head, Catesby. I can jolly well guess what it means, too. Mr. Bulkeley's accused of steal-

ing bonds from the bank, and they can't be found."

"What's that got to do with Bulkeley?" said Lovell, clenching his hands.

"Plain enough, I think," sneered Leggett. "Mr. Bulkeley was visiting your cheery skipper when he was arrested. Of course, the detective thinks his son had a hand in it—very likely thinks that Mr. Bulkeley brought the stolen property down here to hide."

Catesby gave a violent start.

"What—what's that?" he exclaimed.

"Well, wouldn't it be a clever dodge?" said Leggett, evidently pleased with his surmise. "Where would you find a safer place to hide stolen bonds, for instance, than in a school-boy's locker? Nobody would think of looking there. But the detective happens to have thought of it."

"You young fool!" said Catesby harshly. His face was white and set. "How dare you suggest such a thing? Hold your tongue!"

The Modern prefect stalked away towards Mr. Manders' house, several glances resting on him as he went.

Leggett's suggestion seemed to have had a very startling effect upon Stephen Catesby; why, it was impossible to guess.

Leggett would have followed the Modern prefect, but he was not allowed to do so.

Lovell's grasp was upon him.

"Catesby!" yelled Leggett desperately.

Catesby did not even turn his head.

And during the next few minutes Albert Leggett had reason to repent his sage surmises, as the Fistical Four rubbed his nose on the cold, hard quadrangle.

CHAPTER 13.

Under Suspicion!

"BULKELEY!"

The Head's tone was very kind. Ever since the misfortune that had fallen upon Bulkeley's father the Head had been very kind and considerate towards Bulkeley, and the Rookwood fellows had noted it, and liked their head-master all the better for it.

What the Head's opinion might be on the subject of Mr. Bulkeley himself nobody could guess; but, at any rate, he evidently did not believe that he had a right to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.

"Yes, sir?" said Bulkeley, looking at the

Head, and taking no notice of the presence of the detective.

"Bulkeley, this is—is a very unpleasant matter. You understand, of course, that what is about to take place is not by my wish—that my faith in you is quite unshaken."

"You are very kind, sir," said Bulkeley, in wonder.

"You are aware that a number of bonds are missing from the bank of which your father was manager," said the Head. "These bonds have not been found, I am told, and cannot be traced. They represent a large sum of money. I hardly like to—tell you what is now considered possible by the detective in charge of the case, Bulkeley; but—but—" The Head paused.

"Kindly explain to the lad, Mr. Scraw!"

"Certainly. Master Bulkeley, your father visited you a few days ago, when I had the painful duty of taking him into custody."

Bulkeley nodded.

"Did he on that occasion place anything in your keeping?"

"No."

"Had he on any occasion within the last month placed any article in your keeping?"

"No."

"Have you at the present time any property of any kind, of which you are taking care for your father?"

"No."

The detective coughed.

"Ahem! Well, the bonds cannot be found, Master Bulkeley, though the search for them has been rigid."

"You had better find the thief, and then you may find the stolen bonds," said Bulkeley disdainfully.

The detective smiled slightly.

"To come to the point, Master Bulkeley, it occurs to me as possible that your father's hurried visit to you on that occasion was for the purpose of placing the bonds in hiding here in a safe place."

Bulkeley's eyes glittered.

"I suppose you are doing your duty, Mr. Scraw," he said, repressing his anger. "I can only say that my father handed me nothing."

"He might have placed something in your charge without stating its nature," suggested Mr. Scraw. "He might have called it by some other name—family documents, literary manuscripts, anything."

"He gave me nothing."

"If you have any such thing in your

charge, Master Bulkeley. I am willing to believe that you were ignorant of its nature, and if you hand it to me at once a very lenient view may be taken of your conduct. I am here to find the bonds, if they are hidden here. I have a warrant to search for them."

"Search as long as you like!" said the captain of Rookwood scornfully. "You will find nothing here that does not belong to me!"

"Very well. I wished to give you a chance."

"I dare say you meant kindly," said Bulkeley wearily. "But as I know nothing of the bonds, and have never even seen them, I cannot help you. My father did not take the bonds."

"Very well. I have my duty to do. Please remain."

"I will remain also," said Dr. Chisholm.

"I am perfectly convinced that nothing will be found here that does not belong to Bulkeley."

"We shall see," said Mr. Screw calmly. He opened the door and called in the constable.

Bulkeley handed over his keys, and stood pale and silent while the search proceeded. It was a thorough one.

Under Mr. Screw's unfailing eye the constable ransacked every corner of the study, and every receptacle and recess.

Even the books in the bookcase were taken out and opened and shaken separately.

It was more than half an hour before the search of the study finished.

The Rookwood fellows had gone into the dining-hall to dinner.

Bulkeley was not thinking of dinner, and the Head forgot that his lunch was waiting.

The search was over at last, and nothing had been discovered.

"Well, sir?" said Dr. Chisholm, as the detective stood with a somewhat baffled expression on his face. "Master Bulkeley will not object to his person being searched?" asked Mr. Screw.

Bulkeley flushed crimson.

"Surely this is an absurdity!" exclaimed the Head. "A number of bonds would be too bulky to be concealed about the person, sir."

"They might be separated, and even severed in pieces," answered Mr. Screw. "However, if Master Bulkeley objects—"

"Will you allow this gentleman to do as he pleases, Bulkeley?"

"I will do whatever you suggest, sir," answered the Rookwood captain.

"Very well. Proceed, Mr. Screw," said the Head.

It occupied but a few minutes to search Bulkeley from head to foot.

But again the search was unrewarded.

"May I conclude that you are finished here now, sir?" asked the Head, whose impatience was visibly growing.

"Are these the only quarters that Mr. Bulkeley occupies in the school?" asked Mr. Screw.

"Certainly!"

"He does not share a dormitory—"

"The Sixth Form do not sleep in a dormitory. You can see that this room is a bed-room as well as a study."

"Quite so. Has Master Bulkeley a locker, or anything of the kind, in any other room—a class-room, for instance?"

"There is my locker in the Form-room," said Bulkeley. "If you want to look in it, the key is on the bunch I have given you."

"I should certainly like to look in it."

"Follow me, sir," said the Head.

"Kindly accompany us, Master Bulkeley."

"Very well."

Bulkeley followed the Head and the detective, the constable bringing up the rear. But a fresh disappointment awaited Mr. Screw.

Bulkeley's locker in the Sixth Form-room was drawn blank.

"And now, Mr. Screw?" asked the Head, as politely as he could.

"For the present, sir, I have finished," said the detective quietly.

"You are satisfied, I presume, that Bulkeley knows nothing whatever of the stolen bonds?" exclaimed the Head sharply.

"I am satisfied that they are not to be found, at all events," answered the detective drily.

"Really, sir, as you have searched—"

"I have not searched every nook and cranny of this extensive building, and I am not able to do so," said Mr. Screw. "There are, I imagine, many hidden recesses in this old place where a small article could be hidden. Master Bulkeley, I will make one more appeal to you. If your father has placed any article in your keeping, it will be for your own interest to hand it over to me."

"I have answered you already," said Bulkeley coldly.

"Very well. For the present"—the detective emphasised the word—"for the present, Dr. Chisholm, my duty here is done."

And Mr. Screw, with a polite bow, took his leave, the stolid-faced constable following in his wake.

Bulkeley went to his dinner late.

Neville joined him, and sat chatting to him while he ate.

But Bulkeley hardly answered his cham.

There was a fixed gloom upon his face.

He knew why Neville had come there—it was to show that the latest happening had made no difference.

But it must have made a difference to many, and George Bulkeley knew it.

All Rookwood knew that his quarters had been searched for stolen property, or they would know it soon.

Nothing had been found. But that did not prove that nothing had been hidden.

The shadow of shame that had rested on Bulkeley's father had spread, and it darkened now the captain of Rookwood himself. Knowles would make the most of it.

But Bulkeley did not think about Knowles.

For he had come to the same conclusion now as the Modern prefect.

The fellow upon whom rested the shadow of shameful suspicion was not the right captain for Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 14.

Good-bye to Bulkeley!

JIMMY SILVER was worried.

It was just like Jimmy to forget his own concerns, and trouble his head about the troubles of somebody else.

But George Bulkeley was so great a man in junior eyes—he filled so large a space in the little world of school—that almost all the Rookwood fellows felt concerned about him.

It was known now what the detective had come for.

And there were not wanting ill-natured tongues to hint that perhaps Mr. Screw had been on the right track, though he had not found what he sought.

Bulkeley was popular with nine-tenths of Rookwood, but the other tenth did not like him.

Juniors like Peele and Gower and Tracy, seniors like Catesby and Frampton, Knowles and Cartwhew, disliked him and feared him.

He had too strict a sense of duty to be liked by mean-spirited fellows.

And now was the chance of his enemies, the few he had.

His quarters had been searched by the police for stolen property. He was innocent—he might be innocent—but the suspicion, the stain, remained.

It was simply impossible for a fellow in such a position to remain captain of the school.

Even Jimmy Silver felt that it would not do.

And Jimmy knew that Bulkeley had been packing—it looked as if he was leaving Rookwood.

Jimmy felt that as a personal blow.

"I believe he's going, you fellows," Jimmy said dismally, in the end study that evening. "I—I suppose it's a bit rotten for him now. Some fellows are cads enough to think evil of him. Poor old Bulkeley!"

"Poor old chap!" said Raby.

"It's sensible of him to get out for a bit, till this is settled one way or the other," said Erroll, who was in the study. "The position is too rotten altogether. If his father is acquitted, Bulkeley can come back with flying colours."

"But if he isn't—" muttered Newcome.

"Then poor old Bulkeley couldn't stay, anyway. But—but I think the old man's innocent, and if he's innocent, I suppose he will be acquitted."

"Mistakes are made sometimes," said Lovell.

Erroll smiled faintly, but did not reply.

Lovell's meaning was pretty clear; he did not intend to believe anything against Bulkeley or his father, whatever a judge and jury might decide.

Tubby Muffin looked into the study.

"He's going!" he announced.

"Who's going, you fat chump?" growled Lovell.

"Bulkeley."

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. dashed down the staircase.

The big door was open. Outside, in the dusk, gleamed the lights of the station taxi.

Old Mack and the taximan were carrying out a trunk.

Bulkeley, in coat and cap, was saying good-bye to some of the Sixth.

His face was a little pale, but very calm. Neville was looking furious, and the other seniors troubled and dismayed.

"Bulkeley!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You—you're going?"

Bulkeley gave the juniors a kind smile.

"Yes, kid, for a time."

"You're coming back?" exclaimed Lovell.

"I hope so."

"Bulkeley, old chap, there's no need—" muttered Neville miserably.

"It's better, old fellow," said Bulkeley quietly. "The Head thinks so. Good-bye, old man—good-bye!"

Neville went out with him to the taxi.

Through the dusk the figure of Cecil Knowles of the Modern Sixth loomed up. "You're going, Bulkeley?" he exclaimed. "Yes."

Knowles drew a deep breath.

He composed his features to an expression of sympathetic concern, but he could not disguise the glitter in his eyes.

"I'm sorry you're going, Bulkeley," he said.

"Thank you!" said Bulkeley dryly.

"I hope we part friends," said Knowles. "I'm sorry there have ever been any disagreements between us, Bulkeley; and I'd like to say that I believe your father is innocent, and believe that the truth will come out in time. And there's my hand on it!"

Bulkeley took his hand cheerfully enough.

"I'm glad to hear you speak like that, Knowles," he said simply. "It's kind of you. Certainly we part friends, old fellow! Good-bye!"

Knowles stood looking after the taxi as it rolled away in the dusk.

There was a twinge of remorse even in Cecil Knowles' hard heart.

But as he walked away to his own House his eyes were shining.

"Captain of Rookwood!" he murmured. "The path's clear now—Captain of Rookwood!"

Jimmy Silver was thinking of that, too, when Bulkeley was gone.

"There'll be an election for captain," he said. "That cad Knowles will think it's a sure thing for him; and we've got to stop him. Do you hear?"

"And we jolly well will!" said Lovell, with emphasis. "Every vote counts, and we'll rally all the fellows to keep him out."

Bulkeley was gone, with a shadow on

his name, but it did not seem so certain as Knowles supposed, that the Modern prefect would realise his old ambition.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had to be reckoned with.

CHAPTER 15.

The Eve of the Election!

"GIVE him a yell!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Shurrup, old chap! Mustn't yell at a prefect, even if he's only a Modern!"

Lovell grunted.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not "give him a yell," but they looked grim as Cecil Knowles of the Modern Sixth came into the School House.

They had never liked Knowles, and they liked him less than ever now.

A change from Bulkeley to Knowles would be, as Jimmy had expressed it, a step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

However, Knowles was a Modern, and the Classics, at least, did not want a captain of Rookwood selected from the Modern side.

But it could not be denied that Cecil Knowles had an excellent chance of success in the election which was shortly to take place.

The Moderns were certain to vote for him as one man, and a great many of the Classical seniors looked on Knowles as the best man to succeed Bulkeley.

With grim looks, the Fistical Four of the Fourth fixed their eyes upon Knowles as he came in.

They wanted to express their scornful aversion, with due regard to the limits within which juniors were allowed to express their personal feelings towards the high and mighty Sixth.

To their astonishment, Knowles did not bestow on them the scowl with which he usually greeted the Fistical Four when he came across them.

He nodded quite genially.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were so surprised that they left off looking grim and stared at Knowles open-mouthed.

Knowles was in a good temper—and with them!

It was amazing!

And that was not all!

Knowles paused, and spoke to the as-

tounded juniors in a cheery, chatty tone.

"Neville in his quarters, do you know, Silver?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Jimmy.

"Thanks! I hear you've got a cricket-match coming off soon with the juniors on my side," said Knowles.

"Yes; we're beating Tommy Dodd's lot next week."

Knowles smiled.

"Well, good luck to the best team!" he said. "I shall come and see how you shape."

"Will you?" gasped Jimmy.

"Yes. I think the Rookwood Junior Eleven ought to get a bit more of the lime-light," said Knowles. "If I become Head of the Games I shall see to that. My idea is that junior cricket and football ought to come more to the fore."

"My hat!"

"Rookwood First has made a pretty good reputation," said Knowles. "But I'd like to see Rookwood Juniors going great guns, too. I want the School to be heard of in footer this season, too; I'm glad to see you youngsters so keen about it!"

And with another genial nod, Knowles walked on to Neville's study.

He left the Fistical Four almost gasping.

Was this Knowles, the bully of the Sixth—the fellow who had always had a "down" on them, partly because they were Classics, partly because they were—themselves!

"Well, my hat!" said George Raby, in wonder.

"This is a sudden change, isn't it?" murmured Newcome.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose.

Either he had very seriously misjudged Cecil Knowles in the past, or the bully of the Sixth had changed very considerably in a few days.

"I say, if that's Knowles' tack, he won't be such a rotten failure as captain of the school," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell thoughtfully. "Bulkeley always used to back up junior games, but Knowles seems to want to go the whole hog."

"Blessed if I ever expected to see Knowles keen about junior games," said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, of course, he'll have more responsibility on his hands if he becomes captain of the school and Head of the Games. He will have to act for Rookwood, not only for the Modern side."

"That's so!"

"I must say he's showing up better than I expected," conceded Lovell.

"Charmin' chap, Knowles?" said a voice at their elbow.

Mornington of the Fourth had been lounging near at hand, and he had listened to them, with a smile on his handsome, somewhat cynical face.

"I don't know about charming," said Jimmy Silver, looking at the dandy of the Fourth. "But he seems to have become a lot more civilised all of a sudden."

"Charmin', I call him!" answered Mornington, with a grin. "I don't think he's parted with his dose of original sin, though. I can't help suspectin' that he's got an eye on the election."

"Oh!" said Jimmy Silver slowly.

Mornington chuckled.

"You see, you four merchants are workin' your hardest to keep him out, and to get Neville into Bulkeley's place," he remarked. "Knowles seems to have hit on soft sawder as a dodge. Disarmin' tho enemy with sweet words, you know!"

"Oh!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

He had not suspected it. He was not, perhaps, so keen as Valentine Mornington, and certainly he was not so suspicious.

But now that Morny pointed it out, it was plain enough.

"I can't help feelin'," chuckled Morny, "that after he's elected captain, if he ever is, dear old Knowles will drop his charmin' ways an' proceed to make his old enemies sit up."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"So don't be bamboozled, dear boys," yawned Mornington. "We want a Classical captain of Rookwood, an' Neville's the man. I don't say he's a patch on Bulkeley, but he's the next best; and we don't want a Modern cad in the job at any price."

"No fear!"

"I—I suppose it was soft sawder," said Lovell at last. "Fancy a Sixth-Form prefect coming down to that!"

"He won't bag our votes, at any rate," said Newcome. "He can be as cheery as he likes, but the Classical Fourth are solid against him. I don't know about the Shell."

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"Neville's the man," he said. "And, as the election takes place to-morrow, we've got plenty to do. Electioneering's the word!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Rival Candidates!

"COME in!" said Neville of the Sixth. Knowles stepped into the study. Jones major of the Classical Sixth was there with Neville.

The two seniors had been discussing the election when Knowles arrived.

They did not give the Modern prefect welcoming looks.

His keenness to step into Bulkeley's shoes did not endear him to Bulkeley's friends.

However, the Classical seniors were civil.

"I've just looked in," remarked Knowles. "I hear that you've put in your name as a candidate, Neville."

"I'm standing at the election," assented Neville.

"Some of the fellows expected that the election would be a formal matter," observed Knowles. "They didn't suppose that anyone would seriously dispute my claim to succeed Bulkeley."

"What rot!" said Jones major warmly. "We don't feel inclined to select the new captain from the Modern side, I can tell you!"

Knowles looked unpleasant.

"Bulkeley used to say that the two Houses ought to pull together for the good of the school," he said. "In such a question, the matter of Classical or Modern ought to be dropped out of sight."

"Well, yes! But—"

"But you fellows don't mean to give the Modern side fair play on any account—is that it?"

"That's not it!" said Neville. "I think I should make a pretty good skipper, Knowles. I wasn't keen on coming forward, but the fellows asked me."

"Simply to keep a Modern out?"

Neville coloured a little.

"Not exactly that, either," he answered. "If you want it plain, it was to keep you out, personally, Knowles. On this side we don't think you would make a good captain of the school."

"Thanks! So you are going to wedge in, in the hope of dishin' the Modern side, without caring a rap whether you're fit for the job or not?"

"Oh, rot!" said Neville sharply. "Anyway, I'm standing. If Rookwood wants you, Rookwood can elect you, I suppose."

"As head prefect, now Bulkeley's gone,

as vice-captain, and as captain of the Modern side, I have a natural claim to take the top place," said Knowles. "This putting up a Classical candidate is simply a trick!"

"You're welcome to think so!" grunted Jones major.

Knowles' eyes gleamed.

"I came to tell you, Neville, that if it's true that you've put in your name you ought to withdraw," he said.

"I call that cheek!" answered Neville.

"You're going to start a contest between Classic and Modern by putting up, and a lot of fellows will vote according to sides, without thinking about the merits of the candidate," said Knowles. "As there are a good many more Classics than Moderns you may wedge in, by splitting the school, and causing bad blood. I call it a rotten trick!"

"You won't call it that here, Knowles!" said Neville, rising to his feet. "I don't take that sort of talk from anyone. You'd better go."

Knowles looked at him savagely and grimly.

There was, to a certain extent, something in Knowles' contention.

Neville was a good-tempered and popular fellow, but it was a question whether he had the firmness of character required for Bulkeley's post.

Knowles certainly had more of the gifts of a captain; and had he been a more popular fellow personally he would have stepped into Bulkeley's place without opposition.

But he was not popular with the Classics, at all events.

And probably there was a feeling among the latter that it was desirable to keep the captaincy on their own side.

The candidates measured one another with their eyes, and for a moment or two it looked as if there would be trouble in Neville's study.

But both of them felt that it would not do; and Knowles, with a shrug of the shoulders, turned on his heel and walked out of the study.

His brow was clouded as he crossed back to Mr. Manders' House.

He had looked upon his election as a certainty, but he feared Neville's popularity on his own side, and he knew that it would be a struggle now.

His feelings were bitter,

His chums, Frampton and Catesby, were waiting for him in his study.

They gave him inquiring looks as he came in.

"It's true!" said Knowles. "Neville is standing!"

"That ass!" said Catesby.

"It's a trick, of course, to keep the captaincy in their hands!" said Knowles savagely. "They know jolly well that Neville is no good as captain of Rookwood!"

"It may be his idea to keep the place warm for Bulkeley," remarked Frampton. "They hope Bulkeley will come back, some of them."

"That's not likely. But if he comes back, and I'm in the post, Bulkeley won't find it easy to get the captaincy back!" said Knowles grimly. "I've got to get in, you fellows, by hook or by crook! It can't be done without some of the Classical vote on my side, and we've got to nobble the Classical vote."

"Not so jolly easy," said Catesby.

"It's got to be done. I think we can depend on Smythe and his friends in the Shell," said Knowles. "Some of the Fourth, too—Townsend and Peele, and some others. I'm rather afraid of Silver and his gang. Mind how you treat those young sweeps for a bit. Be civil to them."

"Civil to those cheeky little cads!" exclaimed Catesby.

"Yes, till after the election."

"Oh!"

"When I'm captain of Rookwood I'll make Jimmy Silver sorry for some of his cheek!" said Knowles, setting his lips. "I'll see that he's kicked out of junior cricket, and some things. I've got a long score against him. But for the present be civil. Every vote counts."

Catesby laughed.

"I'll ask him to tea, if you like!" he said.

"That would be a bit too palpable," said Knowles, laughing. "Mustn't be too sudden. But I fancy, all things considered, that I shall get in all right. I've got a list here of the Classics I can depend on for votes, and we can do some electioneering. Luckily I've plenty of money."

"Money?" said Frampton.

"Money talks!" said Knowles. "Any fellow who's hard up, and in want of a loan can have it—if he votes the right way. There's a good many fellows in that way.

You fellows will keep your eyes open. And a few bets wouldn't hurt."

"How do you mean?"

"You may lay bets, two to one, among the sporting fellows, that I shan't get in," said Knowles coolly. "I'll find the tin to pay up if you lose. I hope you'll lose. A fellow who's betted on my winning will vote for me."

"My hat! You've got a head on you, Knowles!" said Catesby.

"I flatter myself that I have!" said Knowles complacently.

And the three Moderns settled down to a discussion of the pros and cons of the case. And if the Head of Rookwood could have heard their discussion of election methods, Knowles would never have become captain of Rookwood, if he had remained at Rookwood at all!

Fortunately for Knowles the Head could not hear.

* CHAPTER 17.

Jimmy Silver Means Business!

ELECTIONEERING was the order of the day at Rookwood now.

Even the fags of the Second Form took a keen interest in the great question.

To the Sixth and the Fifth it was a very serious matter.

But the Fourth seemed keenest of all.

Jimmy Silver and his friends were men of push and go, and when they took up anything they took it up in a strenuous way.

Everybody, nearly, was counting votes in advance, making calculations as to how the election would go.

The Classics, being numerically the stronger side, the election ought to have been a sure thing for the Classical candidate.

But there was division in the ranks.

Neville was popular, he was good at games, and he was old Bulkeley's best pal.

All this told in his favour. It was more than enough to make Jimmy Silver & Co. enthusiastic.

But among the more thoughtful of the seniors there were doubts.

Knowles was not liked personally as Neville was, even on his own side, but popularity was not everything in a school captain.

More important than that was the show Rookwood was likely to make at football and cricket.

Knowles, perhaps, would unduly favour his own side in that connection.

But as a games captain he was far and away ahead of Neville, who was by no means one of those fellows who are born to command.

Knowles could be very unpleasant sometimes, but he was a good skipper in the main.

Under his lead, the Moderns had kept their end up fairly well against the Classical side, and under his lead there was no doubt that Rookwood would go ahead.

So, in spite of their natural desire to have a Classical as skipper, many of the Classical seniors meant to vote for Knowles, as evidently the best man for the job.

There was division among the juniors, too.

Townsend and Peele & Co. of the Fourth were supporters of Knowles simply because Jimmy Silver & Co. backed Neville.

In the Classical Shell, the Knowles party was strong.

Adolphus Smythe, who gave the law to the Shell, openly announced that he was for Knowles.

Smythe's motives were not very creditable.

Adolphus was a "blade," and blades had found no encouragement under Bulkeley's rule—quite the reverse.

But it was more than suspected that Knowles himself was given to "going the pace," strictly under the rose.

Under Knowles' reign, the Classical nuts expected a much easier time.

"Knowles is our man!" Adolphus Smythe told his friends. "You see, Knowles himself isn't above puttin' a sov. on a geegee occasionally—on the Q.T., of course; but fellows know it. Leggett says they have bridge-parties in Knowles' study—an' I believe it. It stands to reason that Knowles, as skipper, can't be down on such games as Bulkeley was. Neville would follow Bulkeley's example. Knowles is our man!"

And Tracy and Howard and Selwyn and the rest heartily concurred.

In the end study that evening Jimmy Silver made an anxious calculation with the aid of a sheet of impot paper and a stump of pencil.

The result was not encouraging.

"It won't be a walk-over for Neville," Jimmy announced.

"Do you mean that he'll be licked?" asked Raby.

"Well, it looks doubtful. I've got a list of all the fellows in the lower Forms who have promised to vote for Neville."

"What's the figure?" asked Lovell.

"Sixty."

"All Classicals?"

"Yes, of course."

"The Moderns are sticking together like a lot of thieves!" growled Lovell. "They've got the cheek to think that Knowles is the man for the job! Lacy—the Modern Lacy. I mean—actually told me he liked Neville as a prefect, but was going to vote for Knowles because Neville's an ass!"

"Neville isn't an ass," said Jimmy. "He's very easy-going and good-tempered—everybody likes him."

"I don't say he's a first-class skipper," said Lovell thoughtfully. "Knowles would be the better man actually for the job, if he wasn't such a beast!"

"And if he wasn't a Modern!" said Raby.

"Yes, that's the great point."

"Well, we can't expect the Moderns to look at it in that light," said Jimmy. "They back their man, same as we back ours. The worry is, that a lot of Classicals are backing him, too."

"Traitors!" snorted Lovell.

"Carthew of the Sixth is on his side—because he's a bully, and Carthew's another," said Jimmy. "Bulkeley used to keep Carthew in check, but Knowles won't. Carthew knows that."

"Rotter!"

"Ledbury and his friends are backing Knowles, too. They seem to think Rookwood will get on better at cricket and footer under Knowles."

"Well, that's possible. Knowles is sure to favour his own side, though. Neville's a bit too easy-going, I think."

"Then those Shell rotters—"

"I know why Smythe's backing Knowles!" snorted Lovell. "He thinks he's going to be allowed to smoke, and play cards in his study, because that Modern cad does the same kind of thing over the way."

"I'm afraid so."

"Taking one thing with another, it's rather a bad look-out for our man," said



With two or three fellows dragging at the handle of the door within and Tommy Dodd wrenching at the chisel embedded between the door and jamb without, the lock parted. "Hurrah!" gasped Townsend. He burst out of the study with a rush and the imprisoned juniors followed him hotfoot for the Big Hall. (See page 39.)

Newcome dismally. "The pro-Moderns seem to have a lot of mixed motives, but it comes to the same thing—they'll get their man in."

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"I'm afraid the Classical vote is split about equal," he said; "and then the Modern vote will turn the scale. Knowles has talked over Ledbury of the Sixth. I hear that he's going to write to Bulkeley, asking his advice about making up the First Eleven."

"Well, that's good, if he does it!"

"He won't do it!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "It's camouflage. Just an election dodge, because most of the Classics are backing up old Bulkeley. Bet you that if he gets in as captain Knowles will be a regular tartar!"

"It's a rotten look-out!"

"It's up to us," said Jimmy firmly.

"We can't do anything but vote for Neville."

"We can, and we must."

"What else, fathead?"

"It comes to this, that it's a tussle between Classical and Modern," said Jimmy Silver. "The Classical man's got to get in. He's Bulkeley's pal, and Bulkeley would like it, and that's enough for us."

"It's enough for Smythe and Townsend and that lot—only the other way round!" growled Lovell.

"Smythe & Co. are not going to be allowed to back up against their own side. We've got to persuade them to vote Classical."

"You'll only make 'em cackle if you ask them."

"I'll ask them, all the same. And if they won't agree, we've got to keep the cads out of the election."

"Phew!"

"All voters have got to be in Big Hall at seven sharp to-morrow. Chaps who are not there when the doors are closed can't vote."

"But—but—"

"Smythe & Co. won't be there," said Jimmy Silver.

"But there'll be a row."

"That don't matter—after the election."

"That's so, if we get our man in," said Lovell. "But what's the game?"

"Call in the fellows, and I'll put it to them," said Jimmy.

"Right-ho!"

And a meeting was held forthwith in the end study.

Conroy and Pons and Van Ryn, the three Colonials, came; and Mornington and Erroll and Oswald, Flynn, and Jones minor, Hooker and Rawson, and several more—all fellows who were devoted to the Classical cause, and could be relied upon.

Jimmy Silver expounded his little scheme to his faithful followers, and there was complete agreement.

To the Classics it seemed that anything was justifiable to keep Classics from voting for the enemy—Knowles being the enemy.

Moreover, they knew quite well that the three Tonmies would use any dodge to keep Neville's voters away from the poll.

It was quite probable that Tommy Dodd was scheming something of the kind at that very moment.

As Jimmy Silver put it, the result of the election—and the future fate of Rookwood School—depended on the Classical Fourth.

And the Classical Fourth rose to the occasion!

CHAPTER 18.

Drastic Measures!

CECIL KNOWLES the next day was observed to be displaying a considerable amount of confidence, not to say swank.

Things were looking up for the Modern candidate.

For one reason or another many Classics were on his side—with bad motives or good, according to the kind of fellows they were.

And the Modern vote was solid behind him.

Knowles was calculating on getting in with a majority of at least a dozen—possibly twenty, thirty, or forty.

But for the rivalry between Classical and Modern, there was no doubt that he would have polled three-quarters of the votes.

Classical loyalty influenced many fellows who otherwise would have thought that Knowles was the best man for the job.

Knowles' election methods were not very creditable, but they seemed successful enough.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were more than suspicious of Knowles' methods, and they

felt that they were fully justified in counter-plotting.

They were well aware that Townsend, Topham, Peele, Gower, and others had been betting with Leggett.

Why was Leggett laying money against his own man?

"Plain enough!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "They'll vote for Knowles, to win their measly bets. Where is Leggett getting the money he will have to pay out?"

"Knowles!" said Mornington.

"That's it; simply bribery and corruption."

"It ought to be shown up!" exclaimed Erroll.

"Well, we can't sneak about the cads to Bootles, that's certain—and there's no proof, anyway."

"Proof enough for us!" said Lovell.

"Quite. And we're going to put a spoke in their wheel," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "Knowles can spend his money on votes, and we'll jolly well see that the voters don't turn up! That's a Roland for an Oliver!"

Lessons that day were generally considered an unnecessary evil. All thoughts were upon the election.

All Rookwood was glad when the day's work was over, and they could turn all their thoughts to the great question that was to be decided at seven o'clock.

Over tea in the end study the Fistical Four arranged the final details of their little scheme.

After tea Jimmy Silver & Co. visited Townsend and Topham in their study.

The two nuts had finished tea, and as Tom Rawson was not there just then they had put on cigarettes afterwards.

Jimmy Silver took no heed of the cigarettes.

"Shall I put your names down on my list?" he asked.

"For Knowles?" grinned Towny.

"No; for Neville."

"Thanks, no."

"You're voting Modern?"

"You know we are," said Topham.

"Yes, we know it," said Jimmy. "Come for a walk with us, will you?"

"No fear! We're goin' down to Hall."

"I asked you to come for a walk, Towny."

"Well, I won't come!"

"You mistake. You will. Collar them!" Townsend and Topham jumped up furiously.

But they were collared in a moment, and in spite of their fierce protests, they were marched way to the box-room at the end of the passage.

"What are you up to?" shrieked Townsend, as he was hustled into the box-room. "I suppose you don't think you can keep us here?"

"I rather think so," assented Jimmy Silver. "We're going to hold a meeting of the junior debating society this evening—you're welcome to speak."

"You mean you're going to keep us out of the election, and pretend afterwards that it was a meeting of the debating society?" hissed Topham.

"Topsy, old man, you're growing quite bright."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep them quiet here," said Jimmy Silver. "If they try to get out before the—ahem!—debate, knock them on the head."

"You bet!" said Conroy.

The three Colonials were left in charge of the prisoners, and the rest of the party left the box-room.

Townsend and Topham eyed one another and their guardians in fury and dismay.

They did not make any attempt to get out of the room.

They knew that that was useless.

Ten minutes later the door was opened, and Peele and Gower were marched in, squirming and protesting.

Five minutes more, and there was an uproar in the passage.

Conroy opened the door, grinning.

Through the doorway came hurtling the elegant figure of Adolphus Smythe of the Shell, not looking quite so elegant now as usual.

Adolphus landed with a bump and a roar. After him came Tracy, spinning.

He collapsed on Smythe, eliciting another roar from the unhappy Adolphus.

Selwyn, Chesney and Howard followed, then in, helped by a liberal application of Fourth-Form boots behind.

There was a chorus of protests, howls, and fierce denunciations in the box-room. Jimmy Silver did not heed.

He led his followers away in search of further victims.

Conroy & Co. remained within the box-room on guard.

The door was locked, and the key was in the Australian junior's pocket.

And though the odds against the three were heavy, Smythe & Co. made no attempt to get hold of the key.

The three sturdy Colonials were dreadfully hard bitters, and the Classical nuts were not fond of hard hitting.

Moreover, each of them had a bat in his hand, and those bats were not to be argued with.

There was a knock at the door soon afterwards, and Conroy opened it.

Tubby Muffin was hurled in, grunting.

He collided with Adolphus Smythe, and threw his arms round Smythe's neck to save himself from falling.

Smythe shoved him off angrily, and the fat Classical rolled on the floor and yelled distastefully.

Tracy minor of the Second was "chucked" in after him, and several more fags of the Third and Second Forms followed.

The box-room was growing quite crowded.

"Better keep guard outside now," said Jimmy Silver.

"Do you think we're goin' to stand this?" shrieked Smythe, in helpless wrath.

"You can sit down if you like, dear boy."

The door was closed on them.

Outside, the Colonial Co. remained on guard.

There was really danger of a revolt if they had stayed inside, the crowd of prisoners was growing so numerous.

During the next half-hour the door was opened again, and junior after junior, fag after fag, was pitched into the box-room.

All the nuts of the Classical side, all the fellows who, for one reason or another, good or bad, had determined to vote Modern, came hurtling into the box-room in twos or threes.

Large as the room was, it was getting swarmed.

There were nearly thirty fellows there when the door was finally closed and locked on the outside.

And it was past half-past six.

"That's about the lot," said Jimmy Silver, in the passage. "I'd have liked a few more, but some of the cads are out of doors and we can't collar them in the quad; might attract attention."

"Ha. ha! It might!" chortled Mornington.

"And some have gone into Hall already, and we can't noble them under the nose of the prefects," said Jimmy Silver regretfully. "I suppose Neville wouldn't really approve of this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But as we're not going to tell him that doesn't matter. One of us had better stay here."

"It's losing a vote," said Lovell. "We can't afford to chuck votes away, even now."

"Up to the last moment," said Jimmy. "You stick here. Conroy, and cut down Hall at the last minute."

"Right you are!"

And as seven o'clock drew near, Jimmy Silver & Co. marched into Hall, in good time for the election.

CHAPTER 19.

The Captain's Election!

"WE'VE got to keep our eyes peeled," remarked Tommy Dodd oracularly, as he and his chums left Mr. Manders' House on that fateful evening.

"It's all serene," answered Cook. "Every fellow will come up to the scratch. They know what they'd get if they didn't."

"Bedad, an' they do!" said Doyle emphatically.

"I know the Moderns will turn up duffer," answered Tommy Dodd. "They're mostly in Hall already—they've got orders. It's our Classical backers I'm thinking of. Some of the Fourth have been threatening to scalp Smythe for backing our man. Smythe's a bit of a funk, and may be scared off. He's got to have protection if he needs it."

"Faith, an' a hiding wouldn't do him any harm, Tommy darling! Sure you know why he's votin' for our man?"

"A vote's a vote, and we're not going to risk losing, Smythe's," answered the leader. "We've got to keep a special eye on Smythe & Co., in case those boudoirs try to threaten them. Then there's Muffin—"

"That fat baste!"

"A fat beast can vote as well as a thin beast!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "We've

let Muffin scoff two-thirds of our rations, and everything else we could get for him, for his vote. Well, if somebody else fed him at the last minute, he would go back on us. The election may turn on a single vote; there's no telling. You keep Muffin under your eye, Cook."

"Right-ho!"

From which it will be seen that the three Tommies were very much on their guard, and were not running any risks with their voters.

Knowles had no keener backers than the Tommies, though they disliked him exceedingly.

But he was "their man," and they were going to get him in.

There was nothing pro-Classical about Tommy Dodd & Co.

They had been very busy, and it was about a quarter to seven when they entered Big Hall in the School House.

Big Hall was getting crowded.

The candidates had not yet appeared, but a large number of seniors of the Fifth and Sixth were present, and Mr. Bootles had just come in.

Mr. Bootles and Mr. Wiggins were the sellers in the election.

Tommy Dodd looked round him keenly, to make sure that all the Modern supporters were present.

Catesby and Frampton were looking after senior voters very sharply, but the junior element was under Tommy's special eye.

Cecil Knowles had been rather surprised by Tommy Dodd's keenness.

He had had many rubs with Tommy, and there was no love lost between them.

In point of fact, if Knowles was successful, he was likely to owe it in great part to Tommy Dodd's faithful backing.

Tommy's word was law among the Modern juniors, and fags who might have remembered cuffs and canings from Knowles at an awkward moment for him were all following Tommy's loyal lead.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came in, and hovered from the quarter where Tommy Dodd was looking about him.

They did not want anything to say to Tommy just then.

But Tommy joined them, with a knitted brow.

He had noted the absence of the Classical nuts, and of Tubby Muffin and some of the fags who had gone over to the Modern party.

"Don't your blessed Classics know it's ten to seven?" asked Tommy, with sarcasm. "Or are they going to hop in at the last minute?"

"Oh, we're turning up in pretty good force!" said Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"Seen Smythe?"

"Yes."

"Where is the duffer, then?"

"I saw him at dinner."

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" said Tommy Dodd crossly. "Smythe's voting Modern. None of your tricks, you know!"

"Tricks!" said Jimmy Silver, opening his eyes in astonishment at the bare suggestion.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Lovell. "As for tricks, what about fellows betting to lose money if Knowles gets in? I call it bribery!"

Tommy Dodd coloured a little.

He knew something of Knowles' methods, and in some respects he was not proud of his candidate.

"I've had no hand in anything of that kind!" he said hotly.

"I know that; but some Moderns have, and it's a dirty trick!"

"Well, if anybody's bribed, it's a Classical! A Modern would hit you in the eye if you tried it on him!" retorted Tommy.

"The thief's as bad as the receiver," said Raby.

"All very well. But where's Tubby Muffin?"

"Ask me another."

"Have you chaps been feeding him?" asked Tommy Dodd suspiciously.

"Hallo! Here comes the merry candidate," said Oswald.

Knowles came in with Stephen Catesby. A few moments later Neville entered, with Jones major and Lonsdale.

Their entrance was the signal for a burst of cheering, in which Modern vied with Classical in apparently attempting to raise the ancient roof from its rafters.

Other fellows crowded in after them.

Big Hall was filling. It was close on seven.

Mr. Wiggins came in, and joined Mr. Bootles.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled at one another.

They took up a strategic position close to the big door.

That door would be closed at seven o'clock, and all who were not within the

Hall at that hour would be shut out of the election.

Jimmy Silver meant to see that the door was closed as soon as Conroy had darted in at the last moment.

Knowles' majority, largely gained by shady methods, would remain shut up in the box-room, out of the proceedings.

Meanwhile, Tommy Dodd was getting anxious.

He compared notes with Cook and Doyle, who shared his anxiety.

"The silly idiots will miss the vote if they don't come in!" said Dodd. "Cut out and warn them, Cook! They must be in their studies."

"Don't let those Classical cads shut me out, then!"

"We'll watch 'em?"

Cook hurried out of the Hall, but he came back in a few minutes.

He was alone.

"Can't find 'em!" he announced. "All the studies are empty, and I couldn't see a soul in the quad!"

"Where the thump can they be?" exclaimed Doyle.

Tommy Dodd set his teeth.

"It's a dodge of some sort!" he muttered. "They're being kept away. Why, there's more than twenty of our backers missing!"

"Three minutes to seven!" said Cook, with a glance at the big clock. "Not much time left for 'em."

"It's a dodge!" repeated Tommy Dodd. "My hat! They're closing the door!" He raised his voice and bawled: "Leave that door alone, you Classical cads!"

Mr. Bootles looked round.

"Silver!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"It is not yet time to close the door."

"Ahem! All right, sir!"

Jimmy gave Tommy Dodd a glare, and Tommy grinned.

"That shows they're keeping them out!" whispered Cook. "They've got all their men here, and they want to keep ours out. Hallo! There's Conroy."

Conroy of the Fourth came quietly into the Hall and joined the Classical group just inside the door.

It wanted one minute to seven.

Tommy Dodd was wild with impatience. There was no sign of Smythe & Co., or Tubby Muffin or the rest, and the last minute was slipping away in rapid seconds.

"I'm going out!" whispered Tommy.

"You'll miss the voting!"

"I tell you our men are being kept away somehow. If that's so, we'll make 'em open the door if I can find 'em. If you hear me at the door, tell Knowles I've fetched 'em along, and he'll make 'em open the door!"

"But—"

Tommy Dodd slipped out of the Hall, and Jimmy Silver grinned as he went.

It was another voter gone.

The clock indicated seven, and the Classical juniors shut the big door with a bang.

"Our game!" grinned Lovell.

And the Fistical Four smiled with satisfaction.

CHAPTER 20.

Captain of Rookwood!

TOMMY DODD hurried up the staircase, deserted now.

No one was in sight in the passages.

It was certain enough that voters were being kept away, and Tommy Dodd did not grumble at the "dodge."

It was no more than just retaliation for Knowles' many dodges.

But he did not mean to let it succeed if he could help it.

He hurried along, and looked into some of the Classical studies. But they were empty.

Bang, bang, bang!

Tommy Dodd jumped as he heard that sudden commotion from the direction of the box-room.

He fairly raced towards it.

Thump, thump!

Smythe had started thumping, in the hope that someone might hear and let the prisoners out.

But for Tommy Dodd's wariness Smythe would have hoped in vain.

But, as it happened, Tommy was there to hear.

Tommy Dodd knocked at the door.

"Who's in there?" he called out.

"By gad! Is that you, Dodd?"

"Yes. That you, Smythe?"

"You be! That cad Silver's shut us up here to keep us out of the election!" yelled Smythe, through the keyhole. "Unlock the door!"

"There's no key here."

"Oh, gad, then we're done, after all! Get a key from somewhere, Dodd—there's nearly thirty fellows here."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tommy Dodd. Tommy was a fellow of resource, but he was dismayed.

It was past seven, and he was shut out of Hall.

It was doubtful if he would regain an entrance, with his rescued voters, if he rescued them.

And the door was locked between. "Get us out somehow, man!" yelled Townsend. "We've got to beat that beast Silver!"

"I'll get you out somehow," said Tommy Dodd. "Wait a minute!"

Tommy was desperate. The election trembled in the balance.

He knew that the Modern candidate could not win on a count without those thirty votes.

He rushed into the nearest study, in search of an instrument for breaking the lock, leaving the consequences of such a reckless proceeding to take care of themselves.

He dragged open Lovell's tool-chest in the end study, and seized a hammer and a cold chisel.

In a twinkling he was back at the door of the box-room.

"Pull at the door!" he called out.

"Right-ho!"

Clang, clang! Bang!

Tommy jammed the chisel between the door and jamb, and hammered it fiercely.

With a rain of blows he drove it in, and the lock strained and creaked and groaned under the steady pressure.

Then, with three or four fellows dragging at the handle of the door within, and Tommy Dodd wrenching at the embedded chisel without, the lock parted.

There was a loud crack, and the door flew open.

"Hurrah!" gasped Townsend.

"Come on!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

He threw down the chisel, and ran for the staircase; and after him ran Adolphus Smythe and Peele and Tubby Muffin and the rest.

They were only too keen on avenging their imprisonment by defeating Jimmy Silver at the last moment.

In a breathless crowd, they arrived at the door of Big Hall.

It was closed and locked.

Inside, Jimmy Silver & Co. had their backs against it.

The election in the hall was proceeding. Catesby had proposed Knowles, seconded by Frampton, and Jones major and Lonsdale had done the same for Neville.

Tommy Dodd hammered fiercely outside, but the roar of cheering that greeted the nominations drowned the noise.

"Too late!" chuckled Jimmy Silver, through the keyhole. "You can keep out now, Duddy!"

"Let us in, blow you!" shouted Smythe. Jimmy Silver jumped at that voice.

"My hat! They've got out!" he whispered to his comrades. "Dodd's got the whole gang there!"

"They're not coming in!" said Lovell grimly.

The shut-out voters kicked and hammered and thumped.

Within, the cheering had died down, and the uproar outside was quite audible.

"Cheer!" whispered Jimmy. "Kick up a row, or—"

"Hurrah!" roared Lovell. "Neville for ever! Hooray!"

"Silence, please," said Mr. Bootles, looking round.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip!"

"Silence!" shouted Knowles.

"Open that door!" yelled Tommy Cook, easily guessing the state of affairs. "Get away from that door, you Classical cads!"

"Shift him, bedad!" howled Doyle.

"Order!"

"Stop that shuffling, there, you fags!" shouted Neville.

"Silly ass! He don't know we're making him captain of Rookwood!" growled Lovell. "Keep those Modern cads off!"

"We shall now proceed to take the count," said Mr. Bootles. "Hands up for Neville, please. Quiet there!"

"Order!"

"They're keeping out our voters!" yelled Cook.

"Silence! Anyone not in Hall by seven cannot come in," said Mr. Bootles. "The time of the election was perfectly well known."

Tommy Cook did not heed.

He called on his comrades to the attack, and there was a terrific charge of the Moderns.

The election could not proceed while that uproar was going on.

Three or four prefects strode among the

pommelling juniors, laying about them right and left to restore order.

The belligerents were scattered by those drastic measures.

But Tommy Doyle made a spring for the door, and seized the key and turned it back.

He was caught by the collar by Carthew the next moment, and swung away.

But the door was open now, and Tommy Dodd and his merry men swarmed in.

"Keep them out!" roared Lovell. "Tain't fair—it's past seven!"

"Turn those cads out—it's too late!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"We've been locked in a box-room!" howled Smythe. "Stand by us, Knowles; we're voting for you, and we've been kept away by force."

"Sneak!" yelled Lovell.

But Knowles had heard enough, and he strode on the scene.

"What's that? Kept away by force?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas!" gasped Adolphus.

"Then you can come in. Mr. Bootles, these juniors were kept away by force. Under the circumstances, they must be allowed in."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "Yes, certainly. I am shocked at such a thing. I trust it was only a joke. Let them enter, by all means!"

The door clanged shut again.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another with sickly expressions.

A few minutes more, and Neville would have been elected captain of Rookwood, but it was not to be.

Tommy Dodd had been one too many for his old rivals.

Tommy grinned serenely at the Fistical Four.

"Sold again!" he chortled.

And Jimmy Silver could only glare.

There was nothing else to be done.

The counting proceeded.

Jimmy Silver & Co. held up their hands for Neville, and yelled applause; but their hopes were not high.

They howled with derision when the vote was taken for Knowles, but that, though it was a personal satisfaction, did not affect the result.

There was a breathless hush when Mr. Bootles, after comparing notes with Mr. Wiggins, announced the result of the count.

"Ceil Knowles, one hundred and thirty votes."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Lawrence Neville, one hundred and five votes."

"Oh!"

"Ceil Knowles is duly elected captain of Rookwood!"

There was a roar of cheering from the Knowles faction, and deep groans from the Classics.

Knowles' face was smiling.

It was the realisation of his long ambition.

Fate had removed Bulkeley from his path, and he had won what he had long schemed for.

Jimmy Silver groaned.

"Majority twenty-five!" he murmured.

"We should have done it if that beast Dodd hadn't got those rotters out of the box-room! It's the limit!"

"Sickening!" growled Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had done their best, but Cecil Knowles walked out of Big Hall captain of the school, and he walked as if he were treading on air.

That evening there were great rejoicings on the Modern side.

On the Classical side there was less satisfaction; though the Fistical Four found some solace in visiting Smythe's study, and ragging the rejoicing nuts till they felt like anything but rejoicing.

"It can't be helped," Jimmy Silver remarked, later. "Keep smiling! We did our best, and a fellow can't do more! And if Knowles tries any of his games now he's captain of Rookwood, he will find himself up against this study; and this study never says die! Keep smiling!"

CHAPTER 21.

Knowles Shows His Hand!

TUBBY MUFFIN put his head in at the end study in great excitement.

"Jimmy Silver—you fellows—"

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver, looking round.

"The list's up!" announced Tubby.

"Oh!"

"Nearly all Moderns!" said Tubby.

"Just as we expected, you know. Come and look at it! The fellows are grouching, I can tell you!"

And Tubby Muffin vanished, to carry the news further.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at prep. in the end study, but they rose to their feet at once.

Prep. on such an occasion could wait.

All Rookwood, in fact, was waiting to see the list of the First Eleven for the St. Jim's match—the last big fixture of the cricket season at Rookwood.

Classicals and Moderns alike were eager to see the kind of eleven Knowles of the Sixth intended to put into the field.

By that list it could be seen how the new captain of Rookwood intended to work.

The Fistical Four quitted their study and hurried towards the stairs.

They found a good many more of the Classical Fourth bound in the same direction.

"I hear Knowles has done it!" said Mornington, as he came out of his study with Erroll and joined the Fistical Four.

"Looks like it," answered Jimmy Silver. "But let's see the list!"

The juniors hurried downstairs.

Strictly speaking, the St. Jim's match, being a First Eleven match, did not concern the heroes of the Fourth.

They played St. Jim's themselves—the junior team; and, truth to tell, the junior match loomed larger in their eyes than the senior match did.

But all Rookwood took a pride in the exploits of the Rookwood First, which had done great things under Bulkeley's leadership.

It would be a blow to all, senior and junior alike, if the First Eleven should really "go to pot" under the new leadership.

Jimmy Silver & Co. found a crowd already collected before the notice-board in the hall, where the cricket list was posted up for all to read.

The crowd were nearly all of Classicals, and their comments were decidedly unfavourable.

"Rotten!"

"What a set of tripe!"

"It's a joke!"

"Knowles must be potty!"

"This is asking St. Jim's for a licking!"

Such were the remarks Jimmy Silver & Co. heard as they came up.

They heard other remarks, too, as they

shoved their way through the crowd by a liberal use of elbows.

But they did not heed them.

They were anxious to see the list.

"Who are you shoving, bodad?" roared Flynn.

"You, old chap!" answered Jimmy Silver cheerily.

And he won his way to the board, followed by his chums.

"What do you think of that, Jimmy Silver?" shouted Rawson.

"Let's read it," answered Jimmy.

And he read it, with a frowning brow.

The list of players given for the last big match of the season ran:

C. KNOWLES.
S. CATESBY.
R. FRAMPTON.
T. HOKE.
H. TRESHAM.
M. MYERS.
T. LISTER.
K. BRAYE.
L. NEVILLE.
E. JONES.
M. CARTHEW.

Jimmy Silver fairly blinked at that list. Eight names in it belonged to the Modern side of Rookwood.

The final three were Classicals.

Several of them were fellows who had never been selected for the Rookwood First at all, even as reserves.

Of the three Classicals, Neville and Jones major were first-rate men, but Mark Cartew certainly was not.

But he was a friend of Knowles', and that accounted for his selection.

Jimmy rubbed his eyes.

"My only hat!" he said. "That isn't a Rookwood team—that's a Modern side team. Lonsdale's left out, and Hansom, and Scott—My hat!"

"It's asking for a licking," said Raby.

"An' gettin' it, by gad!" remarked Mornington. "Knowles is beginnin' well!"

"Here comes Neville!" murmured Oswald.

The juniors made way for Neville of the Sixth, as he came along with Lonsdale.

Neville glanced at the excited crowd of juniors.

"What's on?" he asked.

"It's the cricket list," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh!"

"Your name's in it, Neville," grinned Smythe of the Shell.

Neville took no notice of that remark.

He read the list through quietly.

Lonsdale read it, too, and his brow darkened.

Lonsdale had been one of Bulkeley's best men, and he could not be spared from the First Eleven in a big fixture.

But Knowles had evidently considered that he could spare him.

"My hat!" said Neville at last.

"What a team!" said Lonsdale, his lip curling. "Well, the Classical chaps who voted for Knowles are gettin' what they asked for now. That list is simply a disgrace!"

The two seniors walked away.

"We know what the Sixth think of it now," grinned Oswald.

Hansom of the Fifth came up with Lumsden.

Both of them generally played for the Rookwood First in Bulkeley's time.

Both of them were left out of Knowles' team.

"Did you ever?" gasped Hansom, as he stared at the list.

"Well, hardly ever!" remarked Lumsden.

"It must be a joke!"

"A jolly bad joke!"

"Knowles will have to be talked to about this!" exclaimed Hansom hotly. "I voted for the fellow. It was understood that he was going to play the game. This isn't playing the game. This is favouring the Modern side, and chucking away First Eleven matches."

The Fifth-Formers stalked away in great wrath.

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to the end study.

Prep. had to be done. But that evening the Classical juniors certainly did not give so much thought to prep. as they should have given.

The way Knowles had started, as captain of Rookwood, filled all thoughts.

It was not only that he was going to put into the field a team that couldn't beat St. Jim's. That was bad enough!

But it was clear that in Knowles' eyes the Modern side—his own side—was the only side that mattered, and that under the new captain the Classics were to be left out in the cold in every way.

And that was serious.

"They're going to remonstrate with Knowles, I believe," said Jimmy Silver, with a sniff. "Fat lot of good that will be! Knowles will only grin. He's got the whip-hand now, and he's going to use it."

"And Rookwood games will go to pot!" said Lovell.

"Well, it does look like it. 'Serve the fellows right for electing Knowles!' growled Jimmy. "I wish old Bulkeley could come back!"

Jimmy Silver was not the only fellow on the Classical side who wished that.

The Classics—even some of those who had voted for Knowles in the captain's election—would have given a great deal to see George Bulkeley in his old place at Rookwood again.

CHAPTER 22.

Knowles Knows Best!

C ECIL KNOWLES was standing by the window in his study.

He turned from the window with a smile to Catesby and Frampton, who were in the study.

"We're goin' to have visitors," he remarked.

The two Modern seniors grinned.

"I thought the cricket list would stir 'em up a bit," remarked Frampton.

"Bound to!" smiled Catesby.

They joined Knowles at the window.

Through the dusk of the quad they discerned Neville and Jones major of the Sixth, and Hansom and Lumsden of the Fifth, coming to the House.

The four Classical seniors looked very serious.

There was no doubt that it was Knowles' selection of the First Eleven that was the cause of their coming.

"Shall we clear off, Knowles?" asked Catesby.

"No; stay where you are. I shall speak pretty plainly if there's any nonsense."

"Good! Let them understand that the captaincy is on this side of Rookwood now!"

"I intend to. We had to do a lot of knucklin' under while Bulkeley was skipper. It's their turn now."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Knowles' two supporters.

In a very cheery mood the three Modern seniors waited for the visitors.

"Come in!" said Knowles very politely, as a tap came at the door.

Neville and his companions entered.

Knowles greeted them with a cheery nod.

"Glad to see you fellows!" he said affably.

"Sit down!"

"We shan't be staying long," said Neville.

"The fact is, we've come to see you about the team for the St. Jim's match, Knowles."

"Any suggestions to offer?"

"Yes; if you care to hear them."

"Certainly! You are on the committee, Neville, and you have a right to make any suggestion you think fit. Of course, the decision rests with the captain of the school."

"I don't dispute that," said Neville drily; while Hansom of the Fifth gave utterance to an expressive grunt. "We've seen the notice you've posted up, Knowles. It was the first I'd seen of it when I found it on the board. Are we to take that cricket-list seriously?"

Knowles elevated his eyebrows.

"Naturally!" he replied.

"That's the eleven you intend to play against St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"And you expect to win?" broke in Jones major.

"I hope to," answered Knowles calmly.

"With that team?" snorted Hansom.

"You think it could be improved?" asked Knowles.

"What! I know it could!"

"Well, I don't think I ought to leave out Neville or Jones major," said Knowles, with a shake of the head. "They're good men."

"Eh! I'm not suggesting anything of the sort. Leave out some of the Modern crocks you're loading up the team with," said Hansom.

Knowles smiled.

"I'm afraid you're a bit prejudiced, as a Classical, Hansom. You must really allow me to use my own judgment, especially in connection with fellows in my own house that I know thoroughly well."

"I should jolly well think so," said Catesby warmly.

"If you're determined to play this team, Knowles, I suppose there's nothing more to be said," said Neville quietly. "But as head of the Classical side, I feel bound to protest. It's practically a House team, not a School team at all, and it can't possibly meet St. Jim's on anything like equal

terms. It means a defeat for the First Eleven."

"Why?"

"Because half the men you have selected are no good," answered Neville bluntly.

"Because they are Moderns?" sneered Frampton.

"Because they can't play cricket up to the standard required for a first-class match, I mean, and you know it."

"I don't know it," said Frampton. "I know the Modern side produces better cricketers than the other side, though Bulkeley didn't think so in his time."

"Oh, come out into the open!" said Lumsden. "Now Knowles is captain, the Classical side is to be left in the shade. That's it."

"Not at all," said Knowles smoothly. "You remember what Bulkeley used to say. In matters affecting the school we must forget that there are two sides to Rookwood, and think only of the school."

"That's right enough."

"Well, that's what I'm doing. Bulkeley worked on that principle, and it always led him to select the majority of players from the Classical side. It just happened that way, of course. Working on the same principle, I happen to find the best men on the Modern side."

"Only you don't find the best men there; you find a set of crocks."

"I might have said the same to Bulkeley in his time. I certainly thought so," said Knowles calmly. "The fact is, since you force me to speak plainly, I'm not satisfied with Classical cricket."

"What?"

"I want to see a general improvement in your form," went on Knowles. "I want to see you stick to practice, and buck up generally. When you produce men fit to play for Rookwood I'll play them with pleasure. Until then I've got to win matches somehow with the material I've got in hand. That's how the matter stands."

Knowles spoke with perfect gravity, though the effect was somewhat spoiled by the lurking grins of his two comrades.

The Classical seniors stared at him almost open-mouthed.

Knowles' statement was so directly contrary to the facts, that it quite took their breath away.

"So—so that's how you look at it, is it?" gasped Jones major at last.

"Yes, that's it."

"Then we may as well get out. Come on, you fellows!"

"We protest!" said Hansom.

Knowles nodded.

"I will make a note of your protest," he replied.

"And you are going to play that team of duds all the same?"

"I am going to play the Rookwood First, if that is what you mean."

"Then I'm dashed if I'll play in a team that goes out hunting for a thumping licking!" exclaimed Jones major angrily.

"If you choose to resign your place, of course you are at liberty to do so," said Knowles unmoved. "I dare say I can fill it—we've got plenty of good men in this House. Only don't say it was my doing to make the First Eleven entirely Modern. The responsibility for that will be yours."

Jones major strode out of the study without replying.

His companions followed him.

Knowles had them in a cleft stick, as it were.

The Classical players could either share in the match, foredoomed to defeat, or they could resign and put it in Knowles' power to say that defeat was brought about by their desertion.

They were breathing hard as they crossed the quad back to the School House.

Knowles smiled as the door closed.

"I don't think our dear friends got much change out of me," he remarked.

"Not much!" grinned Frampton. "By gad, this is like Bulkeley's time over again, but with the boot on the other leg!"

And Catesby chuckled.

CHAPTER 23.

Tubby Muffin Has His Suspicions!

TUBBY MUFFIN insinuated himself into the end study, where the Fistical Four were starting their preparation.

Tubby ought to have been at prep. himself, but he was apparently putting it off, as he often did, sometimes with dire results to himself when he had to deal with Mr. Bontles in the morning.

"I say, Jimmy—" he began.

Jimmy waved a hand at him.

"Can't you see I'm busy? Buzz!"

"Clear!" grunted Lovell.

"Scat!" said Raby.

"Absquatulate!" howled Newcome.

Tubby Muffin remained entirely unmoved by those four objurgations, all delivered at once.

He only waited for silence, and recommenced:

"I say, Jimmy, Catesby's gone out!"

"Bother Catesby! What the dickens does it matter to us whether a blessed Modern bounder stays in or goes out?" snapped Jimmy. "Let a fellow work!"

"But I say—"

"Go and do your prep., you fat duffer! You'll have Bootles on your track in the morning!"

"Never mind prep. now," said Tubby. "Catesby's gone out, I tell you. It's a jolly good chance for one of you fellows to nip into his study!"

Jimmy looked up from his work at last and stared at the fat Classical.

"What on earth should anybody nip into Catesby's study for, you owl?" he demanded. "Have you gone off your rocker?"

"I've got a strong suspicion—"

"Bow-wow!"

"That he's got a lot of grub there."

"Rats!"

"Then what is it he keeps in his desk?" demanded Tubby.

"Eh? Any old thing, I suppose!"

"I mean that big mahogany desk in his study," said Muffin eagerly. "He keeps it locked, and always takes the key out."

"He may be afraid of a fat little inquisitive beast nosing among his papers!" remarked Raby caustically.

"His fag's noticed it—in fact, he told me," said Tubby, unheeding. "One day Catesby found him near the desk, and cuffed him. Taverner wasn't going to touch his old desk, but Catesby cuffed him. He thought he was. Looks suspicious, don't it?"

"Oh, rot!"

"You see, Catesby never used to keep that desk locked."

"How do you know?"

"His fag says so. Taverner says the matches used to be kept in that desk, and he used to get them when he was going to light a fire for Catesby. Well, all of a sudden Catesby took to keeping it locked. Why should he? The key used to stick in

the lock, but now Catesby wears it on his watchchain. He don't keep papers in it. It's never opened. Taverner knows that."

"And how does Taverner know that?" asked Newcome.

"He was rather curious about it, you see," grinned Tubby, "so I put him up to a dodge. He stuck some wax in the keyhole. It's never been disturbed, though it was a week ago. Catesby never unlocks that desk. Yet he's awfully careful about the key. He had a ring made specially to keep it on his watchchain. 'Tain't a key you'd wear on a chain, neither. It's rather big and clumsy, and must be awkward on a chain."

Tubby Muffin paused and looked inquiringly at the Fistical Four.

Evidently the Paul Pry of Rookwood considered that he had strong grounds for suspicion.

"What do you fellows think?" he asked.

"I think you'd better mind your own business and let Catesby's desk alone!" said Lovell gruffly.

"But he's hiding something in it!" urged Tubby. "What can he be hiding there it not grub?"

"Nonsense!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Don't you think so, Jimmy?"

"No, I don't!"

"But he's hiding something there!" urged Tubby. "Isn't it plain enough?"

"Rats!"

"It's grub, right enough!" said Tubby with conviction. "Couldn't be anything else. I say, what a lark to scoff it and leave him to find the desk empty when he goes to take it out—what?"

"You fat burglar!" said Lovell.

"I suggest one of you fellows going there. You could burst the desk open by—by accident, you know."

"I'll burst you, not by accident, if you don't mizzle!" exclaimed Lovell indignantly.

"Buzz off, you fat clam!"

"But, I say——"

Lovell grasped the inkpot, and Tubby Muffin rolled hastily out of the end study without finishing his remarks.

The Fistical Four were not to be enlisted as amateur cracksmen.

"I say, that's jolly queer, all the same," remarked Newcome, as Lovell set down the inkpot. "Why should Catesby bother so much over his old desk?"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"I can guess what's in that desk," he answered.

"You can?" ejaculated Newcome.

"Yes."

"What the dickens is it, then?"

"Papers!" said Jimmy.

"But how do you know?"

"Don't you remember the day we were at Woodend?" said Jimmy, with a touch of impatience. "Catesby met his uncle there, and the old Johnny gave him a bundle of papers to mind. Ten to one it's that that's in the desk."

"I remember now," said Lovell, with a nod. "I'd forgotten. That was jolly queer, too. It puzzled me at the time."

"Not our business."

"No; that's so. But it was queer, I wonder what Catesby would say if he knew we knew?" said Lovell, with a grin.

"Just as well he doesn't. He would be down on us, though we couldn't help knowing, and as his pal is captain of Rookwood now he could make it warm for us," said Jimmy Silver. "Not a word about it. They want to keep it dark, according to what we heard them say. And it's not our bizney. Pile in, or we shan't get done."

And the Fistical Four resumed their prep.

But Tubby Muffin was not thinking of prep.

The thought of Stephen Catesby's locked desk haunted him.

Tubby Muffin knew nothing of that mysterious meeting between the Modern prefect and his uncle, which Jimmy Silver & Co. had accidentally witnessed.

The only conclusion he could come to was that Catesby was concealing a store of food in the mahogany desk, all the more because Tubby's thoughts and dreams ran continually upon food.

The thought of that possible supply was so enticing to the fat Classical that he made up his mind at last to risk it himself, having failed to interest the Fistical Four in the matter.

With great caution Tubby made his way into Mr. Manders' House, and as most of the fellows were at preparation at that hour he succeeded in reaching Catesby's study unobserved.

With bated breath the fat Classical tip-toed into the study.

It was in darkness.

Tubby groped his way to the desk in the far corner and struck a match.

His eyes lingered on the desk, but he tried in vain to force the locked lid.

His glance wandered to the poker in the grate, and he wondered whether he could risk it.

The match went out, Tubby standing undecided.

The thought of food so near at hand made him feel ravenous.

He struck another match, his fat mind almost made up.

There was a step in the passage, and the door opened.

"Hallo! You're in, Catesby?" It was Tresham of the Modern Sixth. "Hallo! What—"

Tubby dropped the match in terror.

Tresham entered the study, switching on the electric light.

He stared sternly at the palpitating Fourth-former.

"You young sweep, what are you up to?" he exclaimed. "What are you doing at that desk?"

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Tubby. "I—I wasn't touching it, you know. I—"

"What did you come here for?"

"N-nothing! I—I—"

Tresham grasped him by the collar.

"This way!" he said grimly.

"I—I say— Yaroooh!" roared Tubby.

The Modern senior spun him out of the study, and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Tubby Muffin went down the passage as if he had been shot from a catapult.

Tresham burst into a roar of laughter as he went.

Tubby Muffin did not laugh; he roared in quite another way, and fled for his life.

CHAPTER 24.

The St. Jim's Match!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. started for Big Side immediately after dinner on the following day.

They were looking very serious.

Though the First Eleven match was not, in their eyes, so important as their own matches, they still admitted that it was a match of importance.

And they had no desire to see Rookwood

First "walked over" by Kildare and his merry men from St. Jim's.

But that was what they fully expected to see.

How could a team composed almost entirely of Moderns beat any lot that could play cricket at all?

That was the question the Classicals asked themselves, and to which they could find only one answer.

Most of the Classicals agreed that Knowles was simply chucking the match away for the sake of Modern swank.

The view taken by the Moderns was quite different.

Tommy Dodd & Co., the heroes of the Modern Fourth, opined that Rookwood would finish the season in style now that the Modern side was really getting a chance in the games.

It was House patriotism that led to Tommy Dodd taking this view. It really was not founded on the facts.

But Tommy Dodd and the rest held that view with great obstinacy.

"Hallo, Duddy!" said Jimmy Silver, as he arrived on the cricket-ground and found the Moderns there. "Nice prospect for to-day—what?"

"Ripping!" agreed Tommy Dodd.

"Faith, and we're going to see some cricket entirely!" said Tommy Doyle sturdily. "Real cricket, I mane!"

"I don't think!" snapped Lovell.

"No need to tell us that, old scout," remarked Tommy Dodd kindly. "We know you don't. You can't, in fact!"

"Look here, you cheeky Modern chump!" roared Lovell belligerently.

"Order!" said Kit Erroll with a laugh. "Leave Tommy his opinion. He'll change it fast enough when the play begins."

"Well, that's so," agreed Lovell.

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd.

"What a team!" said Jimmy Silver, with an extremely disparaging look at the First Eleven, who were standing by the pavilion.

"Two good men—Jones major and Neville. Cartnew's not much good."

"What do you expect of a Classical?" inquired Tommy Cook.

"But the rest. What a crew!" said Raby.

"Silly ass!" answered Tommy Dodd.

"The Classicals have had the games in their hands too long. Now we're going to see some cricket, now that the Moderns

have got a look-in."

"Here comes St. Jim's!" said Mornington. "They look a rippin' lot!"

There was a cheer for the St. Jim's cricketers.

Jimmy Silver knew a good many of them by sight, having seen them when over at St. Jim's for the junior matches with Tom Merry's team.

Kildare, their captain, was a mighty cricketer; and Monteith, Darrell, Langton, Rusden, Lefevre, and the rest looked very fit and in great form.

They were a team that required the best men in Rookwood to be put into the field against them, and even the Moderns could hardly maintain that Knowles' eleven represented the best in Rookwood.

Knowles seemed to have no doubts, however.

He was smiling and confident.

A victory over St. Jim's would certainly have been a great triumph for Cecil Knowles, and a proof of his contention that the Moderns had never been given a fair show under George Bulkeley's rule.

But it was a very great question whether he could win such a victory with his present team.

Knowles himself was a first-class man, and Catesby and Frampton were good; but most of the others could have been replaced with advantage from the ranks of the Classical seniors.

Knowles won the toss, and elected to bat, and he opened the innings for Rookwood with Frampton.

Kildare and his men went into the field.

"What price duck's eggs to-day?" growled Lovell.

"Cheap!" said Jimmy Silver.

And Tommy Dodd snorted.

Darrell bowled the first over for St. Jim's against Knowles.

The Moderns cheered loudly as Knowles dealt with the bowling.

The Modern captain was certainly at the top of his form, and at such times he was decidedly good.

Jimmy Silver felt his hopes rise as he watched him.

Angry as he was with Knowles, Jimmy could have tolerated his triumph if only he could have bagged a victory for Rookwood School.

Suddenly there was a loud shout.

"Well bowled St. Jim's!"

Knowles' wicket was down for twenty-five runs.

It was a good innings, against good bowling, and Catesby was called in to take his captain's place.

"Catesby will never stand that bowling," said Mornington sagely.

Morny was right.

After a few overs, Catesby's wicket fell to Langton of St. Jim's.

A few minutes later Frampton was caught out by Kildare.

The Rookwood score stood at fifty.

"A jolly good beginning!" said Tommy Dodd, with a defiant look at Jimmy Silver and the disparaging Classics.

"But what price the ending?" snorted Lovell. "Look out for the procession!"

And a "procession" it soon proved to be, and Jimmy Silver's misgivings were more than realised.

CHAPTER 25.

Something Like a Licking!

KNOWLES looked grim as he watched the "procession."

The Rookwood batsmen went to the wickets, and came away—they had little time to stay.

Knowles had set down Neville and Jones major at tenth and eleventh, much to the disgust of the Classics.

After the third wicket fell not a single run was taken till the tenth man went in.

That was Neville. Six batsmen had gone in and gone out, ingloriously.

They had no chance against the St. Jim's bowling and fielding.

The Saints, by that time, were grinning.

This was not the cricket they had expected at Rookwood, and they were already looking on the great match as a walk-over.

The game did not wake up again till Neville and Jones major were at the wickets, doing their best for Rookwood.

The Modern crowd looked on grimly.

The collapse of Knowles' new men dismayed them.

Even Tommy Dodd was silent and dismayed.

The most patriotic Modern had to admit that in Bulkeley's time no Rookwood First Team had ever collapsed in this deplorable style.

Even Tommy Dodd murmured to his

chums that perhaps Knowles had overdone it a little.

The opinion of the Classicals was that Knowles had overdone it a lot.

Probably Knowles himself realised it by this time, now that it was too late.

He had given more attention to exercising his new powers, and humiliating the rival Classicals, than to selecting a winning team.

Now he was getting the result with a vengeance.

It was not much consolation to him that Neville and Jones major were making a great stand in their innings for Rookwood.

Both were Classicals, and their stand was only too plain a hint of what might have happened if he had played more of Bulkeley's men.

The two Classical seniors brought the score up to ninety between them before Jones major was caught out by Monteith, Neville carrying out his bat.

"All down for ninety!" said Mornington. "Why don't you Moderns cheer? Cheer, you beggars!"

But the Moderns did not feel like cheering.

The innings had ended very early, and it had ended badly.

And when the St. Jim's men went to the wickets they showed that their batting was quite equal to their bowling and fielding.

Kildare remained at the wicket while other batsmen came and went, even Knowles' best bowling failing to touch him.

As the runs piled up, the faces of the Rookwood crowd grew longer and longer.

Lonsdale of the Sixth fairly groaned as he watched.

"Couldn't I bowl him, Hansom?" he said to the Fifth-Former, almost in despairing tones. "They've put on Catesby. Now, can't I bowl Catesby's head off?"

"You can, old man," said Hansom. "And can't I bat Catesby's head off?"

"You can!" groaned Lonsdale. "I tell you what, Hansom—that man Kildare will be not out, as well as first in. Knowles can't beat him. They'll declare."

"What a game!" grunted Lovell.

"Bet you they'll declare!" grunted Mornington. "Why, they could keep it up till dark, if they liked! Knowles is the only really good man, beside Neville and Jones, and he won't give Neville the bowling."

Cecil Knowles seemed quite determined on that.

But when the St. Jim's score amounted to a hundred runs for two wickets, the Classicals in the crowd lost all patience, and they fairly yelled at Knowles.

"Give Neville the ball!"

"Yah!"

"Let Neville have a chance!"

"Neville can bowl! Yah!"

Knowles flushed with rage, but he could not resist the appeal in which many of the Moderns were joining.

Neville was put on to bowl.

Matters looked up a little for Rookwood then, two wickets falling quickly.

But even Neville could not touch Kildare. The runs went on piling up.

It was Jones major who caught Kildare out at last, amid thunderous cheers of great relief from the Rookwood crowd.

Jimmy Silver & Co. shouted till they were almost husky.

"Well caught!"

"Bravo, Jones!"

"Good man, Jonesy!"

"That was a good catch," said Tommy Dodd. "Jolly queer a Classical making a catch like that."

"Lucky there was a Classical to do it!" snorted Lovell. "Not that it makes any difference. The Moderns have lost the match."

"Rot!" answered Tommy, but he spoke without assurance.

The most sanguine Rookwooder had to admit that prospects were very dubious for the home team.

At 150 runs, Kildare declared the innings closed, as a good many of the Rookwooders expected him to do.

The opinion among the St. Jim's men was that they would not have to bat again.

Knowles was not looking happy.

Even if he made St. Jim's bat again he could scarcely hope to beat their innings.

The new captain of Rookwood was already repenting him that he had allowed pride and prejudice to carry him so far.

The match was as good as thrown away, and there would certainly be a reckoning afterwards.

Even on the Modern side there would be serious complaints—the Moderns were not lacking in school patriotism.

To exalt his own side, at the expense of losing school matches, was not the conduct they expected even of their own captain.

Knowles opened the Rookwood second

innings in a dogged mood, hoping yet to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

He let Neville open the innings with him, with Jones major down third on the list.

This was an improvement, and showed that Knowles was beginning to see reason, at least.

The few good men in the Rookwood team put up a great fight.

But their opponents' bowling was as good as ever, and their fielding superb.

Knowles went out after his twentieth run, and Neville secured only 15.

Catesby was down for 6, and Carthew for 2.

Frampton had bad luck, and was dismissed for a duck's egg.

Rookwood still wanted 17 to tie, of which Jones major contributed 11.

But Lister added only 1; and after that there was once more a "procession."

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums with feelings too deep for words.

"They won't have to bat again, even!" he gasped.

"No fear!" said Lovell gloomily.

"What rot!" snapped Tommy Dodd fiercely. "There's Braye to go yet, and Tresham and Hoka!"

"Tuppence the lot!" said Mornington.

"Fathead!"

"What a merry job-lot!" said Oswald.

"It's all over bar shouting. Why don't those Moderns chuck it and go home?"

"They might as well!" grinned Smythe of the Shell.

Smythe was right.

The rest of the story was duck's eggs, and the innings closed for 55.

Five were wanted to tie, to make St. Jim's bat again, but five hundred might just as well have been wanted; they were not to be had.

St. Jim's had won the match with an innings to spare.

Knowles' face was like thunder.

He was not a good loser, and this defeat, too, was especially humiliating.

It was a defeat of his plans and schemes, as well as a cricket defeat.

It was seldom that Rookwood First had ever experienced such a crushing reverse on the cricket-field, and it was impossible to deny that the reverse was due to Knowles' selection of the players, and to that alone.

The crowd broke up in utter disgust.

Kildare and his men were smiling when they started on their homeward journey.

They could not help it.

They had been very keen on that match, but they would hardly have taken so much trouble if they had known what it was to be like.

Knowles went to his study in a thunderous mood. He went there alone.

Catesby and Frampton had backed up their chief all along the line, but they had not expected this.

And even Knowles' most faithful followers were fed up now.

He had realised his long ambition, and had become captain of Rookwood; and in the first exercise of his new authority he had come a "mucker," and he had himself to thank for it—which did not make it any the pleasanter!

CHAPTER 26.

Catching It!

"YOW-OW-WOOOP!"

"Hallo, that's Tubby Muffin!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Yow-ow! Help!"

"Sounds rather as if Tubby is getting hurt!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I dare say he's asked for it. What's he doing on this side, anyway?"

"Yaroooh! Leggo, Catesby, you beast! Yow-ow!"

"Come on, Jimmy!"

But Jimmy Silver did not "come on."

The chums of the Classical Fourth had come over to Mr. Manders' House to speak to Tommy Dodd about cricket.

They were on their way to the Modern junior's study, when that sudden outburst of yells smote upon their ears.

The yelling came from Catesby's study—Stephen Catesby, of the Modern Sixth.

Catesby had evidently found Tubby Muffin in his study, where he certainly had no business, and the fat Classical was going through it.

"Better give them a look-in," said Jimmy.

"Oh, rot!" said Raby. "Tubby's no business there."

"Scouting after Catesby's grub, you bet!" said Newcome. "A licking will do him good, Jimmy."

"But Catesby is rather a beast," said Jimmy. "There's a limit, you know. Let's give them a look-in."

Jimmy Silver settled the matter by starting for Catesby's study.

His comrades followed him.

There was no doubt that Muffin of the Fourth had been "nosing" where he had no concern.

But to judge by his howls, the Modern prefect was going too far.

Even Tubby Muffin did not deserve to be entirely slaughtered.

Jimmy Silver pushed the study door open.

Tubby Muffin was lying across a sofa, held down by a heavy hand on his collar.

With his other hand, Catesby was wielding a fives bat.

And the bat was making rapid play on Tubby's fat person.

Stephen Catesby's face was dark with rage.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroooh! Help! Yooop! Yah! Leggo!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "I wasn't going to open your desk! Yow-ow! It's locked, ain't it, you beast? Yoooop! I—I didn't expect to find any grub there! Yarooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Jimmy Silver stepped in, his brows knitted.

"That will do, Catesby!" he exclaimed.

Catesby glared round.

"Get out of my study!" he snapped.

"Let Muffin come, too," answered Jimmy.

"He's had enough," said Lovell. "Don't be such a beastly bully, Catesby! Let the kid alone!"

"I found him trying to open my desk!" roared Catesby.

"I wasn't!" shrieked Muffin. "And it wasn't your desk—it was only that old desk in the corner, the one you don't use. Rescue me!"

Whack! Whack!

Jimmy Silver ran forward.

Catesby had a right to punish the prying Tubby, but there was a limit, and the Modern prefect was far exceeding it.

Jimmy caught his descending arm, and dragged it aside, and the fives bat descended on the sofa instead of upon Tubby Muffin.

The next moment Jimmy jerked it from the prefect's hand, and pitched it across the study.

"That's enough!" he said curtly.

Tubby Muffin squirmed off the sofa as

Catesby turned furiously on the Classical junior.

With one rush Tubby was out of the study, and fleeing for his life.

It did not seem to occur to his fat brain to stand by his rescuer.

"You—you—cheeky cub!" shouted Catesby; and he fairly jumped at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy whirled in his grasp; he hadn't much chance against the big Sixth-Former.

It was fortunate that his chums were there.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed into the conflict at once.

In the grasp of the Fistical Four of the Fourth, Stephen Catesby discovered that he was not to have matters all his own way, by any means.

He was dragged over and bumped on the floor, in a breathless condition.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood looking down at him, breathless and panting, ready for another attack.

It was a rather serious proceeding, bumping over a Sixth Form prefect; but the chums of the Fourth had not had much choice in the matter.

Catesby sat up and gasped.

"You—you——" he spluttered.

"Better cut!" murmured Raby.

But it was too late to "cut."

In the open doorway appeared the form of Cecil Knowles of the Sixth, captain of Rookwood since the late election.

Behind him were Tresham and Hoke and Frampton.

The uproar had been heard, and the Modern seniors had come to see what the row was about.

They had arrived at an unfortunate moment for the Fistical Four.

Catesby staggered to his feet.

"Don't let them get away!" he panted.

"Not likely," said Knowles, with a grim look at the juniors. "Handlin' a prefect—what? This is the kind of thing you learned when Bulkeley was captain—oh! You'll learn different manners now, my pippins!"

The chums of the Fourth drew closer together, their fists clenched.

The rescue of Tubby Martin had landed them in a serious scrape, that was only too clear.

Knowles was palpably glad of the chance. His eyes were glittering now.

"All sorene, Catesby!" he said. "I'll make an example of the young rascals! Hand me a cane!"

Catesby tossed him a cane from the table. Knowles swished it in the air.

"You first, Silver!"

Jimmy set his teeth.

"You're not going to cane me, Knowles!"

"No?" said Knowles, with a smile—not a pleasant smile.

"No. You can complain to my Form-master, or a Classical prefect, if you like. You can't cane Classics on this side."

"Anything else?" smiled Knowles.

"That's all. Keep your distance," said Jimmy.

"Doesn't it occur to you that the captain of the school is a person in authority?" said Knowles smoothly. "I admit that prefects can only punish fags on their own side; but the captain of the school has full authority, my boy, as you're going to find!"

Jimmy did not answer.

He was aware of that, as a matter of fact, though Bulkeley, in his time, had always been careful not to interfere on the Modern side if he could help it.

Knowles was not so particular.

"Oh, thrash the rascals, and not so much talk, old chap!" said Frampton.

"My dear man, it's the duty of the captain of the school to uphold the laws of Rookwood," answered Knowles. "It's my duty to observe the rules, and see them observed by others."

"Oh, my hat!" said Frampton.

It was news to him that Cecil Knowles had a sense of duty at all.

"They're going to be thrashed," added Knowles. "You see, Silver, I'm not going to lick you as a Modern prefect, but as captain of the school. If you're quite satisfied, I'm ready."

"Precious captain of Rookwood!" growled Lovell undauntedly. "Who chucks away cricket matches through playing Modern duds instead of Classical cricketers?"

Knowles' brow darkened.

"I'm waiting for you, Silver," he said. "If you don't hold out your hand at once, I'll take you to the Head."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

There was no help for it.

Knowles was acting within his rights—his new rights as captain of the school, and certainly the Classical juniors had trans-

gressed all the rules by bumping a Sixth Form prefect on the floor of his own study.

It was not much use being taken before the Head, when he hadn't a leg to stand on, so to speak.

Jimmy stepped forward and held out his hand.

Swish!

It was a cruel cut, such as old Bulkeley would never have given a junior, but Knowles had a cruel and cattish nature.

"The other hand!" he said.

Swish!

"Now you, Lovell!"

Lovell clenched his fists for a moment.

He still looked on Knowles as a Modern prefect, not as captain of Rookwood.

But he realised that there was no help for it.

Knowles was choosing to administer the punishment in a careful and lawful way; but, as a matter of fact, the juniors were hemmed in by the Modern seniors, and in any case they would not have escaped without a licking.

Swish! Swish!

Raby and Newcome next went through the infliction.

Then Knowles, smiling, pointed to the door with his cane.

"Cut!" he said briefly. "Help them out, you fellows!"

"What-ho!" grinned Frampton.

The seniors stood back for the four to pass. As the Classics retreated from the study they kicked.

Jimmy Silver & Co. fled ingloriously down the passage, with the Sixth Formers behind them, shouting with laughter and landing out with their boots.

This was not by any means a lawful method of punishment, but it apparently suited the views of the new captain of Rookwood.

The four juniors scudded along to their own quarters, and escaped at last.

Their visit to Tommy Dodd's study was indefinitely postponed.

"Wow! My hands! Wow!"

Mornington of the Fourth looked into the study.

He grinned at the sight of the Fistical Four rubbing their hands and grunting.

"Been in the wars?" he asked.

"Wow! Yes. Knowles! Ow!"

"Our merry new captain!" smiled Mornington. "Never mind; Knowles won't

reign over us long if Bulkeley comes back. His father's innocent."

"Well, I hope he is," said Jimmy. "But Mr. Bulkeley was arrested, though he's let out on bail since. You speak as if you knew something."

"I've thought it out," said Mornington, taking a seat on the corner of the table. "There really isn't any proof against Mr. Bulkeley. Twenty thousand pounds of bonds are missing from the bank. I've read up the evidence that was given when he was remanded, in the newspaper. It seems that the junior partner, James Catesby, was in Scotland, where it took place. Only the two partners had keys to the safe, and Mr. Catesby had left his with Mr. Bulkeley when he went away."

"My hat!" said Lovell. "That looks pretty clear. I remember hearing that the bank safe was opened with a key when the bonds were taken away."

Mornington nodded.

"That isn't all," he said. "The night watchman was stunned by a blow from behind, and Mr. Bulkeley's stick was found on the premises."

"Oh!"

"Poor old Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver feelingly. "I'm blessed if I see how his father is to get away from evidence like that."

"All the same, I believe he's not guilty," said Mornington.

"Why?"

"Knowledge of human nature, old scout. I've seen the old boy when he's been down here visiting Bulkeley; he looked thoroughly decent. I'd lay ten to one in quids on Bulkeley's pater—if I had any quids!"

"Well, I hope he'll get clear," said Jimmy Silver. "But you can see what the police think from that detective man, Screw, coming here and searching Bulkeley's quarters. They thought Mr. Bulkeley had the bonds, and suspected that he might have given them to Bulkeley to hide, as they couldn't find them at his house."

"But they haven't found them," said Mornington.

"Not here."

"Not at all," said Mornny.

"How do you know?"

"Because I've just spotted that defective chap hanging about the school," answered Mornington coolly. "He still thinks old Bulkeley may have hidden the bonds somewhere here, and he's after them. Of course, if they found the bonds here, that would be a clincher at the trial. Until they find them, I don't believe they can find Mr. Bulkeley guilty, and there will have to be another remand when the case comes up. See?"

Lovell frowned angrily.

"The fellow's no right to hang about Rookwood!" he exclaimed.

"Just what I was thinkin'."

"As if Bulkeley would have a hand in such a swindle!" exclaimed Raby. "That detective idiot must be off his chump."

Mornington grinned.

"The detective idiot doesn't know Bulkeley as we do, old scout. I dare say it seems the likeliest thing in the world to him."

"The silly ass!"

"Bulkeley's as innocent as a baby, whatever may be the truth about his father," said Jimmy Silver.

"Exactly. I've been thinkin'," said Mornington. "The detective johnny was in the lane a few minutes ago. I heard him askin' old Mack questions about the abbey ruins."

"What on earth does he care about the ruins of Rookwood Abbey?" exclaimed Jimmy in surprise.

"Don't you see? He thinks those blessed bonds may have been hidden in some nook or cranny by poor old Bulkeley before he left."

Jimmy Silver uttered an angry exclamation.

"The silly chump!"

"And is he there now?" exclaimed Lovell.

"You bet!"

"Confound his cheek!"

"Yaas, it is a cheek—a thumpin' cheek!" agreed Mornington. "That's what I was thinkin'. I came here to make a suggestion. The merry 'tec is nosin' in the abbey ruins. Why not go for him?"

"Eh?"

"And shut him up in the vault," said Mornington calmly. "It would be a lesson."

to him to do his Sherlock Holmes' bizney somewhere else."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

"I suggested it to Erroll, but he's such a sober old judge," said Mornington, "and he wants to play cricket. So I came along here. What do you say?"

"There'd be a row," said Raby doubtfully.

"Not a bit of it! It will be an accident, of course."

"Ha, ha!"

"We go there without knowin' he's there," explained Mornington. "We let him hear us talkin' about somethin' hidden, an' he follows us into the vault, spyin'. See? You bet he'll dodge out of sight when he sees us comin'. He won't want all Rookwood watching him at work. It would be no end of a joke to bottle him up an' leave him to investigate the habits of the merry little lizards in the vault!"

The Fistical Four chortled.

They did not feel very amiable towards the enterprising Mr. Screw, whose suspicions of Bulkeley seemed utterly ridiculous to the majority of Rookwood fellows.

"Of course, we'll let him out later," added Mornington. "A few hours in the vault will teach him not to nose about here."

"It's a go!" said Jimmy Silver.

A "lark" with the detective was an attractive enterprise to the Fistical Four, who were not feeling up to cricket just then.

The four left the end study with Mornington, and they sauntered away with an air of carelessness towards the abbey ruins.

CHAPTER 27.

Bagged!

"IN this style, three-and-nine!" murmured Mornington.

The Fistical Four chuckled softly.

The juniors were approaching the abbey ruins, at some distance from the school building.

Morny's remark was called forth by the sight of a black bowler hat showing above a pile of ancient masonry.

Only the bowler hat could be seen, but

it was evident that the owner was underneath it.

"He hasn't heard us yet," murmured Mornington. "When he does he will take cover, ten to one on that! You see! Otherwise, he would expect to get a crowd round to find out what he's doin' here."

Morny kicked a chunk of loose stone and began to speak loudly.

"The vault's open, you chaps; I noticed that. Whoever went there last left the door unfastened."

Instantly the bowler hat vanished.

The unseen detective ducked down at once at the sound of the footsteps and a voice.

As Morny sagely divined, he did not want to be spotted there, and to get a crowd of curious schoolboys on the scene.

Mornington winked at his companions as the hat disappeared.

The Fistical Four suppressed their merriment with some difficulty.

The detective's belief that his presence was unsuspected there seemed comic to the juniors.

The Fourth-Former walked on, clattering over the loose stones and mortar, heading for the opening of the vault.

The detective remained out of sight.

They reached the mossy stone steps that led down to the vaults, at the bottom of which the great door was ajar.

It was supposed to be kept closed, but fellows with a taste for exploration sometimes got it open, and left it so.

"This way!" said Mornington. "I've got an electric torch in my pocket, you chaps. We'll find the bundle easily enough."

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared for a moment, and then they understood that the word "bundle" was intended for the sharp ears listening behind the masonry.

Jimmy entered into the spirit of the thing at once.

"What do you think is in the bundle, Morny?" he asked.

"Well, that's rather a deep one," said Mornington gravely. "To judge by the look of it, it contains papers of some kind. But I don't see why a chap should hide a bundle of papers in the vault—do you?"

"Blessed if I do!" grinned Lovell.

"It must be grub!" said Mornington, with owl-like gravity. "A chap couldn't want to hide his papers."

"I don't see how he could," said Raby. "If it's grub, we'll jolly soon find out, anyway!"

"I'll tell you what," said Mornington thoughtfully, "if it's grub we'll confiscate it! That's fair!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But if it's papers of any kind we'll leave them there, and not say a word about it. If a chap chooses to hide his property here, it's no business of ours, is it?"

"Not a bit," grinned Newcome.

"That's a go, then!" said Morny.

The juniors pulled open the heavy door and passed into the opening of the vault.

There was a click in the ruins above.

"He's on the move!" murmured Mornington.

The juniors chuckled silently.

Morny turned on the light of his electric torch and led the way in, followed by the Fistical Four.

He stopped in the second vault and made a sign for silence.

Behind them, in the darkness came a faint sound.

It was the sound made by a man softly creeping.

Mr. Screw was on the track.

The detective's eyes were gleaming as he crept into the vault.

He was there to hunt for the bonds, which he suspected were hidden in some nook or cranny about Rookwood.

The words he had overheard settled the matter for him.

These juniors were evidently seeking the bundle he wanted.

Mr. Screw intended to have his eyes on that bundle the moment it was revealed.

The schoolboys might leave it there if it only contained papers, but it was papers that Mr. Screw wanted.

Not for a moment did Mr. Screw suspect that the juniors knew he was there, and were pulling his official leg, and that the bundle had no existence outside Morny's imagination.

The gentleman from Scotland Yard certainly would not have suspected that his dignified leg could possibly be pulled by schoolboys.

Morny smiled as he heard the faint sound behind, which showed that Mr. Screw was on the track.

The "spook" was working like a charm.

"Let me see. I think it was in the third vault," he remarked thoughtfully. "Come on a bit further."

The juniors moved on, the light flashing ahead.

Behind them was black darkness, and through the darkness Mr. Screw followed the light of the electric torch, keeping close to the side of the vault to escape observation if the boys looked round.

He did not intend to reveal his presence until the hiding-place of the bonds was disclosed.

Then it would be easy to step forward and take possession of the stolen goods under the eyes of the astonished juniors.

But to show himself so soon would spoil it all, for it was very probable that Morny would refuse to reveal the hiding-place at his order.

Careful as he was, the detective could not help making a few slight sounds as he crept along in the darkness.

The juniors were well aware that he was in the second vault by the time they entered the third.

"Here, is it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I think so; awfully carefully hidden, too," said Mornington. "I'll bet you could search for a week without finding it, Silver!"

Which was very probable.

"Well, where's the place?" asked Jimmy.

Morny flashed the light round, taking care not to flash it behind him.

"Blessed if I can say which vault it was, they're so alike!" he said. "I really ought to have made a note of it. Let's try from the first one, that's the best idea."

He turned suddenly, and walked back to the first vault, looking neither to the right nor the left, and keeping the light straight before him.

The Fistical Four followed his example.

Mr. Screw squeezed himself close to the

pillar in the second vault at the side of the arch, to keep out of sight.

He need not really have taken the trouble, for the juniors did not intend to see him.

But Mr. Screw was not aware of that.

They passed back into the second vault, and then into the first, and now they were between Mr. Screw and the door.

Morny shut off the light suddenly.

"Hallo, it's gone out!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you ass!" exclaimed Raby.

"I've got a refill in my pocket," said Mornington. "Come into the light, and I'll put it in the lamp in a jiffy."

"Right ho!"

The four juniors moved on to the door of the vault where the daylight streamed in faintly.

They passed through the arched doorway to the stone steps outside.

Mr. Screw was waiting within for Morny to renew the exhausted lamp, and for the juniors to return and recommence the search.

He had a long wait before him.

Once outside the door Morny dropped the electric lamp into his pocket.

"I say, we'll come back later, you fellows," he said. "Better close the door in case anybody else comes along."

Slam!

There was a rush of feet inside.

Mr. Screw was still unaware that the juniors knew of his presence, but he had no desire to be shut in in the dark vault.

But it was too late.

The heavy oaken door was shut, and Morny calmly jammed a wedge of stone under the outer side, so that it could not possibly be opened from within.

Bang, bang!

Mr. Screw was thumping on the door inside, and the sounds came, faint and muffled, through the massive oak.

"Hallo! There's somebody in there!" yawned Mornington. "Time we took a stroll, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the merry juniors took a stroll, leaving Mr. Screw simply raging in the vault.

CHAPTER 28.

Tubby in Luck!

"H A, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. laughed loud and long as they walked merrily from the abbey ruins.

Mr. Screw was left to his just punishment, as the juniors regarded it.

The man who suspected a Rookwood fellow of having a hand in a robbery deserved punishment, according to the Rookwood point of view.

Mornington joined Erroll of the Fourth in the quadrangle, and they went along to Little Side.

The Fistical Four sauntered down to the gates.

Tubby Muffin met them there, and rolled after them as they went into the lane.

"You fellows after Catesby?" he asked.

"Bother Catesby!"

"He's just gone out," said Tubby. "I say, what a chance to get that key off him, and open that desk with the grub in in his study."

Tubby Muffin dodged Lovell's boot, and ceased to make any remarks.

But he followed the four juniors down the lane.

Tubby's thoughts were running on the supposed store of tuck in Catesby's study, and he half suspected the Fistical Four of being on the track of that tuck. He never could understand that other fellows did not think so much about "grub" as he did.

As it happened, Jimmy Silver and Co. were well aware that there was no tuck in Catesby's locked desk.

By chance they had seen the meeting between Stephen Catesby and his uncle at Woodend, and had seen the banker hand Catesby the bundle of documents he was to mind.

They had heard him impress upon his nephew the great necessity for keeping the documents safe and secret, so they could guess it was that bundle of papers that Catesby was keeping so carefully locked up in the mahogany desk.

The incident had puzzled them; but it was not their business, and they had almost forgotten it, when Tubby's keen interest

in Catesby's desk brought it back to their minds.

"There's that Modern worm!" grunted Lovell, as the juniors came in sight of the stile in Coombe Lane.

Sitting on the stile, half hidden by the weeds, was Catesby of the Sixth.

Jimmy Silver gave a sniff.

"He's waiting for some of his precious sporting friends, you bet," he said. "I suppose he's got some money on the races. I know he plays that game, and Knowles, too."

"Ripping, for a captain of Rookwood!" growled Lovell.

"What price bumping him off the stile?" said Raby.

"Fathead! I've had enough of bumping Catesby!"

Raby burst into a sudden chuckle.

"I say, it's ten to one he's there to meet some sneaking sharper from the Bird-in-Hand," he said in a low voice. "You can see he's staring towards the place."

"Most likely. But what about it?"

"Well, let us wait, too."

"Eh? We don't want to meet a book-maker or a billiard-sharper, do we?"

"Yes, we do," answered Raby, with a grin. "It will make Catesby no end waxy; and he can't go far us for hanging about the lane."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

It was quite a good scheme for worrying the bully of the Sixth, in return for what the juniors had received in his study.

"Done!" said Jimmy.

The four walked on until they came abreast of the stile.

Catesby glanced round for a moment, and frowned.

Then he resumed his watching across the fields.

There was an anxious pucker in his brows, and the juniors, who more than suspected Catesby's secret pursuits, could guess that the "gee-gee" he had put his money on was proving unreliable.

The prefect became aware, after a few minutes, that the juniors had halted.

He looked round angrily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood in a group a few yards from the stile, with Tubby Muffin hovering near.

They were not looking at Catesby, and they were talking footer.

The Modern prefect had no right whatever to order them off.

But it did not suit Catesby to have them there just then, when he was waiting for the arrival of his bookmaking friend.

"Clear along, you fags!" he rapped out. Jimmy Silver glanced round.

"Did you speak to us, Catesby?" he asked politely.

"Yes, clear off!"

"Off what—the earth?" inquired Jimmy. "Do you want it all?"

"Get along, I tell you!"

"Can't we stand in Coombe Lane if we want to?" demanded Lovell. "Have you bought the lane, Catesby?"

"What are you hanging about for?" snapped Catesby.

"For half an hour!" answered Jimmy humbly.

But Stephen Catesby was in no mood for Fourth Form humour.

He slipped from the stile with a threatening look.

"Clear!" he said.

The Fistical Four faced him coolly.

They did not intend to take orders from a Modern prefect, with justice so clearly on their side!

"We're not going to clear!" answered Jimmy Silver deliberately. "We've as much right here as you have, Catesby!"

"You spying little rotter!"

"What is there to spy on?" asked Jimmy sweetly; and his comrades grinned.

"Will you go?" shouted Catesby, striding towards them.

"No fear!"

"Then I'll kick you along the road!" exclaimed the prefect savagely.

"Kick away," answered Jimmy coolly. "We can do some kicking, too."

Catesby rushed at them.

Probably he expected to see the fags dodge and flee before him.

But they didn't!

They grasped Catesby as he rushed them down, and all five of them rolled in the dust together.

"Ow!" roared Catesby. "Oh! I—I—I'll smash you! Ow!"

He hit out furiously, and there was a chorus of yelling.

But the juniors grabbed him fiercely.

Lovell's clutch chanced on his watch-chain, and it was dragged out.

The drag, however, pulled Catesby over, and he rolled on his side, and Lovell planted a knee on him.

"Down him!" panted Lovell.

"Yaroo!"

"Bump the ead!"

"Look out!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

In the distance, from the direction of Coombe, appeared the figure of Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth.

He was coming directly towards the excited group.

In a flash the Fistical Four jumped away from Catesby, and bolted through a gap in the hedge.

They did not want to meet their Form-master, in the very act of ragging a Sixth Form prefect—even a Modern one.

Catesby staggered to his feet, gasping, wondering for a moment why the juniors had so suddenly released him.

Then he caught sight of Mr. Bootles, and at the same moment of Mr. Joey Hook, the bookmaker, rolling across the fields from the direction of the Bird-in-Hand.

Stopping only to catch up his cap, Catesby darted through the hedge on the opposite side of the road, and vanished.

It was Mr. Hook's turn to wait for the appointment to be kept. Catesby was not likely to keep it while a Rookwood master was anywhere about.

Tubby Muffin, left alone in the lane, blinked in astonishment.

In a few seconds the excited, struggling group had vanished from Tubby's startled eyes.

"Silly asses!" muttered Muffin discontentedly. "They might have had the key of that desk off him if they'd had any sense! They— Oh!"

Tubby fairly jumped, as a gleam of metal in the dust caught his eye.

A key lay in the road, with two or three silver links of a chain still attached to it.

Catesby's watch-chain had broken when Lovell's sudden drag came on it.

The watch had been left in his pocket, but the other end of the chain had come loose and broken with the violence of the jerk, and the key attached to it had fallen into the dust.

Tubby Muffin knew that key!

He gave one glance in the direction of Mr. Bootles—the master was still twenty yards distant.

Then he pounced on the key!

In a twinkling the key was in Tubby Muffin's pocket, and the fat Classical was scudding back to Rookwood as fast as his fat legs would carry him.

Stephen Catesby's food-board was at his mercy now—if it was a food-board!

CHAPTER 19.

An Amazing Discovery!

TUBBY MUFFIN strolled into Mr. Manders' House with an air of great carelessness, as if merely looking in to speak to a fellow.

But as soon as his saunter brought him to Catesby's study he whipped open the door and darted in.

He closed the door behind him, and listened breathlessly for a minute or two.

But nobody had observed him; the corridors were deserted, as were most of the studies.

As for Catesby himself, he was out of gates, and was not likely to return till after he had kept his postponed appointment with Mr. Hook.

Tubby felt that it was "all clear."

He stopped before the old mahogany desk in the corner of the room, and fumbled in his pocket for the key.

A moment more, and the key was in the lock, and Muffin had turned it.

The fat Classical was trembling now, partly with excitement and partly with nervousness.

It was a serious matter, unlocking a prefect's desk without his knowledge or permission.

He put back the heavy lid of the desk noiselessly.

His round eyes glistened as he looked into the desk, and then his face fell.

He had expected to find the space crammed with good things—ham and tongue, and sugar and cake, and other good things.

Instead of which all he saw in the almost empty desk was a bundle, which looked as if it contained bulky papers.

He fairly blinked at the bundle.

Why on earth did Catesby keep that old unused desk so carefully locked, and wear a heavy key on his watchchain, if there was nothing in the desk but a bundle of papers?

In the faint hope that the bundle might, after all, contain something in the eatable line, Tubby Muffin picked it up and examined it.

It was fastened with string, and wrapped in thick paper, but it felt as if it only contained documents.

Tubby Muffin was as inquisitive as a daw, and his fat fingers were fairly trembling with eagerness now.

There was something so odd, so mysterious, in Catesby of the Sixth taking such extraordinary care of a bundle of papers, that even Tubby's fat brain realised that there must be something very unusual about those papers.

Tubby had very few scruples when his insatiable curiosity was aroused.

He wanted to know, and he meant to know.

Almost unconsciously his fat fingers unfastened the string that tied up the bundle of documents.

After all, he could leave them as he found them, locking the desk after him, and no one would ever know that he had been there—only he would know the secret, whatever it was.

That was his reflection.

Astonishment grew in his fat face as he brought the contents of the packet to light.

The papers were very thick and heavy, were printed in two colours, and were covered with small print.

In large type, at the head of the top paper, he read the words, "Government of Japan."

Tubby fairly blinked.

He did not need telling that this was an official paper of some kind.

What could an official paper, issued by the Japanese Government, be doing in Stephen Catesby's desk at Rookwood?

A lesser mystery than that would have made Tubby Muffin breathless with curiosity.

Lower down the document were the figures, "£1,000."

Almost stuttering with amazement and excitement, Tubby examined the remainder of the documents.

Some of them were in French, and one or two in Spanish.

All had figures marked on them, and sheets of coupons marked in smaller sums; and Tubby, reading them, found that the coupons entitled the holder of the documents to payments of interest at specified dates.

And there were twenty of the documents in all.

Tubby fairly gasped.

It made his brain whirl to realise that he was holding in his fat hands documents that represented a nominal value of twenty thousand pounds!

He knew what they were now.

He had heard of War Bonds, and he knew that these must be bonds of some sort—bonds issued by foreign governments.

—Bonds!

Twenty thousand pounds!

In Catesby's desk!

If Tubby had never heard of the bank-robbery, he would have known that a Sixth-Former at Rookwood could not possibly have come honestly into the possession of twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds.

But he had heard of it, of course. He knew that Mr. Screw had visited Rookwood, searching Bulkeley's quarters for the twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds Mr. Bulkeley was suspected of stealing from the bank.

Tubby was not a bright youth, but he did not need telling that here were the bonds of which Mr. Screw had been in search.

In Catesby's desk—and Catesby was not a friend of Bulkeley's!

Mr. Screw had evidently searched in the wrong house at Rookwood.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby.

He let the bonds fall back into the desk. They were not the kind of plunder he was looking for.

With trembling hands Tubby closed the desk, and locked it again.

His heart was thumping as he stole out of the study, almost bursting with excitement at the discovery he had made.

He rolled away to the gates, and gave a chirrup of relief as he sighted the Fistical Four in the lane.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were sauntering home.

Tubby Muffin rolled out to meet them.

"Jimmy!" he gasped.

"Hallo, porpoise!" answered Jimmy Silver. "Still hungry?"

"I—I say, Jimmy, about Bulkeley——"

"What about Bulkeley?" asked Lovell.

"His father—his father's innocent!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy stared at him.

"I believe he is," he said, "But what do you know about it, fatty?"

"I know who robbed the bank."

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four.

"Honour!" gasped Tubby.

"You know who robbed the bank?" repeated Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"Yes."

"Who was it, then?"

"Catesby of the Sixth!"

CHAPTER 30.

Light at Last!

TUBBY MUFFIN made that announcement impressively.

Apparently he expected the Fistical Four to be very astonished and impressed.

But they weren't!

As Tubby made that astounding statement the Co. naturally supposed that he was trying to pull their leg, and they laid hands on Tubby, and bumped him down in the lane.

It was not permissible to pull the leg of the end study.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Muffin, in surprise

and wrath. "Wharrer you at? What's that for, you beasts?"

"That's for departing from the straight and narrow path of veracity!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "Tell us an easier one next time!"

"A much easier one, please!" grinned Raby.

"Yow-ow-ow! It's true!"

"Fathead!" Jimmy Silver looked at his watch. "I think we may as well drop in at the abbey, you chaps, before we go down to Little Side. I shouldn't wonder if that detective chap has finished his explorations by this time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin scrambled up in great wrath.

"You silly asses!" he gasped. "It's true! I've seen the bonds! They're locked up in Catesby's desk. It wasn't a food-board, after all! It's the stolen bonds!"

"What!"

Tubby Muffin held up the key.

"Catesby dropped that when you were handling him," he explained. "I——"

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"You've been to his desk!" exclaimed Newcome.

"Yes, I have."

"And was there any grub there, you fat burglar?"

"No, you ass! Don't I keep on telling you that the stolen bonds were there—twenty thousand pounds' worth!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy Silver looked at him fixedly.

Back into his mind came that mysterious meeting at Woodend, when Mr. James Catesby had handed a parcel of papers to Catesby of the Sixth, with injunctions to keep them safe and secret.

And Mr. Catesby was Mr. Bulkeley's partner at the bank!

The possibilities flashed into Jimmy's mind at once.

He dropped his hand on Tubby's shoulder.

"Quiet now, and tell us what you've seen," he said quietly.

Tubby, only too glad to have impressed Jimmy Silver at last, went on to relate with great circumspection what he had discovered.

The juniors listened without an interruption, their faces growing very grave.

It was evident that Tubby was telling the truth.

He could not possibly have invented that description of the foreign bonds, which he had never seen till he saw them in Catesby's desk.

"My only hat!" said Jimmy at last, when Tubby's tale was told. "That lets in some light on the subject, you fellows."

Lovell whistled.

"Then it was Mr. Bulkeley's partner!" he said.

"It looks like it."

"He was supposed to be in Scotland at the time, and he had left his key of the safe with Mr. Bulkeley," said Raby. "Mornay said so."

"His journey to Scotland was spoo! If

he did it, he came back secretly, of course," said Jimmy quietly. "As for leaving his key with Mr. Bulkeley, he could easily have had another made like it in advance. I dare say he could easily get hold of a stick belonging to his partner, to leave there after he had knocked the night watchman on the head. Anyway, if those papers he handed to Catesby to keep are the stolen bonds, that settles it."

"But, why—"

"Don't you remember the bobbies suspected that Mr. Bulkeley might have given the bonds to his son to hide?" said Jimmy. "As a matter of fact, that was exactly what Catesby's uncle did. He wouldn't want to keep them anywhere near him, in case of accidents or suspicion, and he wouldn't dare to deposit them in a bank or safe-deposit. He thought a schoolboy's desk would be quite safe; and so it would have been if Tubby hadn't been a sneaking, prying cad."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly. "I think I've done jolly well! Haven't I helped the innocent and denounced the guilty, and—and—"

"But you only meant to bag another fellow's grub!" growled Jimmy. "Still, I must say it's lucky for old Bulkeley that you are a food-hunting pig, Tubby."

"Look here—"

"You can come and spin this yarn to Mr. Screw," said Jimmy. "He's the proper person to hear it. He's after those bonds."

"But—but where is he?" gasped Tubby. "Do you know where to find him?"

Jimmy grinned.

"Yes; we keep detectives bottled up in vaults, in case we want 'em!" he answered, an answer that made Tubby Muffin blink.

The Fistical Four hurried in at the gates, taking Tubby Muffin with them.

Knowles called to them in the quadrangle.

"Here, Silver!"

"Hallo?" answered Jimmy, not very respectfully.

"Take my bat in."

"Oh, find a Modern fag!" said Jimmy. Knowles' eyes glittered.

"You've still got to learn that I'm captain of Rookwood, you cheeky young cub—what!" he asked.

"You won't be long," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Bulkeley's coming back, old scout, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

And the juniors dodged Knowles, and fled, leaving the new captain of Rookwood in a state of angry astonishment.

Having shaken off Knowles they hurried round the buildings, and made their way to the abbey ruins.

There was a faint sound of thumping from within the oaken door of the vaults as they descended the steps.

Mr. Screw was evidently still trying to attract attention—not a very hopeful prospect.

Jimmy knocked on the door.

"Hallo! Anybody in there?" he called out.

Bang, bang!

Jimmy kicked the wedge away, and pulled the door open.

Mr. Screw, with a furious face, strode out.

He shook a bony fist at Jimmy Silver.

"You young rascal!" he thundered.

"Hallo! Is that your thanks for being let out?" inquired Jimmy.

"You shut me in the vault!" raved Mr. Screw. "I can see now that you knew I was there, and you were leading me into a trap by pretending that there was a bundle hidden in the vault! Do you deny it?"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Don't that show what training in the police force will do for a man?" he exclaimed. "Fancy the chap guessing that, you fellows!"

Mr. Screw almost raved.

"I shall complain to your headmaster!" he shouted.

"What about?" asked Jimmy sweetly. "We're supposed to close that door after going into the vaults."

"You—you—you—"

"Easy does it, Mr. Screw!" grinned Jimmy, as the enraged man clenched his hands, as if about to make a frontal attack on the Fistical Four. "I've got news for you. How would you like to find those bonds after all?"

Mr. Screw's manner altered at once.

"If you know anything of the stolen property you are bound to tell me!" he said. "If you can give me any information I will forgive you the trick you have played on me."

"I don't know that I'm worried about that," answered Jimmy calmly. "But I can tell you where the bonds are, if you like."

Mr. Screw gave him a very suspicious look.

"Go ahead, Tubby!" added Jimmy Silver. "Spin your yarn, old porpoise. I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Screw stood you a twopenny bun for it!"

Tubby Muffin rolled into the limelight at once.

With a wealth of detail, he narrated his startling discovery to Mr. Screw, who watched him almost like a hawk all the time he was speaking.

The detective rapped out two or three questions, evidently fearing that his leg was being pulled once more.

But Tubby soon satisfied him that he was relating facts.

Mr. Screw's ill-humour was entirely gone when he realised that.

He even smiled, a rather hard and crusty smile, but a smile.

"Good!" he ejaculated at length.

"Does that clear Bulkeley's pater, Mr. Screw?" asked Lovell anxiously.

"If I find the bonds in Master Catesby's desk it certainly appears to do so," answered Mr. Screw guardedly. "Master Catesby certainly could not have received them from Mr. Bulkeley."

"We know who he received them from," said Lovell. "Tell him, Jimmy."

Jimmy, in a few words told of the meeting the clowns had accidentally witnessed in Woodend, when James Catesby had handed the precious packet to his nephew.

Mr. Screw smiled again, a very pleased smile.

"You young gentlemen have performed a very great service," he said. "If you are attached to this lad Bulkeley, as I gather, you may rest satisfied that his father's name will be cleared when I have verified this information. Please show me the way to Master Catesby's study."

"Can you open his desk, though?" asked Lovell dubiously.

"I have a warrant to search for the bonds."

"That's all right, then."

The juniors left the abbey with Mr. Screw, who grinned to himself several times on the way to Mr. Manders' House.

It was plain that the gentleman from Scotland Yard was feeling in high feather.

Having been hopelessly on the wrong track, and having been set by sheer accident on the right track, he was doubtless calculating upon the credit his striking success would gain him.

He followed the juniors into Mr. Manders' House to meet an inquiring stare from Mr. Manders.

Mr. Manders' stare did not disconcert him, however.

He spoke in a low tone to the Modern master, the juniors standing respectfully back.

Mr. Manders' face was very entertaining to watch as he listened to the detective.

"Good heavens!" the juniors heard him

gasp. "Bless my soul! Impossible! Yes—yes, certainly! At once! Come with me!"

Mr. Manders whisked away with the detective to Catesby's study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed at a respectful distance.

They looked in quietly as the mahogany desk was opened in the presence of Mr. Manders, whose eyes seemed to be almost bulging through his spectacles.

Stephen Catesby, at that moment discussing geegoes and the odds with Joey Hook at Coombe, would probably have forgotten the very existence of geegoes if he had known what was going on in his study at Rookwood. But Catesby did not know—yet.

Mr. Screw threw back the lid of the desk and lifted out the bundle of papers.

Quietly he examined them, comparing them with the list he produced from his pocket-book.

Mr. Manders watched him with a series of horrified gasps, the juniors in breathless silence.

"Correct!" said Mr. Screw at last.

"That—that—that is stolen property!" stuttered Mr. Manders in horror.

"Yes, sir; the bonds Mr. Bulkeley was accused of purloining," answered the detective. "They are found in the possession of his partner's nephew. I think it probable that the boy did not know what his uncle was placing in his charge."

"I am sure of that, at least!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"But as for the uncle——" Mr. Screw's jaw squared. "May I request the use of your telephone for a few minutes, sir?"

"Yes, yes; certainly!" stuttered Mr. Manders. "Please follow me."

He brushed the juniors aside, and Mr. Screw followed him, bestowing a really genial smile on the Fistical Four as he passed them.

He had quite forgiven them for his imprisonment in the abbey vault now.

Jimmy Silver & Co. left the House, walking out into the quad as if they were walking on air.

"My hat!" was all Lovell could say.

"Think what it means!" said Jimmy Silver, his eyes dancing. "Bulkeley's pater will be cleared. Bulkeley will come back. He'll be captain of Rookwood again, and Knowles will get the order of the merry sack! Let's go and tell the fellows! This is too good to keep!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I say, it was my doing, you know!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

But Tubby was not heeded.

Jimmy Silver & Co. fairly raced down to Little Side.

The excited looks drew upon them the eyes of the junior cricketers.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mornington. "What's the news? One of you found a siver?"

"Better than that," chirruped Jimmy Silver. "Listen, you fellows! Lend me your ears. Friends, Romans, and countrymen, Bulkeley's coming back!"

"What?"

"The bonds have been found, and Bulkeley's pater is cleared!" chortled Arthur Edward Loyell. "So Bulkeley will come back, and be captain of Rookwood again! Hurrah!"

And then there was a roar from the Classical juniors that rang far beyond the limits of the playing-fields.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"



BOWLS!

ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST GAMES.

Bowls was always reckoned an excellent game for everybody. But when the pastime was at least three hundred years old, some wisecracker took it into his head that it was a bad game, and it was consequently prohibited.

This silly enactment, which was passed in the time of Henry the Eighth—he ought to have known better, being a bit of a sportsman—was not repealed until 1845. Despite all that nonsense, the enthusiastic bowlers kept hard at it, their eyes fixed on the jack, and sent the sphere to keep the waiting object ball company.

There was a certain game of bowls played on Plymouth Hoe on a memorable occasion, but there is no need to go into that historic matter. It is too well known. But this only shows that bowls, though frowned on by the sports of the law, was the popular amusement. It was played all over the British Isles.

SKILL REQUIRED!

Bowls has its lessons, and calls forth all the smartness of the player to get the ball to go straight, keeping a happy little curl up its sleeve, as it were, so that right at the end of its course it can skim right or left and take up a neighbourly position to the jack. It is not a nice thing to misjudge, or to reckon wrong. When you do that, your bowl swings right bang off in the opposite direction to that which you thoroughly meant it to take. Of course, bowls ranks high amongst games of calculation. There are players who have learned every subtle characteristic of the business. No bowl can deceive them. They gauge distance to an inch as they measure with their eyes the relative positions on the stretch of turf 40 to 60 ft. square.

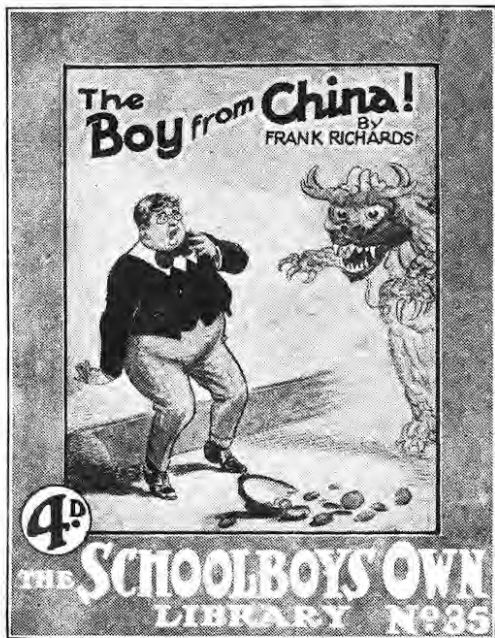
It is a capital game to watch—an old villagers' game, as well as a sport which

attracts crowds of youngsters. And the bowling green itself is something to look at. Any thing but grass is a trespasser. Cumberland turf is what the best greens boast—turf like a soft green carpet, nothing to mar the marvellous level on which players display their consummate dexterity.

CARE OF THE GREEN!

You can spot these greens as you bike or hike about the country. They are as good as the lawn at the old University, which the ancient gardener told an American visitor took centuries of work with a heavy roller to bring to its present perfection. Some of the old manor houses have a bowling green, and, of course, lots of the sports clubs include this feature. For bowls has not gone out, as some people think. It has had its phases of neglect, but it is coming back in the populous districts, while it was always high in esteem in a myriad old-fashioned spots where the greens were treated with the respect due to worth. Some of these greens look as though they were dusted every day. I can recall one, flanked by a mighty yew hedge, a place hundreds of years old, and here a big match was something worth studying, an affair of international importance, with all the champions gathered together to show their mastery of a difficult, and intensely fascinating game. It has proved its worth in many ways. As pointed out, it weathered years of repression and stern disapproval, but, like many a good old English sport, it got away with a large measure of popularity despite of all. Possibly it benefited by the interference of the mischief-makers. Anyhow, since the merry old days of the thirteenth century it has held its own. What more could be asked?

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