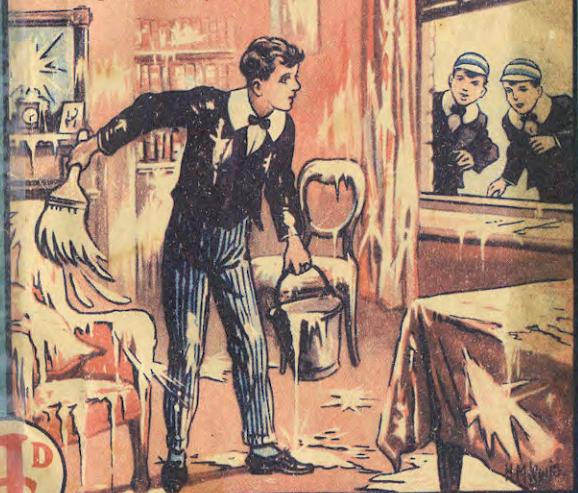


The Colonial Co.!!

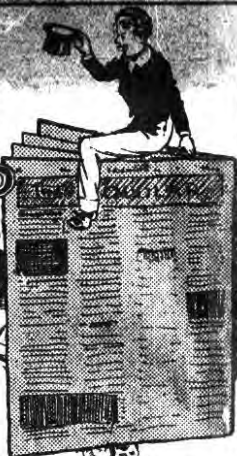
By
OWEN CONQUEST



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The

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An Amusing Story of
JIMMY SILVER & Co.,
and **CONROY & Co.,**
of Rookwood School.

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1.

Trouble in the Study!

HIGGS snorted. Alfred Higgs of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood had an expressive snort.

Higgs was evidently "ratty." Higgs, as the biggest fellow in the Fourth, and a good deal of a bully, was accustomed to see fellows sit up and take notice, so to speak, when he was ratty.

But on the present occasion, his angry snort passed unnoticed.

There were three fellows in No. 3 Study with Higgs. One was Dick Van Ryn, the South African junior, who had once earned Higgs' unwilling admiration by licking him. Another was Charles Pons, a new boy, who hailed from the great Dominion of Canada. The third was Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin, generally called Tubby Muffin, on account of his circumference.

Tubby Muffin was too busy to notice Higgs. Van Ryn had laid in unusual supplies for tea, to entertain the new junior hospitably; and Tubby was making hay while the sun shone. Van Ryn was making

himself pleasant and agreeable to the new fellow, and did not even look at Higgs. And the new fellow, quite a stranger to Rookwood, did not know anything about Higgs, and was quite unaware that any special importance was to be attached to his angry snort.

Higgs glowered at the three.

"Look here, Van Ryn!" he exclaimed at last.

"Another cup of tea?" asked Van Ryn. "Thank you, yes," said Pons.

"Same here," said Tubby Muffin. "And pass the jam, will you? You might pass the biscuits, too, Higgs. They're on your side."

Another snort from Higgs.

"Look here!" he roared.

"Hallo!" said Van Ryn.

"I'm not having this!"

"Which?"

Higgs pointed a forefinger across the table at the new boy, who stared at him. "That!" he snapped.

Pons flushed.

He half rose to his feet. Van Ryn pushed him back into his chair.

"All serene," he said. "Get on with your tea."

"But——"

"All serene, I tell you."

"Well, I say it's not all serene," snapped Higgs. "I tell you plainly, Van Ryn, I'm not standing it!"

"No; I'm standing it," agreed Van Ryn.

"I'm not speaking of the feed, fathead. I'm speaking——"

"Too much!" said Van Ryn cheerfully. "Shut up for a bit, old chap, and give us a rest!"

"You haven't passed the biscuits, Higgs," said Tubby Muffin plaintively. "I like biscuits with my jam."

"Shut up, you!" roared Higgs.

Tubby Muffin promptly shut up.

"Now," continued Higgs, "we'll have this out. You brought that new duffer into this study yesterday, and I stood it. I'm a good-tempered chap. Now you've planted him here again, and you're talking about keeping him in the study. This study isn't a home for idiots."

"What the dickens are you doing in it, then?"

Higgs appeared to choke for a moment.

"I don't want any of your rot, Van Ryn. The long and the short of it is that we're not going to have that new kid in this study. There's three of us already."

"There's room for four."

"That isn't the question. I don't want him in this study."

Higgs made this statement as if it were a "clinch." But the South African junior did not seem to regard the matter as closed thereby.

"You'll get used to it," he remarked.

"I'm jolly well not going to get used to it," roared Higgs. "I tell you I'm not standing it!"

"Take Jimmy Silver's advice, and keep smiling," suggested Van Ryn. "It can't be helped, you know. I've asked Mr. Bootles to put Pons in this study, and he's agreed—and there you are."

"You had the cheek to ask Bootles without asking me first?" spluttered Higgs.

"What was the good of asking you? You always cut up rusty."

Higgs jumped up.

"Well, I won't have it," he roared. "We don't want the born idiot here. Look at him, the spooney ass!"

"Oh, draw it mild," said Pons, speaking for the first time.

"You shut up!"

"But——"

"Dry up! I'm talking!"

"You generally are," remarked Van Ryn, with a sigh.

"Look at the burbling idiot," continued Higgs indignantly. "Calls himself a Rookwood chap! Look at him! Why, the whole school is cackling at him. He let himself be taken in by the Bagshot Bounders!"

"I couldn't help that!" pleaded Pons.

Higgs gave a louder snort than ever.

"Just think of it! He let Pankley lead him off to Bagshot, and made out that Bagshot—that blessed casual ward—was Rookwood. Fooled him like a baby! Did you ever hear of such an ass? Bagshot will be laughing to death over it. He oughtn't to come to Rookwood at all. He ought to go to a lunatic asylum. We don't want the fathead in this study. No fear!"

Pons' handsome, dark face was crimson.

He realised that it was likely to be a long time before he heard the end of the unfortunate adventure of his first day at the school.

Certainly he had been fooled most completely by the practical jokers of Bagshot, the old rivals of the Rookwood juniors.

Pankley & Co. had made him believe that Bagshot School was Rookwood, and had taken him there, and it had been a long time before the unfortunate stranger discovered that he was being taken in.

Even the good-tempered Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, was exasperated.

The laugh was on the side of Bagshot for once. It was exasperating for a Rookwood fellow, even a new fellow, to be taken in so easily and "guyed" by the Bagshot Bounders.

But there were plenty of excuses for poor Pons. A stranger from a distant Colony could hardly be expected to know anything about the rivalry between Rookwood and Bagshot, or to be on his guard against such an extraordinary practical joke.

Everybody was down on Pons for being taken in so easily, feeling that it reflected on Rookwood generally.

Only Van Ryn, in the kindness of his

heart, stood by him, feeling that it was up to him as a fellow Colonial.

The opinion of the Classical Fourth was that Pons was a hopeless duffer, and with schoolboy plainness of speech, they did not hesitate to tell him so.

Higgs' indignation was simply overwhelming at the idea of the duffer being "planted" in his study. And his lordly permission had not even been asked.

"Now, I don't want to quarrel with you, Van Ryn," said Higgs. "You're a good sport, though you're cheeky. But I'm not having that chump in this study."

Pons rose to his feet.

"I don't want to come where I'm not wanted," he said. "I'll cut."

"And the sooner the better," growled Higgs.

"Sit down!" said Van Ryn.

"But—but—"

"You see, you've got to have a study," explained Van Ryn. "You'll get chipped wherever you go, until the fellows forget about it. You'd better stay here. Besides, Bootles has it fixed now. As for Higgs, never mind him. He's always a bit of a bear, and you'll be able to stand him when you get used to him. Sit down!"

Pons considered for a moment, and then he sat down again.

"If my Form-master has put me here, I'm a right to stay," he said.

"Exactly."

"Then I'm staying."

"That's right!"

Higgs' face was almost purple.

"And what about me?" he roared.

"Oh, I'll try to stand you," said Pons calmly. "I wish you'd improve your manners a bit. But I dare say I shall get used to them."

Higgs stared at the new junior speechlessly. Van Ryn grinned, and Tubby Muffin gave a fat chuckle.

"My hat!" Higgs found his voice at last. "It's no good talking to you. Will you go out of this study on your feet or on your neck? That's the question."

"Well, I shan't go on my feet," said Pons.

And Alfred Higgs came round the table with a rush and laid violent hands on the new junior.

CHAPTER 2.

Higgs Meets His Match!

JIMMY SILVER, the captain of the Fourth, stopped in the passage.

"Hello, that sounds like war!" he remarked.

There was a sound of a terrific struggle in No. 3. Certainly it sounded like war.

"Oh, come on!" said Lovell. "It's only that new duffer in trouble again."

"Tea's ready, you know," said Raby.

But Jimmy Silver did not come on.

"The new kid's a howling idiot!" he remarked. "But if Higgs is bullying him it's time for Uncle James to chip in."

"Oh, don't begin Uncle Jamesing now!" urged Newcome. "I tell you tea's ready!"

The Fistical Four were coming in to tea after football practice, and they were hungry. And there was a feed ready in Oswald's study. The Co. were anxious to get there.

So was Jimmy Silver, for that matter. But Jimmy Silver had a very strong sense of duty as captain of the Fourth and Uncle James to Rookwood generally.

Crash, bump! came from the study.

"Dash it all, we ought to look in!" said Jimmy.

"But tea—"

"Never mind tea for a minute—"

"Look here, the new kid is a howling ass and born to find trouble!" growled Lovell. "Look how the Bagshot Bounders took him in yesterday!"

"Well, if he's a silly ass, it's up to wise-aces like us to look after him a bit," suggested Jimmy.

"Oh, rats!"

"You fellows coming?" shouted Oswald from his study doorway.

"Just a minute, Oswald."

Jimmy Silver thumped at the door of No. 3 and opened it.

His comrades growled, but they stopped, too. After all, it would only take a few minutes to bump the bully of the Fourth and reduce him to reason.

But the scene that met their eyes in the study amazed them.

Van Ryn and Tubby Muffin were looking on at it grinning.

Alfred Higgs had grasped Charles Pons of Canada with the intention of hurling him neck and crop from the study. That

was Higgs' simple and drastic method of settling the question.

As Higgs was a head taller than the younger lad, and a very powerful fellow in every way, he did not anticipate any difficulty in carrying out his programme.

But difficulties had arisen.

Pons had returned grasp for grasp, and Higgs, to his amazement, found himself held. The slim arms that were wound round him seemed to be made of steel.

Pons' dark, handsome face was quite calm—in fact, smiling. Higgs was red with rage.

The two juniors were stamping and tramping about the study in a terrific struggle. Chairs had been knocked right and left, and some of the tea-things were on the floor.

But the steel-like grip round Higgs' burly body did not relax.

Van Ryn had intended to interfere, but there was no need for his interference.

The Canadian was quite capable of taking care of himself.

Jimmy Silver burst into a hearty laugh. Lovell and Raby and Newcome could not help grinning. If Charles Pons was a duffer, he was a very capable duffer in some ways.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "That kid's got some muscle. I couldn't hold Higgs like that!"

"Leggo!" roared Higgs.

Pons grinned.

"Well, I didn't begin," he remarked. "Are you going to keep the peace if I let go?"

"You're going out of this study, or I do!" growled Higgs.

"Then you'll go!"

"Out you go!" gasped Higgs, and he made a tremendous effort to whirl the new junior round to the door.

For a moment he thought he was succeeding. They swung to the doorway, and the Fistical Four crowded back to give them room. But in the doorway it was Higgs who was swung outward, and the Canadian suddenly let go. Higgs went spinning into the passage, his arms flying wildly.

Crash!

"Yoop!" roared Lovell, as Higgs' right hand caught him across the nose.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Higgs.

He sat down in the passage with a resounding bump.

Lovell rubbed his nose furiously.

"You silly ass! Oh, you dummy!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Van Ryn. "He is a corker, and no mistake! How the dickens did you do it, Pong?"

Higgs scrambled up breathlessly.

"I'll smash him! I'll slaughter him! I'll scalp him! I'll—"

He rushed into the study again.

"Poor old Pong!" murmured Raby.

But "Pong" was not in need of sympathy.

He was not quite big enough to tackle Higgs at fisticuffs, but with wonderful quickness he closed in with him, and in his grasp, Higgs had no chance with his fists. Pons had received one drive which made his head sing, but was all.

How Pons did it the juniors could not see. It was evident that he was a wielder of uncommon skill. Higgs' muscular arms were pinned down to his sides, and the juniors struggled chest to chest, grinning face looking coolly into Higgs' flaming and furious one.

The bully of the Fourth was struggling frantically.

But it seemed to be a circle of iron that was enclosing him, and he could not break it.

His breath came in quick, sudden jerks.

"Ow! You—you're breaking my arm!" he gasped at last.

Pons nodded.

"If I put the screw on they'd break right enough," he said calmly, "and your ribs along with them. I think I'd better do it!"

"Ow!"

"Have you had enough?"

"Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotter!" groaned Higgs. "Stand up to a chap and use your fists. I can't do this wriggling business—"

"Well, I can't do the fist business against a fellow your size," grinned Pons. "You are a rotten bully to tackle me when you're a head taller!"

"You cheeky rotter! Yow-ow!"

"Make it pax, Higgs!" chuckled Van Ryn.

"Yoop!"

"Better make it pax!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I won't!" gasped Higgs. "I'll smash him! I'll pulverise him! I'll—yow-ow-ow! I say—yaroooh!"

"Make it pax, you ass!" gasped Van Ryn, almost weeping with merriment.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Higgs made one more effort, and then he crumpled up in the Canadian's iron grasp.

"Yow-ow! Leggo, you—you bo-con-strictor! I give in!"

Pons let go at once, and Higgs staggered against the wall. He was utterly out of breath, and quite "done."

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "You—you rotter! Ow! Look here, you're not going to stay in this study, all the same."

Pons shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, cheese it, Higgy!" said Van Ryn. "For goodness' sake let's have some peace."

"If that rotter stays here, I shall change out!" roared Higgs.

"Well, we'll try to survive it if you do."

Higgs shook a weak fist at Pons, and staggered out of the study. He had had enough, for the present at least. Van Ryn gave a shrug. He was almost the only fellow in the Classical Fourth who could get on with Higgs, and he had found him very trying. If Higgs chose to change out of the study, it was probable that there would be dry eyes there over his departure.

The Pistical Four went on to Oswald's study grinning. There had been no need for Uncle James' intervention after all.

"There's more in that new kid than meets the eye," said Jimmy Silver sagely.

"Awful duffer, though," said Lovell.

"Well, after all, he was a stranger here, and Panky is a deep beast!" said Jimmy Silver. "Anybody might have been taken in as Pong was—"

"Bow-wow!"

"He's a silly fathead!" remarked Raby. "But he can wrestle, no mistake about that. I'll get him to give me some tips."

The Pistical Four joined Oswald in his study, considerably interested by the form the Canadian junior had shown. The Canadian junior went on with his tea in No. 3, showing small signs of the exertion he had been through. Tubby Muffin gave him a benevolent blink across the table.

"If Higgs changes out, it will be rip-

ping!" he remarked. "I'd much rather have you, Pong."

"Thanks!" said Pons, laughing.

"Of course, you're an awful ass, the way you were taken in by the Bagshot Bounders."

"I suppose I shall never hear the end of that," growled Pons.

"You never will, till the chaps get something else to think about," grinned Van Ryn. "You must try to dish Pankley somehow, and make the score even, and then you'll hear the end of it."

"Good idea!" said Pons. "I'll think over that."

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"You'd better let Pankley alone," he remarked. "A duffer like you, you know."

"He, he, he!"

But Pons was looking very thoughtful. Van Ryn's suggestion had taken root in his mind. That was one way, at least, of setting himself right with the Rookwood Fourth, if he could contrive it.

CHAPTER 3.

Pankley Surpasses Himself!

"Go it, Panky!"
Cecil Pankley, the great chief of the Fourth Form at Bagshot School, beamed upon Putter and Poole, his study-mates.

The great Pankley had been thinking.

And his admiring chums, who knew the glimmer in Panky's eye when they saw it, guessed that a "wheeze" was working in Panky's mighty brain. So when Pankley gave utterance to a soft chuckle, Putter and Poole knew that the moment had arrived, and they chorused:

"Go it!"

"I've got it!" said Pankley.

"Good man!"

"That wheeze of the season!" said Pankley impressively.

"Go it!"

"We've been giving Rookwood rather a rest of late," said Pankley. "They're really not up to our form. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd can't quite keep up their end against Bagshot."

"No fear!"

"We've done them brown, many a time and oft," pursued Pankley, perhaps forgetting that he also had been "done

brown" occasionally by Jimmy Silver & Co. "They're played out, really. Still, a chap must have some fun. You know that new kid who's gone to Rookwood—Pong or Bong, or something."

"Ha, ha!"

"You know the way we spoofed him, bringing him here from the station and stuffing him that this was Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Putter and Poole.

"Well, a silly idiot like that oughtn't to be wasted," said Pankley. "There's no end of fun in a crass ass like that. And he's a Rookwood chap, anyway. Every time we pull his silly leg it will make Jimmy Silver sit up. In fact, that born idiot is their heel of Achilles—"

"Their which?" asked Poole.

"Don't you know that Achilles was only vulnerable on one spot—his giddy heel?" demanded Pankley severely. "Well, that utter idiot, Pong, is their Achilles' heel. See? We can fool him as much as we like. I've got a wheeze. He's a French chap—"

"French-Canadian," said Putter.

"Well, French-Canadian, then. He's half French, and he's got a French name. Stands to reason that he's a good deal like a Frenchy."

"I suppose he is," said Putter, looking puzzled. "But what's that got to do with the wheeze?"

"That's where it comes in. Being a Frenchy, that's where we catch him. You've heard about French duels?"

"Duels!" ejaculated Poole.

"Yes. You know, they skewer one another when they have a row, instead of punching noses. Of course, they don't hurt one another with their skewering; it's only a sort of comedy. Well, Pong, being a Frenchy, more or less, will have that sort of rot in his blood, and he will be touchy about his honour and glory and things—Frenchies are, you know—and—"

"But what the dickens—"

"So we're going to send him a challenge."

"A—a—a challenge?"

Pankley nodded.

"Yes, a challenge to a merry duel."

Putter and Poole stared at their leader. He had succeeded in taking their breath away.

"A—a—a duel!" babbled Poole, at last.

"A regular, deadly, blood-and-thunder, honour-must-be-satisfied duel," said Pankley. "Being a born idiot, he will think we are in earnest."

"Oh!"

"And being a touchy Frenchy, he will take it quite seriously. You see, we point out that honour demands satisfaction, and all that—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And there's a deadly meeting on heath," said Pankley, grinning. "We a couple of the cadets' rifles, with bl cartridges—"

"Great pip!"

"And there's a blaze-away, and y Putter, fall down fatally wounded."

"Oh, do I?" said Putter.

"Certainly! And we make the poor Frenchy fairly skip," grinned Pankley. "After that we'll let him know it's jape."

"But—but you don't think he's idiot enough to fall into a trick like that?" claimed Poole.

"Rookwood chaps are all idiots, and the champion idiot," said Pankley serenely.

"He was idiot enough to come here thinking this was Rookwood, and let us pull his leg. I think he's idiot enough for anything. And if he does take it on—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he does, it will be a screaming joke against Rookwood. We'll let them know all about it, you bet."

"But—but he couldn't be such an ass," said Poole.

"Well, when we take over the challenge we shall see whether he's such an ass or not," said Pankley. "If he accepts the challenge, that will prove what kind of an ass he is, and then we go ahead with the jape. If he doesn't, we can let it drop, and no harm done."

"Well, that's so. He can't be such an idiot, though."

"We'll see," said Pankley. "You can come over to Rookwood with me with the challenge, Poole. Putter's the injured party who sends it. When Pong was here he trod on Putty's foot, or something, and honour has to be satisfied. Putter is thirsting for gore."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"He sends his seconds with the challenge in the French style." Pankley rubbed his hands. "Master Touchy Frenchy is afraid of being thought a funk, and he accepts the challenge, and then we make a regular guy of him. Just imagine the fun if the silly idiot does take it seriously. We'll have a crowd of Bagshot chaps there to yell when the duel comes off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putter and Poole. Pankley jumped up briskly.

"No time like the present," he said. "Of course, we shall have to keep it dark to Jimmy Silver; he wouldn't let us jape or duffer. You come and get your bike, Poole."

In a few minutes Pankley and Poole were cycling away to Rookwood, to carry out Pankley's extraordinary scheme.

It was an amazing scheme, worthy of the mighty brain of the great Pankley. But even Pankley had some doubts as to whether Pons would be duffer enough to be taken in to that extent. He hoped he would, but he had some doubts. It all depended upon whether or not he was a duffer the new Rookwood boy was. And Pankley had fooled him so easily once, that he had hopes of fooling him again to a still greater extent.

The two Bagshot juniors arrived at Rookwood, and leaving their machines at the porter's lodge, crossed the quadrangle. There was a shout from Jimmy Silver in the distance.

"Hallo, the Bagshot Bounders!"

The Fistical Four bore down upon the enemy as they came up to the School House. Pankley jerked out his handkerchief, and waved it in the air.

"Flag of truce!" he exclaimed.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"White flag is a flag of truce," he replied.

"Well, this is a white flag."

"You must be colour-blind, Panky. That's a black flag, so I suppose you've come here as a pirate, and we always bump pirates."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley glared. His handkerchief, perhaps, was not quite so clean as it might have been, but it was not so bad as all that.

"No larks," said Poole. "We've come on a visit. Returning Pong's visit, you

know. I suppose you're aware that he visited us the other day?"

The Fistical Four grinned.

"We can't help him being a silly ass," said Lovell. "After all, he went to the right place for a born idiot."

"Oh, rats!"

Pankley and Poole hurried into the House, the Fistical Four deciding to respect the flag of truce.

"Is Pong anywhere about?" asked Pankley, addressing the first junior he met inside, who happened to be Tubby Muffin.

"Yes; he's my study-mate."

"Show us where to find him. Only a friendly visit," said Pankley reassuringly.

"Oh, all right!"

Tubby Muffin led the Bagshot juniors to Study No. 3, and left them there. Pankley tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called out Pons' voice.

Pankley opened the door. Pons was alone in the study, getting through some lines he had received from Mr. Bootles. Pankley was glad to find him alone.

The Canadian stared at the Bagshot juniors.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Good-afternoon, dear boy!" said Pankley, coming into the study, followed by Poole. "We've come over for a little talk—rather an important matter. Shut the door, Poole."

Pons rose to his feet, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Only a friendly talk, I tell you," said Pankley. "There's a dozen Rookwood chaps within call. We haven't come here to rag. Sit down."

"Oh, all right! What the deuce is it, then?"

Pankley's manner assumed a portentous gravity.

"You were at Bagshot the other day," he said. "You trod on Putter's foot. Putter is my chum, and I'm acting for him in the matter. I'm his second."

"His second?" exclaimed Pons.

"Exactly!"

"Does Putter want me to fight him? I don't mind."

"You accept the challenge?"

"Certainly!"

"Then choose your weapons!" said Pankley.

CHAPTER 4.

The Challenge Accepted!

PONS stared blankly at the Bagshot junior. He had supposed that Pankley brought over a challenge to a fistical encounter with Putter, and the Bagshot junior's remark made him jump.

"Weapons!" he ejaculated.

Pankley nodded gravely.

"This isn't an ordinary matter," he explained. "Putter has been insulted. You trod on his foot, and called him a silly ass. An insult like that can only be wiped out in blood."

"Oh, my hat!"

A peculiar glimmer came into the Canadian's eyes.

Pankley was quite satisfied that he was a born idiot, owing to his experiences at Bagshot; and certainly only a born idiot could have taken the ridiculous challenge seriously.

But it was barely possible that the great Pankley had made a little mistake, and that Pong was not quite such a duffer as he supposed.

But certainly Pong's next words bore out Pankley's opinion of him.

"A duel?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"As the challenged party I have a right to choose the weapons," said Pons.

Poole gasped, and Pankley had hard work to suppress a chuckle. He had judged the French-Canadian correctly, he considered. Unless he was a born idiot, how could he have answered like that? The scheme was going to work!

"Quite so!" said Pankley as gravely as he could. "We've come over as Putter's seconds to arrange the meeting. As a French chap, you understand how these things are done, and that honour can only be satisfied by skewering."

"Mais oui," said Pons. "Vous avez raison, mon cher!"

"Oh?"

"I mean, you are right. Honour must be satisfied. There is French blood in my veins. I understand perfectly. I accept the challenge."

"Oh, good!" gasped Poole.

"I will meet Monsieur Putter where and when he likes!" exclaimed Pons, gesticulating in an excited manner. "Only one of us shall leave the field of battle alive!"

Poole stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth. It was the only way to keep back a yell of laughter.

"Good!" said Pankley. "Will Coombe Heath suit you—under the trees by the old quarry? That is a lonely place."

"Oui, oui! The dead body can be thrown into the quarry, and nothing need be known," suggested Pons.

"Exactly!" gasped Pankley, almost overcome. "Ex-ex-exactly! The quarry comes in very handy for disposing of body."

"Splendid idea!" stuttered Poole.

"C'est un combat à la mort!" exclaimed Pons.

"Which?"

"I mean it is to the death!"

"Oh, certainly! Quite to the death."

"I am ready. Only one of us shall leave the field alive; perhaps neither. Monsieur Putter shall have satisfaction."

"Hear, hear!" gurgled Poole.

"Then, as the seconds, we settle the tails now," said Pankley. "Coombe Heath by the old quarry, four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. That suit you?"

"Oui, oui!"

"And the weapons?"

"Anything you like. I have none, unfortunately."

"You haven't any duelling rapiers?" asked Pankley gravely.

"Non."

"Nor any pistols?"

"I regret it, none."

"Well, any kind of firearms will do for blowing a chap's roof off. I can get a couple of cadet's rifles—"

"Tres bien."

"And some cartridges. That suit you?"

"Parfaitement."

"And you'll keep it dark, of course? Duelling isn't allowed in England," said Pankley. "The police would interfere—ahem—if they knew."

"Secret as the grave, of course."

"Don't tell any of your friends here. It might spread, you know!"

"I understand."

Pankley felt relieved. If Pons had confided the matter to any of the Rookwood fellows, Pankley was not afraid they would inform the police—not at all. He was afraid they would enlighten Pons, for certainly no Rookwood fellow would have thought that the proposed duel was anything but a spoof.

But Pons seemed to have no suspicion. He nodded gravely.

"But what about a second for me?" he asked. "I must have a second."

"A Bagshot chap would act for you," said

"Poole, here."
"He honoured," said Poole.
"are very good!"

"at all. An honour and a pleasure,"
Poole.

"I accept your offer. You shall be
I."

"rose to his feet, and bowed. Pons
and bowed in return. It was,
y told his friends later, as good
on the cinema. The only trouble
the Bagshot jokers found it diffi-
serve their gravity.

"all's arranged," said Pankley.
"stood that you don't tell any of
here that there's going to be a
death?"

"ly not!" said Pons, with a mo-
summer in his eyes. "A duel to
a matter to be kept very secret.
will be discreet?"
"on us!"

"And, as seconds, you will dispose of the
body of the slain?"

"Yes—oh, of course!"

"You will hurl Monsieur Putter into the
quarry when I have slain him in battle?"

"Yes—I can see myself doing it," agreed
Pankley.

"Then all is arranged. Suggest to Mon-
sieur Putter that he shall make his will."

"I won't forget that, of course!"

Pankley and Poole took their leave. They
seemed to be suffering from suppressed
internal convulsions as they hurried back to
the porter's lodge for their bikes. But it
was not till they were riding home to Bag-
shot that they gave vent to their feelings.
Then they yelled.

"Did you ever hear of such a howling
ass?" roared Pankley.

"Ha, ha! Never!"

"A duel to the merry death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And poor old Putter is to be chucked
into the quarry when slain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Poole.

The two jaspers rode home in great
spirits. Putter met them at the gates of
Bagshot School.

"Well, did he spot the iano?" was
Putter's question.

"No fear!"

"He's accepted the challenge?" yelled
Putter.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Four o'clock on Wednesday, on Coombe
Heath—cadets' rifles, and a duel to the
giddy death!" gurgled Poole.

Putter shrieked.

"And you're to be chucked into the old
quarry, Putter, when slain."

Putter wept.

The merry trio proceeded to relate the
story in the junior Common-room, and the
Bagshot fellows gasped when they heard it.
And there were few in the Fourth Form
of Bagshot who did not resolve to be on
the scene on Wednesday afternoon and see
the duel a la mort. Poole intended to
take his camera. He thought that a snap-
shot of the duel would make an agreeable
picture, which could be sent to Jimmy
Silver & Co. afterwards.

Meanwhile, Pons went cheerfully on with
his lines till Van Ryn came into No. 3
Study. The South African junior re-
garded him rather curiously.

"What did the 'Bagshot Bounders
want?" he asked.

Pons looked up with a grin.

"I have something to tell you, mon
ami," he remarked. "I have an idea—I
think it is a good idea."

Pons proceeded to explain his idea.

Van Ryn listened with astonishment at
first, staring blankly at the Canadian
junior.

But as Pons proceeded, the South
African's face relaxed into a grin, and
the grin became a laugh, and the laugh
a yell. He roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Van Ryn lay back in the study arm-
chair and yelled.

"Hallo! What's the merry joke?"
asked Jimmy Silver, looking into the
study. "Somebody been fooling your
born duffer again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a secret," said Pons gravely—"a
terrible secret—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Van Ryn.

"Oh, blow your secrets!" said Jimmy.

"What are you cackling at, you duffers?"

Van Ryn, chuckling, explained: and

then Jimmy Silver yelled, too. And if Pankley & Co. could have heard, they would probably not have been quite so pleased with themselves.

CHAPTER 5.

The Duel!

"GREAT pip! There he is!"

It was Wednesday afternoon. Pankley, Putter, and Poole crossed the heath from the direction of Bagshot School in the clear, frosty afternoon.

Excellently as their little scheme had worked, the Bagshot trio had had a lingering doubt. They wondered whether Pons would really be ass enough to keep the appointment at the old quarry.

But as they came through the trees from the road across the moor they saw the Canadian junior.

Pons was first in the field.

He stood by the old quarry, with his arms folded, his face dark and stern, in a Napoleonic attitude.

He was alone, and waiting for the enemy.

"By gad!" murmured Putter. "The howling ass has come right enough!"

"Oh, I knew he would!" said Pankley airily.

"Of all the screaming duffers——" murmured Poole.

"Mind you don't laugh," admonished Pankley. "If you cackle, that will give it all away!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Shurrup! He can see us from here. You know what you've got to do, Putty. You fall down fatally injured——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We chuck you into the quarry——"

"Oh, do you?" said Putter.

"Yes, ass——only slide you into the bushes, you know. Then we tell Pons to fly."

"Poor old Pong!"

"And he flies!" grinned Pankley.

"Later on we'll drop in at Rookwood, and let him see Putter alive and well, to relieve his mind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The three juniors assumed looks of great

gravity as they came under the trees. They saluted Pons with becoming solemnity.

Pons gave a graceful bow.

"I have waited, messieurs," he remarked.

"Just four," said Pankley consulting his watch.

"Tres bien."

Here and there on the heath bands appeared in view. A good number of Bagshot juniors were looking on from a distance, not to miss the fun. Pons did not appear to observe them.

Pankley unfastened a long bundle he carried, wrapped in canvas.

A pair of the rifles used by the school cadet corps were disclosed to view.

Pons glanced at them.

"Good!" he ejaculated.

"How many paces?" asked Putter.

"Say ten," said Putter. "I want to make sure of him."

"Does that suit you, Pons?"

"Parfaitement."

"Ten paces, then," said Pankley. "Take your stand while we load the rifles."

The distance was measured off carefully. Pons stood waiting in a Napoleonic attitude. He was quite calm.

"I—I say, Panky," whispered Putter, "you—you're sure that you've got blank cartridges?"

Pankley gave him a withering look.

"Do you think I should make a mistake, you fathead?" he asked.

"Nunno; but——"

"If you're getting nervous, you ass——"

"I'm not; only mistakes do happen——"

"Look at them yourself, fathead!"

"Oh, all right!" said Putter.

"Take your place, ass, or Pong will begin to smell a rat."

Putter went to his place, facing Pons at a distance of ten paces.

The two seconds proceeded to load the rifles.

This operation was performed with due seriousness. Then the deadly weapons were handed to the two principals.

Pons gripped his rifle with a business-like air.

"When I drop the handkerchief you fire," said Pankley.

"Oui, oui!"

"Are you ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Go ahead," said Putter.

"Level your popguns, and wait for the word!"

"What ho!"

The rifles came up to the shoulders. Deadly aim was taken.

"My hat!" murmured Poole. "Pong must be an awful beast as well as a silly fool! He really thinks he's going to wing poor old Putter."

Pankley nodded.

"This lesson will do him good, then!" he remarked. "He'll feel a bit different after winging him. Don't cackle, you ass! Now—"

"Hold on a minute; I've got to get my camera ready!"

"Buck up, then!"

"The Rookwood chaps will enjoy this photograph," murmured Poole, as he opened the view-finder. "They'll gloat over it—I don't think!"

"Now then!" said Pankley, raising his hand with the handkerchief in it. "Eyes front! Ready?"

The duellists blinked along the levelled rifles.

All was ready.

The handkerchief fluttered from Cecil Pankley's hand.

Bang, bang!

The two reports sounded almost as one.

Putter, as per programme, uttered a piercing yell, and fell forward on his face.

To the astonishment of the seconds, Pons gave a shriek at the same moment, spun wildly round, and fell on his side.

They stared at him.

A deep, anguished groan came from the fallen Canadian:

"Oh, mon Dieu! Je suis mort! Helas!"

Then he lay still.

Pankley rushed madly towards him, his face white as a sheet. A crimson stream was flowing over Pons' white collar, dyeing the grass upon which he lay. The Bagshot juniors gazed at him in speechless horror.

injured. But it was evidently no time for jokes now. Putter came running up with a scared face.

"What—what's happened?" he panted.

Pankley's teeth chattered.

"Look at him!"

"He—he's hit!" stuttered Putter.

The Canadian junior groaned again. His hand was clutching at his collar, and his fingers came away dyed crimson.

Putter's knees knocked together. How had it happened? He turned a wild look upon Pankley.

"Panky, you silly idiot, I—I asked you specially if they were blank cartridges!"

"They—they were!" groaned Pankley. "I got them out of the right box, I'll swear!"

"Then they must have got mixed!" gasped Poole.

"But—but I looked at them!"

"Oh, you fool!"

"You silly fool!" groaned Putter. "I knew there'd be some bangle! You've given me a loaded cartridge, and—and now—"

Groan!

The three juniors were almost overcome with horror.

Pons blinked up at them.

"It is nothing!" he gasped. "I—I am— Oh! But you are not to blame. It was a fair duel."

Pankley groaned.

"I forgive you, Monsieur Putter!" moaned Pons. "If I die, you shall throw me into the quarry, and say nothing!"

"Pong, old man," gasped Pankley hoarsely, "it—it was only a joke! We—we thought they were blank cartridges!"

Pons smiled faintly.

Then his features became convulsed, and he writhed in the grass and groaned.

"Ah, je suis mort! Je vais mourir!" he groaned.

There was a crash in the trees and bushes by the quarry, and Dick Van Ryn of Rookwood came panting up.

"What's happened?" he exclaimed. "I heard shots here! Why, what—what's happened to Pong?"

"It—it was an accident!" said Pankley huskily. "We—we were fooling him!"

"Look at the blood!"

"The—the cartridge wasn't a blank, somehow!"

CHAPTER 6.

Not According to Programme!

PANKLEY and Poole stood transfixed, gazing down at the fallen junior. Putter leaped to his feet. It had been arranged for Putter to go through the ceremony of appearing fatally

"Oh, you champion idiot!" exclaimed Van Ryn. "Don't you know better than to play jokes with firearms?"

"I could have sworn—"

"Lend me a hand with him. I've got a trap on the road," said Van Ryn hastily. "He may not be fatally injured. Let's get him to the surgeon's at once!"

"I—I'll look at his injury now!"

"Rot! What do you know about gunshot wounds? Help me get him to the trap. It won't take five minutes to get him to Coombe. Quick!"

Van Ryn was already raising Pons in his arms. The South African junior took the lead now without question. The three Bagshot fellows were utterly overcome with dismay and horror.

Pankley took the Canadian's legs, and Van Ryn his shoulders, and they carried him towards the road.

Pankley could not help thinking it lucky that Van Ryn had happened to be driving by in a trap at that terrible moment. Without that, the wounded junior could hardly have been got to the surgeon's.

The trap was waiting by the roadside. Jimmy Silver was sitting in it, holding the reins.

He stared at them as they came up, carrying the groaning Pons.

"What on earth—"

"An accident!" panted Pankley.

"Good heavens!"

"No time to talk now!" interjected Van Ryn. "He's got to be got away! Help me in with him, Pankley!"

Pons was laid in the trap.

"How—how do you feel, old man?" groaned Pankley.

"Je vais mourir."

"Nunno! You—you're not going to die, old chap! The—the surgeon will get it out. Cheer up, you know!"

Groan!

"You fellows had better say nothing about this till you hear what the surgeon's got to say," said Van Ryn, as he followed the wounded youth into the trap. "Get off, Silver! Drive as fast as you can!"

"Don't jolt him too much!" gasped Pankley. "I—I say, let me tie up his wound first! Look at the—the blood!"

"I'll look after him while we're going. Buck up, Jimmy!"

The trap started.

Pankley gazed after it, stonily, as it disappeared down the road, across the heath, in the direction of Coombe.

Putter and Poole came slowly up and joined him.

The trap had disappeared, driving at a rate that was certainly not good for a fellow who had a bullet in his body.

Pons lay in the bottom of the trap, with Van Ryn at his side. Jimmy Silver drove on to the village, but he did not stop there. He passed the gates of Mr. Scoggins, the surgeon, without thinking of halting, and drove on towards Rookwood. In the lane he slackened speed, and looked round with a grin.

"All serene now," he remarked. "Not dead yet, Pong?"

Pons sat up.

He did not look as if he were perishing now.

He was chortling.

"Right-ho!" he said. "Poor old Pankley!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just imagine Pankley's face when he calls on the surgeon!" gurgled Van Ryn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"I have spoiled my collar," said Pons regretfully, "and it is very uncomfortable to have red ink flowing down my shirt-front. But it was worth inking a shirt and a collar."

"Ha, ha! I should say so!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You're not such a duffer as you look, Pong!"

"Thank you!"

"I saw Putter fall down!" grinned Van Ryn. "He jumped up quick enough when Pong went down, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Rookwood juniors drove on in great spirits, the wounded warrior being anxious to change his shirt. That was all he needed to bring about a complete recovery.

CHAPTER 7.

Quite a Surprise!

PANKLEY & Co. looked at one another after the trap had gone. "Well, this is a go!" said Pankley at last.

"It's your fault!" said Putter. "You

undertook to see that they were blank cartridges!"

"Well, I did see to it!"

"Look at the result."

"I—I can't understand it!"

"What an awful ending to a rotten joke!" groaned Poole. "I—I say, he—he can't be fatally injured, can he?"

"No, no!" gasped Pankley. "Only—only a wound, you know! Goodness knows how the wrong cartridge got into the box. Somebody ought to be prosecuted!"

"We shall be prosecuted when this gets out!"

"Oh, don't!"

"Let's get on to the surgeon's, for goodness' sake, and hear the worst!" mumbled Putter.

But as the dismayed trio started a crowd of Bagshot fellows arrived on the spot. The distant spectators had observed that matters had not gone quite according to programme, and they wanted to know what was the matter. They looked very blue when they learned what the matter was.

"Well, you've done it now, Panky!"

"You awful ass!"

"Putter will be hung!"

"You'll all go to prison, too!"

"Of all the silly idiots—"

"It was a rotten joke, anyway!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Pankley, not much comforted by these remarks. "Some of you get these confounded rifles away, and hold your jaws. It mayn't turn out to be serious."

Pankley and Putter and Poole started for the village, with very unenviable feelings. Truth to tell, they were more anxious about poor Pons than about the consequences to themselves. But the consequences were certain to be very serious.

They started at a walk, but they broke into a run, and arrived in Coombe in a breathless state.

Pankley rang a loud peal at the door of the village surgeon's. He was in too anxious a state to stand upon ceremony, and he rang and rang till the door was opened by a startled maid.

The trio shoved in.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

The maid stared at him, wondering whether he was out of his senses.

"Who—what—"

"Pong! Where is he? How is he?" stuttered Poole.

"I don't understand!"

Mr. Scoggins, the surgeon, stepped out into the hall, frowning. Mr. Scoggins was at tea, and he was not pleased by the disturbance at his door.

"What is it? What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "An accident?"

"How is he, sir?"

"What! How is who?"

"Pong, sir."

"What do you mean—pong?"

"The—the chap who was brought here wounded, I mean. How is he?"

Mr. Scoggins stared at Pankley, as well he might.

"What do you mean? Is this a joke?" he rapped. "Nobody has been brought here!"

Pankley staggered.

"Isn't he here? A Rookwood chap. Didn't Jimmy Silver bring him here in a trap?"

"Certainly not!"

Pankley looked at his comrades in bewilderment. What did it mean?

"You—you—you're sure, sir?" stuttered Putter.

"I suppose I should know whether anyone has been brought here or not," snapped Mr. Scoggins. "If this is one of your practical jokes, you young rascals—"

"Nunno. But—but—"

"Close the door, Mary!"

Mr. Scoggins went back to his tea, and the door was closed in the faces of the Bagshot trio.

Pankley looked helpless.

"They—they didn't bring him here," he gasped. "What have they done with him? They—they wouldn't take him to Rookwood—like that!"

"They must have."

Pankley pressed his hand to his brow. He simply couldn't understand it.

"Let's get on," he muttered, at last.

"I suppose they must have taken him to the school, the silly fools. Buck up!"

A visit to Rookwood, under the circumstances, was not pleasant; but the Bagshot juniors were too terribly anxious to think about that. They ran on up the lane towards the school, tired and dusty and breathless.

They were panting and perspiring when they arrived at the gates. Lovell of the Fourth was waiting there.

"Oh, you've come!" he exclaimed.

"Is Pong here?" gasped Pankley.

"Yes."

"Where—where is he?"

"They've taken him to his study."

"Not—not to the sanatorium?" ejaculated Poole.

"No; it's being kept dark at present," said Lovell. "Only a few of us know. If you want to see him, I'll take you in."

"He—he's not—" The word almost froze on Pankley's tongue. "He—he's not—not dead?"

"Not yet."

"Is—is he going to die?" groaned Putter.

"Yes."

"Ow!"

The miserable trio followed Lovell to the School House. They fairly ran up the stairs to the Fourth-Form passage. But Pankley opened the door of No. 3 Study very softly.

Pankley & Co. tiptoed in.

"Where is he—" began Pankley.

He broke off suddenly.

There were half a dozen juniors in the study having tea. And at the table with a very cheery face, engaged in the act of eating sardines, was Charles Pons of Canada! Evidently not dead.

CHAPTER 8.

Good Old Pankley!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. jumped up, grinning, as the astounded Bagshot juniors stared into the study.

Pankley & Co. could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Pong!" gasped Putter.

"So pleased to see you, Monsieur Putter," said Pons. "Do you want any more satisfaction?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Rookwooders.

Pankley almost staggered. It was dawning upon him now that his leg—the great Pankley's leg—had been pulled. If there had been a born idiot in the transaction, it was not Pons who had been the born idiot!

"You—you're not hurt?"

"Thank you—no. A blank cartridge does not hurt," said Pons, in a tone of surprise. "I was a little uncomfortable from the red ink, but that was all."

"Red ink!" shrieked Putter.

They understood fully now. Pankley turned a ferocious look upon Lovell, who had followed him, grinning, into the study.

"You—you rotter! You said he was going to die!" he howled.

"So he is," said Lovell. "Pons isn't immortal, any more than the rest of us. He's bound to go the way of all flesh, isn't he? Not for another seventy years, I hope; but it's bound to come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny ass!" gasped Pankley.

"But—but—I don't catch on," gasped Poole. "Did—did you know that it was spoof all the time, you grinning beast?"

Pons roared.

"Of course I did, fathead."

"Oh!" mumbled Pankley.

"You took me for a howling duffer," continued Pons; "I took you for howling duffers, too. Who was right?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I agreed not to tell anybody about a duel to the death," said Pons; "but I told Van Ryn and Jimmy Silver about a spoof duel, with three silly asses to be guyed. I never said a word about a duel to the death, according to agreement."

"Oh!" murmured Pankley.

"I knew you were going to spoof with blank cartridges, as I couldn't believe you were idiot enough to be thinking of anything else," went on Pons cheerfully. "But cartridges sometimes get mixed; and I thought that if I fell down dying, you would suppose they'd got mixed—as you did. You were going to spoof me into believing that I had winged Putter, and you couldn't do it, you ass! But I spoofed you into believing that Putter had winged me, because you're a born idiot!"

"Oh!"

"It only needed a small bottle of red ink and a little acting, and Jimmy Silver and Van Ryn ready with a trap on the road," grinned Pons. "How did you get on with the surgeon? Was he surprised?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley & Co. looked at the hilarious Rookwooders and at one another. They were immensely relieved to find that the humorous Canadian was not hurt after all. But to have his own jape turned against him in this way was a bitter pill for the great Pankley to swallow. He realised that Pons had seen through the whole scheme at one glance, had affected to fall in with it, and befuddled him completely, and that he had walked into the trap he had laid for Pons, with unsuspecting innocence. What on earth would they say at Bagshot?

The expression on Pankley's face was excruciating. The Rookwood juniors laughed till they wept.

"I fancy Rookwood scores this time," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Will you stay to tea, Panky, old scout? You're so entertaining!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley & Co. did not stay to tea. With crimson faces, they sneaked out of the study, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. yelling. They did not speak till they were in the road. Then Putter and Poole spoke—with emphasis.

"Pankley, you ass!"

"Pankley, you idiot!"

"I—I'm jolly glad it's no worse, anyway," mumbled Pankley.

"And that's the chap you were going to spoof; taking you in all the time!" hooted Poole.

"Who's the born idiot—eh?" yelled Putter.

"They'll cackle us to death at Rookwood over this!"

"And at Bagshot, too, when they know."

"Oh, you fathead, Pankley!"

"Oh, you ass!"

And the unfortunate Pankley had nothing to say. He could not deny that his tremendous jape had been turned on his own head, and that he had been taken in all along the line. It was time for the great Pankley to hide his diminished head.

In No. 3 Study at Rookwood there was much merriment. Never had the rivals of Rookwood been so completely "dished" before; and the cream of the joke, as Jimmy Silver remarked, was that Pankley had laid the whole scheme himself, and had taken no end of trouble to bring about his own undoing.

CHAPTER 9.

To Let!

"TO let!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in the old quadrangle at Rookwood.

Pons, the new junior in the Classical Fourth, looked round in surprise.

The Fistical Four of the Fourth—Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Raby and Newcome—were on the steps, and they burst into a yell as Pons came out.

Mornington and Townsend and Topham, the nuts of Rookwood, were lounging in the quad, and they echoed the yell as they looked at the new junior.

And then it spread, and from all sides came shouts of laughter.

Pons looked bewildered, and his face flushed crimson.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is the joke?" demanded Pons.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy.

"To let!" shrieked Lovell. "Well, I always knew it was empty!"

And there was a fresh yell.

Pons stood on the steps, blinking about him. He was quite unconscious of the fact that some practical joker had, by means of a fish-hook, attached a small card to the back of his coat. Upon the card was inscribed in bold letters:

"TO LET!"

The unfortunate new boy could not see the card, having no eyes in the back of his head; but everybody else could see it, and they yelled.

Poor Pons was set down as a duffer; hence the little joke of which he was now the victim.

Pons' head certainly was not empty; but the card hooked on the back of his coat implied that it was, and that the vacant space was "to let."

"Look here, what are you cackling at?" Pons demanded warmly.

"All serene!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"There's nothing in it!"

And that remark, which had a double meaning, was greeted with another howl of merriment.

Pons put his hand up to his face, under the impression that something or other was there—an ink-spot on his nose, or something of the kind. The juniors watched him in great glee.

"By gad! That's got him down about right," said Mornington. "To let! What offers for the vacant space?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To let!" repeated Pons. "I don't understand—"

"Of course you don't; you need brains to understand with!" grinned Mornington.

"Look here, what is the matter, Jimmy Silver?"

"Nothing's the matter, dear boy."

"Then what are you chortling at?"

"We're chortling at the duffer of Rookwood!" chuckled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Van Ryn of the Fourth came across the quadrangle from the tuckshop, and Pons called to him. The two Colonial juniors were chums.

"Van Ryn, can you see anything for these silly asses to cackle at about me?"

The South African junior stared at him. He could not see the back of Pons, as the Canadian faced him.

"No, I can't," he replied.

"Then what is the cackle about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fistical Four.

Pons swung round angrily towards them, and then Van Ryn saw the card, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was Pons' unconsciousness of the ridiculous label upon his back that tickled the Rookwood juniors most. He spun round towards Van Ryn again.

"You, too!" he exclaimed. "You silly ass!"

"Ha, ha!" roared Van Ryn.

"Look here—"

"Et tu, Brute!" chuckled Lovell. "Thou, too, Brutus! Ha, ha!"

"Here comes Bootles!" murmured Raby.

"Oh, my hat! Take it off, Pong!"

"Eh? Take what off?" exclaimed the exasperated Pons.

"Ha, ha!"

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was coming over from Mr. Manders' house. He glanced round in mild surprise at the hilarious juniors. Then he caught sight of the card hooked upon Pons' back, and started.

His lips quivered for a moment, but he contrived to frown.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "This is—ridiculous! Pons—come here, Pons! You should not play such an absurd trick, Pons!"

"Trick!" gasped Pons.

"Yes, my boy. It is surely a very peculiar sense of humour which causes you to hold yourself up to ridicule in this way!"

"I—I—" gasped Pons.

"Take it off at once!"

"Take it off!" repeated Pons, in bewilderment. "B-b-but what am I to take off, sir? My cap?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"Is it possible, Pons, that you are not aware that there is a ridiculous card hooked upon your back?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pons' hand made a dive for the back of his coat, and he dragged off the card. His face was a study as he looked at it, and read "To let!"

The expression upon his face made the juniors shriek.

"To—to—to let!" gasped Pons.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! You were not aware, Pons—"

"Nunno, sir!"

"A—very ridiculous joke!" said Mr. Bootles, trying not to smile. "You should not play such jokes upon a new boy!"

And Mr. Bootles went into the School House, and did not laugh till he was out of hearing of the juniors.

Pons stood with the card in his fingers, his face crimson.

"I—I suppose that's a joke?" he ejaculated at last.

"No; it's a fact!" grinned Flynn of the Fourth. "Sure, the space is to let, isn't it intirely?"

"You silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Van Ryn, laughing, put his arm through Pons', and drew him into the House. They left the Classical juniors yelling.

"Poor old Pons!" said Lovell, wiping his eyes. "I suppose he can't help being a duffer, but he's funny!"

In No. 3 Study Dick Van Ryn was grinning, and Pons was frowning, with knitted brows.

"You mustn't mind, Pong, old chap!" said Van Ryn. "Only a joke!"

"I do not mind a joke!" growled Pons.

"But why have all the fatheads made up their minds that I am a duffer?"

"Well, the way Pankley dished you, you know—"

"But since that I have dished Pankley."

"True, O King; but you gave them that idea at the start, and they haven't got over it. Never mind; keep smiling, as Jimmy Silver says!"

"Blow Jimmy Silver!" growled Pons.

And it was some time before the cloud cleared from the usually good-humoured face of the Canadian junior.

CHAPTER 10.

Pons to the Rescue!

"BAGSHOT bounders!" growled Jimmy Silver.

It was the following day, and Jimmy Silver was returning to the school after a visit to Coombe, and at a turning in the lane he met Pankley and Poole and Putter of Bagshot face to face.

As the rival juniors never met without a ragging, Jimmy Silver was evidently in for it.

Pankley & Co. bore down on him at once, grinning.

"What a happy meeting!" exclaimed Pankley.

Jimmy put up his hands.

"Buzz off, you silly asses!"

"Ain't you glad to see us?" asked Pankley, in a pained voice, while his comrades chortled.

"Could anybody be glad to see a face like yours?" demanded Jimmy Silver. At which Poole and Putter chortled still more, and Pankley ceased to smile.

"We're cheeky to-day," grunted Pankley. "Never mind. Come for a little walk, Jimmy, my son. We're just going home. Come along!"

"Hands off, you chump!"

But the three Bagshot fellows did not "Hands off." They closed round Jimmy Silver, who hit out vigorously. But, great fighting-man as Jimmy was, three were rather too many for him. His arms were pinioned, and he wriggled in vain in the grasp of the trio.

"Now, come along," grinned Pankley. "We're going to take you to Bagshot, and

show the chaps what we've found wild on the road. Kim on!"

"Leggo!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on. You walk behind, Poole, and help him with your boot."

"What-ho!" chortled Poole.

"I'm not going to Bagshot, you howling chumps," yelled Jimmy Silver resisting desperately. "Yaroooh! Keep your boot away, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you coming, dear boy?"

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Jimmy.

He had to go. Pankley and Putter held his arms securely, and Poole, behind, was helping him on with a heavy boot. Jimmy walked down the road in the midst of the Bagshot trio, with a red and furious face. He knew what he had to expect if his captors marched him into Bagshot School; but there was no help for it.

There was no buzz of a bicycle on the road, and a junior came pedalling along at a leisurely pace from the village.

It was Pons of the Fourth.

He glanced at the group of juniors in astonishment.

"Look out, Rookwood cad!" muttered Pankley.

"Rescue!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

He did not expect much help from the duffer of the Fourth, but it was a chance. He remembered that Pons had given a good account of himself against Higgs, the bully of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Pons jammed on his brake at once, and jumped down, leaving his bike to go spinning into the hedge.

He rushed upon the scene at once.

"Clear off, ass!" said Pankley warningly. "Do you want to be taken to Bagshot again? Oh, my hat!"

Pons did not reply. He rushed to the attack, hitting out. Pankley and Poole had to let go Jimmy Silver to defend themselves. Poole grasped the Canadian; but he was hurled aside, and went staggering into the hedge. Pons grasped Pankley the next moment, and they rolled on the ground.

Jimmy Silver was freed then, and he piled in without a moment's pause. Putter was driven back under a shower of drives, through a gap in the hedge, and into a clayey field. Then Jimmy turned upon Poole, and in a few minutes Poole had had enough.

Meanwhile, Pons and Cecil Pankley were rolling on the ground in a terrific combat.

They seemed about evenly matched, and both of them were getting terrific punishment.

Jimmy Silver rushed to the rescue of his rescuer and dragged Pankley off by the legs.

Pankley roared.

Pons staggered up. His nose was streaming red, and one of his eyes was closed. Pankley clawed at the ground as Jimmy, with a powerful grasp on his ankles, dragged him towards the ditch.

"Leggo!" he roared. "You're not going to—ow—oh—ooooch!"

Pankley went head first into a foot of rainy mud.

"Goroooooch!"

Poole and Putter were returning breathlessly to the attack, and Jimmy Silver and Pons met them half-way. Pankley was struggling wildly in the muddy ditch, and was quite out of the combat.

"Come and help a chap!" shrieked Pankley. "Groooh! Yow! Oh! Lend a hand!"

"Pax!" ejaculated Poole. And he ran to help his leader. Putter followed behind him, and Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

"A win for us," he exclaimed. "Come on, Pons, let's clear!"

Three or four Bagshot juniors were speeding towards the scene, across the field. It was high time for the Rookwooders to clear.

Pons picked up his bike.

"Jump on behind!" he exclaimed.

"Right-ho!"

"Stop them!" roared Pankley. "Groooh! Stoppem!"

But Pons was in the saddle, and Jimmy Silver was standing on the foot-rests, his hands on Pons' shoulders. The double-loaded bicycle whizzed away down the road, and the Bagshot Bounders rushed after it in vain.

"We've done them!" grinned Jimmy Silver, as Rookwood came in sight.

The bike slowed down, and Jimmy jumped off. Pons alighted, and wheeled the bicycle on, rubbing his nose with his free hand.

"You've had it bad," said Jimmy sympathetically. "It was awfully plucky of you to tackle the bounders like that, Pons. Better buck up and get a beefsteak for your eye!"

"Lucky for you there was a duffer coming along," remarked Pons.

Jimmy coloured a little.

"Well, you didn't look much like a duffer when you tackled them," he said. "You've done me a good turn, Pong, old chap. They were going to yank me off to Bagshot, and I should have had a high old time. Look here, Pong, you are a bit of a duffer, you know, but you've done me a jolly good turn, and it was plucky of you, and—and if I can ever do you one, you've only got to ask me."

Pons looked at him with a peculiar glimmer in his eyes.

"Honest Injun?" he asked.

"Honest Injun!" said Jimmy Silver solemnly.

"I may remind you of that some time."

"Do!" said Jimmy.

And he wheeled in Pons' bike, while the Canadian went to the house-keeper in search of a steak for his eye, which needed it badly.

CHAPTER 11.

What Pons Knew!

MORNINGTON of the Fourth looked in at the end study that evening. Jimmy Silver & Co. had finished their preparation, and Jimmy was conning over a list of names on a slip of paper. The dandy of the Fourth glanced at it.

"That the list for the Bagshot match?" he asked.

Jimmy nodded.

"Got my name down?"

"No."

Mornington looked unpleasant.

"I suppose that means that you're going to keep me out of the footer all the season, as you did out of the cricket?" he exclaimed.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"You can put it that way if you like," he said. "It means that you're not going to have a chance to play dirty tricks in

the footer as you did in the cricket. That's how I put it."

"Well, I warn you that I'm not standin' it, Jimmy Silver."

"Oh, go away and smoke," said Lovell. "That's more in your line than footer."

"Isn't there a game of banker going?" grinned Raby.

"Or nap?" asked Newcome. "You'd rather play nap than footer, any day, Morny."

Mornington did not heed. His eyes were fixed upon Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not standin' it," he repeated. "You can look out for yourself, Jimmy Silver."

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver. "If that means that you've got a dirty trick up your sleeve, Mornington, you'd better look out yourself."

Mornington gritted his teeth, and strode away from the study.

"The chap's a good player, if he wasn't such a howling cad," Lovell remarked thoughtfully. "He would be useful against Bagshot, Jimmy, if—if—"

"If he didn't get into one of his precious tempers, and kick the ball through our own goal to spite us," retorted Jimmy.

"Well, yes, he's rotter enough for that," agreed Lovell. "Hallo, here's the duffer!"

Pons came into the study.

"Still to let?" asked Newcome.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Pons. "I'm getting fed-up with that. I say, Silver, I hear you're making up the eleven for the Bagshot match."

"Right on the wicket," said Jimmy.

"How would you like to put me down?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fistical Four in chorus.

"Well, where does the cackle come in? I can play footer."

"Well, I haven't seen you play," said Jimmy, smiling. "But I hardly think you'd be up to form for the junior team, old son, even if you weren't— Ahem!"

"A duffer?" said Pons.

"Well, yes."

"Then you don't feel inclined to play me for Rookwood on Saturday?"

"Hardly!" grinned Jimmy.

"We're not playing a lunatic asylum!" explained Lovell. "When we do, you shall have a front place!"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy. "That's a go!"

Pons looked from one to another of the grinning faces.

"But you haven't seen me play yet," he remarked.

"No; we haven't had that pleasure," said Jimmy. "Let's see you at the practice to-morrow, Pong."

"Well, if he can play footer as well as he can play the giddy ox, he must be a corker!" remarked Newcome.

"Do you know how to kick a ball?" asked Lovell.

Pons nodded.

"With the foot," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at? Is not that right?"

"Yes," gasped Jimmy Silver, "that's right—right as rain. But—but you'll have to know a little more about the game than that before you play for Rookwood. My word, you are a duffer, old scout!"

"A chap can't help being a duffer, if he's born one," said Pons. "I should like to play football, all the same."

"So you shall, my infant!" said Jimmy kindly. "I'll put you through your paces on Little Side to-morrow, if you like. You've got the build of a good forward, if you knew anything about the game. I'll give you some coaching."

"Thank you; but—surely the game of football is not played in a vehicle?" said Pons, looking puzzled.

"A-a-a what?"

"A vehicle. You spoke of a coach—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is football anything like coaching?" asked Pons, looking bewildered. "Coaching is done with a coach and horses—"

The Fistical Four shrieked.

"Oh, my hat! You're too funny to live!" gasped Jimmy Silver, wiping away his tears. "You are, really! Coaching at footer means teaching you and giving you tips."

"Oh, I see!"

"He sees!" sobbed Lovell. "He sees! Oh, my hat! Sure you see, Pong?"

"Yes; now that it is explained," said Pons simply. "From the game being called football, I supposed that it was played on foot, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it isn't played on horseback," gasped Raby, "nor yet on skates."

"I was sure of it," said Pons. "I do not see why I should not play football, as I know the game quite well——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, to-morrow we'll see what you can do," said Jimmy Silver, almost weeping with mirth. "You are a corker, Pong, and no mistake. Tell us some more about footer."

"I know the rules. The game is played with goal-posts, and when the ball hits a goal-post, that is a try," said Pons, with an air of great knowledge.

This piece of information was too much for the Fistical Four. They went into hysterics on the spot, and Pons, after a surprised stare at them, walked out of the study.

"Oh, hold me somebody!" groaned Newcome, faint with laughter. "Oh, dear! Did you ever——"

"Well, hardly ever!" gasped Lovell.

"It's played with goal-posts," wept Jimmy Silver, "and when the ball hits a goal-post—— Ha, ha!"

"Then it's a try!" shrieked Lovell. "It's a giddy try! Oh, dear!"

"What on earth's the row about?" asked Oswald, looking into the study.

"Lend us your ears," choked Lovell.

"Listen, my infant! The new kid has been telling us how to play footer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's played with—— Ha, ha, ha!"

Oswald stared.

"What are you driving at?" he asked.

"With goal-posts!" shrieked Lovell hysterically.

"What?"

"And when the ball hits a goal-post——" Lovell could get no further. He laid back in his chair and yelled.

"When it whiches?" asked Oswald.

"Then it's a try!" yelled Raby.

"A-a-a try!" yelled Oswald. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell staggered to his feet.

"I must go and tell the chaps about this," he gurgled. "It's too good to keep. It's worth a guinea a box!"

Lovell almost tottered into the Common-room.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he gasped, "listen! The new chap has told us what he knows about footer——"

"Fat lot he knows!" snorted Townsend.

"He does—he do! It's played with gig-gig-gig——"

"With what?"

"Gig-gig-goal-postal!" stuttered Lovell.

"And when the ball——ha, ha!——hits a g-gig-goal-post, it's a——ha, ha, ha!——a try!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the Classical Fourth went up to their dormitory that night, grinning looks were turned upon Charley Pons from all sides. And there was a beseeching chorus:

"Tell us something more about footer, Pong!"

But Pons only grunted and went to bed.

CHAPTER 12.

Something Like Footer!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. went down to Little Side after morning lessons the next day, and Pons of the Fourth went with him. And all the Classical Fourth and most of the Moderns followed. Pons' wonderful knowledge of the great game of football had spread, and all the Lower School had yelled over it. After that they were very keen to see how Pong would get on at the game itself.

The fellow who believed that football was a game played with goal-posts, and that a try was scored when a ball hit a goal-post, was certain to be worth watching with a footer. Smiling faces surrounded Charley Pons, who was smiling good-humouredly himself. He seemed to be pleased at finding himself an object of general interest.

The Fourth Form had already decided that he was a first-class duffer, and had somewhat unreasonably declined to take any notice of evidence to the contrary. Perhaps they were a little pleased in finding that they were in the right to this extent. A fellow who hadn't played footer might be excused for knowing nothing about the game, but certainly only a born duffer could have had such weird ideas about it as Pons had.

"But why are you smiling?" asked Pons. "The goal-posts are here—it is just as I said."

"Quite right," said Jimmy Silver chuckling. "They're here. But we don't generally try to hit a goal-post with the ball——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we don't score tries at all. That's in the other game."

"In cricket?" asked Pons innocently.

There was a shriek.

"Cricket! Oh, crumbs!"

"The other footer game. I mean," gasped Jimmy Silver. "Rugger, you know—they score tries in Rugger, not in Soccer. This is Soccer."

"Then what do you score?"

"Goals, fathead!"

"You mean goal-posts?" asked Pons.

"Hold me, somebody!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "He's too much for me. No, dear boy, we don't score goal-posts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When the ball goes between the posts and stops in the net, that's a goal," said Jimmy, gasping with laughter. "See now?"

"Yes, that is very easy. Is there anything else to learn?"

"Ha, ha! Just a little. But that will do to begin with. Let's see you put this ball in goal—with your feet, you know, not with your chin or your left ear."

"That is quite easy."

"Well, let's see you do it," said Jimmy.

"Get into goal, Flynn."

The grinning Flynn went into goal, and Jimmy pitched the ball into the field. All eyes were upon Pong as he made a run for it.

He kicked it towards the goal with clumsy kicks, and required about a dozen of them to cover ten yards or so. Close up to the goal-mouth he kicked the ball in, and Flynn fisted it out.

Then there was a yell. Pons had rushed into goal at the astonished goalkeeper and collared him.

"Hurroo!" roared Flynn. "What the howls Moses— Yaroo!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Pons was banging Flynn's head against the nearest goal-post. There was a shriek of laughter round the field. Jimmy Silver dashed on, and caught hold of Pons' collar and dragged him back.

"What are you up to?" he yelled.

Pons turned an excited face on him.

"He stopped my goal!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I should have taken the goal, but he knocked it out with his hand—"

Jimmy Silver almost choked.

"Arrah, it's potty he is!" gasped Flynn. "Kape him off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He has spoiled my goal!" shouted Pons.

"Oh, my hat! That's a goalkeeper's bizney!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "That's what he's there for!"

"Nonsense!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You are pulling my leg!" exclaimed Pons indignantly. "What is the use of my kicking the ball into goal if Flynn pushes it out again?"

Jimmy almost collapsed.

"Pong, old man, don't do it," he said feebly. "You've given me a pain in all my ribs. I've got an ache under my waistcoat. Don't say anything more about footer. Give me a chance to recover first."

"But is it fair to push out the ball when I kick it in?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"If it is in the rules, I don't mind," said Pons. "I am sorry, Flynn!"

Flynn rubbed his head.

"It's a pretty gossoon ye are!" he said. "Sure, ye ought to be sent to a home for howlin' idiots intirely! I've a good mind to mop up the ground wid ye! Kick him off the field, somebody!"

"But I am going to practise," said Pons.

"You'd better watch us a bit first," grinned Lovell. "You'll get the hang of the game that way."

"Yes, that is a good idea," assented Pons.

The Canadian joined the fellows round the ropes, while the practice went on. He watched them very seriously and solemnly, as if trying to pick up as much of the game as he could.

He sauntered away at last, however, and Van Ryn joined him as he went to the School House. The South African junior was eying his new chum in a very peculiar way.

"What's the little game, Pong?" he asked suddenly.

Pons looked at him.

"Football," he replied. "It is played with a ball and the foot, and so it is called football. That is very interesting, is it not?"

Van Ryn chuckled.

"That will do for Jimmy Silver," he remarked. "It won't do for me, Pong, my

son. What have you been staggering humanity for in this way?"

"Because I am a duffer," said Pons calmly. "Being a duffer, I cannot be supposed to know anything about football."

And he strolled into the house, leaving Dick van Ryn looking perplexed.

Pons' adventures on the football field furnished good food for gaiety to the Rookwood juniors. After dinner Tommy Dodd & Co. came over from the Modern side and begged Pons to give them a sample.

The obliging Pons gave them a sample, and it made the Modern juniors weep with laughter.

"Do you think I shall soon be fit to play in the Junior Eleven?" asked Pons, when he came off, cheerily.

"Certainly!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "But I'd go for the Senior Eleven, if I were you. Form like yours would be wasted among juniors. Go to Bulkeley, and ask him for a place in the First Eleven."

"And see what he says!" grinned Tommy Cook.

But whether Charley Pons was a duffer or not, he was not quite duffer enough to take that advice; and he did not ask the captain of Rookwood for a place in the First Eleven.

CHAPTER 13.

Held to His Word!

"JIMMY SILVER!"

"Hallo, kid!" said Jimmy cheerfully.

It was the day following Pons' wonderful exhibition on the football-ground. Jimmy Silver was in the window-seat at the end of the passage, with his footer list on his knees.

The Bagshot Bounders were coming over for the match on Saturday, and Jimmy, as a dutiful football skipper, was much exercised in his mind. He meant to put into the field the very best team Rookwood could produce from the lower Forms.

Such mighty players as Jimmy himself, Lovell and Raby, Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle were sure of places.

Jimmy had decided upon Flynn, Oswald, and Towle, in addition, and Rawson. Eleventh man was not yet decided upon, the claims of Newcome and Selwyn of the Shell being about equally balanced.

Jimmy would have been glad to play

his own chum, of course, but considerations of that kind could not be allowed to count in footer. He was turning it over in his mind when Pons joined him.

"You have not finished making up the team?" asked Pons.

"Just about finished," said Jimmy, smiling. "Got any advice to give me?"

"Yes."

"Go it! It's bound to be valuable."

"Put me in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is my advice," said Pons seriously.

"That's the second time you've worked that joke on me!" remonstrated Jimmy Silver. "It's funny, but think of a new one next time!"

"But I mean it," said Pons. "I wish very much to play for Rookwood on Saturday. I want to help to beat Pankley & Co. when they come here, you know."

"Oh, don't be so comic!" urged Jimmy Silver.

"But I claim a place in the team!"

"You—you which?"

"I claim it!"

"Well, there's no harm in your claiming it," said Jimmy, staring at him. "You won't get it!"

"And you will give it to me?"

"Catch me!"

"But your promise?"

"My what?"

"Your promise," said Pons calmly.

"Honest Injun, you know!"

Jimmy started.

"What the dickens do you mean? I never—"

"You told me that I had done you a good turn the afternoon the Bagshot fellows collared you—"

"So you did. But—"

"And that if ever you could do me one, I had only to ask you."

"Ye-es, but—"

"Well, I ask you!" said Pons calmly.

Jimmy could only stare at him.

"You said it was honest Injun," pursued Pons. "I suppose your Injun is honest, Jimmy Silver? You will not break your word?"

Jimmy Silver looked hard at the new junior. Jimmy's expression at that moment was very peculiar, not to say extraordinary.

It was true that he had said it, and he had meant it sincerely when he said it. He

meant it still. But, of course, he had not foreseen any demand of this sort.

"You do remember?" asked Pons pleasantly.

"I remember," said Jimmy shortly.

"You meant what you said?"

"You know I did."

"Yes," said Pons, with a nod. "I know you did. You are a fellow of your word, Jimmy Silver. You will keep your promise."

"I—I said I'd do you a good turn if you asked me," stammered Jimmy. "I didn't say anything about footer."

"That is the good turn I ask—to put me into the Rookwood Junior Eleven for the Bagshot match."

"Look here——"

"Honest Injun!" grinned Pons.

"I—I never meant——"

"You meant to keep your word?"

"Yes, of course. But——"

"Then keep it!"

"You've no right to ask anything of the kind, and you know it!" said Jimmy Silver angrily. "You can't play footer!"

"I think I can."

"You silly ass, all Rookwood has been yelling at the way you play."

"Perhaps I shall improve by Saturday."

"Oh, you fathead! A footballer can't be made in a couple of days! Why, the fellows would be ready to scalp me if I put you in!"

"I am sorry for that."

"So you see it can't be done."

"Not at all. It can be done, and I expect you to do it, as you are not a fellow to break your word."

Jimmy set his teeth.

"It's mean of you to keep me to a promise like that, when I wasn't thinking of anything of this kind!" he said savagely.

"Next time, perhaps, you will think before you promise," suggested Pons, with a smile. "But this time you have committed yourself, mon ami. Am I going to play in the Rookwood Eleven on Saturday?"

"No," said Jimmy Silver desperately. "You can't. You know you can't! If you weren't a born idiot you wouldn't even think of it."

"You refuse me what I ask?"

"Yes, confound you!"

Pons shrugged his shoulders.

"I should not have believed it of you if

anyone had told me," he said. "I thought you were honourable."

Jimmy Silver sprang to his feet, his fists clenched, and his eyes blazing. Pons eyed him coolly.

"I am willing to fight you, if you wish," he said. "Perhaps you can lick me. But if you lick me it will make no difference. If you do not keep your word you are not honourable."

Jimmy's hands dropped to his sides.

He knew it was the truth.

He had made the promise unguardedly, never expecting to be held to it in this way. Pons' demand was preposterous—how preposterous, apparently, the duffer of the Fourth could not realise. But that was the "good turn" he chose to ask for. And unless the captain of the Fourth chose to break his word, his demand had to be granted.

What was to be done?

Jimmy Silver was a slave of his word. It was not fair to hold him to an unguarded pledge in this way. It was taking a mean advantage. But there it was! He could not retract the pledged word.

"Honest Injun, you know!" smiled Pons.

"You rotter!" burst out Jimmy Silver furiously.

"I do not see it. You offered to do me any good turn I asked. I ask you to make me a forward in the Rookwood Eleven on Saturday. That is all."

"All!" said Jimmy bitterly. "You ask me to play a hopeless idiot in one of our hardest matches. Do you call that decent?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I—I can't do it!"

"That is enough!" Pons' lip curled. "You break your word!"

He turned away.

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the floor for a moment, his breath coming quick, his eyes flashing. But as the new junior went down the passage Jimmy called after him:

"Hold on!"

Pons looked back.

"I'll play you if you ask it," said Jimmy. "I think you're a howling cad to ask me, and I despise you. If you choose to hold me to my silly word on those terms, you can do it."

"Perhaps you will change your opinion of me later," smiled Pons. "At all events, I do hold you to your word!"

"Then your name goes down!" snapped Jimmy. "And now get out of my sight before I jam your head on the floor!"

Pons walked away whistling, leaving the captain of the Fourth in a very unenviable mood.

CHAPTER 14.

The Eleventh Man!

"PONG!"

"Rot!"

"It's a joke!"

"That silly ass!"

Incredulous exclamations came from the juniors gathered round the notice-board, where Jimmy Silver had put up the footer list for the Bagshot match.

For the eleventh name on the list—no longer in doubt—was that of Charles Pons, of the Classical Fourth.

The Rookwood juniors could scarcely believe their eyes.

Pons! The fellow who knew as much about footer as he knew about conchology! Pons, the duffer! Pons, the fathead! Pons in the Junior Eleven for the Bagshot match. Excepting St. Jim's and Greyfriars, Bagshot was the toughest team Jimmy Silver & Co. ever had to meet.

No wonder the fellows stared.

"Somebody's shoved that name in for a joke," said Lovell.

"It's Jimmy Silver's fist!"

"Faith, he's off his silly rocker!" said Flynn. "It was to be either Newcome or Selwyn—but Pong!"

"By gad," said Mornington, "that's rippin'! Silver's leavin' me out, and puttin' in that howling idiot! Do you fellows call that fair play?"

"I call it a rotten shame!" roared Higgs. "I'm ready to play if there's a man wanted!"

"Same here!" growled Jones minor. "If Silver plays that idiot, I'll resign from the club!"

"Here he is!" exclaimed Townsend. "Let's ask him! It can't be genuine!"

Jimmy Silver looked worried and troubled as the excited juniors surrounded him. He had expected that announcement to raise a storm in the Fourth. And his expectation was fully realised.

"Silver, you chump——"

"Jimmy, ye omadhaun——"

"You howling ass——"

"What does it mean?"

"You're not playing Pong against Bagshot?"

"Give him a chance to speak!" exclaimed Raby. "It's only a joke, of course! Speak up, Jimmy!"

"Go it, Jimmy!" said Newcome. "We know it's only a joke!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"It isn't a joke!" he said.

There was a yell.

"You're really playing that idiot?"

"Yes."

"Playing that ass against Bagshot!" exclaimed Oswald. "Jimmy, old scout, have you gone off your rocker?"

"What do you want to play him for?" shrieked Higgs. "Why, Tubby Muffin would be a better man!"

"I don't want to play him," grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Then why——"

"I've got no choice!"

"What rot!" said Mornington. "You're puttin' that imbecile in rather than me!"

"Well, I'd rather put him in than you, duffer as he is!" said Jimmy Silver. "He's straight, anyway!"

"That's one for you, Morny!" grinned Van Ryn. And Mornington scowled.

"But what are you doing it for, Jimmy?" asked Lovell. "I suppose you've got a reason?"

"I've got the reason that I can't help it. I'll explain, if you like."

"You'd better!" roared Higgs.

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"Pong chipped in the other day and helped me," said Jimmy. "I told you about it. The Bagshot Bounders collared me, and were going to yank me off to Bagshot and give me a high old time there. Pong handled them, and I got away. I told him, like a silly ass, that I'd do him a good turn if he ever asked me, and—and he asked me to play him on Saturday. That's all."

"Well, my hat!"

"The cheeky ass!"

"I've got to keep my word," said Jimmy.

"But he's a rotter to ask such a thing!" exclaimed Oswald indignantly.

"I've told him that!"

"Do you think you've got a right to muck up a footer match for the school because you were ass enough to make a silly promise?" demanded Mornington.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I don't! You can shut up, Mornington. I'm not talking to you, anyway. But you other fellows have a right to complain—"

"I should think we have!" howled Higgs. "I—"

"Give me a chance to speak. You've a right to complain, and to ask me to resign as captaincy," said Jimmy. "If the club is me to do that, I'm ready to do it. Jimmy Dodd will captain you, if you please."

"We don't want a Modern worm to captain us!" growled Raby.

"We want you, Jimmy!"

"Jimmy's the man!"

"Well, there it is," said Jimmy Silver. "I've got to keep my word to Pong. If you fellows don't like it, you can turn me out. I shan't grumble."

"Let's take him at his word," said Mornington at once. "Hands up for turning Jimmy Silver out!"

Townsend and Topham put up their hands, and Peele and Gower followed suit, and then Higgs. But no other hand went up, excepting Mornington's own.

The dandy of the Fourth looked round with angry disappointment. In spite of Jimmy's really exasperating conduct, he had a strong hold upon his followers, and they stood by him.

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked Jimmy quietly.

"You're going to captain us, of course," said Lovell, "and—and if it's a promise, you say, you've got to play Pong. But I'll jolly well talk to him!"

"Sure, we'll rag him baldheaded!" howled Flynn.

"We'll persuade him to chuck it," said Oswald.

"I've tried that," said Jimmy dismally. "He's as obstinate as a mule. The silly fellow thinks he can play footer."

"Oh, the silly duffer!"

"So you see how it stands," said Jimmy. "I, I'm captain he's got to play. I'm ready to take the order of the boot if the club chooses."

It was evident that the club members did not choose, exasperated as they were. Pong's name remained written in the footer list. He was booked to play for Rookwood.

CHAPTER 15.

Something Like a Surprise!

WHEN Saturday came round Jimmy Silver ventured upon a last remonstrance with Pons. The juniors came out after dinner, Pons with them, in smiling good-humour. "Pons, old chap," said Jimmy. "I know you don't mean to be a rotter, and you don't mean any harm. But you're doing a lot. Will you stand out of the team to-day?"

"But I am going to play a great game for Rookwood," said Pons innocently.

Jimmy tried to be patient.

"You can't play," he said. "Do be a good chap and stand out."

"I have played very much in Canada—"

"Pong, you can't help being a duffer. Will you stand out?"

"No."

And Jimmy Silver snorted and gave it up.

When the junior eleven went down to the ground Pong went with them, in all the glory of the Rookwood colours. He did not seem to mind the black looks of the rest of the team. All the Fourth, and nearly all the rest of the Lower School, thronged round the field to watch.

Pong as a footballer would certainly be worth watching. A licking for Rookwood was inevitable. The two teams were about equally matched otherwise, but with such a passenger as Pong, Jimmy Silver & Co. could hardly hope to keep their end up against Bagshot. Jimmy was paying dear for his rash promise.

"What will you bet on the game?" Mornington remarked to his chums. "I think it will be three or four to nil for Bagshot, at least. I can't say I'm sorry. It serves Jimmy Silver right for leavin' a good man out!"

"Hear, hear!" said the nuts cordially.

But the other fellows were not sharing Mornington & Co.'s views. They expected to see Rookwood beaten, but they did not like the prospect.

When Pankley & Co. arrived from Bagshot they looked oddly enough at Pong, finding that cheery youth on the field with the team.

"Rags" between the rivals were suspended on the occasions of the matches, and the Bagshot Bounders were received very cheerily.

"Is that chap in your team, Silver?" asked Pankley.

"Yes. Inside-right," said Jimmy curtly.

"Ye gods!" said Pankley.

Jobson of the Fifth, the referee, came on the field. The kick-off fell to Jimmy Silver. The Rookwood front line was composed of Oswald, Lovell, Tommy Dodd, Pons, and Cook. Jimmy himself played centre-half. Pons lined up with the team in a business-like way. He asked Tommy Dodd politely whether he should kick-off, to which Tommy replied with equal politeness: "Idiot!"

The ball rolled, and the game began, watched by a bigger crowd than usually assembled to see a junior match. Pong was the centre of interest. Every fellow felt that Pong was worth watching, and they were right.

"On the ball!"

"Play up, Rookwood!"

But it was Bagshot that began the attack hotly. Pankley & Co. got through almost from the whistle, and bore down upon Flynn in goal. The Bagshot Bounders were evidently in great form.

Rookwood meant to do their level best, hoping against hope; but perhaps the knowledge that they had a hopeless duffer in their ranks had its effect upon them.

Certainly Pankley & Co. seemed to be sweeping all before them at first. But the defence was sound. Flynn, in goal, fisted out the ball twice, and then the backs succeeded in clearing. Cook trapped the ball, and sped it away, but Cook was charged over, and inside-right was the only man who had a chance left at it. And inside-right was Pong!

What happened next made the Rookwooders rub their eyes.

Inside-right was on the ball in the twinkling of an eye. He eluded the Bagshot forwards, he drove through the halves, and he wound round the backs before they knew what was happening. Jimmy's front line was almost nowhere—there was nobody to take a pass, but there was only the Bagshot goalie to beat, and Pons was upon him before he realised the danger.

Whiz!

"My hat!" ejaculated the goalie.

Rookwood gasped.

"Goal!"

Like fellows in a dream, they repeated:

"Goal!"

"Goal!" said Mornington, rubbing his eyes. "Pong! Goal! Goal! Pong! This a giddy dream?"

"Goal!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Goal!" stuttered Lovell.

Pons stood smiling at the astonished goalkeeper.

The Bagshot goalie tossed out the ball.

"Are we asleep and dreaming this?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I think we must be!" said Lovell dazedly. "That howling idiot's taken a goal—all on his own, too!"

"Line up!"

Jimmy Silver was astounded. He looked at Pons, and Pons nodded and smiled. Was it an amazing and extraordinary fluke? If it wasn't, what was it? Van Ryn, among the spectators, was grinning hugely. Perhaps he had been prepared for that little surprise.

Bagshot did not grin at Pong any longer. Rookwood might regard him as a duffer, if they chose, but Pankley & Co. knew when they had a dangerous opponent to deal with, and they gave Pong the compliment of their very marked attention after that goal.

The game went on, hard and fast. There came no more goals "on his own" to Pong; a chance like that was not likely to be repeated. But he was "there" all the time, and his passing was, as Jimmy said afterwards, a dream.

Pong was always just where he was wanted, and just where the enemy didn't want him. And when Tommy Dodd very nearly scored just before the interval, it was from a pass from Pong. But the goal did not materialise, and Jobson blew the whistle with the score unaltered—one up for Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver was glad the interval had come. He wanted to speak to Pong. He rushed up to the Canadian junior, grasped him by the shoulder, and shook him.

"You spoofing bounder!" he roared.

Pons grinned.

"What did you tell us you couldn't play footer for?" yelled Lovell.

"But I did not; I told you I could play," said Pons innocently. "It was you fellows who said that I couldn't."

"But—but—but you——"

"You were spoofing us, you image!"

Pons nodded coolly.

"Exactly! As you had made up your

nds that I was a duffer, I thought I could play up. It was amusing!"

"You—you cheeky ass!"

"If I could not have played I should not have claimed a place in the team," said Pons cheerfully. "But I did it because I was in good form. Perhaps another time you will not think a fellow a duffer so quickly, when it is you who are theuffers at the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Van Ryn. "Who's the duffer, Jimmy Silver?"

"So you knew, you Dutch bounder?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Oh, yes, I knew Pons was pulling your leg!" grinned the South African junior. "I knew he could play. And if ever a lot of duffers deserved to have their leg pulled, you did."

Jimmy burst into a laugh.

"It's a fair catch!" he said. "It serves us right! And I'm jolly glad you were spoofing, Pong, you bounder. It's turned out all right for us. This looks like a win for Rookwood!"

"Time!" said Lovell.

The footballers lined up for the second half. Rookwood were in great spirits now. They were one goal up, and their new recruit was a player equal to the best in the team; they realised that now. Round the ground there were loud cheers for Pong, even Mornington & Co. joining in. The Rookwood fellows had come to watch Pong, and, truly, they found him worth watching, though not in the way they had supposed.

The second half was a prolonged tussle, with plenty of good play on both sides. It was within a quarter of an hour of time when Pankley at last succeeded in putting the ball in. But from that moment the Rookwood attack was hot and strong, and the Bagshot team had hard work to defend. And when, right at the finish, the Rookwood forwards came on to goal, Pons was well to the fore, and it was a centre from Pons that was turned into a goal by Tommy Dodd—a shot right into the net that elicited a roar from the delighted spectators.

"Goal!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Bravo, Pong!"

The whistle went.

"Well, my only hat!" said Pankley, as they came off the field. "I took that chap

for a duffer, and, by gum, it was his game from start to finish!"

"Your goal, Pong, you spoofing bounder!" said Tommy Dodd, clapping the Canadian on the shoulder. "Where did you pick up footer, you spoofer?"

"I have played in Canada," grinned Pons. "In Canada I learned to distinguish a goal from a goal-post!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Pong!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "You've given me a high old time this week, but I forgive you! Shoulder-high, you fellows!"

"Hurray!"

And Pong of the Fourth came off the football field in triumph, on the shoulders of his comrades.

CHAPTER 16.

Adolphus Has a Great Ideal

"CONROY!"

Adolphus Smythe, the ornament of the Shell Form at Rookwood, repeated the name in a thoughtful sort of way.

Adolphus had just come into his study, and he accepted a cigarette from Tracy, and lighted it, first making sure that the door was closed. It was very nutty to smoke cigarettes in the study, and Adolphus was a very nutty nut; but he did not want to be seen from the passage. For his dignity—a very important matter with Adolphus—would have suffered severely if his noble ear had been pulled by a prefect.

"Conroy!" he repeated, through a little cloud of smoke.

The fellows in the study looked at him.

There were five of them—Howard and Tracy of the Shell, and Mornington, Topham and Townsend of the Fourth.

They were the most select circle in the Lower School at Rookwood—at all events, they flattered themselves that they were. And undoubtedly their neckties were unequalled in or out of Rookwood School, and their trousers were the last word in elegance.

"What are you burblin' about?" said Mornington. Morny was shuffling a pack of cards. "Lock that door, before somebody comes nosin' in."

"Conroy!" said Adolphus. "Any of you fellows heard that name?"

"I've heard it," said Townsend. "There's a new kid comin' in the Fourth named Conroy. I heard Jimmy Silver say so. He got it from Bootles, I suppose."

"Exactly!" said Smythe.

"Well, what does it matter to us?" said Mornington impatiently. "What does Conroy matter? Get on with the game."

"I've been thinkin'—"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

Adolphus Smythe put up his eyeglass, and gave Mornington a disparaging look. There was a certain amount of rivalry between Smythe and the dandy of the Fourth, though Adolphus considered it wise, as a rule, to keep on friendly terms with the wealthiest fellow at Rookwood. Mornington had a way of regarding the great Adolphus as an ass, and, though his opinion was really well-founded, that did not make it agreeable to Adolphus.

"I've been thinkin'," repeated Smythe of the Shell, "I know that name, and I'm rather interested in the new kid. He comes to-morrow."

"Is he anybody in particular?" asked Townsend. "There are heaps of Conroys."

"I know there are; but I fancy this is a rather special Conroy, and it's up to us to be civil to him."

"Rollin' in oof?" asked Topham.

"Yaas."

"Oh, confound Conroy!" broke out Mornington. "Are you goin' to play?"

"No hurry," said Smythe. "Let a chap finish his fag. Besides I want to tell these chaps about Conroy."

"Hang Conroy, whoever he is!"

"He comes from Australia, I believe," said Townsend. "Jimmy Silver said so. I remember, he was askin' Van Ryn and Pons if they'd like him in their study, as he's another Colonial."

"That's it!" said Smythe.

Mornington smiled sarcastically.

"Goin' to pal with him because he's a Colonial, Smythe?" he asked. "He would suit your style, of course. If he's anythin' like the other Colonials we've got here, he could blow you away with a breath."

"I think this study is going to be civil to him," said Smythe calmly. "I don't care twopence what he's like, but I dare say he's decent. He's got lots of money, anyway."

Smythe's friends looked interested. A

fellow with lots of money was the kind of fellow they felt cordial towards at once. It was on account of his superabundant wealth that they stood Mornington's insolence. Their private opinion of their dear pal Morny was not a flattering one.

Mornington, however, did not look interested or cordial. Morny rather liked the position of being the wealthiest fellow in the school—a chap who could put a fiver against anybody else's ten-shilling note.

He was not at all pleased to hear of a fellow rolling in money coming into his Form at Rookwood, and he had no motive for paying adulation to excessive wealth, having more than enough of his own.

But the frown on Morny's face only amused Smythe & Co. They found a friendly pleasure in putting Morny's aristocratic nose out of joint.

"There's somethin' about him in the paper," pursued Smythe. "I happened to see it yesterday. That's why the name struck me when I just heard Van Ryn mentionin' the kid. Anybody seen the 'Mornin' Post'?"

Howard produced the paper, and Smythe opened it and scanned the columns, regardless of Mornington's growing impatience.

"Here it is!" said Smythe. "Listen, you chaps!"

And Adolphus read out the paragraph:

"Mr. Gerard Conroy, the celebrated Australian financier and millionaire has taken up his residence permanently in England. We understand that his son is being sent to a well-known public school in a southern county."

"By gad!" said Topham.

"I always read the society news, you know," said Smythe. "Comes in useful sometimes—what!"

"You would?" sneered Mornington.

"Then this new kid is a millionaire's son?" said Tracy thoughtfully.

"Yaas; and a regular corkin' millionaire, too!" said Smythe impressively. "Old Conroy is simply reekin' with wealth—owns mines, an' things, an' he's got more oof than he could count in a month of Sundays. The kid will be simply gilded."

"I wonder if he plays nap?" remarked Topham, and there was a laugh in the study.

"If he doesn't, he'll soon learn, I dare say," grinned Townsend.

"So you're thinkin' of rookin' the new kid already?" jeered Mornington.

"Oh, don't be a rotter, Morny!" said Townsend. "It's up to us to be civil to a Colonial chap."

"I haven't noticed you bein' particularly civil to Van Ryn or Pons."

"Well, you see, they—"

"They're not the sons of millionaires!" sneered Mornington.

"Oh, rot!"

"Morny can blow off all the gas he likes," said Smythe unmoved. "But we're goin' to take this Colonial chap under our wing, an' see him through, an' help him on his way a bit at first an' all that. It's up to us."

"Hear, hear!" said the nuts in chorus.

Mornington's lip curled scornfully.

"Well, leave me out," he said. "I'm not goin' to join you in suckin' up to a millionaire cad for his money."

"All millionaires ain't cads," said Smythe. "Some are, certainly."

There was another chuckle at this neat hit by Adolphus. Mornington scowled, and left the study, slamming the door.

"Morny's got his back up!" smiled Adolphus. "One of the dear Morny's ways. It doesn't worry me."

"Morny likes to be the only pebble on the beach!" grinned Tracy. "But he isn't, not by long chalks. I suppose, really, this new chap will be a bit of an out-and-outer—what!"

"If he is, we'll polish him," said Smythe. "I suppose his father's sending him to Rookwood to be polished. We'll do the polishin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And, mind," said Smythe impressively, "I fancy there'll be some competition for this new kid, when it comes out that he's a millionaire. We've got to be the first in the field, an' chum up with him, and we'll start the minute he comes."

"Hear, hear!" said the nuts heartily.

Evidently there was to be a very handsome reception for the new fellow from Australia when he arrived at Rookwood. But whether the Cornstalk would fully appreciate the kindness of Smythe & Co. was still a question.

It was barely possible that a fresh and

breezy youth from a great colony might not be so satisfied with the elegant Smythe as Smythe was himself. But that did not occur to Adolphus.

CHAPTER 17.

Jimmy Silver is Surprised!

"THAT must be the new kid!"

The Fistical Four of the Fourth were airing themselves on the School House steps the day after the meeting in Smythe's study. The station cab had driven in at the gates, and two passengers alighted from it. One was a little, dry-looking gentleman, dressed in black; the other a sturdy youth about Jimmy Silver's age, upon whom Jimmy Silver's eyes turned curiously.

The captain of the Fourth was somewhat interested in the new junior. He knew nothing about the millions, never having heard of Mr. Conroy, the celebrated financier. Jimmy Silver's taste in literature did not lie in the direction of "Society news." All he knew of Conroy was that he was coming into the Classical Fourth, and that he came from Australia.

Jimmy rather liked his looks.

Conroy—it was evidently Conroy—was sturdy and well-built, with a face that was not exactly handsome, but very frank and cheery in expression, and quite prepossessing to look at. He looked in perfect health from top to toe.

"Rather a decent-looking kid," remarked Lovell. "I suppose the old johnny's his father."

"Not much like him," said Raby.

"By gad, here he is!"

Smythe of the Shell came out, with Townsend and Tracy. The old gentleman and the new junior were mounting the steps, and the Fistical Four raised their caps civilly. But Adolphus was not satisfied with merely a polite salute. He was determined to strike the iron while it was hot.

Having raised his shining topper in an elegant manner that was all his own, Adolphus addressed the old gentleman in his politest manner.

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

The old gentleman paused. He had little choice about that, as the dandy of the Shell was standing directly in his path.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" he said, in a squeaky voice.

"Pray excuse my addressin' you, sir," said Smythe in his best manner. "But we—all the Rookwood fellows, in fact—wanted personally to welcome your son to the school, sir."

"Eh?"

"We are very glad to welcome Master Conroy among us, sir," pursued Smythe, a little disconcerted by the old gentleman's stare, but sticking to his guns. "Any fellow from the great Australian Colonies, sir, is sure of a hearty welcome at Rookwood, and your son will find himself among friends from the start."

The old gentleman looked perplexed, and the new junior grinned slightly. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on. They were utterly astounded by Smythe's hearty action, never having expected anything of the kind from Adolphus.

"I have no son," said the old gentleman at last. "You appear to have made some mistake, young man."

Smythe started.

"I—I I—aren't you Mr. Conroy?" he ejaculated.

"I am Mr. Conroy's solicitor."

"Oh!" gasped Smythe.

"By gad!" murmured Townsend.

"However, I understand that you wish to welcome Mr. Conroy's son to this school," said the legal gentleman graciously. "I thank you for your very kind remarks, Master—"

"Smythe, sir," said Adolphus, recovering himself.

"Master Smythe, I am sure Master Conroy appreciates them. Master Conroy, these are your future schoolfellows."

Adolphus held out an elegant hand to Conroy.

The Australian shook it heartily, giving Smythe a grip that made him wince a little.

Conroy looked very pleased and friendly.

Smythe's welcome was a little high-flown, but, so far as the new boy could see, it was dictated by cordiality and kindness of heart, and it was agreeable enough to a fellow arriving in a strange school.

"I hope we shall be friends, Conroy," said Smythe graciously.

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Conroy. "It's very kind of you to welcome me like this."

"Not at all," said Adolphus. "Let me introduce my friends—Townsend and Tracy, two of the best."

Townsend and Tracy shook hands solemnly with the new junior.

Then Mr. Bruff and the new junior passed on into the house, leaving the three nuts looking quite pleased with themselves.

Jimmy Silver tapped Adolphus on the chest.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

Smythe stared at him haughtily.

"I don't understand you, Silver."

"What's the game?" asked Jimmy in perplexity. "What do you mean by acting decently towards a chap you don't know?"

"Are you ill, Smythe?" asked Lovell anxiously.

Smythe gave a sniff.

"We're takin' the new fellow up," he said.

"What for?"

"Well, you see, he comes from Australia, and there isn't any other Australian chap at Rookwood. He might feel a bit lonely at first."

"Great pip!"

Jimmy Silver stared at Adolphus in blank astonishment. Jimmy himself was very likely to feel in that way, but such sentiments from Smythe of the Shell were astounding.

"Well, that beats it!" said Lovell, with a whistle. "Blessed if I'd have thought it of you, Smythe. But good luck to you!"

"And we can get down to the footer," remarked Newcome. "If Smythe's going to look after the new kid, Jimmy, no need for us to worry."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy.

And the Fistical Four walked off. Jimmy Silver had intended to show the new junior some kind little attentions at the start, but evidently his services were not required now. His chums had intended to back him up, but they were glad enough to get away to the football-ground, after all.

"Blessed if I understand Smythe," said Lovell. "He can't be such a bad sort, with all his funny ways. He's playing up quite decently."

"Good luck to him!" said Jimmy Silver heartily. "It's a bit of a surprise from Smythe. He isn't so black as he paints

himself. But I'm blessed if I understand all the same."

"Is the new chap rich?" grinned Raby. "I don't think so. Haven't heard so, anyway."

"Then it beats me."

However, on the football-ground the Fistical Four dismissed the matter from their minds. It was no especial business of theirs.

But Smythe & Co. did not dismiss it from their minds. Mr. Bruff had gone into the Head's study with the new junior, and the nuts collected in Smythe's quarters to discuss the plan of campaign. The news that the millionaire's son had arrived at Roekwood drew all the nuts together, excepting Mornington. Mornington, like Achilles of old, was sulking in his tent.

"Looks quite a decent chap," Smythe told his comrades. "I wish he were comin' into the Shell; by gad! I'd have him in my study."

"Van Ryn wants him, I believe," said Townsend. "I understand that those two Colonial chaps are goin' to ask him."

Smythe smiled.

"Exactly; but they're not goin' to have him. We've got to keep him under our wing, and under our eye. You're goin' to have him in your study, Towny."

"Well, I shouldn't mind, and Toppy wouldn't—"

"Not at all," said Topham.

"But there's that cad Rawson in our study, that scholarship boundary—"

"You can give Conroy the tip about Rawson—that he's a poverty-stricken beggar, and a fellow a chap can't know."

"But what about Van Ryn?" asked Peele. "Conroy's pretty certain to accept his offer."

"Colonials have a way of stickin' together, I believe," remarked Gower.

"Van Ryn will be too late," smiled Smythe. "You trust your uncle, Towny's goin' to the Head to ask."

"What!"

"Why not?" said Smythe. "You go into the Head's study, an' ask for the new kid to be put along with you and Toppy. Dr. Chisholm's bound to consent, an' the new kid will be pleased, and he'll agree at once. It's a dashed polite thing to do towards a stranger, and it will nip Van Ryn's game in the bud."

The nuts looked upon their great leader with admiration. Certainly, Adolphus was showing great acumen.

"Blessed if I don't try it on!" said Townsend. "Van Ryn can take Rawson off our hands, if he likes—if he wants a new study-mate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Towny!"

And Townsend of the Fourth, encouraged by his comrades, started for the Head's study.

CHAPTER 13.

Townsend Gets There First!

"SEEN the new kid?"

Van Ryn asked the question as Townsend came along the passage.

Van Ryn, the South African, and Pons, the Canadian, were chatting there when the nut of the Fourth came along.

"New chap?" said Townsend vaguely.

"Yes. Chap named Conroy—"

"Oh, Conroy!"

"Yes, we're going to ask him into our study," explained Van Ryn. "Is he with the Head, do you know?"

"I fancy he's with Bootles," said Townsend calmly.

"Thanks!" said Van Ryn.

And the two Colonials moved off in the direction of Mr. Bootles' study, nothing doubting that Conroy was with his future Form-master.

Townsend grinned, and went on his way. Van Ryn and Pons were put off the scent. Their motive in wanting to ask Conroy into their study was quite disinterested, for they had never heard of the Conroy millions. But their intention had to be nipped in the bud, as Smythe had put it. The millionaire's son was to be kept very carefully under the wing of Smythe & Co.

The door of the Head's study opened as Townsend came up. Conroy's interview with the headmaster had come to a close. Townsend entered hurriedly.

Dr. Chisholm looked at him.

"What is it, Townsend?"

"If you please, sir, I was only goin' to ask for Conroy to be put in my study," said Townsend meekly. "We're only three in No. 5, sir, an' we should be very glad to have Conroy."

"That is a matter to be decided by Mr.

Bootles," said the Head kindly. "But I have no doubt he will accede to your request, Townsend. If Conroy wishes to share your study—"

He glanced at the new junior.

"I should be very glad, sir," said Conroy.

"Then I will speak to Mr. Bootles, and you may take the matter as decided," said the Head graciously. "I am glad to see you so kindly disposed towards a new boy from a distant colony, Townsend. As it is a half-holiday, you may perhaps care to to show Conroy about the school, and give him any information and assistance he may require."

"I shall be delighted, sir," said Townsend.

"Very well, you may go."

"Come on, Conroy!" said Townsend in a very friendly manner.

The two juniors left the study together, the legal gentleman remaining some minutes longer in conversation with the Head.

"Jolly glad you're coming into my study, Conroy!" remarked Townsend, as they went down the passage together.

"I'm glad, too!" said Conroy simply. "It's very kind of you. I never expected to be welcomed like this in the Old Country."

Townsend's heart smote him for a moment. The simple good faith of the new junior made him feel mean. But he nodded and smiled.

"We shall get on together," he said. "You'll like Topham too—my study-mate, you know. There's rather a rotter in my study—chap named Rawson—but you needn't have anything to do with him. Come up and see the study now!"

Conroy's face was very bright as he accompanied Townsend. So hearty and unexpected a welcome from entire strangers naturally raised his spirits, though he was cheerful enough in any case.

"Hallo, here he is! This must be the chap!" exclaimed Van Ryn, as the two juniors came round the corner of the passage.

"Conroy?" asked Pons.

The new boy nodded.

"That's my name!"

"Come on!" said Townsend.

"Hold on a minute!" said Van Ryn. "I suppose you're study isn't settled yet, Conroy? If you'd care to come into ours,

we'd be pleased to have you. We're both Colonials like yourself, though from rather different parts of the world. I'm from South Africa, and Pons is from Canada. I'm Van Ryn."

"Conroy's study is settled already," said Townsend, before the new junior could speak. "He's comin' into No. 5 with Toppo an' me."

"Oh!"

"Thank you very much, all the same!" said Conroy.

"Oh, all serene!" said Van Ryn. "We thought we'd ask you. You'll find a very decent chap in No. 5—chap named Rawson. Ta-ta!"

Van Ryn and Pons, thus defeated in their kind object, departed to join the junior footballers, and Townsend was left in undisputed possession of his prize. Conroy followed him to No. 5 Study in a somewhat perplexed mood. He had already heard twice of the "chap named Rawson"—once that the said Rawson was rather a rotter, and once that he was a very decent chap. He was rather curious to see Rawson.

CHAPTER 19.

Taking the Stranger In!

THERE was a sound of loud voices in No. 5 Study as Townsend and his companion came up the Fourth Form passage. Topham was there, and he seemed to be arguing with Rawson.

"Dash your rotten swottin'!" Topham was saying, in heated tones. "What do you want to swot for on a half-holiday, you measly prize-hunter? I tell you that we're goin' to have a little party in the study this afternoon!"

"And I tell you you can go and eat coke!" came the deeper voice of Tom Rawson. "Studies are made to work in!"

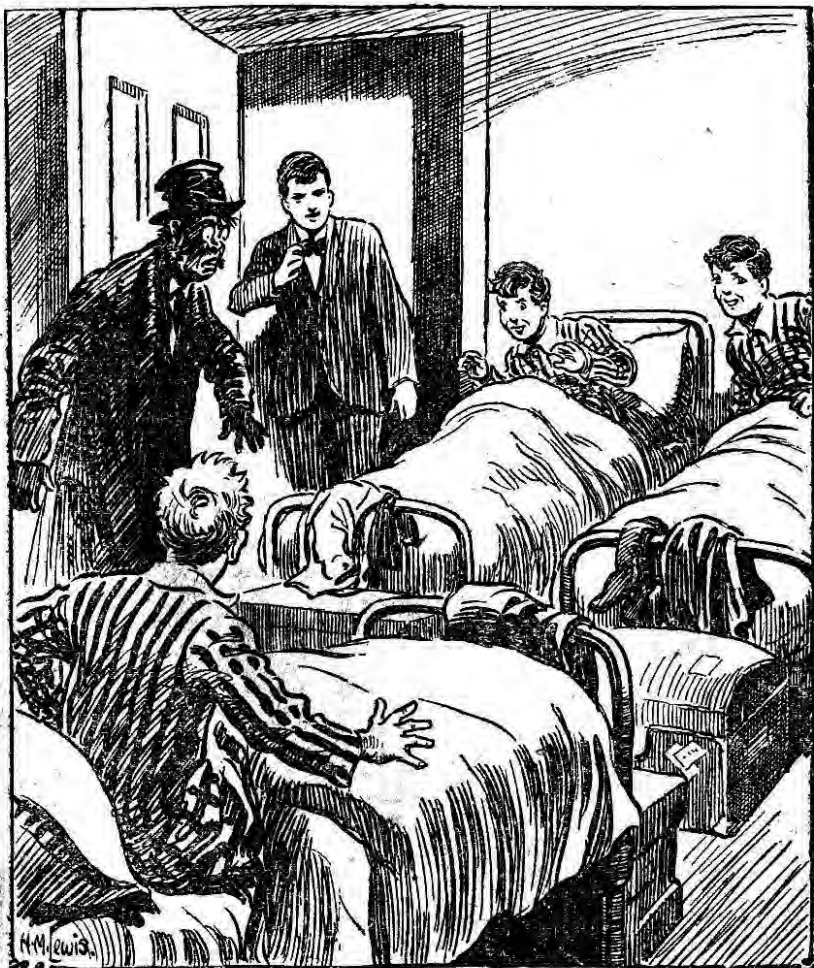
"Look here, you outsider—"

"That's enough! Shut up while a chap's working!"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, rats! Dry up!"

Townsend frowned with vexation. The scholarship junior was a thorn in the side of his aristocratic study-mates. It was not only that the presence of a "poverty-stricken boulder" annoyed Towny and Toppo, but



The door of the dormitory was thrown open, and the electric light turned on. The juniors sat up in bed, and stared at the fearsome figure that presented itself in the doorway. They guessed that it was Mr. Bootles, but the little Form-master was quite unrecognisable. "Ha, ha, ha!" An irrepressible chortle ran through the dormitory. (See Chapter 28.)

Rawson refused to allow smoking or card playing in the study which the "Giddy Goats" or Rookwood regarded as a very high-handed attitude on his part.

And Towny and Toppy wouldn't have stood it for a moment, but for the fact that the burly Rawson could have knocked their heads together, and "handled" them both at once to any extent, if he had chosen.

"That's the cad I told you of, Conroy," whispered Townsend. "A regular swottin' beast, an' likes to make himself a nuisance!"

Conroy nodded without speaking.

They came into the study. Tom Rawson was seated at the table, with a pen in his hand and books open before him. Rawson was a hard worker a "swot," as the nuts contemptuously termed it. But Rawson was not quite in the same position as the nuts; he was poor, and had no resources beyond his scholarship allowance, and he had come to the school to work.

He glanced at the new boy as he came in.

"Hallo, new chap?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Conroy, I suppose?"

"That's right!"

"Conroy's comin' into this study," said Townsend.

"He's very welcome, as far as I'm concerned!" said Rawson.

"An' look here, you can't swot here this afternoon, Rawson," said Townsend. "We're goin to have a little party in honour of the new chap."

"I don't want to disturb anybody, you know," said Conroy, rather at a loss between the two.

Rawson reflected a moment, and rose to his feet.

"All serene!" he said. "I don't want to be in the way. I'll get along to the end study—Jimmy Silver won't mind."

And Rawson gathered up his books and papers, and left No. 5.

"That's the cad I mentioned to you," said Townsend, not making that remark, however, till Rawson was out of hearing. "He isn't one of us, you know—he's here on a scholarship."

"Ought to be abolished, those rotten scholarships!" said Topham. "We don't want that sort at Rookwood!"

"He seems rather an obliging chap," remarked Conroy.

"Oh, he's a rotter!" said Townsend. "I tell you he's too poor to wear decent clothes—you see how he dresses."

"I suppose a chap can't help being poor."

"Well, no; I suppose he can't. But Rookwood isn't a place for the deservin' poor!" said Townsend with a curl of the lip. "The cad's always workin' while other chaps are havin' a good time!"

"If he's poor, I suppose that's the reason."

Townsend gave the new junior a sharp look. Conroy did not seem wholly inclined to accept his estimate of Rawson.

"Never mind that rotter," said Topham hastily. "You're not bound to know him, though he's in the same study. We don't know him. He gets on with Jimmy Silver an' that lot, but the best set don't speak to him."

"Who's Jimmy Silver?"

"He's captain of the Fourth—a footballin', uproarious sort of hoodigan!" said Townsend. "Nèt our sort. He was on the steps when you came, with the rest of his gang—the Fistical Four, they call themselves. A rotten set!"

Conroy was silent. He had noticed the four juniors on the steps, and had rather liked their looks. He was grateful to Townsend for the kindness received at his hands; but it was already coming into his mind that he would not "pull" with Townsend. Every fellow who looked thoroughly decent seemed to be a rotter, according to Towny.

"Well, this is the study," went on Townsend. "This chap's Topham, my study-mate. We're thinkin' of havin' a bit of party here this afternoon, to give you a chance of makin' the acquaintance of some of the best fellows. Like the idea?"

"Rippin'!" said Conroy. "It's very kind of you."

"We'll help you unpack your things presently," went on Townsend. "I suppose you're getting ready for tea after your journey down. Toppy will look after that, an' get the fellows here, while I show you round the school a bit—what?"

And Townsend led his new friend forth. Conroy met Smythe and Howard and Tracy of the Shell in the passage—by chance, of course—and they chatted a few minutes in a very friendly way.

He met Gower and Peele of the Fourth as he came out into the quadrangle, and

was introduced to them. They joined him as Townsend piloted him about Rookwood, showing him the sights.

Conroy's glances turned several times in the direction of the football-ground, where a scratch game was going on, to the accompaniment of loud and cheery voices.

"Like to see the footer-ground?" asked Townsend at last.

"Yes, rather!"

It was only footer practice, but it was very keen. Half a dozen Modern juniors, led by Tommy Dodd, were disputing with half a dozen Classics under Jimmy Silver's lead. Conroy looked on with keen interest.

"Play footer?" asked Peele.

"Yes," Conroy nodded. "I suppose everybody joins in the games here?"

"Everybody who cares for it," said Townsend, with a curling lip. "Our set don't go in for such games; it's hardly the thing!"

"Isn't it?" said Conroy in astonishment.

"Besides, the footer eleven's in the hands of Silver and his friends, and we don't pull with them. In fact, we ignore the crowd."

"Which is Silver?"

Townsend pointed out the captain of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver had just kicked the ball into the Modern goal.

"He can play footer," remarked Conroy.

"I suppose you'll join the junior club?" said Townsend. "There's compulsory practice twice a week, but a fellow can often dodge it if he likes."

"I shouldn't want to dodge it, though," said Conroy. "I want to get all the footer I can, and cricket, too, when that comes along."

Towny exchanged a rather hopeless glance with his friends. It looked as if the new junior would not be so easy to handle as they had anticipated.

The ball was in play again, and a kick lifted it out of the ground, and it came whizzing along to where the group of juniors were standing.

"Send that ball in!" shouted Jimmy Silver from the field.

Townsend & Co. shrugged their shoulders. They did not intend to touch a muddy footer not if they knew it. But Conroy was "on the ball" at once. He lifted it back into the field with a neat kick that landed it among the players.

Jimmy Silver's glance fell upon him, and he came over to the ropes.

"Conroy?" he asked. "I saw you come in, you know. I'm Silver of the Fourth. You play footer?"

"Yes; I've played a good bit."

"I thought so, from that kick. Would you like to join in?" asked Jimmy. "This isn't a regular match—only practice."

Conroy glanced at his companions. His expression hinted plainly that he would have liked to accept Jimmy Silver's invitation, but he felt bound to stick to the fellows who had shown him friendliness.

"Thanks!" he said. "You fellows care for it?"

Townsend shook his head promptly.

"Rotten fag, footer!" he said. "Besides, there's the party in the study."

"Yes; come on!" said Peele.

"Another time, Silver, if you don't mind," said Conroy. "I hope I shall have a chance in the footer here."

"Certainly you will, if you can play," said Jimmy. "All serene! I'll give you the tip next time we come down. Which study are you in?"

"No. 5."

"Oh, come on!" said Gower impatiently.

Conroy walked away with his friends.

"Come here, Jimmy!" shouted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver rejoined the footballers, in a puzzled frame of mind. He was more and more surprised at the kindness the nuts were showing the new boy. He would have expected Townsend to growl at a new boy being placed in his study. Yet Towny was evidently chumming with the junior from Australia.

Conroy glanced back once or twice as he left the football-ground. But he made no remark, and continued his walk round with the nuts, till they went in to tea.

Smythe & Co., including Mornington, were in the study when they arrived.

CHAPTER 20.

Looking for Trouble!

MORNINGTON gave the junior from Australia a far from pleasant glance as he came in with Townsend and his companions.

The arrogant Morny had already taken

a dislike to the new fellow, without having ever seen him.

He was quite keen enough to see that the nuts intended to set the millionaire's son up in opposition to his noble self, and that was more than enough to irritate Mornington.

As much for the sake of irritating Morny as for any other reason, Smythe & Co. greeted Conroy in the most cordial manner.

No. 5 Study looked very cosy and cheerful.

Rawson and his obnoxious "swotting" having been got rid of, Towny's friends had prepared a "spread" which did credit to the study.

Mornington was sulky and silent. But Conroy hardly noticed him. As a matter of fact, the dandy of the Fourth was not particularly welcome in the study just then—his dear pals could have dispensed with his company quite cheerfully. But Morny was a fellow with a dangerous temper, and the nuts did not care actually to quarrel with him. Moreover, there was a certain amount of amusement to be found in "putting his nose out of joint."

Conroy had brought a good appetite with him from Queensland, and he sat down to tea very cheerfully. There was little of the shyness of a new boy about him—he seemed to have dropped into his place at Rookwood quite easily, and at once.

Perhaps the cordiality of his reception at the school had something to do with that. He chatted quite cheerfully, though he did not talk much about himself—the nuts, however, being quite prepared to let the millionaire's son run on as long as he liked.

Mornington found many of his own remarks deliberately unheeded, which added fuel to the fire of his sulky resentment.

His remarks, when he made them, were generally disagreeable, and Conroy glanced at him once or twice curiously. He wondered who was the handsome, sulky junior, and why the other fellows stood his ill manners.

After tea Smythe produced his cigarette-case, and smokes were passed round—a proceeding that caused Conroy to open his eyes wide.

"You'll have a fag, Conroy?" said Smythe jovially.

Conroy shook his head.

"Thanks, no!" he said.

"Oh, you'd better—they're good!" urged Smythe.

"Depend on Smythe for choosin' a good smoke," said Tracy. "You'll find 'em rippin', Conroy."

"Is smoking allowed here?" asked Conroy, in astonishment.

There was a general chuckle from the nuts, and a sneer from Mornington.

"Not exactly allowed!" smiled Adolphus. "We smoke, all the same, though. It's rather the thing!"

"Fellow doesn't want to be a prig, you know!" remarked Peele.

Conroy flushed a little.

"I shouldn't like to be thought a prig," he said. "But that kind of thing is bad for the health in a chap who hasn't finished growing. I don't want to spoil my form for footer."

"We rather go the pace here," explained Smythe. "Under the rose, of course. We're rather a sportin' set. As for footer, the best set in Rookwood don't have much to do with that. It's mostly the outsiders—cads like Rawson and Silver."

"I rather like that chap Silver's looks," said Conroy uncomfortably. "I must say I hope to get a whack in the footer here. No, I won't smoke, thanks. Don't let me interfere with you, of course, if it is your custom."

"Is this a Pleasant Saturday Afternoon meetin'?" asked Mornington, with a bitter sneer. "By gad, I didn't know I was comin' here for a sermon."

"Oh, dry up, Morny! Let the new chap do as he likes. He hasn't learned our ways yet."

"I don't like prigs," said Mornington.

Conroy's eyes gleamed a little.

"I don't call it priggish to keep oneself fit," he said.

"What the dickens do you know about customs among decent people?" said Mornington contemptuously. "Where is it you come from—Borneo or New Guinea?"

"Where I came from doesn't matter, but there we don't insult strangers who've given no offence," said Conroy quietly. "If my ways aren't agreeable here, I'm quite ready to get out."

"You won't do anything of the sort!" exclaimed Smythe. "Shut up, Mornington! If you can't be civil to Conroy, you can clear off!"

"Yes, do dry up, Morny!" urged Townsend.

Mornington's lips curled. He was in a sulky and savage temper, and he intended to quarrel with the new junior. And Conroy's quiet manner gave him an impression that the Australian was timid.

"I'm not goin' to shut up!" said Mornington. "If Conroy can't drop into our ways, we don't want a skeleton at the feast. The fellow's a rank outsider, and I want nothin' to do with him."

"You needn't have anything to do with me," suggested Conroy mildly. "I feel quite the same on my side."

Mornington sneered. It looked as if the Colonial could not be drawn into a quarrel, and Morny was determined upon it.

"Well, that isn't how I should answer if a fellow called me an outsider!" he said scornfully.

"Indeed! How would you answer?" said Conroy, unmoved.

"I should call him a liar!"

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind making a row in another fellow's quarters?" suggested Conroy. "I'd rather not!"

"Any excuse is better than none for a funk, I suppose."

"As a matter of fact," said Conroy calmly, "you are a liar!"

"What!"

"And a rotten, ill-tempered, ill-bred cad into the bargain, since you seem to want plain English."

Smythe & Co. were looking worried, but they chuckled at that. The expression on Mornington's face was quite entertaining.

The dandy of the Fourth jumped up.

"Will you have it here, or will you come into the gym?" he asked.

"Am I going to fight you?" said Conroy, not looking at all alarmed.

"Yes, you cad!"

"Look here, Morny——" protested Townsend.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Mornington. "I don't like the new cad, and I'm going to lick him, if he's got the pluck to stand up to me!"

Conroy rose also.

"I'm sorry this has happened, you fellows," he said. "I didn't want a row."

"It's only Morny's rotten temper!" growled Smythe. "Morny thinks he's the only pebble on the beach, and he isn't. I hope you'll lick him!"

"I'll try!" said Conroy grimly.

"But, look here, you've had a journey to-day, an' you're tired," said Topham.

The Australian smiled.

"I'm not tired," he said. "Fresh as a daisy. If the fellow wants trouble, he's really come to the right party for it."

"I'm waitin' for you" sneered Mornington. He had thrown open the door.

"Come on, Conroy," said Smythe, throwing his cigarette into the fire, and slipping his arm through the new junior's. "We'll see you through. Come on, you fellows!"

And the nuts, reluctantly disposing of their cigarettes, followed Mornington and the Australian from the study. At the doorway they met Jimmy Silver & Co. coming in to tea after football. Mornington's black trown and Conroy's flush caught Jimmy's eye at once.

"Trouble?" he asked Townsend, as the latter passed him.

"Morny's picked a row with the new kid!" growled Towny. "They're goin' to fight it out in the gym. I hope Morny'll be licked!"

"We'll come along and see him licked," grinned Lovell.

And the Fistic Four, and several other fellows, joined the procession to the gym. Dick Van Ryn tapped Conroy on the elbow.

"Want a second?" he asked.

"I'm Conroy's second!" said Townsend loftily. "We're seein' him through, Dutchy."

"All serene. We'll look on," said the South African cheerily.

Quite a little army poured into the gym.

"Gloves?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, of course," said Smythe. "Hand them over. Here you are, Conroy."

And Mornington and the Australian, in their shirt-sleeves, donned the gloves, and faced one another, and Adolphus Smythe took out his handsome gold watch to keep time.

CHAPTER 21.

Morny Meets His Match!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. looked on with considerable interest.

Mornington was strong and active, and he was a good boxer, and, in spite of his surly temper and arrogant ways, he had plenty of pluck. But the Australian

looked as if he could take care of himself. The tussle seemed likely to be of more than usual interest to the spectators.

"Time!" said Smythe.

The fight began.

Mornington attacked at once, hotly. The general condemnation of his action, which he could read in all faces, only made him determined to give his opponent as sound a thrashing as he could bestow upon him.

But he soon discovered that he had not set himself an easy task.

In less than a minute it was quite apparent that Conroy knew something about boxing—quite as much as the dandy of the Fourth, if not a little more. And there was no hesitation about him—no sign of "funk" in his set face and clear, steady eyes.

He gave ground a little at first, and as Mornington came on, hard and fast, he suddenly found his guard swept away, and a hard glove rapped upon his nose, and as Morny staggered a little, the left followed the right, and Mornington went over backwards with a crash.

"Well hit!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Right on the wicket!" said Lovell.

"Bravo, young 'un!"

Mornington lay on the floor, surprised and dazed, and Smythe with a grin, began to count.

Nobody had offered to act as a second for Mornington. Nobody was displeased to see him on the floor.

But he was not to be counted out. He was up again before Adolphus had reached six.

He came on to the attack with a savage rush.

"Look out!" murmured Van Ryn.

But the Cornstalk was looking out.

The fighting was furious for the next minute. Both parties received punishment that would have been very severe but for the gloves, and was quite severe enough with them.

"Time!" rapped out Smythe.

Conroy dropped his hands and stepped back at the call. But Mornington was too furious to heed. He came on, hitting out savagely, and the new junior, taken by surprise, went headlong to the floor.

There was a howl from the Rookwood juniors at once.

"Foul!"

"You cad, Morny! Foul!"

Townsend rushed forward to pick up his principal. Mornington stepped back, his face flushing hotly. He had forgotten himself for the moment.

"You, rotten worm!" roared Lovell.

"Can't you fight fair?"

"I—I didn't mean—"

"This fight isn't going on!" said Jimmy Silver angrily. "Collar that cad, and give him a frog's march round the gym."

Conroy staggered up.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Let's get on! Let him alone!"

"He ain't fit to touch, dear boy!" said Townsend.

"I'd rather fight it out! Let him come on," said Conroy. "We won't have any more rounds!"

"Well, let him have his way!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

The combatants faced one another again, Conroy's eyes gleaming. The foul blow had hurt him, but it angered him more than it hurt him. As Morny did not heed the call of time, there were to be no more rounds, and Smythe put his gold watch away. It was a contest of endurance now, in which the slim Mornington did not seem to stand so much chance as the sturdy new junior.

Mornington, only rendered more sulky and savage by the scorn of the Rookwood juniors, came on with bitter fury. His blows, where they fell, were hard and heavy. But Conroy's blows came like lightning, and the dandy of the Fourth was driven right round the ring, compelled to yield ground, in spite of his savage determination.

In a few minutes he was hard put to it to defend, without attacking his sturdy adversary.

But he fought on with bitter determination, till a heavy drive from the right laid him gasping on his back.

Conroy stood panting, waiting for him to rise.

"Finished, Morny?" sneered Smythe.

Mornington gasped.

"No, by gad! I'll lick the cad yet!"

"You don't look much like doin' it!" grinned Townsend.

Mornington staggered to his feet. The fall had shaken him, and the bitter consciousness of defeat was already creeping upon him. But he came on again with undiminished fury.

The next few minutes were, as Lovell said, quite a circus.

It was quite clear by this time that Mornington was no match for the Australian; but he would not admit it, and he fought on till his strength was expended to the last ounce.

He was knocked right and left, and went down several times; but each time he came on again with redoubled fury. But the end came at last, and Mornington, felled by a terrific right-hander, lay gasping on the floor, unable to rise.

Adolphus Smythe jerked out his watch, and counted ten, with a grinning face. But he might have counted a hundred. Mornington could not get up without assistance.

"Conroy wins!" said Smythe, putting away his watch. "Congratulations, old chap. Let me help you on with your jacket."

It was Jimmy Silver who helped Mornington to his feet. The dandy of the Fourth stood unsteadily, looking dazed.

"Here's your jacket," said Jimmy Silver gruffly.

Mornington, without a word, slipped on his jacket, hurling the gloves on the floor. He walked unsteadily out of the gym. He had had as thorough a licking as any fellow could have had, and nobody had any sympathy to waste upon him.

The nuts surrounded the victor in a congratulatory crowd.

Conroy looked very red and a little bruised, but otherwise he seemed fresh enough, even after that gruelling encounter.

He was walked off in triumph by Smythe & Co.

"That kid's got something in him," remarked Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four made their way to the end study. "I'm blessed if I know why Smythe has chummed with him. I fancy they won't pull together for long. I suppose Morny's nose was put out of joint, and he cut up rusty."

"Never been so pleased to see a cad licked," said Lovell. "Hallo, Van Ryn, what are you looking like a boiled owl for?"

They met the South African junior in the passage, wearing a very thoughtful look. Van Ryn nodded towards Study No. 5.

"They've got the new kid," he said.

"There seems to be a little party on. You know what their little parties are like. I suppose it's nobody's business to give the new kid a tip about them, as he's chummed with them?"

Jimmy Silver looked rather grave.

"Well, a chap doesn't want to chip in," he said. "Conroy looks rather decent. He can see things for himself. He won't join in their rot unless he's that sort."

"Well, a new kid doesn't know the ropes, and, of course, they'll tell him its the thing at Rookwood. Still, a fellow can't very well shove in."

And Van Ryn went into his own study, still looking very thoughtful. Jimmy Silver & Co. went on their way, somewhat thoughtful, too. They knew very well what would be going on behind the locked door of Townsend's study, and they wondered how the new fellow would take it.

CHAPTER 22.

A Slight Mistake!

SMYTHE & CO. were in great spirits in Study No. 5. They had been very pleased by the defeat of Mornington, who had gone to sulk in his own study, not in the least missed by his friends.

Smythe's opinion was that it was high time Morny was taken down a peg or two, and certainly he had been taken down this time with a vengeance. Moreover, the nuts were well aware that a sturdy fighting man would be a very valuable addition to their select circle, none of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood being very conspicuous in that line. It was open to Conroy to become quite a shining light in that noble society.

"Feelin' pretty fit—what?" asked Smythe. Conroy smiled.

"Yes; I'm all right," he said.

"Done a lot of scrappin' perhaps?" said Peele.

"Yes; we lived in the bush at one time; and I sometimes had scraps with fellows twice as big as Mornington," said Conroy cheerily. "We roughed it a bit in those days, and roughing it hardens a chap."

"Before your pater made his pile, I suppose?" said Smythe. "We've heard about your pater, you know."

Conroy looked astonished.

"Have you?" he asked.

"Yes, rather. The name's quite well known in this country," said Smythe, with a smile. "A very prominent man out there, I understand."

"I don't know about very prominent," said Conroy. "My father's in a good position; but I hardly expected to hear that his name was known in England."

"What about a little game to pass the time?" asked Townsend. "We must do somethin' to amuse Conroy."

Towny spoke as if "a little game" was quite a new thing to the select circle of Giddy Goats.

"Well, that's rather a good idea," assented Smythe. "Anybody got any cards?"

"I believe there's some in the study," said Topham gravely. "I'll look, anyway."

"Yaas, do. What games do you play, Conroy?"

"I've played card games—round games—at Christmas," said Conroy, with a somewhat puzzled look. "I shouldn't have thought cards were allowed here, though."

Smythe smiled indulgently.

"We allow ourselves some things that the beaks don't know about," he explained. "Not that we're a gamblin' set, or anythin' of that sort, of course. But a little flutter once in a way does a chap good."

Conroy looked very grave.

"You surely don't mean playing for money?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, not at all! Simply a bob or two on the game to make it interestin'," said Smythe.

"Yes; here's some cards," said Topham. He shuffled the pack. "Nap or banker—or perhaps Conroy would prefer bridge?"

Conroy flushed a little.

"If you'll excuse me, I'd rather not," he said. "Of course, I don't want to interfere with you chaps. It's not my business what you do. But I've never played cards for money, and I don't want to begin."

The nuts looked at one another.

Conroy's manner was quite civil, but it was quite determined, and the Giddy Goats looked rather blank. What was the good of the millionaire's son if he didn't play cards for money?

"Oh, don't be stand-offish!" urged Smythe, repressing his irritation. "I assure you that it is quite the thing at Rookwood. The best fellows do it. Your deal, Poppy. Give Conway a hand, anyway."

"Simply bob points," said Townsend. "Come, you can't call that gambling."

Conroy rose to his feet.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can't join you."

Smythe's eyes began to gleam. Peele grinned. Adolphus' great capture was not turning out a very valuable prize, after all.

"I'm sure you don't mean that, Conroy," said Adolphus, still smoothly. "You don't want to be a prig. Be a sport, an' join in. You can't be afraid of losing a little money."

"I can't afford to lose money, so far as that goes," said Conroy. "But that isn't my reason."

"You can't afford!" repeated Townsend, with a stare.

"No. I suppose a chap can't do much gambling on an allowance of five shillings a week," said Conroy. "But I shouldn't gamble, in any case."

Smythe simply blinked.

"You—you mean to say that your pater only allows you five shillings a week, and he's a millionaire!" he gasped.

Conroy stared.

"A millionaire!" he repeated. "My father's not a millionaire."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"N-n-not a millionaire!" stuttered Townsend.

Conroy looked round at the startled and exasperated faces, and understanding dawned upon his mind. He realised now the reason why Smythe & Co. had swamped him with kind attentions that day. His face hardened a little, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Did you think my father was a millionaire?" he asked very quietly.

"But—but he is!" stammered Smythe, too surprised and chagrined to think of concealment now. "I saw it in the paper—Mr. Gerard Conroy, the celebrated Australian financier and millionaire—"

"My father's name is John Conroy."

"Oh, gad!"

Smythe & Co. sat limply, blinking at Conroy. Townsend gave his great leader a savage look.

"Oh, you silly chump!" he said. "Just like you to get the wrong pig by the ear!"

Towny was naturally indignant. He had wasted an afternoon on the new fellow—had asked him to be put into his study, and he wasn't a millionaire, after all, and had

an allowance much smaller than Towny's own. It was really very hard.

Conroy smiled rather grimly.

"You seem to have made a mistake," he remarked. "There is a well-known Australian millionaire named Conroy, but he is no relation of mine."

"Oh, gad!" gasped Smythe. "The—the paper said he was sending his son to a public school in a southern county, an' I took it for granted—"

"You seem to have taken, rather too much for granted," said Conroy. "I'm sorry, if it makes any difference to you. I don't see why it should."

Adolphus recovered himself a little. All his friendly feelings towards the new junior had vanished. Adolphus' feeling was that he had been taken in and imposed upon, and Adolphus was exasperated and enraged.

"You don't see why it should, you confounded outsider!" he snapped. "Do you think we want to chum up with a fellow who may be a dashed bushranger, for all we know? Preachin' at us, by gad! Never smokes—never plays cards for money. Can't afford to, I fancy. You confounded cheeky, priggish cad—"

"You've shoved yourself into this study under false pretences," growled Townsend, "and the sooner you get out the better!"

Conroy's lip curled scornfully.

"Well, of all the rotters!" he exclaimed. Smythe jumped up.

"None of your cheek, you confounded nobody!" he roared. "You swindlin' outsider, get out!"

"Kick him out!" said Topham savagely.

The disappointment was too much for the good manners of the Giddy Goats, such as they were. They were in a state of intense exasperation, and they closed round Conroy with hostile looks.

Conroy did not speak. He stretched out his hand, and took hold of Adolphus Smythe's somewhat prominent nose and tweaked it.

"Yurrrrggg!" gurgled Smythe helplessly. "Pile on the cad!"

The disappointed and enraged nuts piled on Conroy. With a sweep of a sturdy arm he sent Townsend and Peele staggering, and knocked Topham into the fender. Then he opened the door. He paused in the doorway and looked back.

Smythe held his nose and gasped. Towns-

end & Co. scowled savagely at the smiling new junior, but they did not rush him. The odds were on their side, but they did not want any more.

"Anything more to say besides good-bye?" asked Conroy cheerfully.

There was no reply, and Conroy walked away down the passage. Townsend kicked the door savagely shut, and the next ten minutes were occupied by the nuts of Rookwood in telling the egregious Adolphus what they thought of him.

Van Ryn and Pons were at prep. in their study when a tap came at the door. Conroy looked in.

"You fellows asked me to share this study," said Conroy. "Does that offer still hold good?"

"Yes, rather, if you like," said Van Ryn at once, and Pons nodded. "Trot in! But what about Towny?"

"I don't seem to pull with the fellows in No. 5," said Conroy. "I'd rather dig in here, if you'll have me."

"Welcome as the flowers in May," said Van Ryn, laughing. "This study isn't quite so nutty as No. 5, but we'll try to make you comfy."

Jimmy Silver smiled the next day when he heard that the new junior had already changed out of Townsend's study. The Giddy Goats of Rookwood had lost a recruit, and the Colonial Co. had gained one, and for a long time there were recriminations among Adolphus & Co. on account of Smythe's little mistake.

CHAPTER 23.

Fag Wanted!

"FAG!"

Jimmy Silver glanced round. "That sounds like Carthew's toot," he remarked. "His Majesty seems to be in a wax!"

The Fistical Four had coats and mufflers on over their footer clothes, and were just going out, when Carthew of the Sixth came striding down the passage.

There was no doubt that Carthew was in a "wax," as Jimmy Silver expressed it.

His face was red, and his eyes gleamed under his knitted brows. Something had

evidently happened to disturb the serenity of the Sixth-Form prefect.

He beckoned to Jimmy Silver & Co. as he sighted them in the doorway.

"Stop!"

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"Have you seen my fag—Gower?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes; he's gone out with Mornington," he said.

"The cheeky little beast!" growled Carthew. "Well, I want a fag. You'll do, Silver!"

"Sorry," said Jimmy Silver politely. "We're playing the Moderns this afternoon, and I can't spare the time. Otherwise, of course, it would be a pleasure!"

"I don't think!" murmured Lovell.

And Raby and Newcome grinned. It was never exactly a pleasure to fag for the bully of the Sixth.

The prefect had his ashplant, the symbol of authority, under his arm. He let it slide into his hand, and took a business-like grip upon it.

"I don't want any cheek!" he said. "Any one of you will do—I don't care which. Go into my study!"

"You see——"

"Don't jaw. Some young rascal has been ragging my study, and I want it set to rights," said Carthew. "I dare say it was one of you!"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Raby.

"Well, get along to my study!"

The Fistical Four exchanged a look, and walked out of the School House. There was a match that afternoon with Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern side at Rookwood, and the Classical chums were not likely to "cut" it for the sake of fagging in Carthew's study. They did not like Carthew, anyway.

Carthew glared after them.

"Come back, Silver!" he shouted.

"Bow-wow!" replied Jimmy Silver.

"What?"

"Gower's your fag," said Jimmy independently. "If you can't find Gower, find some chap who'll put up with your rot. We won't!"

Carthew came striding out of the House after the four; and Jimmy Silver & Co. promptly lined up, evidently ready to resist, in spite of the fact that the senior held the rank of prefect.

Carthew paused.

"Will you go into my study, Silver?"

"Can't be did!"

"Lovell——"

"Bow-wow!"

The Fistical Four marched off to the football-ground, and Carthew, after a moment's hesitation, turned back into the House with a black brow.

He was not looking for a "scrap" in the quad with four unruly juniors. What he wanted was a fag, and he wanted him at once.

Carthew was not popular among the juniors. Carthew was expecting a visitor that afternoon—a very distinguished visitor—and, the fact being generally known, some reckless junior had seized the opportunity of ragging his study.

Some cheery youth who had felt the weight of Carthew's heavy hand had taken that peculiar method of paying off old scores. And the Sixth-Former had made the disagreeable discovery just as he was about to start for the station to meet his visitor.

There was no time to waste, and the angry prefect let the Fistical Four go; he had no choice about that. On that fine half-holiday most of the juniors were out of doors, and there was not a fag to be seen. Carthew stood in the passage, clenching his hands with anger.

Three juniors came down the stairs, and the Sixth-Former at once barred their way to the door.

They were Conroy, Van Ryn, and Pons—the three Colonials who chummed together in No. 3 Study in the Fourth.

"I want one of you!" announced Carthew.

"Footer match on," said Pons.

"Pong is playing, and we're going to cheer his goals," explained Van Ryn. "Sorry there's nothing doing, Carthew!"

"You'll do, Van Ryn."

"I'm a linesman."

"Well, I want a fag," said Carthew.

"Some young rascal has mucked up my study, and it's got to be set in order. Conroy will do."

Conroy looked inquiringly at his chums. He was a new boy at Rookwood, and he looked to them for guidance.

"Conroy can't come," said Van Ryn at once. "Gower's your fag, Carthew!"

"Gower's gone out!" growled Carthew.

"Well, we're going out, too!"

Carthew scowled.

"Go into my study at once, Conroy!"

"I'm not bound to, am I?" asked Conroy, addressing his companions.

"No fear!" said Pons promptly. "Gower's bound to, and if Gower has cleared off, that is Carthew's bizney. Look here, Carthew, this is the first footer match since Con has been here, and he's not going to miss it. If your study's mucked up, that's your funeral; you shouldn't be such a beastly bully!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Van Ryn.

"Don't give me any more cheek!" roared Carthew grasping Conroy by the shoulder. "Come with me!"

"Is it allowed here to knock a prefect down?" asked the Australian.

"Ha, ha! Not quite!"

"Well, I want to play according to the rules, of course. Take your paw off my shoulder, Carthew, or I may have to break a rule!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, came along. "What's the trouble, Carthew?"

"My fag's cleared off!" growled Carthew.

"I want this young whelp to clear up my study; it's been ragged!"

"You'd better go, Conroy," said Bulkeley. "You're not playing, are you?"

"No; but I want to see my friends play."

"Well, fag for Carthew first."

"Oh, all right, Bulkeley!"

Conroy, without further demur, followed the prefect to his study, and Van Ryn and Pons went down to the footer ground.

The Rookwood captain's authority was not to be gainsaid, and Conroy took it as cheerfully as possible. He grinned as he came into Carthew's study. A ragger had been at work there with deadly earnestness.

Table and chairs were overturned, ashes and cinders scattered over the carpet, ink and other things upset on all sides.

Carthew gritted his teeth as he caught the involuntary grin on Conroy's face.

"Your handiwork, I dare say?" he hissed. Conroy shook his head.

"No, as it happens," he replied coolly.

"I dare say you know who did it, then?"

"I dare say I could guess."

"Who was it, then?"

"Find out!"

"What?"

"Do you want me to sneak?" said Conroy

pleasantly. "If you do, you'll be disappointed!"

Carthew picked up a cane from the table. "Hold out your hand!" he rapped.

"What for?"

"To be caned, you young fool!"

"So I'm going to be caned for refusing to sneak—what?" asked Conroy, with a glitter in his eyes.

"You're going to be caned for impertinence to a prefect," said Carthew grimly.

"Now then, your paw!"

Conroy put his hands behind him.

"Will you hold out your hand?"

"No!"

Carthew said no more. He grasped the junior by the collar, and laid the cane about his shoulders. Conroy did not take the infliction tamely. He hit out fiercely, and Carthew gave a yell.

"You young villain!"

"Let go, you bully!"

Lash, lash, lash!

Carthew had quite lost his temper, and he laid on the cane furiously.

Conroy was a sturdy youngster, but he had little chance in the grasp of the big Sixth-Former. Carthew caned him till his arm ached.

"There!" he panted, hurling the junior away from him when he had finished. "That will teach you not to cheek the Sixth! Now clear up this study, and if everything isn't in good order when I come back I'll give you some more of the same!"

And Carthew, somewhat solaced, quitted the study, leaving Conroy gasping.

CHAPTER 24.

Fagging for Carthew!

"MY hat!" Conroy rubbed his shoulders, and gasped for breath. He had had a licking which would have "doubled up" a good many fellows, but he had not uttered a cry. The hardy Colonial was tough all through.

But there was a glitter in his eyes. Carthew concluded that the licking would have the effect of bringing the junior to heel. He was quite mistaken.

Conroy had come to the study to fag, at Bulkeley's order. But he did not intend to fag now. The licking had changed his intention.

He remained for some minutes in thought. From the study window he watched Carthew cross over to the gates, and go out. A grin overspread Conroy's face.

"I'm to get the study in order," he murmured. "There's a distinguished visitor coming. The distinguished visitor is going to have a bit of a surprise, I think."

He quitted the study, and sauntered down the passage. The School House seemed deserted. Conroy mounted the stairs, and hurried along to the box-room at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

Old Mack, the porter, had been occupying leisure hours in white-washing the box-room. The task was far from finished, and the pail of whitewash stood just where the porter had left it. Conroy dropped the big brush into the pail, lifted the pail, and bore it away.

He hurried downstairs to the Sixth Form passage, and carried his curious cargo, unobserved, into Carthew's study.

Then he closed the door, and set to work.

There was plenty of whitewash in the pail, and Conroy was an industrious worker.

He started on the walls.

He did not trouble to cover them with the whitewash. "Bi- daubs here and there satisfied him.

Then the looking-glass and the clock were well whitewashed, and, after them, the table and the chairs.

The bookcase came in for the junior's attention next, and the curtains which screened off the bed-alcove from the study.

Then the window was given a good coating.

By that time the whole study was reeking with whitewash. Conroy opened the window to allow the strong scent to clear off a little.

"Phwat the thunder are ye doing intirely?" Flynn of the Fourth looked in at the open window, in blank amazement. "Is it potty ye are, Conroy?"

Conroy glanced at him.

"Carthew ordered me to set his study to rights," he explained. "Nothing like a fresh coat of whitewash to make a place look tidy!"

"Tare an' 'ounds!" yelled Flynn. "Carthew will skin ye alive for this!"

"He's nearly skinned me already. Perhaps he will think twice next time!" remarked Conroy.

"Sure, he's got a visitor this afternoon—a merry old major!" chuckled Flynn. "Blessed if I know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Flynn seemed on the point of hysterics. Several other juniors, gathered by the window, staring in with amazed looks.

Conroy continued his labours.

He did not cease till the last drop of whitewash had been extracted from the pail, and by that time he was in a somewhat whitewashy state himself.

"There!" he remarked. "I think that will do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carthew will scalp you!" giggled Tubby Muffin. "It serves the beast right; but he'll skin you, you ass!"

Conroy shrugged his shoulders.

Having finished his labours he carried the pail and brush out of the study, and returned them to the box-room.

Then, having a much-needed wash, he sauntered down to the porter's lodge.

Old Mack looked at him inquiringly.

"I've used your whitewash, Mack," said Conroy genially.

"The dickens—ye have!" ejaculated Mack, in astonishment.

"I wanted to f eshen up a study a bit," explained Conroy. "I'm willing to pay for it, of course. You don't mind?"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Mack.

"How much, Macky?"

"Five bob!" said Mack surlily.

"Here you are!"

Conroy strolled away with his hands in his pockets, leaving old Mack staring. Mack had never heard of a junior whitewashing a study before. He would have been still ore astonished if he had known whose study it was that the Colonial junior had whitewashed.

The new junior arrived on the football-ground. He was still feeling the effects of the tremendous licking Carthew had bestowed on him, but it did not seem to affect him much. The junior football-match was going strong. Jimmy Silver's team was a goal up, and Tommy Dodd & Co. were fighting hard to equalise.

"Hallo! Ain't you fagging for Carthew?" called out Van Ryn.

"Finished!" said Conroy cheerily. "I've whitewashed the study thoroughly—"

Van Ryn jumped.

"You've done what?" he gasped.

"Whitewashed the study."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I've made a thorough job of it. I hope Carthew will be satisfied."

"You awful ass! What did you do it for?" ejaculated Van-Ryn.

"He licked me for not telling him who ragged his study."

"Oh! There'll be a fearful row!"

"I suppose there will be," assented Conroy.

He did not seem much disturbed by the prospect, however. He watched the football-match with a cheery face. The second half was drawing to an end when Carthew of the Sixth came in at the gates, with a stiff-looking old gentleman. Conroy noted them from the footer ground, and smiled.

"Sure, there's goin' to be throuble now!" said Flynn, with a chuckle. "I'd like to see Carthew's face when he sees his study."

"Let's go and see him!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

The story of Conroy's peculiar exploit had spread among the juniors, and quite a crowd left the footer-ground to follow the prefect and his visitor into the House.

Conroy did not join them, however. He would have liked to have seen Carthew's face when he made the discovery; but it was more judicious to give the bully of the Sixth a wide berth just then.

He remained watching the match, and joined heartily in the cheering when the Classical team came off—the victors by two goals to one.

CHAPTER 25.

The Major is Not Pleased!

"THIS way, uncle!"

Carthew of the Sixth piloted the major into the School House, with a meek and respectful manner that was not much in keeping with his usual style.

Carthew had his own reasons for being meek and mild with the major.

Major Carthew was a rich old gentleman, and the prefect had expectations from him in the future; and he had an immediate expectation of a handsome tip if his uncle was pleased with his visit to Rookwood.

He escorted the old gentleman along the Sixth Form passage to his study. He threw open the door, and stood aside for his uncle to enter.

Major Carthew stopped in the doorway. He sniffed and he blinked.

"That's my study, uncle," said Carthew, wondering why the major did not enter.

He had not looked in himself, and the major's portly form almost filled the doorway.

The old gentleman sniffed again expressively.

"That is your study, Mark?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Do you mean to say, Mark, that this is the apartment you are asking me into?" rapped out the major.

"Ye-es, uncle."

"And do you think that room is in a state for me to enter?" thundered the major. "Is this a practical joke?"

Carthew started.

"Hasn't that young rotter cleared it up, after all? I'll skin him——"

"What?"

"N-n-nothing! I ordered my fag to put the study tidy," stammered Carthew.

"Do you call that tidy?"

Carthew looked into the study.

Then he stood transfixed.

The whole room reeked of wet white-wash. Every article of furniture was smothered with it. It darkened the windows. It clung lovingly to every object in the room.

Carthew's eyes bulged.

"G-g-good heavens!" he gasped.

The major snorted.

"I understand that practical jokes are popular among schoolboys!" he snapped. "I did not expect you to play such a practical joke upon me, Mark."

"Uncle, I—I——"

"Do you think I can sit down in such a room?" roared the major.

"Nung! I——"

"Is this the kind of reception to give your uncle, after a long journey to see you?"

"I—I——"

"Pah!"

The military gentleman stalked away down the passage. Carthew gave a glare into the whitewashed study, and rushed after him.

"Uncle!"

"Don't address me!" snapped the angry old gentleman. "I have no appreciation of practical jokes, none whatever!"

"But I assure you——"

"Enough!"

"You—you're not going, uncle!" ejaculated Carthew, in dismay.

"Yes, sir, I am going!" shouted the major. "I have no appreciation whatever, sir, of a misplaced sense of humour. So these are the little preparations you told me you had made for my visit?"

"Nunno! Not at all——"

The major strode out of the School House. Carthew followed him, crimson with fury and dismay. Major Carthew was a somewhat unreasonable old gentleman, and his dutiful nephew usually had to be very careful with him.

Entertaining the major was a good deal like entertaining a tame bear who might change his mind and bite at any moment. At the best of times it was not always possible to keep the choleric old gentleman in a good humour. It was always an even chance whether he took offence or not. Such good humour as he possessed had quite vanished now.

He strode away towards the gates, evidently with the intention of leaving Rookwood without further parley.

Carthew hurried after him.

A crowd of grinning juniors outside the School House watched them with great delight. The major paused for a moment to glare at them.

"So your friends are parties to your precious practical joke, Mark!" he snapped.

"They're not my friends, sir," panted Carthew. "They're only cheeky fags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, enjoy your joke!" snapped the major. "It is very funny, I dare say—very funny, indeed—remarkably funny to attempt to trick a visitor into entering a room reeking with whitewash! No doubt you hoped that I should be smothered with it."

"Uncle——"

"Not a word more!" growled the major. "Enjoy the joke with your friends, Mark—enjoy it, I beg of you."

He strode on grimly, with Carthew at his heels, pouring out apologies and explanations, hardly knowing what he was saying in his confusion and dismay.

A yell of laughter from the juniors followed them.

The major's unfortunate misapprehension struck them as comical, and the sight of Carthew stalking him to the gates, endeavouring to explain, tickled the juniors im-

mensely. The major refused to hear a word. He interrupted his almost frantic nephew with a series of ferocious snorts. He strode out of the gates, unbending the prefect's almost hysterical expostulations.

Carthew stopped at the gates, and his face was a study as he watched his distinguished visitor stalking away down the road.

The case was evidently hopeless.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" groaned Carthew. "He's gone! The silly old fool!"

The prefect, in a towering rage, strode back to the School House.

His visitor was gone—without leaving the handsome tip, for the sake of which Carthew had been willing to endure the visit.

There would have to be humble letters of explanation, which might bring the old gentleman round in time. Meanwhile, Carthew was anxious to find the fag who had prepared that pleasant surprise for him. He hurried to his study, selected his stoutest ashplant, and set out in search of Conroy of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 26.

Paying the Piper!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. had come in after the football match, and the Colonial Co. had gone to their study. Van Ryn and Pons were looking rather grave. Conroy's little effort in Carthew's study was funny enough in its way; but there were certain consequences to follow. Prefects could not be treated like ordinary mortals. But Conroy's chums were quite prepared to stand by him in facing the music.

A heavy step in the passage warned them that the enemy was at hand.

"Here comes Carthew!" said Pons.

"Sounds rather in a hurry," grinned Conroy.

The door was flung open, and the Sixth-Former strode in, ashplant in hand.

His face was furious.

He gave one glare round the study, and started for Conroy. The Cornstalk junior picked up a cricket-stump from the table.

"Come on!" he said invitingly.

"Put that stump down!" roared Carthew.

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"Go ahead!"

Carthew ran at him, lashing out with the ashplant.

Crash, crash!

The stump came into play, and Conroy fenced with it as if it had been a rapier.

The ashplant was whirling out of Carthew's hand, and crashed into a corner. The prefect staggered back as the business end of the stump jabbed on his waistcoat.

Pons and Van Ryn looked on, grinning.

They were ready to go to the rescue if it was necessary, but it did not seem to be necessary.

Conroy was holding his own.

"Put down that stump!" shrieked Carthew.

"Are you going to make it pax?" asked Conroy.

"I—I—I—" Carthew stuttered with rage. Making it "pax" with a fag was miles beneath the dignity of a Sixth Form prefect.

"Well, is it pax?"

"I'll smash you!"

"Then I may as well begin," remarked Conroy, and he lunged again with the stump and Carthew gave a fiendish yell.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, trouble in the family?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking in. "Hallo, Carthew! Is that a new step-dance?"

"Keep it up!" said Lovell encouragingly. "I'll get my tin whistle, if you like. You can't dance without music."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew rushed at Conroy again. He was almost beside himself by this time. He did not heed the jab of the stump, though it hurt, and he grasped the junior in his muscular arms.

"Now, you young villain!" he panted.

"Rescue!" gasped Conroy.

Pons and Van Ryn rushed in.

The prefect was grasped by two pairs of hands, and dragged off his victim.

"Let go!" roared Carthew.

"Rats! Kick him out!"

"Outside, you rotter!"

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Great pip!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"By gad, what a circus!" remarked Mornington, sauntering to the spot. "What a giddy entertainment! Pile in!"

"Let go, you young scoundrels!" roared Carthew, struggling furiously in the grasp of the Colonial Co.

"Outside with him!" panted Van Ryn. "Clear back there, you fellows."

The juniors in the passage promptly cleared out.

In a struggling heap, the three Colonials and the Sixth-Former came swaying towards the doorway.

There was a sudden yell from the direction of the stairs.

"Cave!"

"Look out!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Here comes Bootles!"

"Cave, you duffers!"

But the excited combatants did not heed, even if they heard. The Colonial Co. had the upper hand now, and Carthew was coming out.

Mr. Bootles, with a frowning brow, came rustling along the passage towards the study whence the commotion proceeded.

He arrived just as the Colonial Co., with a final effort, hurled the gasping prefect through the doorway.

Crash!

Carthew of the Sixth landed fairly at the Form-master's feet.

Mr. Bootles jumped back.

"Bless my soul! Carthew!"

"Gurrrrh!"

"Carthew, is it you?"

"Wooow!"

"What! What!" Mr. Bootles looked astonished and scandalised. "Carthew, I am shocked! This is outrageous!"

"Groooooohoo!"

Carthew sat up breathlessly, looking very dusty and dishevelled.

Mr. Bootles' eyes were fixed sternly upon him.

"Is this your idea, Carthew, of the dignity of the Sixth Form?" he rapped out.

"How dare you a prefect, enter into such horseplay with juniors of the Fourth Form? It is scandalous!"

"Gerrrrh!"

"I shall report this to the Head!" thundered Mr. Bootles. "You will learn, Carthew, that a Sixth-Form prefect cannot enter into such obstreperous games as this with boys of a lower Form."

Carthew stuttered with rage. It was bad enough to be pitched neck and crop out of a junior study, without being supposed to be playing a game with juniors.

"I—I—I—" he gasped.

"It is scandalous! What! What!"

"I haven't—"

"I can believe my eyes, Carthew. There is no occasion for laughter, my boys. This is a serious matter."

"I have been assaulted by juniors!" yelled Carthew. "I've been pitched out of that study!"

"Bless my soul! You were not playing a game then, Carthew?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Answer me, Carthew."

"Of course I wasn't!" hissed Carthew. "I have been attacked by those young scoundrels—"

"What! What! Kindly do not use such expressions in the presence of younger boys, and in my presence, Carthew," said Mr. Bootles severely. "I am surprised at you!"

Carthew almost choked.

"Now, what is the matter?" said Mr. Bootles majestically. "Calm yourself, Carthew. This display of excitement is very unbecoming in a prefect!"

Carthew spluttered. He was not thinking just then of what was becoming.

"I've been attacked. My study has been mucked up with whitewash by Conroy, and I was attacked when I came here to punish him!" he panted.

"Indeed! That lets in a new light on the matter," said Mr. Bootles, in a judicial way. "You should have explained that at first, Carthew."

"I—I—"

"Do not interrupt me, Carthew. Your manner is not respectful. I repeat that this excitement is unbecoming and out of place."

Carthew looked at Mr. Bootles as if he would eat him. He would rather have given the ashplant to Mr. Bootles than to Conroy at that moment. That, however, was scarcely feasible.

"Have you damaged Carthew's study, Conroy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ahem! What did you do?"

"Whitewashed it, sir."

"Bless my soul! Why did you do that, Conroy?"

"Because that rotter—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, because Carthew fagged me, and licked me for nothing."

"My own fag was out, sir—"

"Conroy, I am surprised. You are a new boy here, but surely you must be aware that it is necessary to treat prefects with

respect. It will be my duty to punish you severely, Conroy."

"Yes, sir," said Conroy.

"Those others have laid hands on me, sir," spluttered Carthew.

"Van Ryn and Penn, you will take five hundred lines each, and stay in the next half-holiday to write them out," said Mr. Bootles severely.

"Oh!"

"Conroy, you will follow me."

"Very well, sir."

"I shall punish this infraction of discipline," said Mr. Bootles. "At the same time, Carthew, I must repeat that I do not approve of your general line of action. This excitement is unbecoming—most unbecoming!"

And Mr. Bootles whisked away down the passage, followed by Conroy, leaving the bully of the Sixth grinding his teeth.

The Form-master glanced into Carthew's study, to see what damage had been done. He almost fell down at the sight of the whitewash.

"Bless my soul! This is—is outrageous!" he exclaimed. "Follow me, Conroy. I shall punish you very severely."

"Yes, sir."

Conroy did not enjoy the next five minutes in Mr. Bootles' study. He had called the tune, and now the time had come to pay the piper. He went through the infliction with grim fortitude. Six on each hand was an unusual punishment for the mild Mr. Bootles to inflict, but he felt that the case required it. He was breathing rather hard when he laid down the cane.

"You may go, Conroy."

"Thank you, sir!" mumbled the junior.

"I hope this will be a warning to you, Conroy."

"I hope so, sir," said Conroy demurely. Mr. Bootles coughed, and the junior left the study. He was twisting himself into various weird attitudes as he came back to the Fourth-Form passage.

"Had it bad?" asked Jimmy Silver sympathetically.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Sure, and ye were askin' for it intirely," said Flynn consolingly.

"Wow-wow!"

"How many?" asked Raby.

"Six on each paw, and regular twisters!" groused the Australian. "Wow-wow! I

didn't know Bootles was such an athlete! Yow-ow!"

"Never mind; you've made Carthew sit up," said Newcome.

"Yow-ow! Bootles has made me sit up. I know that."

"Better let Carthew alone after this," grinned Mornington.

"Oh, rats!"

Conroy went into his study. Van Ryn and Pons were looking a little blue. Five hundred lines and a gating were rather a high price to pay, even for the pleasure of handling the bully of the Sixth.

Conroy was still rubbing his hands dolefully when Bulkeley of the Sixth looked into the study grimly.

"You three are wanted," he said.

"Oh, dear! More trouble!" sighed Pons. Bulkeley grinned a little.

"You're to go to Carthew's study, and clean it up," he said.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"It's got to be made spick and span, and as clean as a new pin; Form-master's orders," said Bulkeley. "You'd better think a bit, Conroy, before you whitewash a Sixth-Form study again."

"Oh, crikey!"

Bulkeley strode away, and the Colonial Co. looked at one another.

"Well, we might have expected that," said Conroy, after a pause.

"Oh, you ass!" groaned Van Ryn. "It will take us pretty nearly all the evening, I should think."

"Oh, you fathead!" said Pons. "I've a jolly good mind to bump you!"

In somewhat doleful spirits the three juniors proceeded to Carthew's study. They set to work.

It was a long task.

Conroy had done his work thoroughly with the whitewash—too thoroughly, as he was now ready to admit himself.

By the time the study was cleaned the three juniors were tired out, and in a state that required cleaning themselves.

Carthew came in as they finished, and grinned as he looked round the room.

"That's a bit better!" he remarked. "I think I'll keep you cheeky young scoundrels in order! Get out!"

And the cheerless Co. got out without a word. They limped away to their own quarters, and the sight of the dirty and

fatigued trio made the Classical juniors chuckle.

"Not quite so funny now—what?" chortled Townsend.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Conroy.

The Colonial Co. were late beginning their prep., and they were too tired to give it much attention.

"Carthew's got the best of us this time," remarked Conroy, when the work was done at last.

"Looks like it fathead!"

"It was a good idea, whitewashing his study, all the same."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"One swallow doesn't make a summer," said Conroy. "We shall get the best of it next time."

"There isn't going to be a next time, fathead! I'm fed up with Carthew!"

"Rats! This study has got to get even!"

"Br-r-r-r!" snorted Pons and Van Ryn together. They had had enough of Carthew and all his works. But the Australian junior was determined, and his active brain was at work. Carthew, of the Sixth, had not yet done with the Colonial Co.

CHAPTER 27.

Up Against It!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were very sympathetic.

The Colonial Co. were "up against it."

Carthew of the Sixth made a special mark of them, and there were many ways in which a prefect could make himself unpleasant to juniors.

The Colonial Co. were by no means perfect youths, and a prefect who made it his special business to keep an eye on them and catch them tripping was certain to find many opportunities.

If Van Ryn slid down the banisters into the hall, Carthew was sure to spot him and report the same to Mr. Bootles. If Pons kicked a football along the passage, Carthew appeared on the spot as if by magic, and there were lines or detention. If Conroy, especially, broke any rule, large or small, Carthew was certain to get wind of it, and to see that condign punishment was visited upon the offender.

Carthew had set himself the task of

bringing the Colonial Co. to heel; a very difficult task, certainly.

The prefect was still in anxious correspondence with his offended uncle, and it was not at all certain that the major would "come round." The major was a touchy and suspicious old gentleman, and he had a lurking suspicion that his nephew was only civil to him for the sake of the loaves and fishes, so to speak, in which he showed considerable judgment.

He was not certain of it, but he suspected it, and Carthew had been to the trouble of "buttering-up" the old gentleman to an immense extent to eradicate that unfortunate suspicion from his mind. The incident of the whitewashed study had put the "lid" on.

It really seemed as if it would require a surgical operation to get the belief out of the major's mind that his nephew had intended the whole affair as a practical joke on him. Once, in his early and thoughtless boyhood Mark Carthew had actually played a practical joke on the major, and the old military gentleman had never forgotten it.

Carthew of the Sixth was given to dabbling in Turf matters, and his experiments on the Turf had been very profitable—to the bookmakers. They ran away with Carthew's spare cash, and also cash that he could not spare, and he had hoped that his uncle's visit would result in replenishing an exhausted exchequer.

Owing to the incident of the whitewash that hope had been dashed to the ground; and Carthew was being dunned by Joey Hook, the bookmaker, for an account, without any immediate prospect of liquidating it.

Under such circumstances, it was not likely that the bully of the Sixth would forgive the new junior, whom he regarded as the cause of all the trouble, and he found great solace and comfort in making Conroy's life a burden, so far as lay in his power; and it was in his power to make himself very unpleasant indeed.

The Colonial Co. were very soon "fed-up." Systematic persecution was not an easy thing to resist, when it came from a prefect, who was careful to keep in the sight, and to catch the juniors "out."

Jimmy Silver & Co. were sympathetic. They had had their own troubles with Carthew, though, as Jimmy explained, the end study always kept its end up.

"We're going to keep our end up!" growled Conroy.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Rather above your weight, I'm afraid, kid," he remarked. "You'd better give Carthew a wide berth."

"The end study is the only study that can handle the Sixth!" said Lovell, with the air of an oracle. "Better keep off the grass!"

"Don't bite off more than you can chew!" suggested Newcome.

"Rats!"

"Conroy!"

It was Mr. Bootles' voice.

"Yes, sir!" said Conroy, leaving the group of juniors.

Mr. Bootles was frowning.

"Conroy, Carthew informs me that you were fighting in the passage this afternoon."

"Ye-e-es, sir. Only a scrap, sir."

"You seem to be a very unruly boy, Conroy. I am continually receiving complaints of you. You will take two hundred fines, and I warn you that at the next complaint I shall cane you."

Mr. Bootles rustled away majestically. He was grieved as well as angry, for he had taken a liking to the frank, sturdy Colonial junior, who had made a very good impression upon him at first. But as Carthew always contrived to have some ground for his complaints, he was gradually making an impression upon the Form-master's mind that Conroy was unruly and undisciplined, and disrespectful to authority.

Conroy was looking grim as he rejoined his companions.

"You heard that!" he grunted. "The beast's reported me for fighting! Not a word about Townsend, who I was fighting with!"

"Just like Carthew!" said Jimmy Silver. "Towny's one of his favourites. They've got tastes in common."

"What the dickens were you fighting Towny for?" asked Lovell.

"Well, I wasn't exactly fighting him. I only rubbed his nose on the floor for cuffing young 'Erbert of the Second Form," said Conroy. "He wanted his nose rubbed, or he wouldn't have asked for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I'm getting fed-up. Carthew's got to stop it!" growled Conroy. "He's got to have a lesson! If you chaps have taught him to keep off the grass, we can."

Jimmy Silver smiled the superior smile of Uncle James.

"My dear kid, we're up to his weight," he explained. "You'd better toe the line. Leave him to us."

"Rats!" said Conroy.

The Australian junior looked very thoughtful when the Colonial Co. went into tea. Pons and Van Ryn were thoughtful, too. Carthew's persecution was getting on their nerves. Yet they did not quite see how it was to be dealt with, unless they toed the line and ate humble pie to the extent that the bully of the Sixth required, which was not to be thought of.

"We're not standing it!" said Conroy suddenly.

"I don't quite see what else we can do," said Van Ryn. "The beast's got a down on us. And a prefect is a big proposition to tackle."

"He wants to make us crawl, like Towny and that set," said Conroy, with contempt. "Catch us! He won't hear us saying, 'Please, Carthew!' and 'Yes, Carthew!' and 'No, Carthew, please!' That's not quite the style of this study."

"No jolly fear!" said Van Ryn emphatically.

"We've got to make him sit up and understand that we're better left alone," remarked Conroy.

"No more of your dashed whitewashing!" growled Pons.

Conroy laughed.

"Besides, we've got to show the end study that we can keep our end up," he said. "This study ought really to be top study in the Fourth!"

"Ahem!"

"And I've got an idea," added Conroy.

Pons and Van Ryn groaned in chorus.

"Look here, you silly asses, it's a jolly good idea!" insisted Conroy. "I've got an idea for handling Carthew—"

"Bow-wow!"

"And smothering him with soot—"

"Fathead!"

"And in a way that will make it impossible for him to lay a complaint!"

"Rats!"

"Honest Injun, you asses!"

"Well, go ahead!" said Pons cautiously. "We'll see."

"You know the cad breaks bounds sometimes at night," said Conroy. "All the Fourth knows it, for that matter. I'm not

thinking of giving him away to the beaks, of course. That's outside the limit."

"Couldn't prove it if we did," said Van Ryn. "He's too jolly cautious to be caught. He would always have some excuse."

"I shouldn't wonder. But, as a matter of fact, I happen to know that he's going out to-night."

"Let him go, and be blowed!"

"Tubby heard Gower speaking of it to Mornington—you know, Tubby hears everything," pursued Conroy. "We know the blackguard does it, and, according to what Tubby told me, he's going out to-night at half-past ten. Prefects have a key to the side-gate; he lets himself out."

"Well, we shall be in the dorm then," said Pons.

"We shall be in the quad!" said Conroy coolly. "We can get out of the dorm. We're going to collar Carthew at the gate—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And smother him with soot. He won't be able to say a word about it without explaining why he was going out at half-past ten at night. And I guess he won't want to explain that to the Head."

"Ha, ha! No fear!"

"We shall catch him fairly on the hop," said Conroy, with great satisfaction. "He won't dare even to yell, for fear of somebody finding out that he's out of doors at night."

"By Jove! What a ripping wheeze!"

"I'm glad you can see it."

"It ought to be safe as houses," said Pons thoughtfully. "We can easily get a bag of soot. Of course, he'll know it's us."

"That doesn't matter—he won't dare to complain. And he can't be more down on us than he is already, and it will be a warning to him that the worm will turn. I want him to know it's us. He may think it better to go easy."

Van Ryn nodded.

"We'll do it!" he said.

"It's a go!" said Pons.

And so it was settled.

The Colonial Co. were busy that evening.

Van Ryn found a bag, and a quantity of soot was raked down several chimneys to fill it. That part of the task was not difficult.

The bag of soot was concealed in the

box-room during the evening. The Colonial Co. went up to bed with the juniors, as usual, in a very cheery mood. Jimmy Silver & Co. had seen the preparations, and they knew the scheme, and they grinned over it; but they had their doubts.

According to the Fistical Four, only the end study was equal to the task of dealing with the Sixth. But they cordially wished the Colonial Co. good luck.

Carthew of the Sixth saw lights out for the Classical Fourth that night. He bestowed a scowl upon Conroy & Co.

"Have you done your lines, Van Ryn?" he asked.

"Not yet," said the South African.

"They are doubled, then!" said Carthew.

"Thanks!"

"And if you don't show them up by tea-time to-morrow you will be reported!" added the prefect.

"Thanks so much!" said Van Ryn imperturbably, and the juniors chuckled.

Carthew scowled and quitted the dormitory.

Conroy & Co. did not settle down to sleep. At ten minutes past ten they were out of bed and dressing in the dark. A sleepy voice came from Jimmy Silver's bed:

"Hallo! You fellows up? Better chuck it!"

"Rats!"

"You'll make a muck of it, you know," admonished Uncle James. "Better leave Carthew to the end study, we're up to his weight!"

"Bow-wow!"

Jimmy grinned, and settled down to sleep. The Colonial Co. finished dressing, and crept silently from the dormitory.

Most of Rookwood was in bed, and the upper passages were dark. The three juniors groped along to the box-room, the bag of soot was dropped lightly out of the window, and the juniors climbed after it.

A thick mist from the sea pervaded the quadrangle, and through it the shapes of the old beeches loomed up dimly.

"Grooh!" mumbled Pons. "What a night!"

"All the better—we shan't be seen."

"Got the soot?"

"Here it is!"

"Come on, then!"

The juniors groped their way across the quadrangle, stumbling into the trees every

now and then. They reached the little gate, to which the masters and prefects of the school had their own keys. Prefects, of course, were not supposed to use their keys for letting themselves out at a late hour of the night. Carthew's relaxations of that kind were a dead secret, or so he supposed.

Had the Head been aware that Carthew was in the habit of dropping in at the Bird-in-Hand to see Joey Hook and his select circle of sporting acquaintances, the prefect would not have troubled Rookwood with his presence much longer.

"Here we are!" murmured Conroy, as the school wall loomed up. "Here's the gate. Not half-past yet."

"Jolly cold waiting here!"

"Why did you forget to bring a stove or an electric radiator?" asked Conroy sarcastically.

"Oh, rats!"

"Shush! Mum's the word!"

And the Co. settled down to wait.

CHAPTER 28.

Simply Awful!

HALF-PAST ten sounded faintly through the mist.

The Colonial Co. waited.

It was difficult to see in the mist, but they could not mistake Carthew when he came. They would hear the key grating in the lock, even if they did not see the prefect. Conroy held the bag open, ready to deliver the soot.

They had not long to wait.

Apparently Tubby Muffin's information was well founded. Five minutes after the half-hour there was a footfall from the direction of the house.

Conroy nudged his companions.

"Look out!" he breathed.

"Quiet, you ass!" murmured Pons.

"Shurrup, Pong!"

"Look here—"

"Shurrup!"

The juniors scarcely breathed as the footsteps came nearer. A form in an overcoat loomed up faintly, and there was a grating sound as a key rubbed on a lock, finding the keyhole.

"Go it!" muttered Van Ryn breathlessly.

Conroy sprang forward, the bag in his hands.

The figure at the gate swung round, startled by the sound behind him.

Swooooooh!

As the dim form turned Conroy fairly capped it with the open bag. There was a sudden rush of soot, and a weird and wild gurgle from the unfortunate recipient of the soot.

"Gurrrrrrgg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

"Groooh! Gurrrrg! Gugggggg!"

The figure swayed and stumbled, spluttering wildly. There was a clink on the ground of a fallen key.

"Gug-gug-gug; What—what! Bless my soul! Groogh! Help! Help!"

Conroy & Co., almost suffocating with suppressed laughter, were making for the house. But at the sound of that voice they halted, dumbfounded.

In a frozen whisper Conroy gasped:

"Bootles!"

For it was not the voice of Carthew of the Sixth. It was the voice of Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, that emanated from amid the cloud of clinging soot!

"Bootles!" stuttered Van Ryn.

"Bub-bub-bub-Bootles!" stammered Pons.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Grrrrrrrrrrrr! Help! I am suffocated! Help! Grooooooh!" came from the unfortunate Mr. Bootles, as he gouged wildly at the soot.

"Bootles!" moaned Van Ryn. "What was he going out for, at this time of night? The silly ass. He never goes out at night—"

"Groooooh! Help! Gurrg!"

There were hurried footsteps in the misty quad, and a running figure ran fairly into the horror-stricken juniors. It was Carthew of the Sixth.

"Who's that? Conroy! Van Ryn! You young rascals! What are you doing out of your dormitory—"

"Help! Gurrg! Help!"

The three juniors fled in the mist. Carthew hurried on towards the gate. In the mist a figure loomed up with wildly-waving arms.

"Mr. Bootles! Is that you?" gasped Carthew.

"Groooh! Yes. I have been attacked—smothered with something! Bless my soul! Groooh!"

Carthew drew a quick breath. He did not

need telling what had happened, and he thanked his stars that he had not arrived at the gate at the same time as Mr. Bootles. He had been on his way to the gate when he heard the disturbance.

"Let me help you, sir," he gasped. "I—I heard somebody in the quad, and—came out to see who—who it was. Ahem! I have just spotted three juniors out of bed—three of the Fourth—"

"Groogh! What is this clinging to me, Carthew—what is it?"

The prefect sniffed.

"Soot, sir!"

"Bless my soul! Gug-gug-gug!"

"Let me help you in, sir. I can point out the perpetrators of this outrage at once," said Carthew, with much satisfaction.

He took hold of the Form-master's arm, in a rather gingerly manner, and led the gasping and spluttering gentleman towards the house. Mr. Bootles hardly seemed to know whether he was on his head or his heels.

"It is—is atrocious!" he gasped. "Unheard-of! The wretched boys must have known that I was going out, and laid in wait for me. Groooh."

"Of course they did sir," said Carthew, grinning in the mist.

He could guess very accurately whom the juniors had been in wait for, but he was not likely to tell Mr. Bootles that.

"They must have learned that. I was going to sit with the vicar to-night," gasped Mr. Bootles. "It is extraordinary, as I do not remember mentioning to anyone but the Head that Mr. Sweady was ill."

"Eavesdropping, most likely, sir," said Carthew, who knew very well that the Colonial Co. knew nothing at all of Mr. Sweady's illness, or of Mr. Bootles' benevolent intention of sitting with him. If they had had the slightest idea of it, they would not have been within fifty yards of the gate that evening.

"Yes, yes, doubtless, Carthew," gurgled Mr. Bootles. "Thank you for coming so promptly to my help. Groogh! Gug-gug-gug!"

Carthew, manfully repressing a strong desire to chuckle, piloted the unfortunate gentleman into the house. It was evident that the suffering Mr. Sweady would not have the pleasure of Mr. Bootles' company that night.

Meanwhile, three scared juniors had scuttled into the dormitory of the Classical

Fourth, in a state of mind that was decidedly unenviable. Conroy's masterly scheme for "getting even" with the bully of the Sixth had been a ghastly failure—even the hopeful Cornstalk could not deny that.

"Hallo, how did it go?" yawned Jimmy Silver, as they came in.

"Did you give him the soot?" chuckled Lovell.

Conroy groaned.

"Yes, we gave him the soot!"

"Good man!"

"Only it wasn't Carthew!"

"Eh?"

"It was Bootles!"

"Bootles!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

There was a howl of merriment from one end of the dormitory to the other. "Bootles! Oh, gum!"

"Bootles!" shrieked Lovell. "You've sooted Bootles?"

"How could we tell in the dark?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We thought it was Carthew——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my Aunt Matilda!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Tumble in, quick! You'll have to prove a jolly strong alibi for this."

"N. G.!" groaned Van Ryn. "Carthew came along a minute later, and spouted us!"

"What awful luck!"

"Bootles may be here any minute," mumbled Pons. "We're going to slaughter Conroy."

"Well, it wasn't my fault. How was I to know that Bootles would take it into his head——"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Colonial Co. undressed and turned in. But there was no sleep just then for the Classical Fourth. They expected a visit from Mr. Bootles. And they had not long to wait. There were footsteps in the passage, and the door was thrown open, and the electric light turned on.

The juniors sat up in bed, and stared at the fearsome figure that presented itself in the doorway.

They guessed that it was Mr. Bootles.

But the little Form-master was quite unrecognisable. Soot smothered him and blotted him out, as it were. He reeked with soot from head to foot. In spite of the awful seriousness of the moment, an irrepressible chortle ran through the dormitory.

"Conroy! Van Ryn! Pons!" Mr. Bootles' voice came in muffled tones. Some of the soot had found its way into his mouth. "You were out of your dormitory a few minutes ago. It was you who——"

"It was a mistake, sir," gasped Conroy. "We didn't know it was you, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"We—we thought it was Carthew, sir."

"Nonsense! What reason could you have had for supposing that Carthew would be going out at such an hour? Nonsense! Even upon your own confession, you intended to make this outrageous assault upon a prefect! Look at me!" thundered Mr. Bootles. "This is your work! You may remain in bed. I sha' not deal with you now. But to-morrow morning you will be flogged, severely flogged, by the Head. Grooooooh!"

And Mr. Bootles turned out the light, slammed the door, and retired.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Poor old Bootles!"

"Poor old us!" groaned Van Ryn. "A flogging in the morning! My hat!"

"Well, you've asked for it, an' no mistake," chuckled Mornington.

"This has been a bit of a failure" said Conroy.

"Only a bit?" hooted Pons.

"We haven't dished Carthew this time!"

"No, you ass, you've dished us!"

"But next time——"

"Next time?" shrieked Van Ryn and Pons together.

"Yes," said Conroy coolly, "next time. Hallo, what the merry thunder are you up to?"

Van Ryn & Co. did not explain what they were up to—it really did not need explaining. In their present mood, the mention of "next time" was a little more than they could stand. They scrambled out of bed, and grabbed Conroy. The Cornstalk junior smote the floor of the dormitory with a terrific bump.

"There," gasped Van Ryn, as Conroy struggled in vain in the grasp of his indignant chums: "There, you ass! There, you fathead! I suppose next time you want us to soot the Head or the board of governors—what? There's not going to be any next time, you dangerous dervish. Give him another."

Bump! Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Pons and Van Ryn went back to bed,

somewhat comforted. Conroy crawled into bed and grunted. He did not mention "next time" again.

But there was going to be a "next time"; the Cornstalk junior was quite determined on that. And next time Carthew of the Sixth was to be made to "sit up"—at all events, Conroy was quite determined about it. The bully of the Sixth was yet to discover that he had met more than his match in the Colonial Co.

CHAPTER 29.

Hard Lines!

"YOW-OW!"

"Oh! Ah!"

"Yah!"

Those weird ejaculations proceeded in a kind of chorus from Study No. 3, in the Fourth Form passage.

Three juniors were in that study, and they were all ejaculating at once.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were looking in at the open doorway with sympathetic looks. But sympathy was not much use to Conroy, Pons, and Van Ryn, the three Colonial juniors in the Classical Fourth.

The Colonial Co. had been through it.

They had just returned from a visit to the Head's study. Dr. Chisholm had apparently taken a leaf out of the book of that gentleman of olden time, who declared that to spare the rod was to spoil the child.

The Head had certainly taken no risk of spoiling the Colonial Co. by sparing the rod. He had done the work thoroughly. Too thoroughly, the three unfortunate juniors thought.

They had fairly limped back to their study, and now they were twisting themselves into strange attitudes, and uttering remarks that were wild and weird.

"Had it bad?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"No; it was nice!" groaned Conroy. "Ripping, in fact! I felt as if I were being ripped, anyway!"

"Too bad!" said Jimmy.

"Never knew the Head was such a merry athlete!" moaned Van Ryn. "He thought he was beating a carpet, I think."

"What a cricketer he would make!" mumbled Pons. "Or a carpet-beater. Or a blacksmith. Ow! Ow! Ow!"

And the three victims groaned in dismal chorus.

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver, by way of comfort.

"Yow! Fathead!"

"Grin and bear it!" suggested Lovell.

"Silly ass! Yow!"

Raby and Newcome did not offer any advice. The Colonial Co. did not seem in a mood for it somehow.

Mornington of the Fourth came along the passage. He was smiling. He looked into the study, and smiled more broadly. The weird contortions of the sufferers seemed to amuse the dandy of the Fourth.

"What a happy family!" he remarked.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"What the dickens did you expect?" said Mornington. "You can't splash soot over a Form-master's napper without trouble to follow."

"Yow! We thought it was Carthew, you ass!" groaned Conroy. "Do you think we specially selected Bootles' napper for the soot?"

"Well, it was like your cheek," said Mornington. "You can't soot a prefect of the Sixth. Serve you right!"

"Yes; he's a friend of yours," growled Conroy. "Birds of a feather, you rotter. Take your face out of this study!"

Mornington laughed.

"It's rather amusin' to watch you," he replied.

The Australian junior made a step towards him, and then gave a yelp as a spasm of pain caught him.

"Yow-ow! Jimmy Silver, you ass, can't you kick that cad out for me?" he howled. "Certainly," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything to oblige. Outside, Morny."

"Hallo! What's that?"

Carthew of the Sixth stepped into the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. eyed him with great disfavour. They did not like the bully of the Sixth, and they had had a good many rubs with him; though of late Conroy & Co. had had the chief benefit of his attentions. Carthew had a "down" on Study No. 3, and that study had felt the heaviness of his hand.

Conroy & Co. glared at the prefect.

"Well, you look as if you're enjoying yourselves," said Carthew, with a grin.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You fairly asked for it," said Carthew. "I've never heard of juniors chucking soot over a Form-master before."

"You know jolly well we didn't intend it for Mr. Bootles," said Conroy savagely. "We meant it for you, and you know it!" Carthew gave him a sharp look.

"You bunged that soot over Mr. Bootles last night when he was going out at half-past ten," he said. "If you meant it for me, what made you suppose that I should be going out at that time of night?"

"Because we know your little ways," said Conroy coolly. "You were going out on the razzle, like the blackguard you are."

Carthew gritted his teeth.

"You mean somebody told you so!" he said.

"Well, I heard it—and it was true, too. Bootles happened to get the soot, but you came up a minute later."

"Have you told Mr. Bootles all that?" Conroy's lip curled contemptuously.

"You needn't be afraid," he said. "We're not sneaks. Besides, we couldn't prove it, if we did tell him, and he wouldn't believe it."

"Exactly," said Carthew, with a nod. "I think you'd find it very difficult to prove anything of the sort. You've got a queer suspicion in your silly heads, owing to some tattle among the fags, I suppose. If you made any accusation against me, I should bring it before the Head, and if you couldn't prove it, you'd be expelled from the school for slandering a prefect. And now, you'll take two hundred lines each for making the suggestion."

"What?"

"And if the lines aren't shown up by tea-time, they'll be doubled," said Carthew.

And the Sixth-Former turned on his heel, and walked out of the study. Conroy & Co. cast very expressive glances after him.

"You want to be careful how you slang a prefect, Conroy," remarked Jimmy Silver. "We know a good deal about Carthew's little games, but proving it is quite another matter."

Conroy grunted. He was quite aware of that.

"How did you know Carthew was going out last night?" asked Lovell.

"Tubby Muffin heard Gower speaking about it to Peele," said Conroy. "It was right enough, too. If old Bootles hadn't happened to be going out, we should have bagged Carthew; and he couldn't have expected us, as he was going to break

bounds so late at night. But it all went wrong—Ow-ow!"

"Carthew's had the best of it this time," said Jimmy Silver. "You'd better give him a wide berth after this."

Conroy snorted.

"Catch us! It's this study against Carthew, and we're going to down him. Yow-ow-ow! I'll make the beastly bully sit up yet!"

CHAPTER 30.

Conroy's Chance!

FOR a week past the Colonial Co. had been the object of Carthew's enmity, and he had given them little rest; but the persecution redoubled now. It was not difficult to catch the juniors tripping now and then.

The fact that the Co. knew, or suspected, his shady secrets, made the bully of the Sixth all the more bitter. It was evidently his object to break the spirit of the unlucky juniors, and "bring them to heel" till they were ready to cringe without limit. He had no doubt of succeeding.

But he had, in fact, no chance whatever of success. The three Colonials were made of sterner stuff than he supposed.

But things certainly were hard for them. They had lines without number, petty restrictions and interferences, detention at awkward moments—every kind of trouble the malicious bully could devise for them.

Conroy was thinking hard.

It was a tussle between the bully of the Sixth and the Colonial Co., and the Co. were determined, somehow, to get the best of it. At present it could not be denied that they were getting decidedly the worst of it. The three chums were discussing the matter in the study a few days after the soot incident, when a loud howl along the passage, announced that Tubby Muffin was in trouble.

The Colonials had the somewhat doubtful honour of sharing No. 3 Study with the fat Classical. They did not rejoice in his company, but they were very tolerant towards him. Conroy rose at once as he heard Tubby's anguished wail.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Leggo, Mornington, you beast! Yow-ow-ow!"

Conroy hurried out of the study, with his chums after him. Tubby was in Morning-

ton's grasp, outside No. 4. The dandy of the Fourth had him by the collar, and was laying a cricket-stump about his fat person.

"Hold on, Mornington," said Conroy quietly.

Morny did not hold on. He continued to lay the stump about the yelling Tubby.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped.

"Yow-ow-ow! Rescue!" yelled Tubby.

Conroy grasped the dandy of the Fourth at once, and wrenched the stump away from him. He tossed it into the study.

"That's enough," he said.

Mornington clenched his fists furiously.

"I caught the fat rotter listening at my keyhole!" he hissed.

"I suppose they're fond of eavesdroppers where you come from, Conroy!" sneered Peele, from the study.

"I—I wasn't listening!" stammered Tubby. "I—I just happened to stop! I didn't hear Morny talking about Carthew!"

Conroy grinned.

"You fat rascal!" he exclaimed. "I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking myself! You're a disgrace to the study!"

"I'm going to lick him!" said Mornington savagely.

"You've licked him enough," said Conroy. "You'll let him alone now. Enough's as good as a feast, you know!"

"Well, I won't!"

"You will!"

Tubby Muffin had scuttled behind the sturdy Australian. Mornington looked for a moment as if he would hurl himself at Conroy; but he had tried that once, with disastrous results to himself. He changed his mind, and strode into the study and slammed the door.

Conroy took Tubby Muffin by the ear, and led him, yelping, into No. 3.

"You fat boulder," he said angrily, "it serves you jolly well right to be licked! What do you play those dirty tricks for?"

"I—I didn't—I wasn't—"

"Oh, don't tell lies!" growled Conroy.

"If I'd known what Morny was licking you for, I wouldn't have chipped in!"

"Well, they're a set of rotters!" said Tubby, with an injured look. "I think they ought to be shown up! Fancy a prefect of the Sixth going out on the razzle

with a Fourth-Former. What would the Head say?"

"What are you burbling about now?"

"Carthew's just been to that study. He's going out to-night, and Morny's going with him!"

"What rot!"

"It's true!" howled Tubby. "I heard them talking, and that beast Carthew came out quite suddenly and found me. Then he cleared off, and Morny started licking me. Of course, I wasn't really listening!"

"You seem to have heard a lot for a chap who wasn't listening!" growled Pons.

"Well, you see——"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Van Ryn.

Tubby Muffin snorted. He expected sympathy in his own study, but he did not receive any. He blinked out into the passage, and, finding that the coast was clear, he scuttled off.

Conroy's brows were knitted in thought.

"This looks like our chance, you fellows," he said at last.

"How do you mean?"

"If that's true, and Carthew is going out on the tiles to-night——"

"Only Tubby's gas, very likely!"

Conroy nodded.

"Likely enough. But we know Carthew goes in for that sort of thing. We know he pals with Morny on the quiet, too. I believe he borrows money of him. If Morny clears out of the dorm. to-night, that will show it's true!"

"What about it?"

"It's our chance." Conroy's eyes glinted. "If we catch Carthew out of bounds at night, we can bring him to terms. I've thought all along that it's through his rotten, shady tricks that our chance will come! Well, it's come!"

"We tried that before, and got Bootles instead of Carthew!" growled Van Ryn.

"We shall be a bit more careful this time. I'm not thinking of sooting him; that's not good enough. Suppose we catch him out, and keep him out——"

"My hat!"

"And bring him to terms before we let him in?"

"What about Morny? We can't risk giving away a chap in our own Form, rotter as he is," said Van Ryn, with a shake of the head.

"We can see Morny safe, and then deal with Carthew. Morny's nothing to do with us, and we don't want to sneak about him, of course. I dare say he'll be bowled out and sacked some day, without our help. Carthew's our game, and this is our chance. If Morny clears out of the dorm, we go on the warpath!"

And the Colonial Co. put their heads together, and discussed the matter in all its bearings, with many chuckles. It looked as if their chance were coming at last, and they meant to make the most of it.

CHAPTER 31.

In the Dead of Night!

MORNINGTON scowled at the Colonial Co. in the dormitory when the Classical Four went up to bed. He had not forgotten Conroy's interference, but he made no remark, and the Colonials did not address him.

"You chaps done your lines?" asked Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

The chums of No. 3 had a large number of lines on hand, as usual.

"Not a line," said Conroy.

"That'll mean trouble."

"The fact is, we're not going to do any more lines for Carthew," remarked Conroy airily.

"Eh?"

"Carthew will report you to Bootles," said Lovell.

"I think not."

"Why won't he, then?" asked Jimmy Silver, puzzled.

"I shall tell him not to."

Mornington burst into a scoffing laugh.

"You'll tel' a prefect not to report you!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I think so."

"Weil, you silly ass!"

"Same to you, dear boy!"

"You'll sing a different tune to Carthew!" sneered Peele.

Carthew came into the dormitory to see lights out. He tackled the Colonial Co. at once.

"You didn't bring your lines, you three!" he snapped.

"Had no time for lines, Carthew!"

The Sixth-Former stared.

"They're doubled!" he said.

"Thanks!"

"If they're not shown up at tea-time to-morrow, you will be reported to Mr. Bootles for a caning!"

Conroy yawned.

"How good of you!" he said.

"Thanks awfully!" remarked Van Ryn.

Carthew stared at them and scowled, somewhat puzzled. He exchanged a meaning glance with Mornington before he put out the light and left the dormitory. The new line taken by Conroy & Co. puzzled the Fourth-Formers, too, and several voices asked them if they had gone potty. They left that question unanswered.

The Classical Fourth settled down to sleep, with some exceptions. The three Colonials did not close their eyes, neither did Mornington. The blackguard of Rookwood did not intend to pass that night in slumber. He was booked for one of his little excursions, this time in company with the black sheep of the Sixth. Carthew's friendship with the wealthy junior was more or less of a secret; it would scarcely have "done" for it to be known publicly.

As a matter of fact, there was little friendship in the matter. They were useful to one another, and they had tastes in common, that was all. Morny's unlimited wealth made him useful to the senior, who was frequently in difficulties for money, and Carthew's influence as a prefect of the Sixth rendered the way easy for Morny's incurable blackguardism, that was all.

Most of the Fourth had long been fast asleep at eleven o'clock. Before that hour it was scarcely safe for the black sheep to venture out. But the sporting gentlemen at the Bird-in-Hand kept very late hours.

At eleven Mornington slipped quietly from his bed, and dressed himself quickly and noiselessly in the dark. But cautious as he was, there were three pairs of ears that heard. As the door closed softly behind Mornington, Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons sat up in bed.

"You fellows awake?" breathed Conroy.

"You bet!"

"He's gone. Keep quiet."

Conroy slipped from his bed and hurried on his trousers. Without waiting to clothe himself further, he quitted the dormitory as silently as Mornington. The School House was in darkness and slumber.

Without a sound from his bare feet, the

Australian junior hurried down the stairs to the Sixth Form passage. There was no light under any of the doors; the passage was in pitchy darkness. Conroy stopped at Carthew's door and listened.

There was a faint sound in the study. The Colonial junior remained motionless, his ears strained. Silence succeeded. But he still waited, till more than ten minutes had elapsed. He knew that the sound he had heard was that of a cautiously closed window, and that Carthew and his companion had gone out.

It was an easy drop from the study window to the quadrangle. But he left nothing to chance, and he waited patiently till he was certain all was safe. Then he softly opened the study door.

Carthew's bed was in an alcove, curtained off. The Sixth had studies and bedrooms combined, instead of sleeping in dormitories like the juniors. Conroy stepped quietly in and listened.

He knew what had happened, but there was a bare possibility of mistake, and he was very cautious. He tiptoed towards the bed and listened. There was no sound of breathing from the bed. Through the curtains, where they parted, he could see the bed dimly, and the form of a sleeper in it. But there was not the faintest sound of breathing, and he knew that it was only a dummy under the bedclothes.

"Carthew!" he whispered.

There was no sound. Then he groped over the pillow, and, as he expected, found no head there. The pillows and bolster were arranged under the bedclothes to give the appearance of a sleeper. It was a precaution always taken by the black sheep of the Sixth on such occasions. Conroy chuckled softly, and crossed to the window. It was closed but unfastened. Conroy fastened the catch.

Then he left the study, and returned to the dormitory as silently as he had left it. Van Ryn and Pons were awaiting him anxiously.

"All serene!" whispered Conroy. "Up with you!"

The three juniors dressed quietly. The night was cold, and they had to remain up a considerable time. They were in Carthew's study ten minutes later, with the door closed, and their eyes on the window.

How long they had to wait they did not

know; it depended on the hour at which the festive party at the Bird-in-Hand broke up. Twelve o'clock passed—half-past twelve. Outside the moon glimmered on the quadrangle of Rookwood, and faint light stole in at the window.

It was close upon one o'clock, and the three watchers were nodding drowsily, when shadows fell upon the moonlit window.

Conroy started, and nudged his companions.

"Look out!"

"What-ho!" whispered Pons.

And Van Ryn chuckled silently. The hour had come!

A hand groped over the window outside. From within the dark study the three juniors could make out the figures of Mornington and Carthew, in coats and caps. They were evidently puzzled and alarmed at finding that the window would not open.

They had returned quite unsuspiciously from the Bird-in-Hand party, expecting to enter as they had left. Carthew had only to get into the study. Mornington had to

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2

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pass through it, and creep upstairs, with his boots in his hand—a curious way for a junior to come home at night, but nothing new to Morny. But that simple programme could not be carried out, for the window did not open.

There was a faint muttering of voices outside:

"It won't open! What the thunder's the matter with it?"

"By gad, we've got to get in somehow!"

The Colonial Co. chuckled softly.

Conroy stepped to the window, and there was a gasp outside as the roysterers saw his shadow on the glass. The junior slipped back the catch, and opened the window at the top. Standing on a chair he looked out. Carthew looked up at him, with a face white as a sheet. Exposure, expulsion, and ruin were staring the rascally prefect in the face, and he realised it.

"Who—who—who's that?" stammered Carthew faintly.

"Don't you know me, dear boy?"

"Conroy!"

"We're all here!" grinned Van Ryn, over the window. "What a happy meeting, Carthew!"

"Enjoyed your little walk?" chuckled Pons.

Carthew ground his teeth with rage.

"Open that window!" he muttered thickly.

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"You're not goin' to keep me out, you chaps!" muttered Mornington, in shrill tones of alarm. "Don't be rotten sneaks!"

"Who's keeping you out?" said Conroy. "Get in! You can climb in over the window if you're spry!"

Mornington hesitated a moment, and then he climbed to the window-sill. Conroy gave him a hand, and he clambered in over the lower sash. Van Ryn and Pons received him, and they did not let go when he was safe in the study. They held his arms tight.

"Let go!" muttered Mornington.

He dared not speak aloud.

"Not yet, my pippin!" said Conroy coolly. "Take him to the dorm, Pong, and see that he doesn't leave it again!"

"Right-ho!" grinned the Canadian.

"What about Carthew?" muttered Mornington.

"Never mind Carthew! That's our business!"

"Look here, Conroy——"

"Shut up! Take him away, Pons!"

In the sturdy grip of the Canadian junior Mornington was led to the door. He went unresisting. He dared not make a sound lest Bulkeley should awaken in the next study.

As a matter of fact, the blackguard of the Fourth was only too glad to escape the danger himself, without troubling his head about Carthew. The two juniors left the study silently, Pons closing the door.

Carthew had climbed on the window-sill, expecting to climb in after Mornington. To his rage and alarm, the window was pushed up. He held on to the sash with his hands, standing on the sill; and Conroy, standing on the chair inside, looked him in the face through the narrow aperture, with a quiet smile.

CHAPTER 32.

Brought to Terms!

CARTHEW breathed hard, choked back his rage.

He could not guess what the junior intended, but he knew what he deserved at the hands of the chums he had persecuted with tireless malice.

He was at their mercy.

There was no door or window unfastened at night in the school save only his own window. And there he could not enter. It was in the power of the juniors to keep him out all night if they chose. That meant inevitable discovery of his shady rascality. He could only get in by waking the House. And how was he to explain how he came out of doors at one o'clock in the morning, in coat and muffler, with the mud of Coombe Lane on his boots?

There was no falsehood, no humbug that would serve his turn! It would be complete exposure, and he knew what would follow—a terrible interview with the Head and the sentence of expulsion from the school with every circumstance of disgrace and ignominy. His head turned almost giddy as he thought of it.

Conroy knew the thoughts that were in the prefect's mind as they looked at each other in dead silence over the sash of the

window. Carthew broke the silence at last. huskily.

"Will you let me in?" he muttered huskily.

"No fear!"

"For—for mercy's sake, Conroy!" muttered Carthew, throwing all dignity to the winds. "You know what it means to me."

"Exactly!"

"You—you don't want to see me sacked!" muttered Carthew, licking his dry lips.

"Why not?" smiled Conroy. "It would be a bit easier for us after you were gone, wouldn't it?"

Carthew panted.

"I—I'm sorry I—I've been rather rough on you!" he stammered. "I—I never really meant to—"

"Liar!"

Carthew choked.

"You're a rotten bully, and a low black-guard!" said Conroy cheerfully. "You're a disgrace to the school, and you ought to be kicked out of Rookwood, and you know it!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Van Ryn.

Carthew mumbled indistinctly. He did not dare to give utterance to the furious words that rose to his lips. Even now, he was in terror lest Conroy's whispering voice should be heard by other ears. It was the fact that Conroy whispered that gave him a lingering hope. If the junior had intended to betray him he would not have subdued his voice.

"Let me in, there's a good chap!" muttered Carthew. "I—I'll let you alone in future! I—I swear it! I—I beg your pardon, Conroy!"

"How are the mighty fallen!" chuckled Van Ryn.

"You're a rotten funk as well as a shady cad!" remarked Conroy. "Why, even Morny wouldn't show the white feather like that, Carthew!"

"Will you let me in?"

"On conditions—yes."

"I—I'll agree to anything! If you want money—"

"Oh, shut up! Do you think I want to touch your dirty money?" growled Conroy. "I'll let you in, on condition that you leave my study alone in future, and behave yourself!"

"I—I will! I promise!"

Conroy laughed softly.

"I'd as soon take Tubby Muffin's promise

as yours!" he said contemptuously. "You'll put it down in black and white!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Here's a pencil and a sheet of paper," said Conroy calmly. "You can write it on this book. Here you are!"

"What do you mean?" hissed Carthew.

"You'll write as I dictate! And if you try to alter your usual fist in any way, I shall fasten the window and leave you out!"

"I—I—"

"Are you ready?"

"Yes," panted Carthew. He took the book, the pencil, and the paper, over the top of the window-sash. "What do you want me to write?"

"In consideration of being let into the school, after returning home from the Bird-in-Hand at one o'clock in the morning—"

"I won't write that!" breathed Carthew.

"You'll stay out all night if you don't!" said Conroy grimly.

Carthew panted.

"You young fool! Such a paper would be enough to get me expelled, if anybody saw it!"

"That's what I want!"

"What!"

"I shall keep that paper," explained Conroy. "So long as you behave yourself it will be safe in a secret place, and I'll give it back to you at the end of the term. So long as you keep the conditions that paper won't be seen. Break your word, and the paper goes to the Head! See? Begin. bullying again, and I'll pin it up on the wall of the senior Common-room!"

"You—you young villain!" groaned Carthew. "I won't write it!"

"Lend me a hand with this window, Van Ryn!"

"Hold on! I—I'll write it!" panted Carthew.

"I thought you would."

"You—you promise to keep it dark?" asked Carthew, in a voice stifled between fear and fury.

"I've said so—so long as you play the game, and it's yours again at the end of the term. You know you can take my word, just as I know that I can't take yours!"

Carthew did know that. But he still hesitated, and the two juniors began to push up the sash. That decided Carthew.

Any risk was better than the absolute certainty of discovery and expulsion.

"Hold on! I—I'll do it!" he stuttered. "It's your last chance!" said Conroy. "Now then, as I dictate! 'In consideration of being let into the school, after returning from the Bird-in-Hand, at one o'clock in the morning, I promise not to behave like a cad and a rotten bully for the rest of the term. Signed, Mark Carthew.' And write it in your ordinary hand. We shall examine it before we let you in."

There was no help for it. Carthew rested the paper on the book, and wrote as ordered, without any attempt to disguise his hand. He was trembling with rage as he passed the paper in to Conroy. "Wait while I look at it," said the Australian coolly.

He stepped back, Van Ryn taking his place on guard at the window. Behind the bed-curtains Conroy struck a match, and examined the paper carefully. He was quite satisfied with it, and he put it into his pocket.

"All serene?" asked Van Ryn.

"All serene! Come on! You can get in, Carthew!"

The two juniors left the study at once. Carthew forced up the sash, and opened the window and clambered in, white with rage. But the two juniors were gone before he was in the study. If the prefect had thought of making a desperate attempt to regain the tell-tale paper, it was too late.

Conroy and Van Ryn returned to the Fourth-Form dormitory. They found Pons and Mornington awake.

"All right?" asked Pons.

"Right as rain!"

"Good egg!"

"Where's Carthew?" asked Mornington. "Gone to bed, I imagine," yawned Conroy. "I'm going, too."

"You'll get it in the neck for this in the morning," muttered the dandy of the Fourth.

"I hardly think so!" chuckled Van Ryn.

"You fool! Carthew will skin you for scaring him like that!"

"Wait and see!"

And the Colonial Co. went to bed in a satisfied frame of mind, feeling that they had fairly earned what remained of their night's rest.

CHAPTER 33.

All Serene!

CONROY & CO. turned out rather sleepily at the clang of the rising-bell in the morning. They were sleepy but cheerful.

Mornington eyed them sourly. He was looking forward with pleasure to the high old time they were to enjoy at Carthew's hands. He had no doubt whatever that the bully of the Sixth would find a very early excuse for punishing the three. Morny was unaware of the pledge that was safe in Conroy's keeping.

"You fellows look like boiled oysters," Jimmy Silver remarked. "Didn't you sleep well?"

"Well, we were awake a good time," said Van Ryn, smiling.

"Did you go out on the razzle with Morny?" sniggered Tubby Muffin.

"Exactly. We enjoyed the razzle more than Morny did—didn't we, Morny?"

Mornington sniffed, and did not answer.

"What have you been up to?" asked Lovell, puzzled.

"Snuff!" said Conroy cheerily.

The Colonial Co. were smiling merrily as they came down with the Class of the Fourth. They were in very good spirits that morning.

Carthew met the juniors in the lower passage. Mornington's eyes gleamed. He expected the bully of the Sixth to "begin" at once.

But Carthew didn't begin. He only gave the Colonial Co. a black scowl, and turned away.

Mornington hurried after him as the juniors streamed out into the quad.

"Carthew!" he exclaimed.

Carthew scowled at him.

"Aren't you going to give those rotters something for the trouble they gave us last night?" muttered Mornington.

"No!" growled Carthew.

"You're going to take it lying down?" ejaculated Mornington, in blank astonishment.

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

Carthew strode away, leaving Mornington rooted to the floor with amazement. The prefect was evidently not in a forgiving mood. Yet apparently he intended

to let the matter drop. Morny simply couldn't understand it.

Some of the Fourth noticed that the Colonial Co. were very cheery that day. They seemed to be enjoying some little joke known only to themselves. Whatever it was, they did not confide it to their Form-fellow.

"Done your lines?" Jimmy Silver asked, as he met Study No. 3 after tea.

Conroy shook his head.

"You'll have Carthew down on you," said Jimmy rather anxiously. "No good getting reported to Bootles, you know."

"I don't think Carthew will report us."

"He jolly will!" said Lovell. "You're playing into Carthew's hands. Here he comes!"

The Colonial Co. turned smiling faces on Carthew & the Sixth. Carthew didn't smile. He scowled blackly.

"Hallo, old son!" said Conroy.

The prefect halted. His eyes were burning. Jimmy Silver & Co. could see that he was quivering with rage, but he was putting a restraint on himself that astounded them.

"Feel all right to-day, dear boy?" said Conroy.

"Yes," muttered Carthew thickly.

"By the way, you gave us some lines yesterday," remarked Conroy.

"D-d-did I?"

"Don't you remember?" said Conroy sweetly. "You told us they would be doubled if they weren't handed in by tea-time to-day. We're not going to do those lines, Carthew."

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

He expected an explosion. But the explosion did not come. Carthew clenched

his hands for a moment, but he unclenched them again, and nodded.

"All right!" he muttered.

"We're not going to do any more lines for you, Carthew," continued Van Ryn. "We've decided to have nothing further to do with you. We don't like bullies!"

"By gad!" muttered Mornington, who was looking on blankly. Morny wondered whether he was dreaming.

Carthew's face was a study. He seemed unable to speak.

"My advice to you, Carthew, is to give up bullying, and try to be a decent chap," added Conroy. "Understand?"

"Yes!" gasped Carthew.

And he walked away hurriedly.

Jimmy Silver grasped Conroy by the shoulder, and shook him.

"How did you do it?" he yelled.

"What's come over Carthew? How have you wangled it, a grinning fathead?"

"Don't be inquisitive, dear boy. The fact is, Carth. isn't up to the weight of Study No. 3," said Conroy calmly. "Come on, you chaps! It's still light enough to kick a ball about!"

And the Colonial Co. went off smiling.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were astounded. So were the rest of the Classical Fourth, when they found that the persecution of Study No. 3 had entirely ceased, and that the bully of the Sixth was quite civil whenever he came into contact with the cheery trio. But they puzzled over it in vain. Conroy & Co. kept the secret, as in honour bound. And their troubles with Carthew were at an end. The bully of the Sixth had made the painful discovery that he was not up to the weight of the Colonial Co.



LIONS AT SCHOOL!

To capture a lion, send him to school, and have him taught tricks—there's an ambition for you! Of course everyone's taste does not lie that way, but in this sort of adventure there is a grand and thrilling "living" for hunters, tammers, and the man who finally puts the mighty African beasts through their paces at the circus.

The showman may bring his performance to a grand and breathless climax by placing his head in the mouth of one of his pets; then, indeed, is his the greatest adventure of them all. Beside that sort of trick the lion-hunter's job is a walk-over! But before the head-in-mouth business is possible lots of very touchy work must be performed.

First, of course, the lion must be caught.

RUNNING A LION FARM.

You can't go after a lion with a gun if you want to sell him whole. The usual scheme is to dig a deep pit, place something tasty at the bottom, and hope for a lion to jump in after the feed and then fail to jump out again. Then comes the rope-play, for a lion in a pit isn't exactly safe unless its legs are tied up securely!

The most up-to-date method, however, involves the use of a great iron trap, which springs shut when the bait is moved. The favourite-bait is a dead goat—which may attract other eyes than a lion's. One such trap was set for a big beast, who, in the days when the Uganda Railway was being constructed, had hauled a man head first out of one of the carriages, and calmly loped off into the jungle to finish his feast. It was not long before the trap was sprung. But there was no lion inside it—just a couple of natives who had tried to steal the goat-bait!

That is just one little item the lion-hunter is up against. To cut out such unpleasing incidents, and to save time, certain enterprising spirits have started lion farms, where animals are bred specially for circuses and cinema purposes. There is one near Los Angeles, where nearly all the lions that perform for the "flickers" at Hollywood are "grown."

THE LION SCHOLARS.

The actual training is done in a soft-hearted school, where the whip is unknown. Anyone who tried to tame a lion with a whip would last about ten minutes. Kindness and patience, plus nice, juicy bits of raw meat by way of reward, combine to do the trick.

The lion is most manageable, from the schooling point of view, when about fifteen months old, and school lasts about three hours per day. As soon as the scholars have each learned their own name, and have come to regard the teacher as He Who Must Be Obeyed, tricks are started. You train a dog to beg by tempting him with a tit-bit placed just out of his reach; you would have to do exactly the same with a lion.

Raw meat, not a lump of sugar, is the reward for learning. But only very small bits at a time, and those not very often. The real fun comes after school. The lion-scholar makes much of that, for he is allowed only one nap per day, for health's sake. It is for reasons of health, too, that the lions on the Los Angeles farm are not in cages. They have a enormous enclosure in which they are free to roam and stretch their limbs at will, and snug shelters into which to retire when the fancy takes them.

LIONS FOR THE "FLICKERS."

It is in these shelters that many a young lion first sees the light of day. He will know nothing of African forest or jungle, but will go straight to a purchaser when his school days are at an end. The youngster would have just one big adventure, and then finish, if left with his mother. She would probably eat him, so he has to be taken away and raised on the bottle. Goats' milk three times a day, then fresh milk working up gradually to the grown-up feed of raw meat.

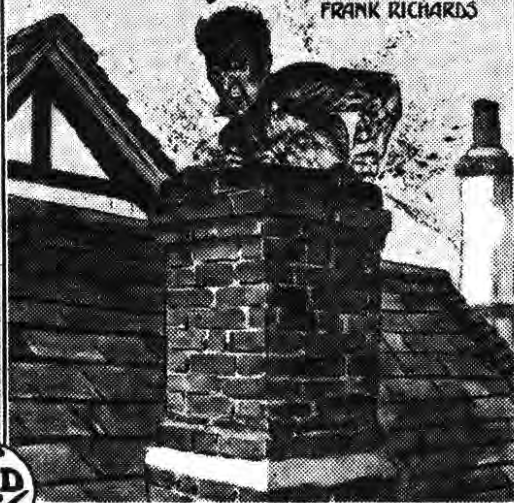
A long and risky business, this rearing of young lions. But the result is worth while. Film studios gladly have them on hire, whilst to a baby lion outright would cost you at least \$50, and a full-grown "roarer," tipping the scales at something over 5 cwt., would run you in several thousands of pounds.

How fond a lion may become of its tamer was shown by one which was owned by a famous amateur zoo-keeper in England. The lion died of a broken heart when its master enlisted to serve in the War. Like a dog whose master has disappeared, it refused the dainty morsels of raw meat, and after a few days it ended came. And that beast was of the same blood as the man-eater who hauled its dinner head first through the window of the railway carriage in Uganda!

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