

The Fighting Form-Master!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



THE **SCHOOLBOYS' OWN**
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"Leading Lights" in Boys' Fiction!

Meet them

EVERY WEEK —



THE
BIG KID



JIMMY
SILVER



FERRIS
LOCKE



BILLY
DUNTER



ARTHUR
AUGUSTUS
DARCY



IN

The POPULAR

THE PAPER WITH COMPLETE STORIES
OF SCHOOL, WILD-WEST & DETECTIVE
ADVENTURE.

THE FIGHTING FORM-MASTER!



OWEN CONQUEST.

A Powerful Long Complete Story of the Chums of Rookwood, dealing with the Arrival of DICKY DALTON, the Fighting Form-Master.

CHAPTER I.

Jimmy Silver Has an Idea.

"His name is Cutts," remarked Jimmy Silver.

And Arthur Edward Lovell remarked sagely:

"Lads' hope he won't live up to it!"

The Fistic Four of the Fourth were standing in a group in the Rookwood quadrangle, discussing a rather important topic.

For the moment the Rookwood Fourth was without a master.

Mr. Dootles, who had been their master for so long, had retired, and Mr. Cutts, the newly-appointed master of the Fourth, had not yet arrived.

His arrival had been delayed a few days, and probably nobody in the Rookwood Fourth would have been disappointed if it had been delayed a few weeks. The Fourth Form—in their own opinion, at least—could have got on very well for a few weeks without a Form-master. If lessons had been

stopped, they would have been quite willing to take it out in football. They had heard that Mr. Cutts, at the last moment, had caught a cold, and even the tender-hearted Jimmy Silver hardly wished him a prompt recovery, while Tabby Mullin had been heard to express a charitable hope that it might turn to pneumonia!

But Mr. Cutts had evidently recovered from his cold, for his coming was announced for that Wednesday afternoon, and Mr. Dootles had been seen off only that morning. There was to be no happy interregnum.

"Blessed if I'm specially interested," remarked George Raby.

"Same here!" said Newcome.

"He's coming this afternoon," continued Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "I've asked Bulkeley about it. He gets to Latcham at two-thirty, takes the local train for Coombe, and lands at Coombe at three-thirty. That's the programme."

Jimmy Silver's chums eyed him.

"What did you ask Bulkeley all that rot for, Jimmy?"

"Your Uncle James," said Jimmy Silver impressively, "has an idea. Your Uncle James, as you are aware, does all the thinking for this Co.—"

"Bats!"

"Your Uncle James is a big chief!" said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Look here, we don't know what sort of an animal this new man may be. He may be a good little ass like Bootles, the dear departed, or he may be a swilling turkey like old Greeley; he may even be a-cough drop like Manders. I don't want to discourage you young people—"

"Ass!"

"But he really may be anything. But whatever he is, we've got to stand him, we've got to laugh at his little jokes, and put up with his little tantrums. Well, Form-masters are only human after all. They like better just like common mortals. Suppose four nice boys walked down to the station and met Mr. Cutts, and carried his bag, and and his coat, and his umbrella, and things, and sort of extended the right hand of fellowship—"

"But—"

"Wouldn't that be liable to melt the ice round his heart, and make him love us first go off?" asked Jimmy.

"Some of the fellows would call it sucking up to him!" said Lovell, with a shake of the head.

"Some of the fellows can talk any rot they like!" retorted Jimmy Silver. "There's no law against pulling a Form-master's leg to put him in a good temper, that I know of. Besides, if he's a decent merchant we're going to like him, and we shall really want to make him feel at home. I think this is a jolly good stunt. The ground's too jolly wet for footer, and we've got nothing special to do so why not do the polite thing?"

"Well, putting it like that—" said Lovell thoughtfully.

"Oh, any old thing!" said Baby. "There's nothing on, and we may as well mooch down to Coombe as lounge about the quad."

"I don't mind!" yawned Newcome.

Uncle James of Hookwood nodded with satisfaction. He really thought he had hit on a good idea for killing a damp afternoon. Of course, he wasn't going to explain to Mr. Cutts that they were doing the polite thing because there was nothing else

on. That would have spoiled the effect. Mr. Cutts was going to see, at once, what nice, polite boys there were in the Fourth Form at Hookwood, and he was bound to be pleased.

Having come to this decision, the Fistical Four turned away to walk down to the gates, and at that moment three mocking voices chimed in upon their meditations. Three modern juniors had been standing near at hand, screened by one of the big old beeches, and plainly they had heard every word of the discussion. And Tommy Cook, Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle spoke all together.

"Yeh! Sucking up to a Form-master! Classical cads! Yeh!"

The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth hurried that taunt at the Fistical Four in unison.

Jimmy Silver halted.

"There's a lot of time to get to Coombe," he remarked. "Let's wipe up the quad with these Modern rotters before we start."

"Hear, hear!" said Lovell heartily.

"Classical cads!" roared Tommy Dodd, as the Fistical Four charged.

"Modern worms! Mop 'em up!"

Three juniors went spinning from the charge of four.

The three Tommies were strewn under the beeches on the damp earth, roaring. Then the Fistical Four walked on to the gates again, feeling that they had done their duty, and done it well.

Tommy Dodd scrambled up, and folded his cap.

"The cheeky rotters! After them!" he shouted.

"Wow!" said Doyle.

"Ow!" said Cook.

"Back up!" yelled Dodd.

"Oh, rats!" grumbled Doyle. "Look at me nose!"

"Wow-wow!" said Tommy Cook.

There was no pursuit after all. Jimmy Silver and Co. swung out at the gates, and strolled away cheerily towards Coombe. The three Tommies attended to the necessary repairs after the brief but exciting combat. Tommy Doyle was still mopping his nose, when a voice hailed the juniors from a window. They spun round. In their brief combat with the four Classics they had been in full view of the Head's study, and there was Dr. Chisholm himself looking at them from the open window.

"Oh cumber!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "Now for a row! He saw us."

But the next moment his uneasiness was relieved. The Head was not frowning; he did not look wrathful. Evidently he had come to the window after the combat was over.

He raised his hand and beckoned to Tommy Dodd quite amicably. The leader of the Modern Fourth ran up at once.

"Dodd!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Please go to the garage and tell Thompson that the car will not be needed to go to the station."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Cutts has telephoned from Latcham that he lost the connection there, and he will not reach Connaught Station till half-past four. Kindly tell Thompson so, and inform him that the car will be required at the station at four-thirty."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Thank you, Dodd!"

Tommy Dodd returned to his chums with a grinning face.

CHAPTER 2.

So Has Tommy Dodd!

"H A, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies waited till they were a safe distance from the Head's window before they chuckled.

Then they chuckled loud and long.

The Classical chums had gone to Coornie to meet Mr. Cutts' train, and Mr. Cutts was not coming after all! He was coming by the next "local" from Latcham, which was an hour later.

"Serve 'em jolly well right, bodad!" grinned Tommy Doyle. "Suckin' up to a baste of a Form-master!"

"They can cool their heels at the station!" chuckled Cook. "They'll wait for the next train—"

"And then the car will come for Cutts!" roared Tommy Dodd. "There won't be room for Classical fags in the car! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear old Jimmy doesn't know the car was going—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just like Jimmy!" said Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "Always putting his Classical hoof in it. Fancy his face when the giddy

train comes in, and no giddy Form-master in it to be polite to! By Jove!" Tommy Dodd's eyes danced. "I wonder—Ha, ha, ha!" He burst into a roar.

"Phwat's biting you now?" demanded Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd ecstatically.

Evidently some new and brilliant thought had shot into the brain of Master Thomas Dodd of the Modern Fourth.

"What is it?" demanded Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, bump it out of him!"

Cook and Doyle grasped Tommy Dodd together, and Tommy's head came into contact with the garage wall.

"Crack!"

"Yoop!" roared Tommy Dodd. "You silly owls, paws off! Owl! My napper."

"Wall, explain then, ass!"

"Owl!" Tommy jerked himself away, and rubbed his head. "Hands off, you chumps! Ain't I just going to explain? Look here, we're going to pull their Classical leg!"

"There he goes again!" exclaimed Cook, in great exasperation. "Bump him!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd hastily. "Wait till I've given my message to Thompson, and I'll tell you."

Tommy Dodd ran into the garage, with the message from the Head to the chauffeur. He came out again grinning.

"Now lend me your earlows," he said impressively. "Those Classical asses will be waiting for the three-thirty train, expecting a giddy Form-master by it—a man they've never seen."

"Of course they've never seen him, ass, as he's never been to Rookwood. What are you getting at?"

"Suppose another man came—"

"Eh?"

"Calling himself Cutts, they'd never be the wiser—"

"You owl!" roared Cook. "Why the merry dickens should another man come along calling himself Cutts!"

Tommy Dodd tapped himself on the chest.

"Little me!" he said.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Jimmy Silver thinks the Classical Players are no end big guns at theatricals," said Tommy Dodd, "but we know the Modern

Dramatic Society beats them hollow, don't you?"

"Yes, but——"

Tommy glanced at his watch.

"The train from Letcham passes through Rookham," he said. "I could get to Rookham on my bike, and get into it there, and arrive at Coombe just as if I'd come from Letcham Junction. There's lots of time, if we put on a bit of speed on the bikes."

"But, what——"

"The costumer's at Rookham that we always deal with," continued Tommy Dodd. "We can hire the things, and Judson will help me make-up. We'll tell him it's a lark, of course. He's helped us before. In a big coat and boots, and whiskers, and specs, and a felt hat, I'll make a Form-master all right. I'm nearly as tall as old Bootles was, anyway. I don't say I'd face the Head——"

"My hat! I should say not."

"But I'd face any number of Classical duffers—if it came out, there's no harm done," said Tommy Dodd. "But it won't come out. I shall just feel these, and pull their leg, and put them through it."

"But——"

"No time for butting now," said Tommy Dodd briskly. "Get out the bikes sharp! You can do your butting on the way to Rookham."

"But——" gasped Doyle.

"Come on!" roared Tommy Dodd.

He led the way at a run to the bike-shed. His comrades, in a state of breathless astonishment and uncertainty, followed him.

Cook and Doyle were smitten by doubts—many doubts. But Tommy Dodd had his way—as he usually did.

In a few minutes the three Moderns were in the saddle, and pedalling away for Rookham as fast as wheels could revolve.

By road and lane and short cut they fairly flew.

The three Tommies were good cyclists, but never had they covered the ride from Rookwood to the market town in such record time.

They were flushed and gasping when they jumped off their machines, at last, outside Mr. Judson's shop in Rookham High Street.

Mr. Judson was a barber—or, rather, hairdresser, wig-maker, costumer, and several other things. He did costumes for the Rookham Theatre Royal, and also for

the amateur theatrical society at Rookwood School. Tommy Dodd & Co. were good customers, and worthy of Mr. Judson's best consideration. Leaving their machines against the shop-front, they rushed in.

Mr. Judson was astonished at first, but he was amenable to reason. In five minutes the three chums were in Mr. Judson's private room, and Mr. Judson was at work on Tommy Dodd—his chums watching him with grinning faces.

When Tommy Dodd was finished, the metamorphosis was amazing.

He looked taller, with elevators in large boots; he looked considerably fatter, in a well-padded coat, with an overcoat outside it. A short beard and moustache, and a few touches of make-up, changed his face remarkably. A pair of spectacles added to the effect. A thick grayish wig covered his short, dark hair, and it was crowned by a "Daily Mail" hat.

Cook and Doyle simply gasped as they looked at him.

Tommy Dodd looked like a respectable gentleman of fifty or so—rather short and stumpy for his age, perhaps.

"Dodd, and is it really you, now, Tommy?" gasped Doyle.

"Blessed if I'd know you, kid!" said Cook, in quite an awed voice.

"Boys," said Tommy Dodd, in a deep, stern voice that made his comrades jump, "kindly cease these—or—personal remarks. What are you—or—doing here? Go back to Rookwood at once, and take a hundred lines each."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Judson grinned.

"You going out like that, sir?" he asked.

"You bet!" answered Tommy Dodd.

"You fellows get my clothes and the bikes back to Rookwood. I'll change again in the spinner, near the school, after we've japed these Classical chumps. Now I'm off!"

Tommy Dodd coolly walked through the door into the street.

There were two or three customers in the shop, but they did not glance specially at Tommy Dodd. Evidently his disguise passed muster.

He breathed rather quickly as he came out into Rookham High Street, however.

But again he passed muster quite well; the passers-by did not give him a second glance. There was nothing in that middle-

aged-looking gentleman to attract special attention. Tommy Dodd tucked his umbrella under his arm, and walked away quickly to the station.

He had done well; there was ten minutes to wait for the train from Letcham. Tommy Dodd sat on a seat and waited. And when the train came in, he took a seat in it with perfect coolness.

In his carriage were three or four other passengers, and they did not give him any special attention. And when the train ran into Coombe, at last, and Tommy Dodd, from the window, spotted four youthful figures in Etons waiting on the platform, he chuckled under his beard.

CHAPTER 3.

The New Master!

ARTHUR Edward Lovell detached himself from an automatic machine on the platform in Coombe station and yawned.

"Here's the train!"

"Now for the merry Cutts," said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistful Four lined up on the platform to watch the alighting passengers, and pick out the new Form-master.

The gentleman was a stranger to them, of course; but they had no doubt of picking him out. In fact, by a process of deduction, as they say in detective stories, the chums of the Fourth very quickly arrived at the only person who could possibly be Mr. Cutts. A dozen passengers alighted from the train; but half of these were young persons. Of the rest, four were farmers, one a lady. Evidently none of these could be Mr. Christopher Cutts.

The remaining passenger was a somewhat stumpy gentleman in a hard hat, a thick overcoat, an umbrella, and beard and moustaches. He looked a very quiet and respectable middle-aged gentleman as he blinked about him over a large pair of spectacles, for he did not look through the lenses.

"That must be the Johnnie!" said Baby.

"Bit of an old coker," remarked Newcome, "but he looks harmless enough."

"Quite tame!" grinned Lovell.

"That's the merchant!" said Jimmy

Silver. "Must be! But we'll ask him, anyhow."

And Jimmy Silver and Co. crossed the platform towards the gentleman in the Sandringham hat and raised their caps very politely.

He blinked at them.

"Mr. Cutts?" asked Jimmy.

"Ah, you belong to Rookwood, my boy?" asked the spectacled gentleman in a rather high-pitched voice, blinking at a great rate over his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Yes, sir. We've come to meet you," said Jimmy.

"Indeed! Did Dr. Chisholme instruct you—"

"Nunno, sir. We just came on our own," said Jimmy Silver.

"You did what?" exclaimed Mr. Cutts.—If it was Mr. Cutts—sharply.

"We came down on our own, sir," repeated Jimmy, rather taken aback.

"You shouldn't use such an expression, my boy!" said the master. "You doubtless mean that you came of your own volition!"

"Yes, sir."

"Then say that you came of your own volition, or of your own accord, not that you came on your own!" said the new master severely.

"Oh! Ah! Yessir!" stammered Jimmy.

The new master was losing no time in calling his pupils to order.

"Tabber slang!" said Mr. Cutts.

"D-d-d-yoo, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"S-sorry, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "We—we came of our own volition, sir, to—to—to welcome you to Rookwood, sir."

"Thank you very much, my little fellow!" Jimmy Silver coloured.

He was not exactly a little fellow, if it came to that. He was a rather sturdy fellow. Still, perhaps from the pinnacle of the enormous age of fifty, he seemed a little fellow to Mr. Cutts. But the chief of it was that Mr. Cutts was scarcely taller than Jimmy himself!

"Your name?" asked the new master.

"Silver, sir!"

"Silver? Absurd!"

"Wh-a-!"

"That is the name of a metal. Please do not make practical jokes with me, boy! What is your name?"

"It—it's really Silver, sir!" said Jimmy.

Lovell & Co. grinned.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Cutts. "Is it possible that Silver is a name?"

"Certainly it is!" said Jimmy, rather resentfully. Jimmy's own opinion was that Silver, even if uncommon, was at least as good as Cutts.

"And your name, my boy?"

"Lovell, sir!" said Arthur Edward, with satisfaction. There was no fault to be found with that very nice name, anyhow. "These chaps are Raby and Newcome, sir!"

"Are you in my Form—the Fourth Form?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very good. I am very much obliged to you for cutting hair, my boys. You might have put on clean collars. However, I shall soon see that you keep up a more neat and tidy appearance."

"Oh!"

Mr. Cutts' strictures were quite uncalled-for. If he wasn't satisfied with the Fistical Four, they wondered what he would think of Tabby Muffin.

"Shall I carry your umbrella, sir?" asked Raby meekly.

"Thank you, no!"

"Your—your luggage, sir—"

"Never mind that now. Kindly show me the way out of the station."

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not think much of their new Form-master, so far. They led the way to the exit, exchanging surreptitious glances. Mr. Cutts followed them, and was careful that they should not see his ticket as he handed it to the porter.

At the station door he paused to blink round him. Jimmy Silver & Co. moved off a few paces, and Raby made a thrilling communication in a whisper.

"I say, you chaps, he wears a wig!"

"What?" murmured Lovell.

"I'm sure of it!" breathed Raby. "Swear to it!"

"By Jove!"

"If he cuts up rusty we'll have no end of fun with him!" Raby breathed delightedly. "What about jerking it off with a fish-hook some time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silver!" exclaimed Mr. Cutts. He drew Jimmy's attention with a lunge of his

umbrella, which caught the captain of the Fourth in the ribs.

"Yarrah!" roared Jimmy, taken by surprise.

"Silver! For what reason are you uttering that ridiculous and ill-mannered ejaculation?" exclaimed Mr. Cutts.

"Ow. You hurt my ribs, sir!"

"Nonsense!"

"Ow!"

"Silence, Silver! I can see that you are a bad boy!" said the new master sternly.

"Now attend to me."

"Ow! Yes, sir."

"Has not the Head sent a car to meet me?"

"I—I suppose not, sir," said Jimmy, staring up and down the street. There certainly was no sign of the Head's car.

"Absurd! How does the Head think I am going to Rockwood?" exclaimed the new master.

"There's the hack, sir!" ventured Lovell.

After what they had seen of the new master the Fistical Four would have been quite pleased to see him seat himself in the station cab and roll away, leaving them to their own devices. But Mr. Cutts was not done with them yet—not by any means!

"Ah, the hack!" said the new master. "Very good! Ask the driver how much he will charge to drive us to Rockwood!"

"Us!" repeated Jimmy, in dismay.

"You are coming with me."

Now, if Mr. Cutts had turned out a nice gentleman, like the beloved and regretted Mr. Bootles, Jimmy Silver & Co. would have been delighted to accompany him to the school. But he hadn't! Jimmy was still feeling that poke in the ribs from the umbrella. He did not want to risk another. So he stammered apologetically:

"We—we're not going back just yet, sir, if—if you don't mind—"

"Nonsense!"

"It's a half-holiday, sir!" ventured Lovell.

"Are you arguing with me, Shovel?"

"Nunno, sir! And—and my name's Lovell, not Shovel," said Arthur Edward rather warily.

"Get into the hack at once!"

"Oh, dear!"

The ancient driver of the station cab alighted from his seat and opened the door. The Fistical Four, with dismayed looks, crowded in. Raby was the last, and he

gave a sudden yell as Mr. Cutts lunged into his back with the umbrella.

"Yowp!"

"Silence, boy! Get in!"

Raby fairly jumped in, scrambling over his comrades' legs. Mr. Cutts followed them in.

"Make room for me!" he snapped. "Whose foot is that?" He jabbed down with the umbrella.

"Yarbooh!"

"Whose leg is that?" Another jab.

"Oh, crikey!"

"How dare you yell in that manner in your Form-master's presence! Be silent at once! Driver, you may proceed."

The driver clambered back to his box, with a grin, and proceeded. Crowded in the back, as far as they could get from Mr. Cutts, Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged disgruntled looks. And Lovell, Raby, and Newcome glared at Jimmy, with glares that were almost warranted to kill at forty yards. It was Uncle James who had landed them into this—Uncle James, with his potty stunts about meeting Form-masters at stations! But for the august presence of Mr. Cutts, Uncle James of Rookwood would probably have been rolled just then in the bottom of the back, and three pairs of boots would have been wiped on him.

CHAPTER 4.

Going Through It!

THERE was silence in the back as it tumbled on to Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were thinking of this new obnoxious master, and the ructions there would be at Rookwood if he kept on as he had started.

The new master was thinking, too, and his thoughts would have amazed the Fistical Four if they could have guessed them! For the new master was thinking whether he could venture as far as Rookwood in his present guise and he was making-up his mind to do so. The spirit of adventure was strong upon Master Tommy Dodd, and he had been so successful so far that he was throwing prudence to the winds. There were other Classics to be "spoofed" as well as the Fistical Four!

So the back rolled on to the gates of the school, and overtook two juniors who were

riding bikes, one of them wheeling a third bike, and the other carrying a bundle. They were Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, and they stared blankly at the back, with the new master sitting in it. As soon as it had passed them, they chuckled breathlessly.

"Stop!" rapped out Mr. Cutts, at the gates.

The new master alighted, followed by the juniors, and walked into the quad.

He glanced towards the School House, and the spirit of mischief prompted him to enter there but he refrained. A meeting with the Head, or with Mr. Greely, was rather too much risk even for Master Dodd. He turned towards the archway that led into the Little Quad.

"Follow me!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir! That—that isn't the way in—"

"Silence!"

The Fistical Four followed the new master into Little Quad. They were asking themselves now whether Mr. Christopher Cutts was quite in his right mind.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Kindly all together all the Classical members of the Fourth Form, and bring them here. I prefer to examine them in the open air."

"Oh, dear!"

"What are you whispering about, Silver!"

"N-o-o-thing, sir."

"Then do at once as I bid you."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" gasped Jimmy helplessly.

He hurried away, leaving his chums with Mr. Cutts. Mr. Cutts eyed Lovell & Co. morosely.

"I can see that you are accustomed to slacking about," he said severely.

"Really, sir—"

"I shall soon change all that! You will find that I am not to be trifled with. Can you run?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then let me see you do so. Run from the archway to the library and back. Keep it up till I tell you to stop."

"Oh, my hat!"

Form-masters' commands, however extraordinary, had to be obeyed. Lovell & Co. trotted up and down Little Quad in a state of dazed amazement, while Mr. Cutts sat on a bench and watched them, frowning.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver was calling together the Classical Fourth.

Some of them were out of gates, but the greater part of the Classics were rounded up in the house or the quad. They heard of the new master's command in amazement.

"What the thump does he want us in Little Quad for?" demanded Mornington.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Blessed if I know! I believe he's off his rocker."

"Oh, gad!" said Morny.

"Must be a jolly queer fish!" said Conroy. "We'd better go, though."

And the Classics went.

Fifteen or sixteen juniors came through the arch together, and they fairly blinked at the sight of Lovell & Co. panting up and down the path.

"What on earth's that game?" ejaculated Oswald.

"Ho, ho, ho!" cackled Tubby Muffin.

"Is he potty?" breathed Patty Grace.

"Looks like it!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Cutts.

Lovell & Co. stopped willingly enough. They were getting winded.

"Boys! Are these all the boys of my Form, Silver?"

"All I could find, sir!"

"Very good! Form in ranks!" commanded Mr. Cutts. "Don't stand slacking about! I cannot stand laziness!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Now, then! Form up, there!"

The astonished juniors stood ranked before Mr. Cutts. In the distance, a number of the Shell and the Third stood staring on, grinning, and wondering what it all meant. Modern Fourth-Formers gathered round, too, but Mr. Cutts took no notice of them. All his attention was concentrated on the hapless Classics. Jimmy Silver hoped that the Head would appear in the offing; but the Head was not likely to come wandering through Little Quad.

"A more slovenly-looking set of boys I never saw in my life!" said Mr. Cutts. "Snocking! Disgraceful! My first proceeding will be to cane the lot of you!"

"Phaw!"

"My hat!"

"You first, Silver! Hold out your hand!"

"Oh, erkey" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Cutts gripped his umbrella. Evidently he was going to use it as a cane!

Jimmy Silver held out his hand; there was no help for it! Swipe!

"Ow!"

"Lovell!"

Swipe!

"Mornington!"

Swipe!

"How the thump did he know my name!" murmured Morny, as he rubbed his hand.

Mr. Cutts marched the whole length of the line, caning each junior in turn with his umbrella, and then came back along the second rank, till he had caned—or, rather, umbrella-ed—the whole crowd. The juniors squeezed their hands in dismayed silence, wondering what was coming next.

"A precious crowd!" snorted Mr. Cutts. "I am ashamed of you! Now let me see how you can run! You lead, Silver! You will run round Little Quad till I give you the word to stop! Any boy who slackes will be knocked up by my umbrella. Start!"

"Oh, gad!"

"He's mad!" breathed Lovell.

"Mad as a hatter!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

"Start!" roared Mr. Cutts.

The juniors started. In a breathless crowd, they trotted round Little Quad, amid peals of laughter from juniors of other forms, staring on at the extraordinary show.

Tubby Muffin was the first to lag; and Mr. Cutts' umbrella "touched him up" with such effect that Tubby roared, and put on a spurt.

Round and round trotted the hapless juniors with Mr. Cutts' sharp eyes blinking at them over his spectacles. In the distance the hoot of a motor-car was heard; but neither master nor pupils noted it. But suddenly Tommy Cook came bolting through the archway with a scared face. He rushed up to Mr. Cutts.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped at last, panting for breath. They realised that something had happened; though they could not hear what Tommy Cook was saying to Mr. Cutts.

What happened next seemed like a wild dream to the Classical juniors. Cook had only breathed a few words, when Mr. Cutts suddenly made a break for the archway, running as if for his life.

The Classical juniors stared after him dazedly.

Mr. Cutts pelted along as if he were on the cinder-path. He vanished through the archway almost in the twinkling of an eye!

"What on earth——"

"Cook—I say, Cook——"

But Tommy Cook was running after the puzzling new master. In utter bewilderment the Classics rushed through the archway into Big Quad.

Outside the School House the Head's car was drawn up, and a rather tall, bony-looking gentleman was descending from it.

Jimmy Silver gasped for breath.

"What—what—what does it all mean?" he stuttered. "What has Cutts bunked for? What—what—what——"

Bulkeley of the Sixth was in the quad, and Jimmy rushed across to him.

"Bulkeley! What does it mean—our

"Eh? He's just come!" said Bulkeley.

"Eh? He's just come!" said Bulkeley.

"Just came!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes—that's Mr. Cutts getting out of the car!"

Jimmy Silver fairly staggered.

That angular gentleman, just entering the School House, was Mr. Cutts! Then who was the stumpy gentleman who had ragged the Classical Fourth in Little Quad?

"It's a Modern joke!" roared Mornington suddenly. "Didn't you notice he hotted when Cook came and told him something? What he told him was that Mr. Cutts had come and——"

When the three Tommies came in at the gates they came in with smiling faces. Jimmy Silver spotted them, and rushed up to them.

But the three Tommies dodged into Mr. Manders' House; and a few moments later they waved their hands mockingly from a study window above. And a crowd of Classical fists were shaken, furiously but fruitlessly, at Master Tommy Dodd—Rookwood's amazing new master!

CHAPTER I.

The New Master of the Fourth!

"CHRISTOPHER'S late!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark, with a grin.

The Rookwood Fourth were assembled for more than five minutes. And still they were left to their own devices.

Mr. Cutts, the new master of the Fourth was not punctual.

All the Fourth were there—Classical and Modern. And they waited for Mr. Christopher Cutts to "blow in," as Jimmy Silver expressed it.

So far, the Fourth hadn't seen much of Christopher Cutts. That morning the Head had presented him for the first time—in the place of Mr. Bowdles, retired.

They had noted that he was a tall, angular gentleman, with a jaw that closed like a vice, and a very sharp, cold eye. They had found that he had a sharp way of speaking, but not a very pleasant way. But morning lessons had passed off fairly well. The new master was getting into his stride, as it were, and the Fourth had been left rather in doubt as to what they really thought of Mr. Cutts.

Tobby Maffin declared that he was a beast. No doubt that was because Tobby had been chewing toffee in class, and had had his fat knuckles rapped with a pointer in consequence. But nobody else had suffered from the pointer, so far. And Jimmy Silver & Co. generously resolved to give the new man a chance.

They had been very careful to be in the Form-room to time that afternoon.

And now they had waited over five minutes for him.

It was a surprise.

Now, according to all rules and regulations, the Rookwood Fourth should have sat quiet and sedate in their places, and waited for the arrival of their Form-master. They should not have stirred; they should not even have talked, and, certainly, they should not even have spoken humorously of their Form-master by the name of Christopher.

If they had felt bored with waiting, they could have done mental arithmetic to pass the time, or could have allowed their thoughts to dwell upon irregular verbs. The Classical portion of the Form could have let their minds linger lovingly on Greek declensions. The Moderns could have revelled in recollections of their last German lesson, or exercised their brains with imaginary book-keeping by double entry. Really, there was no need for the juniors to grow restive, with all these resources at hand.

But they did grow restive.

Tommy Dodd, the Modern, who was

going to the head of a big business some day, did not give a single thought to book-keeping, either by double or single entry. Instead of that, he found a little harmless and necessary relaxation in shying paper balls at the back of Tabby Muffin's head. The Fistical Four, whose Greek really left much to be desired, from a Form-master's point of view, did not recall to mind just then any one of the thirty-six forms of the definite article. They sat on their desks instead of on the form, swung their legs, and chatted.

And the rest were as bad, or worse.

"Ten minutes late!" said Lovell, looking at the clock. "Christopher is taking things easy, you chaps."

"So are we!" grinned Raby.

"Let's hope he'll linger longer!" remarked Newcome. "I can do with a rest. We get rotten English literature this afternoon! I wouldn't mind giving it a miss in bulk, for one."

"Hear, hear!" said Jimmy Silver heartily. "But it's jolly odd of old Chris! I thought he was no end of a punctual beast!"

"He looks as sharp as a razor!" said Lovell. "Did you notice his jaw?"

"Didn't I!" said Jimmy.

"Looks as if he would bite a chap in half for a false quantity," said Raby. "When I first saw him, my idea was that he wasn't safe without a muzzle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He may be all right," said Jimmy Silver tolerantly. "A man doesn't make his own face."

"He jolly well wouldn't make me like Christopher's, if he could help it," grinned Lovell. "I wonder if he'd think it rude if I offered him a Guy Fawkes' mask? I've got one left over from last November."

"Well, he ought to be glad of a chance to improve his looks," said Raby. "But you never know these Form-masters. He might cut up rusty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's a beast!" said Tabby Muffin, with his mouth full of toffee. "Dodd, you rotter, stop chucking at me. He's a beast, Jimmy! He gave me an awful rap on the knuckles this morning."

"Not so decent as old Bootles, in any shape or form," said Oswald, looking up from his book.

"I think—" Lovell was beginning.

He stopped suddenly, struck by a look of

horror that was gathering in Jimmy Silver's face.

Jimmy seemed transfixed.

In fact, his eyes almost started from his head, just as if he had seen the legendary ghost of Rockwood.

"What on earth—" stammered Lovell.

Jimmy did not speak.

He pointed.

Outside in the passage the afternoon sun was streaming in at a window. A broad wave of sunlight came through the half-open door of the Form-room. And in the middle of that pool of light was a black shadow!

Lovell gasped.

Evidently, a man was standing outside the door, his person intercepting the sunlight and casting that shadow into the room.

He was making no sound, but just standing there, like a statue. But for the shadow falling into the Form-room, the juniors could never have guessed that there was anyone there at all.

"My only hat!" murmured Raby.

"The cad!"

"The howling mob!"

These comments were passed in low whispers. The Fistical Four did not want Mr. Cutts to hear any more of their observations. They shuddered to think of what he must have heard already.

Jimmy Silver waved his hand to Conroy & Co., who were still leap-frogging. He could not call a warning to them without being heard by the man outside the door.

Conroy caught his eye, and stared at him.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, in astonishment.

Jimmy pointed to the shadow.

"Oh, crumbs!"

There was a rush of the Colonial Co. to get into their places. The alarm spread now. A wild scramble took place. In the midst of it, the door was thrown wide open, and Mr. Christopher Cutts stalked in.

CHAPTER 5. Master and Pupils!

"STOP!"

Mr. Cutts tapped out that word like a pistol-shot.

The Fourth-Formers stopped, just where they were. Some of them were in

their seats, some a few yards from their seats. All of them were excited and breathless. Mr. Cutts' sharp voice seemed to penetrate the air like an icy wind. It stopped the juniors, just as if they were mechanisms that had suddenly run down.

They all stared at Mr. Cutts.

The tall, bony gentleman towered in the Form-room, and his icy glance swept over the confused juniors. He had two narrow and very bright eyes that glistened a good deal like a rat's. The expression on the hard face was very grim.

"So this is how you behave yourselves during your Form-master's absence!" said Mr. Cutts.

Silence.

"You play leapfrog in the Form-room, you read papers and eat toffee, and you pass disrespectful remarks upon your Form-master."

Mr. Cutts' look and tone were accusing.

The Fourth-Formers looked at their desks or at the floor. There was no denying that the accusations were well founded.

They had done all those things!

And they couldn't reply to Mr. Cutts—that it was not a Form-master's duty to creep stealthily up to a door, and wait there watching and listening to ascertain how his pupils behaved in his absence. They couldn't tell him that their old master, Mr. Bootles, wouldn't have dreamed of doing such a thing. "Back-chat" was not allowed in Rookwood Form-rooms, so in an argument with a Form-master, the Form naturally had the worst of it.

"I am ashamed of you!" said Mr. Cutts.

Some of the Form were ashamed of him; but, again, they couldn't tell him so! That certainly would not have poured oil upon the troubled waters.

"I will not say I am surprised," continued Mr. Cutts grimly. "My first view of this Form gave me the impression that it had been allowed to get out of hand. Rule has been slack. That will be completely altered in the future—the immediate future."

This was a reflection upon Mr. Bootles, and the juniors resented it. But still they were silent.

"The whole Form will be detained for one hour this afternoon," went on Mr. Cutts. "Modern members of the Form will return here at the usual hour of dismissal, and remain in detention with the Classical members."

"Oh!" murmured Tommy Debb.

"Silver, Lovell, Rahy, Newcome!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Step out here!"

The Factical Four stepped out. Mr. Cutts picked a cane from his desk.

"You four juniors have been entertaining yourselves with making insulting remarks about your Form-master."

"Oh, sir!"

"You do not deny it, I presume?"

"We—we did not mean our remarks to be insulting, sir," stammered Jimmy Silver.

"They were insulting, whatever you may have meant."

Arthur Edward Lovell's eyes gleamed. Lovell had a rather hasty temper, and did not always reflect before speaking.

"I don't see how you know what our remarks were like, sir," he said boldly.

"I heard them all, Lovell."

Mr. Cutts made no bones about admitting that his ears had been busy at the doorway.

"Of course; we didn't know you were listening, sir," said Lovell.

"What?" thundered Mr. Cutts.

"Shut up, Lovell!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

But Lovell would not shut up. A Form-master had no right to play the eaves-dropper and act upon information thus surreptitiously obtained. Lovell felt it borne in upon him to point that out. In any case, he was going to be caned, and it seemed judicious to have his money's worth, as it were!

"Mr. Bootles would not have taken any notice of words not intended for him to hear, sir," said Lovell.

"Indeed!" sneered the new master.

"Yes, indeed, sir! What we may have said was private conversation, and was not spoken in your presence."

The Form hung on Lovell's words. They wondered where Arthur Edward was getting his nerve from.

"I heard every word you said, Lovell."

"You are bound not to take notice of it, sir."

"Wh-a-a-t?"

The look on Mr. Cutts' face was now so terrific that Arthur Edward's heart almost failed him. But he kept courageously on.

"As a gentleman, sir, you're bound not to take notice of words not intended for your ears."

"Doesn't old Lovell talk like a picture!"

book?" Mornington whispered to Effell. "I wonder if the Cutts bird will leave any skin on him!"

Mr. Cutts seemed to find difficulty in breathing for some moments.

"Have you anything more to say, Lovell?" he gasped at last.

"That's all, sir."

"Very good. Stand aside. I shall leave you till last, as I have to punish you for insolence in addition to riot and insubordination. Silver, hold out your hand."

Swish!

"Raby!"

Swish!

"Newcome!"

Swish!

"You three boys may go to your places," said Mr. Cutts.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome moved off, squeezing their aching palms. They had had only one cut each, but the new master had put his muscle into his work. One lash from Mr. Cutts was worse than two from Mr. Bootles.

Mr. Cutts fixed his steely eyes on Lovell.

"Your hand, Lovell!"

Swish!

"The other hand!"

Swish!

"Again!"

Swish!

"Now again!"

Lovell hesitated. His palms were aching and burning, and he was throbbing with anger and indignation from head to foot. But his hand came slowly out, and the cane descended again.

Swish!

"Now go! Another example of insolence on your part, Lovell, and I shall cane you with severity."

Apparently Mr. Cutts did not think he had displayed severity already. Arthur Edward Lovell limped to his form, his face white and set, and only a strong effort of will keeping back the tears from his eyes.

Then Mr. Cutts took his Form in English literature.

He knew his subject—there was no doubt about that; he was an efficient man, perhaps more efficient, if it came to that, than little Mr. Bootles. But his peculiar methods did not put his pupils in exactly the proper humour for enjoying the beauties of English literature. Even that great poet and dramatist, Shakespeare, failed to elicit any enthusiasm from the

Fourth, under the basilisk eye of Christopher Cutts.

Valentine Mornington was the only fellow who succeeded in scaring off Mr. Cutts. Morny had a quick brain and an iron nerve. Shakespeare being the subject, gave him his opportunity, which he seized. But Mr. Cutts fairly asked for it.

"I see by your books," said Mr. Cutts, "that you have been doing Shakespeare's works with your late Form-master. I am afraid I shall have to ask you to take the matter more seriously than you have been accustomed to. I doubt whether any boy in this Form could recite a striking passage from this great poet, without looking at his book."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Mornington, "I could!"

"So could I, sir," piped Tubby Muffin, anxious to get into the good graces of the terrible gentleman.

Mr. Cutts' lip curled. He had a most unpleasant and disconcerting way of curling his lip.

"I will ascertain the extent of your knowledge," he said. "I am listening."

Valentine Mornington lounged to his feet, as cool as ice, and recited in his turn, very correctly:

"Man, vain man,

Dressed in a little brief authority,

Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven

As make the angels weep!"

There was no mistaking Morny's intonation. That he was calmly applying those telling lines to Mr. Cutts himself was obvious to everyone in the Form, including Christopher Cutts.

Mr. Cutts' face became a rich purple.

The juniors tried not to grin, but they could not help it. Morny had hit off Mr. Cutts wonderfully—with the assistance of William Shakespeare. He was dressed in a little brief authority, and in the opinion of the Fourth Form at least, his fantastic tricks might have made the angels weep.

"Mornington!" thundered Mr. Cutts.

"Yes, sir!" said Morny, in his silky tones.

"Is it your intention, sir, to be insolent?"

"Insolent, sir?" said Morny, in a tone of wonder. "I was reciting Shakespeare, sir. The lines are Shakespeare's, not mine. I—I couldn't make up lines like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Who laughed?"

Whoever it was that laughed, he was not laughing as Mr. Cutts' badlik eye swept over the class.

Nobody felt inclined to laugh, or even to smile, with that keen and searching eye roving in his direction.

Mr. Cutts gave Mornington a very expressive look. He had to drop the subject. He felt that he could not very well call Morny to account for it. But he did not forget. Ten minutes later Valentine Mornington yawned slightly. Then Mr. Cutts was upon him.

"Mornington! Do you consider the Form-room is the place for yawning?"

"Ahem! No, sir."

"Stand up, Mornington!"

Mornington lounged out before the class, with a smile on his face. He winked at Jimmy Silver as he passed him. His look told plainly enough that having had his little joke with the new master he expected to have to pay for it.

Swish, swish!

"I will keep discipline in this class," said Mr. Cutts.

And he did.

From that moment the Fourth were on their best behaviour, though their suppressed feelings were anything but good. After English literature had been disposed of, the Modern portion of the Form cleared off, to take chemistry with Mr. Manders "over the way." But the hapless Classics had to endure Mr. Cutts all the afternoon. And before lessons were over there wasn't a fellow in the Classical Fourth who did not yearn to use Mr. Christopher Cutts as a punch-ball—without gloves!

CHAPTER 7.

Quite the Limit!

"THE brute!"

"The beast!"

"The rotter!"

"The rank outsider!"

Such were the comments of the Fourth Form on their new master after lessons and detention that day.

Moderns and Classics, for once, were fully agreed. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd saw eye to eye.

Every unpleasant name that could possibly be thought of fitted Mr. Cutts to a hair!

He was a brute, a beast, a bully, a snob,

a rank outsider, the limit, the outside edge—he was everything that was horrid and unpleasant and disagreeable.

The Moderns congratulated themselves that they wouldn't have as much to do with him as the Classics.

In Mr. Bootles' time they had rather envied the Classics, for Mr. Manders, the Modern master, was rather a cough-drop, as Tommy Dodd put it. But Mr. Manders was kind and gentle in comparison with the unpeppable Cutts. The Modern juniors felt quite a filial affection for him, in comparison with their feelings towards Mr. Cutts. And as Lovell dimly remarked, a master couldn't be more unpleasant than Manders without being the very outside edge.

Needless to say, the comments of the Fourth were not passed where Mr. Christopher Cutts could overhear them.

They had already learned to be wary of the stealthy gentleman.

Even in the Fourth Form passage they glanced round before they called Mr. Cutts a beast, or a bully, or a boonder.

In the end study, over a late tea, Jimmy Silver & Co. discussed the situation in gloomy tones.

"How are we going to stand him," asked Lovell. "My paws are still aching."

"Can we stand him?" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver granted.

"How can we help it?" he asked.

"But if he goes on as he's started and

—"

"Life won't be worth living——"

"He's an impossible beast!"

"A regular Hun!"

"We've got to mind our p's and q's," said Jimmy. "He's a good man as far as work goes. He knows his business. I dare say he could walk all over poor old Bootles, if it came to that. But lolly-ragging isn't the way to impart giddy knowledge. He will have all the Form in a state of red-hot rebellion at this rate."

"A rotten Prussian!" said Lovell.

"A blessed Bude!" said Baby.

"Thank goodness, we're quit of him till to-morrow!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's something."

But Jimmy Silver was mistaken on that point.

The chums of the end study were thinking of beginning prep when the study door opened, without a knock.

To their astonishment, Mr. Cutts appeared on the threshold.

The juniors rose to their feet, with clouded faces. Every other master at Rookwood knocked at a door before entering.

"It is seven o'clock!" said Mr. Cutts sharply.

"We know that, sir."

"Why are you not at preparation?"

"We were just thinking of beginning."

"Thinking of it is not enough!" said Mr. Cutts sharply. "For this once I will excuse you, as you have plainly not been accustomed to anything like order. Remember that in future preparation commences at precisely seven."

"Oh!"

"And it will be done under my personal supervision," added Mr. Cutts.

"Oh!"

"Leave your door open."

"Oh!"

Mr. Cutts walked to the next study.

The Fistical Four exchanged speechless looks.

Prep. was supposed to be done between seven and half-past eight, and it was left to the juniors. If they neglected their prep, there was trouble in the Form-room to follow. The Second and the Third prepared their lessons in their Form-rooms, under a master's eye. But the Fourth were above that—at least, such had always been the custom. Mr. Cutts was inaugurating new customs.

Prep was to be done under his supervision, just as if the Fourth were fags like the Second and Third!

Without a word the Fistical Four set to work.

Prep. was quietly going on in the other studies.

All the doors were left open, so that the juniors were under the supervision of Mr. Cutts, who walked up and down the passage, with his cane under his arm.

Schoolboys are conservative by nature, and great sticklers for rights and traditions. For the Fourth to be treated as irresponsible fags, like the Third, was an outrage.

Possibly Mr. Cutts did not realise the storm of wrath that was brewing. Possibly he did not care. Possibly, indeed, he was on the look-out for some sign of rebellion that would justify the use of the cane. At all events, he began his self-imposed task grimly, and twice or three dropped

into a study to "jaw" a junior who slacked.

Prep was a painful infliction that evening. All the Classical Fourth breathed more freely when it was over, and the angular form of Mr. Cutts descended the stairs and vanished.

"Makes a fellow wish he was a Modern!" said Arthur Edward Lovell gloomily. Which was the most emphatic thing a Classical could have said.

Mornington came along to the end study. There was a tightness about Morny's mouth and a glitter in his eye that boded trouble.

"How long are we goin' to stand this slave-drivin' bizney!" Mornington asked.

"The brute can do as he likes!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"He's breakin' up all our customs. The Head ought to stop him!" said Mornington savagely.

"I don't suppose the Head knows."

"He ought to be told, then."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"The Head's sure to back up a Form-master," he said. "Cutts would lick us for going to him. No good asking for more trouble. We seem to have enough to go on with."

"I'm not standin' much more of it," said Mornington. "He caned me for speakin' to Erroll during prep, just as if I was a beastly little inky fag in a beastly Form-room."

"You pulled his leg in class," said Lovell.

"I'll do more than that!" said Mornington, between his teeth. "I hear that Cutts is takin' on secin' lights out in our dorm, instead of one of the prefects. We're goin' to have Cutts from early morn to dovy eve. It's goin' to be Cutts first, Cutts last, an' Cutts all the time."

"Keep smilin'!" said Jimmy, but his voice was not so cheerful as usual.

"You've spotted the kind of brute he is," said Mornington. "He likes usin' the cane! He's a bully!"

"I'm afraid he is," admitted Jimmy Silver.

"If he comes to the dorm, to see lights out he'll make an excuse for canin' at least one chap."

"Very likely."

"Well, are we goin' to stand it?" demanded Mornington excitedly.

"I don't quite see what we can do."

Mornington snapped his teeth.

"Well, I know what I'm goin' to do," he said. "If the cad puts his head inside our dorm to-night he's goin' to put it into a booby-trap!"

"Morny!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"I mean it!"

And Valentine Mornington quitted the end Study, evidently with his mind made up. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"After all, there's bound to be trouble!" said Arthur Edward Lovell philosophically. "It must come sooner or later, if the brute goes on as he's begun. As well sooner as later."

Jimmy Silver nodded, with a clouded brow. He realised that Lovell was right. Undoubtedly there was going to be trouble!

CHAPTER 9. Catching Cutts!

"BED-TIME!"

Mr. Cutts shot that word into the junior Common-rooms. He stood in the doorway, angular, bony, steel-eyed as usual. The clock indicated twenty-five minutes past nine. Nine-thirty was the customary bed-time for the Fourth Form. Again the new master was invading the sacred, immemorial rights of his pupils.

"Go to bed immediately!" he snapped.

The juniors marched out in silence, many of them with sulky looks. Mr. Cutts shepherded them to the dormitory. He watched them in, and glanced into the dormitory after them.

"I shall return in precisely five minutes!" he said. "By that time I shall expect every boy to be in bed."

Silence!

Mr. Cutts walked away, after drawing the door shut behind him.

"Nice man!" growled Oswald.

"The awful rotter!" mumbled Muffin.

"Better turn in sharp, you fellows," said Jimmy Silver. "No good asking for trouble."

"I shall be busy for a bit!" drawled Mornington.

From a cupboard at the end of the room Morny extracted a wicker-basket. Inside

the basket brown-paper had been pasted thickly, to render it more or less water-tight.

Into the basket Mornington emptied a number of bottles he had collected in the cupboard ready. There was a bottle of pyro, a bottle of gum, a bottle of indelible marking-ink, a bottle of red ink, a bottle of vinegar, and several other bottles.

The juniors watched him breathlessly.

"Morny!" murmured Erroll, in a tone of expatiation.

"You'll never have the nerve!" breathed Conroy.

Mornington did not heed.

To the horrid contents of the papered basket he added a packet of pepper and a tin of green paint, and proceeded to mix it up with a ruler.

His movements were rapid. The whole was ready inside three minutes. He carried it very carefully along the room to the door.

He opened the door and set it ajar.

Then he placed a chair within, and stood on the chair, and carefully balanced the basket on the top of the door against the wall above.

"Great pip!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Murny!"

Valentine Mornington took away the chair and sat on his bed, and proceeded to take his boots off, with a cheery grin.

"How's that?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver looked worried. There was not the slightest doubt that whoever opened the door from outside, would get that booby-trap right on his head, and his state afterwards would be simply unspeakable.

No doubt Mr. Christopher Cutts deserved it, no doubt he had really asked for it. But—There was a very big "but."

"Oh, what a surprise!" murmured Lovell. "What will he say when he gets that lot right on the napper? Something pungent—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be a frightful row," said Erroll. Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them be!" he answered. "I've

been caned five or six times to-day. Cutts has taken that booby-trap out in advance! He's going to have it, the brute, and I hope he will like it!"

"Cave!"

"He's coming!"

There was a footstep in the corridor. It was not a loud footstep. It was a stealthily tread the juniors had already learned to recognise. Mr. Cutts was coming!

Some of the juniors bolted into bed, half-dressed. Some of them stood staring towards the door as if fascinated. The inevitable consequences of Mr. Cutts pushing the door open seemed to mesmerise them.

The soft footfalls stopped at the door. It moved.

"Now—" breathed Lovell.

The door swung open under a push from without.

Swoosh! Crash!

The instant the door swung the basket shut downward, overturning as it fell.

The contents shot out in a sticky stream, fairly enveloping the man below. They reached him before the basket dal. But the latter was only a second late, and it landed fairly upon Mr. Cutts' head, benumbing him beautifully.

"Grooooooch!"

A mild and muffled howl escaped from the astonished Mr. Cutts.

He staggered into the dormitory, streaming with various liquids, and with the basket clinging to his head like a very large hat.

Ink and gum and other things streamed down his face and his clothes. His features were totally unrecognisable. He spluttered and gasped and staggered.

A wild roar of laughter rang through the dormitory from end to end. Even Tabby Muffin sat up in bed and yelled. Mr. Cutts was irresistible!

Crash!

The basket went to the floor, and oozed out the remnants of its contents there. Mr. Cutts gouged wildly at his eyes. He could not see, and he could hardly breathe.

"Boys, you—you have dared— Yoo-o-o-ooh!" Mr. Cutts spat and foamed. The horrid liquids were oozing in his mouth as well as his nose and ears. And the pepper was making its presence felt.

"Oh gad!" gasped Mornington. "There's a picture for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooh! Gnoooooch! Yug. yug. yug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth—" Bulkeley of the Sixth strode into the dormitory. "What

is happening here? Why—what—what—" The Rookwood captain stared at Mr. Cutts, dumbfounded. "What— Who is that?"

"Yooooooch!"

"Is—is that Mr. Cutts?" gasped Bulkeley.

"Groooh! I am suffocating! I am blinded! Groooh!" Mr. Cutts dabbed his gummy eyes, and blinked uncertainly. "I—I have been—been assaulted! A—a trap was laid for me. I—I— Grrrrr!"

"My hat!" stuttered Bulkeley. He tried to keep grave, but the aspect of the Form-master was so amazing that he simply couldn't. He simply had to smile. "Mr. Cutts, I—"

"What are you laughing at?" yelled Mr. Cutts.

"I—I—" stammered Bulkeley.

"You grinning fool!"

"What?"

"Take me to a bath-room immediately!"

"Certainly, sir! This way!"

Bulkeley led Mr. Cutts out, still gasping, spitting, spluttering, and foaming. He left a trail behind him that it would not have required an experienced scout to follow. His gurglings and gaspings died away in the distance, and from somewhere along the corridor came a sound of laughter. The Fourth-Formers stared breathlessly at one another.

"Well, he's got it!" grinned Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a chivvy!" gasped Lovell. "He'll be half the night getting that lot off! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared. But the laughter suddenly ceased as Bulkeley came back into the dormitory.

"Turn in!" said the Rookwood captain curtly. "This will be inquired into. Mr. Cutts will deal with you in the morning. He is not in a—ahum!—fit state to-night. Good-night!"

And the Classical Fourth turned in, still chuckling. But there were many misgivings as they thought of the morning!

CHAPTER V.

Called to Account!

"NOT a word!"

"Not a giddy syllable!"

"But I say—"

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"That's all very well," persisted Tabby

Muffin. "But the Head will rag us all round!"

"Let him!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"But—"

"Shot up, Muffin!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

Tulby Muffin shut up, but very reluctantly. He seemed to be rather dismayed at the prospect of a "ragging" from the Head.

He was not, as a matter of fact, the only dismayed fellow in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood School.

Many of the juniors looked very dubious.

The Classical Fourth were gathered in the Form-room after prayers that morning, and nobody present looked happy.

Valentine Mornington had a rather sardonic air of supreme indifference, probably assumed for the occasion. Jimmy Silver & Co. were frankly uneasy. But the word had gone forth that the Form were to "stand together" in the forthcoming interview with the Head; Jimmy Silver was captain of the Fourth, and his word was law. Even Peele and Gower and Lettrey felt that they had to line up with the rest, lest worse should befall them; while the great majority of the Form backed up Jimmy Silver without hesitation.

"Not a word!" repeated Jimmy impressively. "The Head will ask us who rigged up the booby-trap in the dormitory last night. We can't say we don't know, because we do know—"

"I don't see why we can't say we don't know, all the same!" grunted Peele.

"Perhaps you don't, Peele," answered Jimmy crushingly. "But I do, and all the decent fellows here do. We can't tell the Head a whacking lie for two reasons—first and foremost, because we're not liars—second, because he wouldn't believe it."

"Two jolly good reasons, with the odds on the second!" grinned Gower.

"You can tell him it was I, if you like," drawled Mornington. "I'm not afraid to face the music!"

"We're not going to tell him anything," said Jimmy Silver. "Speech is silver, silence is golden—"

"Oh, we're all standing by Morny in this," said Baby. "Morny ragged the brute, but we all wanted to see him ragged."

"Hear, hear!"

"But, I say!" murmured Tulby Muffin. "Suppose the Head gets awfully waxy—"

"Let him!"

"But he will lay into us if he's waxy!" wailed Muffin.

"Let him!"

"I don't want to be flogged!" shrieked Muffin indignantly.

"A flogging would do you good," said Newcome.

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Hush! Here comes his royal Nibs!" said Lovell.

There was a tremor in the Fourth Form, as the stately tread of Dr. Chisholm was heard approaching.

Silence fell on the anxious juniors as the Head swept into the Form-room with rustling gown.

He was followed in by Mr. Cutts, the new master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Mr. Christopher Cutts looked pale and bitter. It was only his second day in charge of the Rookwood Fourth; but already relations had been strained to breaking-point.

Dr. Chisholm was very grave, and his brows were knitted. What had happened in the dormitory the previous night seemed to him an "outrage." To the juniors it seemed only a lark on an unpopular master; as Lovell remarked, booby-traps had been rigged up before, without all this fuss.

For some moments the Head surveyed the Fourth Form in silence, and their uneasiness increased. They carefully avoided catching his eye. He spoke at last; and his voice, though quiet, seemed to rumble like thunder through the silent Form-room.

"Boys! It is my duty to inquire into the outrage that occurred last night in your dormitory. A—er—receptacle—a—a basket of some sort—was placed on the top of the door, and it—ah—fell on the head of Mr. Cutts when he entered to see lights out, and—ah—covered him with a peculiar mixture of various liquids, including, I believe, ink and gum, and— and paint, and several other extraordinary ingredients."

The juniors did not venture to smile,

though it was difficult to keep serious when they remembered how Mr. Cutts had looked with those various and extraordinary liquids streaming over him.

"This is an unprecedented outrage," continued the Head. "Mr. Cutts has been with us only a few days, and yet he is treated in this manner by his boys. Nothing of this kind occurred in connection with your late master, Mr. Bootles. Besides the disrespect of this action, it involves—er—a shocking lack of hospitality to a newcomer in our midst. I require to know the name of the boy who placed this—ah—receptacle on the dormitory door."

Silence.

"One boy is guilty," said the Head. "I request him to stand forward, and admit his guilt."

Mornington closed one eye at Jimmy Silver. Mornay, at all events, was not taking this serious situation with much seriousness.

The Head waited.

Nobody, evidently, was going to stand forward. Mr. Cutts closed his thin lips tightly together.

"I am waiting!" said the Head at last mildly.

Still silence.

"Every boy present must be aware of the—the culprit's identity," said the Head. "Silver?"

"Yes, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

"As head boy of the Form, I ask you to give me the name."

Jimmy's lips closed hard.

"You are aware of the identity of the delinquent, Silver?"

"We all know, sir," answered Jimmy. "But it really wasn't only one fellow, sir! The whole Form supports him!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lovell.

The Head frowned.

"If the whole Form identifies itself with this outrage upon Mr. Cutts, I shall regard the whole Form as equally guilty, Silver."

"Yes, sir."

The Head paused.

"Has any boy anything to say?" he asked at last.

Tubby Muffin turned an anguished blink upon Jimmy, and received a ferocious frown in response. The fat Classical re-

mained silent. Not a word came from the Classical Fourth.

"Very well!" said the Head. "The whole Form will be punished for this outrage. I shall inflict the punishment personally. Mr. Cutts has been insulted; and, through him, my authority has been treated with contempt. I shall cane the whole Form."

"Oh, crumbs!" mumbled Tabby Muffin. "Kindly hand me your cane, Mr. Cutts."

Mr. Cutts kindly handed his cane to the Head. Valentine Mornington, quietly and coolly, came out before the class.

"It was I, sir!" he said.

There was a murmur in the Fourth.

"Good old Mornay!"

"Bravo!"

CHAPTER 10.

Facing the Musket

"SILENCE!" rapped out the Head.

The murmur died away. Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes gravely on Mornington. Mr. Cutts' eyes glittered at him. The dandy of the Fourth took no notice whatever of Mr. Cutts. He stood before the Head, cool and calm.

"You, Mornington?" said Dr. Chisholm.

"Yes, sir!"

"You laid this trap for your Form-master, and covered him—smothered him, in fact—with a flood of—of various liquids—"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well, Mornington! I shall punish you with the greatest severity for the outrage," said Dr. Chisholm quietly. "I will, however, first ask you your reason for acting in such a manner. What could have caused you to treat your new master so maliciously?"

"What was Mr. Cutts comin' into our dorm at all for?" said Mornington coolly. "In Mr. Bootles' time, a prefect used to see lights out for the Fourth."

"Mr. Cutts preferred to take that duty upon himself, Mornington. Surely you did not act in such a way for so trifling a reason—"

"Oh, no, sir! We all knew that if Mr. Cutts came in, he would find some excuse for pitching into some of us," said Mornington coolly.

The Head started.

"Boy! Do you venture to assume your Form-master of administering unjust and unprovoked punishments?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good old Morny!" murmured Lovell, greatly delighted. Morny was looked for a severe casting, and apparently he was bent on taking out its value, as it were, in advance.

"How dare you, Mornington!" exclaimed the Head, greatly shocked.

"Mr. Cutts is a bully, sir."

"What?"

"And a brute, sir!"

"Boy!"

"And so say all of us!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, suddenly, feeling called upon to give Morny some support.

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

Mr. Cutts looked almost green.

"Dr. Chisholm!" he stuttered. "Am I—I to listen to this—to such outrageous insults—"

"Calm yourself, my dear sir!" said the Head. "You may depend upon me to uphold your authority, Mornington—"

"You are going to punish me, sir, for punishing Mr. Cutts," said Morny calmly. "I have a right to speak, and give my reasons."

"That is true. But—"

"Mr. Cutts has already caned every fellow in the Form. He has caned some of us a dozen times. Mr. Bootles never found that necessary, sir. Why should Mr. Cutts find it necessary?"

The Head paused—that was a point well taken.

"Mr. Cutts supervises our prep, sir, and watches us in our studies while we are doing it," said Mornington. "Mr. Bootles never did. The Fourth have always been allowed to prepare their lessons by themselves, without being supervised like the Fifth."

"I do not quite understand this," said the Head. "Your preparation is done in your studies as usual, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; and Mr. Cutts orders us to leave our doors open, and he walks up and down the passage with his eye on us."

"I was not aware of this!" said the Head. "That is, however, no excuse—no excuse whatever—for the outrage that has occurred. You have not justified yourself

in the least, Mornington—indeed, your outrageous conduct admits of no justification. You will now hold out your hand!"

What followed, was painful—especially to Mornington.

Morny received six strokes, and they were laid on in earnest.

With all his coolness and nerve, Mornington writhed under that severe infliction.

His handsome face was quite pale, his lips tightly set, as he went back to his place.

Dr. Chisholm laid down the cane.

"I trust," he said, "that this will be a warning to all the Form. Mr. Cutts is my representative in this Form-room, and must be treated with the same respect and obedience as myself. That is all!"

He rustled to the door.

"Mr. Cutts, I shall be glad of a few words with you before you take your class."

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Cutts' hard face had quite brightened as Mornington went through his punishment. But it clouded as he followed the Head from the Form-room.

Dr. Chisholm did not speak till he was well out of the hearing of the juniors. He would not allow them to hear their master being taken to task. He paused at last by the corridor window, and looked directly at Mr. Cutts, who found some difficulty in meeting the Head's clear, calm eyes.

"You are new here, Mr. Cutts," said the Head very mildly. "You are young and—doubtless—keen and enthusiastic. No doubt the changes you have made seem to you to make for increased efficiency."

"That is certainly my motive, sir," said Mr. Cutts.

"There is an old Latin tag that everyone does well to remember, however," said the Head. "'Festina lente,' Mr. Cutts. 'Make haste slowly.' Schoolboys are born conservatives. They are strong upon tradition. They resent interference however well-intentioned, with prescriptive rights and ancient customs. I should suggest—the Head's voice was mildness itself, but his "suggestion" was evidently in the nature of a command—"I should suggest that you do not interfere hastily with any established practice that is harmless in itself."

Mr. Cutts set his lips.

"I suggest that the duty of seeing lights put in the Fourth Form dormitory should be left to a prefect, as before. I suggest that preparation in the studies should not be done under supervision. Supervision is necessary with the Second and Third; but the Fourth are supposed to be old enough to understand something of a sense of responsibility. I think it would be wise to leave these customs unchanged. Good-morning, Mr. Cutts!"

The Head sailed majestically away.

Mr. Cutts remained where he was for some moments, staring after the Head.

His look was not pleasant.

It was, in fact, cheekmate for the new rules the new master had introduced, and which had so much exasperated the Classical Fourth.

Mr. Cutts gritted his teeth.

He was a hard, severe man, with a peculiar sense of duty that was all his own. He had a firm belief in efficiency; and his idea of efficiency was incessant interference and driving. But Mornington's bold words to the Head had cut the ground from under his feet, as it were. What Mr. Cutts called efficiency the Head would have called fussiness; and the Head had no use for fussiness.

Morning lessons did not go pleasantly in the Fourth Form-room that day.

The Modern portion of the Form were not present that morning, which was rather fortunate for them.

Mr. Cutts had the Classics all to himself, and he was in a temper for which the word "Hunnish" would have been a mild description.

Mornington, after his punishment, was not in a fit state for school work; and a tactful master would have given him a rest. But Mr. Cutts had no tact, or, perhaps, he found pleasure in rugging the junior who had swamped him the previous night with various and extraordinary liquids. He had no mercy upon the hapless Morny; and before the class was dismissed, Morny was white with rage, and on the verge of an outbreak. Mr. Cutts had a bitter tongue, and he used it pitilessly upon Mornington.

There was black wrath in the breasts of the Classics when they were dismissed at last.

"There's going to be trouble!" said

Arthur Edward Lovell savagely as he rubbed his hands in the passage.

"There is—and jolly soon!" said Mornington.

Jimmy Silver nodded rather dimly. It was quite certain that trouble was coming; the only question was, what form and shape would it take?

CHAPTER 11.

Catching Carthus!

"WHAT'S the game?"

Jimmy Silver asked that question rather dispiritedly, as he came on Mornington in the Fourth Form passage after lessons.

Afternoon lessons had been a severe infliction to the Classical Fourth, and more than ever had they envied the Moderns when the latter trooped off to Mr. Mander's House for scientific instruction. Arthur Edward Lovell had desperately declared that he would be willing to study German and "stinks"—the Classical name for chemistry—rather than stand Mr. Christopher Cutts.

But only the Moderns could escape; the Classics had to stand Mr. Cutts, and they bore him with much repining.

In the end study there was some excited talk over tea, but even "Uncle James" could not exactly say what was to be done. Christopher Cutts was impossible, and not to be stood; only, as Jimmy dimly remarked, they had to stand the brute.

It was after tea that Jimmy happened on Valentine Mornington in the passage, and he found Morny busy—in a very curious way. He was driving a gimlet into the wainscot, about three inches from the floor. As Jimmy Silver stopped to observe him, Morny crossed the passage, and drove in a second gimlet, exactly opposite the first.

Then the captain of the Fourth demanded to know what was the game. Morny looked up with a grin.

"Cord across," he explained.

"What for?"

"Oh, to catch rabbits!" said Mornington sarcastically.

"You mean for Cutts?" asked Jimmy.

"If Cutts comes up in watch us at prep, as he did yesterday, I shouldn't wonder if he takes a tumble," smiled Mornington.

"His own fault, for spying on us. We don't ask him to spy."

"But he'll see the cord," said Jimmy.

"There won't be a light in the passage. I'm going to put it out just before seven," smiled Mornington. "You might tip the fellows the wink not to come strolling along here in the dark."

"It will mean another row," said Jimmy. "Let it!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"You're right, Morry. Let him take a tumble if he comes spying into our quarters. Don't own up if there's a row. We'll stand together. Here, let me take a drive at that gimlet; then I shall be in it as well as you!"

"Right-ho!" said Mornington, with a grin.

In a short time all the Classical Fourth knew that another trap was laid for the stealthy Mr. Cutts.

Before seven o'clock the light was extinguished—accidentally, of course—in the passage, and the juniors started prep in their studies, listening intently, giving much more attention to Morry's trap than to prep.

They were blissfully eager to hear Mr. Cutts come along the passage in the dark, and catch his foot in the stretched cord, and take a tumble.

It was not a trick that Jimmy Silver would have approved of in the ordinary way, but a persecutor who persisted in invading the Fourth Form quarters had to be dealt with somehow.

The juniors were, of course, ignorant of the talk that had taken place between the Head and the new master that morning. Mr. Cutts no longer felt at liberty to parade the Fourth Form passage, supervising personally the Fourth Form prep. He was annoyed and irritated, but he knew that he had to observe the dictates of the Head. But he could not make up his interfering mind to leave the juniors in peace. Towards seven o'clock Mr. Cutts dropped into Carthew's study in the Sixth Form passage. He had already spotted Carthew of the Sixth as a prefect who would be likely to help him in his drastic methods with the juniors. He did not like Bulkeley or Neville; but Carthew, the bully, was a fellow after his own heart.

After a little agreeable conversation with Carthew, in which prefect and master took

each other's measure pretty accurately, Mr. Cutts remarked in a casual way.

"I should be glad, Carthew, if you would look in at the Fourth Form studies at seven, and note whether the juniors are at work, as they should be. I fear that there is a good deal of disorder in that passage, which naturally leads to the neglect of work."

"Quite so, sir."

"Anything out of order you will, of course, report to me," said Mr. Cutts. "It is my firmest principle to give a perfect the fullest support."

Carthew smiled as the new master strolled away. He thought he saw an opening now to wipe off some old scores against the Fiscal Four. Anything above a whisper would be good enough for Carthew to report as disorderly conduct in the junior passage.

At seven sharp Mark Carthew left his study, and ascended the stairs to the Fourth Form passage.

He found it in complete darkness.

Carthew smiled to himself.

This was a delinquency to begin with, for he guessed easily enough that the light had been extinguished intentionally.

Most of the study doors were closed, but at the far end of the passage, Jimmy Silver's door was open, and light streamed out. A faint buzz of voices came from that study, looking very much as if a number of juniors had gathered there to chat.

Carthew trotted cheerfully along the passage, to look for something to report to Mr. Cutts—any trifle, light as air, would have suited him.

But he did not get anywhere near the lighted doorway of the end study. As he came briskly along, something caught him on the ankles, and he went spinning forward with a wild yell.

CHAPTER 12.

Rank Rebellion!

CRASH!

The concussion rang through the passage as Carthew of the Sixth landed on his hands and knees.

From the end study there came an irrepressible outburst of chuckles.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yooop!" roared Carthew.

"Got him!" chuckled Lovell.

"Landed him, by gad!" grinned Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better go out and sympathise," grinned Conroy. "Mind you're all astonished when you see the cord across the passage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-oooooh! Oooooop! Oh, dear! Owl!"

"Hallo! That's not Cutts' foot!" murmured Jimmy Silver, as the juniors crowded out of the end study.

Erroll groped for the switch, and turned on the light.

"Carthew!"

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew was sprawling in the passage. He was howling with pain; his knees were barked and his hands were hurt, and he was in a towering rage.

"Hallo, Carthew!" said Jimmy Silver genially. "Fallen over, old bean!"

"You young villain!" roared Carthew. "I've caught my foot in something."

"Always putting your foot in something, ain't you?" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew scrambled up.

"There's a cord here!" he hissed. "It was put there on purpose."

"Not for you, Carthew," said Raby. "We didn't know you were coming sneaking along our passage, you know."

Carthew clenched his hands. He was inclined to rush at the group of grinning juniors, hitting out right and left. But prudence forbade. The Fourth were not in a tame mood, and Carthew could see by their looks that he would be roughly handled. He choked down his rage.

"I shall report this to Mr. Cutts!" he gasped.

"Report and be dashed!" retorted Mornington.

"Get out of our passage, Carthew!" bawled Higgs.

Study doors were open all along the passage now.

"Kick him downstairs!" shouted somebody.

Carthew beat a hasty retreat.

Hisses and cat-calls followed him to the stairs, and an over-ripe apple caught him on the collar as he went.

Carthew hurried down. He was rather anxious to get out of that hornet's nest.

"Caught the wrong bird!" growled Mornington, jerking out the gimlets and the cord. "But it was Cutts that went him, of course. And now we're going to see the Cutts bird himself, I reckon."

"With his cane!" said Van Ryn grimly.

"We've already decided what to do about Cutts," said Mornington coolly. "Every fellow locks his study door, and takes no notice of him. Mind you all stick to it."

"I—I say—" began Tubby Maffin.

"If any fellow lets him in, he will take it out of that fellow. You can bet your boots on that!" said Mornington. "If you're wise you'll keep your doors locked."

"It's a go!" said Conroy.

"You bet!" said Putty Grace.

"Tumble in before the brute comes along."

The juniors hurried into their rooms.

Every door was closed and locked, and with breathless anticipation the Classical Fourth waited for Mr. Christopher Cutts.

They had no doubt that Carthew would seek him at once, and that the new master would be only too glad of an excuse for visiting the Fourth Form passage, cane in hand. They were right, for a couple of minutes later his step was heard on the stairs.

"Here he comes!" murmured Jimmy Silver, in the end study. "Now for the giddy tug-of-war!"

"Let him rip!" chuckled Lovell. "It's going to be war anyhow. He's asked for it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Boys!" boomed Mr. Cutts' voice.

"Lend him your ears!" chuckled Newcome.

"Every boy will come out of his study immediately!"

"Will he?" murmured Lovell. "I don't think!"

Mr. Cutts waited a few moments, evidently in expectation of seeing all the doors thrown open. But not a door moved. The master seemed a little puzzled. He strode along the passage to the end study, and delivered a sharp cut of his cane on the door.

"Open this door at once!"

The Fictical Four in the study, breathed rather hard, but they did not move.

The handle turned, but the lock held the door, and Mr. Cutts shook the handle angrily.

"Silver!"

No reply.

"Silver! I know you are there! Open this door at once!"

Jimmy Silver closed one eye at his comrade's, and there was a faint chuckle in the end study. That that was all.

Crash! Mr. Cutts' cane smote the door again.

"Silver, open this door! I command you!"

"Go home!" murmured Jimmy Silver, sotto voce.

"Lovell! Baby! Newcome! Open this door!"

Dead silence in the end study. Mr. Cutts, breathing hard, moved along the passage, not unlike a tiger on the prowl. He stopped at the door of No. 4, in which Erroll and Mornington were at prep. He tried the handle and found the door locked.

"Mornington! Erroll! Admit me at once!"

No answer.

"I command you to admit me, Mornington!" exclaimed Mr. Cutts, his voice throbbing with rage.

Not a sound from the study.

"This is rank rebellion!" stormed Mr. Cutts. "If you do not obey instantly I shall fetch Dr. Chisholm here!"

Morley winked at his study-mate.

"That's the game," he murmured. "The Head will soon get tired of being dragged into rows with the Fourth! Bootles never used to drag him up here. Cutts is buying a rope with which to hang himself."

Erroll nodded. Perimps Mr. Cutts realized that it was not for his own benefit to "drag in" the Head if he could help it. At all events, he did not go for Dr. Chisholm. He moved along the passage, rapping at door after door, and demanding admittance. Not a door was opened.

With a face that was almost livid with fury, he sat down at last on the window-seat in the passage to wait.

In the studies the Classical Fourth went on with their prep with beating hearts. Prep was not very thoroughly done that evening. In such circumstances it was not likely to be. Like a tiger in his lair, Mr. Cutts was waiting for them to emerge from their studies, and then—

CHAPTER 12.

Defeated!

"WHAT next?" asked Lovell, with a rather tremulous grin.

Prep was over.

The Fistical Four had stood themselves a supper in the study, as most of the other fellows were doing. To go down to the school supper they had to pass Mr. Cutts.

"We shall have to clear out at bed-time, I suppose?" said Baby doubtfully.

"Not with that giddy wild animal loose in the passage," said Jimmy Silver resolutely. "Fancy the temper he will be in by this time, after waiting a couple of hours! Fairly boiling, I should think!"

"Rat-hot!" grinned Newcome.

The minutes seemed to drag by till half-past nine. This was bed-time for the Fourth, so the peculiar situation was growing rather serious. But Jimmy Silver & Co. sat tight, and the rest of the Fourth did not intend to open their doors until the end study set the example.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came up to the stairs with an expression of perpetuity on his face. He had looked in the Common-room for the Fourth, as usual, and had found only Shell fellows there. He started a little at the sight of Mr. Cutts seated in the passage, his cane across his knees, and his face full of suppressed fury.

"Are the Fourth in their studies, sir?" asked Bulkeley.

"Yes!" snapped Mr. Cutts.

"The Head informed me that I am to see lights out for them, sir," said the Rookwood captain.

"I am aware of that."

"It's very odd," said Bulkeley. "not one of the Form appears to be downstairs: I suppose I'd better rouse them out!"

"Do so at once!"

Bulkeley could see that something very unusual was on, though he did not guess just yet what it was. He rapped at the door of the first study, and would have opened it, but the door held. He rapped again.

"Peelo! Gower! What does this mean?"

"Ask Jimmy Silver, Bulkeley!" answered Peelo, with rather a quaver in his voice. "He's got to start!"

"To start what?" demanded Bulkeley in amazement.

"We're not to open our doors till he does, I mean," stammered Peole.

Bulkeley uttered an angry exclamation, and strode along the passage to the end study. Mr. Cutts rose to his feet, his eyes glittering, and his grasp closing hard on his cane. He was prepared to deal with the Classical Fourth as soon as Bulkeley brought them into his clutches.

The captain of Rookwood thumped on the door of the end study.

"Silver! What is this nonsense? You know it is past bed time! Come out and go to your dormitory at once!"

"Is Cutts still there, Bulkeley?"

"Mr. Cutts? Certainly!"

"We're not coming out to be ficked by Cutts!" said Jimmy Silver determinately.

"What do you mean? I do not suppose for a moment that Mr. Cutts is here to punish you—"

"Ask him!" said Lovell.

Bulkeley turned round.

"The juniors appear to think you are waiting here to punish them, Mr. Cutts," he said.

"That is the case!" answered Mr. Cutts through his teeth.

"Not the whole Form, I suppose?" asked Bulkeley with a stare.

"The whole Form without exception!" replied Mr. Cutts.

"Really, sir—"

"Kindly get them out of the studies, if you can," interrupted the master of the Fourth.

"For what is the whole Form to be punished, sir, may I ask?" said Bulkeley.

"That is my business!"

George Bulkeley bit his lip.

"Quite so," he said. "It is also your business, sir, to get them out of their studies—not mine. I shall simply report to the Head that I am unable to see lights out for the Fourth, as they decline to go to their dormitory!"

Bulkeley spoke sharply, and he turned towards the stairs. Mr. Cutts looked as if he would like to lay his cane across Bulkeley's broad shoulders.

"Stop!" he said hastily. "I do not want the Head brought into this matter. He has been quite sufficiently troubled by the Fourth Form to-day!"

"I am bound to make my report to him,

if the juniors do not go to their dormitory," said Bulkeley coolly.

Mr. Cutts seemed to have an inward struggle. He realised that he was treading, as it were, in slippery places.

Bulkeley waited. It cost Mr. Cutts an effort to get it out, and Bulkeley had to wait a full minute, but the tyrant of the Fourth got it out at last.

"I will postpone the punishment of the Fourth Form," he said. "You may tell the juniors so, Bulkeley. This uneasy state of affairs must end."

"Very well," said Bulkeley. He shot a quick glance at the master. Somehow he did not trust Mr. Cutts. "The matter is postponed until to-morrow, I suppose!"

"That need not be entered into."

Bulkeley flushed.

"If you are thinking of making use of me, sir, to get the juniors to the dormitory, intending to cane them there—" he began hotly.

"The punishment is postponed until the morning," said Mr. Cutts hastily.

"I accept your word, sir!"

Mr. Cutts, gnawing his underlip with rage, went downstairs. Bulkeley tapped again on the door of the end study.

"You may come out now, Silver. Mr. Cutts has postponed dealing with the matter until to-morrow."

"He's a downy bird," came Arthur Edward Lovell's voice. "I jolly well don't trust him!"

"You may trust me!" said Bulkeley sharply.

"Oh, yes, rather."

Jimmy Silver threw open the door of the end study. It was the signal to the rest, and all the Classical Fourth crowded into the passage. Very obediently they allowed Bulkeley to shepherd them off to the dormitory. But they grinned, and exchanged glances of satisfaction. Christopher Cutts had registered his first defeat.

It was a victory for the Fourth. The new master had been defied, and he had had to swallow the defiance. The juniors pictured him spluttering with rage in his study, and the picture pleased them mightily.

They turned in in the most orderly way. There was no quarrel with Bulkeley, and, in fact, they wanted Bulkeley to see what really nice, well-disciplined fellows they were—when properly treated.

"Good-night, Lovell!"

"Good-night, Bulkeley!" came an amiable chorus when the Rookwood captain put out the light.

The door closed after Bulkeley.

Valentine Mornington whipped out of bed, and groped to the door in the dark. There was a click!

"Hello! What's that?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Locking the door!" answered Mornington sadly. "I don't trust Cutts! Now Bulkeley's gone, I fancy the Cutts bird will rustle this way."

"Dash it all, even that cat wouldn't break his word!" said Lovell.

"We shall see!"

Mornington turned in again. The juniors listened intently. Five minutes had scarcely elapsed when the door handle was turned on the outside.

"Cutts!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

There was a low exclamation outside; the door creaked as it was pushed. Evidently Mr. Christopher Cutts was not keeping his compact. If anything was needed to fill the cup of his pupil's scorn for him, that would have done it. They were not likely to respect a master who could not keep his word. But for Morny's precaution, the cane would have been busy in the dormitory on thinly clad limbs. But the big oaken door was locked. And after another savage shove, and a muttered word or two, the baffled master retired.

"Nice man!" murmured Lovell.

"We've beaten him once," said Jimmy Silver, "and we'll beat him again. It's the Fourth against Christopher Cutts now, and we're going to win!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Plan of Campaign!

CLANG, clang!

The rising-bell clanged out over Rookwood School in the windy March morning.

Jimmy Silver sat up in the bed, in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, and yawned.

Clang, clang!

Jimmy turned out of bed. He was generally first out. Arthur Edward Lovell gave a portentous yawn, and followed his example.

"Tumble out, you fellows!" called out Jimmy Silver. "No time to waste this morning."

"Anything special on this mornin'?" drawled Mornington.

"Yes. There's got to be a Form-meeting before we go down," answered the captain of the Fourth. "We've got to decide how to deal with Mr. Cutts—"

"Before he deals with us!" grinned Lovell.

"Exactly!"

Tubby Muffin sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"I say, Jimmy—"

"Well, fatty?"

"Form-meetings are all very well," said Muffin. "But we can't be late for breakfast, you know. That's important."

Jimmy Silver hurled a pillow at the fat Classical.

"Never mind breakfast," he said.

"You—you—you silly idiot!" gasped Muffin. "You nearly knocked my head off, you burbling chump!"

"I'll quite knock it off if you don't shut up."

The Classical Fourth were unusually rapid with their ablutions and with their toilet that morning. Every face in the dormitory was grave. The position was serious, from the point of view of the juniors.

It was war now between the Fourth Form and the Fourth Form-master. All the Fourth agreed that they had had enough of Mr. Cutts' ragging and coaxing, and that they weren't going to stand it. But it was easier to make such a resolve than to carry it out.

There was authority on the side of Mr. Christopher Cutts. Behind the Form-master loomed the awe-inspiring figure of the Head!

True, the juniors felt that if the Head knew exactly what kind of a brute Mr. Cutts was, he would award him the immediate order of the boot, and Rookwood School would see the last of him. But the Head did not know—and was not likely to know. And anything like insubordination was likely to rouse the dire wrath of Dr. Chisholm.

As captain of the Fourth, a great responsibility rested upon Jimmy Silver, and he realised it.

But Jimmy was in a resolute mood. His Form-fellows looked up to him to lead them, and he was prepared to lead.

"Now for the giddy meeting!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, as he finished lacing his boots. "Who takes the chair?"

"I don't mind taking the chair," said Tubby Muffin, "so long as we're not late for brekker."

"Shut up, Muffin."

Jimmy Silver mounted on a bed to address the meeting, and the Classical juniors gathered around him.

"Gentlemen!" began Jimmy Silver.

"Go it, Jimmy!" said Lovell encouragingly.

"Gentlemen, you know how the matter stands—"

"Then you needn't tell us," suggested Peele.

"Shut up, Peele!"

"There's going to be a row when we go down," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, the whole Form has got to stand together. It's us against Mr. Cotts, and the word is shoulder to shoulder!"

"Bravo!"

There was not a dissentient voice. Evidently the Classical Fourth were in full agreement with the orator mounted on the bed.

"The train isn't fit to be a master at Rookwood," resumed Jimmy Silver. "He knows his business, so far as that goes. But he don't know how to handle us. We can be led, but not driven!"

"The man's a cad—"

"Ye, rather, he is!"

"The very outside edge in cads and—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The question is, what are we going to do with the matter. We can't lynch him—"

"What a pity!" murmured Lovell.

"We can't bump him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there's one thing we can do," said Jimmy Silver. He paused impressively. "We can send him to Coventry!"

Jimmy Silver's suggestion took the Classics by surprise.

They had heard of sending a fellow to Coventry, certainly, but sending a Form-master to Coventry was rather a new idea.

"Off your rocker, old bean!" asked Peele pettily.

"Shut up, Peele!" roared Lovell.

"How exactly are we going to work it?" asked Mornington.

"Easily enough," answered the captain of the Fourth. "We simply buycott the boulder. From this hour he's in Coventry, and no fellow in the Fourth Form will speak to him!"

"Phew!"

"I say, Jimmy—" began Tubby Muffin.

"Well?"

"What about breakfast?"

"Kill him, somebody!"

"Yarcooh!" roared Muffin, as Arthur Edward Lovell smote him wraithfully, and he rolled over on a bed.

Breakfast was not a primary consideration with the Fourth Form just then.

"But in class?" exclaimed Gower. "We shall have to speak to the cad in class!"

"He can't make us speak," answered Jimmy Silver.

"But—but—" stammered Townsend.

"But we can't do our lessons without speakin' to the blighter!" howled Topham.

"We're not going to any lessons."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"Great pip!"

"No lessons!" Tubby Muffin brightened up. "I say, that's a jolly good idea, if it can be worked!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind, we've all got to stick together," said Jimmy Silver impressively. "But, shoulder to shoulder, we can beat that brute hollow. He will have to call in the Head to deal with us."

"Oh!"

The Classical Fourth did not look specially pleased at the idea of being dealt with by the Head.

"You see," continued Jimmy Silver, "the brute had to call in the Head several times yesterday. Now, the Head don't employ a Form-master just to come and do the Form-master's work for him, does he?"

"I should say not!" chuckled Mornington.

"Dr. Chisholm was a bit snappy about it yesterday," said Jimmy. "He didn't like

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Cotts is Cull!

"SEND him to Coventry!"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

There was a buzz of astonishment in the Fourth Form dormitory.

being yanked away from his precious Sixth, and Greek roots, and things, to take on Cutts' job. The offender he gets it the less he will like it. If Cutts proves that he can't manage the Fourth, Cutts will have to go. That's clear, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Erroll. "But it looks as if we shall collect up a record number of licks in the process."

"Who cares?" exclaimed Lovell.

"H'm! I care, for one," said Peele.

"Oh, you don't count!" retorted Lovell. "You're nobody, you know. Less than nobody, in fact!"

"Look here——"

"We'll put it to the vote," said Jimmy Silver. "If any fellow can suggest a better plan for handling Christopher Cutts, let him stand up on his hind legs and say so."

"Or for ever hold his peace," said Baby.

The Classical juniors looked at one another dubiously. Jimmy Silver's plan seemed a risky one and a thorny one, but certainly nobody seemed to have any better scheme to suggest.

"Then hands up for sending Cutts to Coventry!" said Jimmy.

Nearly every hand in the dormitory went up. Risky as the plan seemed, the Classics were prepared to follow their leader. For undoubtedly Mr. Cutts had to be dealt with in some manner. Life under the severe and tyrannical rule of Mr. Christopher Cutts was not worth living.

There were only four or five dissentients. Jimmy Silver looked over the crowd.

"Carried!" he asked.

"Unanimously!" said Dick Oswald.

"Not quite unanimously," said Jimmy. "But the dissenters will have to toe the line with the rest. All the Classical Fourth must stand together."

"United we stand, divided we fall," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Any chap who stands out can please himself, but he will be licked by the Form."

"Hear, hear!"

"Any fellow speaking a word to Cutts will be sent to Coventry by the rest of the Form," said Jimmy Silver. "Also, he will be bumped six times for every word he speaks to Cutts."

Peele and his friends looked rather glum.

"And now," said Jimmy Silver, jumping off to bed—"now we'll go down. Not a word to Cutts. From this giddy moment we cut Cutts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy unlocked the dormitory door.

The Classics streamed out, and met Balkeley of the Sixth in the corridor. The Rookwood captain eyed them.

"I was just coming to root 'u out," he said. "You're late down. Cut down to brekker."

"Yes, Balkeley," said Jimmy Silver meekly.

The Classical Fourth streamed down the staircase. Their hearts were beating rather fast. At the breakfast-table they were to meet the new Form-master, who had visited the dormitory with a cane, and had been unable to obtain admission. It was not likely to be a pleasant meeting with the tyrant of the Fourth. However, they reflected that he could scarcely begin with the cane in the dining-hall.

Mr. Christopher Cutts sat at the head of the Fourth Form table as the juniors came in.

His narrow eyes glinted at the juniors, and his thin lips closed hard and tight. It was evident from his look that Mr. Cutts had neither forgotten nor forgiven.

The Classical Fourth did not bid their master good-morning.

They dropped into their places at the table in silence, without looking at him, or, indeed, seeming aware of his presence.

"Silver," said Cutts, in his grinding voice, "I hold you responsible for the locking of the dormitory door last night, and I shall deal with you in the Form-room."

Jimmy did not look up or speak.

"You hear me, Silver?" exclaimed Mr. Cutts, raising his eyebrows.

Jimmy's heart throbbed a little.

It was a new and strange experience to be sending his Form-master to Coventry. But "Uncle James" of Rookwood did not falter. He was called upon to set an example to the Fourth, and he was not found wanting.

"Silver!" rapped out Mr. Cutts.

Jimmy kept his eyes fixed upon his plate. Some of the juniors breathed hard. The tussle was beginning already.

If Jimmy had weakened the whole scheme would have fallen through on the spot. But Jimmy did not weaken.

Mr. Christopher Cutts looked puzzled, as well as angry. He did not quite catch on to this new and unexpected development.

"Are you deaf, Silver?" he ejaculated. "Why do you not answer me, boy? How dare you not answer me?"

No sign from Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell, is Silver deaf? What is the matter with him?" exclaimed the perplexed master.

Lovell seemed deaf, too. At all events, he did not answer, and he did not look up. "Lovell!" thundered Mr. Cutts.

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard, but he was silent. He was loyally ready to follow Jimmy's lead.

By this time the rest of the dining-hall was quite aware that something very unusual was going on at the Fourth Form table. Smythe & Co. of the Shell stared across at the Fourth; Hanson of the Fifth blinked at them; even the great men at the Sixth Form table seemed interested. For once, the Classical Fourth were the centre of attention.

Mr. Cutts grew crimson.

He began to realize that there was resistance in his Form—that his commands no longer carried authority.

"Lovell," he said, in concentrated tones, "I order you to answer me!"

Frozen silence from Arthur Edward Lovell. The rest of the Classical Fourth hardly breathed.

"Very well," said Mr. Cutts, at length. "I comprehend fully that this is insubordination. I shall not deal with you here. I shall deal with you in the Form-room!"

And breakfast finished in many silences.

CHAPTER 10.

"In Coventry!"

MR. CHRISTOPHER CUTTS came into the Fourth Form room, and found his pupils in their places.

The Modern Fourth were busy with Mr. Manders that morning on the Modern side, but all the Classics were there. Some of them were looking rather uneasy—especially Tubby Mullin. The fat Tubby made himself as small as possible, as Mr. Cutts' glinting eyes wandered over the class. Cyril Peelo and Lettroy and Gower looked dubious and glum; Townsend and Topham were distinctly uneasy. But the rest of the Fourth were in a resolute mood, especially the Pittal Four, and Morningside, and Conway and Peck and Van Bro.

As a matter of fact, the Fourth-Formers realized that they had little to lose by standing up against their tyrant. Mr. Cutts'

methods were so exceedingly drastic, that in any case they would have had to "go through it" that morning. And as Arthur Edward Lovell had sapiently remarked, a fellow might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. If they were going to suffer, anyway, they might as well have their money's worth, as it were.

Mr. Cutts took a cane from his desk, and stood before the class. The juniors waited breathlessly. The real tug-of-war was about to commence.

"Silver!"

Mr. Christopher Cutts rapped out the name like a bullet. But the owner of the name seemed deaf.

"Silver, stand out before the class!"

The captain of the Fourth neither spoke nor moved.

"You hear me, Silver?" thundered Mr. Cutts.

No answer.

Mr. Cutts' grip closed almost convulsively on his cane. Like the dying gladiator of old, the junior heard him, but he bled not. Mr. Cutts strode in among the forms. As the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet had to go to the mountain.

He stopped beside Jimmy Silver. With all his courage and nerve, Silver felt a tremor as the tall, angular gentleman bent over him.

"Silver, stand up and hold out your hand!"

Silence!

"If you do not obey me, Silver, I shall come you across the shoulders!"

Still silence.

Slash!

Mr. Cutts' temper was at boiling-point now. He brought down the cane with a terrific lash across Jimmy Silver's back.

"Yarnab!" roared Jimmy.

That terrific cut made him find his voice involuntarily.

"Now hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Cutts.

Jimmy sprang from the form. He did not intend to sit still and be lashed at Mr. Cutts' pleasure.

He ran out into the middle of the Form-room, and Mr. Cutts rushed after him.

"Hold out your hand, Silver!"

Jimmy did not answer, or hold out his hand. He dodged behind the master's high desk.

"Come here!" pointed Mr. Cutts.

"Stick it out, Jimmy!" shouted Lovell. Mr. Cutts spun round.

"Lovell, step out here at once! Hold out your hand, sir."

Lovell did not answer or move.

Mr. Cutts strode towards him, with his cane uplifted. Lovell moved fast enough then. He dodged round the form.

"I—I will deal with you presently, Lovell!" panted Mr. Cutts. "Silver, once more I command you to come here and take your punishment."

Jimmy watched him warily over the high desk, without speaking. Mr. Cutts made a rush at him, and Jimmy dodged round the desk. After him came the infuriated Mr. Cutts, his gown streaming behind him, his cane swishing in the air.

While

An inkpot flew through the air, and caught Mr. Cutts under the chin. A stream of ink shot over his gown.

"What—what—"

The inkpot crashed on the floor.

"Mornington! That was you, Mornington! You—you have dared to hurl an inkpot at me!" shrieked Mr. Cutts.

Mornington smiled serenely.

The enraged Form-master made a rush at him, and Morny leaped up and dodged round the back of the class.

There were now three juniors on their feet, dodging Mr. Cutts; and the rest of the Form sat and looked on breathlessly.

Mr. Cutts seemed rather at a loss.

Lessons did not seem likely to begin early, at this rate. Mr. Cutts had determined, that morning, to make a severe example of the rebellious spirits in his Form. He found his path a thorny one.

"Silver!" he gasped. "Once more I command you to come here!"

Jimmy was behind the big blackboard easel now. He eyed Mr. Cutts warily without speaking.

Evidently he did not intend to come.

Mr. Cutts started for him, and Jimmy backed round the easel, watching him. The Form-master made a sudden rush. Whether he bumped on the easel, or whether Jimmy gave it a push at the psychological moment, was not clear. The big easel went over with a crash—on Mr. Cutts!

Crash!

"Oh! Oh! Ah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth.

Mr. Cutts went sprawling on the floor,

with the easel on top of him. Conroy jumped to his feet.

"Turn him out!" he shouted. "We're had enough of this! Turn him out of the Form-room!"

"Back up!" shouted Lovell.

Conroy led, but Jimmy Silver was a good second. Before Mr. Cutts could gain his feet, they had hold of an ankle each. Lovell and Baby and Newmans had a hold a second later.

The dazed and astounded Form-master found himself whisked along the floor to the doorway.

Morny ran to open the door.

"Out with him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Outside!"

"Let go!" shrieked Mr. Cutts. He grabbed wildly at the floor with his hands, but his legs were safe in the grasp of nearly a dozen hands, and he had no chance. "Help!"

"Outside with him!" roared Lovell.

Mr. Cutts rolled into the corridor.

He lay there, gasping astertorously, and the juniors jumped back into the Form-room. Jimmy Silver slammed the door and turned the key.

He was only just in time.

A second after the key turned Mr. Cutts hurled himself against the door, and it shook under his weight.

Crash!

Lovell chuckled.

"He can keep that up as long as he likes," he remarked. "That door is a bit stronger than Cutts, I fancy."

Arthur Edward was right. The stout oaken door stood quite firm. Outside, Mr. Cutts could be heard spluttering with rage.

"We're fairly started now," said Mornington. "It's us against Cutts; and there's no turnin' back!"

"No fear!"

A voice, hoarse and husky with rage, penetrated through the keyhole.

"Open this door instantly, or I shall call the Head here!"

No answer.

Mr. Cutts' footsteps stamped away down the corridor. The Classical Fourth exchanged glances.

"The Head!" murmured Newcome.

"What will the Head say?"

"We've got to stand it!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors waited in rather painful anxiety. Footsteps sounded in the corridor at last. Then there was a quiet, but very commanding voice without.

"Open this door!"

It was the Head!

CHAPTER 17.

The Revolt of the Fourth!

JIMMY SILVER unlocked the door at once.

He drew it wide open, and Dr. Chisholm rushed into the Form-room.

Mr. Cutts, pale with rage, followed him in. Dr. Chisholm's brow was darkly knitted.

He had had to leave his duties in the Sixth Form room in support of Mr. Cutts, and he was deeply annoyed and exasperated.

But all his wrath was not directed against the juniors. A Form-master who could not handle his Form was not likely to please the Head of Rookwood.

Mr. Beetham had had no trouble of this kind in his time, but since Mr. Cutts' arrival there had been incessant trouble in the Fourth Form room. The Head could not fail to see that the fault could not all lie with the Form.

"Here, Mr. Cutts inform me that you have spotted him from this Form-room!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm. "Such an occurrence has never taken place at Rookwood before."

"There's never been a master like Mr. Cutts before, sir!" said Mornington.

"Silence! I shall rule the whole Form!" said the Head. "And if there is any further disturbance here, I shall flog the whole Form."

Jimmy Silver set his lips. This was the second time the Head had awarded a caning to the whole Form since Mr. Cutts' advent at Rookwood. But, after all, it was no more painful than what Mr. Cutts had intended for his pupils; and it was quite certain that the headmaster would very soon be fed up with being called upon to perform such duties.

The Head lost no time in carrying out his drastic sentence.

One after another the Classical Fourth went through it—most of them in silence, though there were loud howls from Tubby Muffin.

Dr. Chisholm looked a little tired when he had finished. He had put some energy into the infliction.

He laid down the cane at last.

"Now I shall leave you with your Form-master!" he said. "Let there be no further disturbance here. I am ashamed of you!"

With that crushing remark the Head swept out.

Mr. Cutts eyed his Form almost wolfishly when the headmaster was gone. The hapless juniors were rubbing and squeezing their hands, most of them in the lowest possible spirits.

Probably Mr. Cutts would have been pleased to repeat the punishment on the spot, but he realised that there was danger in the air.

"We will now proceed!" he said harshly.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

The path the rebels had set themselves was a thorny one, and after their experience at Dr. Chisholm's hands, there was much doubt and hesitation.

It seemed only too likely that the rebellion would flake out, and Mr. Cutts would resume his sway. But Jimmy Silver was resolved. If he was called upon to surrender, he was determined not to speak.

Perhaps intentionally, Mr. Cutts called upon Tubby Muffin to construe first. Tubby was pretty certain not to adopt an heroic attitude, and his submission would break the ice, as it were.

"Muffin!"

Tubby rubbed his fat hands, and cast an anxious blink at his Form-fellows. He did not answer for a moment.

"Muffin!" thundered Mr. Cutts.

"Yes, sir!" squeaked Tubby desperately. Such courage as he had oozed out at Tubby's podgy finger-tips.

"You will construe, Muffin!"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Tubby.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave the fat Classical a ferocious look.

"I—I can't help it!" mumbled Tubby.

"I—I can't stand any more cane, you know. Oh, dear!"

"Muffin, are you talking to Lovell?"

"Eh? Oh, no, sir!"

"To whom are you talking, then?" thundered Mr. Cutts.

"I—I wasn't talking, sir!"

"Do not tell me falsehoods, Muffin! Lovell, was Muffin speaking to you?"

Arthur Edward Lovell's lips closed like a vice. He was made of sterner stuff than Reginald Muffin.

"You hear me, Lovell?"

Lovell stared directly in the Form-master's face without speaking. His palms were aching savagely from the Head's caning. But his spirit was unbroken. He was sticking to the plan laid down and adopted at the Form meeting in the dormitory.

Mr. Cutts picked up his cane.

"I command you to speak, Lovell!"

Not a word from Arthur Edward.

"Stand out before the class!"

Lovell did not move.

Mr. Cutts' eyes glinted with rage. He seized Lovell by the collar, and wrenched him bodily out of his place.

Then his cane came down with a savage lash across Lovell's shoulders.

Arthur Edward roared, and tore himself loose.

His face was crimson with wrath.

"Come out of this, you fellows!" he roared. "We've had enough."

He rushed to the door and threw it wide open. Mr. Cutts brandished his cane.

"Come back!" he howled.

Lovell strolled furiously out into the corridor. Jimmy Silver jumped up and called to his comrades. With one accord the Classical Fourth followed their captain.

Mr. Cutts threw himself between the juniors and the doorway.

"Stop! Stand back! I——"

The cane fell on Jimmy Silver. There was a scuffle, and Mr. Cutts went whirling away. He sat on the Form-room floor violently. The Classical Fourth marched out.

Only Tabby Muffin remained in his place, terrified to move. But as he found himself left alone with the terrible Mr. Cutts, Tabby jumped up and ran for it. Mr. Cutts at the same moment jumped up and ran for Tabby.

The tyrant of the Fourth was purple with passion now. He seemed to have thrown all self-control to the winds. His cane came down again and again on Tabby Muffin's back as the fat Classical fled.

Tabby roared and yelled, and put up speed, but Mr. Cutts' long legs enabled him to keep pace easily with Tabby's greatest efforts, and the cane rose and fell without ceasing.

The hapless Tabby was really the least offending in the Form, but he was at Mr. Cutts' mercy, and the infuriated man was thirsting to "take it out" of somebody.

So he took it out of the unfortunate Reginald Muffin.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Yaroooo! Help! Yooop! Murder! Help!" raved Tabby Muffin, as he fled with ducked head from the lashing cane.

Crash!

"Stop!"

"Oh crickey!"

At the corner of the passage the fleeing junior rushed right into a figure in cap and gown, and the Head of Rookwood reeled against the wall. Tabby, in utter horror at having cannoned the Head, darted away. Mr. Cutts stopped irresolute, and lowered his cane.

CHAPTER 12.

Exit Christopher Cutts

DR. CHISHOLM panted for breath. It was no joke to be cannoned by Tabby Muffin in full career. The Head leaned on the wall, and gasped. It was a full minute before he could speak.

But even before he found his voice his eyes glittered over his glasses at Mr. Christopher Cutts. It was evident that a storm was coming, but Mr. Cutts was too enraged himself to care very much.

"Mr. Cutts!" stuttered the Head at last. "How dare you!"

"Sir!" booted Mr. Cutts.

"I engaged you, sir, to take up the duties of a Form-master here!" stormed the Head. "I find you chasing a junior along the corridor, and beating him in a cruel and brutal manner——"

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"How dare you use a boy in such a way!" thundered the Head. "Muffin must be covered with marks from your cane! Do you think for one moment, sir, that such hooliganism will be permitted at Rookwood?"

"The boy refused to stop! The Form is out of control!" snapped Mr. Cutts savagely. "My methods have been interfered with——"

"Your methods, sir, seem to be more suitable to a slave plantation than to a Public school! Why are the boys out of control? They were never out of control with Mr. Bootles!"

"Confound Mr. Bootles!" snorted the angry master. "I have heard quite enough of Mr. Bootles!"

"Sir!" staggered the Head. "You—you venture to use such expressions to—to me?"

"I demand the exemplary punishment of the whole Fourth Form!" said Mr. Cutts. "Unless every boy in the Form is flogged for this behaviour—including Muffin, sir—I shall have to consider whether to hand you my resignation! Milk-and-water methods will not answer with these unruly boys! I demand the most severe and exemplary punishment!"

"Yes—you will hand me your resignation!" gasped the Head. "Do you imagine, for one moment, that I should allow you to remain another day at Hookwood, after the way I have seen you treat this boy Muffin? I should be failing in my duty, sir—"

Mr. Cutts paused. Apparently he had not expected the Head to be so ready to accept his resignation.

"I—I spoke hastily, sir," he said. "I—I withdraw my remark about handing in my resignation! I am prepared—"

"I am not prepared to allow you to remain, sir! I am glad—I am thankful—that I have seen you in your true colours! What, sir! I was brought away from my duties by the sounds of disturbance, and I found you—"

"I—I was perhaps a little hasty in—"

"You can withdraw your resignation if you please, Mr. Cutts!" said the Head sternly. "You may resign your position, or not, as seems to you best. But if you do not resign your position, sir, you are dismissed—dismissed this day from your post in Hookwood School, sir! Kindly do not add another word! My decision is irrevocable! I should not be fit to hold my present position in this school, sir, if I allowed you to wield authority for one hour longer! You are dismissed, sir!"

"Sir! I—"

"Enough!"

And the Head—having recovered his wind—sailed majestically away, leaving Mr. Christopher Cutts with an expression on his face that a Prussian Hun might have envied.

"Sacked!"

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Sure of it!"

"Won! Yes! Ow!"

Tuffin Muffin joined the crowd of

Classical Fourth in the quad, squeaking with pain, but bursting with the glad news. He had heard what the Head had said to Mr. Cutts, and it almost convulsed him for the aches and pains in his fat back.

"Hurray!" roared Lovell.

"Yow-ow-ow!" mumbled Tobby. "I'm hurt—I'm fearfully hurt! But you should have heard the old sport jawing him—Yow-wow! Talked to him like a—yow-ow!—picture-book! Cutts was quite—ow!—green! Wow!"

Tobby Muffin bubbled with satisfaction and anguish at the same time, and the result was peculiar.

"Hallo! Here comes Bulkeley!"

The Hookwood captain came out of the School House.

"Get into your Form-room!" he rapped out.

"Cutts there?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"No. The Head has asked me to take you for the rest of the day," said Bulkeley. "I think Mr. Cutts is leaving! Get along with you!"

With joyous faces the juniors trooped in. They had aching palms still—but Mr. Cutts was going! They had all been through it—but Mr. Cutts was going! Mr. Cutts was going—that was consolation for everything.

And in the Form-room, in charge of the prefect, the Classical Fourth were as good as giddy. They wanted it to be quite clear that the trouble wasn't their fault, and they knew the value of discipline, though they rebelled against tyranny.

Bulkeley had no fault to find with them that morning, and they were equally satisfied with Bulkeley. It was, as Arthur Edward Lovell observed, a glorious change after Christopher Cutts.

It was after morning lessons that the hack came from the station to take away Mr. Cutts and his baggage. He was going that day; the Head had determined that another sun should not go down upon him at Hookwood. Peele suggested hissing and cat-calling; but Jimmy Silver frowned him into silence. The Classical Fourth would not triumph over a fallen enemy.

So in silence Mr. Cutts shook the dust of Hookwood from his feet, and glad enough were the juniors to see him go. He gave the crowd of Classics a black and better look as he drove away, but they stared at him with expressionless faces, in silence.



Whether Mr. Cutts bumped on the easel, or whether Jimmy Silver gave it a push at the psychological moment, was not clear. Anyway the big easel went over with a crash—on Mr. Cutts! Crash! "Oh! Ow! Ah!" gasped the Form-master. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth. (See Chapter 18.)

CHAPTER 19.

Lovell's Idea!

"IT'S a good twenty miles!" said Raby. "Quite!" remarked Newcome. "Every bit!" said Jimmy Silver. Whereat Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.

"I've gone over it on the map!" he said. "It's exactly nineteen and a half miles."

"Nineteen and a half miles," said Jimmy Silver sentimentally. "is fairly hefty. You've got to consider that if it's nineteen and a half miles there, it's likewise nineteen and a half miles back. And twice nineteen and a half miles is—"

"Thirty-nine miles!" said Raby, shaking his head.

"Hilly, too!" said Newcome.

Another snort from Lovell!

The Fictal Four, of the Classical Fourth at Rockwood, were holding a discussion in the quadrangle after dinner, but it was evident that one mind in the quartette was already made up.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were undecided what they were going to do with the half-holiday. But Lovell wasn't undecided. Arthur Edward Lovell had quite decided; he was only wasting time, now, in bringing his chains round to his way of thinking.

"If you fellows can't cycle thirty-nine miles," said Lovell, "the best thing you can do is to give your jiggers away to chaps who know how to ride them. It's a shame to keep three good jiggers simply as ornaments."

Evidently Lovell was growing sarcastic.

"Thirty-nine miles," repeated Raby.

"Barely that!" said Lovell.

"And hilly—"

"Hills go down as well as up!" suggested Lovell patiently. "What you lose on the swings you bag on the roundabouts, you know."

"And what about tea?" asked Raby.

"We can get some tea at Bunbury, after seeing the show at the Ring."

"I suppose we could. But—"

"Keep on butting!" said Lovell. "Don't mind me! The afternoon's going, but never mind. At this rate we shall be standing here at tea-time—butting! Keep it up."

"Keep your wool on, old chap," said Jimmy Silver scathingly. "If we're going

to hike thirty-nine miles this afternoon—

"The sooner we start the better," said Lovell. "Hanging about won't reduce the distance. Talking for an hour won't make it thirty-eight, or thirty-seven and a half."

"Not so much sarc, old chap," urged Newcome. "We can do it, I suppose, in—"

"It's a big show," said Lovell. "I want to see it! So do you fellows, only you're so slack. Stryke & Co. have been talking about it, and they'd go like a shot, only they're not up to the ride. We don't want to slack like those wasters in the Shell. Get out the bikes."

"There's another point," said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell gave a deep groan.

"Keep on!" he said. "The only trouble is, we may take root here if we stand chinning so long."

"What's the point?" asked Raby.

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful. As captain of the Fourth, and as "Uncle James" of Rockwood, he naturally felt a little more responsibility than his comrades.

"Well, I'm not sure that the Head would want us to go to the Bunbury Ring, to see a fight," he said. "You see—"

"Tain't out of bounds," said Lovell.

"Well, the Head hasn't put any place twenty miles away out of bounds, specially—"

"Nineteen and a half!" said Lovell.

"Well, nineteen and a half, then, far-head. It hasn't occurred to the Head that we might go as far as that on a half-holiday. Not seeing a fight between professional boxers—h'm!"

"Tain't a prize fight," said Lovell.

"They have gloves on, of course. It's a boxing match—and a good one. The Lamb is a gentleman boxer. I don't know anything about the man he's boxing, but I dare say he's all right. My cousin's seen the Lamb, and he's told me he's no end of a boxer, and a fine-looking fellow. He's advised me to see him if I ever get a chance. And now we've got a chance—"

"Ahem! But—"

"The Head couldn't object," said Lovell. "It's a quite decent glove fight—the Bunbury Ring is so and respectable. A chap could take his notes there. Don't hunt for

possible, Jimmy! For goodness' sake, get out your bike, and let's start."

The Co. exchanged glances.

Lovell was evidently keenly set upon visiting the Bunbury Ring, and beholding the prowess of the Lamb in a boxing match. The Co. were rather interested in boxing, and they liked the idea. There were plenty of objections, such as the distance, and the possible disapproval of the Head. But Lovell, at least, was determined, and his claims decided to go.

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver, at last. "Let's chance it. And if we're going, the sooner we start the better; it's a long way."

"A thundering long way," said Raly. "But I'm game."

"Oh, anything for a quiet life," yawned Newcome.

The Fistical Four reached the bike-shed, and wheeled out their machines. Mornington was there, mending a puncture in his machine.

"Coming along to Bunbury, Morny?" asked Lovell carelessly.

"Er? It's twenty miles away."

"What's that?" said Lovell, shrugging his shoulders.

"You won't be back for callin' ever," said Mornington. "I'm goin' on a rather less hefty spin with Errol. What the thump are you goin' to Bunbury for?"

"Boxing match."

"Well, you'd better get in to time," said Morny. "The new Form-master arrives this evenin', you know—Bulkeley said he may be here about six or seven. You don't want to be missin' when he's presented to his flock. And I don't suppose he would be specially pleased to know you'd been goin' around seein' prize-fights."

"Blow the new Form-master," granted Lovell. "I'm fed-up on new Form-masters. I wish Mr. Bootles had stayed."

"Same here; but he didn't stay, and Mr. Dalton is turnin' up this evenin'. And if you're missin' there—"

"Oh, rats! Come on, you fellows; we shall never get off if we wait here till Morny's done croakin'."

Jimmy Silver & Co. wheeled off their machines, leaving Mornington grinning. They wheeled them out into the road, where they found Tabby Muffin waiting for them, with a very determined expression on his fat face.

CHAPTER 20.

Carthow Wants to Know!

"HOLD on, Jimmy—"

"Buzz off, Muffin," said Jimmy Silver impatiently. "We're in rather in a hurry. Roll out of the way fatty."

"I'm coming with you," said Muffin.

"Where's your bike, then?"

"My bike's rather in want of repairs," said Tabby. "But that's all right. I'm not really up to a forty mile ride. I want one of you fellows to mount me."

"What?" roared the Fistical Four.

"Take it in turns to give me a lift," explained Tabby Muffin. "It's only ten miles each for you!"

"You fat duffer—"

"I can stand on the foot-rests behind," said Tabby. "After all, you'll be sitting down, so you'll have an easier time. I shouldn't mind walking up some of the hills—the steep ones."

"Ass!"

"I want to see the Lamb box at the Bunbury Ring," said Muffin. "I'm keen on boxing, you know. I may pick up some tips. Smythe & Co. are going, and they pressed me to come with them. But I said I wouldn't desert my old pals on a half-holiday."

"Will you get out of the way of the bikes, Muffin?"

"Are you going to give me a lift to Bunbury?"

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Look here!" said Tabby Muffin. "This won't do! You know jolly well you oughtn't to be going to see a prize-fight—"

"It's not a prize-fight, you fat idiot!"

Tabby Muffin winked—a fat wink.

"You can't spoof me!" he said. "It's a prize-fight right enough. I'm shocked at you, really. Fancy Rookwood fellows going to see a prize-fight—"

"What's that?"

Carthow of the Sixth came out at the gates while Reginald Muffin was speaking.

He stopped at once.

The Sixth Form bully fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver & Co., with a glint in them.

"So you're going to see a prize-fight!" he exclaimed. "I'm not surprised at it—just in the least! Only you jolly well won't go! It will be my duty to report this—"

The Fistic Four looked at Carthew as if they could eat him. It was sheer ill-luck that their old enemy of the Sixth should have dropped upon them like this.

"It's nothing of the sort!" bawled Lovell.

"Where are you going, then?" demanded Carthew.

"Find out!"

That was not a properly respectful reply to make to a Sixth Form prefect, but Lovell's temper was rising. He turned his back on Mark Carthew, and wheeled his bike on. As Tubby Muffin was standing directly in the way, Tubby received Lovell's front wheel on his fat little legs, and was fairly howled over.

"Yaroooh!" roared Muffin, as he sat in the dusty road.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Stop!" shouted Carthew.

Richly speaking, Jimmy Silver & Co. ought to have stopped at an order from a prefect of the Classical Sixth. But they were in a hurry, and they were fed up with Carthew and his meddling. Headless of the prefect, they jumped on their machines and careered away down the road.

Carthew made a rush after them, but he was dropped behind at once. He turned back savagely to Muffin, who was scrambling up, crimson with wrath. In a few minutes Carthew had extracted from Tubby a full account of the Bumbury Ring, and the Lamb's pugilistic display there.

And Carthew went on his way towards Coombe with a sour smile on his face. He had never forgotten his old grudge against the Fistic Four, and he felt that his chance had come at last of playing off old scores.

True, it was only a boxing match the juniors were going to see, and there was no harm in it. But it was not strictly within the rules, and by a little judicious exaggeration, Mark Carthew considered that he could make the exploit look much worse than it was. And the new master of the Fourth was to arrive that day.

"It's my duty to report this, of course!" Carthew grinned. "I'll bring 'em before Dalton, and start them in their new master's black books. Nothin' like making a bad impression to begin with. They'll have their Form-master down on them from the start."

He was going to do his duty as a prefect thoroughly—perhaps a little too thoroughly.

And when he reached Coombe, Carthew turned into the garden of the Bird in Hand Inn, and by a circuitous route reached the billiards-room, where he was soon deep in a hundred up with Mr. Joey Hook, with a "quid" on the game, which certainly was a peculiar proceeding for so very distant a prefect!

CHAPTER 21.

The Fight at Bunkery!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. pedalled away cheerily on their long ride.

It was a sunny afternoon, and merrily to be out of doors skimming along the lanes, fresh in the green of spring, was happiness.

The encounter with the bully of the Sixth was unfortunate, and might lead to trouble later, but the Co. dismissed it from their minds for the present. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof. It was an unmeeting trouble half-way.

So the Co. howled merrily along the lanes, and passed through Letcham, and fairly spread themselves on the wide, white country road beyond.

Three cyclists came into view ahead, past Letcham, and they recognised Smythe and Howard, and Tracy of the Shell. They grinned.

"So Adolphus & Co. are going!" said Jimmy Silver. "If I were a betting chap, I'd lay a hundred to one they don't get near Bunkery to-day."

"Not within ten miles, I fancy!" chuckled Lovell.

There was a hill outside Letcham, and on the hill the Shell cyclists dismounted. The Fistic Four, pedalling on their lowest gears, came up with them, and hailed them cheerily.

"Hallo, Smythey!"

Adolphus Smythe turned a back-lustre eye upon them. His face was red, his forehead bedewed with perspiration. Howard and Tracy were breathing hard and grunting. The nuts of the Shell had covered about six miles already. They did not look like doing the remaining fourteen.

"Going strong, Smythey?" grinned Baby.

"Oh, rats!" said Adolphus.

"You should have left off the smokes, Smythey!" chuckled Newcome. "How much wind have you got left?"

"Don't give me any of your fag cheek!"

captioned Smythe. "We'll beat you to Bunbury if you're join' there."

"Yes, retreat!" gasped Howard.

Jimmy Silver winked at his comrades.

"Done!" he said. "It's a go!"

The Fistical Four dismounted at the hill grew steeper, and wheeled their machines on. Beyond lay a long slope for two or three miles. The seven juniors nudged together, and came down the slope with a rush. On the lower level the Shell fellows got ahead.

Smythe looked back, with a triumphant grin.

"Bestin' them!" he gasped.

"What ho!" breathed Tracy.

The Fistical Four rode on a dozen yards or so behind the murr of the Shell.

"Take it easy here for a bit," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got a bigger hill ahead of us after another mile, and we don't want to do too much walking up. Let dear old Adolphus think he's bagged a win."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows kept ahead, occasionally turning their heads and making mocking gestures at the heroes of the Fourth. They were feeling very pleased with themselves at giving such hefty cyclists as the Fistical Four a lead.

At the foot of the next hill Smythe & Co. dismounted to wheel up. Jimmy Silver & Co. came pedalling on.

"Busted already, Smythe!" grinned Lovell. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye-ee!" sang Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four shot ahead, pedalling up the incline on a low gear. Smythe stared after them and panted.

"The beasts! They seem as fresh as paint. They were only pullin' our leg, the cads! Oh, dash this hill!"

"Bliss it!" groaned Tracy. "And there's two more as bad as this before we get to Bunbury."

Jimmy Silver & Co. disappeared over the crest of the hill. They went down on the further side with a merry rush. On the next hill, winding white over the high downs, they looked back. But there was no sign of Adolphus Smythe and his nutty friends.

"They cranked on the last rise!" chuckled Lovell. "Silly asses to think they could ride to Bunbury!"

The Fistical Four rode on merrily. From each hill-top they looked back, but they saw no more of Adolphus & Co. These

nutty youths, drenched with perspiration and in extremely bad temper, had turned back, and were slowly and painfully grinding home to Rookwood. Adolphus Smythe had over-estimated his powers, as he often did.

But even the hardy chums of the Fourth were ready for a rest when they pedalled into Bunbury at last.

The four bikes were put up at the railway station, and the chums of the Fourth made their way to the Ring.

It was easy enough to find that building, which was in the High Street of Bunbury, and was adorned with flaming posters, giving pictorial representations of the terrific combats that had—or hadn't—taken place in the Ring.

The Saturday afternoon show was evidently popular, for the Fistical Four found a good crowd proceeding in the same direction. Judging by the numbers of the crowd, it was going to be a full house.

As they wedged in the crowd, they heard a good deal of discussion on the subject of the forthcoming encounter.

The young boxer who was known as the Lamb was booked to stand up to the Bunbury Pot, a local celebrity. And the Yet was plainly the favourite. The Lamb, it appeared, was a stranger from afar, and, though known to be a good man, was not personally known in Bunbury. And the loyal Bunburians backed up their local champion to a man.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed in with the crowd and secured good seats. There was a raised and roped ring, where the glove-fight was to take place, as yet untenanted. Jimmy Silver glanced rather sharply over the crowded audience. Although there was no harm in the show, there was no telling what view the Head might take if he knew the juniors had visited it. But Jimmy saw no face that he knew.

"Too far from Rookwood for anybody to be here that knows us," said Lovell. "And Carthew doesn't know we were bound for Bunbury. Besides, I shouldn't mind anybody knowing we came home."

Jimmy nodded, and dropped back into his seat.

"Least said soonest mended, all the same," he answered. "I only hope Carthew hasn't got it out of Muffin."

"Oh, bother Carthew!" said Lovell carelessly. "Here they come in! That big chap is the Pot, I suppose."

"Nearly three as big as the other fellow."

commented Jimmy. "They're not the same weight by any means. Blessed if I should like to stand up to those leg-of-mutton paws!"

"The Lamb looks game, though," said Lovell, with the air of a connoisseur.

The juniors looked with a good deal of interest at the Lamb.

He was a young man; he did not look over twenty-five at the most. In the scanty attire of the ring, his well-developed limbs showed off well; he was a picture of grace and physical development. His face was handsome, with a frank expression on it that was very pleasing, and it bore no signs whatever of his peculiar profession. The Bunbury Pet was of a larger and coarser mould, and he certainly was not pretty to look at, with his square jaw and a nose that had been broken at some stage in his pugilistic career.

There were evident signs of swank in the manner of the Pet as he grinned to his friends and enthusiastic backers in the front rows. Evidently the Pet was expecting to knock out his opponent before the stipulated ten rounds were up.

But there was a cool and quiet confidence in the Lamb that impressed some of the more critical of the spectators.

"He looks a good man," was Jimmy Silver's comment. "I shouldn't be surprised if he pulls it off."

"I believe there's a purse of fifty guineas on it," remarked Lovell. "I—I hope there won't be any damage done."

Jimmy Silver grinned. Lovell's misgiving was coming rather late in the day. It was very possible for a glove-fight to degenerate into sheer brutality; and if that happened, certainly the chums of Rookwood did not want to be present. But the clear, frank, handsome face of the Lamb was reassuring.

"Seconds out of the ring!"

"Time!"

And the fight began.

CHAPTER 22.

Something Like a Surprise!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. watched with keen interest.

Somehow, they felt their sympathies go out to the handsome young boxer who was called the Lamb, and whose name

they did not know. Perhaps it was because the rest of the crowd backed the Bunbury Pet.

In the first few rounds the "gentleman boxer" was holding his own well, and more of the punishment was taken by the Edinburghian. The Pet's eyes were gleaming now; he was beginning to look "ugly." In the fifth round he forced the fighting, and there were thudding blows. But for the gloves severe damage would have been done, and even with the gloves the blows told heavily. The Pet was aiming at a knock-out, but he never succeeded in getting his little and nimble adversary just where he wanted him. Once, when the Lamb was almost cornered, a light spring saved him, and the Bunbury Pet whirled clumsily after him, gritting his teeth.

But the young boxer was the first to go to grass, in the seventh round. The Pet grinned down at him while the count was taken.

But the Lamb was on his feet at six, and stalling off the fierce attack of the Pet, barely holding his own till the call of time gave him a much-needed respite.

"That was a rather close thing for our man!" murmured Lovell.

"A mile is as good as a mile," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, rather! But you see comes up smiling."

Lovell was right. The Lamb stepped up briskly from his corner at the call of time, seemingly as fresh as paint.

The eighth round was hammer-and-tongs and close on the call of time, the Lamb went down again under a terrific drive.

Arthur Edward Lovell looked quite grave.

"If he walks on after that he's a good man," he said.

And the Lamb did walk on, for the ninth round met by a grinning Pet. The Bunbury man was quite confident now, and sure of victory.

For a full minute the young boxer was busy stalling him off, and then of a sudden came a kaleidoscopic change. The Lamb's right got him, crashing right on the mark, and the Bunbury Pet went down as if he had been shot. There was a loud hum in the audience. Anxious eyes fixed on the lone champion as the count was taken.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—"

The Bunbury Pet made an effort.

But he sank back again helplessly. That terrific blow had fairly knocked him out, and the Pet was done.

"Eight, nine——"

The Lamb waited quietly.

"Out!"

There was a loud buzz, and some cheers for the winner. The Fistical Four cheered heartily, quite relieved at the victory of the man they honoured with their allegiance. So vigorous was their cheering, indeed, that it attracted a glance from the Lamb himself, and the young boxer smiled.

"Well, it was a good show," said Lovell as the juniors struggled out into the crowd.

"Worth biking over for—what?"

"Oh, quite!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Only we've got to get home again," said Newcome. "Twenty miles home——"

"Nineteen and a half."

"Oh, rats!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to the station for their bicycles, and mounted for the ride home to Rookwood.

The ride to Banbury had been more downhill than up. Consequently the ride home to Rookwood was more uphill than down. Whether the distance was twenty miles, or only nineteen and a half, there was more of it than the chums of the Fourth wanted on the way home. But they pedalled away manfully, up hill and down dale.

"Late for calling over, anyhow," remarked Newcome.

"We've been late for call-over before," grunted Lovell. "Don't croak!"

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver.

"My hat, though, I shall be glad to get in to tea."

The chums of the Fourth had not stopped for tea at Banbury. Without that it was only too clear that they would be late home. They refreshed themselves with chunks of toffee as they rode; but they thought of tea, and new-laid eggs and ham, in the end study at Rookwood, with a deep yearning. But after the feast came the reckoning. They had had their entertainment, and now it was time to pay the piper. They rode on resolutely as the dusk descended over the downs.

"Might have taken the train," Newcome remarked, when they stopped to light up. "That would have landed us at Coombe by this time."

"Who's got in to ride on railway

ferns?" granted Lovell. "What's the good of bringing a bike, and carting it home by train, anyhow?"

"I'm jolly tired!"

"Oh, stick it out!"

"I am sticking it out, ain't I?" said Newcome, rather tartly. "I'm not asking you to give me a lift, like Tubby Mullin!"

"Easy does it!" murmured Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Keep smiling, you know."

The Fistical Four rode on again, with their lamps burning. They came through Letcham at last; already later than the hour for locking the gates at Rookwood.

"There'll be a holy row!" said Raby.

"Dashed unlucky that our new Farm-master is coming this evening, too."

"Can't be helped!" grunted Lovell.

"I wonder what Dalton's like!" said Jimmy Silver. "May be an awfully decent chap, you know."

"And he mayn't!" growled Raby. "May be another beast like Cuffa."

"My hat! Let's hope not."

"Oh, don't chin us much!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Put your breath into your biking!"

"Rats!"

There was no doubt that the Fistical Four were fatigued, and perhaps tempers were growing a little tart in consequence. And they were very hungry. They left Letcham behind and pedalled through Rookham, and then on to Coombe. They were glad to find themselves in Coombe Lane at last, with Rookwood School ahead of them.

"Eight o'clock!" said Jimmy Silver as they passed through the village. "Great pip!"

"Can't be helped!"

"Only another mile now, thank goodness!"

"Only three-quarters!" said Lovell.

"Bow-wow!"

The chums glided on towards the school, their lamps gleaming out through the spring evening. Lights from a vehicle ahead, which they were overtaking, caught their eyes, as they drew near the school gates.

"That's the station hack," said Jimmy Silver. "Hallo, it's stopping at the school!"

"Somebody from the station for Rookwood——"

"The new master!" exclaimed Baby. "My hat! You to one it's Mr. Dalton! We shall hop in along with him."

"I wish to goodness we'd taken the train home!" mumbled Baby.

"Lot of good wishing that now!" grunted Lovell. "Come on! Even if it's the new master, he won't eat us, I suppose!"

They could hear the bell ringing in the porter's lodge within the gates. Old Mack came out to open the gates, and they were wide when the juniors arrived, and jumped off their machines. A young man in an overcoat and bowler hat had stepped from the back, and was speaking to the porter as the four juniors wheeled their bikes in. They could guess that it was the new Form-master, Mr. Dalton, but they did not want to interview him just then, and they wheeled in rather hastily.

Old Mack looked quickly round.

"Names?" he snapped. "I've got to report 'yer!"

And Jimmy Silver & Co. had to stop.

The young man in the overcoat glanced at them carelessly as the porter took their names. They looked at him. The juniors were standing in the shadow, but where the new arrival stood, the light from the porter's lodge fell clearly upon him. It showed up a handsome, frank, pleasant face—a face at which Jimmy Silver & Co., after the first glance, stared with a fixed and frozen stare.

For they knew that face!

Only a few hours before they had seen it—when the young man was very differently clad!

"Silver, Baby, Lovell, Newname!" mumbled old Mack. "These four is in your Form 'ere, Mr. Dalton, sir."

Jimmy Silver & Co. fairly fled. They rushed their bikes away, leaving the young master staring after them. He had been going to speak. What had happened had astonished them so much that they wondered whether they were dreaming.

They did not speak till they reached the bike shed. There, instead of putting up their bikes at once, they blinked at one another.

"It—it—it's not possible!" stuttered Lovell.

"You—you saw—" gasped Baby.

"Yes, but—"

"Dalton!" said Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"It's the new master, right enough. Old

Mack called him Mr. Dalton! And so—he—he's—"

"The Lamb!" breathed Newname.

"The boxer!" stuttered Lovell. "It ain't possible—we're dreaming! How—how could he be the Lamb—and Dalton—"

"It's a giddy resemblance," said Baby. "One of those mysterious resemblances you read about, you know."

"It must be!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head. He was amazed, almost dumbfounded, but he knew that his eyes had not deceived him.

"No good blinking the facts, you fellows," he said. "It's the Lamb—the man we saw fighting at Bunbury—and it's Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Fourth at Rookwood. And—and—goodness knows what it all means, but I think the less we say about it the better. The Head can't know! But he's all right. This a case, my infants, where silence is golden."

His chums agreed that it was; and in quite a dazed state of mind they put up their machines, and walked away to the School House.

CHAPTER 22.

A Secret to Keep!

THE end study in the Fourth Form passage was rather crowded while the Festival Four had a very late tea—or early supper. Most of the Classical Fourth knew where they had been that afternoon, and wanted to know all about it, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were called upon to describe the fight at the Bunbury Ring in full detail. They obliged; but there was one piece of information that they kept very carefully to themselves; and that was the fact that in Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Rookwood Fourth, they had recognised the "gentleman boxer" of Bunbury. Some instinct warned them that that was not a topic to be discussed up and down the school; Mr. Dalton's affairs were no business of theirs, and they did not want to start what would have amounted to a scandal, about a master who had arrived at the school only that day.

Not that Jimmy Silver & Co. thought any the worse of a Form-master who was a boxer too. They were rather inclined to admire him on that account. They had admired the

Lamb for the splendid and plucky fight he had put up at Bunbury. They did not cease to admire him when they found that the same man was their new Form-master. But they realised that Mr. Dalton could not possibly want it to be known at Rookwood.

Doubtless, he had supposed that, at such a distance from the school, his exploits at Bunbury would be quite unknown and unsuspected at Rookwood. So they certainly would have been but for Arthur Edward Lovell's brilliant idea of a forty-mile cycle-spin that afternoon. And the Fistical Four were rather sorry now that they had under taken that spin. They had a secret to keep—and keeping a secret was unpleasant business.

"By the way, the new master's come," Mornington remarked, in a pause of the talk about the fight at Bunbury.

"We've seen him," said Jimmy Silver.

"He—he came in just when we did."

"Looks a decent chap," said Morry. "I rather like his looks, in fact. A bit more athletic than old Bootles was."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Lovell. "Fancy old Bootles standing up to the Pet!" He checked himself abruptly as Jimmy Silver stamped on his foot under the table.

"What's that?" asked Mornington, staring at Lovell.

"Oh, n-n-nothing!" stammered Arthur Edward.

"Hallo! Here comes Carthew!"

Carthew of the Sixth came into the end study. He fixed a most unpleasant look on the Fistical Four.

"So you've come back!" he said.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Jimmy Silver shortly.

"You've been to Bunbury?"

"No harm in going to Bunbury, I suppose!" snapped Lovell.

"You've been to the prize-fight there."

"There wasn't any prize-fight there, that I've heard of."

"No good prevaricating," said the prefect, with an unpleasant grin. "Did you go to the Bunbury Ring or not?"

"Yes!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"You saw the fight that's been advertised between the Lamb and the Bunbury Pet?"

"Just a boxing match——"

"Did you see it or not?" snapped Carthew.

"Yes!"

"I thought so. It's my duty to report this to your Form-master."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "You might give the chap a rest on his first evening at Rookwood."

"Follow me!" was Carthew's answer in that.

The Fistical Four followed the prefect from the study. They exchanged rather troubled looks as they went down the staircase. They were being taken to Mr. Dalton, to be reported for their first visit to the Bunbury Ring, and Carthew evidently expected to see them condemned and punished. But Mr. Dalton, their Form-master, was the man who had figured at the Bunbury Ring as a boxer! It was an extraordinary situation. Any other Form-master at Rookwood would probably have been severe upon their escapade. But how could Mr. Dalton be severe, in the circumstances?

That was a hopeful thought. But the situation was full of trouble. Carthew's report would show Mr. Dalton that the juniors had seen him at Bunbury, a circumstance they would have preferred to keep from his knowledge. Possibly, when they were brought specially to his attention, he would recognise them as the schoolboys he had glanced at in the Bunbury Ring. He would know they knew his secret. What would his attitude be then? He might resent their knowledge, he might be angry, he might be uneasy; and what the outcome would be to the unfortunate possessors of his secret could not be foreseen. It was with much uneasiness and trepidation that the juniors followed Carthew to the study that had once belonged to Mr. Bootles, and was now tenanted by Mr. Dalton. Carthew knocked.

"Come in!" came a deep and pleasant voice. Somehow, that voice had an encouraging effect upon the delinquents. There was a very pleasant tone in it that they liked.

Carthew opened the door, and marched in with the juniors at his heels. Mr. Dalton rose at his table. The juniors hardly dared to raise their eyes to the handsome face of the young master.

But though they did not look at him, they were aware that he gave a slight start as they stood before him. He had recognised them as the schoolboys he had glanced at at Bunbury that afternoon. The Fistical Four knew it.

What was he going to say? He said nothing but looked inquiringly at Carthew of the Sixth. That youth had evidently already made the acquaintance of the new master.

"I have brought these juniors to you, sir, as they are in your Form," said Carthew. "I have a rather serious matter to report."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dalton.

He glanced at the Fistical Four.

"They came in late after lock-up and missed call-over," said Carthew.

"Ah! Are these the four boys that came in when I did?" said Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir," murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Silver, Raby, Newcome and Lovell!" said Mr. Dalton, who appeared to have a good memory for names as well as for faces.

"Yes, sir," murmured Jimmy.

"That is not all, sir," resumed Carthew, with a glint in his eyes. "It has come to my knowledge, Mr. Dalton, that these juniors have visited a place of very ill-repute this afternoon, nothing less than a den, at Bunbury, where prize-fights take place. They have admitted that they were present at this brutal and degrading fight."

Involuntarily Jimmy Silver smiled, as he wondered how Mr. Dalton would like that description of the contest in which he had been engaged.

"Indeed!" said the new master. "Are you referring, Carthew, to the boxing match at the Bunbury Ring?"

"Yes, sir; a brutal——"

"You do not seem to be well-informed," said Mr. Dalton calmly. "There is nothing brutal in the matter, Carthew."

The prefect started. This was not the view he had expected the master of the Fourth to take.

"You—you know about the place, sir?" he stammered.

"Quite well. I do not wholly approve of the juniors visiting the Bunbury Ring, but no great harm has been done. I am sure they were not conscious of any harm in the matter."

Carthew gritted his teeth. His little scheme for landing the Fistical Four into trouble with their new master at the start was crumbling down about him.

"But—but, sir——" he stammered.

"You may have this matter in my hands, Carthew!" said Mr. Dalton, in a very decided tone.

"Very well, sir," gasped Carthew. And

he quitted the study in so great a rage that he could not trust himself to speak further.

"I shall pass over your late return," said Mr. Dalton. "But it must not occur again! You may go."

"Thank you, sir! Good-night, sir!" stammered the Fistical Four.

"Good-night, my boys!" said Mr. Dalton, in his hearty voice.

The Fistical Four left the study. In the passage they looked at one another.

"He knows we know!" murmured Lovell.

"And he wouldn't ask us to keep it dark!" said Raby. "He trusts to our honour. He's a brick!"

"A real brick!" said Newcome.

"Not a giddy syllable about Bunbury!" said Jimmy Silver. "Blessed if I can make it all out. But he's a brick, and we're going to back him up, what?"

To which the Co. responded cheerily.

"Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 24.

Carthew Makes Discoveries!

"LOVELL, you are——"

"Look here, Jimmy——"

"You've been letting your chin run away with you," said Jimmy Silver, in a tone of great severity.

"You see, I——"

Carthew of the Sixth paused. He was coming through the arch that led from Little Quad to Big Quad at Rookwood, when the voices fell upon his ears. Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the quadrangle, in a group, near the old stone archway, and they did not see Carthew. Jimmy was evidently in a magisterial mood. Arthur Edward Lovell was being called over the coals.

"Didn't we agree that nothing was to be said about our having seen Mr. Dalton at Bunbury on Saturday?" demanded Jimmy. "Not a word, not a syllable, not a giddy whisper!"

"There's no harm done," said Lovell defensively. "I'm blessed if I'm a good hand at keeping a secret, anyhow. You see, as the new master came on Saturday evening, nobody's supposed to have seen him before then. It's beastly awkward as we saw him on Saturday afternoon. But I never said a word about the fight at the

Bunbury Ring. Nobody knows that Mr. Dalton was mixed up in that."

"Thank goodness for that," said Jimmy Silver. "But Morn's just asked me why we never mentioned having seen Mr. Dalton before he arrived at Rookwood. Makes it look as we're keeping a secret."

"Well, so we are!" said Lovell.

"Fathead! Follows aren't to know it, are they?"

"Well, no! Still, there's no harm done," said Lovell. "Tain't as if I'd mentioned seeing him at the Bunbury Ring. I was jolly careful not to do that. Just happened to let out that I'd seen him before he came to Rookwood, that's all—"

"And quite enough, too!" granted Jimmy Silver. "Goodness knows what would happen if it all got out. Goodness knows what the Head would think. And Mr. Dalton is a real brick; we don't want to cause him trouble."

"No fear!" sneered Raby.

"So you see, Lovell—"

"Oh, I see," yawned Lovell. "Give us a rest, Jimmy; not so much of your Uncle James stunt, you know. Let's get along in the cricket!"

Carthaw of the Sixth came out of the archway at that. Evidently he had heard all that he was going to hear. But Carthaw wanted to know more; and he meant to know more. His curiosity was keenly excited.

"Hold on, you fags!" he snapped.

Jimmy Silver & Co. spun round, and stared at the prefect. Instantly they knew that he had overheard their talk. Jimmy Silver's teeth came together hard.

"You spying cad!"

"Silver!"

"You've been listening!" shouted Jimmy Silver furiously. It was not quite the manner in which Jimmy should have addressed a prefect of the Sixth Form; but his anger and indignation carried him away. The secret the Fistical Four had been keeping in connection with the new master of the Fourth was out now—or very nearly out.

Carthaw grimaced with rage.

"You cheeky cab!" he gasped.

"Listening!" said Lovell, with savage contempt. "Pretty business for a Rookwood prefect, spying behind a corner like Tubby Muffin!"

"I heard what you were saying," said

Carthaw. "And I want to know some more. What was Mr. Dalton doing at Bunbury? Answer me, Silver!"

"Go and eat cake!"

"I'm going to know more about this," said Carthaw, controlling his temper with difficulty.

"What does it matter to you?" demanded Newcome. "Mr. Dalton is our Form-master, not yours. Nothing to do with you."

"Oh, he's got his knife into Mr. Dalton for letting us off," said Lovell savagely. "He thought he had us on the hop when he reported us for going to the Bunbury Ring on Saturday."

"Spying cad!" said Raby.

That was too much for Carthaw. He made a rush at Raby and caught him by the ear. Raby yelled.

"Open him!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

In a twinkling, Silver and Lovell and Newcome had hold of Carthaw, and the prefect came to the ground with a heavy bump and a roar. And having gone so far, the Fistical Four decided to go a little further, and they rolled Carthaw over, and dabbed his face in a puddle, and shoved his cap down his back, amid wild yells and gasps and ejaculations from the bully of the Sixth. The Fistical Four were just warning to their work when a deep voice broke in:

"Boys! Stop this at once! How dare you!"

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Lovell. "Cave!"

The juniors let go Carthaw as if he had suddenly become red-hot, and spun round, to face Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 25.

The Heavy Hand!

MR. DALTON looked sternly at the crimson juniors.

The handsome, athletic young Form-master had been only a few days at Rookwood School, but he had already won golden opinions. He was popular in his Form; as popular as Mr. Bootles had been in his time. He was popular with the prefects and the masters, too. He had won the heart of Bulkeley, the captain of the school, by the way he played cricket. His frank, kind face was pleasant to look upon, even pompous Mr. Greely, and acid Mr. Manders, rather liked

him. And the Head was known to think a great deal of him. All the juniors described him as a real brick. And the Fistical Four, who had seen him in the boxing-ring, admired him more than all others. They felt proud of a Form-master who had been able to stand up to, and beat, the Bunbury Pet.

But just now the new master was not looking kind. His face wore a severe frown.

"How dare you lay hands on a prefect of the Sixth Form!" he exclaimed. "Are you out of your senses?"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"We—we—" stammered Lovell.

Mark Carthew scrambled to his feet. He was muddy and dishevelled, and he was crimson and breathless, panting with rage. Certainly he presented an aspect that was remarkable in a Sixth Form prefect.

"Those young scoundrels!" he gasped.

"Moderate your language, please!" said Mr. Dalton sharply.

"You see what they've done!" roared Carthew. "I'm going to the Head about it."

"You will remain where you are, and explain this matter to me," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Silver, you have ventured to lay hands on a Sixth Form prefect—"

"He laid hands on us, sir," mumbled Baby. "He was pulling my ear—"

"That is no excuse."

"He shouldn't listen behind a corner when chaps are talking," blurted out Lovell. "Prefects oughtn't to spy on fellows."

"What! Surely, Carthew, it is not possible—"

"I—I happened to hear them speaking as I came through from Little Quad," stammered Carthew, "and—and they refused to answer my questions—"

"Why did you refuse to answer Carthew, Silver?"

"Oh, dear!" murmured Jimmy helplessly.

Carthew's question had been on the subject of Mr. Dalton himself. The new Form-master, of course, did not suspect that.

"It is not advisable, as a rule, Carthew, to take notice of words heard by chance," said Mr. Dalton. "But if you have learned, accidentally, of some serious breach of discipline, it alters the matter. You shall repeat your questions in my presence, and I will see that these boys answer fully and frankly."

The Fistical Four looked at one another. Carthew remained dumb.

The position was a very peculiar one. What Mr. Dalton would think, if he learned upon what subject the prefect had been questioning Jimmy Silver & Co., the juniors could not even surmise.

"Well," said Mr. Dalton, puzzled by the silence. "I am waiting for you, Carthew. Let us go into the matter."

"I—I—" stammered Carthew.

"Upon what topic were you questioning these juniors?"

Carthew stammered.

He could not confess that he had been endeavouring to discover something to the discredit of Mr. Dalton himself.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned; they could not help it. The prefect's position was quite a painful one.

"This is not a laughing matter," said Mr. Dalton sharply.

"Nunno, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Carthew! Why do you not speak?"

"I—I—" Carthew broke off helplessly.

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth. "Silver, you will tell me, at once, upon what subject Carthew was questioning you."

"I—I—" stammered Jimmy.

"Answer me!"

"It—was about our ride over to Bunbury on Saturday, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "About—about our going to the Bunbury Ring, sir, to see the boxing match!"

A shade came over Mr. Dalton's brow.

Evidently that affair was not an agreeable topic to him.

"That matter is settled," he said. "I see no need to reopen it, Carthew."

Carthew gritted his teeth, and was silent.

"Have you anything to say, Carthew?"

"No, sir!" muttered the prefect.

"Very good! You boys will take two hundred furs each!" said Mr. Dalton. "You may go now."

Jimmy Silver & Co. departed, gladly enough. The situation was growing too painful, and they were greatly relieved to be out of it. Mr. Dalton turned to Carthew, who was crimson with fury.

"You—you are letting them off again!"

exclaimed Carthew, in a choking voice. "You saw what they've done—knocked me over, and rolled me in mud—and—and you

give them two hundred lines! I'll go to the Head."

Mr. Dalton fixed his eyes on the prefect grimly.

"You may please yourself about going to the Head, Carthew," he said. "But first you will listen to me. I have not punished these juniors severely, for a good reason. You have re-opened a matter which was settled by me several days ago. You had no authority to do this. And it appears that you have acted very injudiciously, to say the least, in hearing what was not intended for your ears. The juniors have the impression that you were deliberately playing eavesdropper."

Mr. Dalton's look showed that he shared this impression.

"I—I—" muttered Carthew.

"It is the business of a prefect to make himself respected in the school," continued Mr. Dalton. "You cannot do this by acting in a way calculated to bring contempt upon you."

"Mr. Dalton!" gasped Carthew.

"I am using plain language," said the Form-master. "It is necessary. I have been here only a few days, Carthew, but I have already observed you. I warn you that you should be more careful in your methods."

Carthew clenched his hands.

"Perhaps you had better be more careful, too, sir!" he blurted out, too enraged to measure his words.

"What? What do you mean, Carthew?"

"You've let them off!" hissed the bully of the Sixth. "Do you think I don't know why?"

"I have told you why."

"And I'll tell you why!" snarled Carthew. "It's because they saw you at the Bunbury Ring on Saturday, and you went there to keep it a secret."

For a moment the young master stood quite still, looking at Carthew. He was taken aback. It seemed to Carthew that he was afraid, and at that thought the insolence of the Sixth Form bully broke all bounds.

"When a Form-master has a shady secret with juniors—" he began.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Dalton.

"I—"

"So that is what you heard by playing the eavesdropper," said Mr. Dalton more calmly.

"You heard these juniors mention that they saw me at Bunbury on Saturday last?"

"Yes, I did—at the boxing-ring!" said Carthew viciously. "I wonder what the Head would think of one of his staff visiting such a place?"

Mr. Dalton smiled.

That remark, insolent as it was, showed that Carthew did not know all.

"You appear to have erroneous ideas with regard to the Bunbury Ring, Carthew," said Mr. Dalton. "It is a perfectly respectable place; on a par, in that respect, at least, with the National Sporting Club."

"You can tell the Head that!" snarled Carthew. "You'd better be rather careful, sir, how you deal with me, or I may mention it to the Head myself."

Carthew certainly would not have gone to that length had he not believed that the Form-master was afraid of an exposure. Never had the bully of Rookwood made a greater mistake.

Mr. Dalton strode towards him, and his hand dropped in a grip of iron on Carthew's shoulder.

"Come with me!" he said grimly. "We will go to the Head together."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I shall report your insolence," said Mr. Dalton. "I have no doubt that Dr. Chisholm will deal with it as it deserves. Come," Carthew quaked.

He realised that Mr. Dalton, so far from being afraid, was only angry and contemptuous. Carthew's sudden courage oozed out at his finger-tips.

"I—I don't want to go to the Head!" he stammered. "I—I—"

"Possibly not!" said Mr. Dalton dryly. "But I insist!"

"I—I—Let go!"

"Unless you apologise instantly for your insolence, I shall take you to Dr. Chisholm! Make up your mind at once!"

"I—I—" Carthew gasped. "I won't—I—"

"Then come!"

The grip on Carthew's shoulders, that felt like an iron vice, drew him away towards the School House. The last vestige of Carthew's courage oozed away.

"Hold on, sir! I—I—I apologise!" he gasped.

"Very good!" Mr. Dalton released him. "Take care in future, Carthew. I shall not be so lenient on another occasion."

With that, the master of the Fourth walked away. Mark Carthew stood looking after him, crimson with rage and humiliation. He almost limped away from the spot at last, with bitter rage and hatred running riot in his breast. His feelings towards the Fistical Four were quite mild and charitable, now, in comparison with his feelings towards Mr. Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth.

"I—I—I'll make him suffer for it!" muttered Carthew. "I—I'll bring him down! He was only bluffing. He daren't let the Head know; I know he daren't! But—but I couldn't chance it! But I'll find out something more. I know those young cads know more than they let on. I'll find it all out, and then—then—"

He still seemed to feel the iron grasp on his shoulder. But there was consolation in the thought of future revenge upon the young master who had humiliated him.

CHAPTER 25.

Carthew's Doing!

"HERE comes Dicky!" murmured Lovell.

And there was a chuckle in the Classical Fourth.

Richard Dalton, M.A., entered the Fourth Form-room, where the juniors were gathered for afternoon lessons.

It was quite a cheerful class that afternoon.

Mr. Dalton was a hard-working master, and he made his pupils work; which led to some bitter remarks on the part of fellows like Peele and Gower. And Tubby Muffin was rather doubtful as to what he really thought of Mr. Dalton. But there was no doubt that the Form, as a whole, liked and respected him. They would not have respected a master who had allowed them to slack.

A proof of his popularity was the fact that the juniors—out of his hearing, of course—alluded to him as "Dicky." Probably Richard Dalton would not have been wholly gratified by that proof of popularity if he had heard it.

But "Dicky" he was to the Fourth; and "Dicky" he was likely to remain, so long as he was a master at Rockwood School.

Jimmy Silver & Co. eyed Dicky rather uneasily at first; but the young master did not

pay them any special attention. Apparently he had forgotten the scene in Dig Quad. He was unaware of the Fistical Four's knowledge of his secret; though they knew that could not be! He had not spoken on the subject; yet they knew he could not be indifferent as to whether they talked about him or not. As Lovell had remarked, he relied on their honour not to chatter about matters that did not concern them; and this unspoken trust was very gratifying to the chums of the Fourth. It showed, Jimmy Silver said, that Dicky knew they knew how to play the game.

After lessons, Mr. Dalton called to the Co. as they were leaving the Form-room.

"I shall expect your lines after tea."

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy dutifully.

In the corridor, Arthur Edward Lovell shook his head in a rather doubtful way.

"Dicky might have let us off the lines," he remarked. "After all, he knows we're backing him up."

"Fathead!" answered Jimmy Silver tersely. "If he let us off because we could babble about him if we liked, it would be rotten! Dicky wouldn't do that."

"Well, that's so, too," agreed Lovell, after some thought. Arthur Edward Lovell was not a rapid thinker. "Still, some fellows would make capital out of it. Suppose Peele knew, or Gower—"

"I hope we're not like Peele or Gower!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Of course not, am! But if they know—"

"They won't know," said Jimmy. "And, look here, we'd better not talk about it even among ourselves. That sad Carthew very nearly got on to it to-day, listening behind a corner. Tubby Muffin might hear us, and then it would be all over Rockwood. Better make the whole subject taboo."

"Good idea!" said Baby.

"Here's merry old Carthew!" murmured Lovell.

The bully of the Sixth passed them in the passage. He bestowed a black scowl upon the Fistical Four in passing, but did not speak. They gave him a sweet smile in return for his scowl.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went down to cricket practice after lessons, and they found Mr. Dalton there. He was in charge of the junior practice that day, and they found that he was a wonderful coach, which increased their respect and admiration for Dicky.

Tubby Muffin rolled up to the Fistical Four when they came in after the cricket.

"What have you fellows been up to?" he asked. "Bulkeley wants to see you in his study."

"Asking us to tea, most likely," said Lovell.

Tubby chortled.

"He didn't look as if it was that!" he said. "He had his aspirant on the table. You're hooked!"

"Rats!" growled Lovell.

The Fistical Four made their way to Bulkeley's study in rather an uneasy frame of mind; though, as a matter of fact, they could not recall any recent sins of commission or omission. They found the captain of the school looking rather grim.

"Muffin says you want us, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver meekly.

"Yes. What's this you've been chattering about Mr. Dalton?" demanded the Rookwood captain sharply.

The Fistical Four stared.

"Chattering—"

"About Dicky—"

"About Mr. Dalton?"

The juniors' astonishment was so evident that Bulkeley's grim expression softened.

"Well, there's a yarn going round, and it seems to have come from you," he said. "It's being said that Mr. Dalton was at a prize-fight last Saturday—"

"Great Scott!"

"Carthew mentioned it to me, and said he understood that the information came from you in the first place," said Bulkeley. Jimmy Silver flushed.

"Carthew listened when we were talking among ourselves!" he exclaimed. "That's how he knows! And it's Carthew who's spreading the yarn!"

"Do you mean to say it's true, then?" exclaimed Bulkeley.

"It wasn't a prize-fight—it was a boxing match at the Bunbury Ring," said Jimmy Silver reluctantly. "We never meant to say a word. We couldn't help Carthew listening."

Bulkeley bit Mr. Up.

"I thought it was simply a silly yarn," he said. "It's dashed awkward. Mr. Dalton knows his own business best, of course; but—" He paused. "It's all over the school now. But, if it's true, I suppose there's nothing more to be said. You can clear off."

Jimmy Silver & Co. left the captain's study in an uncomfortable mood. Carthew had done his worst, and they were glad that he did not know all. That was one comfort. But it was had enough to have the school buzzing with the news that Mr. Dalton had been seen at what Carthew chose to call a prize-fight.

"He'll think we've been babbling, after all," muttered Jimmy Silver uncomfortably. "I wonder—"

"Let's go and see him," said Lovell resolutely. "He's bound to hear of it soon, and it's not fair that he should think we've been chattering about him."

Jimmy shook his head.

"We can't speak to him about it unless he speaks to us first. After all, he knows Carthew was listening to us, and he may guess it was that cad did the trick. Let's go and have tea."

In a rather troubled mood the chums of the Fourth proceeded to the end study.

After tea, when they took in their lines to Mr. Dalton, they looked—as they felt—uneasy, wondering whether the master had yet heard the "yarn" that was going the rounds of Rookwood.

His face gave no sign of it.

He was calm and kind as usual, though he glanced quite carefully over the impositions to see that they were well done. The Fistical Four felt rather comforted as they quitted their new master. They felt that, after all, Mr. Dicky Dalton would do them justice, and would understand that they were not responsible for the unpleasant talk when at last it reached his ears, if it had not done so already. But towards Mark Carthew their feelings were very nearly Hunnish.

CHAPTER 27.

Carthew Does Not Go to Bunbury!

"GOING to Bunbury again, you chaps?"

Tubby Muffin asked that question as the Fistical Four wheeled their bikes out on the Wednesday afternoon. Mornington and Erroll and Oswald were with the four.

"No, am!" answered Jimmy Silver. "Too jolly far for a ride. We had enough of forty mile spins last week."

"I say, if you're going—"

"I've told you we're not, fathead!"

"I know!" assented Tubby Muffin. "But if you're going, I'd like to come. Is there another boxing match at the Bunbury Ring, Jimmy?"

The captain of the Fourth glared at Reginald Muffin. Apparently the fat Classical did not place absolute faith in Jimmy's veracity. Tubby Muffin suffered from the sad fate of all liars—he never could believe what was told him.

"You fat rotter!" said Jimmy Silver. "I've a jolly good mind to scalp you! Buzz off!"

Tubby Muffin banked away.

"Well, if you won't give a fellow a lift to Bunbury——" he said.

"We're not going to Bunbury!" shrieked Lovell.

"Oh, all right; no need to yell!" said Muffin. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes, that's all! I jolly well hope Carthew will catch you at it!"

"Carthew!" said Jimmy. "What do you mean, you fat duffer?"

"I fancy Carthew knows you're going, anyhow!" jured Muffin. "That's why he's going, I fancy. Serve you right if he catches you!"

Jimmy Silver looked very grave all at once.

"How do you know Carthew is going to Bunbury this afternoon, Muffin?" he asked quietly.

"Because I heard him ask Knowles for his county map to look out the cycling routes to Bunbury," answered Muffin. "I saw him going over the map, too. And he asked Bulkeley how long it took him when he rode to Bunbury once—I heard him. You mind Carthew don't catch you going into the Ring. You won't get off so lightly next time!"

Lovell made a moment towards the doubting Thomas of the Fourth, and Reginald Muffin promptly fled to escape the lunge of a rather large boot.

Jimmy Silver's face was grave as the chums wheeled out their machines. Near the gates of Rookwood Jimmy stopped, and his comrades stopped with him. Mornay looked round.

"You fellows comin'?" he asked.

"Don't wait for us," answered Jimmy Silver. "I think, after all, we may go on another road."

"What——" began Lovell.

"Oh, all serene!" said Mornington. And he rode away with Erroll and Oswald.

The Fistical Four remained alone, three of them with inquiring eyes fixed on their "Uncle James."

"What's this stunt?" asked Lovell. "We arranged to go for a spin with Mornay and the rest. What's biting you now, Jimmy?"

"What is Carthew going to Bunbury for?" said Jimmy Silver abruptly. "He's too thumping a slacker to want to ride twenty miles out and back if he can help it!"

"Perhaps he's going to the boxing show, as he's heard so much about it lately!" grinned Newcome.

"More in his line than ours, really, especially if he could get some bats on it," said Raby.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I can't help thinking that it's up against Dicky!" he said.

"Eh? How?" asked Lovell.

"He must have a jolly good reason for such a ride, a slacker like Carthew. You remember how keen he was to get out of us what we knew; he guessed we knew more than we let on. He knows that Dicky was at the Ring—that's all. Doesn't it look as if he thinks he may find out something more by going over to Bunbury? We know he hates Dicky like poison for setting him down."

"I—I suppose it's possible. But if——"

"If he's after Dicky's scalp, we're going to chip in," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "Carthew's not going over to Bunbury spying after Dicky. He may find out lots of things. He may spot that—that——"

"That Mr. Dalton was a fighting man in the ring there," said Raby, with a whistle. "I dare say the Lamb's name was known to some people. My hat, if Carthew spotted that, he could make Dicky sit up!"

"Richard's a good sort," said Jimmy Silver. "He's been a brick to us—though he does give us lines—and it's up to us to see that nothing happens to Richard."

"Good old Richard!" chuckled Lovell. "I'm game! What are we going to do—have Carthew off his bike and mop up the road with him? It would only mean a flugging."

"Here he comes, anyhow," said Newcome. Carthew of the Sixth wheeled his bike out. He scowled at the Fistical Four and

mounted and pedalled away towards Coombe.

"Get on!" said Jimmy Silver.

"After him?"

"Yes!"

The four juniors rode slowly after Carthew. They did not want to pass him, and did not want him as yet, to guess that they were following him. But the prefect had no suspicion of that. He pedalled through Coombe and on to Rookham. Leaving Rookham behind he rode along the leafy lanes to Latcham, the Fistical Four still behind.

After Latcham, Carthew stopped to walk his machine up a hill, and then he looked back, and started at the sight of the clouds of the Fourth.

He waited for them to come up, with a grim expression on his face.

"What are you four doing here?" he asked.

"Biking," answered Jimmy Silver briefly.

"You are following me!"

"Have you purchased this road Carthew?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell sarcastically. Carthew's eyes glinted.

"Go back to Rookwood at once!" he said. "I order you, as a prefect."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances; but they did not budge. That "rational exercise of the authority of a prefect 'out no ice'" with the clouds of the end study.

"Do you hear me?" roared Carthew.

"We're not deaf."

"Go back!"

"Rats!"

"I shall report this to the Head!" shouted Carthew.

"Report and be hanged!" answered Jimmy Silver coolly.

Carthew clenched his hand. But the Fistical Four looked so warlike that he wisely decided not to come to closer quarters. Jimmy Silver & Co. were quite prepared to dust the road with Carthew, prefect as he was, in their friendly concern for Mr. Dalton, Form-master and boxer. They had decided, *nem. con.*, that it was up to them to take care of Dicky, though probably Mr. Dalton would have been very much astonished to learn that he was under the protection of four juniors in the Fourth Form.

Carthew turned away with a black look, and remounted. Behind him the Fistical Four followed.

The prefect's attempt to turn their back

removed any lingering doubt Jimmy Silver might have had. Carthew was going to Bunbury to make inquiries on the subject of Mr. Dalton, hoping to learn something against him. And if he did so while the memory of the great fight between the Lamb and the Bunbury Pet was still fresh, there was little doubt that he would get hold of the facts.

That Jimmy Silver was determined to prevent. He would have taken big risks rather than have allowed Dicky to come under the thumb of the scheming prefect.

Mile after mile glided under the revolving wheels, the Fistical Four still hanging on the track of Carthew, who took no further notice of them. Half-way to Bunbury Jimmy Silver made up his mind. The cyclists had dismounted to walk their machines up a steep hill.

"We've got to stop him," said Jimmy in a low voice. "Now's our chance! He's too jolly slack to walk the other ten miles to Bunbury, if something happens to his figger."

"But what can happen to it?" ejaculated Lovell.

"He's going to lose it!"

"My hat!"

Jimmy Silver gave his instructions to his followers, and they stared. But there was no hanging back. The Fistical Four were all game in the generous enterprise of taking care of Dicky!

They remounted their machines, and pedalled on hard after Carthew, who was still wheeling his bike up the steep hill. Carthew was perspiring and grunting, and scowling savagely. The exertion did not agree with him. He called out to Jimmy as the juniors came up.

"Silver!"

"Hallo!"

"Wheel this bike up for me."

Jimmy started. It was on the tip of his tongue to refuse. He had not ridden so far from Rookwood to lag for Carthew of the Sixth. But the next moment he realised how the prefect was playing into his hands. Jimmy had determined to get hold of the bike by charging the prefect and rolling him over—a very reckless proceeding. Now Carthew was offering him the bike! Uncle James of Rookwood smiled.

"You want me to take it, Carthew?" he asked.

"Yes, hang you!"

Carthew did not wholly expect his order to be obeyed. So he was relieved when Jimmy Silver jumped down and took the handlebars.

"Leave it to me," said Jimmy meekly.

Carthew was only too glad to leave it to him. It was far enough to tramp up the hill without wheeling the bike.

Jimmy closed one eye at his chums. Lovell and Baby and Newcome turned, and went free-wheeling down the hill the way they had come. And as Lovell passed Jimmy, the latter handed him Carthew's bike, and Lovell wheeled it on beside his own.

It was done so neatly and quickly that Carthew had no chance whatever of interfering. Indeed, even then it did not occur to him that the chums of the Fourth intended to carry off his machine.

"Stop that fooling!" he called out angrily.

Jimmy jumped on his own machine and followed his chums.

Carthew stared after them.

"Come back, Silver!" he howled.

Jimmy did not answer. The four juniors were going downhill at a terrific pace now. Carthew's bike led by Lovell. Then it dawned upon the bully of the Sixth what was happening, and he broke into a desperate rush in pursuit.

"Bring my bike back!" he shrieked.

"You'll find it at Rookwood!" yelled back Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—I'll—I'll—" Carthew spluttered furiously. He dashed down the hill at a frantic speed after the cyclists.

But he had simply no chance. There was a slope of a mile before the juniors, and they went down it at record speed. Behind them came Carthew, flushed and panting, streaming with perspiration, boiling with rage, and uttering ejaculations which it was just as well Jimmy Silver & Co. did not hear—certainly those ejaculations were not suited to youthful ears. Frantic as were his efforts, the pursuing prefect was left farther and farther behind at every step.

At last, when he caught his foot at last, and stumbled and rolled over, losing his balance. Jimmy Silver glanced back from the foot of the hill, and gave a breathless laugh at the sight of Carthew rolling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was the last the chums of the and what saw of Carthew. A bend of the road

hid him from their sight, and they swept on towards distant Rookwood, triumphant.

Carthew's trip to Rookwood was knocked on the head for that day at least!

That evening there was trouble far four. Jimmy Silver & Co., called into their Form-master's study, found Carthew there, furious and full of complaints, and looking utterly dusty and weary and fagged out. Mr. Dalton's look was very stern.

"Carthew informs me that you deprived him of his bicycle, and caused him to walk nine miles home to Rookwood," said Mr. Dalton severely. "How dare you play such a trick on a prefect!"

"Swish, swish, swish, swish!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. wriggled out of the study. They had expected it, and it couldn't be helped. But it was painful—very painful! And when the pain had worn off they were not sorry; though it was a swishing from Mr. Dalton that had rewarded them for looking after Dicky!

As Jimmy Silver remarked later on that evening, a caning under those circumstances was just bearable; and to this noble sentiment his three chums answered with three groans!

CHAPTER 25.

Very Handsome of Dicky!

"FIFTY guineas!"

"Yes!"

"Rubbish!" said Jimmy Silver & Co., all together.

Tubby Muffin looked indignant. Tubby always was indignant when his statements were doubted. His statements, as a rule, were not worthy of much credence. But Tubby was indignant all the same.

"If you fellows don't believe me—" he said warmly.

"Of course we don't!" said Jimmy Silver, with a look of surprise. "Does anybody—over?"

The statement was too steep for them.

Certainly, Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Fourth, was just the man to make the biggest contribution he could afford to a fund for a man disabled in the War—an old Rookwood man. But fifty guineas was a subscription far beyond the means of the average Form-master. Masters' salaries at Rookwood were on a generous scale; but

they did not allow of the disbursement of sums like that for charitable objects.

Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth, lounged into the study.

"Heard the latest about Dicky?" asked Morny.

"Tubby's got a yarn about him," said Jimmy Silver. "He's dreamed that Dicky has put up fifty guineas for Captain Smith."

"It's true!"

"What?" exclaimed the Fistical Four, in chorus.

"Right as rain!" said Mornington. "I've seen it in the list. Isn't it simply ripping of Dalton? Must make a thumpin' big hole in his quarter's salary!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared.

"Dalton's really put up fifty guineas!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He has. And all the fellows think it's rippin', and so it is! Somebody says that Dalton was out in Flanders with Smith, and was with him when he was knocked out," said Mornington. "He's standin' by an old comrade-in-arms, it seems. But it's rippin' of him to do it to a tune like that—what?"

"Splendid!" said Jimmy. "I'm jolly well going to see the list!"

The Fistical Four left their tea half-finished, in their eagerness to confirm this new circumstance to the credit of Dicky. They crossed the quadrangle, and turned into Little Quad, upon which the school library opened. Carthew of the Sixth was crossing Little Quad in the same direction.

They followed the prefect into the library. Evidently Carthew had heard the news of Mr. Dalton's munificent subscription to the fund, and was curious to see whether it was true.

It was true enough. The list was open for all to see. And there was the name of Richard Dalton, with the sum of fifty-two pounds ten shillings attached.

"There it is as large as life!" said Lovell. "Tubby was telling the truth for once! Good old Dicky!"

"Isn't it ripping?" exclaimed Raby.

"Isn't he a brick?"

Carthew scowled. His feelings towards the new master of the Fourth were bitter enough; he had had trouble more than once already with Mr. Dalton, though the latter had been only a week or so at Rookwood. Mr. Dalton was very severely down upon Carthew's bullying proclivities, and the bully of the Sixth had been brought up sharp on

several occasions. Jimmy Silver & Co. piled on their enthusiasm a little, for the special benefit of Carthew.

The prefect looked at them sourly.

"Isn't it topping of him, Carthew?" asked Jimmy Silver affably.

And his chums grinned.

"Jolly queer for a new master to whack out a sum like that!" said Carthew, with a sneer. "I wonder where he got it!"

And he lounged away, with a dark brow. Anything that added to the popularity of Richard Dalton was like gall and wormwood to his enemy, the bully of the Sixth.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"The sneering rotter!" he muttered.

"Does he think that Dicky picked it out of a pocket, the rotter?"

"It is a bit queer, though," said Lovell.

"I fancy everybody will be surprised at Dalton whacking out such a sum. I haven't heard that he's a wealthy man."

"He isn't!" said Jimmy.

"Fifty guineas is a lot of money!"

Jimmy Silver gave a start, as a new thought flashed into his mind.

"Fifty guineas!" he ejaculated. "I've got it!"

"You've got it?" exclaimed Raby.

"Yes, I think so."

"Whack it out among your pals, then!" grinned Raby. "It will see us through the rest of the term!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. "I mean I've thought it out. I know where Dicky got fifty guineas—at least, I think I do."

"Where?" demanded his three chums together.

"At the Bunbury Ring!" said Jimmy. "Don't you remember—the fight between the Lamb and the Bunbury Pet was for a purse of fifty guineas, and Mr. Dalton won. He bagged the purse, of course. That's where it came from. And he's stowed the whole of it to this giddy fund."

"Great Scott!"

"You've hit it, Jimmy!"

"Isn't he a corker?" said Jimmy Silver. "By Jove! I'd like to tell it to all Rookwood! By Jove, I would! But we've got to keep it dark about Dicky boxing at Bunbury. But isn't he a real white man?"

"Hear, hear!"

The Fistical Four strolled out of the library much elated with their discovery. They had no further doubt on the subject.

They had seen Mr. Dalton knock out the Bunbury Pot in the boxing-ring at Bunbury, and they knew he must have received the winner's purse of fifty guineas. The sum was the same—it was clear that the fighting Form-master had handed out the whole of it in a subscription for the benefit of an old comrade "crooked" in the War.

And if anything had been needed to add to the Fistical Four's great admiration of their new leader, that would have done it. They passed Mr. Dalton on their way back to the School House, and "capped" him with deep respect. Mr. Dalton gave them a nod and a kind smile—probably quite unconscious of the fact that he had assumed heroic proportions in the eyes of the enthusiastic juniors.

"He's a real white man, and no mistake!" Jimmy Silver remarked, as he sat down to finish his tea in the end study. "And if that red Carthew tries any more of his tricks against him we'll jolly well drop on him like a ton of bricks!"

To which the Co. responded heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 25. Carthew Scores!

ON Saturday afternoon Jimmy Silver & Co. were "keeping an eye" on Mark Carthew, prefect of the Sixth Form. The Fistical Four ought really to have been attending to cricket practice, but on that special half-holiday they were more interested in Mark Carthew.

Not that Carthew, in himself, was an interesting object. Generally, the less the juniors saw of him the better they liked it.

But they suspected Carthew. They were aware that he was "up against" their hero, Dicky Dalton.

Carthew did not know that Mr. Dalton had figured in the Bunbury Ring as a boxer. He only knew that the Form-master had been present on the occasion of the fight. But he had vague suspicions of something more. He had found out so much by eavesdropping. And he knew the Fistical Four were keeping something back, and he was keenly desirous to know what it was, having no doubt that it was something to Mr. Dalton's discredit. It was at Bunbury that Carthew hoped to

find out the whole of the facts, whatever they were. And, once he began inquiries on the spot, it was only too probable that he would be able to identify Mr. Dalton with the "Lamb" who had knocked out the Bunbury Pot. That was what Jimmy Silver feared.

The Fistical Four admired Mr. Dalton for his boxing abilities. But they realised that the Head of Rookwood was certain to take quite a different view.

Indeed, they rather shuddered to think of what the Head might say and do if he learned that one of his Form-masters had appeared in a ring as a pugilist.

True, it had happened before Mr. Dalton's arrival at Rookwood, but only a few hours before. Dr. Clisholm's view of the matter were likely to be a very severe one. It might even lead to Mr. Dalton's departure from Rookwood—a prospect that dismayed the chums of the Fourth.

So, at any risk, they were ready to "handle" Carthew if he started on the track of investigation.

After dinner that day, when Carthew strolled into the quadrangle, four juniors strolled after him.

When he went round to the bike-shed, four juniors also went round to the bike-shed.

When Carthew wheeled out his machine, four juniors wheeled out their machines, sticking to him like shadows.

Carthew wheeled his bicycle into the road, apparently unconscious of this faithful following. Four juniors wheeled their bicycles into the road also. And when he stopped, they stopped.

Then Carthew of the Sixth looked at them, with a bitter smile.

"Following me again—what?" he said.

"Oh, we're going for a spin," said Jimmy Silver.

"On the road to Bunbury, I suppose?"

"Possibly."

"With the idea of bagging my bicycle and leaving me stranded, as you did before?" said Carthew.

"What a fellow goes spying—" began Lovell hotly.

Jimmy Silver made a sign to his chum to be silent.

"I quite get on to the idea," said Carthew, with a smile. "But I fancy you will be nipped in the bud this time! Mark!" He called to the porter. "Mask,

will you ask Mr. Dalton to step here? He's in the quad."

"Suttlingly, sir!" said Mack.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another with rather startled glances. They had not expected this move on the part of the enemy.

For once the chance of the end study were rather unplaced.

Certainly they could not tell Mr. Dalton that they were "looking after him"—and certainly he would be wrathful, at least, at the idea of being taken under the protection of Fourth Form juniors if he knew it. The Fistical Four were at a loss, and they were feeling very uncomfortable when Mr. Dalton appeared in the gateway.

"Excuse my troubling you, sir," said Carthew politely.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Dalton, glancing at the prefect and then at the juniors. "What is the matter, Carthew?"

"Last Wednesday, sir, I reported these juniors for collaring my bike and leaving me to walk home. I have reason to believe that they intend to play the same trick this afternoon," said Carthew calmly. "They have started following me."

Mr. Dalton frowned.

"Silver, is it possible?"

"We—we—" stammered Jimmy.

"Are you following Carthew?" demanded the master of the Fourth.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"How dare you, Silver? I caned you on the previous occasion! Have you no respect for a prefect of the Sixth Form, or for your Form-master?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton sternly.

"A fellow shouldn't go spying—" blurted out Lovell.

"What?"

"He's going to Bunbury!"

"Shut up!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

A slight change came over Mr. Dalton's face. He fixed a very penetrating glance upon Mark Carthew.

"You are going to Bunbury, Carthew?" he asked.

"I may go in that direction, sir," answered Carthew coolly. "I suppose it does not concern these boys of the Fourth Form?"

"Quite so," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Silver, and the rest, you will immediately go in, and within gates for two hours."

"Oh, sir!"

"If there is any interference with Carthew, I shall punish you with the greatest severity."

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged hopeless looks, and quietly wheeled in their machines. The pursuit of Carthew that afternoon was nipped in the bud. The scheming prefect had completely checkmated Dick's protectors!

"You are going for a rather long spin, Carthew," Mr. Dalton remarked, his eyes on the prefect.

"Yes, sir," said Carthew calmly. "I may drop in at Bunbury. There's a show-to-day at the Bunbury Ring."

"I am not sure that the Head would approve of your visiting the Bunbury Ring, Carthew."

"Why not, sir?" said Carthew, with a smile. "Silver and his friends visited the place last week, and you did not punish them when I reported it. And, according to Silver, you yourself were there at the same time. I do not set up to be more particular than a Form-master, sir."

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips hard.

"I have forbidden the juniors to visit the place again," he said. "I shall not interfere, however, with a prefect."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

Carthew grinned as he mounted his bicycle. He felt that he had scored this time over the man he chose to regard as his enemy. It was in quite a cheery mood that Carthew of the Sixth pedalled away on the long road to Bunbury.

CHAPTER 20.

Carthew's Triumph!

"YOU Jackers coming down to cricket?"

Conroy, the Australian, asked the question as he came on the Fistical Four in the quadrangle.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had put up their bicycles; they had no use for them now. The ride to Bunbury was off—very much so. An hour had passed since Carthew had started, and following him now was out of the question. They could not disobey the direct orders of Mr. Dalton, even for his own sake.

The chums of the Fourth were not idle!

ing happy or comfortable. Conroy eyed them with a grin.

"You look like a set of merry moulted fowls!" he remarked. "Anything happened?"

"Lots of things," grunted Jimmy Silver. "But we may as well come down to the cricket. We've got to hiek you kids into shape for beating the Moderns next week."

And the Fistical Four repaired to Little Side. They could do nothing for "Dicky," and there was no use in wasting time. And the Co. soon forgot their disappointment in the keen interest of cricket.

But when the cricket was over, and they came in to tea, they thought of Carthew again, and his ride to Bunbury.

"After all," remarked Lovell, as he cracked his egg in the end study—"after all, it's a week since the fight at the Bunbury Ring, and Carthew mayn't find anything out about Dicky. He was a stranger in the town. He came down from London for the fight."

"And came on here afterwards," said Raby. "My hail! Fancy going in for a fight only a few hours before he was due to turn up at Rookwood as the new Form-master!"

"Well, the date of the fight was arranged, most likely, a good way in advance," remarked Jimmy Silver. "If Dicky was booked for it he couldn't help it; and I suppose he bagged the appointment at Rookwood as soon as he had a chance; and so the dates coincided. But the Head would jump if he knew; I can't help thinking that. It would be awfully unpleasant for Dicky. The Head might call it a prize-fight, the same as Carthew does."

"It might mean the boot for Dicky!" Raby observed.

"It might easily."

"And that cad's over there this afternoon nosing it all out!" said Newcome. "And Dicky himself called us off from stopping him. I—I suppose he really had no choice, though."

"But he mayn't spot anything about the fight," said Lovell. "He only knows that Dicky was at the Ring the same time that we were there. So were a thousand other people."

"He suspects more, though," said Jimmy Silver. "He doesn't know what the secret is, but he knows there's a secret; and when he hears that the fight was for fifty guineas

he may jump to the truth, knowing that Dicky has put up fifty guineas for Captain Smith's benefit."

"Bollen!" growled Raby.

"We can't do anything now," said Lovell. "Pass the jam."

"We'll see Carthew when he comes in, though," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll find out whether he's made a discovery, anyhow."

But it was a long time before Carthew of the Sixth came in.

He did not turn up at evening call-over, as the juniors noticed. Prefects had the right to cut call-over, so Carthew's absence was not specially remarked upon, excepting by the Fistical Four. Evidently the slacker of the Sixth had found the long ride a laborious one.

After call-over, Jimmy Silver & Co. hung about downstairs, keeping an eye open for Carthew. He came in at last, looking rather dusty and extremely tired. But there was a satisfied expression on his face, in spite of his fatigue, and Jimmy Silver's heart sank as he noted it.

The cad of the Sixth had made a discovery. His eyes fell on the Fistical Four, and he smiled—a smile that was full of malicious triumph.

"Hallo! You're late, Carthew!" remarked Bulkeley of the Sixth, coming along. "Had a long spin?"

"Yes, as far as Bunbury," said Carthew, with an eye on the Fistical Four. "Jolly long ride, but I've had quite a good time."

"Anything special on in Bunbury, then?"

"Yes. I've heard a lot about a big fight that took place there last week—the Lamb and the Bunbury Pet," said Carthew.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. Carthew could see that the juniors were drinking in every word, and their varying expressions afforded him a keen satisfaction.

Bulkeley, who did not notice that by-play at all, was puzzled.

"Not much interest in a fight that took place a week ago, is there?" he asked.

"In this instance, yes," answered Carthew, with a smile. "The fight was between a local champion and a visiting boxer from London for a purse of fifty guineas. The Lamb, from London, won the trick. Nobody seemed to know what the Lamb's name was, but I was lucky enough to bag

a copy of the local paper with a photograph to it."

"Oh!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"An enterprising local photographer snapped the Lamb," continued Carthew. "It was put in the 'Banbury Record,' along with that of the Pet. Rather lucky, wasn't it?"

"I don't quite see it," answered the Rookwood captain, more and more perplexed. "You're not specially interested in the Lamb, are you?"

"No end!" answered Carthew.

And he walked on to his study, leaving Bulkeley staring.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged sickly looks as Bulkeley went on his way, and Carthew disappeared into his study.

The worst had happened; or, rather, worse than the worst the Fistical Four had anticipated.

Carthew had not only found out the truth, but he had brought proof of it home to Rookwood, in the shape of the photograph published in the Banbury paper.

"What awful luck!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "I—I never even thought of anything of that kind."

"We could have stopped him," muttered Lovell. "But—but Dalton did—"

"The game's up!" said Raby miserably. "That rotten cad will show the picture all over Rookwood. No one could mistake Dicky's face. There ain't a lot of faces like Dicky's."

Jimmy Silver set his teeth.

"He was just rubbing it in because we could bear him," he said. "But—but the cad isn't going to have it his own way. He hasn't shown the paper yet, and he's not going to. We'll stop him—"

"He could get another copy," said Raby, shaking his head. "He's done us, Jimmy."

Tubby Muffin rolled along the passage.

"Jimmy!"

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped the captain of the Fourth.

He was in no humour for being bothered by Reginald Muffin.

"Carthew wants you!" grinned Tubby.

"You're to go at once—all four of you."

"What the thump for?" growled Lovell. Tubby chuckled.

"I didn't stop to ask," he said. "But Carthew had his cane on the table. He, he! You're in for it!"

Lovell lunged on with his boot, and the fat Classical yelped and dodged, and the Fistical Four made their way to Carthew's study, in the very lowest of spirits. The bully of the Sixth had scored, and they realised it. Carthew had won all along the line, and Mr. Dalton—their idolised Dicky—was now at his mercy.

CHAPTER 31.

The Whip Hand!

MARK CARTHEW smiled as the Fistical Four presented themselves in his study. He was still dusty and tired, but apparently his triumph could not wait. He had the whip-hand now—or he believed he had—and he longed to show his power.

"Come in you young scoundrels!" was his polite greeting.

The juniors came in.

"You started following me to-day," said Carthew. "The other day you begged my bike. I'm going to ease you severely!"

"Are you?" said Jimmy Silver between his teeth.

"I am. And I don't think your cheery Form-master will chip in to protect you this time!" sneered Carthew. "I happen to hold that dear young gentleman in the hollow of my hand."

"You mean, you've been spying!" grunted Lovell contemptuously.

"I'll make you smart for that along with the rest!" smiled Carthew. "So that was the secret you young scoundrels were keeping. Last Saturday you saw Mr. Dalton fighting in the ring, like a common prize-fighter, and you thought you were going to keep it dark. I knew there was something, but I never guessed that, by gad! A Rookwood Form-master boxing a pug in the ring for money! Sounds well, doesn't it?"

The juniors did not speak. The gloating tone of the bully of the Sixth showed how much he enjoyed the situation. Jimmy Silver & Co. were very far from enjoying it.

Carthew had succeeded far beyond his hopes. He seemed hardly able to contain his triumph.

"I shouldn't have guessed it," he went on. "I couldn't find out the Lamb's real name, and I got the paper, hoping to find

out something about the affair—something or anything. And then there was Dalton's shivery staring me in the face. Bless that merry photographer! I fancy Dalton doesn't know his photograph was pinned there. He would hardly carry his head so high if he knew. I'll lower it for him, fast enough!" Carthrew laughed. "I've only to show this copy of the 'Duchary Record' to the Head. And I will if he doesn't tow the line! Ha, ha!"

Jimmy breathed hard.

He understood now that Carthrew did not intend to make his knowledge immediately public. He was going to hold it over Mr. Dalton's head. The Form-master would be under his thumb!

Jimmy felt a sickening sensation. He had tried to save Dicky, and he had failed. It was bitter that the blackest sheep at Rookwood should triumph in this way.

"Why did you young rascals keep it dark?" demanded Carthrew. "I should have expected you to babble it all over the school."

"You would!" said Newsome scornfully.

"You're getting an easy time in the Fourth, I suppose, as the price of silence—what?" jeered Carthrew.

"I suppose you'd think so," said Jimmy Silver. "We kept the secret because it wasn't our business. And Dicky—I swear, Mr. Dalton—is a splendid fellow. You'd keep it, too, if you were decent. Look here, Carthrew, you know what he's done with the money. He's put it up for a man who was crippled in the War—"

"I ought to have guessed when I saw that," grinned Carthrew, "but I never did. But I know now. I think I've got the upper hand now, my pippins. I'm going to make you smart for your cheek, and if you give me any more of it I'm going to have you flogged."

"And how are you going to do that?" said Jimmy, eyeing him.

"I shall ask Mr. Dalton to see to it."

"And do you think he will?"

Carthrew nodded smilingly.

"Yes. I think so, rather than be given away to the Head. I don't think Dr. Clisholm would let a prizefighter stop here as a master."

"Oh, you said!" burst out Lovell.

"That will do!" said Carthrew, taking up his cane. "Hold out your hand, Silver! You shall!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"You hear me?" said Carthrew menacingly.

"If you don't obey me I shall take you to Mr. Dalton and order him to have you flogged."

"Order him!" said Jimmy, between his teeth.

"That's what it amounts to. Mr. Dalton won't get his ears up with me again in a hurry, I assure you," said Carthrew. "I'm master now, and I'm beginning with you cheeky young cads. I'll put Dalton in his place, too, never fear. Now hold out your hand!"

Jimmy Silver held out his hand.

He would have resisted, but he thought of Mr. Dalton and how the young master would face a demand from Carthrew, a demand which would have the force of an order behind it, based on Carthrew's knowledge of the affair at the Banbury Ring. For Dicky's sake Jimmy Silver repressed his feelings and resorted to submit quietly. Carthrew measured the distance with his eye, and brought down the cane with a terrific lash.

That lash would have hurt Jimmy Silver a good deal if it had struck his palm. But by instinct, without thinking, Jimmy jerked his hand back from the savage blow.

Crash!

As nothing stopped the cane it swept on, and landed on Carthrew's own leg. The prefect gave a fearful yell as it landed, doubtless wishing that he had not put quite so much savage force into the lash.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha!" gasped Lovell breathlessly.

"Owl! Owl! Owl! You young demon!" roared Carthrew.

Beside himself with rage, the bully rushed at Jimmy Silver, lashing out recklessly with the cane.

Jimmy caught one blow on his shoulder and one on his arm, and one on his head. And then the four juniors, reckless of all else, rushed on Carthrew and collared him.

Bump! Carthrew came heavily to the carpet, with the Platani Four clinging to him and sprawling over him.

The juniors' blood was up now. Lovell snatched the cane from the prefect's hand.

"Hold him!" he roared.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The cane descended on Carthrew's back and legs with terrific swipes. Arthur Edward Lovell, in his excitement, seemed to be under the impression that he was beating a carpet.

Carthrew roared and struggled frantically. But the four sturdy juniors were too much for him.

His yells rang through the study and through the corridor beyond. The door was suddenly flung open.

"What—what is this?"

It was Mr. Dalton!

CHAPTER 32.

To Go or Not to Go?

CARTHREW struggled to his feet. He was panting with rage and pain, and almost beside himself.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Are you boys aware that this uproar can be heard as far as my study?"

"They have attacked me!" howled Carthrew.

"I can see that! Silver—"

"Look at that mark on Jimmy's face!"

hooted Lorcill. "We had to stop the brute!"

A flash of the cane was visible, glowing crimson, on Jimmy's face. Mr. Dalton's expression altered as he glanced at it.

"Carthow, you have done this—"

"He refused to be counted," shouted Carthow.

"That is no excuse for a brutal attack worthy of a hoodlum," said the Foremaster sternly. "Carthow, I am ashamed of you! You are not fit to be a prefect of Bookwood!"

"I tell you—"

"The juniors, apparently, were only defending themselves from brutality," thundered Mr. Dalton. "Why were you punishing them in the first place? I am not satisfied that there was good cause."

"Because I chose!" started Carthow.

"What?"

"Is that plain enough? Now they're laid hands on me they're going to be flogged!" hooted Carthow. "I expect you to see to it, Mr. Dalton. You needn't worry about the rights and wrongs of the matter. That's for me to settle. I want you to report these juniors to the Head for a flogging."

Mr. Dalton stared at him.

"Are you out of your senses, Carthow?" he exclaimed blankly.

"No, I'm not; but I mean to have my way," said Carthow, with savage insolence. "You can't afford to quarrel with me now, Mr. Dalton. These fags may keep your shady secret, but I shall not unless I choose."

"Shady secrets!" repeated Mr. Dalton. "Do you dare to insinuate—"

"I insinuate nothing. I'm stating the facts!" started Carthow. "Last week these fags saw you in a prize-fight at Bunbury, and they kept it dark. I know the facts now!"

"Indeed!" Mr. Dalton's manner was very quiet now. "And what facts do you know, Carthow?"

"I know that you fought in a prize-fight under the name of the Lamb," said Carthow. "I've got a copy of the local paper with your portrait in it as the winner of the prize-fight."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at the floor. There was a dead silence in the study for some moments.

Jimmy ventured to speak at last.

"We—we never said a word, sir. We—wanted to stop him from going over to Bunbury because—"

Mr. Dalton made a gesture.

"I understand, Silver. You were aware that I should not care to have the matter mentioned at Bookwood, and you very properly did not mention it. I am much obliged to you!"

"You don't deny it?" sneered Carthow.

The young master gave him a scornful look. "I could scarcely deny what is true, Carthow," he said. "You are mistaken only on one point. It was not a prize-fight, but a properly conducted boxing match."

"You can tell that to the Head," said Car-

thow decisively. "You'll have to, Mr. Dalton. If we do not come to terms."

"What do you mean exactly by coming to terms, Carthow?"

Carthow pointed at the juniors.

"Those four young rascals are to be flogged!" he said. "That's for a beginning."

"Those four juniors will not even be asked," said Mr. Dalton. "I do not blame them for defending themselves against brutality, and consequently they will not be punished at all!"

Carthow's eyes glinted.

"You'd prefer me to go to the Head?" he snapped.

"Undoubtedly!"

"And tell him you're a prize-fighter!" jeered Carthow. "You know you haven't face it!"

"I think you are mistaken once more, Carthow," said Mr. Dalton tranquilly. "So far from requesting you to keep the matter secret, I shall insist upon your accompanying me to the Head this very moment, and acquainting him with the matter."

"You juniors may go!" said Mr. Dalton. "Carthow, come with me at once to the Head's study. I shall take you by the collar if you do not come quietly!"

"Oh, I'll come fast enough!" said Carthow, lewd with rage. "You won't be a master here much longer, when the Head knows what I can tell him."

"That is for the Head to decide, not you!" said Mr. Dalton calmly. "Come!"

The Fistical Four, feeling miserable enough, hung about near Dr. Chisholm's study, when the door of that august department had closed upon Mr. Dalton and Carthow. They would have given a great deal to know what was happening within the closed door. Carthow was making his report—and showing the photograph in the paper, doubtless, as a proof. What would the Head say? What would he do?

The door reopened at last. Mark Carthow came out grinning. He glanced at the Fistical Four.

"You—you're told the Head!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"Every word!" blazed Carthow. "And if it isn't the sack for your merry Fore-master, I don't know Dr. Chisholm!"

And he walked on. The Fistical Four exchanged dispirited glances, and lingered. The study door opened again. Mr. Dalton and the Head appeared there together. Dr. Chisholm's face was very set.

"I must consider!" His voice reached the juniors. "In the circumstances, Mr. Dalton—really—"

"I could do no more than explain," said the young master quietly. "The account you have heard was exaggerated. It was a boxing-match, not a prize-fight—"

"I see little distinction," said the Head

dryly. "And for a master of Bookwood—you surely comprehended that—"

"I do. But the recession was a peculiar one, I think I may say. I have done a great deal of amateur boxing, but have never boxed for a purse before, and never intend to do so again. My object was to raise a substantial contribution, if possible, for my old comrade, Captain Smith—now disabled and helpless. I succeeded; and I cannot say I am *sorry*."

"A very worthy object, Mr. Dalton—but—there is a certain fitness of things—"

The Head coughed.

"I am aware of it, sir! I shall be sorry to leave Bookwood, but if you consider it necessary, I shall go without repining. I only ask you to let me know your decision as soon as possible."

"I must consider," said the Head. "I have had a high opinion of you, Mr. Dalton—this news is a great shock to me. I will consider!"

"Very good, sir!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had judiciously backed away out of sight. Mr. Dalton walked away; and the Head stood looking after him for some moments, with a thoughtful, frowning brow. Then he shook his head, and turned back into his study.

That evening—chiefly owing to Carthew—all Bookwood knew that Mr. Dalton and the Lamb who had knocked out the Banbury Pet were one and the same person. And the question of burning interest was: Did it mean "the boot" for the master of the Fourth? And the general opinion was that it did!

CHAPTER 32.

The Return of Gummage Major!

GUMMAGE major's come back!" Tabby Muffin fairly howled that announcement into the doorway of the end study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at tea in the end study in the Fourth, and they were discussing a topic that was just then of burning interest to the Fourth Form at Bookwood School.

The fact that Mr. Dalton, their new Form-master, might have to leave Bookwood, worried the Physical Four considerably.

They liked and admired Mr. Richard Dalton, whom they alluded to, among themselves, as Dicky, and they thought it very hard lines that the shadow of the "sack" hung over him.

"I say," howled Tabby Muffin. "Gummage major's come back, you fellows! Do you hear? Morry's seen him in Coombe—"

"Who and what the thump is he?" exclaimed Lovell, exasperated. "Bother the man! What about him?"

"He's come back!" gasped Tabby Muffin.

"Well, is there anything unusual in an old Bookwooder looking in at Bookwood?" demanded

Jimmy Silver. "What the dickens does it matter, and where does the predicament come in?"

"Oh, you don't know," said Tabby. "It's Gummage, who was expelled. That was before our time. He was sacked for public-haunting and going to the races and carrying on generally. An awful character, I believe. The Head fairly booted him out after a row. Now he's come back. He's putting up at the Hotel-Infant, I tell you!"

"Must be a shady sort of character to get up at that den!" growled Lovell. "But I don't see anything to get excited about."

"You will when I tell you," said Tabby. "Gummage major was expelled, and I've heard Bulkeley and Seville and Carthew talking about him. He's been seen in the village, I tell you, and they all know what he's come back for."

"Well, what has he come back for?" asked Newcome.

"To lick the Head!"

"What?"

The Physical Four jumped at that. Reginald Muffin had succeeded in startling them at last.

"To lick the Head?" yelled Lovell.

Tabby grinned, much pained with the impression he had made.

"That's it!" he answered.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy Silver crossly.

"It's true!" howled Tabby. "Old Mack knows all about him; so does the sergeant. He was here before our time, but they remember him. The sergeant saw him in Coombe, and Gummage major gave him a message for the Head before two or three Bookwood trips. He told Sergeant Kettle to mention to the Head that he'd come back to keep his promise!"

"And what was his promise?"

"When he was sacked he told the Head he would come back when he was a man and thorough!"

"Then—"

"That's years ago, I believe," said Muffin. "It's a jolly long time, anyhow. He said he'd have come back before, only there was the War, you know, and he couldn't come before now. Now he's come, and he says he's coming on to Bookwood to-morrow afternoon to keep his promise. He's going to bring a dog-whip—"

"For the Head?" shrieked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"My only hat!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. forgot tea; they even forgot Dicky Dalton. The return of Gummage major, once of the Sixth, was a much more exciting matter. An Old Boy returning to Bookwood with a dog-whip for the Head was the most tremendous surprise that had ever happened, or could happen, at Bookwood.

"It can't be true!" Lovell gasped, at last.

"The fellow can only be passing."

"It's true!" shrieked Tabby Muffin. "The Head's going to be dog-whipped to-morrow! Fancy that! Fancy him lapping! He, he, he!"

Morrington looked into the study, grinning.

"You fellows heard?"

"Is it true?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"True as a die! I heard Gummage major talking to the sergeant in the High Street in Coombe," grinned Morry. "He's a hefty fellow, six feet high, with legs like legs of mutton, and a basted back. He's been in the prize-ring since he left Rookwood. I hear that he always was a hefty fellow with his fists, and he took up prize-fighting for a livin'. Fancy a giddy prize-fighter comin' here to lick the Head to-morrow!"

"Great Scott!"

"Does the Head know?" gasped Lovell.

"I don't know whether Sergeant Kettle's delivered the message," grinned Merington. "But the man's coming, anyhow—a regular bulldog, and full of spite. He's goin' to make the Head pay for sackin' him from the school fifteen years ago. So he says, an' I know he means it. How lucky it's a half-holiday to-morrow! I'm going to be on hand to see the fun."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"The fellow will have to be stopped," he said. "The Head will telephone for the police."

"The police!" chuckled Morry. "That's F.-c. Boggs, and Gummage major could knock him into the middle of next week with his little finger."

"The Sixth will chip in," said Basy.

Morry laughed.

"I don't envy them, if they try to handle a six-foot prize-fighter," he said. "He could handle Bulkeley like a baby. I can tell you, there's goin' to be a show to-morrow. Gummage major means business."

Jimmy Silver & Co. left the end study—leaving their tea unfinished—and joined the crowd of the Fourth in the passage. The passage was buzzing with excited voices; the news had spread. From one end of the school to the other, the fellows were discussing Gummage major, some of the Sixth, and his ferocious intentions. If Gummage major's desire was to create a sensation in his old school, certainly he had succeeded. From the captain of Rookwood, down to the smallest and inkiest fag, there was one name on every lip—and that was the name of Gummage.

CHAPTER 34.

Nice for the Head!

"I am sorry!" Dr. Chisholm spoke kindly enough, but there was an inflexible decision in his look and voice.

Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Fourth Form, bowed his head.

He was seated in the doctor's study, and in that calm and sedate apartment there was no trace of the excitement that reigned everywhere else in Rookwood School.

Apparently Dr. Chisholm had not yet heard of the return of Gummage major. Possibly he would have declined to be disturbed by the news, even if he had heard it.

"I am sorry, Mr. Dalton," he repeated. "I will say that you have given me every satis-

faction during the short time you have been at Rookwood. As a Form-master, I have no fault to find with you—none whatever. I am sorry to part with you—sincerely sorry. But I fear that there is no help for it."

The young master was silent.

His dismissal from Rookwood was a serious matter to him; such posts were not to be picked up every day. And he liked Rookwood; he liked his class; he was happy at the old school. But he was proud, too; and much as he would have liked to remain, he had no thought of asking it as a favour.

"I have taken time to consider the matter," went on the Head gently. "I will even say that I do not blame you very much. But there is the fitness of things to be considered. All the boys in the school are aware that you appeared in the boxing-ring at Bunbury in a fight with a professional boxer—"

"It was before I arrived here to take up my appointment, sir," said Mr. Dalton.

"A few hours before," said the Head, "and it seems that some Rookwood boys were actually present and saw you there. You must ask for yourself, Mr. Dalton, that I could not tolerate anything of the kind. You tell me that the affair was simply an ordinary boxing-match. There are many people who will describe it as a prize-fight. And I do not see much distinction myself—certainly you heard in a public place

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for a purse of money. I am, I repeat, sorry; but in the circumstances, I do not see how you can remain at Bookwood as a master."

Michael Dalton rose to his feet.

"Very well, sir," he said. "It is, of course, for you to decide. I am sorry to leave; but I am prepared to go immediately."

"You will take your time, Mr. Dalton; and so far as your work here is concerned, I shall always be pleased to give you a recommendation. But I—"

"I will leave to-morrow, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "It is not pleasant for me to remain here under notice of dismissal; and if I am to go, the sooner the better. Unless it will cause you serious inconvenience, I should prefer to leave to-morrow."

"My convenience need not be considered at all," answered Dr. Chisholm stiffly. "If you prefer it, let it be to-morrow, by all means."

"Very good, sir!"

Book!

The door opened, and the flushed and troubled face of Sergeant Kettle appeared in the doorway.

Mr. Dalton passed the sergeant on his way out. Dr. Chisholm fixed a look of calm inquiry on the sergeant.

"What is it, Kettle?" he asked.

Sergeant Kettle stammered and flushed. He had a message to deliver, but it was a very difficult message to deliver to such a man as the Head of Bookwood. Dr. Chisholm's glance grew colder and more surprised as Mr. Kettle stammered and hesitated.

"Well?" he snapped.

"If—If you please, sir—" stammered the sergeant.

"You have not been drinking, I hope, Kettle?" said Dr. Chisholm icily.

"Oh, sir! No, sir! I—I—I've been to the village, sir—"

"Kindly tell me at once why you have come to my study, Kettle!" said the Head testily.

"It—It's young Gummage, sir—"

"Gummage?"

"Vexat!"

Dr. Chisholm elevated his eyebrows.

"I fail to understand you, Kettle. There is no boy in the school of that name. Are you referring to a boy whom I expelled from Bookwood for misconduct many years ago?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the sergeant.

"And why?"

"He's come back, sir—he's in Coombe now, playing at the Bird-in-the-Hand, sir!" stammered Mr. Kettle.

"Indeed!"

"You—You remember, sir?" murmured the sergeant. "When he was expelled, sir, and flogged. He—He said he—"

"He was guilty of insolence," said the Head firmly. "I do not care to recall his insolence, Kettle. Why do you mention the matter?"

"He's given me a message for you, sir," said the sergeant desperately. "Talked it out loud in the street, sir, afore a lot of Bookwood

boys. He's coming up in the school to-morrow afternoon, sir!"

"He will not be admitted," said the Head. "You will mention to Mack that Gummage is not to be admitted to the school. He was a disgrace in Bookwood while he was here, and he will never be allowed to revisit the school so long as I am headmaster."

"He—he says, sir—"

"If you have anything to say, Kettle, say it at once!"

"He's got a dog-whip, sir—"

"What?"

"And—he says he's coming up to-morrow, sir, to—to thrash you, sir, same as he said he would when he was kicked out, sir!" blurted out the sergeant.

It was out at last.

A trace of colour crept into Dr. Chisholm's cheeks. But that was the only sign he gave that the insolent message had impressed him at all. His manner was as calm and stately as ever.

"You should not have repeated his fresh insolence to me, Kettle," said the Head severely.

"But, sir—"

"I take no notice of it. The man is beneath my notice!" said the Head. "That is all, Kettle!"

"But—but he means business, sir!" stammered the sergeant. "He's grown into a six-foot chap, sir, and he's been a prize-fighter since he left Bookwood. He's dangerous, sir!" Dr. Chisholm's lip curled.

"You can scarcely suppose, Kettle, that I should be moved in any way by the threats of a ruffian!" he said.

"Nonsense, sir; but—but—"

"You may go, Kettle."

"Yes, sir. But—but he's coming to—"

"You will tell Mack that he is not to be admitted!" said the Head. And, with a wave of the hand, he dismissed the sergeant.

There was nothing more to be said, and Sergeant Kettle quitted the study, sorely troubled in his mind.

Mr. Kettle proceeded to inform old Mack, the porter, at his lodge, that he was not to admit Gummage major on the morrow. Old Mack blinked at him.

"And 'ow am I to stop him, if he chooses to come in?" demanded old Mack.

The sergeant shook his head.

"The 'Ead didn't say," he replied.

"He'd better say, if he wants his job done!" said old Mack testily. "I'm paid to keep this 'ere gate, Mr. Kettle, not to wrap with prize-fighters at the age of sixty-three. Why, that feller Gummage could pick me up in one 'and, and you in the other, Mr. Kettle, and knock our 'eads together, if he liked!"

"And well I know it!" said Mr. Kettle.

"Well, then," argued old Mack, "all werry well for the 'Ead to say he ain't to be admitted. But 'ow am I to stop him? I ask you that, sergeant!"

"Don't ask me!" said the sergeant. "I ain't a blooming wizard, and I don't know."

"I know what the 'Ead ought to do—he ought to call in the police," said old Mack. "He won't. He's too 'igh and proud to do it," said Mr. Kettle. "Besides, 'sposn Gummage was only gaming, and don't come? We can't keep a policeman 'singing on 'ere all his blessed life, I 'pose?"

"Well, I'm going to speak to Mr. Boggs, and ask him to drop in and take a drop with me to-morrow afternoon," said old Mack. "If the 'Ead won't, I will. And I'll look the gate. More'n that I ain't paid to do. But if young Gummage begins rustling, the 'Ead will 'ave to deal with him. It ain't my job, nor yours neither, sergeant."

To which the sergeant assented heartily enough.

CHAPTER 25.

Great Expectations!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were in a state of considerable excitement the following day. In fact, there was excitement all through Rookwood School.

Lessons that morning were taken in an atmosphere of subdued feverishness, as it were. All the fellows were thinking of the afternoon and what it might bring.

After lessons some of the prefects consulted together, and Bulkeley and Neville decided that if the priestesses attempted violence they would have to chip in. But they did not look forward to the prospect with any joy. Sturdy fellow as Bulkeley was, he knew that the tremendous ruffian at the Bird-in-Hand could knock him out like an infant. He was rather relieved when, after dinner, he noticed Police-constable Boggs drop in at old Mack's lodge. Though what Mr. Boggs could do against Gummage major, if he came, was rather a mystery. Unless his uniform and the terrors of the law scared off Gummage major, Mr. Boggs was not likely to be useful in the emergency.

After dinner there was a crowd of Rookwood fellows outside the gates watching the road, like Sister Anne, for the first sign of Gummage.

But they were not allowed to watch for long. Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, came out and ordered them in, frowning. Then the gates were closed.

"Give Gummage major a chance when he comes, Mack!" grinned Mornington.

Old Mack shut the gates and turned the key. Jimmy Silver & Co. remained about the gateway, and more and more fellows joined them there. At any moment now the expelled Rookwooder, who had saved up his vengeance as long, might arrive; and most of the fellows wanted to be on the scene when he came.

There was a loud shout as a powerful figure loomed up at last, visible through the metal bars of the gate.

"Gummage major!" roared Mornington. It was the prize-fighter.

He did not look much like an old Rookwood boy. His face was marked by many signs of old combats, and his nose was broken.

"Let me in!" hooted the volunteer.

"You, Master Gummage?" asked old Mack, blinking at him.

"I'm Gummage—George Gummage! I've come back!" exclaimed the big man through the bars. "You haven't changed much, Mack. Let me in, old sport. I've got a pressing engagement with the 'Ead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got orders not to let you in, Master Gummage," said old Mack seriously. "Now do go away and be quiet."

"That I'm coming over!"

"Oh my boys!" gasped the porter.

George Gummage moved along from the gate, and swung himself on the top of the school wall. Then, forth from the porter's lodge like a lion from his lair, strode Police-constable Boggs, plump and majestic. Gummage, with one leg over, looked down at him, grinning. Mr. Boggs waved a large-gloved hand at the returned Rookwooder.

"Clear back!" he said. "If you step inside these 'ere premises it will be my duty to take you in charge, by order!"

"How are you going to manage it, cocky?" asked Gummage major.

"Esch answers law!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "If Boggy tackles that cove, I fancy he will bite off more than he can chew."

Gummage, evidently not scared by the majestic Boggs, dropped lightly within the school wall.

"Take him into custody, Mr. Boggs!" called out old Mack in a quavering voice.

"I takes you into custody for trespass, Mr. Gummage," said Mr. Boggs. "And if you resist the lot—" He loosened his truncheon.

Gummage major did not give him time to handle the truncheon. He came at Mr. Boggs like a bull, and what happened next the fat constable never knew. Something that seemed like an earthquake hit Mr. Boggs, and he woke up, as it were, to find himself on his back.

"Ands off!" moaned Mr. Boggs, as the big man stooped over him. "I give you best! Oh crikey! 'Ands off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gummage.

"Oh my hat!" gasped Mornington. "Isn't he a corker!"

And Gummage strode off towards the School House, with an excited crowd of juniors following at his heels. Even the pending departure of Dick Dalton was forgotten now in the tense excitement of the arrival of Gummage major.

George Gummage came up the steps of the School House with a grim expression on his rugged face.

In the hall Bulkeley of the Sixth was waiting, with five other prefects of the Sixth Form. They were prepared to stand up in defence of their headmaster, and any ordinary individual would not have had much chance against half a dozen sturdy Sixth-Formers of Rookwood. But the big, broad-shouldered

prize-fighter was an ordinary individual. He was, in fact, a rather extraordinary one.

"Get out!" said Bulkeley sharply.

"I'm here to see the Head—"

"We're here to stop you," said the Hookwood captain. "(Get out!)"

"Nas half!" said the old Hookwooder.

And he rushed on.

Six sturdy seniors closed on him desperately, and there was a struggle and a terrific uproar.

For a moment or two little could be seen but whirling arms and legs, and then Bulkeley and Neville went spinning away, crashing on the floor. Knowles and Corbush loosened their grasp and backed off. Lonsdale and Jones major, fighting hard, were fairly grabbed off their feet and tossed away. Leaving the prefects scrambling and gasping, George Gummage strode on down the corridor towards the Head's study.

"Dr. Chisholm," he roared, "where are you? I've come back—George Gummage, that you sacked from the school fifteen years ago, you old rascal! Where are you hiding yourself?"

He crashed a heavy fist on the door of the Head's study.

The door was not locked.

The door flew open under his blow, and he strode into the study. Dr. Chisholm, pale and calm, rose to his feet to face him. From under his coat, the prize-fighter whisked out a dog-whip.

In the School House hall Bulkeley staggered up.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"He's gone to the Head's study," exclaimed Mornington.

"Come on, you fellows!" panted Bulkeley.

He raced down the corridor. Neville followed him; the rest were too severely damaged.

Bulkeley and Neville rushed into the Head's study. In the passage the Hookwood fellows watched breathlessly.

"They can't handle him!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Good heavens, what's going to happen now?"

"Nobody here can handle him," said Lovell. "Nobody but Mr. Dalton, anyhow, and he's sacked and gone—"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Dick!" he exclaimed.

It was like a brain wave.

Without another word to his chums, Jimmy turned and darted to the staircase, and raced up the stairs.

He thumped frantically at the door of Mr. Dalton's room. The new master of the Fourth was there, putting the finishing touches to his packing. The station cab was coming for him at four. Jimmy thumped on the door, and hurried it open.

"Mr. Dalton!" he panted.

"Silver," he ejaculated, "what do—"

"Oh, come, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "Gummage major—"

"What?"

"He's assaulting the Head, sir. Nobody can

stop him. But you could, sir, if you liked. You could handle him, same as you did the Bunbury Fat, sir. Oh, do come!" gasped Jimmy impudently.

Mr. Dalton rose quickly to his feet.

"I do not understand. Who is Gummage major? What has happened?" he exclaimed.

Jimmy panted out a breathless explanation. Mr. Dalton understood in a few words.

"He's in the Head's study now, sir," roared up Jimmy, panting. "He's got a dog-whip, and—"

Mr. Dalton, without even starting to put on his coat, dashed out of the room. He took the stairs three at a time. Jimmy Silver, rushing after him, was left far behind.

CHAPTER 36.

A Fight to a Finish!

BUMP!

Bulkeley of the Sixth came out of the Head's study and landed in the corridor. Crash!

Neville followed him out.

There was a hush in the crowded corridor. The hapless prefects had fared ill in their last attempt to restrain Gummage major, one of the Hookwood Sixth.

"Now the Head's getting it!" murmured Mornington.

"We—we ought to chip in," muttered Lovell.

The Hookwood fellows crowded along to the open doorway. They stopped there; they could not tackle the burly prize-fighter. Dr. Chisholm, standing at his writing-table, was pale, but still calm. Gummage major made the dog-whip whistle in the air.

"Now for you, my dear old Head!" he chuckled. "You remember me—what? George Gummage of the Sixth, whom you sacked and kicked out of Hookwood, fifteen years ago—what!"

The Head eyed him coldly.

"I remember you, Gummage," he said.

Gummage major chuckled.

"Didn't I tell you I should come back and thrash you?" he demanded. "I'd have come back before but for the War. That kept me too busy for some years. But I never forgot you, old lad! Now I've come! Are you ready?"

"Hullo, hands off!"

"I reckon not!"

There was a sudden yell in the corridor.

"Dick! Go for him, Dick!"

Early footsteps approached the Head's study. Mr. Richard Dalton, in his shirt-sleeves, appeared in the doorway. He glanced at the Head and at the burly prize-fighter.

"Do you require my assistance, sir?" he asked quietly and politely.

"Mr. Dalton," he said faintly, "this—this ruffian—"

"Leave him to me, sir," said the young Formmaster quickly.

He strode into the study, and promptly placed himself between the Head and the threatening assailant. Dr. Clidholm stood, leaning one hand on the table, breathing hard, Gummage major came closer to Mr. Dalton, with a threatening glare.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"It is for you to get out," said Mr. Dalton calmly. "Otherwise I shall eject you. Take your choice!"

Gummage major grinned, and rushed on him. The next moment he was flying backwards, to crash against the wall. The hands that had knocked out the Humbery Pet had not lost their cunning.

"Well hit!" roared Lovell, in the doorway.

"Bravo, Dickey!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

Gummage major slid to the floor. He blinked dazedly for a few moments at the young man who had knocked him down. Then he leaped up, dropped the dog-whip and tore off his coat. Without a word, but with a snarl of rage, he rushed at Mr. Dalton, and the next moment a wild and whirling fight was in progress in the Head's study.

Round the doorway the Rookwooders were crammed. Jimmy Silver & Co. had good places—behind them crowds were wedged. Down the corridor the swarm was thick. Too fellows who could not see into the study yelled excited inquiries, and Jimmy Silver & Co. yelled back.

Dr. Clidholm looked on at the scene like a man in a dream.

There was severe punishment on both sides. Mr. Dalton's left eye closed, his nose was swollen, and a red stream trickled from his mouth. But the face of the prize-fighter looked like raw hide. Every blow from the fighting Form-master told, and, powerful as his antagonist was, it was soon clear that the fight was going against Gummage major.

He fought on gamely, however, standing up to Mr. Dalton so long as he could stand. It was a tougher "scrap" than the fight in the Humbery Ring. At one time it seemed like "touch and go." But the fighting Form-master gradually gained the upper hand, though he paid for it dearly. He was almost lettering when at last George Gummage went to the floor with a crash, and failed to rise. The defeated prize-fighter lay and gasped.

"You've done well, Owd! You're a good man, you are!" he said heartily. "Owd! Dost! Knocked out, by thunder! I'm done!"

There was a roar in the corridor.

"Dickey wins!"

"Good old Dickey!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bulkeley," said Mr. Dalton quietly, "help that man away, and see him off the premises, please."

"Certainly, sir!" said Bulkeley.

And Bulkeley and Neville raised the defeated bruiser from the floor, and led him out of the study, and the door closed after him. Mr. Dalton turned to the Head, with a rather painful smile.

"It is all right now, sir," he said. "But I was about to leave when Silver called me here. But, as you see, I am in hardly a condition for travelling. With your permission I will postpone my departure until to-morrow."

"Your departure!" exclaimed the Head warmly. "Mr. Dalton, can you speak of that now? You have saved me—from what, I shudder to think. Only to-day I told you that you could not remain at Rookwood as a master. Now I ask you to stay! I beg you to stay! You will not refuse?"

"But, sir—" stammered Mr. Dalton.

"I will take no refusal," said the Head, taking the young master's hand and wringing it. "You shall stay. Come, sir, as a favour to me you will consent to remain at Rookwood!"

And Mr. Dalton stayed.

The affair of Gummage major was long the talk of Rookwood. The Old Boy had guns again—and in a sadly disfigured state—and he did not reappear. He had evidently had enough. And Mr. Dalton stayed. For a week the young master was invisible to the general eye, keeping to his room till he recovered from the effects of that terrible combat. When he appeared in public again there were still signs of damage about him, and he was the hero of Rookwood. And when he came into the Fourth Form-room to take his class again the Fourth stood up, and for a full two minutes by the clock they cheered the Fighting Form-master.



THE MERCANTILE MARINE AS A CAREER.

A boy entering the merchant service can do so either through the training ships Worcester or Conway, or he can start as an apprentice with one of the steamship companies.

The period of service at sea required by the Board of Trade is three years for boys from the training ships, or four years if they start with a steamship company.

The premium for three-year apprentices is about thirty pounds; and for four-year apprentices about forty pounds.

This is returned by instalments in the form of a bonus, at the end of each year of service.

The cost of the outfit, uniforms, etc., is about thirty pounds.

Apprentices must be fifteen to sixteen years of age, and before signing indentures must produce a medical certificate as to general health; a clergyman's, or schoolmaster's certificate as to conduct and ability; a Board of Trade certificate for distance and colour; and a certificate from an ophthalmic surgeon.

in Tropical Seas

Apprentices turn out at seven and work until eight-thirty, when breakfast is served; then work again from nine-thirty to lunch, which is at twelve-thirty; then work again from one-thirty to dinner, which is at six o'clock.

The apprentices have their meals in the saloon, with the captain and officers. The food is good and plentiful. On all English boats bacon and eggs are served for breakfast on Thursdays and Sundays.

The work of the apprentice is the same as the sailors. In heavy weather the paintwork is washed with soap-powder, called by the sailors "soogee"; below-deck tackle is overhauled; cargo slings spliced, and the general gear for working the cargo is seen to.

In fine weather, work consists of overhauling boat's gear, shipping off iron rust, and burning off old paint. Then there is painting to be done, and in painting the masts, you are slung aloft on the "Roan's chair."

In the tropics the decks are hofatoned, and then oiled; the oiling is done with a rag, you work on your hands and knees and the oil gets as hot as your back!

On Saturday there is a half-holiday, and no work is done by apprentices on Sunday, so they can sit about in deck chairs, if the conditions are favourable, watching the gambols of the

porpoises, or, in southern latitudes, the albatross and mollyhawk, which will follow the ship for weeks together. Whales on ordinary routes are rarely seen, but flying fishes are often met with, sometimes flying on board.

On Sunday the apprentice can take a sight with the sextant and work out the ship's position at noon; or he can take a turn at the wheel; in which case he will find that the chief engineer gets very wild if a zigzag course is steered, as he loses so much on the day's run, and will favour the steersman with a few words, generally unintelligible, for, as a rule, engineers talk Scotch!

When in port abroad, the work consists in tallying the cargo, and in keeping a weather eye open to see that nothing is stolen.

Some tact is required in many ports in dealing with the men employed to discharge the cargo; they are known as "roughness"; the name is appropriate and descriptive.

Apprentices are allowed time to go on shore at the different ports called at, and as soon as their ship reaches a home port they have leave, generally for three or four weeks.

On the best boats the cabin is comfortable, and the apprentices share a cabin together; or in the tropics it is pleasant to sleep on deck, with the Southern Cross overhead.

A Man's Job!

Technically, there is no such position as captain in the Mercantile Marine; he is ship's master, and can generally qualify for his master's certificate by the time he is thirty years of age.

To follow the profession of a sailor is to follow a manly occupation. You see something of the world; you understand better what life really is. Some people seem to imagine from the way they talk that the sun rises and sets in their own backyard!

"What do they know of England
Who only England know?"

But to a sailor, who has spent years at sea in all parts of the world, news from abroad becomes of absorbing interest; memory will recall the past, and he will have visions that will make him less ferocious.

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