

PREFECTS ON STRIKE

By
Owen
Conquest.



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Prefects on Strike!



By
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There's a sensation at Rookwood when the Head deposes **GEORGE BULKELEY** from the captaincy of the school, and lively times follow when the prefects go on strike in sympathy!

CHAPTER I.

Rough on Raby!

"**L**OOK out, Carthew!"
"Keep off the grass!"
"Clear out!"

Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, shouted—and several other Juniors shouted in wrathful tones.

But Carthew of the Sixth did not heed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at cricket practice on Little Side at Rookwood. Raby was at the wicket, and Arthur Edward Lovell was bowling to him. And Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, calmly walked across the pitch.

Carthew was a Sixth-Former and a prefect, and a very important person—

in his own estimation, at least. But he certainly had no right to walk into junior cricket in this way, and a dozen emphatic voices told him so.

Carthew glanced at Jimmy Silver as he shouted, but that was all. He walked on.

He was taking a short cut.

Apparently the bully of the Sixth supposed that junior cricket would stop while he took his short cut. It was very like Carthew!

George Raby, at the wicket, looked at him, and his eyes gleamed. Lovell was delivering the ball. Raby played the ball exactly as he would have done if Carthew had not dawned upon the horizon at all.

He did not want the leather to hit Carthew, but he did not care twopence whether it hit him or not. That was Carthew's look-out.

In point of fact, it did hit him.

The ball, hot from the bat, whizzed right at the Sixth-Former as he strolled carelessly across the pitch.

Even then a quick movement would have saved him. But it did not even occur to Carthew that a junior batsman would venture to take the risk of hitting a ball in his direction.

He strolled on unregarding.

Crack!

Then Carthew took notice!

He really had no choice about the matter then, for the ball smote him upon the shoulder with a terrific smite, and Carthew staggered.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Newcome. "He's got it!"

"Well stopped, Carthew!" shouted Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew gave a gasp of pain—he was hurt. The ball roared at his feet, and he clasped his shoulder and glared round at the juniors.

"Who threw that ball?" he shouted.

"Nobody threw it," answered Jimmy Silver. "You got in the way, Carthew, I warned you."

"Your own look-out," said Raby.

Carthew compressed his lips, trilled as much by the grinning of the juniors as by the pain in his shoulder.

"Send that ball back, Carthew, will you?" called out Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew did not trouble about returning the ball. He ran along to Raby's wicket, his eyes glittering.

"You cheeky young rascal!" he panted.

"Here, hands off!" exclaimed Raby warmly. "It was your own fault. Don't you know better than to walk across a pitch like that? Oh, my hat!"

Carthew grasped the batsman by the collar.

"Yarooht! Let go!" roared Raby. "I'll jolly well give you my hat——"

The prefect grasped the hat and twisted it away. Then he jerked up a stump from the wicket.

Whack, whack!

"Yoo! Help! Yarooht! Rescue!" howled Raby.

With the Sixth-Former's grasp on his collar and the stump attacking him in the rear, George Raby wriggled and danced and yelled. Carthew laid on the stump with great energy.

"Rescue!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

There was a rush of the Fourth-Formers to intervene. Prefect or not, Mark Carthew had to be stopped.

Fortunately, before the juniors could lay hands on the angry prefect, Bulkeley's commanding voice was heard. The captain of Rookwood came striding over from Big Side, whence he had witnessed the incident.

"Stop that, Carthew!"

"Hold on, you fellows!" murmured Jimmy Silver, as Bulkeley strode upon the scene with a knitted brow.

The juniors paused. But Carthew, too enraged to care even for the head prefect, laid on the stump, and Raby roared again.

Bulkeley caught the prefect by the shoulder and swung him back. Carthew's next swipe with the stump missed Raby.

He turned a passionate face on Bulkeley.

"Let go, you fool!" he shouted.

"Let go that kid!" was Bulkeley's answer.

"I won't! I——"

"I think you're forgetting yourself, Carthew," said Bulkeley quietly. "Let go Raby at once!"

"Let go, you cad!" shouted Lovell.

"Silence, Lovell!" rapped out the captain of Rookwood. "Take fifty lines for calling a prefect names."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "I—I say——"

"Silence! Carthew, release Raby's collar at once!" said Bulkeley in tones that were quiet, but so full of determination that the bully of the Sixth obeyed him.

Raby jumped away as soon as he was released, gasping for breath.

Bulkeley let go Carthew's shoulder then. It had very nearly come to a collision between the captain of Rookwood and the Sixth Form bully, and it was fortunate for Carthew that he had yielded in time.

"You—you—you saw what that young scoundrel did!" panted Carthew.

"It was your own fault."

"What?"

"You'd no right to interrupt the cricket. Get off the junior ground at once," answered Bulkeley.

Carthew gritted his teeth.

"So you're backing up those cheeky young rascals, Bulkeley!" he shouted.

"Well, I can tell you—"

"That will do," said the Rookwood captain curtly. "Clear off, Carthew: you've said quite enough."

Carthew gave him a bitter look and tramped off the field. Bulkeley followed him.

"Good old Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Bravo!"

"What has the silly ass given me lines for, I'd like to know?" grunted Arthur Edward Lovell. "I only called Carthew a cad! Bulkeley knows he's a cad."

"He is—he are!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "But these painful truths mustn't be told to prefects by juniors, aid top. Raby, old fellow—"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from Raby.

"Hurt?" asked Jimmy.

"Yow-ow! Do you think a chap can be lathered with a cricket-stump without being hurt?" howled Raby. "Wow-wow-wow! I'll make that bully squirm for this! Wow-wow!"

"Batting again?" asked Conroy.

"Wow! No! Wow!"

"Go and sit down for a bit, old son," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, dear! I'm not going to sit down for a bit—not for a good bit!" grunted Raby. "Wow-wow!"

The unfortunate batsman jumped away, still yowing and wowing and yow-

ing vengeance on Carthew. And the cricket practice went on minus George Raby—and uninterrupted by Carthew of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 2.

A Roland for an Oliver!

"YOW-WOW-WOW!"

Putty of the Fourth looked into the end study in the Fourth Form passage on the Classical side. Putty of the Fourth—otherwise Teddy Grace—looked sympathetic, though he was smiling a little.

"Yow! Ow! Woop!"

Raby was moving restlessly about in his study.

He had come in from the cricket-field, but he was not feeling inclined to sit down—far from it.

Carthew had laid on the stump not wisely but too well.

The junior glanced round as Putty of the Fourth appeared in the doorway glumly.

"Peeling bad?" asked Putty.

"Ow! Yes!"

"Sorry, old chap!"

"Thanks!" grunted Raby. "Much obliged, though your sorrow won't help me much. Yow-ow-ow! Why aren't you at cricket?"

"I've done some bowling," answered Teddy Grace. "I came in to speak to you."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You see—"

"Wow! I'm not good company at present, thanks!" grunted Raby. "Yow! You'd better get back to the cricket. M-m-m-m-m—yow!"

"I was thinking of Carthew—"

"Hang Carthew!"

"Can't be done—there's a law against hanging prefects—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"But there are other ways of treating him," pursued Putty. "More ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream. Carthew's out at present—"

"Wow!"

"But he will be coming in to tea before very long——"

"Bather Carthew!" roared Raby. "You ask, what are you burling about Carthew for? Wow-wow!"

Putty smiled.

"I thought you might like to know," he replied. "You see, Carthew has been asking for trouble, and there's no reason why he shouldn't get it. There's a picture-nail over the door in his study——"

"Bother his study! Wow!"

"Suppose you tied a string to it——"

"Wow!"

"And the other end of the string to a nail——"

"Oh!"

"It would balance the pail nicely on the top of his door, which you could leave ajar!" exclaimed Putty.

Raby stared.

"And a mixture of soot and ink in the pail would make a pleasant surprise for Carthew, wouldn't it?" continued Putty.

Raby grinned.

"That's what I dropped in to remark," said the new junior. "A word to the wise, you know. There's an old tin pail in the box-room, and I believe there's soot in the chimney, and ink can be collected up from the studies—the fellows won't mind if it's in a good cause——"

Raby laughed.

"There, you're better already!" said Putty encouragingly. "I'll help you, if you like. Always pleased to do anything to oblige a prefect, like a good fag, you know. What do you say, my pippin?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Yes, but, besides, that?" grinned Putty.

"Wow! It's a jolly good idea. But you'd better not help," said Raby. "You're a bit too well known as a practical joker. Carthew is sure to think of you when he gets it on his napper. You'd better keep in the public eye and be able to prove an alibi."

"Oh, I'll chance it!" said Putty carelessly. "Besides, you can't do it alone; the pail has got to be fixed up. Let's

get a move on, and have it ready for Carthew when he comes in."

"All right."

Raby almost forgot the pain of the stumping as he set to work to help Putty of the Fourth in preparing that agreeable little surprise for Carthew.

Putty hurried to the box-room for the old pail, and Raby scraped down soot from the chimney.

In a very short time the pail was nearly full of a horrid mixture, soot predominating, mixed with plenty of ink of different hues, and some gum to give it consistency.

"We shall have to be jolly wary getting this to Carthew's quarters," said Raby, grinning.

"All serene, I think—everybody's out of doors," answered Putty. "But I'll go ahead and scout. You follow with the pail, and if I whistle get it out of sight."

"Right-ho!"

Putty of the Fourth scuntered cheerily downstairs, with his hands in his pockets and a genial smile on his face.

George Raby followed more cautiously with the pail.

But there was no alarm.

In the bright spring afternoon nearly everyone was out of doors, and the pail was conveyed safely and unseen to Carthew's study in the Sixth Form quarters.

The study was unoccupied at present. Putty, glancing from the window, spotted Carthew at a distance in conversation with Knowles, of the Modern side.

"All serene!" he said. "There's Carthew, and he's walking towards Mr. Manders' house. He's going in with Knowles, I expect. Lots of time."

"Good!" said Raby.

The fixing up of the booby-trap was done in a leisurely and careful manner. Putty seemed to have had a good deal of experience in this line, as Raby noticed. It was, in fact, as much Putty's irrepressible propensity to practical joking as anything else that had led

him to espouse Raby's cause in this way.

Putty was too good-natured to play such a trick upon an undeserving victim; but probably he had not been displeased to find a victim who deserved it. And there was no doubt that Carthew of the Sixth deserved it.

The door was placed a little ajar, with Raby holding it from the outside, keeping a wary eye open on the passage.

Putty mounted on a chair inside.

"How are you going to get out afterwards, though?" asked Raby.

"That's all right; I can drop out of the window."

"You might be spoiled——"

"It's all right, I tell you. Hold the door still," answered Putty. "Dodge if anybody comes along; I can look after myself. The window's open."

"It seems to me you're taking all the risk!" growled Raby.

"That's all serene!"

Putty was working quickly as he talked.

A cord was fastened to the bottom of the tin pail securely. The other end of the cord was secured to the nail over the door.

The pail rested on top of the door, against the wall above, safely enough—so long as the door was not moved. When the door moved the pail would pitch over and hang upside-down on the cord. And whoever happened to be underneath it was certain to meet with the surprise of his life.

Putty jumped down and put the chair back in its place.

"All right—cut off, Raby!" he said.

The door was ajar, but the space was too narrow for Putty to pass. He crossed to the window, and, after a cautious glance, dropped lightly out from the sill and sauntered away with an air of careless unconcern—as if he had done anything but drop from a prefect's study window.

George Raby, in the corridor, chuckled as he turned away. His chuckle ceased suddenly, however, as

Neville-of the Sixth came round the corner.

Neville glanced at him as he came along to his study, and Raby passed him with all the unconcern he could assume. The prefect took no special notice of him, but Raby wondered whether Neville would remember having seen him there later!

But it was no use thinking of that now. The booby-trap was fixed and waiting for Mark Carthew, and Raby hoped for the best.

CHAPTER 2.

Waiting for Carthew!

JIMMY SILVER came off Little Side with his bat under his arm, with Lovell and Newcome and Mornington and two or three other fellows. Raby met them in the quad as they were heading for the School House.

"Feeling better, old infant?" asked Jimmy.

Raby nodded, with a grin.

"Much better," he answered. "You see, Carthew's going to feel worse, and that's a comfort."

"What's up?" asked Lovell.

"A booby-trap!"

And Raby explained.

There was a chortle from the juniors. Mark Carthew was not popular.

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver. "I say, we ought to be on the scene when Carthew gets it in the neck. Isn't he in yet?"

"I think he's gone to see Knowles. Must be back soon, though," said Raby. "It's past tea-time!"

"By gad, though, there'll be a fearful row if Carthew does get it!" remarked Valentine Mornington.

Raby grunted.

"I don't care! He couldn't prove I put it there. Anyhow, he larruped me with a stump—and prefects aren't allowed to larrup chaps with stumps. If it comes before the Head, Carthew will get a show-up."

"And serve him right," said Erroll, as

the juniors entered the School House. "You've a right to appeal to the Head, Raby."

"Shush!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, was standing in the hall in conversation with Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth. Errol's words had certainly reached his ears, for his glance turned upon the juniors sharply, though not unkindly, for a moment.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed on quickly.

Much as they resented Carthew's bullying, they were not in the least disposed to make complaints; partly from a natural repugnance to "sneaking," and partly because they were quite confident of their ability to take care of themselves in the long run.

Somewhat to their relief, therefore, the Head did not call to them, but continued his remarks to Mr. Greely as if he had heard nothing.

From one of the landings on the big staircase it was possible to get a view of part of the Sixth Form passage, and on that landing Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped.

They lounged cheerfully against the banisters there, keeping an eye below to see Carthew pass when he came in.

"The beast may be staying to tea with Knowles," growled Arthur Edward Lovell, after ten minutes of waiting and watching.

"Just like him!" said Newcome.

"Well, he'll come in sooner or later," remarked Mornington. "It's worth waitin' for. We shall hear him from here when he gets the pall."

"I fancy he'll be heard all over Rookwood!" chuckled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you chaps!" Tubby Muffin came along the staircase. "You fellows waiting for something? I say, Bulkeley's awfully waxy."

"How do you know, fatty?" said Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin gave the captain of the Fourth a fat wink. Tubby generally knew everything, whether it was his

business or not, and he prided himself on that fact.

"I happened to hear him speaking to Neville," he said. "He's going to give Carthew a jawing. I fancy. He said to Neville that the fellow oughtn't to be a prefect at all."

"Right on the wicket there!" said Jimmy Silver. "He oughtn't!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, as head prefect he's got a right to call Carthew over the coals," continued Tubby. "There's going to be a row. Fancy that! They make out that they don't have rows in the Sixth like fags, you know, but they do. Bulkeley is awfully ratty. He actually cuffed me—"

"What did he do that for?" grinned Lovell.

"I suppose he thought I was listening—and I wasn't, you know," said Tubby Muffin. "I simply happened to stop near him when he was jawing to Neville. Of course, I wouldn't listen—but he landed out. I called him a beast."

"Wha-a-ut!"

"You called Bulkeley a beast!" howled Conroy.

"Yes, rather! So he was a beast!" said Tubby indignantly. "What did he want to cuff me for?"

"And what did Bulkeley do?"

"Nothing."

"You called the captain of the school a beast, and he did nothing?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, you see, he didn't hear me, you know," confessed Tubby. "I—I didn't call him a beast while he could hear me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! There's old Bulkeley," murmured Lovell.

From somewhere below, the voice of Bulkeley of the Sixth came to the ears of the juniors on the landing.

"Is Carthew in yet, Neville, do you know?"

"Not yet, or we should have heard from him," murmured Lovell.

"Shush!"

Neville's voice was heard in reply.

"I haven't seen him, Bulkeley—in his study, I dare say."

"Right!"

Then there were footsteps.

Jimmy Silver gave a horrified jump.

"He—he—he's going to Carthew's study!" gasped Jimmy faintly.

"Oh, gad!"

"Mum-mum—my hat!"

For a moment Bulkeley came into view as he strode along the Sixth Form passage towards Mark Carthew's study, and vanished.

The juniors gazed at one another in horror.

That Carthew was not in his study they knew, or the booby-trap would have fallen. And Bulkeley was going there!

"He—he's got to be stopped!" gasped Jimmy.

"Too late——"

It was too late, and Jimmy Silver knew it, but he bounded down the stairs. Before he was half-way down there was a sudden roar from the direction of Carthew's study.

"Yurrergggghh!"

Jimmy Silver stopped as if frozen.

"He—he—he's got it!" babbled Baby.

"Bulkeley——"

"Bulkeley's got it!"

"Oh, Grilley!"

"Bunk!" rapped out Mornington.

"By gad, there'll be a row now! Bunk, for goodness' sake! Get a move on!"

The juniors fled. It was too late to save Bulkeley, and the only thing to be done was to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the scene of the disaster.

And that they did—promptly.

CHAPTER 4.

The Wrong Man!

"YURRERGGOCHH! Gurrghh!"

Wild and weird and woeful sounds rang along the Sixth Form passage.

"Yaw-ow! Ooooch! Grilch! Mmm-mmm!"

"What the dickens——"

"Bulkeley——"

"Great Scott!"

Doors opened on all sides, and there was a chorus of startled voices. Most of the Classical Sixth were at tea, or coming in to tea. In a minute or less the corridor was crowded with astonished seniors.

In the doorway of Carthew's study was a shocking spectacle.

A figure staggered there—the lower part recognisable as belonging to Bulkeley of the Sixth—the upper part utterly unrecognisable.

Soot and ink drenched the unfortunate captain of Rockwood.

Over the doorway an up-ended pail swung to a cord-dripping. The last drops of the mixture dropped out on the floor.

But the bulk of it had found a resting-place, at one fell swoop, upon the head and shoulders of the captain of Rockwood.

Bulkeley had tapped on the door and pushed it open quite unsuspectingly. And then the catastrophe had occurred with lightning swiftness.

Putty had laid that booby-trap well, and it worked like a charm, though not exactly according to programme. There was nothing wrong with the booby-trap; it was the victim that happened to be the wrong one. That was a small detail that the most careful of practical jokers could not possibly have foreseen. But it was rather serious.

Bulkeley staggered, spluttering, gasping, and spluttering wildly, hardly knowing what had happened to him.

There was soot in his hair, down his neck, on his face, in his eyes and his nose; and not only soot, but a thick mixture of gum and ink—a horrid mixture that clung and stuck and smelt.

Extraordinary sounds came from Bulkeley as he staggered in the doorway and clawed at the mixture.

Neville was the first to reach the spot.

He gazed in horror at the captain of Rookwood.

"Bulkeley!" he gasped. "Is—it—is it you, old chap?"

"Grooch! Ooooooooooch!"

"What—wha—ant—oh, crumbs!"

"Yurrrrrgggh!"

"It's a booby-trap!" gasped Jones major. "Oh, my hat! A—a—a booby-trap over Carthew's door——"

"Yoooooooooch!"

"Meant for Carthew!" murmured Lonsdale. "Bulkeley——"

"Gurrrrrrrrrgh!"

Bulkeley gouted at his eyes and nose, spluttering and almost weeping with rage. Bulkeley's good temper was generally to be relied upon; but the best of tempers would have failed at such a moment.

The Sixth-Formers stared at him, backing away a little. They could not help him; and they were rather unwilling to come in contact with him just then. The mixture did not look inviting.

"Hallo! What the thunder——" Carthew of the Sixth came striding along the passage, and he fairly blinked at the weird figure in his doorway. "What on earth—— Bulkeley—— Oh, my hat!"

Carthew had returned five minutes too late for the booby-trap.

"Gurrrrrrrgh!"

"It's a b-b-booby-trap!" said Jones major helplessly.

Carthew grinned.

"In my study, and Bulkeley's got it!" he said. "My hat! I say, I'm awfully sorry, Bulkeley!" His voice did not sound very sorrowful. "This is hard lines—very hard lines indeed!"

"Grooch! Grooch! Ow! Yow! Oh!" gasped Bulkeley. "Who—who did this? I'll skin him! I—I—I—— Oooooch! Puh! Ow!"

"I fancy I can guess who did it," said Carthew. "That young rascal Raby, of course, because I licked him for his cheek. It's clear enough that it was intended for me——"

"Oooch!" Bulkeley got his vision

clear at last, and blinked at Carthew. "I came to your study, Carthew, to speak to you about that—— Groooch! I—I—— Gurrrrrrrgh!"

"And you got the booby-trap!" grinned Carthew. "Much obliged! I suppose I should have got it if you hadn't."

"Oooooooooch!"

"Better get along to a bath-room, old chap," murmured Neville.

"It was Raby of the Fourth right enough," said Carthew maliciously. "Shall I look for him and give him a licking, Bulkeley?"

It was quite an enjoyable situation to the bully of the Sixth. He thought this might be a lesson to Bulkeley about backing up cheeky juniors against the Sixth. He charitably hoped so, at all events.

Bulkeley dabbed at his mouth with his handkerchief breathlessly.

"You'll let him alone!" he snapped.

"What? After what he's done?" smiled Carthew. "You look an awful sight, Bulkeley! It will take you hours to get the muck out of your hair! This really isn't the way the captain of the school ought to be treated, Raby——"

"You've no proof that it was Raby!" growled Bulkeley. "If it was I'll skin him! But——"

"By gad! I remember seeing Raby hanging about here some time back!" exclaimed Neville. "Now I think of it——"

"I'll see him later, then, if you saw him!" gasped Bulkeley, evidently attaching more importance to Neville's words than to Carthew's. "You're not to touch the kid till I've inquired, Carthew. I can deal with him."

Carthew shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, just as you like!" he answered. "If I'd got that little lot I'd have nearly slaughtered him; I know that! You've got it, and you're welcome to it!"

And Carthew walked away smiling, in great good-humour. He returned at once to Mr. Manders' House to relate this happy happening to his pal Knowles, amid many chuckles.

It was not a happy happening from the Rookwood captain's point of view, however. George Bulkeley staggered away to a bath-room, still gasping and spluttering.

Neville went with him to help him scrub. There was quite a lot of scrubbing required.

Steaming hot water, plenty of soap and an untiring scrubbing-brush occupied Bulkeley's attention for quite a long time.

Neville helped him in sympathetic silence. Bulkeley's temper was at boiling-point, and it was not a time for conversation. Indeed, Bulkeley snapped even at Neville once or twice, so sore and savage was he—which Neville took as a good pal should at such a time, in diplomatic silence.

Soot and ink were not easily removed; and by the time the captain of Rookwood was clean he was tired and he was sore; his face and head felt as if they had been freshly boiled. His complexion was crimson and his eyes had a dangerous glitter in them.

That look in Bulkeley's eyes boded ill to the offender. Neville brought him a change of clothes, which were very much needed. His attire was drenched with ink.

When Bulkeley emerged, newly swept and garnished, so to speak, the look on his face was so menacing that Neville ventured upon a remark at last.

"It's not certain that it was Raby, old chap—"

"You say you saw him there!"

"Yes; but—"

"I'm going to be just, I hope," said Bulkeley. "If it wasn't Raby, Raby won't be punished. I don't suppose you think I'm a bully, Neville, ready to land out at the nearest fag?"

"Of course not, old chap. But—"

"Well, tell Raby to come to my study."

"I mean it wasn't intended for you, Bulkeley—"

"I got it!"

"It was meant for Carthew—"

"For a Sixth Form prefect?" said Bulkeley.

"Ye-es! But—"

"I'm bound to support Carthew, even if I don't like him, Neville. I'm bound to set just the same as if this trick was played on any other prefect—and, as it happened, it was played on me instead of Carthew. But you needn't be afraid I'm going to adopt Carthew's methods. I shan't touch Raby unless it's clearly proved that he did it."

Neville said no more. Bulkeley certainly was not likely to punish any junior without proof, however enraged he might be. But his look showed that if proof was forthcoming the punishment in this instance would be severely drastic.

The captain of Rookwood strode away to his study with knitted brows, and his chum went in search of Raby of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 5.

Bulkeley Loses His Temper!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. were at tea in the end study.

It was rather a desultory tea. For once the healthy appetites of the Physical Four were impaired.

The disaster that had happened was utterly disconcerting. It could not possibly have been foreseen; but that did not make the matter any better. Raby was quite unhappy. The punishment intended for Carthew had fallen upon George Bulkeley, whom the juniors liked and respected, and at a time when, as appeared from Tubby Muffin's chatter, Bulkeley had been going to "slang" the bully on Raby's account.

That was the unkindest cut of all—that Bulkeley had received the flood of mixture—Raby's mixture—when it was on Raby's own account that he was paying that visit to Carthew's study.

Raby hardly touched his tea. He was feeling quite miserable, and not by any means solely because of his apprehensions of what was to follow.

But he had his apprehensions, too,

The captain of the school was far too important a personage to be treated like this without a terrific "row" following. If Carthew had got it the matter might have been serious. But Bulkeley had got it, and it was almost time for the skies to fall.

"It's rotten!" said Raby for the tenth time at least. "Rotten! Who could have guessed Bulkeley would get it? It's rotten!"

"Beastly!" said Jimmy Silver. "I wish you hadn't thought of the thing at all, by Jove! It was rather a rotten idea, anyway!"

"Well, I didn't think of it. It was that ass Putty suggested it," said Raby. "But he meant well, the silly idiot!"

"I've a jolly good mind to punch his head, whether he meant well or not!" growled Lovell. "He's always playing monkey tricks!"

"No, that's not quite fair," said Raby loyally. "Putty was backing me up, and he meant well. Goodness knows I wish he hadn't! But I was glad of the suggestion, and he helped me—in fact, did nearly the whole bizney, and I helped him. Of course, I've got to stand the racket. No need for Putty to be dragged into it."

Raby's chums assented to that. But they were anxious for Raby.

"I wonder we don't hear from Bulkeley," said Raby uneasily. "Of course, they must know I did it. Neville saw me there, and Tubby's said that he heard Neville tell Bulkeley so. So they must know."

"Bulkeley's cleaning himself, I suppose!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Scoff your egg, Raby: you've hardly touched it."

"I don't feel hungry."

"Better stoke up: it'll help you to stand what's to come," advised Newcome.

Raby grinned faintly, and put his spoon into his egg. Newcome's advice was good, after all.

"Hallo, here comes somebody!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Neville of the Sixth looked into the

and study with a grim brow. The Fiscal Four rose to their feet in silence.

"Come with me, Raby!" said the prefect.

"Yes, Neville," answered the junior meekly.

"What's Raby wanted for?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"On suspicion of being up a booby-tap in Carthew's study," answered Neville grimly. "Nothing to be afraid of if you didn't do it, Raby."

"Can we come, too?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"If you had a hand in it, you'd better come."

"They hadn't," said Raby. "They didn't even know what I was doing—they were at cricket, Neville."

Neville gave him a rather curious glance. There certainly was no sign of prevarication about Raby, serious as the matter was.

"You're admitting it, Raby," he said quietly.

"I'm not going to deny it," answered Raby. "But these chaps knew nothing at all about it till I told them afterwards."

"Then they're not wanted."

Raby followed the prefect from the study, leaving his chums with glum faces. Willingly enough would Jimmy Silver & Co. have accompanied him and shared his punishment, if that had been possible. But it was not possible.

Neville did not speak on the way to the Sixth Form quarters. Neither did the hapless junior. But near Bulkeley's door the prefect stopped, and, after a moment's hesitation, spoke kindly enough to the junior.

"Bulkeley's very much exasperated, Raby," he said. "Be careful how you speak to him. For your own sake, no cheek!"

"I'm not going to cheek him, Neville. Goodness knows I'm sorry enough that he got it! I'd rather have got it myself."

Neville nodded.

"Go in!" he said.

Raby went into the captain's study,

and Neville returned to his own room with a thoughtful brow.

Bulkeley was standing by his table, with a look on his face that startled the junior a little. He had never seen the captain of Rookwood look quite like that before.

The Sixth-Former's eyes glittered as they were fixed on Raby. The latter came in rather timidly.

"I—I— You wanted me to come here, Bulkeley?" he stammered.

"Yes. You know what's happened, Raby?"

"I—I know."

"Did you fix up that booby-trap in Carthew's study?" rapped out the captain of Rookwood.

"Yes."

The answer came fearlessly and unhesitatingly.

"Oh! You admit it?" exclaimed Bulkeley, rather taken aback.

"Well, you know I did it, and I shouldn't tell lies about it, anyway," answered Raby. "You know I never meant it for you, Bulkeley—"

"That's not the point! You meant it for a prefect of the Sixth Form!"

"I meant it for Carthew, because he's a bully—"

"That's enough! You dared to play such a trick on a Sixth Form prefect, and landed it on the captain of the school by mistake. That's the best defence you can make?"

"I—I am sorry—"

"I dare say you're sorry now that you laid that trap!" said Bulkeley grimly.

"I'm sorry you got it, I mean."

"Oh, you're not sorry you played the trick, then?"

"No, I'm not!" answered Raby sturdily. "Carthew asked for it, and I jolly well wish he'd got it!"

Bulkeley compressed his lips.

"You know he's a bully," said Raby, as the captain of Rookwood picked up his cane. "You know yourself—"

"Did you think I should allow you to insult a Sixth Form prefect because you think I am not on the best of terms with him personally?" exclaimed

Bulkeley angrily. "That was it, I suppose?"

"No, it wasn't. I never thought—"

"You had better learn to think—I'll help you!" said the captain of Rookwood grimly. "But before I lick you—"

"Oh, I know you're going to lick me," said Raby. "I don't think you ought to, as it wasn't meant for you. But—"

"That will do. Who helped you fix up the booby-trap?"

No answer.

"It doesn't look as if you could have done it alone," said Bulkeley. "One of your study-mates, or all of them—"

"No."

"But there was someone?"

Silence.

"Mind," said the captain of Rookwood, between his set teeth, "I'm going to get to the bottom of this, Raby. Someone helped you fix up the trap, and he's as guilty as you—perhaps more so. I order you to give me his name!"

Silence.

"That's admitting that there was another fag concerned in it. I want to know who it was. Will you tell me?"

"No, I won't!" said Raby desperately. "It's not like you to ask me to, either. Carthew might, but you—"

"You refuse to answer me?"

Raby drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said.

Bulkeley's grasp closed more tightly on the cane.

"You understand that this is a serious matter, I suppose?" he said savagely. "You laid a trap for Carthew, and it fell on me. It might have fallen on a master—on the Head himself, if he'd gone to the study—"

"Oh!" gasped Raby, dismayed at the bare idea.

"Whoever was concerned in it is going to be punished—hard. I want the name of the fellow who helped you."

No reply.

"Hold out your hand, then!"

Raby obeyed in silence.

Swish!

"Now the other hand!"

Swish!

Raby uttered a cry of pain.

It was not at all like "old Bulkeley" to lay the cane on like this, and he would not have done so if he had been cooler. But he was not cool now.

"Will you answer me now, Raby?"

"No, I won't!" panted the junior. "I'm not a sneak, and I'll be cut into pieces first, so there!"

"Hold out your hand again, then!" exclaimed Bulkeley angrily.

Raby's hand came out, quivering, but as the cane lashed down involuntarily the junior snatched his hand back. His palm was burning with the first hard cut, and flesh and blood would not stand another.

The cane, meeting with no resistance, lashed down, and struck Bulkeley's own leg with a sounding lash.

"Oh!" gasped Raby.

He had acted without thinking, but to Bulkeley's angry mind it looked like an intentional trick, and he quite lost his temper. He made an angry stride towards the junior, and grasped him by the collar with his left hand. Then the cane came into play across Raby's back.

Lash, lash, lash!

Raby yelled and struggled, surprised and furious by a licking of this kind.

"Let me go! Stop it! Yarcooh! Oh, oh, oh! You bully—Oh!"

Lash, lash!

"Bulkeley!"

The door opened.

CHAPTER 6.

The Fall of the Mighty!

"BULKELEY!"

It was a grim, surprised, shocked voice in the doorway.

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, stood in the doorway, gazing in on the scene with stern disapproval.

Bulkeley's arm dropped to his side. His face flushed scarlet. Raby staggered away as the captain of Rookwood released him, and leaned heavily on the table, panting and groaning.

There was a moment of grim silence on the Head's part, and then he rustled into the study. Bulkeley stood rooted to the floor. His action, though unusually harsh, had not been unjustified, but it was pretty clear that the Head had drawn the worst possible impression from what he had seen.

"Bulkeley," said Dr. Chisholm, very quietly, "place that cane on the table!"

Bulkeley obeyed without a word.

"I came here," said the Head, in the same quiet, severe tone, "to speak with you, Bulkeley, on certain matters connected with your duty as head prefect of Rookwood School. Until this moment Bulkeley, I have had every confidence in you. I did not expect, as I came to your study, to hear the cries of a junior boy subjected to what I can only call brutal usage."

"Dr. Chisholm!" stammered Bulkeley.

"Is that the manner, Bulkeley, in which a boy of the Fourth Form should be punished?" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"I—I—"

"You appear to have lost control of your temper, Bulkeley. I should not have appointed you head prefect of Rookwood if I had not supposed that you had proper command of your temper."

Bulkeley's eyes flashed. In his present mood he was not much inclined to accept a rating even from the Head.

"If you are not satisfied, sir, with the way I perform my duties—" he began hotly.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Calm yourself, Bulkeley, please! That is not the way to address your headmaster!"

The captain of Rookwood bit his lip hard. Raby, leaning on the table, suppressed his sounds of woe. He was hurt—severely hurt—but he tried hard to keep silent. For, strange as it might seem, the junior who had just been thrashed by Bulkeley, was concerned for Bulkeley himself now that the Head was "down" on him.

Bulkeley was too good-hearted a fellow in the main for one licking, however harsh, to change the junior's feelings towards him. Raby was sorry that the Head had come in, lucky as it had been for him personally.

Bulkeley suppressed the angry words that rose to his lips. As a matter of fact the Head's entrance had recalled him to himself, and he was already ashamed of the violence he had displayed.

"A prefect," continued the Head severely, "is empowered to administer a caning, if needed, but certainly not to thrash any boy in such a brutal manner, Bulkeley."

"You don't know what's happened, sir!" gasped Bulkeley.

"Whatever may have happened, Bulkeley, does not alter the fact that you have exceeded your authority, and acted in a brutal manner. If this boy's fault was so serious that a caning would not meet the case, you should have reported him to me, and I should have considered whether to administer a flogging. You are perfectly well aware of that."

Bulkeley was silent.

He was aware of it, and he knew that he was in the wrong. But this humiliation in the presence of the junior he had punished was too bitter.

"I—I—" Raby gasped. "It—it's all right, sir. I—"

Dr. Chisholm glanced at the junior.

"Did you speak, Raby?"

"Yes, sir," stammered Raby. "I—I don't mind, sir. It—it's all right. Bulkeley thought I was checking him, sir. I didn't mean to. I—I don't mind a licking, sir—"

Raby's voice died away in a tremulous murmur as a sense of his audacity in thus daring to address the Head rushed upon him.

"This boy, apparently, wishes to speak in your favour, Bulkeley, in spite of the way you have used him," said the Head. "Yet you wish me to believe that he has committed so serious

a fault as to justify such punishment as you were inflicting."

Bulkeley looked dogged.

"You don't know the circumstances, sir," he muttered.

"You are at liberty to explain the circumstances to me, and then I shall judge whether I can continue to repose confidence in you," said the Head sternly.

Raby was silent in dismay. His well-intentioned intervention had certainly done Bulkeley no good.

The silence that followed the Head's remark was broken by a tap on the half-open door, and Teddy Grace looked into the study.

"M-m-may I come in?" stammered Putty of the Fourth.

"Bulkeley is engaged at present, Grace."

"But—but it's about that, sir!" stammered Putty. "I—I want to own up. It—it wasn't Raby—not all Raby, anyhow."

The Head's expression grew grimmer. "You may come in, Grace," he said.

Putty came in, looking from one face to another in surprise and dismay. He had been to the end study, and learned that Raby had gone to "face the music," and he had loyally come along to own up and take his share. Half the punishment, at least, was due to him, and he was prepared to take it. He had not expected to find Dr. Chisholm there.

"Now, kindly acquaint me with what has happened, Bulkeley," said the Head coldly. "This boy, Grace, appears to be concerned in it."

Bulkeley compressed his lips.

"I was caught in a booby-trap," he said. "Raby had fixed it up for another prefect. That is all."

"You admit this, Raby?"

"Yes, sir," said Raby at once.

"And you, Grace?"

"I was in it, too, sir," said Putty. "It was my idea, in fact. I—I'm ready to take my share of the blame. We did it together."

"That is very proper, Grace. Were

you aware that Grace was concerned in the affair, Bulkeley?"

"No, sir," muttered Bulkeley.

"You were punishing Raby in an outrageous manner, without even ascertaining that he was not the only person concerned in the offence!" exclaimed the Head.

"I—I did not know——"

"You did not know? It was your duty to know! It was not even difficult to do your duty in this case, as the boy was ready to admit his share in the transaction, and has indeed come here of his own accord to confess."

Bulkeley was silent.

He had been hasty, and he had been violent—he had, in fact, for once allowed his temper to get the better of him. There was little to be said. It was the first time; but the Head, naturally, did not know that. So far as he knew, this was simply the first time that he had discovered Bulkeley acting harshly and unjustly, which was quite a different matter.

"Have you anything to say, Bulkeley?" asked the Head in an ominous tone.

The captain of Rookwood did not speak, and the two juniors exchanged a glance of dismay. "Old Bulkeley" was evidently in for it.

The Head turned to them.

"You boys may go!" he said.

Slowly and reluctantly Raby and Putty left the study. They were well aware that the "chopper" was to come down on Bulkeley as soon as they were gone. They wondered breathlessly what was going to happen as the door closed.

There was a moment or two of silence in the room after the juniors had gone. The Head's firm gaze was fixed upon Bulkeley's face, crimson and downcast before him.

"This is a very disconcerting discovery to me, Bulkeley," said Dr. Chisholm at length. "I had every confidence in you. You have destroyed it. You must yourself acknowledge that I cannot, consistently with my duty, allow

you to exercise any longer the authority of head prefect of Rookwood."

Silence.

"I am sorry for this, Bulkeley," went on the Head in a gentler tone. "I have no choice in the matter, however. You have left me none. From this moment, Bulkeley, you are not a prefect of Rookwood. Whether I may be able to reinstate you at a later date I cannot now say, but for the present my decision is as I have stated—you are no longer a prefect, and no longer captain of the school."

And, as the hapless captain of Rookwood did not speak, the Head turned to the door.

He passed out of the study, leaving the fallen captain of the school still silent, and rustled away down the passage. He passed two scared-looking juniors there, who stared after him, and then at one another.

"What's happened, Putty?" muttered Raby.

Putty shook his head.

"I—I don't know."

Raby glanced towards Bulkeley's study, but he did not venture to take a step in that direction. Slowly, and with a troubled face, the junior mounted the staircase.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, and Newcome met him on the landing.

"Well?" muttered Jimmy, looking directly at Raby.

"I—I say, it's rotten!" said Raby miserably.

"You've been licked?"

"Yes, yes; that doesn't matter. But—but Bulkeley! He's in an awful row with the Head, and I don't know what's happened."

"Phew! But what——"

Raby explained miserably, and his chums listened with grave faces. Raby seemed to have forgotten his own licking, painful as it still was, in his concern for the popular captain of Rookwood. And Jimmy & Co. shared that concern to the full.

What had happened between Bulkeley and the Head? That was the question

that troubled them, and to which for the present there was no answer.

But what had happened was known to all Rookwood School that evening.

There was a notice on the board in the Head's hand; it was brief, but to the point. All Rookwood gathered to read it; and fellows came over from the Modern side in crowds to read it, to "Rotten!"

That was the general verdict.

For the Head's note briefly stated that George Bulkeley had been removed from the position of captain and head prefect of Rookwood. Lawrence Neville of the Sixth was appointed head prefect in his place, and there was to be a new election for the captain of the school.

"Rotten!"

"Beastly!" groaned Raby. "And it's my fault as much as anybody's! Oh, that silly, howling ass Putty!"

"Old Bulkeley's sacked from the captaincy!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "It's too rotten!"

"Rather a come-down for the merry sport—what?" smiled Smythe of the Shell. It will be rather interestin' to see his face when he shows it in public again, by gad!"

The Fistical Four turned on Smythe as one man and smote him, and Smythe fled, yelling. He did not make any more disrespectful remarks about Bulkeley in the hearing of Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Step up for you, Neville," remarked Caribew of the Sixth, looking at the notice, and then grinning at Neville, who was reading it with a gloomy face.

Neville gave him a grim look.

"Nothing of the kind!" he answered.

"But you're appointed——"

"I shall refuse!" answer Neville curtly.

And he walked away, leaving Caribew whistling. Caribew looked very cheery that evening. He was wondering whether he had a remote chance in the new election of squeezing in as captain of Rookwood. The same thought was

in Knowles' mind over on the Modern side.

The news was a shock to all Rookwood. Bulkeley—"Old Bulkeley," as the fellows affectionately called him—had fallen from his high estate—the Head of the Sixth, whose nod had been a command, was now—nobody in particular. Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, he had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

Bulkeley was not seen in public again that evening. He remained in his study, and only his chum Neville visited him there. But the fall of the captain of Rookwood was the one topic in the school that evening, from the Sixth to the Second. And all Rookwood wondered what was to come of it.

CHAPTER 7.

Tubby Wants to Know!

"NEVILLE!"

Jimmy Silver of the Fourth tapped at Neville's door in the Sixth Form passage at Rookwood and looked in.

Jimmy's usually sunny face was clouded.

From his expression it might have been supposed that the junior had come to Neville's study for a licking; but Jimmy was not, as it happened, worried about himself. He was thinking, like many of the Rookwood juniors, of the trouble that had fallen upon "old Bulkeley," the popular captain of the school—captain no longer.

All Rookwood School was in a buzz of excited discussion upon that topic just then.

"Neville, the Head's sent me to tell you——" began Jimmy Silver, as he put his head into the study.

Then he stopped as he discovered that the study was untenanted. Neville of the Sixth was not in his quarters.

Jimmy Silver stepped back into the passage, looking more clouded than

ever. He guessed that Neville was in Bulkeley's study, so that he had to go there with his message from the Head, and he found his task repugnant.

Only an hour before he had pulled Tubby Muffin's fat ear for proposing to give Bulkeley a look in and see how he was taking it. Jimmy did not want to see how Bulkeley was taking it; he could guess, only too easily, that Bulkeley was feeling rotten enough, and did not want to be bothered by intrusive fags.

But there was no help for it; Jimmy had to deliver Dr. Chisholm's message. So he went slowly along to Bulkeley's door and tapped.

There was no cheery "Come in!" from within. Jimmy heard a chair move, and then the door was opened, and Neville of the Sixth glanced out to see who had tapped.

Neville's handsome, good-natured face was very grim now. He frowned at the junior.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "Bulkeley can't see you now."

Jimmy's glance passed Neville, and rested for a moment upon the athletic figure of George Bulkeley, standing by the mantelpiece. Bulkeley was staring at the hearthrug, and did not turn his head.

"I haven't come to see Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver hastily. "I thought you were here, Neville, I've been to your study."

"Well, what do you want?"

"It's a message from the Head."

"Oh! Get it out, then!"

"The Head wants you in his study at once, Neville."

"All right. You can clear off."

Jimmy Silver cleared off, glad to go. The door closed again with a snap, and there was a murmur of voices in the study.

Jimmy went quickly down the passage, and found a group of juniors waiting for him at the end.

"You've told Neville?" asked Lovell.

"Yes."

"I say, did you see Bulkeley?" asked Tubby Muffin eagerly.

"Yes," growled Jimmy Silver.

"Did he look awfully down?"

"So-r-r-r!"

"I suppose he does," said Tubby. "It's an awful come-down for Bulkeley, you know, to be sacked from the captaincy. I saw Garthwaite of the Sixth grinning over the Head's notice on the board; he was jolly pleased."

"The roster!" growled Lovell.

"There'll be a new captain," pursued Tubby Muffin. "I expect it will be Neville, as he's going to be made head prefect in Bulkeley's place. That will be all right for us."

"All wrong, you mean, you fat duffer!" said Raby.

"Well, Neville's jolly easy-going—in fact, sort," said Tubby sagely. "He won't jaw us like old Bulkeley. Bulkeley's a good sort, in his way; but he did jaw a chap. Frinstance, if a chap was too tired to turn out up at cricket practice Bulkeley would never take any notice. He took me down to Little Side by the ear the other day. Fancy that!"

"Serve you right, you fat slacker!" grunted Newcome.

"Well, Neville wouldn't; Neville's jolly good-natured," said Tubby Muffin. "And Townsend says a fellow won't be afraid about putting on a smoke in the study now—Neville won't be on his track."

"Townsend's a smoky worm!"

"Well, my opinion is——" began Tubby loftily.

"Oh, bother your opinion, and you, too!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Dry up, for goodness' sake!"

"Hallo, here comes Neville!" murmured Raby.

The Pistical Four made a point of looking the other way as Neville came along, evidently on his way to the Head's study. But Tubby Muffin didn't. Inquisitiveness was Tubby's besetting sin.

Tubby was intensely curious to know how Bulkeley was taking it, as he ex-

pressed it; and only Jimmy Silver's dire threats had kept him from inventing some pretext to visit the fallen captain of Rookwood in his study.

As Neville came along, Tubby ventured to tap him on the sleeve. The prefect glanced down at him impatiently.

"I—I say, Neville—" began the fat Classical.

"What do you want, Muffin?"

"I—I say, how is Bulkeley taking it?" gasped Tubby, almost scared at his own temerity, but consumed by a desire to know.

Neville gave him a fixed look, for a moment too surprised by Tubby's cheek to answer him. Then he took the fat Classical by the collar and shook him vigorously.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Yoop! Leggo! I—I say, Neville, you know, I only said— Yaroooooh!"

Shake, shake!

Neville released the fat Classical and strode on without a word, leaving Tubby Muffin in a dazed state.

"Ow-ow-ow!" mumbled Tubby. "I—I say, Jimmy, what was Neville waxy about? Wha-a-at did he shake me for? Ow!"

Instead of answering, Jimmy Silver grasped the fat junior by the collar and proceeded to continue the shaking.

"You fat chump!" Shake! "Don't be an inquisitive little beast!" Shake! "Go and eat coke!" Shake!

"Yaroooooh!"

Tubby Muffin staggered against the wall, gasping, as Jimmy released him; and the Pictorial Four walked away and left him there.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" howled Tubby. "You awful rotter! Wow-wow!"

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?" asked Conroy of the Fourth, coming along a few minutes later and finding Tubby Muffin still spluttering.

"Ow-ow! I just asked Neville how Bulkeley was taking it, and that beast

Silver shook me— Why, wharrer you at? Yarooooh!"

Shake, shake!

"Oh, my hat! Yoop! Leggo!"

Conroy walked on, leaving the fat Classical struggling for breath. The inquisitive Tubby had never been so shaken in all his fat career before, and it was quite a long time before he ceased to splutter.

CHAPTER E.

Neville says "No!"

DR. CHISHOLM'S face was very grave as Neville of the Sixth entered his study.

"Pray come in, Neville," he said. "Doubtless you are aware why I have sent for you. You have seen my notice on the board?"

"Yes, sir," answered Neville quietly.

"As you know, Neville, I have decided to remove Bulkeley from the position of head prefect and captain of the school. I have reflected upon the matter, and decided that there is no other course open to me. I have no longer the necessary confidence in him.

"But, sir—"

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand to stop the interruption.

"As I have decided to appoint you in Bulkeley's place, Neville—"

"But—"

"Pray allow me to conclude," said the Head sharply. "I have decided to appoint you head prefect in Bulkeley's place, as you are next in rank. You will also act as captain of the school pro tem—that is, until a new election takes place."

"But, sir—"

"Really, Neville, you should be aware that you ought not to interrupt your headmaster in this manner. Bulkeley has, perhaps, acquainted you with the affair—"

"Yes, sir, and—"

"The date of a new election of captain of the school will be fixed very

soon. Until the result is known you will act as captain of Rookwood."

"But, sir—" stammered Neville.

"That is my decision, Neville. I trust," said the Head, in quite a grim manner—"I trust, Neville, that you have no objection to offer?"

Neville drew a deep breath. It required a good deal of nerve to oppose the Head, who was always a very awe-inspiring personage. Opposition, too, was not likely to be of much use; Dr. Chisholm was a man of very firm character—perhaps a little too firm. There had been whispers at Rookwood that the Head's firmness partook of the nature of obstinacy.

And Neville, on his side, was not specially firm—he was good-natured and easy-going, and hated to say "no" to anybody. But he was George Bulkeley's loyal chum, and that consideration nerved him even to the extent of opposing the Head.

The gathering frown on Dr. Chisholm's brow was not encouraging; but Neville took his courage in both hands, so to speak, and made the plunge.

"I—I should like to point out, sir—"

"Well?"

"Bulkeley was to blame, sir—"

"Most seriously to blame," said the Head.

"He has admitted it to me, sir, and he is sorry for having lost his temper with Raby of the Fourth—"

"No doubt."

"And—and that being so, sir—"

"I cannot place sufficient reliance, Neville, upon a prefect who loses his temper and is sorry for it afterwards," said the Head. "Weakness of that kind is out of place in Bulkeley's former position."

"Ye-es, sir. I—I know—but—"

"Have you anything more to say, Neville?" asked the Head, as the unfortunate Sixth-Former stammered. His manner was icy, not to say Arctic. Opposition of any kind always had that effect upon the Head. His decisions were promulgated, as it were, from the heights of Olympus, and it

was not for common mortals to criticise them, much less oppose them.

"Yes, sir, I have," said Neville, with some spirit. "Bulkeley was at fault, but it wasn't so very serious—"

"I consider it serious, Neville."

"Ye-es, sir; but—but for instance, the Junior in question, Raby of the Fourth, makes no complaint. Raby, I am certain, will be as sorry as anybody to think that Bulkeley is degraded on his account. I have seen him, and he is looking quite miserable about it. He would rather have had twice the licking, than have caused Bulkeley trouble like this."

"That is simply another condemnation of Bulkeley," said the Head coldly. "It appears that he punished, with undue severity, a Junior who is his loyal admirer."

"Well, ye-es, but—"

"I think there is nothing more to be said, Neville."

Dr. Chisholm took up a paper from his desk, as a hint that the interview was at an end.

But it was not quite at an end.

"What I mean, sir—" Neville recommenced.

"You have made your meaning clear, Neville, and I trust I have made mine clear. Nothing remains to be said."

"I—I mean, sir—"

"Neville!"

"I—I mean," pursued the Sixth-Former undauntedly, "that though Bulkeley did lose his temper, the fellows don't think any the worse of him—and they all look on it as a disaster for him to be turned out of the captaincy. Even the Junior he punished thinks the same as the others. The whole school has confidence in Bulkeley."

"I have said, Neville, that I no longer have confidence in him. That is the end of the matter. You may leave my study, Neville."

"Then, sir, I'm bound to say that I can't—"

"What!"

That sudden ejaculation from the

Head was almost terrifying. So might Jove, on cloudy Olympus, have ejaculated, at the first breath of opposition to his lofty will and pleasure.

Neville faltered, but he went on:

"I can't, sir——"

"You cannot—what?"

"I can't consent to taking Bulkeley's place——"

"Neville!"

The Head, more Olympian than ever, rose to his feet. His glance was simply scathing.

"Is it possible, Neville, that you are thinking of declining the position I have decided to place you in?"

"Yes, sir," said Neville desperately. "I'm not going to supplant Bulkeley—I can't take his place."

There was a moment of silence—awful silence. Then the Head spoke, quietly—but with a rumble of distant thunder, as it were, behind his quiet tone.

"Very well. I did not expect this, Neville. I fear I have been mistaken in you."

"I—I——"

"You need say no more, Neville. You understand, of course, that you are no longer a prefect. Leave my study!"

"I—I hope, sir——" faltered Neville.

"You may go!"

And Neville went.

CHAPTER X.

Something Up!

ROOKWOOD SCHOOL was in something like a flutter on the following day. The school was, at present, without a captain; and the august body of prefects was without a head.

It was known far and wide that Lawrence Neville had refused to take Bulkeley's place; and fellows discussed his refusal with bated breath.

How he had found the nerve to do it was a mystery. But he had done it: there was no doubt about that.

So far no fresh appointment was

made. Jimmy Silver remarked that it was a "facer" for the Head. Smythe, of the Shell, in his slangy way, declared that the downy old bird was no end bottled. Whether the Head was "bottled" or not, he had made no move so far.

There was quite an unusual atmosphere in the Form-rooms that day. A sort of unrest was perceptible all over Rookwood.

Everybody felt a sense of trouble to come.

That Bulkeley had been in fault in the affair with Raby of the Fourth was not to be denied. But Bulkeley was too good a fellow for his popularity to be shaken by one fault. Raby, who had been severely licked, was as loyal a supporter as ever of the old captain of Rookwood. Jimmy Silver & Co., in fact, were his most enthusiastic backers.

The Head, whose only intention was to be just, was erring a little on the side of excessive firmness. If all Rookwood could forgive Bulkeley, there was no reason why the Head should not—no reason, excepting that when he had once decided, his decrees were as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

That was all very well in its way; but Smythe of the Shell remarked that it wasn't a headmaster's bizney to set up as a giddy Teal or Kaiser, and Jimmy Silver & Co., for once, agreed with Adolphus Smythe.

After morning lessons, which were a little thundery in the Sixth Form-room, there was a meeting of some of the Classical Sixth in Neville's study. The juniors noted it with keen interest, and wondered what would come of it. For there was no doubt that the Sixth were supporting Bulkeley, though the fallen captain of Rookwood was not asking for support.

Bulkeley did not attend the meeting. He came out into the quadrangle, and many eyes were fixed upon him there. His face was a little clouded, but he

did not appear conscious of the general attention.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were chatting near the doorway, and Raby coloured a little as Bulkeley came up to the quartette. Poor Raby was feeling very downhearted. It was through him that this disaster had fallen on George Bulkeley, though he really was not to blame. He wondered for a moment, as Bulkeley came up, whether it meant more trouble.

"I've wanted to speak to you, Raby," said Bulkeley quietly, without any sign of anger.

"Yes, Bulkeley," murmured the junior.

"I'm afraid I lost my temper with you yesterday, kid. I gave you rather more of a licking than you deserved."

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry!" said Bulkeley.

Raby gasped.

The great man of the Sixth was actually apologising to him, a fact of the Fourth!

If Bulkeley's popularity had waned in the Lower School, nothing more than that would have been required to restore it to its zenith.

"Oh, Bulkeley," whispered Raby. "I—I don't mind; it doesn't matter a bit! Besides, it was my fault——"

"All serene, kid," said Bulkeley.

And, with a kind nod, the ex-captain of Rookwood walked on towards the cricket-ground.

The Finalist Four looked at one another.

"Isn't he a brick!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath.

"Splendid old chap!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Fancy the Head selecting a chap like that! The Head's a donkey!"

"It's a shame!" said Raby. "It's a rotten shame! I'd have been flogged a dozen times before I'd have had this happen to Bulkeley. Suppose he did lose his temper! Well, he got the booby-trap that I'd fixed up for Carthew. It was enough to make any fellow weazy."

"Of course it was!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"It's rotten!" he said. "The Head means well; he thinks he's seeing stern justice done. As a matter of fact, he's going too far. But he's jolly obstinate."

"Silver!"

Neville of the Sixth looked out from the doorway. Jimmy Silver hurried to him at once.

"Yes, Neville?"

"Take this note over to Knowles, in Mr. Manders' house, will you?"

"Yes, rather!"

Jimmy Silver took the note and trotted off to the Modern side with it. In Mr. Manders' house he found Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern Fourth in deep discussion upon the topic that was agitating all Rookwood just then. He went on to Knowles' study to deliver the note, and found the head Modern prefect there, with Frampton and Cateby.

The three Modern prefects were, like the juniors in the passage, deep in discussion. Knowles gave Jimmy a sharp, frowning look.

"For you, Knowles!" said Jimmy; and he tossed the note on the table, and retired.

He rejoined his chums on the School House steps, and in a few minutes Knowles & Co. came across. The note had evidently been to summon them to the meeting in Neville's study. Knowles, Cateby, Frampton, and Tresham passed into the House, and the juniors exchanged glances.

"Something's up!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell oracularly.

The juniors could not help feeling keenly curious. Some step was contemplated by the Sixth, which was to be taken all together, it was clear. Tubby Muffin came out of the School House a little later, with his roused, fat face full of excitement.

"Jimmy!" he gasped. "I—I say, they're going it!"

"Who's going it, fatty?"

"The Sixth!" gasped Tubby. "All the prefects—in Neville's study."

"They're going to remonstrate with the Head—"

"What?"

"And request him to reinstate Bulkeley—"

"Oh!"

"And they've agreed that no prefect will take Bulkeley's place, and if the Head asks them they're going to refuse!" gasped Tubby. "Even Knowles—that Modern cad, you know—is backing up! I don't believe he wants to back up Bulkeley, you know, but he daren't get the Sixth down on him—that's my belief—or he'd be jolly glad to jump into Bulkeley's place. Even Carthew has agreed. All the Sixth are in it. Fancy that!"

"And how the thump do you know all this?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell gruffly.

"I—I happened to be near Neville's door—"

"And your ear happened to be at the keyhole, you listening beast!" exclaimed Lovell, in disgust. "You've no business to know anything about it!"

"Well, I like that!" said Tubby indignantly. "You let me tell you, anyway!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Lovell.

Tubby Muffin fled.

In a very short time Tubby Muffin's exciting news was widely known. In Neville's study the important debate among the great men of the Sixth went on, the prefects of Rookwood little dreaming that it was the subject of another exciting debate among the small fry outside the sacred precincts of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 16

Jimmy Silver Takes a Hand

"**W**E'RE going to back him up!" Jimmy Silver made that announcement in the end study at tea-time.

The captain of the Fourth had been thinking. This, apparently, was the result.

"Bulkeley, do you mean?" asked Lovell, as he cracked his second egg.

"Naturally."

"We'll back him up all right," said Arthur Newcome cheerfully. "But how are we going to do it, Jimmy?"

"I've got an idea."

Lovell grunted.

"There's nothing doing, Jimmy. We can't argue with the Head, and it depends on the Head. And he's as obstinate as a mule."

"I'm not thinking of arguing with the Head. But look here." Jimmy Silver raised his hand holding the egg-spoon, and proceeded to lay down the law with the egg-spoon, as it were. "The Head's pushed Bulkeley out of the captaincy, wishing to be just. We know he means well—these headmasters always do mean well. But he doesn't understand."

"He doesn't, for a fact."

"He thinks he's defending the rights of juniors, and all that—standing between chaps like us and an overbearing fellow in the Sixth—"

"What rot!"

"Well, that's how the Head is looking at it. If it was Carthew or Knowles he would be right; but it's Bulkeley, and Bulkeley is the best chap at Rookwood."

"Hear, hear!"

"He pitched into Raby. Well, Raby can stand that and come up smiling—can't you, Raby?"

"Of course I can!" grunted Raby.

"I'm not made of patty, I suppose?"

"But the point is this. A junior was the injured party, and the juniors still have confidence in Bulkeley—plenty of it."

"Lots!" agreed Lovell.

"The whole Lower School backs him up as one man—excepting a few cads, perhaps, like Lattrey, and Gower and Peele, and Leggett, and perhaps Towny and Toppy, and perhaps a few others. Those who don't back up Bulkeley don't count."

"Nobody counts who doesn't agree with us."

"Don't be a funny ass, Lovell! Practically the whole Lower School backs up Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver warmly. "Well, if he wasn't all right for head prefect and captain, would they do it?"

"Of course not."

"Now, then, suppose the Head is made aware that the whole Lower School supports Bulkeley, won't that very likely make him change his mind?"

"Ahem!"

"His only reason for shifting Bulkeley is that he can't trust him to be just to the Lower School. Well, the opinion of the Lower School on that point is bound to influence him, as a reasonable man."

"Ye-es, if he is a reasonable man."

"Well, even a headmaster is bound to be more or less reasonable."

"Hm!"

"So my idea," pursued Jimmy, "is this—"

"Hm!"

"I'll tell you my idea, if Lovell isn't going to start difficulties at the very beginning—"

"Oh, plie in!" said Lovell.

"My idea is, a loyal address to Bulkeley—"

"Eh—a which?"

"Loyal address, signed by the whole of the Lower School!" said Jimmy Silver impressively. "We can get sheets and sheets of impot paper filled up with signatures. Every chap in the Third, the Fourth, and the Fifth will sign it on both sides of Rookwood. The Second too, for that matter."

"Cut!"

"Every chap signs freely, of his own accord, in hearty support of Bulkeley of the Sixth. See?"

"And suppose a chap won't?"

"Then we'll jolly well punch his head till he does!" said Jimmy Silver warmly.

"Oh, be hell! Punch his head till he signs of his own accord!"

"For goodness' sake, Lovell, don't keep on arguing! I never knew such

a chap for starting difficulties!" exclaimed the captain of the Fourth, in great exasperation. "My idea is free and unanimous support of Bulkeley by the whole Lower School. We draw up the loyal address in a few well-chosen words—"

"Who's going to choose 'em?"

"I am. In a few well-chosen words, and get all the fellows to sign it. We present it to Bulkeley in a representative deputation—"

"Oh!"

"With a speech from the chairman of the deputation—"

"Who's chairman?"

"I am."

"And what's the speech going to be?"

"Oh, a few well-chosen words, you know."

"And you're going to choose 'em?"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"It jolly well looks to me as if this giddy loyal address will represent Jimmy Silver more than anybody or anything else. Why not drop in on the Head, and give him our advice straight away?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a heavy touch of sarcasm.

"Look here—"

"Peace!" murmured Newcome. "I say, Jimmy, if we present the chery address to Bulkeley the Head mayn't even hear of it."

"He's bound to," said Jimmy. "After handing it to Bulkeley we are going to stick it on the notice-board."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bulkeley will read it, you see, and thank us—"

"In a few well-chosen words?" asked Lovell.

"And thank us!" roared Jimmy Silver. "And then we shall put it on the board for all Rookwood to read. As a reasonable man, the Head is bound to be influenced by it."

"He might!" said Newcome.

"And he mightn't!" remarked Lovell.

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm, anyway," said Raby pacifically. "Let's

draw up the blessed address after tea, and then get the fellows to sign. Even if it doesn't make any difference with the Head it will please old Bulkeley."

"Yes, something in that!" agreed Lovell.

"I'm glad you can see something in it at last," observed Jimmy Silver sardonically.

"Keep your wool on, old chap. Let's get on with the giddy address, and we'll all help choose those few well-chosen words. Four heads are better than one."

"Thicker, at any rate!"

"Look here, Jimmy——"

"Agreed!" said Jimmy Silver. "We'll all put our heads together over it, and then take it round for the fellows to sign. And my belief is that it will make a lot of difference with the Head, and the trouble will blow over—all through the end study."

The idea of the end study causing the trouble to blow over was rather flattering to the Co. And the tea-things were shifted, pens and ink and paper produced, and the Fiscal Four started to work upon the loyal address which, at the very least, was to assure Bulkeley of the Sixth that he possessed the full confidence of the Lower School at Rookwood.

CHAPTER II.

The Loyal Address!

"**H**OW do we begin it?"

"Dear Bulkeley," I should think," said Lovell thoughtfully.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Too easy and familiar," he said. "Something a bit more—well, more stately and—official, you know."

"Which person is it to be?" asked Raby.

"Bulkeley, of course," answered Lovell.

"Fathead! I mean which person

"Well, Bulkeley's the person, isn't he?"

"I mean second or third person!" howled Raby.

"Ob, I see. You never make yourself clear, Raby. Third person sounds rather impressive," remarked Lovell. "Something like this: 'Bulkeley of the Sixth is assured by members of the Lower School——'"

"That sounds a bit as if we were taking out a life assurance," remarked Newcome.

"Rot! Assured by members of the Lower School that they have complete confidence in him, and are down on his being sacked."

"Better not rub it in too much about the sack. That point ought to be passed over diplomatically," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"He is sacked from the captaincy, isn't he?"

"Well, yes; but——"

"Well, I believe in calling a spade a spade. You can call it a dashed agricultural implement if you like."

"Let's hear Jimmy's views," murmured Raby.

Jimmy Silver smiled. He was waiting patiently for the Co. to come round to his views.

"Well, Jimmy gases such a lot," said Lovell. "Still, let him go ahead. I don't believe he can improve upon 'assured by members of the Lower School.'"

"Something like this," said Jimmy Silver: "We, the undersigned members of the Lower School at Rookwood, hereby——"

"Well, 'hereby' sounds all right," admitted Lovell. "What about 'heretofore,' too? That's got quite a legal sound."

"It isn't necessary."

"Ob, if you're only going to put in what's necessary——" said Lovell, with the air of a fellow washing his hands of the job.

"Go it, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver went it, and his rough sketch of the loyal address was more

or less approved by the other members of the end study. Lovell made some amendments, which were discussed, and some of them admitted—perhaps not with enthusiasm. Raby and Newcome also put in an improvement here and there—in doubt by way of drawing attention to the fact that the end study was a free republic and not an autocratic monarchy.

Many hands are said to make light work; but, as a matter of fact, four heads did not prove much better than one in this case. And by the time the loyal address was completed a considerable time had elapsed, and the paper it was written on was inky and blotchy and smudgy.

But they were satisfied, upon the whole, with their joint production. It really was rather an eloquent document, and they agreed that Bulkeley was sure to be pleased, even if the Head did not come down off his perch.

The document, as completed, ran as follows:

"WE, the undersigned members of the Lower School of Rookwood, comprising all the Lower School of Rookwood excepting a few cads, hereby announce, declare and affirm our complaint and continue confidence in George Bulkeley of the Sixth Form, and in the name of the Lower School of Rookwood we hereby demand that the said George Bulkeley be reinstated as captain of the school without a stain on his character.

"We also declare that we, the Lower School of Rookwood, won't have any other captain, at any price, and if ordered so to do we shall regard it as our duty to look upon it with Contempt.

"Our motto is back up Bulkeley, who is a good sort, though some Fatheads may think otherwise, for he's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us

"(Signed) J. SILVER,

"A. E. LOVELL,

"G. RABY,

"A. NEWCOME."

"That only requires some more signatures, and it's all right," said Jimmy Silver.

"That bit about the fatheads is good!" said Lovell, with a grin. "Of course, it may be glancing at the Head, and it may not."

"It's rather deep," agreed Raby.

"I believe there ought to be an 'i' in 'stain,'" murmured Jimmy Silver. "In fact, I know there ought."

Lovell shook his head.

"It's a word of five letters, Jimmy—I know it," he answered. "Leave it to me, old chap. I'm pretty strong on spelling."

"Leave out the 'e,'" suggested Jimmy.

"What rot!"

"Lovell!"

"We don't want to make a bad impression on Bulkeley by showing him a lot of bad spelling," said Lovell. "A word misspelt might spoil the whole effect. Leave it as it is."

"But I tell you—"

"It's a jolly curious thing, you chaps, that Jimmy thinks he knows everything that's to be known in this study!" remarked Lovell. "What is it puts the idea into his head?"

"Oh, leave it as it is, then!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly.

"I should jolly well think so—especially as you've left out my bit about assuring him. Besides, I think 'heretofore' would have been impressive; but I've agreed to leave it out."

"Let's go and gather up signatures," said Raby. "We'll pin the sheets of impot paper together."

"Good egg!"

And the Fistical Four sallied forth, document in hand, with an ample supply of impot paper for the signatures.

They looked in first on the Colonial Co. Conroy, Van Ryn, and Pons grinned when they read the document, but they signed cheerfully. Oswald and Jones minor, and Flynn and Teddy Grace followed their example, and Tubby Muffin

appended a signature that looked like something in Turkish.

Mornington and Erroll were the next, and Mornington grinned and Erroll stared as the loyal address was presented to them for inspection.

"What is it—a map?" asked Morny.

"Map!" repeated Lovell. "What the thump do you mean?"

"Blessed if I can tell whether it's a geographical map or a geological chart!" said Morny. "Which is it?"

"It's an address to Bulkeley!" roared Lovell. "There may be a blot or two."

"I—I say, will Bulkeley like that?" hesitated Erroll. "Especially that bit about the fatheads. I suppose that means the Head."

"That's where we're jolly deep," said Lovell complacently. "It's a sort of hint of what we think, you know, without saying anything right out. Of course, we couldn't very well call the Head a fathead actually."

"Bad form!" said Ruby, with a shake of the head. "It's pretty well wrapped up there. That's all right."

"I suppose you're going to sign, Erroll?"

"Oh, certainly!"

And Erroll signed, and Morny followed his example; and the Pistical Four marched on in search of fresh signatures.

Up and down Rookwood they went with the loyal address, sheets of impot paper, and a fountain-pen, and signatures flowed in like the waves of the sea. Nearly every junior at Rookwood, Classical or Modern, was prepared to testify his readiness to back up Bulkeley.

There were a few objectors—Lattrey & Co, for instance, who were rather black sheep, did not like Bulkeley, and said so. Jimmy Silver & Co. left them in their study after a short argument without taking their signatures—but they left them in a state of wreck and ruin that was simply deplorable. After the Pistical Four had gone Lattrey extracted his head painfully from the con-scuffle, and Pease clawed ashes out of

his hair, and Gower gazed furiously at the ink on his face, and the observations they made sounded absolutely Hunsdian.

Smythe of the Shell also declined—but after his refusal Smythe of the Shell was scarcely recognisable by his nearest and dearest pal.

Possibly owing to such considerations as this, fellows who were not very keen on the loyal address decided to append their signatures lest a worse fate should befall them.

By the time the Pistical Four had finished their round they had sheets of impot paper covered with signatures more or less decipherable, representing at least ninety per cent of the Lower School of Rookwood.

The sheets were pinned together carefully in the end study. It certainly was an imposing document now, and the Pistical Four justly considered that a few blots and smudges did not detract from its imposing nature.

"It's bound to impress Bulkeley," said Lovell. "And the Head, too. I really think that the Head can scarcely fail to take notice of this. It will show him what we jolly well think, anyhow."

The Co. agreed that it would; and the loyal address being completed at last, and duly pinned together, Jimmy Silver & Co. fared forth in search of George Bulkeley, with the firm conviction that, upon presentation of that loyal address the one-time captain of Rookwood would be "no end backed."

CHAPTER 12.

Not Quite a Success!

BULKELEY of the Sixth was pacing to and fro in his study after tea with a deep line in his brow.

He was in a troubled mood.

That a meeting of the Sixth had been held, and that (his decision had been to support him, he knew; and though the loyal friendship of the Sixth was agreeable enough, it troubled him. He fore-saw trouble with the Head, which would certainly not be good for the school or

good for the Sixth, and he would gladly have dropped quietly into the background and submitted without question to his severe sentence.

But that his friends would by no means allow. Even Knowles of the Modern side, his old rival, was acting with the rest. The seniors agreed that the dignity of the Sixth Form was compromised by the Head's decision, and that it was up to them to back up the captain's cause.

Bulkeley's friends—who were most of the Sixth—were enthusiastic; and Knowles & Co. gave their support somewhat less warmly; and even Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, for the present gave it his adhesion.

Feeling was so strong in the Sixth, in fact, that Bulkeley's few enemies could not venture to make their voices heard, even if they wished to.

But Bulkeley was sorely troubled by the thought of having his rights championed against the Head; and he knew by experience that Dr. Chisholm was certain not to yield the point, and that nothing but a struggle could ensue of which the results could not be foreseen.

He was thinking over the matter as he paced to and fro, when the door opened and Neville looked in. Bulkeley gave him a sombre glance.

"It's being settled now," said Neville. "Come along to the prefects' room, will you, Bulkeley?"

"Neville, old chap——"
"Come along, anyhow, and you can tell us what you think," said Neville.

"Oh, all right!"
Bulkeley followed his chum slowly to the prefects' room—an apartment sacred to those members of the Sixth who had been appointed prefects. Other seniors sometimes came in by permission; but to juniors and such small fry the precincts were strictly taboo.

Only prefects were present now: Knowles, Frampton, Catesby, and Treham, of the Modern side; Neville, Lonsdale, Jones major, Carthew, Scott, and Bulkeley himself, of the Classical side.

It was a very grave and serious

assembly—only on Carthew's face was there a suspicion of a lurking grin. But the bully of the Sixth did not dare to allow his secret satisfaction at Bulkeley's fall to be seen. For the present, at least, Carthew was acting in co-operation with the rest.

There was a murmur in the room as Bulkeley came in with Neville. The latter was about to close the door when Jimmy Silver presented himself. Behind Jimmy Silver came his chums, and behind them a little crowd of the Fourth and some of the Shell.

"Hold on a minute, Neville," said Jimmy. "We want Bulkeley——"

"You can't see him now—cut off!"

"It's important."

"Cut off!" said Neville sharply.

He did not see the importance of it—nor even having noticed that Jimmy Silver had a bundle of inky sheets of impot paper in his hand, and besides being quite unaware that those inky sheets were, in point of fact, a loyal address from the Lower School of Rookwood, affirming their undiminished confidence in Bulkeley of the Sixth.

"Look here, Neville," chimed in Lovell warmly, "this is jolly important, and we want to see Bulkeley at once. Bulkeley, we want——"

"What on earth's the row?" called out Bulkeley.

"Some blessed fags——" began Neville.

"Cut off!"

"It's important, Bulkeley; it may mean the end of all this trouble," said Jimmy Silver. "Let us come in!"

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Bulkeley. "Let the young donkeys come in for a minute, Neville."

The juniors looked at one another rather uncertainly, not over-pleased by the "young donkeys." Still, Bulkeley did not know about the loyal address yet. Doubtless he would change his opinion when he did know.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver determinedly.

And the deputation of the Lower School marched in, about nine or ten of

them, eyed very grimly by the prefects in the room.

"Well?" said Bulkeley.

"Ahem!" Jimmy Silver cleared his throat. "The—the fact is, Bulkeley—"

"Sharp!"

"All right! We, members of the Lower School of Rookwood——"

"What?"

"We, members of the——"

"Is this a joke, Silver?"

"None!"

"What the thump are you driving at, then?"

"We, members of the Lower School!" gasped Jimmy Silver, a little confused. He found his task harder than he had supposed. "We have come—that is to say, we—we are hereby—I mean here, to assure—I mean—— Ahem!"

"Turn them out!" said Knowles impatiently.

"Only some fog check," said Carthew. "For goodness' sake kick them out, and let's get to business!"

"You ring off, Carthew!" said Jimmy Silver, with spirit. "This address isn't for you, anyway. The Lower School haven't any confidence in you, I can tell you."

"What?"

"If you have anything to say, Silver, say it and cut!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "You should not have come here, anyway."

"We, members of the Lower School——" began Lovell, as Jimmy hesitated. There came a murmur from the deputation:

"Shut up, Lovell!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver found his voice, and resumed, amid blank stares from the prefects of the Sixth.

"We, members of the Lower School of Rookwood, have brought a loyal address for presentation——"

"Ye gods!" murmured Neville.

"To Bulkeley, and we hereby have the pleasure," said Jimmy, with dignity, "of handing it to you, Bulkeley."

Bulkeley, with a look of great aston-

ishment, took the inkly sheets held out to him.

"What on earth's this?" he asked.

"An address, Bulkeley."

"A loyal address."

"Backing you up, you know."

"Hear, hear!"

Some of the Sixth-Formers laughed; which caused the juniors to repeat "Hear, hear!" in louder and somewhat defiant tones.

Bulkeley stared at the loyal address. Jimmy Silver & Co. watched him, to see the pleased smile dawn upon his face. But it did not dawn. To their surprise and consternation, Bulkeley frowned instead.

"You thundering young idiots!" he ejaculated.

"Wha-a-at!"

"What does this utter rot mean?" exclaimed Bulkeley. "You cheeky little sweeps——"

"Eh?"

"Take this rubbish away at once," said Bulkeley sternly. "If I were a prefect now I should cane you for alluding to the Head disrespectfully. By Jove, I've a good mind to cane you, anyway."

"Oh!"

"I've got my ashplant here," remarked Carthew.

"Get out, you ridiculous young duffers," said Bulkeley, "and don't play the goat again! Put that rubbish into the fire! Off with you!"

And Neville bundled the astounded and amazed deputation of the Lower School of Rookwood out of the room, and closed the door on them.

In the passage, Jimmy Silver blinked at the loyal address which Bulkeley had thrust back into his hands, and then blinked at his comrades. His complexion was very rich at that moment.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

"B-b-b-b-bulkeley didn't seem pleased, after all," murmured Newcome.

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin. "Oh, crikey! He, he, he! Yareoooooh!"

Tubby Muffin's cachinnation changed into a howl of anguish as Jimmy Silver's

boot came in contact with his podgy person.

The juniors looked at Jimmy Silver as he stood, with a crimson face and the hapless loyal address in his hands, wishing that the floor would open and swallow him up. They walked away grinning, only the faithful Co. remaining with their leader.

"Seems a bit of a frost!" murmured Raby comfortingly.

"Rotten idea, if you ask me," said Lovell. "It was the way the address was drawn up, of course. If we'd put in that bit about assuring Bulkeley——"

"Fathead!"

"And worded it a bit more impressively—such words as heretofore," said Lovell warmly. "In that case, I think——"

"Oh, you can't think!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, you ass——"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. "I'll put this rot in the study fire," he said. "It will be useful to boil the kettle, anyhow. And if you fellows ever get up a loyal address again, don't ask me to have a hand in it. I simply won't!"

And Jimmy Silver walked away, leaving his chums staring after him blankly. They did not speak; they couldn't. Jimmy had taken their breath away.

CHAPTER 13.

Resignations Accepted!

BULKELEY of the Sixth remained alone in the prefects' room. The Rookwood prefects had heard what he had to say, but Bulkeley's counsels of peace had not been heeded. And the prefects had gone in a body to the Head's study to remonstrate.

Bulkeley could guess the kind of reception they would get, and he was very uneasy. He knew that the Head would not change his determination; and a struggle, once entered upon, would have to be proceeded with.

There were steps outside at last, and

Neville came into the room, followed by the rest of the prefects.

All of them looked red and angry, excepting Cartlew, whose face wore a lurking smile.

"Well?" said Bulkeley.

Neville knitted his brows.

"He won't listen to a word!" he exclaimed. "The moment we mentioned you he told us to be silent."

"He won't hear of reinstating you, old chap, or even of listening to a word on the subject," said Lonsdale. "He said his mind was made up, and told us to go."

Bulkeley nodded.

"I expected it," he said quietly. "Now, you fellows, I want you to let the matter drop. I was to blame, though not so much as the Head seems to think; and I don't want trouble on my account."

"It's not wholly on your account," said Knowles. "It's the position of the Sixth in the school. We've got to keep up that position."

"Yes, but——"

"We've been treated like a gang of cheeky fags!" burst out Neville. "It won't do!"

"We're not standing it!"

"The Head can't set up prefects and push them over like skittles at his own will and pleasure, without a reason," said Jones major. "The case of one is the case of all. When the Head had a dispute with the masters the staff went on strike and brought him to reason. I'd like to know how he'd run the school without prefects."

"But——"

"Enough said, Bulkeley! We're standing by what we've said to the Head, and if he doesn't come round we shall all resign."

A quarter of an hour later Jimmy Silver of the Fourth was called to the prefects' room. He came with a rather red face; but he soon saw that the loyal address had been quite forgotten by these august seniors. He was simply wanted as a messenger.

"Take this note to the Head, Silver!" said Neville.

"Yes, Neville."

Jimmy Silver conveyed the note to Dr. Chisholm's study. He found the Head with a very stern brow. The visit of the prefects, in a body, to remonstrate had roused the firm old gentleman's ire.

"What is it, Silver?"

"This note, sir, for you."

Jimmy laid it on the desk, and waited in case there should be an answer. Dr. Chisholm opened it, and his brow was thunderous as he read:

"We, the prefects of the Sixth Form, beg to tender our resignations."

The signatures of the whole body of prefects followed.

Dr. Chisholm sat silent for a minute or two, the note in his hand. Jimmy Silver hardly dared to look at him. He did not know what was in the note, but he felt the atmosphere of thunder.

The Head took up a pen at last, wrote a few words on the paper, and replaced it in the envelope.

"Take that back, Silver."

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy Silver returned to the prefects' room. He found the prefects all there, in a very subdued and serious mood. Their looks were anxious, as Jimmy handed the note to Neville.

"It's our own note back," said Neville, as he opened it.

"Hasn't he said anything?"

"Yes; there's something written on it. Oh! Look!"

The Head's reply was short, if not sweet.

"Your resignations are accepted. New prefects will be appointed."

That was all.

The Sixth-Formers exchanged grim looks.

"New prefects will be appointed, will they?" muttered Lonsdale. "Not from the Sixth—the Sixth are solid with us."

Jimmy Silver quietly left the prefects'

room, leaving the seniors in hot discussion. The trouble at Rookwood was coming to a head at last.

The next day all Rookwood knew that the prefects were on strike. The battle had been joined between the Sixth Form and the Head, and all Rookwood looked on breathlessly, wondering what the result might be.

CHAPTER 14.

CARTHREW'S LITTLE GAMBIT

"SILVER, my boy!"

Carthew of the Sixth looked into the end study in the Fourth Form passage with an agreeable smile on his face—as agreeable a smile as his hard features were capable of.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at home.

The four juniors had been deep in discussion on the subject of the captain's election, which was fixed for that afternoon. The discussion ceased suddenly as Mark Carthew appeared in the doorway.

The Co. fixed rather grim looks on him, and Jimmy Silver's hand strayed towards a cricket-bat that lay on the table. Carthew, as a prefect of the Sixth Form, was a person to be treated with respect by juniors; but Carthew did not always get the respect his position entitled him to. He was too much given to bullying the fags to be popular among them.

So Carthew's agreeable smile found no reflection in the end study. No smiles were visible on the faces of the Fustical Four.

"I've looked in to see you kids," went on Carthew pleasantly.

"Oh!" said Jimmy, puzzled.

"Just a little chat, you know," explained Carthew.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Arthur Lovell.

Raby and Newbome simply stared. What this sudden affability on the part of their old enemy might portend they

could not even guess. But they concluded that the bully of the Sixth meant mischief, somehow.

Carthew came in, and sat on a corner of the table. The Flatfoot Four eyed him, and Jimmy Silver rested his hand in a careless sort of way on the cane handle of the bat. In dealing with Carthew there was no telling whether a cricket-bat might be needed or not.

Carthew did not notice it—or affect not to notice it. He grinned agreeably at the surprised juniors, with a grin of the utmost affability.

"You chaps are not busy just now?" he asked.

"Nunno!" stammered Jimmy. "We were just talking about the election, that's all."

"What a coincidence!" remarked Carthew. "I've come here to speak to you about that!"

"Have you?" murmured Lovell.

"Just so. The fact is, I really want to consult you," explained the Sixth-Former.

"Kik-kik-consult us?" stammered Lovell.

"That's it."

"Oh, crikey!"

The chums of the Fourth almost wondered if they were dreaming. Even a good-natured prefect like Bulkeley or Neville never carried his affability to the extent of consulting Fourth Form fellows. And for the bully of the Sixth to do so— It was no wonder that the Flatfoot Four were astounded.

They blinked at Carthew.

"The fact is," said Carthew, with a beaming smile, "I think a lot of your judgment."

"Oh!"

"You fellows are the leaders of the Fourth Form, and you have a lot of influence in the Lower School generally," said Carthew. "Now, rightly used, that influence may be a very good thing for the school—and, of course, the good of Rookwood is what we all have at heart."

"Well?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Well? I—I say, Carthew, are you pulling our legs?"

"Certainly not. I am quite serious!" said the Sixth-Former. "As matters stand at present, Rookwood is in rather a bad way. Bulkeley has offended the Head, and has been removed from the captaincy, and is no longer a prefect. All the other prefects have resigned, as a protest. I had some doubts about it, but I stood in with the rest. But you fellows, being rather sharp and sensible kids, can see that this isn't a good thing for the school."

"It certainly isn't!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "I wish the Head would come round, and give Bulkeley his old place back!"

"He won't do that," said Carthew, shaking his head; "he's too firm. Ooer he's made up his mind, the thing's done. Bulkeley's had his day, and it's over. But this sort of thing can't go on—no prefects in the school, and Rookwood without a captain. You see that?"

"Well, there's a new election for captain to-day," said Lovell, with a grin.

Carthew gave him a sharp look. He did not quite understand what that grin implied.

"Yes, that's so," he went on. "Now, as all the Six's—even the Moderns—are standing by Bulkeley, it's rather a question where the new captain will come from. Nobody wants a Fifth-Former as captain. It's quite unheard of, and it wouldn't do!"

"No fear!" said the Flatfoot Four, with one voice.

"It comes to this, then," continued Carthew—"that for the good of the school some member of the Sixth will have to come forward. I've decided to do so!"

"You?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Exactly."

"Oh!" said Jimmy; and he looked at his chums.

Carthew's excessive affability was explained now.

The new presidential member of Rookwood was standing as a candidate for

the captaincy; and it was a time to be shrewd.

Under ordinary circumstances, Mark Carthew would not have stood the slightest chance of election.

But with Bulkeley down and out, and the Sixth Form standing by him to a man, there was a chance for him—at least, he hoped there was. It involved the desertion of Bulkeley's cause; it involved turning against the general movement in his own Form, and taking advantage of the peculiar state of affairs for his own benefit. But Carthew was not overburdened with scruples at any time.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at Carthew, hardly taking the trouble to conceal the contempt they felt. Carthew was fishing in troubled waters, but he was not likely to catch the Fish-tail Pour.

Carthew rattled on cheerily, apparently not observing the expression on the faces of the Co.

"I'm doing this from a sense of duty, of course. Rookwood simply can't go on as at present. I've seen the Head, and he approves. I've had my name put up as a candidate simply because it wouldn't do for a Fifth Form chap to get in as captain. The fact is, I expect the election to be merely a matter of form—a walk-over—as there will be no rival candidates. Still, Hanson of the Fifth might think of trying his luck. Some other chap in the Sixth might come forward at the last minute. Now, can I count on you chaps for support?"

Jimmy Silver smiled sarcastically.

"Chaps!" he repeated.

"Yes, you chaps."

"Have we been promoted?" asked Jimmy.

"Promoted?" repeated Carthew. "I don't catch on."

"Last time you spoke to us we were young sweeps, and fags, and cheeky little blighters!" explained Jimmy. "Now we're chaps! I suppose that may be looked upon as a promotion?"

There was a chuckle in the end study; and for a moment Carthew's affable smile faded away.

His eyes glittered, but only for a second. Then he smiled again.

"My dear kid, I don't mind your little joke," he said pleasantly. "Now, in come to business. I want your support. Every vote counts in an election. Are you standing by me?"

"Not quite."

"If I become captain of Rookwood I shall remember fellows who backed me up," remarked Carthew. "I shall also remember fellows who refused to do so!"

"My dear man, that's all right; you won't become captain of Rookwood!" answered Jimmy Silver. "There's one captain of Rookwood—one and only one—and that's old Bulkeley. We're backing him up!"

"Bulkeley is not standing for election this—"

"He's going to be elected, all the same!" said Jimmy. "It's all cut and dried, my dear man! The Head's pushed him out of the captaincy, but all Rookwood is going to pump for him at the election, and the Head can put that in his pipe and smoke it! See?"

Carthew's lips tightened.

His affability had gone again—for good. It was pretty clear that the sweetest of smiles would extract nothing from Jimmy Silver & Co.—excepting plain English.

"You can't re-elect Bulkeley!" he said savagely. "The Head would take it as disrespect—"

"I hope he'll take it as a tip!"

Carthew slid from the table.

"Then you're not backing me up?"

"No fear!"

"You cheeky young scoundrel!" roared Carthew.

"Aren't we 'chaps' any longer?" asked Jimmy Silver innocently. "Have we become cheeky young scoundrels already?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew clenched his hands. Jimmy Silver took a business-like grip on the bat. It was needed, after all.

"None of your little games, old nut!"

he remarked. "We're ready for you, you know."

"If you dare to touch a prefect——"

Jimmy chuckled.

"You're not a prefect now," he said coolly. "There aren't any prefects at Rookwood now, you know. The prefects are on strike!"

Carthew's reply to that argument was a rush. He had resigned in concert with the rest of the august body of prefects; but apparently he considered that he still retained his authority.

The Fistical Four did not see it, however.

Carthew's rush was met by Jimmy Silver's cricket-bat, which jammed on his chest with what a novelist would describe as a sickening thud.

"Oh!" roared Carthew, staggering back. "Ow! I—I—I—I— You young demon, I'll——"

"You'll travel!" grinned Jimmy Silver, lunging again with his bat. "Kick him out, you fellows—he's not a prefect now, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As one man the Fistical Four rushed on Carthew. The Sixth-Former went spinning down the passage.

Crash!

Carthew measured his length on the cold, unsympathetic linoleum.

"Jump on him!" roared Lovell. "Now then, all together!"

Carthew did not wait.

He leaped up and ran for it, and from the Fourth Form passage a roar of laughter followed him, which was not a good augury for Carthew's prospects in the captain's election.

CHAPTER 15.

By Order of the Head!

"JIMMY!"

Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, came rolling up to the Fistical Four in the quadrangle about an hour later.

Tubby's fat face was excited. Evidently he had news.

The Fistical Four were in discussion with Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern Side. For once, Classics and Moderns at Rookwood were in complete agreement.

Nearly everybody was determined to stand by "old Bulkeley," not only in the Sixth, but in the other Forms: senior and junior.

Half a dozen of the Fourth, and a many of the Sixth, intended to vote for Carthew—fellows like Lattrey & Co. and Leggett; but it was probable that even the black sheep of Rookwood would not venture to do so when it came to the pinch. Public opinion was too strong against them.

But in any case their votes would be of no value to the ambitious bully of the Sixth. They would be swamped by a couple of hundred votes for George Bulkeley.

True, Bulkeley was not officially standing for election. His cousin Neville had urged him to do so, but he had declined. It made no difference, however, for Neville had arranged to propose him in his absence. Lonsdale was to second the proposal, and a show of hands was to be called for. And it was absolutely certain that there would be a forest of hands up for "old Bulkeley."

That would be, as Morny of the Fourth remarked in his stargy way, "one in the eye" for the Head.

The high-and-mighty Sixth, of course, could not confess that they were planning "one in the eye" for their headmaster. Their view was that Bulkeley's re-election would show the trend of public opinion in the school, and influence Dr. Chisholm into reconsidering his decision. It was a more sedate way of putting it; but it really came to the same thing.

"Vote for Bulkeley?" Tommy Dodd was saying, as the fat Classical rolled up. "I should jolly well say so. Every junior on our side is going to vote for Bulkeley. Leggett doesn't seem keen—so he's going in with me, and I'm going to keep hold of his arm. If he puts up

his paw for Carthew, something is going to happen to Leggett."

"I say, Jimmy——"

"It will make the Head think, when Bulkeley is re-elected by practically the whole school," said Jimmy Silver. "Besides, it will give him a graceful way of climbing down. No need for him to keep up this game, after he's had proof that the whole school has confidence in Bulkeley."

"After all, the Head means well," remarked Raby.

"Only he's so jolly obstinate!" grunted Lovell.

"Jimmy——" roared Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, run away and play, fatty!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"But there's a notice on the board——"

"Oh, we all know about that—election at six!" said Jimmy Silver.

"A new notice——" howled Tubby Muffin.

"Never mind——"

"In the Head's list!" shrieked Tubby.

"Oh! Something about the election?" asked Jimmy Silver, showing a little interest at last. "Not postponed, is it?"

"Nunnó! But Bulkeley can't be elected!" gasped the fat Classical.

"Rats!"

"The Head's forbidden it!"

"What!" shouted all the juniors together.

"That's it!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Bulkeley's forbidden to stand for re-election, and everybody's forbidden to vote for him in his absence—by order of the Head!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cheek!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Awful cheek!"

Dr. Chisholm, the reverend Head of Rookwood School, would probably have been surprised if he had heard his action described as "cheek" by the Fourth-Formers. Fortunately, he did not hear.

"Let's go and see it!" exclaimed Newcome. "That fat duffer may have got it all wrong!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

There was a rush of the juniors to the School House.

They found a crowd already collected round the notice-board.

Teddy Grace, the new boy in the Classical Fourth, called to Jimmy Silver, as he came breathlessly up.

"Seen this, Silver? The Head says——"

"Let's see it!"

Putty of the Fourth made room for Jimmy. Jimmy read the notice, with knitted brows and deep indignation.

It was official enough.

Evidently the intention of Bulkeley's supporters had become known to the Head. There it was, in the Head's own classic hand. Briefly, the notice announced that Bulkeley of the Sixth, formerly captain of the school, was forbidden to offer himself for re-election; and that no member of any Form was permitted to propose, second, or vote for Bulkeley in the election.

"By gad! The Head's dished us, and no mistake!" said Mornington. "What do you think of that, Jimmy Silver?"

"Thumping cheek!" said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Head's no right to forbid us——"

"Headmasters assume these rights," grinned Mornington. "The game's up, old infant; we can't re-elect Bulkeley."

"Let's go ahead with it just the same!" suggested Putty of the Fourth.

"Fathead!" was Morny's reply. "An election held against the order of the Head would be null and void."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"That's so," he said. "Besides, we—we can't very well directly disobey an order from the Head."

"It's cheek, all the same!" said Lovell hotly.

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"Carthew's been to the Head," he remarked. "He's put the old boy up to this, of course, to dish us. And it jolly

well looks as if we're dashed, anyway. I shan't vote at all."

"We shan't vote for Carthew, anyway!"

"No fear!"

"But if there's no rival candidate, Carthew will get a walk-over," said Teddy Grace.

"Let him, the cad!"

"The Sixth ought to interfere," said Lovell hotly. "Carthew is going back on his own form, and trying to squeeze in as captain by trickery. The Sixth ought to stop him somehow!"

"Bulkeley could chip in and give him a jolly good hiding," suggested Ruby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dash it all, that's not a bad idea!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Let's go and see Bulkeley——"

"Come on!"

An excited crowd of juniors headed for Bulkeley's study. Jimmy Silver knocked on the door and opened it.

Bulkeley was there at work at his table. The fallen captain of Rookwood had not appeared in the public eye so much as usual since his fall. He was spending this half-holiday at Greek. He looked up, with a surprised frown, as his doorway was blocked with excited juniors.

"Bulkeley——" began Jimmy Silver.

"What do you want?"

"There's a new notice on the board, Bulkeley!"

The erstwhile captain of Rookwood raised his hand.

"Cut off!" he said.

"What?"

"I save my study, please, all of you!"

"But——"

"Shut the door after you."

Bulkeley dropped his eyes to his work again. The juniors looked at one another rather sheepishly. Jimmy Silver, with pink cheeks, drew the door shut. Evidently the loyal—and somewhat noisy—support of the Lower School was not, somehow, gratifying to him. There was nothing to be expected from "old Bulkeley."

CHAPTER 15.

Not Popular!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. could not help feeling a little crestfallen as they walked away from Bulkeley's study.

The calm and quiet reserve of the Sixth-Former dashed their spirits a little and threw cold water upon their warm enthusiasm.

But their loyalty did not waver.

Whether Bulkeley wanted their support or not, he was going to get it.

"After all," said Jimmy Silver considerably, "we've got to make allowances for old Bulkeley. He's proud, you know. He couldn't very well get mixed up with a mob of juniors against the Head. He couldn't, you know! There's the dignity of the Sixth to consider."

"Oh, blow the dignity of the Sixth!" answered Lovell.

"Bulkeley's right," said Mornington. "He's bound to keep clear of it. But we're backing him up all the same."

"Yes, rather!"

"And, anyway, we can boycott the election," suggested Erroll. "If Carthew gets in on the votes of two or three cads like himself it won't be a genuine election, and he won't have much of a show as captain of the school."

"That's so!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "But the Sixth ought to interfere. And if the Sixth won't, we will. We ought to let Carthew know what Rookwood thinks of him, anyway. He's gone back on the other prefects, and even Knowles wouldn't do that."

"Here he comes!" murmured Conroy. Carthew of the Sixth came along the corridor towards his study.

There was a smile on his face.

The bully of Rookwood was well aware that the Head's latest order would be attributed to him, and that it would add to his unpopularity. But he cared little for that.

His way had been made clear to the captaincy of the school, always an object of his ambition, though he had

never before had the remotest chance of realising that ambition.

Hiss!

The bully of the Sixth started as a loud and prolonged hiss fell upon his ears.

Hiss-s-s-s-s!

Carthew's cheeks coloured a little.

The corridor and the stairs were crowded with juniors, and every one of them was hissing away as if for a wager.

Carthew cast a furious look round him.

Hiss-s-s-s-s!

For a moment the bully looked as if he would run amok among the hissing juniors, hitting out right and left. But the results of that would certainly have been more painful to the Sixth-Former than to the fags. He controlled himself, and walked on quickly to his study.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

Tubby, turning to distinguish himself, followed Carthew to the door of his study, which the senior had slammed after him.

The fat Classical stooped, and hissed loudly and emphatically through the keyhole.

Hiss-s-s-s-s!

The door flew open suddenly.

A hand appeared and grabbed Tubby Muffin by the collar, and with a loud howl Tubby disappeared bodily into the study.

"Yaroooh! Help!"

Whack, whack, whack!

It was the sound of an ashplant smiting with terrific vim upon the fat person of Reginald Muffin of the Fourth.

Whack, whack!

"Yoop! Help! Rescue!"

Whack, whack!

"Rescue!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"Come on!"

"Phew!"

There was a moment's hesitation. Carthew was no longer a prefect, certainly, but the idea of "rushing" a Sixth-Former in his study was rather

startling. But since there had been no prefects at Rookwood discipline had been very much relaxed. The hesitation was only momentary. Jimmy Silver led the way, and a crowd of the Fourth followed him, with some of the Shell and the Third.

The ashplant was whacking away in Carthew's study as the rescuers arrived, and Tubby Muffin's yells were terrific.

Carthew was taking it out of the fat Classical, as it were, for the hissing the juniors had given him in the corridor. The luckless Tubby was paying for all.

"Yaroooh! Rescue! Help! Yoooh!" roared the unhappy Tubby. "I say—Oh! Leggo! Leave off! Yooop!"

"Rush him!" yelled Lovell.

The juniors came in with a swoop.

Carthew swung round, brandishing the ashplant, and Arthur Edward Lovell yelled again as he caught it. But Carthew had no time for more.

He went spinning over under the rush of a dozen fellows, and crashed on his hearthrug.

As he sprawled there an enterprising junior up-ended the table, and a shower of books and papers and an inkpot descended upon Carthew.

Then Tubby Muffin was seized and rushed in triumph out of the study.

The juniors crowded out.

They stayed for a moment in the doorway to give vent to a loud and prolonged hiss, and then departed, triumphant.

Carthew sat up dazedly.

He felt as if an earthquake had happened in his study as he dabbed the ink from his hair and face.

"Ow-ow-ow!" he stammered. "Ow! Yow! The young villains! I—I—I'll smash—"

He staggered to his feet and grasped his ashplant. But he stopped. On second thoughts he decided to remain in his study. The juniors were in a dangerous temper just then, and Carthew had no support to expect from the rest of the Sixth.

He decided to take the invasion of

his study "lying down," so to speak, to be repaid with interest at a later date—when he was captain of Rookwood.

But there was no rest for Carthew yet. He had just finished washing off the ink when there came a tap at his study window as a stone clinked there.

He stepped to the window and looked out.

Outside thirty or forty juniors had assembled, and a roar went up as Carthew appeared.

"Blackleg!"

"Yah!"

Hiss-a-a-ss!

Carthew gritted his teeth.

He stepped back from the window, but the shouting outside continued. Not a single member of the Sixth Form appeared on the scene. As the prefects were on "strike" it was not their business to interfere.

But suddenly an awe-inspiring figure appeared in the doorway of the School House.

"Boys!"

It was the Head's voice—a voice of thunder.

"Oh, my hat! The Head!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Cave!"

The demonstration suddenly faded away. Dr. Chisholm had a brief view of heads that vanished in all directions, and quiet reigned once more in the quad.

The Head turned back into the House with a frowning brow.

He had had the advantage of learning what the Lower School thought of the candidate for the captaincy—for what that was worth. But it made no difference to the Head. Opposition only confirmed him in his determination, and Jimmy Silver & Co.'s demonstration was very far from shaking his decision.

A little later there was fresh news for Rookwood. Carthew of the Sixth had been reappointed a prefect—so far, the only one that Rookwood could boast. Evidently the end of the Sixth had completely made his peace with

the Head—by deserting the cause he had at first half-heartedly supported. And, in spite of the angry derision of all Rookwood, it seemed a certainty now that Carthew was to become captain of the school.

CHAPTER 17.

Carthew Means Business!

NEVILLE of the Sixth tapped at Carthew's door, and opened it.

The prefect looked at him sourly, and more sourly still at the faces that appeared behind Neville, as he stood in the doorway.

Six members of the Sixth Form had arrived, and their serious looks showed that they had serious business with the new prefect. They were Neville, Lonsdale, and Jones major, of the Classical side, and Knowles, Frampton, and Catesby, of the Modern Sixth.

"You needn't come in!" was Carthew's polite greeting.

"We've got something to say to you," answered Neville.

"I don't think I care to hear it."

"You've got to hear it, Carthew!" broke out Cecil Knowles angrily.

Carthew shrugged his shoulders. The six seniors came into the study, and Neville closed the door. Carthew leaned back in his chair, and regarded them with a mocking smile.

He could guess the purport of the visit, but it was not likely to influence him in any way. He was never likely to have another opportunity of realising his ambition.

"We'll come straight to business, Carthew," said Neville. "It seems you're a prefect again now."

"That's so."

"You've gone back on the Sixth!" exclaimed Lonsdale.

"I felt it my duty—"

"Oh, give us a rest!"

"My duty," pursued Carthew calmly, "to give the Head my support. Discipline must be maintained in the school. The juniors are getting out of hand,

already. There must be prefects. On second thoughts I think a strike was a rotten idea—utterly rotten. Having come to that conclusion, I was bound to go to the Head and withdraw my resignation."

"You mean you backed up the Sixth till we were fairly committed, and then sold us out for your own purposes," said Knowles.

"That's a rotten way of putting it, Knowles. I felt it my duty——"

"We didn't come here to listen to that rot. The question is, are you going to stand by the other prefects, and support Bulkeley, or desert them?"

"You haven't always been so keen on supporting Bulkeley, Knowles," sneered the bully of the Sixth.

"That's neither here nor there. In the present case, it's a question of the whole body of prefects defending their rights, and we all ought to stand together—if only for our own sakes."

"That's how it stands, Carthew," said Neville, more mildly. "You can't say it's playing the game to creep in like this and make a bid for the captaincy."

Carthew sneered.

"I dare say other fellows here had the same idea in their heads," he answered. "I dare say I was a few hours in front of somebody else."

Knowles coloured.

"That's rot," said Neville. "Knowles has second claim to the captaincy, but he hasn't tried to take Bulkeley's place."

"If I were rotter enough," said Knowles, "I should know that all the Sixth would be down on me, and I shouldn't think it good enough."

"That's why you haven't chipped in, then?" grinned Carthew.

"Knowles wouldn't!" said Catesby.

Another shrug from Carthew. He was quite convinced that Knowles would have played his game, if he could have, and that he had simply been first in the field.

"To come down to plain talk," said Jones major, "you've got to chuck it,

Carthew. "We want you to resign again."

"Can't be done."

"And withdraw your candidature for the captaincy!" said Knowles savagely.

"Sorry!" said Carthew. "Can't be done."

"You're simply selling us out by taking this line."

"I don't see it."

"You don't choose to, you mean!" exclaimed Neville. "All the prefects are on strike till Bulkeley is reinstated. You're acting the part of a blackleg!"

"My duty——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Knowles. "Duty from you is a bit too funny."

"If that's all you've got to say to me, you may as well clear!" remarked Carthew.

Neville glanced at his companions. The Sixth-Formers were looking very grim. There was deep anger in their hearts at this betrayal of their cause by a member of their Form, for the purpose of fishing in troubled waters. Even Knowles, who was not a scrupulous fellow, would have hesitated to take the course Carthew had taken.

"You intend keeping on as you've begun, then—currying favour with the Head, and setting up as captain of Rookwood?" asked Neville.

"That's simply abuse. I shan't answer it."

"In a word, then, will you line up with the rest of the Sixth and stand by Bulkeley, as we agreed at first?"

"Can't be done."

"Very well. Go to your election, then. It will be boycotted by the Sixth," said Neville. "No member of the Sixth will be present, or will vote, or will recognise you as captain of Rookwood if you are elected."

"I shall be captain, all the same, answered Carthew coolly.

"So long as you keep up this game you'll have all the Sixth down on you."

"I'll chance that."

"You won't find it easy to face."

"I'll try," smiled Carthew.

"As captain and as a prefect, you

won't get any support from the Sixth. You've seen already how the juniors look on you."

"I dare say a few floggings will set them into a state of subordination," said Carthew coolly. "I hope so, at all events."

"You'll be sent to Coventry by the Sixth."

"I'll risk it."

"You mean that you're keeping on with this cad's game, and nothing we can say will make any difference!" exclaimed Seville.

Carthew nodded coolly.

"You've hit it!" he answered.

"We may as well go," said Jones major, in disgust. "I shan't speak to the cad again, I know that."

"Same here."

"It's a dirty trick!" said Frampton.

"So sorry you think so," smiled Carthew. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

The angry prefects retired from the study. Knowles shut the door—with a slam.

Carthew knitted his brows when they were gone.

He had kept up a smiling face while they were present, but he was not so confident as he affected to be.

The game he was playing was a treacherous one, and it was pretty certain that the Sixth-Formers would not forgive such a trick. He had entered into the plan of going on "strike," and he had deserted to the enemy, as it were, as soon as his fellow-prefects were too deeply committed for retreat to be possible. It was not a game of which even Carthew could be proud, and he knew how deeply it must exasperate the other prefects, especially Knowles, who was suspected of having an eye on the captaincy himself.

But he did not falter.

With the Sixth Form in opposition, his tenure of the captaincy was not likely to be a bed of roses; but, at all events, he would be captain of the school, with the Head's support, and the

fellows might come round in time. He could hope for the best, anyway.

"It's worth it," muttered Carthew. "There'll be trouble—there's sure to be trouble—but it's worth it. Captain of Rookwood! It's worth something! Let them stick to Bulkeley, if they like—hang Bulkeley! Captain of Rookwood! That's a prize worth bagging."

And Carthew lighted a cigarette, and smiled through the curling smoke. In his mind's eye he already saw himself captain of Rookwood.

But there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, as Carthew was destined to discover. He had reckoned without his host—in the shape of Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 12.

Something Like a Slant!

PUTTY of the Fourth strolled into the end study, where Jimmy Silver & Co. had sat down to an early — and disconsolate — tea. The Fifth-Form were not cheerful.

The captain's election was coming off at six, and it was to be a walk-over for Mark Carthew. That seemed inevitable. A rival candidate might have beaten Carthew at the poll, but no other Sixth-Former would set up as a candidate for Bulkeley's place. And in that they had the support of the Fifth Form. Hanson, the captain of the Fifth, had thought it over, and decided that it wouldn't be "cricket." And his Form-fellows agreed. And if any less particular Fifth-Former had thought of it, he did not venture to make a bid for the honour. Hanson & Co. would certainly have put the "stopper" on any such ambitious candidate from their Form.

Jimmy Silver & Co. would have welcomed even a Fifth-Former as a rival to Carthew; they would have welcomed even Knowles of the Modern side. And over tea Jimmy Silver & Co. debated whether it was possible for a junior to stand. Certainly such a candidature

was unheard of, but if it would lead to the defeat of Mark Carthew it was worth thinking of.

But the difficulties in the way were great. Supposing even that a junior could enter the field as a candidate, there would be an immediate split between Classics and Moderns, Fourth and Shell, and one candidate from the Lower School might be followed by a dozen. And it was pretty certain that if a junior was elected the Head would not allow such an election to stand.

Putty smiled cheerfully at the glum four. Teddy Grace's chubby face was always cheerful. The Co. gave him grim looks. Putty's cheerfulness seemed to them out of place at a time when, as Lovell expressed it, Rookwood School was going to the giddy how-wows.

"You fellows look down!" remarked Putty.

"We're feeling down," growled Arthur Edward Lovell, "and we don't feel any better for being grinned at by a silly ass!"

"What I like about this study," remarked Teddy Grace, "is that a fellow can always depend on a civil reception here."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Teddy Grace smiled—and did not go.

"The election's coming off pretty soon," he observed. "I came along here to make a suggestion for dishing Carthew."

Jimmy Silver looked up eagerly.

"If you can think of a way of doing that——" he began.

"I've thought of one."

"Go ahead!"

"Another candidate is wanted——"

"Not!" said Lovell. "No senior in the school will put up for Bulkeley's place. Even Knowles isn't cad enough—or he's afraid of public opinion."

"What about a junior?"

"We've thought of that," said Jimmy. "N. G. The Head wouldn't allow the election to stand, for one thing. And the Moderns would want a Modern——"

"And the Classics a Classical, of course," said Ruby.

"And the Shell would want a Shell chap—and, of course, the Fourth would want a Fourth-Former!" said Newcome. "It would simply mean all the juniors at loggerheads, and the vote split into dozens of sections. And most likely a lot of seniors would vote for Carthew then, to keep a junior out. He would get in on a big vote instead of a little one."

Putty nodded.

"But all the Lower School might unite if a suitable chap was found," he answered. "This is my idea: The Head won't let us vote for Bulkeley. We don't want to vote for anybody else."

"So we're not going to vote at all," said Ruby.

"That's playing into Carthew's hands."

"Can't be helped. Even if another senior put up, we don't want him as captain any more than Carthew."

"Let me expound!" said Putty. "Bulkeley's down and out. We don't want any other candidate, and it seems that we're going to be landed with Carthew. But suppose we turned the whole blzney into ridicule by electing a candidate who made the election ridiculous——"

"Oh!"

"It would keep Carthew out all right, and it would be a lesson to the Head not to dictate to the chaps whom they were to vote for."

"But who——"

"Tubby Muffin!" said Putty.

"Who?" yelled the Fistical Four.

"Tubby," said Teddy Grace calmly.

"You howling ass!"

"You thumping clump!"

"Lend me your ears, my infants!" said Putty appealingly. "Don't you see what a really corking idea it is?"

"No, I don't!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly. "One of your idiotic practical jokes, I suppose. Go and eat coke!"

"But listen to me——"

"Rats!"

"Listen to a chap, for goodness' sake!"

sake!" shouted Putty. "Tubby Muffin, if he's elected, turns the whole thing into ridicule. Can't you see what a fiasco that would be for the Head? He won't let us have Bulkeley. We'll hand him Tubby, then, as a captain of the school! That's Rookwood's reply—see?"

Lovell snorted, but Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose in a rather thoughtful way.

The possibilities of Putty's extraordinary suggestion began to dawn upon him.

Certainly it would be a thunderclap for the Head. The Rookwooders were free to elect their captain, but the Head dictated that Bulkeley should not be elected. It would certainly be a crushing rejoinder if the fat and absurd Tubby was elected captain of the school in response. The whole affair would become farcical, and it was not impossible that the Head might take warning from it.

"But," said Jimmy slowly, "the Head wouldn't let it stand. He would cancel the election."

"And another would be held," said Lovell.

"Exactly," smiled Putty, "and we'd elect Tubby again."

"Oh!"

"And keep on electing Tubby every time till he lets us have Bulkeley back," said Putty, with a chuckle. "We could keep it up as long as the Head. It would be a game. And the longer it lasted, the more ridiculous it would grow—and it might dawn upon his Nibs at last that it would be better to allow Bulkeley to be re-elected."

"By Jove!" said Jimmy.

"It would be funny, anyway," said Newcome, laughing.

"You see, all the Lower School could unite on this," said Putty eagerly. "If Jimmy Silver put up, Tommy Dodd would put up, too, for the Moderns; and Smythe would put up for the Shell, and Wegg for the Third, and very likely young 'Erbert for the Second—a crowd, in fact. And the seniors would rally

round Carthew, most likely, to keep a junior out. They'd beat us, with our vote split. But all the fellows would back up for a huge on the Head like this. It's like stating our terms to the Head. We offer him Tubby Muffin till he offers us Bulkeley."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a corker!" said Putty. "Depend on it, the fags will rally round as one man. The only chap who'll take the election seriously will be Tubby himself. He may!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver jumped up.

"It's a go!" he exclaimed. "It's really a bright idea of yours, Putty!"

"Quite a brain-wave!" grinned Raby.

Jimmy looked at his watch.

"Election in an hour," he said. "No time to lose. We've got to do a lot of electioneering—"

"For Tubby Muffin?" gasped Lovell.

"Yes. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Pistical Four left their tea unfinished. They hurried from the end study with Putty to begin the good work.

Word was quickly passed for a meeting of the Lower School in the Common-room, and Putty's amazing scheme was propounded by the captain of the Fourth—to be met at first with a howl of astonishment and derision, and then with roars of laughter.

"By gad!" exclaimed Mornington. "It's corkin'—the best thing this term! And it's the only way of dishin' the Head!"

"Dishin' the Head" seemed a popular idea just then in the Lower School of Rookwood.

There was great enthusiasm on the subject. With not more than a dozen exceptions, the Juniors agreed to vote "en bloc" for Tubby Muffin, Modern and Classical alike entering into the joke.

Tubby Muffin was in his study finishing his tea while the meeting was held. His study-mates, Putty and Higgs and Jones minor, had gone down to the

meeting, and Tubby had remained behind—to finish their tea as well as his own. Tea was of more importance in the plump Classical's eyes than any meetings.

Tubby started as his study door was thrown open and a crowd of the Fourth appeared.

He jumped up from the table in alarm.

"I haven't!" he roared.

"Hallo! You haven't what?" demanded Putty.

"I haven't touched the cake."

"The cake?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"What cake?"

"If Jones' cake isn't in the cupboard," said Tubby, "don't blame me. I don't know what's become of it. Higgs may have scoffed it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat duffer!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Never mind the cake. We want you."

"Oh!" said Tubby Muffin. "Is it a feed?"

"Ha, ha! No. It's an election—the captain's election."

"Come on, Tubby."

"You're the candidate."

"Eh?"

"You're the junior candidate."

"Wha-a-ah?"

"Don't you understand?" said Jimmy Silver. "We want you to stand as candidate for the captaincy."

"Oh, h-h-h-h!" stuttered Tubby, his round eyes growing quite saucer-like in his astonishment.

"Cheers for Captain Muffin!" yelled Mornington.

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, if you fellows are pulling my leg——" said Tubby Muffin.

"Not a bit of it, my lulp. You're our candidate, and we've got over a hundred votes promised," grinned Jimmy Silver. Tubby drew a deep breath.

That he was a person of considerable importance, and that he had never really enjoyed the limelight he was entitled to, Tubby was convinced—but

he had never expected his importance and his uncommon qualities to be publicly acknowledged in this way.

It was, at last, a just tribute to his real merits—that was how the fat Tubby looked at it.

He began to swell immediately.

"Gentlemen——" he began.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Gentlemen," said Tubby Muffin, with dignity, "I am obliged to you for this mark of your confidence and esteem——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I shall have great pleasure in standing as the Lower School candidate at the captain's election——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall do my best to deserve your confidence and to merit your suffrages," said Tubby, in quite a Parliamentary manner. "Gentlemen, I am at your service."

"Bravo, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And in the midst of an enthusiastic and chuckling crowd of supporters, Tubby Muffin, the juniors' candidate, was marched away to Hall.

CHAPTER 15.

The Election!

SIX o'clock found Big Hall crowded. Carthew was there early—with no supporters. Not a single senior was to be found in the school to give him support. The few who would have done so were deterred by the attitude of the majority. Sixth and Fifth sternly boycotted the election.

Half a dozen juniors were all the supporters Carthew could gather—by the promise of favours to come—and they trickled in, not very enthusiastically, and found their candidate there with Mr. Bootles and Mr. Mooney, who were to count the votes.

The election was expected to be a walk-over, and Carthew was to be

nominated, seconded, and elected as a matter of form.

But as six o'clock approached, Hall began to fill.

It was a surprise to Carthew. He did not see what that army of juniors wanted there.

But they came—in swarms. Tommy Dodd led in nearly all the Modern juniors. Third and Fourth and Shell. Jimmy Silver marched in with most of the Classical Fourth. The Classical Shell was well represented. Even the Second Form sent a contingent, led by Erbert and Jones *minimus*.

Carthew bit his lip as he watched them.

The rules of the Broomwood election allowed a candidate to be nominated right to the time fixed for polling, and Carthew wondered whether the Sixth had decided, after all, to put up Knowles or Neville against him. It was possible that they had abandoned their lofty and dignified course of ignoring the election, simply for the purpose of dishing him. Yet not a single senior was present. It could not, after all, be that. Yet what was the meaning of this grinning swarm of juniors?

He felt uneasy, and showed it.

Tubby Muffin, pushed forward by his enthusiastic supporters, was prominent, but Carthew did not understand the cause of the lofty and swelling looks of the fat Classical. Of all the swarm of juniors present, Tubby was the only fellow who took his candidature seriously; but he was taking it very seriously indeed.

Mr. Bootles blinked over his glasses at the numerous assembly, and glanced at the clock and then at Mr. Mooney. It was six o'clock.

"H'm! Hem!" said Mr. Bootles. "We shall now—ahem!—proceed—hum! Carthew, I believe—ahem!—is the only candidate—hum!"

"Not at all, sir!" interposed Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bootles blinked at him.

"Indeed! I understand, Silver, that there is no other candidate."

"Yes, sir, there is one more," said Jimmy. "Forward, Muffin!"

And there was a delighted roar from the juniors.

"Go it, Tubby!"

"Hurrah for Muffin!"

"Muffins and crumpets! Hurrah!"

Tubby Muffin rolled forward, his fat waistcoat swelled almost to bursting, his fat little nose high in the air. At that moment Reginald Muffin of the Fourth was sublime.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, in perplexity. "What—what? Am I—hum!—to understand, Silver—ahem!—that Muffin is—bless my soul!—a candidate for the captaincy of the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"At the request of the school, sir," said Tubby Muffin loftily, "I am standing for election! Let the best man win!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew made a furious stride forward. He understood the cause of the grinning swarm in Hall now.

"I protest against this!" he exclaimed angrily. "This is turning the election into a farce! A junior cannot stand—"

"Boooh!"

"Shut up, Carthew!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Really, Muffin—really, Silver—ahem!"

"I know it's unusual, sir," said Jimmy Silver firmly. "But there is no law at Broomwood against it. We claim the right to put our candidate forward and vote for him."

Mr. Bootles looked helplessly at Mr. Mooney, who smiled slightly.

"There is certainly no rule against it that I am aware of," said Mr. Mooney. "It has never happened before, but— but there is no rule forbidding—"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, taking off his spectacles and polishing them, and replacing them on his nose, "I—I really—"

"I protest against anything of the kind," shouted Carthew furiously.

"Your protest is not in order, Carthew. There seems no reason against the candidature of Muffin of the Fourth, though the result of the election, of course, must be confirmed by the Head."

"The Head would never confirm——"

"That is for Dr. Chisholm to decide. Carthew, when the result comes before him. The election will proceed," said Mr. Bootles.

Smythe of the Shell had pleasure in proposing Carthew, and Latirey of the Fourth had pleasure in seconding him, while Jimmy Silver and Putty had the same pleasure for their candidate. When the names were put to the meeting for a show of hands, there were six hands for Carthew and more than a hundred for Tubby Muffin.

Mr. Bootles blinked at Mr. Mooney, and Mr. Mooney smiled at Mr. Bootles. Mark Carthew bit his lip till the blood came.

This was the outcome of his trickery; instead of romping home, as it were, as captain of Rookwood, he was beaten at the poll with every circumstance of ridicule, his successful rival being the fat and fatuous Tubby Muffin of the Fourth, celebrated as a raider of study cupboards, and for possessing the most gargantuan appetite at Rookwood, and for nothing else.

It was a bitter pill for Carthew to swallow.

His face, as he watched the show of hands, was worth, as Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, a guinea a box.

Mr. Bootles blinked at him.

"Ahem! Muffin's supporters—ahem!—seem to be in the—ahem!—majority," murmured Mr. Bootles. "You may—ahem!—claim a count if you so desire, Carthew!"

Carthew did not claim a count. It was not much use counting six hands against a hundred. Without even replying to Mr. Bootles, the disappointed and furious schemer turned and strode from the Hall.

Amid laughter and cheers, Mr. Bootles proceeded to pronounce Reginald Muffin, of the Fourth Form,

duly elected captain of the school. And the proceedings terminated, so far as the masters were concerned.

But the juniors were not finished yet.

"Speech! Speech!" howled Mornington.

"Ha, ha! Go it, Tubby!"

Tubby Muffin struck a Napoleonic attitude. He was still taking the proceedings with owl-like seriousness.

"Gentlemen——" wheezed the fat Classical.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, you have done me the honour to elect me captain of the school," said Tubby, quite eloquently. "You can rely upon me to fill this lofty position with ability——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And in a really distinguished way. I'm not saying anything against Bulkeley, whom we all esteem——"

"Bravo!"

"But I think it will be admitted that Rookwood has got the right man in the right place at last——"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Real merit has received recognition!"

"Oh!"

"And now that Rookwood has got the captain it really wanted all the time, the school will fairly go ahead! Rely on me for that! Gentlemen, you have placed me in a very important position. All I can say is, I deserve it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby's modest speech was the climax. The egregious Tubby was borne shoulder-high from Hall, and Rookwood School rang with cheers for its new captain.

But how long the new captain was to hold office was another matter!

CHAPTER II.

The New Captain of Rookwood!

"CAPTAIN TUBBY!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a roar of mingled laughter

and cheering in the old quadrangle at Rookwood School.

Bulkeley of the Sixth looked out of his study window, with a puzzled expression on his face.

A peculiar scene met his gaze.

Nearly all the Lower School of Rookwood seemed to be in the quad, where the dusk was falling. An extraordinary procession was passing within view of Bulkeley's study window.

First came Jimmy Silver & Co.—the Pistical Four of the Fourth Form. On their shoulders they supported a fat figure—that of Tubby Muffin—and it needed all four of them to keep the fat Tubby successfully in his elevated position.

Round them, and following them, came a swarm of the Fourth, the Third, and the Shell. Classics mingled with Moderns.

Bulkeley looked on at the scene in amazement.

Why Tubby Muffin should be chaired round the quadrangle was a mystery to the former captain of Rookwood.

Tubby was distinguished for nothing but his circumference—though that, certainly, was very distinguished indeed.

Tubby's fat face was quite beatific in expression. He was enjoying himself, as he was impressed with a due sense of his own importance. Everybody else seemed to take the matter more or less as a joke; but to Tubby Muffin it was extremely serious.

Teddy Grace was beating a tin can with a cricket-stump, by way of musical accompaniment, and Mornington added to the musical honours with a pair of saucepan lids, which served as cymbals.

Crash, crash! Bang! Jingle!

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon my word!" murmured Bulkeley, staring from his window. "What on earth can it mean? They'd better stop that row!"

Bulkeley was about to throw open his window and call to the processing juniors, but he paused. He remembered that he was no longer captain of

Rookwood—and no longer even a prefect. He possessed no more authority now than any other senior in the school.

So he stood looking out in silence. His study door opened, and Neville of the Sixth came in. There was a very peculiar expression on Neville's face, as Bulkeley noted, looking round at him.

"What's that row about, Neville?" asked Bulkeley, with a nod towards the shouting procession in the quad.

"The election's over," answered Neville. "All the seniors stayed away from Hall, as we agreed; but I've just learned the result from Smythe of the Shell."

"Is Carthew elected?"

"No."

"Well, I'm glad of that," said Bulkeley. "Carthew isn't the kind of fellow to make a captain of Rookwood. But I understood that the election would be a walkover for him, as no other senior would put up. What has happened?"

Neville pointed to the window.

"That's happened," he answered. "The juniors put up a candidate—Tubby Muffin of the Fourth!"

Bulkeley started.

"What utter nonsense!" he exclaimed.

"Nonsense or not, they did it—and Muffin of the Fourth has been elected captain of Rookwood—by an overwhelming majority, too," said Neville, with a grimace. "The seniors boycotted the election, and the juniors weren't likely to vote for a bully like Carthew. A few did, I think, but they didn't count. Muffin of the Fourth is captain of the school."

"My hat!"

Bulkeley turned to the window again, and stared out at the uproarious procession. The juniors were celebrating their victory, such as it was. They were making a great deal of noise—rejoicing in unaccustomed freedom, in fact. For since Bulkeley's dismissal by the Head had been followed by a "strike" of the prefects, in protest, the Lower School were no longer in dread

of those great Panjandrum of the Sixth.

It was as in the old days, when there was no King in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

"This is simply absurd!" exclaimed Bulkeley, at last. "It's turning the election and the captaincy itself into ridicule!"

Neville smiled.

"I fancy that's the idea," he answered. "In fact, I'm sure of it. Some of the Fourth—Jimmy Silver and his friends—are at the bottom of it. They think the Head will come round, and reinstate you, old chap, rather than have that fat little duffer as captain of the school."

Bulkeley frowned thoughtfully.

"It's ridiculous!" he said.

He opened the window as the procession came along by the windows of the Sixth, and called out to Jimmy Silver.

"Silver!"

"Halt!" sang out Jimmy.

"Hurrah!"

The procession came to rather a disordered stop. The clanging of the improvised cymbals ceased.

"Hallo, Bulkeley!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What are you playing the fool like this for?"

"Oh!"

Tubby Muffin blinked at Bulkeley. On the shoulders of the Fisticat Four, he was nearly on a level with the Sixth-former at the study window. Tubby raised a podgy forefinger, and wagged a reprovingly at George Bulkeley's frowning face.

"Shut up!" he said.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Shut up!" commanded Tubby solemnly. "You're nobody!"

"Hurrah!"

"Don't cheek Bulkeley, you fat duffer!" growled Jimmy Silver.

But Tubby did not heed.

He was taking himself very seriously as captain of the school—very seriously

indeed—and he intended that his importance should be recognised and acknowledged. He brooked no rivals, and he did not intend to have another "Richmond in the field," so to speak.

"You were captain of Rookwood, Bulkeley," he said, more loftily than ever. "Now I'm captain! You've got to obey my orders. We obeyed your orders, didn't we, when you were captain? I'm going to have some discipline in this school, I can tell you!"

There was a roar of laughter from the procession. Tubby in his new state of dignity was entertaining.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I want no cheek from you, or any of the Sixth," went on Tubby. "The Sixth don't amount to much in the school now. I'm going to be fair all round though. I shan't cane you, though, Bulkeley——"

"Wha-at!"

"Unless you ask for it. But if there's any cheek from you, I shall give you the ashplant. Bear that in mind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, Tubby!"

"So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Bulkeley!" said Tubby Muffin. "You're nobody! You're less than nobody! And if you—— Yaroooooh!"

Tubby Muffin broke off, with a loud yell, as the Fisticat Four let him down with a run. The new captain of Rookwood disappeared all of a sudden from his elevated position.

Bump!

"Yooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 21.

Tubby the Great

TUBBY MUFFIN sat on the cold, unsympathetic quadrangle and roared.

The procession roared, too, with laughter. But Tubby Muffin was not laughing. He roared with anguish.

"Yaroooo! You silly asses! Wharrer you bumping me for? Don't you know

how to treat a captain of the school? Ow, ow, ow!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. glared down at him.

"If you cheek Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver, in measured tones, "we'll bump you till you burst!"

"You fat chump!" said Arthur Edward. "If you cheek Bulkeley——"

"We'll scalp you!" said Raby.

"We'll boil you in oil!" said Newcome impressively.

Tubby Muffin blinked up at the Fistical Four in wrath and dismay. They had been his firmest supporters at the election. But this, certainly, was not the support a captain of Rookwood had a right to expect.

It began to dawn upon Reginald Muffin that his captaincy was not being taken with proper seriousness.

"Look here," he howled, in great wrath, "you cheeky rotters, who's captain of Rookwood. I'd like to know?"

"Bulkeley is—or he's going to be," answered Jimmy Silver. "You're a silly stopgap, till the Head comes round. See?"

Tubby scrambled to his feet.

"You cheeky ass!" he roared. "I'll show you whether I'm captain of Rookwood or not. Bulkeley!"

Bulkeley stared at him from the window.

"Throw me out your ashplant!" commanded Tubby Muffin.

"What?"

"Your ashplant—sharp!"

"You little idiot!" was Bulkeley's reply.

"Buck up—I'm going to cane Silver!"

"Cane me!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, rather! Captain of the school canes whom he chooses, doesn't he?" demanded Tubby.

There was a yell of laughter. It was pretty certain that the new captain of Rookwood would not be allowed to exercise his new authority to that extent. There was much disillusionment in store for Reginald Muffin.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Never mind the ashplant," he said.

"But I do mind!" howled Tubby Muffin. "Bulkeley, hand out that ashplant at once, or I shall cane you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulkeley closed his study window.

"Murnington!" thundered Tubby.

"Hallo!" grinned Morny.

"Fetch me a cane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't he a corker?" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "Oughtn't he to be on the cinema? Shut up, Tubby!"

"I shall cane you, too, Dodd."

"Not just yet, I think," chuckled the Modern Junior. "Come on, you fellows; we haven't talked to Carthew yet."

"Up with Tubby!"

Up went Reginald Muffin again to the shoulders of the Fistical Four. He was borne along to the window of Carthew's study. Mark Carthew of the Sixth was in his study, with a black brow and a heart full of rancour. At the last moment, unexpectedly, his ambition had been foiled; the election he had counted on as a walk-over had turned into an overwhelming defeat for him, and to add to the bitterness of his humiliation he had been defeated by so absurd a rival as Muffin of the Fourth.

It was a well-deserved punishment. He had deserted the cause of Bulkeley, and abandoned the rest of the prefects in their strike—for this! He had earned the contempt due to a "black-leg," in order to see the fat and egregious Tubby elected captain of the school over his head.

And the Rookwood electors evidently meant to "rub it in." They halted under Carthew's window, and there was a roar.

"Wake up, Carthew!"

"Carthew, Carthew!"

"Yah!"

"Hurrah!"

The window did not open, but the prefect's face could be seen within, pale with anger and chagrin.

"Make him come out!" ordered

Tubby Muffin. "Bust the window if he won't open it!"

"He's a prefect, you know," murmured Jones minor.

"Captain of the school has authority over all prefects," answered Tubby. "Carthew is under my orders, isn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! I suppose he is," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Captain of the school is always head prefect. Tubby is a prefect in virtue of his position as captain. That's Rookwood law."

"Jolly good law, too!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Carthew!" shouted Tubby Muffin truculently, "open that window at once. I order you!"

The window flew open, though probably not in obedience to Tubby Muffin's order. Mark Carthew's furious face looked out.

"You young scoundrels——" he began.

"Silence!" commanded Tubby.

The prefect did not heed.

"Stop this at once!" he exclaimed.

"Go indoors immediately. You will take five hundred lines all round!"

"Yah!"

"Blackies!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "Give it him! You're a bully, Carthew! You're a cad! I'm going to keep you in order!"

"Bravo, Tubby!"

Carthew's face was a picture.

"Muffin," he rasped, "come to my study at once. I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Tubby Muffin indulged in a scornful sneer.

"I don't think!" he retorted. "It's you that's going to have the licking, Carthew. I'm down on bullies. Remember that I'm your superior now—now I'm captain of the school."

"You fat fool!" roared Carthew.

"You forget yourself," said Tubby, with dignity. "That isn't the way to speak to the captain of Rookwood, Carthew."

"Come to my study!" roared Carthew, brandishing a cane at the fat Classical, who was fortunately beyond his reach.

"Rats! You come to my study!" answered Tubby. "In fact, I order you to. Come to my study in half an hour, Carthew. Don't fail!"

"You—you—you——" spluttered Carthew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on," said Raby. "Tubby's rather a weight. Good-bye, Carthew—and don't forget to come up to the Fourth Form passage to be caned!"

And the procession marched on, leaving Carthew gesticulating at his window, in a state of fury that was quite Humish.

The procession "processed" to the School House doorway, where it came to a halt at last. The celebration was over, and Tubby's weight was telling on the Platical Four, sturdy as they were.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, looked out as Tubby Muffin was set down on the steps.

"Boys," he exclaimed, "this—this disturbance—you must really——"

"Only celebrating the election, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "There's always a bit of noise on election nights, you know, sir."

"Yes, yes; but—but——" Mr. Bootles blinked at Tubby Muffins over his glasses. "Quite so, but—but——"

"It's all right, sir," said Tubby Muffin cheerfully. "I can keep the juniors in order, Mr. Bootles."

"What—what?"

"Go to your studies," said Tubby, with a wave of his fat hand. "Order, please! Leave them to me, Mr. Bootles!"

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Bootles.

Captain Tubby Muffin was a little too much for him. He beat a retreat, and the crowd of juniors dispersed in a more or less orderly manner.

CHAPTER 22.

Cancelled!

"PREPOSTEROUS!"

Thus Dr. Chisholm.

The Head of Rookwood was frowning, evidently very much annoyed. Mild little Mr. Bootles blinked at him, and said nothing.

"Preposterous!" repeated the Head.

He stared at Mr. Bootles almost aggressively, as if daring him to deny that it was preposterous. But Mr. Bootles didn't! He knew better than to argue with the somewhat autocratic old gentleman.

He had reported the result of the captain's election to the Head, and he could not help wondering how Dr. Chisholm would take it. It was pretty clear that the Head was not taking it in good part.

"Preposterous!" said the Head for the third time, as the Fourth Form-master did not speak. "Unheard of! A junior captain of Rookwood—absurd! Such a thing has never been heard of!"

"Certainly not—before now," assented Mr. Bootles. "There is, however, no rule laid down upon the subject, I believe."

"Such a rule was not necessary; it is a matter of common-sense," said the Head tartly. "Only a Sixth Form prefect can be captain of the school. This election is an absurdity."

Mr. Bootles nodded assent to that. He was quite of the Head's opinion there, but he did not quite see what was to be done. The election was a "fait accompli," and it was rather too late to make new rules on the subject.

"I fully understood that Carthew would be elected," continued the Head. "He has my approval. He is the only one of the prefects who had not set himself in opposition to my authority. He has a sense of duty."

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"He does not seem popular in the school, sir," he murmured.

"A sense of duty does not always make a prefect popular. Mr. Bootles, Carthew at least knows what is due to

his headmaster. This election is an absurdity, and the result must be cancelled. I shall take steps to that end immediately. Pray request Carthew to come to my study, Mr. Bootles."

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Bootles withdrew, perhaps glad to leave the presence of the angry old gentleman.

Dr. Chisholm was pacing his study with a knitted brow when Carthew of the Sixth tapped discreetly at the door, and entered.

The Head's brow cleared a little as he glanced at the prefect—the only prefect, at present, that Rookwood School could boast.

"This is an extraordinary occurrence, Carthew," said the Head.

"I agree with you, sir," said Carthew, in the meek, ingratiating tone he always adopted towards the Head. "I was very desirous, sir, of carrying out your wishes. I did my best—"

"I am sure of that, Carthew. You have my complete confidence. I shall not forget that you returned to your duty at once, when the other prefects took up their present inexcusable attitude."

"Thank you, sir," said Carthew meekly.

He was well aware that his conduct was looked upon in a very different light by the rest of Rookwood. Most of the Rookwood fellows knew exactly how much "duty" had been Carthew's motive in deserting the prefects. But it was the Head whom Carthew desired to propitiate.

"This election will be cancelled," said Dr. Chisholm. "I shall not dream for one moment of allowing such a result to stand."

"I suppose so, sir."

"A new election will be ordered, and you will stand again, Carthew."

"Certainly, sir."

"The result will, no doubt, be different; if not, I shall take still more drastic steps," said the Head. "I assure



"Yorp!" Carthaw fairly howled as Tubby Muffin, Captain of Rookwood, laid on the antagonist! With half-a-dozen juniors hanging on to him like limpets, the prefect had no chance to defend himself.

"Count the strokes, Silver!" puffed Tubby, "I'm going to give the beast a thousand!"

you of my continued support as a reward for your faithfulness to duty."

"You are very kind, sir."

"I have written this notice," added the Head. "Kindly post it on the board for me, Carthew."

"Certainly."

The prefect left the study with the paper in his hand. He read it in the corridor, and smiled.

A few minutes later it was pinned on the notice-board for all Rookwood to read and comment upon.

A numerous crowd gathered before the board. In the crowd was the new captain of Rookwood, and he snorted with great indignation over the Head's paper.

"Rot!" said Tubby Muffin emphatically. "Cheek! That's what it is—cheek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've a jolly good mind," continued Tubby wrathfully, "to go to the Head and tell him so!"

"Do!" chuckled Smythe of the Shell. "We'll come and carry you away afterwards—what's left of you."

Tubby Muffin snorted again, but he decided not to go to the Head. He was captain of Rookwood, certainly; but the Head was rather too terrible an old gentleman for Tubby Muffin to face at these quarters. Bearding the lion in his den was not in Reginald Muffin's line.

There was much comment on the Head's notice, which had been rather expected by the juniors. It was pretty certain, anyway, that the Head would not have allowed the election to stand without interference. The notice stated briefly that the late election was cancelled, and that a new election would be held on Monday to fill the vacant post of captain of the school.

"Isn't a vacant post at all, you know," said Tubby Muffin, in a greatly aggrieved tone. "The Head's right off the mark."

"Can the Head cancel an election?" inquired Puffy of the Fourth. "Isn't he getting a bit over the limit?"

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I know," he answered. "I suppose the headmaster has power to cancel an election. But it comes to the same thing. We have the power to elect the same candidate over again, if we choose."

"And we shall jolly well choose!" said Conroy.

"Yes, rather!"

"Tubby's the man!" grinned Lovell. "Muffin for our money!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tubby Muffin beamed.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "You fellows stand by me, and I'll stand by you. The Head can't cancel an election a second time. We won't take any notice of him if he does!"

"Ha, ha!"

"And I'll tell you what," continued Tubby. "After Monday's election even the Head can't make out that I'm not the captain of the school. And the first thing I'll do will be to cane Carthew before all the chaps."

"Bravo!"

"We'll back you up, Tubby!"

"Of course, I shall expect to be backed up," said Muffin, with dignity. "Loyal support is what I want."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no doubt that Reginald Muffin would get plenty of loyal support. As Jimmy Silver put it, Rookwood would keep on giving the Head Tubby Muffin till the Head gave them Bulkeley. And Jimmy added that they could keep up that game quite as long as the Head could.

CHAPTER II.

Tubby Takes Command.

MONDAY was a day of some excitement at Rookwood School.

Rookwood was still without prefects—with the exception of Mark Carthew, who was careful not to over-exercise his solitary authority. Car-

(Jew's aim was to conciliate the fellows as much as possible till the election was over. He restrained his bullying propensities, and he was remarkably civil even to fags in the Second Form. Carthew hoped to catch votes—and he hoped, too, that the Head's displeasure would prevent a ridiculous candidate like Muffin from being put forward again.

But it skilled not, as a novelist would say. Carthew was too well known for his "soft sawder" to have any effect on the fags; and, besides, the "lark" of electing the egregious Tubby appealed to their sense of humour. And the fact that they were, in a perfectly constitutional way, "dishing the Head," appealed still more to the juniors.

The strike of the prefects still continued, and though the Head gave no sign the masters were also growing restive. A great deal more work fell upon them in consequence of the prefects' strike. A prefect was not merely an ornament, by any means. They had their uses and their duties—and now their duties fell on the masters. Mr. Bootles had to see lights out for his Form, and to attend to many other matters that had usually been taken off his hands by a prefect. The supervision of the games, too, was a rather serious matter, and certainly little Mr. Bootles was not the man to take the Fourth Form in charge at cricket practice.

And the masters could not be everywhere at once. Sliding down the banisters, shrill whistling in the passages, "rows" in the studies and the Common-room, became frequent and painful and free.

Probably all the staff would have been very glad if the Head had decided to close the matter by reinstating Bulkeley, and thus conciliating his supporters. But the Head did not waver. The fact that the whole school was against his decision only rendered him the more determined; and he was to do him justice, far from suspecting that his firmness partook of the nature of obstinacy.

He would have been surprised, as well as shocked, if he had known that the Rookwooders regarded him not so much as a firm man as a mulish one.

After lessons on Monday the new election took place in Big Hall.

Rookwood came to it in a swarm.

The seniors stood out of the proceedings, as before. The Sixth were solid behind Bulkeley, and the Fifth followed the Sixth. In fact, the seniors regarded the proceedings not only with disdain, but with a certain grim satisfaction. Their captain was rejected by the Head—and the Head could make the best of Tubby Muffin—and they charitably hoped that he would like it!

Carthew's hopes of a majority had been faint, and they were soon dissipated. The election was a still more overwhelming triumph for Reginald Muffin of the Fourth. His majority was well over ten to one, and could have been larger if more votes had been wanted.

Loud laughter and cheers greeted the announcement of the result.

Tubby Muffin beamed on his majority.

He had received the loyal support he desired, and he was once more captain of Rookwood, in spite of the cancellation of the first election.

Tubby seemed two or three inches taller as he rolled out of Hall, in the midst of cheering.

He grinned at Carthew, who was striding away with a savage brow.

"Beaten you again, old top!" he remarked cheerily.

Carthew gave him a furious look.

"Don't scowl at me," continued Tubby. "None of your cheek, Carthew. For two pins, I'd— Yooop!"

Tubby Muffin went spinning, as the enraged prefect smote him, and he rolled along the floor with a loud yell.

Carthew strode away.

"You-ow-ow-ow!" roared Tubby Muffin, sitting up dazedly. "Yow-ow! I'll thrash you! I'll cane you! Yooop! Gimme a hand up, somebody! Warrer you all cackling at? Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Patty of the Fourth helped Tubby Muffin to his feet, and the fat Classical clung to him, gasping.

"Where's that rotter?" he panted.

"Mizzled!" answered Jimmy Silver, laughing.

Tubby raised a fat hand commandingly.

"Silver!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, my lord."

"Go and tell Carthew to come to my study at once," ordered Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to put the stopper on his cheek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And bring me a cane!" added Tubby. "You can get Bootles' cane from the Form-room. I authorise you to do so."

"You authorise—— Oh, my hat!"

"Do as I tell you, Silver! Tell Carthew I expect him in my study in five minutes. We'll see who's captain of this school, I can tell you."

And Tubby Muffin gasped away to his study, leaving the juniors yelling.

"All the same, Tubby's within his rights," said Mornington. "We won't let him cheek Bulkeley; but Carthew's a bully, and he's fair game."

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll give him our giddy captain's message, anyway," chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Go it!"

Captain Tubby Muffin's authority depended on what support he might get; and the juniors were quite prepared to support him against the unpopular bully of the Sixth. Calling Carthew of the Sixth up for judgment seemed an excellent idea to the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver followed Carthew at once to his study. He found the Sixth-Former with a black brow. Carthew fixed a savage look on him.

"Does the Head——" he began. Carthew was expecting a summons to the Head.

"I haven't come from the Head, old bean," answered Jimmy Silver. "I've

an order for you from the captain of the school."

"What?" roared Carthew.

"Tubby Muffin——"

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

"Not at all," answered Jimmy Silver blindly. "I leave that to you, Carthew; it's your stunt. Tubby Muffin requires you in his study at once."

"You—you——"

"You're to go immediately."

Carthew clutched up a cane.

"Come here Silver!" he rapped out.

"No jolly fear!" answered the captain of the Fourth, backing out of the study.

"I order you—as a prefect——"

"My dear man, I'm acting under orders of the captain of Rookwood," answered Jimmy coolly. "I suppose you know the captain of the school has authority over prefects?"

Carthew's reply was a rush, with the cane brandishing in the air. Jimmy Silver scudded down the passage.

"Come back!" roared Carthew, from his doorway.

"Bow-wow!"

And Jimmy Silver went cheerily up the staircase, to report to the captain of Rookwood. He found Tubby Muffin in his study, with a good many other fellows—all grinning, with the exception of Tubby. The fat Classical had Mr. Bootles' cane in his hand, Lovell having obligingly felched it from the Form-room.

"Is he coming?" demanded Muffin, as Jimmy Silver looked in.

Jimmy shook his head.

"He's refused, Tubby."

"Refused!" thundered Muffin. "He refused to obey the captain of the school!"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Don't cackle, Jimmy Silver! It's disrespectful."

"Oh!"

"So he's refused to come, has he?" exclaimed Tubby, evidently greatly incensed. "He won't obey the captain of

the school! I'll show him! Carthew is going to be caned—very severely caned."

"How are you going to do it?" asked Erroll, with a smile.

"Go and fetch him, Tubby," suggested Mornington. "As the mountain won't come to Mahomet, you know, Mahomet will have to go to the mountain."

Tubby Muffin shook his head.

Seriously as he was taking his new powers and authority as captain of the school, he had no desire to tackle Carthew of the Sixth in his study—by himself. Carthew was rather too hefty for that. Besides, as commander-in-chief, Tubby felt that there was no necessity for him to go into action, as it were. It was the duty of his loyal followers—privates, so to speak—to go into action, while he directed operations from headquarters.

"Silver, Lovell, Raby——" he rapped out.

"Adsum!" grinned the juniors.

"Newcome, Mornington, Erroll——"

"Here!"

"Conroy, Pons, Van Ryn——"

"Here we are, mighty chief!" grinned the Colonial Co. in the doorway.

Tubby raised a fat hand commandingly.

"Fetch Carthew of the Sixth here," he said.

"Oh!"

"I authorise you to use force!" said Tubby grandly. "As captain of the school, I authorise you, and will see you through. If Carthew won't come, carry him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Get a move on!" rapped out Tubby.

"But——" began Erroll.

"Silence!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Obey orders, and no back-chat. Please," said Tubby, frowning. "Who's captain of the school, I'd like to know? Fetch Carthew here! I command you! Go!"

And Jimmy Silver & Co.—after a grinning glance at one another—went.

CHAPTER 21.

Captain's Orders!

TUBBY MUFFIN sat down again with lofty content.

His followers were obeying orders, which—to Tubby's fat mind—was exactly as it should be. True, they were obeying with their tongues in their cheeks, but that did not matter—Tubby wasn't aware of that.

Jimmy Silver & Co. intended to suit themselves exactly how far they obeyed the orders of the new captain of Rookwood. But when it suited them to do so their obedience was prompt. It suited them in this case. Handling the bully of the Sixth was no trouble—it was a pleasure—and the thought of the prefect being caned by Tubby of the Fourth made them chuckle with glee. And, as captain of the school, Tubby was acting within his rights; and certainly Jimmy Silver & Co. were acting within their rights in obeying him—if they chose!

The juniors realised that a Fourth Form captain had his uses; it enabled them to deal with the Sixth in a hitherto undreamt-of manner.

True, if the other seniors interfered, there was no doubt that Tubby's followers would be driven in rout from the Sixth Form passage. But they were not likely to interfere on behalf of the "blackleg" who had sold them. If they did not, Carthew hadn't much chance against nine sturdy juniors.

The cheery nine arrived in the Sixth Form passage, and Jimmy Silver hurried Carthew's door open. There was a whiff of tobacco-smoke in the study. Mark Carthew was consoling himself with a cigarette.

He threw it hastily into the grate as his door flew open, and started to his feet, catching up an ashplant.

"Carthew, you're wanted!" shouted Lovell.

"Clear out of my study!" exclaimed the prefect angrily.

"You're wanted!"

"Captain's orders!"

"This way, Carthew!"

Carthew came that way—with a rush. Lovell yelled as he caught the ashplant with his shoulder, and Conroy roared as he captured the next "lick." But the bully of the Sixth had no time for more.

Jimmy Silver was gripping him, and Raby and Newcome got hold, and Pons and Van Ryn piled in, and Carthew was borne backwards. He went down on his carpet with a crash, the juniors sprawling over him.

"Hands off!" shrieked Carthew.

"Pile in!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Down him!" roared Lovell.

"Hurrah! Down him!"

Like a wave the invaders flowed over the unhappy bully of the Sixth. Carthew struggled desperately, but he could not throw them off. The odds were much too great even for the big Sixth-Former.

His arms and legs were captured, and Morny took a good grip on his back hair, while Pons and Van Ryn captured an ear each.

Carthew, still wriggling, was a prisoner; he could not do much more than wriggle, with so many hands on him.

"Bring him along!" shouted Raby.

"Are you going to walk, Carthew?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Yaroooh yes, or yaroooh no?" asked Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young rotters! I'll have you flogged! Lemme go! Oh, crumbs!" panted Carthew, wriggling frantically in the grasp of the Fourth-Formers.

"If he won't walk, carry him!" said Jimmy Silver. "March!"

The juniors crowded out of the study with Carthew in their grasp. He roared for help as they came out with a rush. Neville and Lonsdale and Jones major appeared on the scene.

"What are you fags up to?" demanded Neville.

"Taking Carthew to the captain's study," answered Jimmy Silver. "Orders from the captain of Rookwood, Neville."

"But Bulkeley—" began Neville.

"Captain Muffin!" explained Jimmy.

"Oh!" Neville grinned and went back into his study.

"Help me, you fools! Jones, Lonsdale, lend me a hand!" howled Carthew desperately.

Lonsdale gave him a contemptuous look.

"You're a prefect," he said; "I'm not—now. I've no right to interfere, not being a prefect. You've authority. Use it."

"You silly idiot!"

Lonsdale gave a shrug and turned away.

"Jones! Do you hear, Jones—"

"I hear you, my boy," answered Jones major. "But I'm not a prefect now, you know. You've gone back on us, and you can help yourself. The fags can do as they like, for all I care."

Jones major stepped out of the way, and Carthew was rushed on towards the staircase, his arms and legs flying wildly. He yelled for help again, and Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, rushed up.

"Boys!" exclaimed Mr. Mooney. "What—what does this mean?"

"Captain's orders, sir," said Jimmy Silver meekly.

"I do not understand you, Silver! What—"

"The captain of the school has ordered Carthew to come to his study, sir, and he won't come. He's ordered us to bring him."

"We're bound to obey the captain of the school, sir!" said Mornington.

"Do you—do you mean Muffin?" ejaculated Mr. Mooney.

"Yes, sir."

"Bless my soul! Really—"

"Make them let me go, sir!" howled Carthew.

Mr. Mooney stood nonplussed.

"I—I think you had better let Carthew go," he said dubiously. "Muffin cannot—ahem!—be regarded very seriously—ahem!—as captain of Rookwood."

"It's captain's orders, sir!" said Jimmy Silver firmly. "We're bound to

obey our captain—asking your pardon, sir."

And, leaving the perplexed Mr. Mooney rubbing his chin, the juniors rushed Carthew up the staircase. He opened his mouth to yell again, but Conroy pushed a folded handkerchief into it forcibly. The juniors did not want their own Form-master to be brought on the scene.

Carthew, gurgling and wriggling spasmodically, was brought up to the Fourth Form passage, and to the doorway of No. 2, where the new captain of Bookwood sat in state.

Jimmy Silver & Co. whirled him into the study and set him upon his feet, dishevelled and breathless.

"Here he is, Muffin!"

"We've brought the boulder!"

Carthew stood panting for breath, with a crimson face, and in a state of fury that was beyond words.

Tubby Muffin rose to his feet with a lofty look, and picked up the cane.

"Carthew!" he rapped out.

"Grooooh!"

"You laid hands on me, the captain of Bookwood! I'm going to cane you!"

"Groogggh!"

"I'm going to maintain discipline in this school, or know the reason why!" said Muffin. "Hold out your hand, Carthew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared Tubby. "How dare you face laugh?"

"Fags!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat!"

"Draw it mild, Fatty!"

"Do you want to be caned, too, Jones minor? You'd better be careful. Now, Carthew, hold out your hand! Sharp's the word!"

"Hold out your hand, Carthew!" roared the juniors in great merriment.

Carthew did not hold out his hand. Having recovered his breath, he made a rush at Tubby Muffin. The new captain of Bookwood roared as the bully of the Sixth seized him.

"Yaroooh! Help! Back up!"

The cane was snatched from Tubby's

fat hand, and Carthew, grasping the fat Classical by the collar, laid it on Tubby.

Whack, whack, whack!

It was the most disrespectful way to treat the new captain of the school. It was very painful, too, as Tubby's yells testified. Carthew laid the cane on as if he thought he was beating carpet.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yoop! Help! Rescue! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack, whack!

CHAPTER 25.

The High Road!

JIMMY SILVER & CO., for a moment or two, were laughing too much to go to the aid of the helpless captain of Bookwood. In those few moments Carthew put in a good many lashes with the cane, and Tubby's frantic yells rang through the study and to the end of the passage. In those awful moments the captain of Bookwood probably repented of having sent for Carthew.

But Jimmy Silver came to the rescue, and the other fellows followed his lead. Carthew was seized and dragged off, some of the juniors getting lashes of the cane in the process.

But the bully of the Sixth was downed again, in spite of his furious resistance. And the juniors did not let him go after that. He was rather too dangerous to be let loose.

Carthew disappeared under seven or eight juniors on the floor, who pinned him down by sheer weight. His nose was grinding into the carpet, as Putty of the Fourth sat on the back of his head. A wild and inarticulate gurgling came from the unhappy senior.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Tubby Muffin. "I'm hurt! You rotters, why didn't you dragstomf? Yow-ow-ow-ow! Yaroooh! I'll cane the lot of you! Oh, crams! Ow-ow-ow-ow!"

"All serene now, Tubby——"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Aren't you going to cane Carthew?" chuckled Lovell.

"Ow! Oh, yes, rather! Gimme the cane!"

The cane was handed to the fat junior, and he gripped it, with a vengeful gleam in his eyes. It was Tubby's turn now, and Carthew was evidently going to get it hot and strong. Certainly he had asked for it by the way he had treated the captain of the school.

"Hold him!" exclaimed Tubby. "Face down—that's it! Pin him, you know! Mind you don't let the beast gerrup! That's important!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, then! Count five hundred, Jimmy Silver!"

"Five hundred! Oh, crikey!"

"No; a thousand!" said the vengeful Tubby. "I'm going to give him a thousand! Keep clear!"

Whack!

Part of Carthew was left clear for the kicking, the juniors standing or sitting on the rest of him to keep him pinned to the carpet. The cane came down with all the strength of Tubby's podgy arm. It rang like a pistol-shot, and it was answered by a fearful yell from the Sixth-Former.

Whack, whack, whack!

Wild yells from Carthew answered every whack. Tubby was laying it on, not wisely, but too well. The prefect struggled furiously, but quite in vain; he was too well held. Whack, whack, whack!

"How many's that, Jimmy?" gasped Tubby, gasping for breath.

"About a dozen," gasped Jimmy. "I think that will do, Tubby."

"Shut up!"

"What-a-at?"

"Don't argue with me!"

"Oh!" stuttered Jimmy.

"I'm captain of Rookwood! I'm going to give him a thousand, and you're to count. Shut up!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Tubby Muffin was laying it on again. He was smarting from the cane himself, and so long as he smarted he was not likely to think that Carthew of the Sixth had had enough. It was for-

tunate for the hapless prefect that Tubby Muffin was not an athlete.

There was a step in the passage, and Smythe of the Shell came through the laughing crowd of juniors.

"You've got Carthew, hero?" he asked. "Oh, my only aunt!"

Adolphus Smythe started at the scene in amazement, as Tubby Muffin laid on the cane again.

"You—you—you're whacking a prefect!" he gasped.

"Captain of the school can whack anybody he likes, can't he?" retorted Tubby Muffin independently. "If I have any check from you, Smythe, I'll whack you."

"Will you, by gad?" said Adolphus.

"Yes, I will!" roared Tubby truculently. "I'm going to have discipline in this school, I can tell you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gad!" said Adolphus. "That fat idiot is too funny to live! Look here, you kids, the Head's sent me for Carthew. He's in Carthew's study now waitin' for him. He looks waxy."

"Phew!"

"Better let him clear!" said Mornington.

"Rot!" exclaimed Tubby. "I've only given him about twenty! You're not counting, Jimmy Silver! You'd better be careful, if you don't want some of the same. I'm going to give him a thousand!"

"But the Head——" said Lovell.

"Let the Head wait!"

"Good old Tubby!" grinned Mornington. "Isn't he swelling? Mind you don't burst, like the giddy frog in the fable, fatty!"

"Shut up!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-woop! Help!" came in frantic tones from Carthew. "You young villains! Help! Yooooop! Help!"

"The Head will hear this!" said Smythe, with a scared look.

Tubby Muffin sported.

"Let him hear!" he answered. "The Head's no right to interfere with the

captain of the school executing his duty."

Flynn put an excited face into the study doorway.

"Cave! The Head's coming!" he gasped.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Hold him!" shouted Tubby Muffin, as the juniors crowded off Carthew. "Keep him pinned! I haven't finished yet. He's got to have a thousand——"

"You fat idiot! The Head——"

"Bother the Head!"

"Look here——"

"Hold Carthew. I tell you!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Do you hear? Aren't I captain? I order you!"

His new dignity had evidently got into Tubby Muffin's head with an intoxicating effect. But, captain as he was, his order was not obeyed. The juniors released Carthew as Dr. Chisholm's step and the rustle of his gown were heard in the passage outside.

The prefect sat up dazedly, howling with pain, as the Head appeared in the doorway—mufesic.

Dr. Chisholm gazed at the scene speechlessly.

The juniors outside the study had fled, but there were nine or ten inside the room, and they were cornered. They showed a remarkably unanimous desire to avoid meeting the Head's eyes.

All excepting Tubby Muffin. That egregious youth was quite "beyond himself," so to speak; "swank" had mounted to his head like new wine. He stood, cane in hand, and confronted the Head, the juniors spellbound at his audacity. But Tubby was not aware that he was being audacious. He was acting with proper dignity as captain of the school, that was all!

"What—what——" The Head found his voice at last. "What does this scene of ruffianism mean?"

"Come in, sir!" said Tubby Muffin cheerily.

"What?"

"You're welcome to witness Carthew's punishment, sir," said Muffin, with dignity. "I have been compelled to give

Carthew of the Sixth a rather severe licking, sir."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Insubordination, sir," explained Tubby, as the Head blinked at him, speechless again. "Carthew was wanting in proper respect to the captain of the school. He actually laid hands on me—me, sir, the captain of Rockwood. I've had to give him a rather severe warning."

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from Carthew, in tones of deep anguish.

"Muffin!" thundered the Head.

"Yes, sir?"

"You—you have dared to assault a prefect——"

"Not at all, sir! I've caned him."

"Caned him—caned a prefect—you, a junior in the Fourth Form!"

"Captain of Rockwood, sir," said Tubby Muffin respectfully but firmly. "The captain of the school has authority over the prefects, sir."

"Boy!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Muffin, I—I think you must be out of your senses. Give me that cane."

"Are you going to cane Carthew, sir?"

"No!" thundered the Head. "I am going to cane you, Muffin."

Tubby jumped.

"C-c-c-cane me!" he stammered.

"Yes, decidedly. Hold out your hand!"

Tubby Muffin blinked at him.

"B-b-but, sir," he stammered, "the—the captain of the school can't be caned, sir! It's—it's against all the rules! Nobody ever heard of the captain of Rockwood being caned! Oh, no, sir!"

"You utterly absurd boy——"

"Excuse me, sir, that isn't the way to speak to the captain of the school."

"What?"

"It's liable to cause insubordination among the fags, sir," said Tubby Muffin.

"Captain of the school expects to be supported by the Head, sir. It's always been the rule."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

"How dare you laugh at the absurdities of this ridiculous boy! Muffin, give me that cane at once, and hold out your hand!"

"But, I—I say, sir——"

Tubby Muffin broke off in dismay, as the Head jerked the cane from his hand and took him by the collar. The cane rang upon Tubby's plump person, and Tubby's yells resounded far and wide.

Carthew staggered to his feet, and looked on, gasping. Tubby Muffin wriggled in anguish under the infliction.

He had woke up, as it were, and descended with a rush from his exalted position as captain of the school, and he was once more a lag of the Fourth, yelling under an unusually severe licking!

It was a painful awakening for the new captain of Rookwood!

"Yow-ow-ow! Yow-wow-wow!" howled the hapless captain of the school. "Oh, Ah! Ow! Stop! Yoop! Yah! Phew! Oh, crikey!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on in stony silence. They had rescued Tubby from Carthew's grasp, but they could not rescue him from the Head. The captain of Rookwood had to take care of himself when he came into conflict with the headmaster, and he did not seem quite equal to the task.

"There!" exclaimed the Head. "Now, Muffin, I trust that will be a warning to you, you utterly absurd boy!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Carthew, kindly come with me."

"Yes, sir," gasped Carthew.

He was wriggling painfully as he followed the Head from the study. He had been well licked before the Head arrived, and that was some solace to the juniors. Tubby Muffin was beyond solace, however, for the present. He was rocking with woe and anguish.

"Wow-wow-wow!" he moaned. "Oh, dear! Ow-yow! Is that the way to treat the captain of the—yow-ow!—school? Oh, dear! The Head never missed Bulkeley—yow-ow-ow! You fellows ought to have stopped him—

woop! I—I say, what's a captain of the school to do, you fellows, if the Head goes on whipping him just as if he's a—yow-ow-ow!—lag?"

But there was no answer possible to that question. Jimmy Silver & Co. really didn't know what it was proper for a captain of the school to do under such circumstances, and Tubby Muffin was left to work out the problem for himself. But the general opinion of the juniors was that Tubby's days as captain of Rookwood were numbered.

And they were!

That evening a new notice appeared on the board in the Head's hand, and it was read with keen curiosity by crowds of Rookwood fellows. The notice was brief, but to the point. It stated that Mark Carthew of the Sixth Form had been appointed captain of the school by authority of the headmaster, and it was signed by Dr. Chisholm.

"Appointed captain of the school, without an election!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath. "That's rather thick."

"Unconstitutional!" said Lovell.

"Cheek!" said Mornington.

"The Head can't do it!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"But he's done it, by gad!" remarked Smythe of the Shell.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he said. "The Head's overridden all our rights of election, and appointed a captain of the school! We refuse to recognise any such captain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We refuse to acknowledge Carthew as captain of Rookwood, and any fellow who does acknowledge him will be sent to Coventry——"

"Bravo!"

There was a roar of assent. Carthew of the Sixth had reached the goal of his ambition, but it did not look as if he would find the captaincy a bed of roses!

CHAPTER 35.

The New Captain!

"RATS!!!!"

That expressive word, in large capital letters, emphasised by three big notes of exclamation, stared Carthew of the Sixth in the face.

It was daubed in white paint on the dark oak of his study door.

As Mark Carthew came up the Sixth-Form passage, with his nose in the air and rather a strut in his walk, that inscription on his study door dawned upon him.

Carthew of the Sixth had been feeling very pleased with himself. Nobody else at Rookwood was pleased with him; but that did not matter to Carthew. He had reached the goal of his ambition at last—he was head prefect and captain of Rookwood School.

True, Rookwood did not want him. He had been imposed upon the school as captain by the autocratic will of the Head, in defiance of the rights of election and all the traditions of Rookwood. Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth Form had announced that they still regarded "old Bulkeley" as captain of the school, and didn't intend to take any notice of Carthew. But the new captain did not heed the attitude of the Fourth, even if he was aware of it.

The whole of the Sixth gave the new captain the "marble eye," but even that did not mar Carthew's satisfaction. He hoped that they would come round in time; but even if they didn't, he was still captain of Rookwood!

So his look was lofty and his face wore a smile as he lounged along the corridor, feeling a truly great man in his own eyes. And then that daubed inscription on his study door struck him.

Carthew stopped and stared at it. Evidently it was a message from rebellious spirits in the Lower School. Who wanted Carthew to understand what they thought of his captaincy.

The head prefect looked round with a glittering eye.

But there was no junior in sight of the captain, and only two seniors—Bulkeley, late captain, and Neville, his chum. Carthew then called to them:

"You fellows seen this?"

Neville looked round, and then, without answering, turned his back on Carthew. But George Bulkeley called back:

"What is it, Carthew?"

"The foolery on my door!" shouted Carthew.

Bulkeley came a step or two along the passage and looked at the inscription. Then he smiled.

"I hadn't noticed it before," he said.

"You don't know who did it?"

"Naturally, I don't."

"Perhaps you wouldn't tell me if you did!" growled Carthew.

"Probably not," assented Bulkeley, unmoved. "As I am not a prefect now it is not my business to keep an eye on the juniors. I suppose it is the work of some junior."

"I'll skin him!"

Bulkeley turned away. Carthew eyed him angrily. Although he was captain now, and Bulkeley had fallen from his high estate, he still felt the old awe of the former captain of Rookwood. But that feeling only led Carthew to assert himself all the more.

"Look here, Bulkeley!" he rapped out.

"Well?"

"I want the fag found who daubed that on my door!"

"You had better find him, then."

"I leave that to you," said Carthew. "I believe you know that I am head prefect now. You will take your directions from me."

"Nothing of the kind, Carthew!"

"Look here—"

"I do not think you will find anyone to take your orders," said Bulkeley. "Even the fags will refuse to do so, I think. The fact is, Carthew, you have put yourself into a false position. You know very well that the

Head has no right to appoint a captain of the school, and the fellows will not acknowledge a captain appointed without an election. I, for one, certainly shall not!"

And with that Bulkeley rejoined Neville, and the chums of the Sixth walked away, without another glance at Carthew.

The latter scowled blackly after them. His first attempt at the exercise of authority had not been much of a success.

He scowled again at the door on his door. The paint was still damp. Carthew shouted for a fag.

"Fag!"

His voice echoed along the corridor, but only the echo answered him.

Certainly some of the juniors must have heard him, but if so they did not take the trouble to reply or to come.

"Fag!" roared Carthew.

Still no reply.

Carthew strode away furiously towards the big staircase. On the staircase four juniors were chatting—Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome, of the Classical Fourth. Carthew looked up at them.

"Fag!" he shouted.

The Fistical Four went on chatting, as if afflicted with deafness.

"Silver!" yelled Carthew.

Then Jimmy glanced down.

"Hallo, old top!" he said.

It was the first time on record that a captain of Rookwood had been addressed as "old top" by a junior in the Fourth Form. But it was also the first time that a fellow like Carthew had been captain of the school.

"You look rather excited, little one!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a grin.

Carthew gasped.

"I want a fag!" he howled. "Come down at once, Silver!"

"Eh?"

"Come to my study at once!"

"What?"

"Will you come at once?"

"Which?"

Carthew's face was a study in itself as Jimmy replied with that series of interrogations.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

"You—you—you—" gasped Carthew. "Do you know you're talking to a prefect, Silver?"

"The prefects are on strike, aren't they?" smiled Jimmy Silver. "If you're not backing up the rest, Carthew, you're a blackleg! Blacklegs don't count."

"You—you—" stuttered Carthew.

"Run away and play!" suggested Raby.

That was too much for Carthew. He charged up the stairs at the Fistical Four.

He expected them to break into flight, and to smite them as they fled. But they didn't. They lined up across the stairs and waited for him.

"Come on, old nut!" said Jimmy Silver. "Collar him, you chaps, and bump him—hard!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Newcome.

Carthew halted.

"You—you dare!" he panted.

"Come on and see!" cooed Jimmy Silver.

But Carthew did not come on and see; he could see without coming on. He was looking for a fag, not for a scrap with four sturdy juniors on the staircase, in which, as he knew, there would be no aid for him from the other seniors.

With a black and furious look he turned and descended the stairs again, and a chortle from the Fistical Four followed him.

They had won the first round in their tussle with the new captain of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 37.

(Not All Lavender!)

MARK CARTHEW entered his study with all the jaunty satisfaction gone out of his manner.

Already it had dawned upon his

mind that his new and lofty position as captain of the school was not destined to be a bed of roses.

The fact was, that a captain of Rookwood could not hold the position, and exert due authority, without the support of the rest of the Sixth, and the respect of the school generally. And Carthew possessed neither the one nor the other.

He had the Head's support, and that was all. That was a great deal; but it was certain that he could not venture to drag the Head into every trifling dispute. At that rate Dr. Chisholm was likely to get tired of his newly appointed captain even sooner than the school.

Carthew took a duster and rubbed the paint off his study door, and then closed it with a slam. He was about to pitch the duster into a corner when his eyes fell on the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. He stared, and gritted his teeth. Across the glass was chalked in large letters:

"RATS!"

Breathing hard, the new captain of Rookwood rubbed out the chalk letters.

His fire was out, and he wanted his tea. But he hesitated to call a fag. He was doubtful whether even one of the Third or Second would obey his call.

There was a sound of footsteps outside his door.

They stopped.

Carthew expected a knock, or to see the door open. Neither happened. He stared at the door, wondering why anyone should have stopped outside.

After a few moments he stepped to the door and dragged it open.

"Oh!" came a startled exclamation.

Teddy Grace—otherwise Putty of the Fourth—stood there, with a brush in one hand and a small can of paint in the other. On the door there were three large capital letters: "R A T

Putty of the Fourth had not had time to add the "S" before Carthew opened the door.

The junior jumped back as Carthew's furious glance fell on him.

"So it was you!" shouted Carthew.

"Oh!" gasped Putty.

"I—I'll smash you!"

Carthew rushed out of the study, and Putty of the Fourth promptly fled. The prefect's hand dropped on his shoulder at the end of the passage, and Putty uttered a yell.

"Rescue!"

From somewhere five or six juniors appeared with a rush, and Carthew was seized in as many pairs of hands and dragged away from Teddy Grace.

Bump!

The bully of the Sixth was spinning along the floor.

He sat up in a dazed state.

Footsteps died away round the nearest corner. Teddy Grace and his rescuers had vanished.

"Ow!" gasped Carthew. "Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jones major and Lonsdale of the Sixth were looking out of a study near at hand—and laughing!

As Sixth-Formers, it was really their duty to lend the captain of Rookwood their aid against rebellious fags. But apparently nothing was farther from their thoughts. They roared with laughter.

Carthew gave them a furious look as he staggered to his feet.

"You rotters!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why didn't you help me?" shrieked Carthew.

"Help yourself, my boy!" grinned Jones major. "I've never seen a captain of Rookwood handled like that before. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're backing up the fags against the captain of the school!" hissed Carthew.

"They don't seem to need much backing up!" chuckled Lonsdale. "The fact is, Carthew, you've bitten off more than you can chew, old scout! You'll never be captain of Rookwood. Chuck it up!"

"Br-r-r!"

"If you give it up the Head will very likely come round and give Bulkeley his old place back," said Jones major. "Do the decent thing, Carthew!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Carthew tramped back to his study and slammed the door—still adorned with three capital letters.

Something whizzed in at his study window and dropped on the floor at his feet. In astonishment he stooped to pick it up.

It was a square of cardboard, and it bore the familiar word:

"RATS!"

Carthew hurled it into the grate and rushed to the window. Three or four grinning juniors were in the dusk outside.

They did not flee, as they might have been expected to do after such an outrage upon the lofty dignity of a captain of the school. They stood where they were, and grinned at Carthew.

"Mornington!" shouted Carthew.

"Hallo, cocky!"

"Take two hundred lines!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Take two hundred lines, Rawson!"

"Rats!"

"Take five hundred lines, Conroy!"

"When will you have them?" asked Conroy. "This year, next year, now, or never?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young rascals——"

"Rats!"

"I shall report this to the Head"

"Rats!"

Carthew slammed his window.

CHAPTER 25.

The Head's Ultimatum!

THE next day, after lessons, Jimmy Silver looked into Neville's study, in the Sixth, with a rather peculiar expression on his face.

"Message for you, Neville," he said. Neville looked round—and Jones major and Scott, who were with him, looked round also.

"Well, Silver?"

"From the Head!" said Jimmy.

"Oh!" said Neville, becoming grave. "Well, what is it?"

"Dr. Chisholm told me to tell you," said Jimmy Silver. "He's coming to the prefects' room to speak to you, and he wants all the prefects of Rookwood present—except Bulkeley."

"There are no prefects at Rookwood excepting Carthew," remarked Scott. "You'd better take your message to Carthew, young 'un."

"Well, that's what the Head said," answered Jimmy.

And he left the study.

Neville and his companions looked at one another.

"I—I suppose we'd better go," Neville remarked. "The Head is rather a trial, but we're bound to treat him with respect. We haven't had a word from him since we all resigned in support of old Bulkeley. This looks as if he's coming round."

"He ought to have summoned us through Carthew, as Carthew is captain," remarked Lonsdale.

"Well, the present state of affairs can't last for ever. It's time the Head saw reason. Who ever heard of a school without prefects?" said Jones major. "I'll cut over to the Modern side and tell Knowles and the rest."

"Do!" said Neville.

The late prefects of Rookwood were glad, upon the whole, to receive that summons to a meeting with the Head.

They hoped that it was a sign that Dr. Chisholm was coming round to their point of view.

Sixth Form prefects formed a very important part of the administration of the school, and so long as they were out of office their work and responsibilities fell upon the masters—not at all to the satisfaction of the staff.

But awkward as the strike was for the Head and the staff, it was not

exactly agreeable for the prefects themselves. They had lost their powers and privileges.

All parties would have been glad to see the present state of affairs come to an end, but Bulkeley's supporters were determined not to give in. Unless Bulkeley was made head prefect again the rest of the august body intended to remain on strike. Even Knowles, Bulkeley's old rival on the Modern side, had lined up with the rest. If the thought had crossed his mind of taking personal advantage of the state of affairs, the scorn and odium poured upon Carthew was a warning to him.

One by one the Sixth-Formers who had held the rank of prefect dropped into the prefects' room in the School House, and there they awaited the arrival of the Head.

Some of them looked a little uneasy as the rustle of a gown was heard without.

Dr. Chisholm was an awe-inspiring old gentleman, and it was not easy to stand up in opposition to him.

Frampton and Catesby moved a little to screen themselves behind the other fellows as the Head entered.

But the rest faced him firmly enough. They felt that they were in the right, and that encouraged them.

Dr. Chisholm's brow was very stern. He greeted the assembled Sixth-Formers with the curtest of nods.

"I am glad to see you all here," he said, though there was not much gladness in his look or tone.

"All except Bulkeley, sir," said Neville.

The Head frowned.

"Bulkeley is not a prefect," he said.

"Neither are we, then, sir."

"I accepted your resignations," said Dr. Chisholm. "I supposed, however, that in a short time you would return to a sense of duty. One of your number, I am pleased to say, has done so."

Carthew smirked.

"One of our number, sir," said

Neville, "has acted in a way that the rest of us regard with contempt."

There was a murmur of applause. The Sixth-Formers had not expected so easy-going a fellow as Neville to speak up so bluntly to the headmaster. And the Head's deepening frown indicated that he had not expected it, either.

"I did not ask your opinion on that point, Neville," he said tartly. "I repeat that Carthew has acted well and dutifully in returning to his proper allegiance. I expect the same of the rest of you."

Silence.

"The present state of affairs cannot continue. While you are neglecting your duties——"

"Really, sir——"

"Do not interrupt me, Neville. While you are neglecting your duties, they fall upon others to perform. This cannot continue. I have, therefore, come to speak to you, and to offer to reinstate you all in your former position. I am willing to overlook your disrespectful act in resigning in a body."

There was a pause.

"Does that include Bulkeley, sir?" asked Neville, at last.

"Certainly not."

"Oh!"

"Bulkeley was dismissed from his position for good reasons. You know the reasons. That matter is closed."

"But, sir——"

"I can listen to nothing further on that subject, Neville. My decision was not taken hastily, and it is impossible for me to reconsider it."

"Very well, sir."

"May I take it, then, that you accept my offer?" inquired the Head, looking round at the serious faces of the prefects.

"No, sir!" answered Neville. "We acted in support of Bulkeley. Unless he is reinstated we do not desire to be reinstated."

Dr. Chisholm closed his lips tightly.

"I hope that you speak only for yourself, Neville," he said.

"He speaks for all of us, sir," said Lonsdale.

"Certainly!" said Knowles.

"Very well," said the Head. "I have given you this opportunity of receding from the absurd and disrespectful position you have taken up. You decline. I shall now take other measures. Other prefects will be appointed in your places."

"Not from the Sixth Form, sir," said Neville quietly. "No member of the Sixth will become a prefect until Bulkeley is reinstated. We are all agreed on that. Only Carthew is bad enough

"Silence! If the Sixth refuse, undutifully, to act as prefects, I shall have no resource but to appoint prefects from another Form."

"The Fifth!" exclaimed Neville.

"Precisely so."

There was a grim silence in the room. "I am still prepared to bear you say that you are ready to return to your duty!" said the Head.

No answer.

"I will give you," said Dr. Chisholm. "all this hour to-morrow. If you have not by that time applied to me for reinstatement, I shall proceed to appoint prefects from the Fifth Form in your places. That is my last word."

With that, Dr. Chisholm turned and rustled out of the room.

He left a rather dismayed silence behind him.

Mark Carthew broke in:

"You fellows had better give in," he remarked. "You can't keep this up."

"Shut up!" snapped Neville.

"Where will the Sixth be—with the Fifth-Formers swanking over them as prefects?" said Carthew. "It won't do, and you know it! It's not good enough."

"It's rather thick, I must say," muttered Frampton.

"Better toe the line while you've got the chance!" urged Carthew.

"And acknowledge you as captain of Rookwood—what?" asked Neville.

"Of course!"

"Bosh! You're no more captain of Rookwood than Tubby Muffin is! Get out of this!" growled Neville. "We want to consult, and we don't want a spy present."

"Get out yourself!" retorted Carthew. "This is the prefects' room, and I'm the only prefect at Rookwood at present. You've no right here at all, unless you accept the Head's offer."

Neville's eyes gleamed.

"I've told you to get out!" he said.

"And I've told you I won't!"

"Then I'll jolly soon make you!" exclaimed Neville.

He advanced upon Carthew.

The new Captain of Rookwood backed away towards the door. Once more he had found his authority break in his hands.

"I'm not going to scrap like a fag," he said loftily. "If you touch me, Neville, I shall report you to the Head."

"Report and be hanged!" said Neville.

He shoved Carthew out at the doorway; and the captain of Rookwood did not resist. He certainly was not looking for a "scrap" with Neville—whatever his reasons might have been!

Neville slammed the door after him.

After Carthew's departure there was a long and anxious consultation among the former prefects. But the decision was to "carry on"—there was to be no surrender. And if the Head waited in the expectation of repentant prefects visiting him, he waited in vain.

CHAPTER IX.

Carrying the War into Africa!

"IT'S up to us!"

Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, made that remark in the end study.

There was a gathering in that famous study—quite a representative gathering of the Fourth Form.

The Physical Four were there, and Conroy, Pons, and Van Ryn, the Colonials, and Morningson and Errol

and Teddy Grace. Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle, of the Modern side, were there also—for once on the best of terms with their Classical rivals. It was, as both parties agreed, a time for the lion to lie down with the lamb: House rows could stand over till the common enemy had been dealt with—Carthew of the Sixth being the common enemy.

"Right! on the wicked, Jimmy," agreed Tommy Dodd. "It's up to us. And we're going to solve the giddy problem."

"We are—we is!" said Arthur Lovell. "What's the programme, though? Are we going to beat Carthew in oil?"

"Something lingering, with boiling oil in it—what?" grinned Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Be serious, please," said Jimmy Silver. "This is a serious matter. Rookwood is going to the dogs."

"Hear, hear!"

"Full steam ahead for the merry low-wow!" agreed Mornington.

"What's going to be done?"

"Carthew is!" said Raby.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"The Head isn't a bad sort," said Jimmy Silver considerably. "It was owing to Bulkeley passing Raby a bit too hard that he sacked him from the captaincy. The Head meant well. He went too far. The fact is, the Head is a bit of a mule."

"More than a bit," remarked Conroy.

"Now, we can't exactly back up against the Head," said Jimmy Silver.

"It's rather bad form—"

"And might lead to lickings," remarked Van Ryn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind that. Carthew is our game. He's appointed captain of Rookwood, and he's got to be disappointed."

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"My idea is to lead him a dog's life till he gets out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Nobody will support him," said Jimmy Silver. "The Sixth turn their backs on him; the Fifth sneer at him to his face. Even the kids in the Third turn up a cheery deaf ear when he howls for a tag. I saw Wegg of the Third walk off right under his nose today."

"Good old Wegg!"

"Morny's cousin, in the Second, refused to tag for him—didn't he, Morny?"

"He did!" grinned Mornington. "And Carthew didn't pitch him into him, as I came along with a cricket-bat in time."

"He's reported several fellows to the Head," went on Jimmy. "Some of us have been caned—"

"We have!" said Lovell, rubbing his hands.

"But we can stand that—"

"I'm!"

"Carthew can't keep it up. He took me in to the Head this afternoon," said Jimmy Silver. "The old bird looked very rattly. He caned me, but after I was gone Carthew stayed to be jawed. I don't know what the Head said, but I can guess. He doesn't want fags marched into his study to be caned every ten minutes."

"Ha, ha!"

"Hitherto—" continued Jimmy.

"That's a good word!" said Lovell admiringly. "Go it, Jimmy!"

"Hitherto," repeated Jimmy Silver, "we've just cheeked Carthew, and made it a point to disobey all his orders. He's no more captain of Rookwood than he's Emperor of China, as a matter of fact. But he's still clinging to the name, though he can't have the game, and standing in Bulkeley's way. We've got to take active measures now."

"Hear, hear!"

"Like merry old Scipio, we're going to carry the war into Africa," said Jimmy Silver. "Having declared war on Carthew, we've got to take the offensive and go over the top."

"Bravo."

"We're going to lend him a dog's life till he resigns, or until the Head gets fed-up and sacks him. We don't care which. Now, Carthew's gone out—I watched him from the window. I suggest getting his study ready for him when he comes in—"

"Fagging for him?" exclaimed Newcome.

"Yes—in a way. We're going to rag the study."

"Phew! Rag the prefect's study!" said Raby.

"Yes—when Carthew's the prefect. That's what I mean by carrying the war into Africa. In this case Carthew's study is Carthage, and we're the merry Romans. Gentlemen of the Fourth, follow your leader!"

"Oh, we're game!" exclaimed Mornington.

"Hurrah!"

Jimmy Silver threw open the door of the end study and led the way. The crowded meeting poured out after him, and followed him downstairs.

Three or four more juniors joined up on the way, as the news of the expedition spread.

There were fifteen or more in the party when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived in the sacred quarters of the Sixth Form.

Jones major met them in the passage.

"What the thump do you want here?" he demanded.

"Calling on Carthew," answered Jimmy Silver.

"He's out."

"I know. That's why we're calling on him."

There was a chortle from the army of juniors.

Jones major looked at them very doubtfully.

"If this is a rag—" he began.

"You've hit it."

"Well, look here—"

"Sorry, old man, but we've no time to waste," answered Jimmy Silver politely.

"What!" roared the Sixth-Former.

"You must allow me to point out that you're not a prefect, and you've no right to interfere, Jones major," said the captain of the Fourth, with great politeness, but still more firmness. "We're on the war-path, and we mean business. See?"

"That's how it is, old chap," said Jones minor, who was in the crowd. "Let's get along, Bert!"

Jones major, with a very curious expression on his face, backed out of the way. After all, it was none of his business, as he was not a prefect any longer.

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched on triumphantly to Carthew's study.

That apartment was empty—but it was soon swarming.

There was not really much room for fifteen or sixteen fellows in the study, but they found room.

They swarmed all over it.

The "rag" was soon going strong.

Such proceedings in the study of a captain of Rookwood were simply unheard of. They were heard of now for the first time.

Jimmy Silver started with the table, which was up-ended into the fender. Ashes and cinders were dragged from the grate and scattered far and wide. The carpet was dragged up and hung in festoons over the table-legs, further adorned with a pile of chairs and pictures from the walls.

Meanwhile, Putty, who had brought his paint and brush, was adorning the walls and the glass and the windows with inscriptions, such as "Rats!" "Blackleg!" "Outsider!" till the whole study reeked with complimentary messages to Carthew of the Sixth.

A quarter of an hour sufficed to make quite a startling change in Mark Carthew's quarters.

Fellows strolled along the passage to look at the juniors at work, and walked away chuckling. Nobody seemed to think it was his duty to interfere. The ragers were very careful not to make noise enough to bring masters on the

scene. And there were no prefects to take a hand in the proceedings.

The only fellow who came along and showed a disposition to chip in was Hansom of the Fifth—rather a lofty youth. But Hansom's first expostulation was answered with a roar of defiance:

"Get out!"

"Yah!"

"No Fifth-Formers wanted!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, you cheeky fags——" roared the captain of the Fifth.

That was all Hansom had time to say.

There was a rush of the raggers, and Hansom went spinning out of the study with a dab of paint on his nose, a fist in his eye, and three or four cushions crashing after him. He sprawled in the passage, where he made a good target for several portable articles belonging to Carthew. Hansom picked himself up and ran for it—a sadder and wiser Fifth-Former.

Then Jimmy Silver & Co. finished their work—conscientiously and thoroughly. By the time they had finished, Carthew's study looked as if a horde of Prussians had been let loose in it.

Jimmy Silver surveyed the havoc with a satisfied eye.

"I think that will do," he remarked.

"I should say it would!" gasped Lovell. "I'm blessed if I know how Carthew will ever get this to rights again!"

"That's his funeral," remarked Conroy. "Hallo! We've forgotten the clock! Better put the ink in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Their work well done, the raggers marched off in triumph.

Carthew's study, in an extraordinary state, awaited his return. And the raggers, satisfied as they were with their handiwork, could not help wondering what would come of it—and some of them rubbed their hands in anticipation.

CHAPTER 20. Going Through It!

"SILVER!"

Hansom of the Fifth looked into the end study. He found the Fourth-Form finishing their tea in that apartment.

"Hallo, old gun!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Trot in! We don't often have the Fifth to tea; and there's still the tail of a sardine——"

Hansom snorted. Evidently he had not come to tea, and was not to be tempted by the remains of the sardine.

"The Head——" he began.

"No—the tail!" said Jimmy Silver innocently.

"I tell you," roared Hansom, while the Fourth-Formers chorled, "the Head——"

"And I tell you, the tail——"

"The Head wants you!" yelled Hansom.

"Oh! You're alluding to the Head of Rookwood? I was talking about the tail of the sardine."

"You'd better go, the lot of you!" snorted Hansom.

And he turned and strode away in lofty wrath.

Lovell rubbed his hands.

"Looks like trouble for little us!" he remarked.

"It do—it does!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "Carthew's reported us, of course. How did he guess we had a hand in wrecking his study?"

"How, indeed!" grinned Newcome. "Even Carthew's brain was equal to that. I should say."

"And the Head's sent Hansom to tell us!" remarked Ruby. "There's a rumour going round that the Head is going to make some of the Fifth into prefects. It looks as if Hansom is getting ready for the job."

"Let me catch him prefecting!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I—I say, we'd better go. Rather bad form to keep the Head waiting."

"Ahem! We'd better go!"

There was really no doubt upon that.

point. The Fiscal Four agreed that they had better go; and they went.

"Trouble?" asked Mornington, as he met the chums of the Fourth in the passage, heading for the stairs with rather serious faces.

"The Head's sent for us," answered Jimmy.

"About rugging Carthew?"

"I suppose so."

"Then you're not going alone!" said Mornington decidedly. "We are all in it, and we'll all come!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"No," he answered. "No good the whole crowd getting licked; it may discourage the chaps. Besides, it mayn't be that affair at all. You stay where you are."

And the Fiscal Four went on to the Head's study.

They found Mark Carthew with the Head. The captain of Rockwood was pale with rage; and even the Head's presence could hardly restrain him when Jimmy Silver & Co. entered. The effect of the rag upon Carthew had been like that of a red rag on a bull!

Dr. Chisholm's face was grim and stern.

"Silver!" he rapped out. "Carthew's study has been, he tells me, wrecked during his absence this afternoon."

"Indeed, sir," said Jimmy.

"He suspects you of being concerned in the affair."

"Does he, sir?"

"Kindly tell me at once, Silver, whether you had a hand in such lawless proceedings!" exclaimed the Head.

Jimmy was silent.

"Do you hear me, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then answer me at once!"

"Of course it was Silver, sir!" burst out Carthew. "No other junior at Rockwood would have the nerve——"

"Let Silver speak, please. I am waiting for your answer, Silver. Were you concerned in the outrage in Carthew's study?"

"I was there, sir."

"He was the ringleader!" exclaimed Carthew.

"You cannot possibly know that, as you were not present, Carthew," said the Head, rather sharply. "Silver, did you take the lead in the proceedings?"

"Yes, sir."

"We were all in it!" exclaimed Lovell. "Jimmy did no more than the rest of us—less, in fact."

"All who were concerned in the affair will be severely punished!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm. "Such a thing is too serious for a caning. I shall——"

Tap!

The door opened, and Mornington of the Fourth marched into the study. He was followed by his chum Erroll and the Colonial Co., and the three Tommies, and Putty, and several other juniors.

Dr. Chisholm gazed in astonishment at the army of fags that had suddenly invaded his quarters.

"Bless my soul! What does this mean?" he ejaculated.

"We're all in it, sir," said Mornington cheerfully. "We're all down on Carthew, sir, for being a blackleg——"

"Mornington! How dare you!" thundered the Head.

"And we all took a hand, sir," said Mornington coolly. "If Jimmy's going through it, it's only fair for us to take our share!"

"We were all equally to blame, sir, if anyone was to blame," said Erroll, in his quiet way.

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head.

He gave Carthew a look that was not exactly pleasant. Evidently he did not expect his new captain and head prefect to "land" him with fifteen juniors to cane at once. He dismissed the idea of flogging from his mind; fifteen floggings was rather too large an order.

He rose and took up his cane.

"As you were all concerned in the outrage, I shall punish you all," he said. "You first, Silver!"

Swish, swish, swish!

For a good ten minutes there was a sound of swishing in the Head's study.

It was accompanied by other sounds—of woe and suffering.

Carthew of the Sixth looked on with glittering eyes. He was enjoying the scene—the only fellow there who did! There was no enjoyment for the hapless ruggers.

Dr. Chisholm looked a little fatigued when he had finished with the cane. He had put in some rather hard exercise, and he was not an athlete.

He pointed to the door, and the unhappy victims filed out with suppressed moans and mumbles. In the passage they looked at one another dolorously.

"This is what comes of carrying the giddy war into Africa!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "Ow! Wow! Ye gods! My hat! Wow!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Oh, crickey!"

"Might have been worse!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "It was going to be a flogging, if you hadn't come in with your crowd. Morry! Yow-ow! Keep smiling! Yoop!"

"Oh, dear!"

The ruggers wandered away disconsolately. They were still keen on the war with Carthew; but for the present their keenness was damped.

Carthew was not exactly enjoying himself now, in the Head's study. As soon as the door had closed on the last of the juniors Dr. Chisholm turned to him with a very severe brow.

"This is not what I expected of you, Carthew," he said. "In appointing you captain of the school, I anticipated, of course, that you would exert the usual authority over the juniors. A dozen times, at least, you have brought cases before me which would naturally be settled by the head prefect. My time is of value, Carthew——"

"I—I've done my best, sir——" stammered Carthew.

"You certainly led me to suppose that you would be able to do better than this. It is most unpleasant for me to be put to the task of caving fifteen boys on a single occasion."

"They refuse to be caved by me——"

"They did not refuse to be caved by Bulkeley, when he was head prefect," said Dr. Chisholm. "I was seeking a better captain of the school, not a worse one, Carthew. Such a scene as this must not be repeated. You must find some way of making yourself respected in the school, or it will be quite useless for you to retain the captaincy. You see that, of course."

Carthew rambled something indistinctly.

How he was to make himself respected in the school was a problem far beyond his ability to solve. He could only have done it by "playing the game"—and the first step would have been to resign the captaincy he had "barged" by deserting his comrades of the Sixth. The Head, in fact, was just a little unreasonable; but he was annoyed and troubled by the wholesale execution that had taken place in his study. He felt that it did not accord with the fitness of things, and perhaps it was natural that he should lay the blame upon Carthew, instead upon his own error of judgment in selecting that youth as captain of Rookwood.

"Kindly bear in mind what I have said, Carthew!" added the Head tartly. "Such a scene as this must not recur. You may go, Carthew!"

And Carthew went, leaving Dr. Chisholm shaking his head very seriously.

The captain of Rookwood was in need of a fag to clean up his study—in fact of a good many fags. But he shouted for a fag in vain. He took his ashplant and started for the junior quarters, but he stopped, and turned back. He knew that there would be resistance, and he could not venture to make more complaints and reports to the Head—yet, at all events.

The hapless captain of the school had to clear up the wreck himself, and it kept him busy for quite a long time. Other Sixth-Formers came along to glance in at him and smile.

Carthew's temper was at boiling-point all that evening.

But he had to control it, and con-

sume his own smoke, as it were. It was dawning upon his mind that the captaincy of the school was no sinecure; and he was beginning to doubt very seriously whether he had been so very clever, after all, in "begging" Bulkeley's place.

CHAPTER 31.

The Last Straw!

"HIS gone out!" Tubby Muffin came up to the Fourth Form passage with that news after lessons the next day.

Tubby had been on the watch, and he had seen the stately figure of Dr. Chisholm crossing the quadrangle to the gates.

"He's gone!" announced Tubby; and there was a buzz of voices at once in the Fourth Form passage.

"This is where we begin!" said Lovell.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"You'll get into an awful row!" remarked Townsend.

"Aren't you coming, Towny?"

"No fear!"

"Yah! Funks!" roared Lovell.

"Oh, we don't want Towny!" said Jimmy Silver. "Half a dozen would be enough to handle Carthew. Funks aren't wanted, anyway."

"Plenty of us, and no mistake!" said Mornington. "We'll get along to the Head's study, and Tubby can take the message to Carthew. He won't be suspicious of Tubby."

"I'm your man!" said Tubby Muffin at once. "I don't mind taking a message. What am I to say?"

"Simply tell Carthew he's wanted in the Head's study," answered Jimmy Silver.

"But the Head's gone out!"

"Carthew's wanted there all the same. We want him."

"Oh, I see!" grinned Tubby.

And the fat Classical rolled away on his errand. Jimmy Silver & Co. repaired to the Head's study. That sacred apartment was usually trodden with

fear and trembling by juniors, but the rebellious fags of Rookwood were making very free with it now. Jimmy Silver's latest scheme seemed to some of the Fourth rather the limit of prudence; but he found plenty of followers.

The juniors had a shrewd suspicion that the Head was far from satisfied with his new captain, and that he was tired of the incessant troubles that had followed Carthew's appointment. Jimmy's idea was to make him "sunder," as he expressed it.

While nine or ten of the Fourth were ensconcing themselves in the Head's study Tubby Muffin rolled away to deliver the message to Carthew. He found the new captain of Rookwood in his study with a gloomy brow. Carthew had had his tea in Hall, his bag, with the general support of the Lower School, having gone on strike. Carthew, certainly, could have gone on "strike" in another way—with his asphalt—but he had had enough of rousing hornets' nests of enraged fags about his ears.

He was, in fact, a hopeless failure as captain of the school, and he was no longer in a mood to look for trouble.

He scowled at the fat face of Tubby Muffin as the Palstaff of the Fourth looked in.

"You're wanted in the Head's study, Carthew!" said Tubby Muffin; and he disappeared before the prefect could ask him questions.

Carthew growled under his breath as he rose to obey the summons. He was not aware that the Head had gone out, and he wondered what he was wanted for. He little guessed.

A few minutes later he was tapping at the door of the Head's study. As he was not told to come in he tapped again, and opened the door.

Then he stared.

Dr. Chisholm was not there, but nine members of the Fourth were there in a state of breathless excitement.

Carthew stood in the doorway and blinked at them.

"What——" he began.

"Collar him!"

There was a rush.

Carthew jumped back into the passage in alarm, but the Platonic Four rushed him down, and he was seized outside the doorway. The startled prefect struck out furiously and Lovell yelled as he caught the blow and spun over on the floor. But the rest of the juniors swarmed to the aid of the Co., and Carthew, in the grasp of many hands, was swept into the study.

He sprawled on the Head's carpet, with three or four knees planted on him to keep him there. Putty of the Fourth shoved a duster into his mouth as he opened it to yell, and Carthew's yell died away in a suffocated gurgle.

Arthur Edward Lovell, with his handkerchief to his nose, followed his comrades in and closed the door. Lovell's nose was the only casualty.

"Jump on him!" gasped Lovell. "Groogh! Scalp him! Ow! Look at my nose! Give him lip!"

"Gerronocogh!" came from the captain of Rookwood.

"Hold him!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I've got the rope!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew struggled desperately. But he was helpless in so many hands.

Jimmy Silver whipped out a coil of cord, and proceeded to bind the senior's wrists together, and then his ankles. Meanwhile, Teddy Grace secured the duster in his mouth by binding twine round it and round Carthew's head. It was fortunate for the Rookwood captain that he had his nose to breathe through.

"Up with him!" grinned Mornington.

"Heave-ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew was swung up against the Head's desk. There, Jimmy Silver proceeded with the rest of the rope. Carthew was secured in an upright position to the desk, facing the door.

The expression on his face was extraordinary.

"Now, where's the ink?"

• Carthew gurgled wildly as the ink was

applied to his face. In a few minutes he looked like a Christy minstrel. The juniors chuckled spasmodically as they regarded him.

"I think that will do!" said Jimmy.

"I rather think so!" gasped Lovell. "What on earth will the Head say?"

"Goodness knows!"

"It will be rather a surprise packet for him," remarked Mornington. "It ought to show him that Carthew is no good as captain of Rookwood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. streamed out of the Head's study, closing the door carefully after them.

The captain of Rookwood was left to face the Head when he returned.

Carthew's eyes glittered. He made frantic attempts to get rid of the gag, to yell for help and get released before Dr. Chisholm could come back. But Putty had done his work too well, and the duster silenced Carthew's voice effectually. He gave it up at last, and waited.

The sunset changed to dusk, and the dusk deepened into night.

Carthew still waited.

His feelings while he waited were the reverse of enviable. What the Head would say and do when he found him there he could hardly guess. Certainly he would be very angry with the ragers. But what was he likely to think of a captain of Rookwood who was treated like this by the fags?

The schemer of the Sixth felt that the game was up. Whatever severe measures the Head took with the daring ragers he was not likely to sustain Carthew any longer in a position for which he was so obviously unfitted. The game was up—and, indeed, just then Carthew would willingly have given the captaincy, and a great deal besides, to escape from his position.

But there was no escape for him.

The silence was broken at last by footsteps in the corridor.

Carthew shivered.

It was the Head returning.

Dr. Chisholm pushed open the study

door, felt for the light-switch, and turned it on. He came into the study, for a moment unaware that anyone was there.

Then Carthew dawned on him, so to speak.

The Head stopped suddenly, as if transfixed. His gaze fastened in a fascinated way on the blackened face of the figure tied to his desk. For the moment he did not recognise Carthew.

"What—wha-a-at—" he stammered.

"Grooogh!"

"What—what is it—what—who—"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Goodness gracious!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

With a brow of thunder the Head strode towards the unhappy Sixth-Former and dragged away the duster from his mouth.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed in great wrath. "Is it—is it—is it Carthew?"

"Ow! Yes!"

"And what does this mean?"

"Oh! Wow!"

"What does this mean, Carthew?" thundered the Head.

"Ow—wow! Wasn't my fault! Fags—Jimmy Silver! I've been ragged! Ow! Yow—"

Carthew's voice died away. The look on the Head's face rendered him dumb.

Five minutes later Carthew of the Sixth limped away from the Head's study, free at last, but feeling as if life were not worth living as captain of Rookwood School.

That evening there were carings in the Fourth—carings numerous and painful. But Jimmy Silver & Co., as they rubbed their hands, had good news to solace them.

For they had been successful.

The news ran like wildfire through Rookwood that Carthew of the Sixth had resigned the captaincy!

Whether he had resigned entirely of his own accord, or under pressure from the Head, the fellows did not know—or

care. The fact remained that he had resigned, and was no longer captain of the school.

And Jimmy Silver & Co., as they rubbed their aching palms, rejoiced, and rejoiced still more heartily when the pain had worn off. They had led the new captain of Rookwood a "dog's life," and this was the result; and after the licking had worn off a little there was a greater celebration in the end study over the fall of Carthew of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 32.

The New Prefects!

"IT'S up!"

Tubby Muffin rushed into the junior Common-room at Rookwood with that breathless announcement.

There was a buzz of excitement at once.

"Up!" repeated Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form. "Are you sure, Tubby?"

"I've seen it! I saw the Head putting it up—the Head himself!" said Tubby Muffin. "I had my eye on him, you know. I saw him come out of his study with the paper in his hand, after jawing to Hanson of the Fifth. And he pinned it up on the board himself! Fancy that!" gasped Tubby.

"Let's look!" said Lovell.

"Come on!"

There was a rush from the Common-room at once.

The announcement Tubby Muffin had made was not unexpected. But it caused great excitement when it came. A buzzing crowd gathered round the school notice board.

A new paper was there and undoubtedly it was in Dr. Chisholm's "list." The juniors craned over one another's shoulders to read it.

Comments were loud and emphatic.

"Rot!"

"Check!"

"We're not taking any!"

"No fear!"

"Fifth Form prefects! My hat! What is Rookwood coming to?"

"Boat!"

Which certainly was an unusual manner of commenting upon a notice in the Head's list. But affairs at Rookwood school just then were in a rather unusual state.

Bulkeley and Neville of the Sixth Form came along, and the juniors made way for them to look at the notice. Bulkeley, late captain of Rookwood, had all eyes upon him as he read it. But his thoughtful face expressed little. If the juniors expected to read his opinion in his looks they were disappointed.

Neville shrugged his shoulders. Then the two great men of the Sixth walked on, without passing any audible comment.

The buzz broke out with renewed emphasis when they were gone.

"Fifth Form prefects!" repeated Arthur Edward Lovell. "Does the Head think we're going to stand it?"

"Let 'em begin prefecting, that's all!" said Raby, with a warlike look.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hanson, Lumsden Talboys, Muggins, Classical prefects," read out Jimmy Silver; "Myers and Lister, Modern prefects. Half a dozen of 'em—and not one of 'em any good."

"Rotten!"

"It's the Head's list right enough; he's signed it," said Mornington. "But it won't wash!"

"We're not taking any, at least!"

Jimmy Silver mounted on a stool to address the indignant gathering of juniors.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth——" he began.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"Gentlemen, this is the last straw. This is the limit!"

"It is—is are!" said Newcome.

"Hear, hear!"

"Not content with pushing old Bulkeley out of his job as captain and head prefect, the Head thinks he is going to

plant Fifth Form bounders on us as prefects! It won't wash!"

"Never!"

"What are the Fifth, anyway?" demanded Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"Nothing!"

"Nobody!"

"Exactly! Nothing and nobody, or even less!" said Jimmy eloquently.

"We're backing up old Bulkeley——"

"Bravo!"

"Bulkeley isn't a prefect now," remarked Smythe of the Shell. "And all the Sixth Form prefects have resigned in sympathy. Well, then, the Head's bound to stick in Fifth-Formers. There must be prefects! If the prefects go on strike, what can they expect?"

"Shut up, Smythe!"

"Bump him!"

"Scalp him!"

Adolphus Smythe's views were evidently unpopular. There was a yell from Adolphus as he was bundled away and went rolling along the floor; and the voice of Smythe of the Shell was heard no more.

"Go it, Jimmy!" shouted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver "went" it!

"We're backing up Bulkeley! The Head's down on him for next to nothing. The other prefects were right in going on strike to support him. I don't think much of the Sixth as a rule——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But in this matter they're right. If they didn't support old Bulkeley we'd be down on them——"

"Which would be awful for them, of course," observed Townsend, the dandy of the Fourth, in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"Shut up, Towney!"

"Kick him out! Go it, Jimmy!"

"We'd be down on them," resumed Jimmy Silver. "All the Sixth Form prefects are standing by Bulkeley, excepting Carthew—and Carthew's a blackleg and a worm——"

The orator was interrupted by deep groans for Carthew of the Sixth. When the groaning died away he went on:

"Even Knowles, who's a bit of a worm himself, is backing up Bulkeley. So are we, to the last shot in the locker——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now the Head has appointed prefects from the Fifth Form," said Jimmy Silver warmly. "Who ever heard of Fifth Form prefects in the history of Rookwood? It can't be did!"

"Never!"

"I put it to this meeting, that we don't take any notice of any Fifth Form prefects. They can play prefects to one another if they like. But they can't come the prefect over us."

"Hear, hear!"

"And I suggest a deputation to the Head to remonstrate——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm willing to lead the deputation," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm ready to be spokesman. And I'll put it to the Head plain——"

"Cave!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Here comes the Head!"

Tubby set the example of flight.

There was a rustle, and an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown dawned upon the noisy meeting.

"What——" began the Head.

A clatter of hurrying feet interrupted him. Almost in the twinkling of an eye the meeting was gone.

Only Jimmy Silver remained, elevated upon the stool. He blinked at the Head, and the Head stared at him.

"What is all this uproar about, Silver?" rapped out Dr. Chisholm sharply.

"This—this uproar?" stammered Jimmy.

"Yes. I heard you in my study—most disorderly shouting!" exclaimed the Head. "What does it mean?"

"I—I—— We——"

"You appear to be the cause of it, Silver. Get down from that stool at once!"

Jimmy Silver stepped down. It did not occur to him for the moment that now was an excellent opportunity for making his remonstrance to the Head, and putting it plainly to him. Somehow

such ideas were driven from his mind by the stern brow of the headmaster of Rookwood.

"You will kindly keep order," said the Head severely. "There has been too much laxity of late, owing to the prefects resigning their functions. Now that new prefects are appointed, the most complete discipline will be maintained. Remember that, Silver!"

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Any repetition of this uproar will be severely punished!" said the Head. "You may go, Silver!"

And Jimmy Silver went.

That opportunity of remonstrating with the Head and putting it to him plainly was lost for ever!

CHAPTER 32.

Members of the Fifth in All His Glory!

EDWARD HANSOM of the Fifth Form walked into the prefects' room at Rookwood with his hands in his pockets and a lofty smile upon his face.

Hansom of the Fifth was rather a lofty fellow at times; he had an excellent opinion of himself, and never took the trouble to conceal it. But at the present moment he was loftier than ever—in fact, he seemed like the gentleman of ancient times, who was like to strike the stars with his sublime head.

It was the first time in the history of Rookwood that prefects had been appointed from the Fifth Form. Always those great and important personages had been selected from the august ranks of the Sixth. And it was possible that his elevation had got into Hansom's head a little.

In the Fifth Form, at least, the Head's new idea seemed an excellent one—and Hansom endorsed it most heartily. He was, as he confided to his chums Lumden and Talboys, just the man the Head wanted—just the fellow to be a prefect, having, as it were, an eye like Mars to threaten and command.

Hitherto, the Fifth had been rather

inclined to support Bulkeley and the Sixth in the peculiar dispute that was dividing Rookwood. The "sacking" of Bulkeley from the captaincy had seemed to them, as to the rest of Rookwood, rather high-handed on the Head's part; and they had approved of the strike of the prefects in protest against it. But the Head's new "stunt," as the juniors called it, had brought the Fifth round, or most of them.

Hansom almost strutted as he walked into the prefects'-room.

That room was sacred, in normal times, to prefects of the Sixth Form—other members of the Sixth who were not prefects only entered it on sufferance. The Fifth had no right to set foot within its door; and as for juniors, they would have been scalped if they had entered its precincts, excepting on fagging duties.

Now Hansom walked into it as if it belonged to him—as, indeed, it did in virtue of his new rank.

Bulkeley and Neville were chatting by a window in the prefects'-room, Mark Carthew was in an armchair, and Lonsdale and Jones major were at the table. The former prefects still used the room, though they were on strike. And all of them *looked very expressively at Edward Hansom of the Fifth as he strolled loftily in.

Even Carthew looked rather grim—though he was against the rest of the Sixth, airs and graces on the part of a Fifth-Former did not please even Carthew.

Hansom was quite aware of the sudden grimness that had come over the faces of the Sixth-Formers. But he did not mind. He was a prefect now—and as one holding authority! He was, in fact, in authority over fellows who were not prefects, whether they were in the Sixth or the Second. And it was his intention to let that fact come into due prominence.

His visit to the prefects'-room, in fact, was to let the Sixth-Formers learn, at first hand, who was who and what was what!

"Oh! You fellows here—what?" remarked Hansom, reposing himself elegantly on a corner of the table and surveying the room.

There was no reply.

Bulkeley and Neville ostentatiously looked out of the window, so that their backs were turned to the Fifth-Former. Carthew grinned and Lonsdale stared. Jones major snorted. And that was all.

"I don't want to cause you an inconvenience, of course," went on Hansom undauntedly.

Another snort from Jones major.

"But this is the prefects'-room, you know," said Hansom a little more loudly.

Then Lonsdale ejaculated:

"What?"

"Prefects'-room, you know," explained Hansom. "I'm sure I don't want to put you out in any way, but as soon as you can make it convenient to vacate the premises——"

"What do you mean?" snapped Lonsdale.

"I mean what I say, dear boy."

"Don't call me dear boy, please!"

"As a prefect, Lonsdale, I shall call you anything I like."

"As a prefect! You a prefect!"

"I suppose you've seen the Head's notice."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here," said Hansom of the Fifth, his temper beginning to rise, "I'm a prefect, Lonsdale, and I want you to understand it! I'm going to be fair and considerate—if you'll let me. But I want it understood, first of all, that I'm a prefect, and I've got to be treated with respect!"

"Boosh!"

"Rubbish!" snorted Jones major.

Hansom raised his hand.

"Do you want me to give you lines?" he demanded.

"Lines!" roared Jones.

"Yes. As a prefect——"

"Lines!" said Lonsdale. "Lines—us! Us—lines! Are you off your silly rocker, you dummy?"

"If you call a prefect names, Lonsdale——"

"Folthead!"

"Look here——"

"Idiot!"

"Take five hundred lines, Lonsdale!" roared Hansom in great wrath.

"Fool!"

"Take a thousand lines!"

"Ass!"

Hansom breathed hard. He did not think it wise to make it two thousand lines; he had a misgiving that those lines would never be done, though ordered by a prefect.

Lonsdale turned his back on him.

The new prefect was rather at a loss. He had come there as a monarch of all he surveyed, so to speak, but it was evidently a limited monarchy that he enjoyed so far—very much limited.

But he could not very well retreat. It was a case of now or never.

"I'm sorry to turn you fellows out," said Hansom, after a very awkward pause. "But you are aware that the prefects-room is used only by prefects. You must clear. Not you, of course, Carthew; you're a prefect the same as I am——"

"Not quite the same as you are, I hope!" grunted Carthew.

Hansom did not heed that remark.

"You other fellows are to get out," he said. "I can't have outsiders in the prefects-room! Now then, get a move on!"

"Chuck him out, Bulkeley!" suggested Jones major.

But the late captain of Rookwood shook his head.

"Hansom is within his rights," he said. "The Head has chosen to make him a prefect, and this is the prefects-room. I shall not dispute the point."

And with that George Bulkeley walked out of the room. Neville, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

Hansom looked rather pleased. This was a real concession to his new dignity.

"Now, you others——" he said,

Lonsdale and Jones major exchanged a look.

Bulkeley's quiet sense of dignity in the affair and his feeling of what was due to the authority of the Head did not quite appeal to them. They were angry and restive.

It was true that they were on "strike," and were no longer prefects; but that did not incline them to take "check" from anybody in the Fifth.

"I'm waiting for you!" said Hansom.

"We won't keep you waiting!" said Lonsdale grimly.

"That's right! I can tell you I mean to—— Yaroooh! Wharrer you at?" roared Hansom in surprise and wrath as the two Sixth-Formers rushed upon him and collared him.

It was a superfluous question; he could really see what they were at.

Lonsdale and Jones major collared him without ceremony, and spun him towards the door.

"Leggo!" yelled Hansom.

"Out you go!" growled Jones.

"I—I—— Lend me a hand, Carthew—do you hear? Yow!" howled the Fifth-Former, struggling frantically.

Carthew only chuckled. Hansom had no aid to expect from his fellow-prefect.

He went whirling to the door in the grasp of the two powerful Sixth-Formers, and went spinning through the doorway.

Crash!

"Ow! Yaroooh! Ow!"

Hansom sprawled breathlessly in the passage.

Lonsdale and Jones major looked out at him grimly.

"Now come back again and play prefect!" said Lonsdale.

"Ow! Yow!"

Hansom did not come back to play prefect. He scrambled up and limped away to the Fifth Form quarters—to consult with his comrades.

The Fifth Form prefect had lost the first round. But the tussle was only beginning.

CHAPTER 24.

Jimmy Silver & Co. Take a Hand!

JIMMY SILVER chuckled.

"Here they come!"

In the corridor near the doorway of the prefects' room a little army of juniors had gathered.

The Fistical Four were there, and Mornington, and the three Tommies from the Modern side, and a dozen other fellows. They lined the walls with grinning faces to see the circus, as Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it.

The news of the dispute in the prefects' room had spread. It was known that Hansom had called a meeting of the prefects in his study, where a council of war was being held. As it was certain that the new body of prefects would never consent to leaving their official headquarters in the hands of their rivals, Jimmy Silver & Co. had assembled to see the "rumpus." The idea of a battle-royal between Fifth and Sixth was quite entertaining—to the juniors.

"Here they come! Order!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Down the corridor came the new prefects, with determined faces. Hansom was not alone now. With him came Lumsden, Talboys, and Muggins, prefects of the Classical Fifth; and Myers and Lester of the Modern side. Hansom's claim to the prefects' quarters having been disputed, the whole angry body were coming to take possession—evidently by force if no other means would serve.

Hansom had not cared to call in the authority of the Head. He was aware that Carthew had failed in his brief spell as captain of Rookwood, because he had called for the Head's support every time a difficulty cropped up, and had worried and tired Dr. Chisholm out. Besides, Hansom was ready to defend his rights himself. He had plenty of pluck and determination, whatever might be said of his intellectual powers.

He frowned loftily at the grinning juniors, as he found them gathered in numerous array in the corridor.

"Go it, Hansom!" came an encouraging voice from the fags.

"Stick up for your rights, old man!" chuckled Mornington. "We're going to wait outside and catch you as you drop."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hansom halted, and raised his hand. "You fags clear off!" he rapped out.

"Bow-wow!"

"Off with you!" roared Hansom.

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Yah!"

The replies of the fags were more emphatic than elegant; but there was no mistaking their meaning.

For a fellow who had an eye like Mars, to threaten and command, Hansom did not seem very well able to assert his authority. Possibly he was mistaken about his commanding qualities.

"Will you go?" he demanded angrily.

"No fear!"

"You know I'm a prefect——"

"Think again!" suggested Jimmy Silver. "We don't know it yet. We're never going to know it!"

"Bow-wow!"

Lumsden touched Hansom's arm.

"Don't get into a scrap with the fags now, old fellow!" he murmured. "We've got the Sixth to deal with now."

"That's all very well, but——"

"My dear chap, one lot at a time!" whispered Talboys.

"Oh, all right! Come on!"

Hansom realized that the advice of his chums was good. A row with the Fourth, at the same time as a tussle with the Sixth, was really looking too large an order.

He marched on, frowning, followed by a victorious chortle from the heroes of the Fourth.

The door of the prefects' room opened with a crash. Hansom marched in, with the Fifth Form prefects at his heels.

Only Lonsdale and Jones major were in the room now. They had no special business there, or desire to be there; but they remained to show the Fifth

that they would stay there if they liked. It was really not very dignified of the mighty Sixth to take such a line; but they were thinking more of their wrath than of their dignity just then.

Hansom & Co. crowded in.

"So you've come back!" growled Jones major.

"Outside!" said Hansom.

"Oh, clear off!"

"This is the prefects' room, and we're the prefects," said Hansom firmly. "We've come to take possession. Are you going?"

"No, you silly ass!"

"Then you'll be put out, sharp!"

Hansom waved his hand to his followers.

"Put them outside!" he said.

"You bet!" answered Lumsden.

"We're not going to stand any rot from the Sixth. I can tell you, Jones!"

"Hands off, you dummy!"

"Rot! Out you go!"

It was a most lamentable scene, considering the lofty position held in the school by both the Fifth and the Sixth, and the fact that both senior Forms were called upon to set an example to the juniors. But tempers were rising on all sides.

Hansom & Co. rushed to the attack; and as six fellows piled on them, the two Sixth-Formers possibly regretted the rather obstinate and unreasonable decision they had taken. But it was too late to retreat. They could not submit to being tossed out of the room like cheeky fags.

Lonsdale and Jones major put their hands up and hit out.

The odds were great; but both the late prefects were hefty men with their hands; and there was a struggle. Hansom rolled on the floor, feeling as if his chin was travelling through the back of his neck, as he caught Jones major's right. Lumsden collapsed on him as Lonsdale hit out with great vigour. But they jumped up again and rushed to the attack.

The six drove the two back—but not towards the door. Lonsdale and Jones

major were driven into the window recess, where they put up a gallant fight. Most noses in the room were damaged by that time; several of them streaming crimson.

But the odds told at last.

Lonsdale and Jones major were collared and dragged over in the grasp of the Fifth-Formers, and hustled, still resisting furiously, towards the doorway.

In the doorway was gathered a breathless crowd of juniors. Jimmy Silver & Co. had watched the struggle with wide-open eyes; it was an event unprecedented at Rookwood.

But as the two Sixth-Formers were dragged doorward, Jimmy's voice was heard.

"Rescue!" he shouted.

To tell the truth, the affair was not exactly Jimmy Silver's business. But he was up against Fifth Form prefects anyway; and the two victims were supporters of Bulkeley, the idol of Rookwood. That was enough for Jimmy Silver, and for his comrades.

He did not need to call twice. There was an excited rush of the juniors to the rescue of Jones major and Lonsdale.

"Mop 'em up!" roared Conroy.

"Down with the Fifth!"

"Rag 'em!"

"You fags clear off!" shrieked Hansom. "Hands off! I'll report you to the Head! ITI—ITI—ITI— Oh, my hat! Yoop!"

Hansom disappeared on the floor under half a dozen juniors. His comrades rushed to his aid, letting go the Sixth-Formers. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were in great force; and they drove the Fifth-Formers back by weight of numbers.

"Back up, Lonsdale!" called out Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "Back up, Jones! We'll help you chuck 'em out!"

"You cheeky fag!" exclaimed Lonsdale.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Get out of here at once!"

Jimmy Silver blinked at the Sixth-Former.

He hadn't expected black ingratitude like this!

But the bare idea of being mixed up in a rumour with the fags of the Fourth was too much for the lofty Sixth-Formers. They were not grateful—far from it. They were angry and indignant.

"Turn those fags out!" exclaimed Jones major.

"Why, you ungrateful rotter!" shouted Arthur Edward Lovell. "Haven't we just stopped them chucking you out?"

"Outside, I tell you!"

"Let's get out of this, for goodness' sake!" growled Lonsdale.

The two Sixth-Formers walked out of the room. They were more than fed-up with the whole affair.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "I like that! This is what we get for backing up the Sixth!"

"Blow the Sixth!" growled Lovell.

"Swanky ones!" muttered Raby.

"Turn those fags out!" roared Hansom.

The Fifth Form prefects rallied and charged. But the juniors were ready to meet them half-way. There was a wild scrapping in the prefects' room, in which the furniture was considerably damaged. In the midst of it the astonished face and spectacles of Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form, looked in.

"Bless my soul! What—what—what is—" stammered Mr. Bootles.

"Yarcoob!"

"Mop 'em up!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Cease this at once!" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "Silver—Lovell—Mornington—Dodd, be quiet at once! Leave this room at once! Do you hear me?"

"Oh, dear!"

"Bootles!"

"Yes—o—o—o, sir!"

Under Mr. Bootles' wrathful eye and appraised head the juniors crowded out of the prefects' room. Mr. Bootles followed them.

In the disputed apartment Hansom &

Co. remained, victorious. But as the Fifth Form prefects rubbed their noses and their eyes and gasped for breath, they were not feeling very victorious. That evening Hansom of the Fifth was seen with a dark circle round his right eye, growing darker and darker.

He was beginning his career as a Rookwood prefect with a black eye, which was certainly beginning it under a very severe disadvantage.

CHAPTER 25.

Let Us Meet

"LUMSDEN'S in charge!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

It was a day or two later, and a half-holiday. Cricket practice was the order of the day for the Fourth Form, and the prefect in charge of the junior practice that afternoon was Lumsden of the Fifth.

Since the affray in the prefects' room Hansom had avoided the public eye as much as possible, his own private eye being the reason. A prefect with a black eye was unheard-of at Rookwood, and Edward Hansom's eye had developed into a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—it was, as Lovell admiringly declared, a regular corker! Black eyes had sometimes been seen in Rookwood before, but never such a first-class, thorough-going specimen as Hansom's.

So far he had kept it from the Head's observation.

What the Head would say if he saw his new prefect with a black eye Hansom did not care to imagine.

Certainly it wasn't Hansom's fault; it was only his misfortune. But a prefect wasn't entitled to such misfortunes. It was certain that the Head would consider a discoloured eye quite out of place in a prefect, whatever the cause of it, and whether the recipient thereof was to blame or not.

Hansom dodged interviews with the Head during that day or two; he fell into a habit of scuttling round corners if the Head was sighted. He hoped

fervently that his eye would grow a little less conspicuous before he had to meet Dr. Chisholm face to face.

He had intended to take the Fourth at cricket practice himself, but his eye kept him in his study that afternoon, and Lumsden of the Fifth was the happy man. Lumsden was as determined as his leader to make the fags understand that he was in authority, all the more because of certain scornful and mocking glances from the Sixth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came down to Little Side with happy smiles. They were quite pleased to have a Fifth Form prefect in charge, which did not bode well for the prefect.

Lumsden really knew a good deal about cricket, being a great man in the Fifth Form eleven, and sometimes playing for the First Eleven. But the fags were not seeking cricket knowledge from Lumsden. They had come down more for ragging than for cricket, as the new prefect soon discovered.

"Give him some bowling, Jimmy!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. And Jimmy Silver nodded, with a smile.

Jimmy was the champion bowler of the Lower School, but his ball seemed quite unable to find the neighbourhood of the wicket now. Curiously enough it found the neighbourhood of Lumsden's legs, though the Fifth-Former was a good distance from the stumps.

Lumsden gave a howl as the leather clamped on him.

"What's that? Why, you silly young idiot, do you call that bowling?" he roared.

"Did it hit you, Lumsden?" asked Jimmy, with an air of mild surprise.

"Yes, you young ass!"

"Now, I wonder how that can have happened? Send that ball in, Putty." Teddy Grace sent the ball in.

He was supposed to be sending it in to the bowler, but somehow or the other it flew up and dropped gently on Lumsden's head.

Lumsden jumped.

"What on earth's that?" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well hit, Putty!"

As the ball rolled at his feet Lumsden understood. He had an asphalt under his arm, and he let it slide down into his hand, and made a rush at Putty of the Fourth.

Putty fled for his life.

"Stop!" yelled Lumsden.

He was gaining on the junior, when a bat came somehow in the way of his legs, and he rolled over.

There was a roar of laughter from the Fourth.

"Pin him!" shouted Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit on him, Tubby!"

Lumsden was struggling up, when five or six juniors collared him and downed him in the grass again. Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, sat on his shoulders.

Tubby's weight was no joke. Lumsden of the Fifth gave a gasp and collapsed.

"Gerroff!" he mumbled faintly.

"Stick to him, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All serene!" said Tubby cheerfully. "I'm sticking to him! You take care of his arms and legs."

"Gerroff!" shrieked the hapless prefect.

But Tubby sat tight.

Jimmy Silver jammed four stumps into the ground, deep. With some lengths of whipcord Lumsden's ankles and wrists were tied to the stumps. His nose was exploring the grass, and his voice came up in muffled but furious accents.

"Now we'll get some more cricket!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you lemme gerrup?" shrieked Lumsden.

"Not just yet, old fellow. You're all right there. Besides, we don't want to disturb Tubby."

"I'm all right!" said the fat Classical, settling down comfortably on the Fifth-Former's shoulders. "I'll sit here for a bit. Don't mind me."

"Yow-ow! Help!"

But there was no help for the unfortunate Fifth Form prefect.

With Tubby Muffin planted on his shoulders he was helpless to make any attempt to release himself, and he had to stay where he was.

The Fourth-Formers proceeded to play cricket.

They got through their practice quite well, without any assistance from Lumden, and without heeding the enraged howls that proceeded from the unhappy prefect of the Fifth.

Bulkeley and Neville, on their way to Big Side, passed within view of Lumden at last, and stopped to stare at the extraordinary scene.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Bulkeley.

Neville grinned.

"Looks like one of the Head's giddy new prefects," he said. "Come on."

"Dash it all, this won't do!" said Bulkeley. "I'd better chip in, I think."

"We're not prefects now, you know," remarked Neville.

"I think I'll chip in, all the same."

And the former captain of Rookwood walked on the junior field towards the unhappy Fifth-Former, spreadeagled under Tubby Muffin's weight. Tubby looked up at him with a grin.

"It's all right, Bulkeley," he said. "It's only a Fifth Form bouncer. He tried to come the prefect over us, you know."

"Get up!"

"Oh, I say—"

Jimmy Silver ran up.

"Roll off, Patty!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you do as Bulkeley tells you?"

"Bulkeley isn't a prefect now!" grunted Tubby Muffin. "Look here—yow-ow!—leggo my ear, Jimmy, yow beast—yow-ow! I'm getting off the beast, aren't I?"

And Tubby Muffin got off.

"Let Lumden loose at once, Silver!" said Bulkeley quietly.

"Right you are, Bulkeley," said Jimmy cheerily.

He released the Fifth-Former. Lumden sat up in the grass, gasping, his face crimson. Bulkeley walked on to rejoin Neville, with a slight smile on his face.

Lumden staggered to his feet.

"You cheeky young rollers!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll—"

"You'll travel!" said Jimmy Silver. "We've let you go because Bulkeley told us to. But we don't want any cheek from the Fifth! Travel off!"

"I—I—I—"

"Travel!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

And as the command was backed up by half a dozen lunging bats and stumps, Lumden of the Fifth decided to travel. And as he limped and gasped his way back to the School House he vowed silently but emphatically that he would never, never take the Fourth at cricket practice again. And he never did.

CHAPTER 22.

The High Hand!

"YOU'RE wanted, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver was coming in, with a bundle under his arm, when Talboys and Muggins of the Fifth appeared. Jimmy had been shopping for tea, and he was thinking of anything but Fifth Form prefects as he came in. Talboys and Muggins took both his arms at once, and walked him along before Jimmy quite knew what was happening.

"Here, let go!" exclaimed Jimmy indignantly. "What do you want?"

"You, my pippin!"

"The fellows are waiting for these things for tea in my study."

"Let 'em wait! Kim on!"

"I jolly well won't! I—"

"Yank him along!" said Talboys.

Jimmy was being hurried down the corridor to the prefects' room. The two seniors nearly lifted him off his feet as they rushed him on. Jimmy had time only for one shout.

Tubby Muffin was hanging about the

passage, and he blinked at the scene with wide-open eyes.

Then Jimmy was whirled into the prefects' room, and the door was slammed shut.

"Oh, my aunt!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin. "Fancy that!"

And the fat Classical rushed off to carry the news to the Fourth Form quarters.

Jimmy Silver, breathless and excited, was whirled into the middle of the room, bundle and all. There was an ominous crack from the bundle. It contained eggs among other things.

"Lock the door!" rapped out Hansom of the Fifth.

The Fifth Form prefects were all there. It was evidently a meeting in council of that august body.

Lumsden locked the door.

Jimmy Silver looked round him, rather apprehensively, at the six Fifth-Formers. He was quite at the mercy of the new prefects, and the locked door was between him and possible rescue.

"Look here, what's this game?" demanded Jimmy.

"Silence!" said Hansom.

"Oh, rats! Do you want another eye to match that one you've got?" asked Jimmy Silver undauntedly.

Hansom frowned majestically, though the majestic effect was somewhat marred by his black eye.

"You're brought here for punishment," he said.

"Look here, you cheeky cad——"

"Silence!" roared Hansom. "You've been picked out, Silver, as the ringleader of the fags. Discipline is going to be instituted. Since the Head made us prefects, you and the rest of the fags have been rebellious. You don't come to fag when called upon."

"No fear!" said Jimmy emphatically.

"You have even dared to rag a prefect on the cricket-field!"

"Not a real prefect!" said Jimmy cheerily. "Only one of your Fifth Form spoof prefects!"

The expressions on the faces of Han-

som & Co. were quite peculiar as Jimmy Silver expressed himself thus.

"You're only making matters worse for yourself, Silver!" growled Hansom.

"Bow-wow!"

"You're going to have a prefect's licking, as a warning to the other fags," explain Hansom.

"Only prefects can hand out a prefect's licking," said Jimmy.

"Well, we are prefects."

"Rats!"

"That's enough!" exclaimed Miggins angrily. "Collar the cheeky cad, and let him have it!"

"Yes, rather!"

Jimmy Silver jumped back as the Fifth-Formers closed on him, and swung up his parcel.

"Hands off, or——"

"Collar him!" shouted Hansom.

Crash! Biff! Squash!

The parcel smote Lumsden on the head and burst, and the eggs it contained burst at the same moment from the shock. There was a howl from Lumsden as broken eggs streamed down his face and over his hair.

"Grooogh! Ooooch! Ooooooch! Wow!"

"Nail him!"

Jimmy Silver had only time for that one doughty swipe. Then his arms were seized, and he was helpless in the grasp of the Fifth-Formers.

"Put him across a chair," said Hansom, taking up an ashplant. "I'm going to give him twenty of the best."

"Rescue!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Buck up, or we shall have a horde of fags here soon!" said Talboys.

"Don't open the door, Lumsden!"

"Grooogh! I'm going to get a wash! Grooooch!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Let us in!" came in a roar from the passage without, in the dulcet tones of Arthur Edward Lovell of the Fourth, and Lumsden's hand relinquished the lock just in time. There was a trampling of feet and a howl of excited voices outside.

"They've got Jimmy!" howled Tubby

Muffin. "They've got him in there! I saw him! They've got him!"

"Open this door!"

"It's locked!"

"Bust it in!"

Thump, thump! Kiek! Bang!

"Clear off, you fags!" shouted Hansom.

"Let us in!" howled Lovell.

"Buck up!" murmured Talboys. "There'll be a regular riot soon. The Head won't like this!"

"Hold him!" said Hansom.

Jimmy Silver was wriggling in the grasp of the Fifth Form prefects, but he wriggled in vain. Muggins and Myers held him down across a chair, and Hansom wielded the asphalt.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yoop! Help! Rescue!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Bang, bang! Crash!

To the accompaniment of a terrific din at the door the whacking of the asphalt continued, and Jimmy Silver wriggled and yelled as he received the prefect's licking.

Suddenly the din at the door ceased.

There was a rushing of footsteps, and then silence without.

"They've cleared off!" remarked Talboys.

But Talboys was mistaken. It was about a minute later that the two tall windows of the prefects' room looking on the quad were darkened by a crowd of heads. The room being on the ground floor, the windows were easy of access, and it was Mornington who had suggested that mode of ingress.

Whack, whack!

"Yoop!"

"Look out!" shouted Myers.

A window flew open with a crash, and Mornington of the Fourth tumbled in head first. The flower-bed under the window was sadly trampled, but the juniors were not thinking of the flowers just then. After Mornington came Arthur Edward Lovell, breathless and warlike.

"Keep them out!" shrieked Hansom.

Jimmy Silver had received only nine

or ten of the promised "twenty of the best." But there was no time to deliver the balance. The Fifth Form prefects rushed to defend the invaded window. They knew what to expect if a mob of juniors succeeded in swarming into the sacred precincts of the prefects' room. Since the last affray the Sixth had avoided that apartment with lofty dignity, but there was no lofty dignity about the Fourth!

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy Silver, as he rolled off the chair.

"We're coming!"

"Back up, Fourth!"

"Hurrah!"

Mornington was seized, and Lovell was seized. Raby and Newcome, who tumbled in next, were seized. But Conroy and Pons and Van Ryn came rolling in recklessly, and after them came Putty of the Fourth, and Rawson and Jones minor, and Oswald and Higgs and Tommy Dodd and Towle, and a swarm more. They came in like the tide.

The Fifth Form prefects were swept back from the window.

Jimmy Silver was in the midst of the fray. He had Hansom's head in chancery, Hansom's legs being in the possession of Lovell, and Hansom's voice being like unto that of the Bull of Bashan. As the Fourth-Formers streamed in the unhappy prefects were scattered far and wide, most of them on the floor.

"Hurrah for us!" roared Mornington. "Don't let them get away! Collar that duffer!"

Lunsden was grabbing at the key in the door when he was seized and dragged back.

"Sit on him!"

"Sit on the lot of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" panted Hansom, as he was sat upon by three or four juniors and squashed almost to pancake shape. "Yow-ow! Gerrup! Let me up, you young villains! I-I-I'll let you off, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy chuckled breathlessly.

"But I'm not letting you off, Hansom, old nut! You're jolly well going to have a prefect's licking yourself!"

And there was a roar of applause from the Fourth.

CHAPTER 37.

The Chapter Comes Down!

JIMMY SILVER was feeling rather painful. Hansom's strokes with the ashplant had been well laid on. But the tables were turned now, and Jimmy derived considerable comfort from the idea of reversing the process of the prefect's licking.

He took up the ashplant the captain of the Fifth had dropped, and took a businesslike grip on it.

"Put them over the chairs," he said.

"Hansom first!"

"What-ho!"

"Leggo, you young villains!" roared the Fifth Form prefect.

"Buck up, there! Never mind his yelling! I'm going to give him something to yell for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hansom struggled desperately. There was no doubt as to Jimmy Silver's intentions, and the humiliation of a licking at the hands of a junior was too terrible—if it could be helped. It did not seem, however, that it could be helped.

A prefect's licking had seemed to Hansom's mind exactly to meet the case—applied to Jimmy Silver. Applied to himself, it was an outrage too awful for words. But it was going to be applied.

Hansom was yanked across the chair where Jimmy Silver had lately been held, in the grasp of so many hands that it was impossible for the Fifth-Former to do more than wriggle.

"Keep clear!" said Jimmy.

The ashplant whizzed up. Hansom waited in horrid anticipation for it to come down. He did not have to wait long.

Whack!

"Yoop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Lay it on!" chortled Lovell.

"Stop it!" shrieked Hansom. "I'll report you—"

Whack!

"Ow! I'll—I'll smash you! I'll—"

Yaroo! Oh, crumbs!"

Whack, whack!

Jimmy Silver was warming to his work. Hansom wriggled and yelled in anguish. He had had no idea how painful such an infliction might be, but he was learning now.

Lovell was counting, and it was until he had counted a dozen that Jimmy Silver ceased to lay on the ashplant.

Then Hansom, gasping with anguish, was yanked aside, and Tailboys was stretched across the chair in his place. The dandy of the Fifth shuddered in dire apprehension.

"I—I say, Silver! I say—" he gasped.

Whack, whack!

"Yaroo! Stop it! Leave off! I—I say, I'll resign if you like!" shrieked Tailboys. "I—I don't want to be a prefect! I—I'll resign!"

"Resignation is needed at a moment like this!" chuckled Mornington. "Resign yourself to your fate, old bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Oh, by gad! Whooooop!"

"Muggins next!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

"Look here, you young swarper!" roared Paul Muggins. "I'll jolly well smash you! Don't you dare to lay a finger on me! I'll—"

"Put him on the chair!"

"I'll—I'll— Oh, crickey!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Knock!

"Hallo!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, as a loud sharp knock came at the door. "Who—who's that?"

A deep voice came from without.

"What is this disturbance? Admit me instantly!"

"Phew! The Head!"

Knock, knock!

The juniors looked at one another. In the excitement of the moment they had forgotten the Head.

"I—I suppose he must have heard the row!" stuttered Lovell.

"Unless he was stone-deaf!" grinned Mornington. "Hook it! The window—sharp! Hook it!"

"What-ho! Come on, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver.

He tossed away the ashplant, and there was a rush for the window. The juniors tumbled out pell-mell after one another.

The Fifth Form prefects did not attempt to stop their retreat. They were feeling too badly used to care for any more scuffling. The sharp knocking at the door continued.

"Admit me at once!" thundered the Head. "Are you there, Hansom—Lumsden? Open this door instantly!"

With a sickly look Hansom of the Fifth tottered to the door and unlocked it. The last of the juniors disappeared from the window as Hansom threw the door open.

Majestic in his wrath, the Head of Bookwood stalked into the prefects'-room.

The dusty, dishevelled Fifth-Formers blinked at him. Never had a sorrier crew met the Head's gaze. They did not look much like prefects. They looked, in fact, a good deal more like tramps. Most of them were mopping their noses. Some of them had their coats burst or buttonless. All were rumpled and dusty and gasping.

The Head looked them over with astonishment and wrath in his gaze. This was certainly not how he had expected his new set of prefects to look.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "You—you—Are these Fifth Form boys of Bookwood, or a set of hooligans?"

There was silence, broken only by painful gasping and snuffling. The unhappy prefects looked at the floor.

"Hansom!" thundered the Head.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"What is the matter with your eye?"

"Mum-mum-my eye, sir?"

"Yes, your eye, Hansom!"

"It—it—it's black, sir!" gasped Hansom.

"You have been fighting here!" exclaimed the Head in indignant scorn. "You, senior boys, whom I have appointed prefects, have been fighting—actually in the prefects'-room itself!"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Lumsden.

"Then how is it that I find you in this state?"

"The—the juniors——"

"What! Do you mean to tell me that juniors have treated you like this—that you have allowed juniors to treat you like this?" thundered the Head.

"We—we couldn't help——"

"We—we—we——"

"Absurd! Ridiculous! Unheard of! Pooh!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "I appointed you as prefects to keep order in the school! I find you with black eyes——"

"Only—only one black eye, sir!" gasped Hansom.

"I find you with black eyes!" thundered the Head, incensed, as he always was by anything that looked like contradiction. "I find you with black eyes and swollen noses——"

"Ow! Oh, dear!"

"With black eyes and swollen noses, engaged in fighting with juniors!" exclaimed the head. "Juniors! Upon my word! Is that what you regard as conduct suitable for prefects of Bookwood?"

"We—we—we——"

"I—I—I——"

"Enough! Your appointment is cancelled!" exclaimed the Head. "Not only have you proved yourselves useless in the capacity of prefects, but by your ridiculous conduct you have brought contempt upon that rank. Your appointment as prefects is cancelled! Evidently I was mistaken in you! You need say no more, Hansom. Your appointment is cancelled! Ridiculous!"

And with that the incensed headmaster swept out of the prefects'-room.

Hanson & Co. looked at one another with sickly looks.

"I—I'm jolly glad!" gasped Hanson. "I'm fed-up with it, anyhow. That's all toffee to be a prefect, that I can see! Br-r-r-r-r!"

And Hanson's followers agreed with him. Certainly it had not been all toffee in their case. They limped away from the prefects'-room for a much-needed wash and brush-up, sadder if not wiser Fifth-Formers!

That evening fags were wanted to put the prefects'-room to rights. Jimmy Silver & Co. did that duty cheerfully—in fact, merrily. They had seen the last of the Fifth Form prefects.

CHAPTER 35.

A Case of Snobs Without Fire!

"YOW-OW-OW!"

Thus Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical came along the Fourth-Form passage, squeezing his fat hands and uttering sounds of woe.

"Shurrup!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Wow-wow!"

The Fistical Four were chatting in the passage—on the subject of cricket.

The august body of prefects were still "on strike," maintaining a lofty and dignified attitude of passive resistance, till the Head should come round. But the Head showed no sign whatever of coming round.

Meanwhile, it was certain that the school suffered from the state of affairs.

Fags slid down the banisters, and kicked up shindies in the passages, almost as they liked.

Masters could not be everywhere at once. A great many duties had fallen to the prefects; now they fell to the masters, and a good many of them were left undone.

Carthew was "cut" by the rest of the Sixth, and very considerably "cheeked" by the juniors.

The Fistical Four, indeed, were at

open war with Carthew, who, prefect as he was, found it rather too difficult to deal with Jimmy Silver & Co., having no support from the other seniors. Even fags of the Third would take the liberty of yelling opprobrious epithets through Carthew's door and balking.

Tubby Muffin squeezed his fat hands and blinked at the Fistical Four reproachfully, evidently in expectation of sympathy.

"I've had a fearful licking, Jimmy!" he said pathetically.

"I dare say you wanted one," answered Jimmy.

"It was that beast Carthew!" groaned Tubby Muffin. "I simply went to his study to take him lines—he'd given me lines, the beast! He was smoking—"

"Nice prefect!" grunted Lovell.

"I suppose he was waxy at a fellow catching him smoking!" groaned Tubby. "He pitched into me, Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"Dash it all, that's too thick!" he said. "Carthew's a beastly bully; and he's no right to smoke. As a prefect he ought to be setting us a good example."

"Catch him!" snorted Lovell.

"Sure he was smoking, Tubby?" asked Jimmy.

"He had a cigarette in his mouth, and there was no end of smoke in the study," said Tubby. "I saw fag-ends in the grate, too. The beast smokes no end. Yow-ow! And he pitched into me just because I saw him."

"Smoke in the study!" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes, lots!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes glimmered.

"What have you got in your noddle, fathead?" asked Raby. "A rag on Carthew?"

"Well, not exactly a rag," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "If there's smoke in Carthew's study, it looks as if the study must be on fire."

"Tubby says he was smoking."

"But we have a right to suppose that a prefect of the Sixth wouldn't smoke," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Taking it for granted that Carthew is incapable of breaking the rule—as we've a right to do—it stands to reason that his study must be on fire if it's full of smoke."

"What the thump——"

"If Carthew's study is on fire, we're bound to roll up at once, and put out the conflagration," said Jimmy Silver. "Carthew is a beast, but I suppose you wouldn't leave even Carthew to be burned to death."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Carthew's study being on fire it is——"

"But it isn't!" shrieked Lovell.

"It must be, if it's full of smoke, unless Carthew's smoking, and we've a right to refuse even to suspect him of smoking. Therefore, his study is on fire. Luckily, there are the fire-buckets at the end of the Sixth-Form passage, all ready in case of fire. Come on!"

"Where?" howled Lovell.

"To Carthew's study."

"What for?"

"To put out the fire."

"But there isn't a fire."

"My dear man, we're going to put it out, whether there is or not. If Carthew is not satisfied, he can explain to the Head how there came to be smoke in his study."

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "I see!"

"Time you did, old chap."

"He, he, he!" cackled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded downstairs to the Sixth-Form quarters, to act as an amateur fire-brigade. As Jimmy declared, they had a right to suppose that Carthew's study was on fire, if it was thick with smoke. They were going to exercise that right.

"But—but there'll be a row if we swamp Carthew's study with water," murmured Raby.

"Rot! It's our duty. Carthew won't complain to the Head."

"But the other prefects——"

"There aren't any other prefects now."

"My hat! I forgot that!" grinned Raby.

"There's some advantage in having no prefects," observed Jimmy Silver. "The Sixth can't interfere with us. This way!"

The Fistical Four scudded along the Sixth-Form passage to the row of little red fire-buckets. There was a tap round the corner, and the chums of the Fourth were filling the buckets when Lonsdale and Jones major of the Sixth came along.

"Chuck that!" said Lonsdale. "None of your fag tricks here!"

Jimmy Silver looked at him.

"May I respectfully inquire who you are?" he asked politely.

Lonsdale reddened. He had forgotten for the moment that a prefect on strike was no longer an authoritative person.

"Look here——" he began.

"Don't you chip in!" said Jimmy Silver chidingly. "I should be sorry to chuck a bucket of water over you Lonsdale!"

"What?" roared the Sixth-Former.

"But I jolly well will, if you chip in! Besides, these buckets are put here to be used in case of fire. Do you want Carthew to be burned to death?"

"Is Carthew's study on fire?" exclaimed Jones major in astonishment.

"There's smoke in it, anyhow, so it must be. How could there be smoke in it if it isn't on fire?"

The two Sixth-Formers grinned and walked on. It was not their business to interfere; they were not prefects.

Four juniors, each bearing a bucket of water, moved along to Carthew's study.

Jimmy Silver turned the handle and threw the door open suddenly.

There was an angry exclamation within the study. Mark Carthew was there, sprawling in his armchair, with

his feet on the table and a cigarette between his lips.

The bully of the Sixth was taking his ease in his study, and he had certainly smoked a good many cigarettes, for the atmosphere of the study was quite hazy.

"What—" he began angrily.

"Go it!" shouted Jimmy.

Carthew leaped to his feet as the Physical Four rushed in with swamping fire-buckets.

Swoosh!

Yooooop!"

A flood of water deluged the Sixth-Former from head to foot. It swamped upon him from four buckets at once, choking him and blinding him. Carthew staggered back, spluttering wildly, and sat down in the fender with a crash.

"Yurrrrgggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall we get some more water, Carthew?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"Gurrrrggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew scrambled to his feet. He gouged the water from his eyes, and stood panting, dripping and furious.

"You—you—you young scoundrels! I'll report this to the Head! I'll have you flogged! I'll—"

"Have us flogged for putting out the fire in your study!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in pained surprise.

"You young rascal, there's no fire here, and you know it—"

"Where does the smoke come from, then?"

"Wha-a-t!"

Carthew had seized his ashplant, and was striding towards the juniors, when Jimmy asked that question. He stopped suddenly.

"The—the smoke!" he repeated.

"Don't you notice the smoke?" asked Jimmy Silver sweetly. "It's quite thick, Carthew."

"You—you—you—"

"Bulkeley!" Jimmy called to the late captain of Rookwood, who was

coming along to his study. "Will you look in here, Bulkeley?"

"What's the matter?"

"We want you as a witness," said Jimmy. "We've been putting out a fire in Carthew's study—"

"What?"

"And he's going to complain to the Head. We want a witness that the study really was full of smoke."

Bulkeley sniffed the smoke and frowned.

"That's tobacco smoke, you young ass," he said.

"Impossible!" said Jimmy. "A prefect of Rookwood wouldn't smoke in his study. He wouldn't dare to tell the Head so, anyhow. Come away, you fellows—the fire seems to be out. You needn't thank us, Carthew—you're quite welcome."

Carthew stood rooted to the floor, ashplant in hand. As the juniors were well aware, he dared not let the matter come before the Head. Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered away and hung up the fire-buckets. Bulkeley remained standing in the doorway of the study, looking at Carthew with a very expressive look.

"So you're smoking here?" he said.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Carthew. "Those young villains didn't think the study was on fire, and you know it."

"They know you can't take them before the Head, as you're breaking the rules of the school yourself," said Bulkeley contemptuously. "You've asked for this, Carthew, and it serves you right!"

"Oh, get out!"

"If I were still a prefect I should report you myself."

"Well, you're not!" sneered Carthew. "I'm a prefect, and you're not, Bulkeley, and you're under my orders. Get out of my study!"

Bulkeley clenched his hands for a moment; but he turned quietly and walked away. Carthew kicked the door shut savagely after him. And for a long time afterwards the

"blade" of the Sixth was busy with towels—what time he was murmuring anathemas, not loud and deep, upon the Fiscal Fear of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 35.

Carthew Leads In!

BEDTIME, my boys!" said Mr. Bootles mildly.

The master of the Fourth blinked into the Common-room. In the days of the prefects it had been a prefect's duty to shepherd the juniors to their dormitories; but that was one of the many duties that now fell to the staff.

The Classical Fourth obediently marched out, and little Mr. Bootles walked after them, with a sigh. Mr. Bootles did not like the stairs. Carthew of the Sixth was coming down-stairs, and he bestowed a dark scowl upon Jimmy Silver & Co.

Jimmy bestowed a sweet smile upon him in return.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath, but Jimmy's sweet smile certainly failed to have that effect. Carthew made a stride towards him.

"Line up!" murmured Jimmy.

Mr. Bootles blinked round.

"Dear me! Is anything the matter?" he asked. "What is it, Carthew?"

The bully of the Sixth mumbled something, and went on his way. He had to see lights out for the Third, being the only prefect on duty. Jimmy smiled again as Carthew departed. The "blackleg" prefect never got much change out of the end study, as Jimmy remarked complacently to Lovell.

The Classical Fourth turned in, and Mr. Bootles put out the light and retired to his study. The Third went to bed rather less quietly. Carthew was in a bad temper, and he cuffed Algy Silver of the Third—and Jimmy's cousin "buzzed" a pillow at him in return. Carthew's asplaat

came into play—and so did several pillows and bolsters, although Carthew was a prefect!

Carthew quitted the dormitory by no means victorious, followed by hoots and howls from the darkness.

The Sixth-Former went down to his study with a black brow. His rank of prefect was not much use to him when he was not treated with respect by anyone, and could only venture to "take it out" of fags who could not help themselves, like Tubby Muffin. The "strike" of the other prefects left him without support from the other seniors, and the juniors paid him little heed. Carthew attributed it chiefly to Jimmy Silver, and his feelings towards that cheery young gentleman were not pleasant.

He passed Bulkeley in the Sixth Form passage, and scowled at him; but Bulkeley did not give him a glance. Mark Carthew was a good deal of an outcast in his own Form now.

He went into his study and slammed the door savagely.

There he threw himself into his arm-chair and lighted a cigarette by way of solace.

Since Bulkeley's fall, Carthew had been a good deal more free and easy in this respect than of old. He had nothing to fear, as it was not likely that a master would drop into his study. His example was followed by the "dog-gish" youths among the juniors—such as Smythe & Co. of the Shell, and Towny and Toppy, Latreay and Peele and Gower, of the Fourth. Those amiable youths found life much more free and easy without any prefects "posin' around," as Adolphus Smythe expressed it.

Carthew took a pink paper from his pocket and began to scan it, with a corrugated brow. His little speculations on "gee-gees" had not been fortunate of late. He glanced occasionally at the clock over his mantelpiece. He was waiting.

Carthew had made up his mind that

Jimmy Silver & Co. needed a lesson; and as soon as the coast was quite clear, the prefect intended to visit them in the Fourth Form dormitory. It would be easy to explain afterwards that he had heard a disturbance there—Carthew not being a stickler for the truth. He intended to take a cane with him, and by the time he had finished with the cane, it was probable that Jimmy Silver & Co. would be sorry for themselves.

He crumpled the pink paper in his hand and threw it angrily upon the hearthrug. Then he smoked a couple more cigarettes, while the clock-hand crawled round the dial.

When it indicated ten o'clock, Carthew threw away a half-smoked cigarette and rose to his feet, picking up his ashplant.

He turned out the light and quitted the study, and went quietly towards the staircase.

The room remained in darkness, save for a tiny red glow—the still burning end of the cigarette. Carthew had not noticed where the cigarette had fallen, in his carelessness; but it had fallen on the crumpled paper, and the paper was dry and inflammable.

The tiny red glow did not go out; it was increasing as it scorched the edge of the paper, which began to glow, too.

It was an even chance whether the red ember died out or whether it burst into flame, and a draught from the door, which Carthew had left open, decided the matter.

There was a brighter glow in the darkened room as a little tongue of flame rose and flicked along the edge of the paper.

A few moments more and the paper was ablaze.

It flared up, and the fluffy rug on which it lay flared up, too, fanned by the draught from the corridor through the open doorway.

The flames licked round the armchair, and caught the table-cover. The study was full of dancing light and shadow now, and thickening with

smoke. Even then it was time for the growing fire to be stamped out, if Carthew had returned—but Carthew did not return. Little dreaming of what was happening in the study he had left, the bully of the Sixth had reached the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, and turned the handle of the door. He switched on the light and strode in, ashplant in hand.

Jimmy Silver started out of slumber and rubbed his eyes, startled by the light in the dormitory.

"What the thump—" began Jimmy drowsily.

Then he jumped as he saw Carthew striding towards his bed.

"Carthew! What—Yaroooooh!"

The ashplant came down on Jimmy Silver with a sounding whack. His yell rang through the dormitory, and awakened every other fellow there.

Jimmy rolled out of bed, but as he did so, Carthew grasped him by the back of the neck.

"Now, then, you young rascal!" said the Sixth-Former, between his teeth.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy.

Lovell was out of bed with a bound, grasping his pillow. Raby and Newcome were only a second after him, and Mornington was next. They rushed at Carthew, brandishing pillows and bolsters.

"Stand back!" exclaimed Carthew fiercely.

"Sock it to him!" yelled Mornington.

"Pillow him!" roared Lovell.

Carthew, attacked by half a dozen swiping pillows, defended himself with his cane, letting Jimmy Silver go. Jimmy grasped his pillow at once, and joined in the attack.

"Down him!" shouted Conroy.

"Stand back!" yelled Carthew furiously.

Once more the bully of the Sixth had succeeded in awakening a hornet's nest. Nearly all the Classical Fourth were out of bed now, and scrambling over one another to swipe him with pillow or bolster. By that time Mark Car-

they probably regretted that he had made the venture.

He made a rush for the door; but it was too late. A crowd of juniors were round him, and the swiping pillows sent him spinning to the floor.

"Hurrah! He's down!" gasped Lovell.

"Keep off! You young villains— Oh, my hat! Yow-wow!" howled Carthew, as the Fourth-Formers piled on him.

"Collar him!" panted Jimmy Silver. "We've got him!"

"Stretch him on a bed, and I'll give him his own asphalt!"

"Hurrah!"

Carthew—quite repentant now—struggled furiously, but in vain. In the grasp of a dozen hands, he was dragged to the nearest bed, and plumped upon it, face down. Then Jimmy wielded the asphalt.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver "went it" with vigour. Whack, whack, whack!

CHAPTER 40.

First

NEVILLE, old chap!" Bulkeley of the Sixth was leaning back in his chair, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep line in his brow. He had been silent for some time, and Neville, who had dropped in for a chat after prep, was silent, too. He looked up as Bulkeley spoke.

"Well, old fellow?"

"This won't do!" said Bulkeley.

"The prefects' strike, you mean?" Bulkeley nodded.

"It won't do!" he repeated. "It's a rotten state of affairs for Rookwood. I'm grateful, of course, for the fellows backing me up as they've done, but—I'd rather it came to an end. There must be a captain of the school, Neville—especially with the matches coming

on soon. The Head's down on me—and I was partly to blame, as I've admitted. Well, if the Head won't alter his mind—and he won't do—"

"Sooner or later—" began Neville.

"He won't, Neville. I'd rather not let it go on. I'm not keen on being captain of Rookwood; excepting that I think I can do pretty well for the school. But you—"

"I'm not bagging your job," said Neville decidedly. "You've suggested that before. Nothing doing."

"But it won't be bagging my job!" urged Bulkeley. "I'm out of it!"

"Not for good!"

"It looks as if it's for good. It's gone on a good time now. The discipline of the school is suffering—and it won't do, in many ways. Nobody in the Sixth, excepting Carthew, will put up as captain—and he's tried and failed, and was glad to chuck it up. The Head would consent to another election, if you put up, Neville—or Lonsdale, say, if you're determined. And

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—and I think the prefects ought to return to duty."

"And leave you in the lurch?" exclaimed Neville warmly.

"Well, I don't mind—in fact, I want them to. It's for the sake of the school," urged Bulkeley. "This can't go on!"

"It's jolly well going on till the Head sees reason!" Neville shook his head. "It's no good, Bulkeley—whether you like it or not, the Sixth are going to back you up to the last shot in the locker! The Head knows very well that he's made a mistake; but he won't admit it. Well, he will have to admit it sooner or later. That's settled!"

Bulkeley did not answer; but the line in his brow deepened.

He was worried and distressed by the state of affairs; all the more because it was on his account. It was hard for him to find fault with the loyalty of the fellows who were backing him up; but he wished deeply that they would let him be set aside, and let affairs at Hookwood take their normal course once more.

There was silence in the study again. Neville broke it. He had sniffed once or twice, and now he rose to his feet.

"Something's burning somewhere," he said. "Do you notice it?"

Bulkeley started.

"Yes—now you mention it. I don't think there's any fires going this evening," he said. "Some ass has dropped a match on something. Look in the passage!"

Neville threw the door open and started back with an exclamation. A volume of smoke was rolling down the corridor.

"What the dickens! It's a study on fire!" he exclaimed. "My hat! It's Carthew's study—"

He ran along the passage with Bulkeley at his heels. A rush of smoke, mingled with flame, from the study doorway drove them back.

Carthew's study was a mass of blaze. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What—what—"

"Fire!" shouted Neville.

Doors opened on all sides, and voices called. Half a dozen of the Sixth came dashing out into the passage.

Mr. Bootles' voice was heard, high-pitched and excited.

"What—what—what—"

"Fire!"

"Hess my soul! The boys—the boys—"

"That fool Carthew!" said Bulkeley, between his teeth. "How has he done that? Where is he?"

"Fire!"

There was a roar of voices now. Bulkeley's clear tones rang above the din.

"The fire-buckets! This way! Neville, cut off and call the sergeant—the hose will be wanted! You fellows help me!"

Neville scudded away.

Bulkeley's voice calmed the confusion. The Sixth-Formers, as one man, backed him up. Buckets were filled and rushed along the passage, and water hurried into the blazing study.

But the fire had gained a strong hold, and the water hissed and spluttered, with little effect. Furniture and floor were ablaze now, and a rush of flame drove the Hookwooders back from the doorway. Flames were creeping along the walls from the doorway, and shooting across the passage. Loud shouts from above announced that the fire had burst through the ceiling into the room over Carthew's study.

"The hose—the hose!" Mr. Bootles was shrieking frantically.

Bulkeley caught the excited Form-master by the arm.

"The fire's spreading, sir! I think we shall get it under, but all the boys must be got out of the dormitories!"

"Yes—yes!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "I—I—I will call the Head—"

Mr. Bootles scuttled away, hardly knowing what he was doing in his excitement and confusion.

The alarm-bell was ringing now. Into every corner of the great school the alarm had penetrated, and Hookwood, from end to end, rang with the cry:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Silver, let me go! I—I—I'll——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

While the rest of the juniors of Rookwood were asleep in bed, there was very wide wakefulness in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth.

Carthew of the Sixth was sprawling on the floor, his wrists tied to the leg of Jimmy Silver's bed.

The unhappy prefect had been in that uncomfortable position for some time, the chuckling juniors paying no heed to his threats.

"My dear chap, you can stay there!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You came here to please yourself. You can stay to please us!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Carthew.

"All in good time, my pippin! You've got to beg the pardon of the Fourth Form, on your banded knees, first!" said Jimmy Silver coolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I won't! I—I'll—I'll——" spluttered the hapless bully of the Sixth.

"I'll—I'll——"

"Then you can spend the night there!" chuckled Jimmy. "You shouldn't have come, you know. You weren't invited into this dormitory."

"I—I—I——"

"Tie a pillow over his chin, or he'll keep us awake!" suggested Mornington.

"Good egg!"

"Fire!"

That sudden shout from below silenced the chortling in the dormitory. Jimmy Silver spun round towards the door.

"Hallo, what's that?" he exclaimed.

"Fire! Fire!"

"My only hat!"

Lovell ran to the door and threw it open.

A din of voices came from below, and a smell of burning, and an acrid taste of smoke.

"It's fire, right enough!" gasped Lovell. "The school's on fire! My only hat!"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Help!"

"Shut up, Tubby!"

"Help! Yooop! Fire! Help!" roared Tubby.

"Let me go!" shrieked Carthew.

Jimmy Silver hastily cut the prefect loose. Carthew staggered to his feet. The fire was below, and, as yet, nowhere near the dormitory; and it certainly was Carthew's duty, as a prefect of the Sixth, to think of the safety of the juniors. But he didn't! He made a rush for the door, and dashed out.

Carthew vanished from sight in a moment. But the sound of a collision came from the passage, and Bulkeley's voice:

"Carthew——"

"Let me pass, you fool!" shrieked Carthew.

"The juniors have got to be got out!"

"Let me pass!"

"You rotten funk! Get out, then, and good riddance to you!" roared Bulkeley.

Pattering footsteps died away down the passage and the stairs. The next moment Bulkeley looked into the Classical Fourth dormitory upon a sea of scared and startled faces.

"Order!" he rapped out, as two or three juniors rushed for the door. "Get into your clothes—quick! There's plenty of time to get out into the quadrangle. Don't lose your heads!"

"All serene, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Yaroop! Help!" came from Tubby Muffin.

"Quiet, you fat idiot!"

The Fourth-Formers dressed themselves quickly—or half-dressed. Under Bulkeley's eye they marched out of the dormitory in order.

Down the big staircase they went, amid flying smoke. On the staircase was Neville, keeping order. Longdale, Jones major and Scott were shepherding out the Shell, the Third, and the Second.

The prefects of Rookwood had taken charge, under Bulkeley's order.

Outside, in the quadrangle, the

hose, handled by Sergeant Kettle, was hissing streams of water in at the window of Carthew's study.

Whether the fire would be got under before it spread over the building was still a question; but it was evidently wise to get the boys out into the safety of the quad while there was time.

Under Bulkeley's cool direction the juniors were marched out, and stragglers were rounded up.

In a very short space of time nearly all Rookwood was in the quadrangle, and the Form-masters were calling the roll of their Forms to ascertain that all were there.

Dr. Chisholm, with a pale but calm face, was standing by the sergeant as he flooded water into the blaze.

Smoke, mingled with sparks, rolled skyward in dense volumes, obscuring the stars.

"The fire was got under at last."

"The promptness with which it had been tackled had prevented a catastrophe."

"Bulkeley!"

The Head spoke quietly as a blackened, smoke-begrimed figure passed him. Bulkeley stopped, gasping.

"Yes, sir."

"Are all the boys out, Bulkeley?"

"I'm just going the rounds, sir, to make sure."

"Very good. Please let me know as quickly as possible."

"Yes, sir."

Bulkeley hurried away with a rather curious expression on his face under the smoke grime. He had laboured like a Hercules, and he had been the last out of the building. The Head had not spoken to him hitherto; but probably he had observed. His tone was very quiet but very cordial as he had addressed Bulkeley, as if there had never been any trouble between them.

Bulkeley returned to him in a few minutes.

"All out, sir!"

"Thank goodness!" said the Head. "The fire will be got under, I think; but it would be dangerous to be indoors in the smoke now. It would mean suffocation. You are sure all are out, Bulkeley?"

"The masters have called the roll, sir. None missing."

"Thank you!"

Dr. Chisholm hesitated a moment, and Bulkeley, seeing that he had something more to say, waited, wondering what it was. There was a brief struggle in Dr. Chisholm's breast, but the obstinate pride of the old gentleman was vanquished at last.

"Bulkeley, I have observed you during this unfortunate affair, and—and I thank you, my boy. But for your promptness and coolness I do not like to think what might have happened. If the boys had not been got out before the smoke filled the house—" The Head paused a moment. "Bulkeley, I think you may have saved many lives this night."

"At least, none have been lost, sir, thank goodness!" said Bulkeley cheerily.

"I think that is owing to you, my boy." There was another pause, and the Head watched the last spluttering flames that sank under the hissing streams of water. He turned to Bulkeley again, and held out his hand frankly. "My dear boy, there has been a misunderstanding between us. It is over, and I am sorry that it ever occurred. Tomorrow, Bulkeley, I request you to resume your old position in the school. You will not refuse, I am sure."

"I—I shall be glad, sir!" stammered Bulkeley.

He shook hands with the Head mechanically. Never for a moment had he expected this concession from the lofty old gentleman. But the Head had made it, and Bulkeley's heart was lighter.

"By gad! There's the Head shaking hands with Bulkeley!" murmured

Mornington, in the ranks of the Fourth. "Does that mean that the trouble's over?"

"Let's hope so," murmured Jimmy Silver. "The Head's not a bad old sort, and surely he must have seen to-night that Bulkeley's the man to be captain of Rookwood."

The rift in the lute was healed at last. Rookwood School had its old captain back once more.

* * * * *

The next day a considerable part of the Sixth Form passage in the School House was a charred mass of ruins. Apart from the damage done by smoke, however, the rest of the building had escaped. Rookwood was able to "carry on" as usual while the workmen were busy on the burnt-out studies.

The origin of the fire was not discovered—luckily for Carthew of the Sixth. It was known that it had

started in Carthew's study, and that was all. Carthew professed ignorance of the cause, and if he remembered the cigarette he had thrown carelessly down, he took great care not to mention it.

The fire had been an exciting episode, and it was fortunate that matters had turned out no worse. In the opinion of most of the Rookwood fellows they had turned out very well, in fact. For the reinstatement of Bulkeley as head prefect and captain was followed by the return of the other prefects to duty; the "strike" was ended and done with, and nothing more was said on that subject.

Carthew of the Sixth was probably the only fellow who was not satisfied. But, as Jimmy Silver remarked, Carthew did not matter. And the rest of the school rejoiced that the Prefects' Strike was over, and that "Old Bulkeley" was once more Captain of Rookwood.



WEMBLEY STADIUM.

WHICH was Soccer's most memorable day?

Opinions may differ on that subject, but put that question to anyone you know who was at Wembley Stadium on April 23rd, 1923, and you won't have to wait very long for an answer. It was Cup Final day, the first to be held at Wembley, and the greatest sports arena in the world was given its baptism amidst scenes that will be discussed for many years to come.

The Wembley Fiasco.

In a few hours on that historic afternoon 125,000 people passed through the turnstiles, while another 25,000 rushed the gates and scaled the spike-topped walls—all to see West Ham United play Bolton Wanderers for football's most coveted trophy.

It's still a wonder that the match was ever played, for when the time for the kick-off came round only a few square yards of the pitch were visible beneath the uncontrollable mob that and swarmed across it. Nothing quite like that amazing fiasco had ever happened before, and ever since strong precautions have been taken to avoid a possible repetition.

Nowadays, as everyone knows, admission is by ticket only, and the terracing has been divided up into hundreds of small pens, walled in by concrete. The result is that the Stadium's holding capacity has been reduced to 92,000 odd, but that multitude can be accommodated quite comfortably.

Wembley Stadium on Cup Final day, still its great stands and terraces black with people, is always a mighty spectacle, but how many of those ninety thousand spectators know any of the

really surprising facts and figures concerning football's finest ground?

A Costly Stadium.

Its size, for instance. Some idea of what a huge undertaking the building of Wembley Stadium was will be gained when it is realised that it cost £200,000 to erect, and that the arena and surrounding terraces and buildings cover an area of 12 acres. The outside length and breadth measure 896 feet and 695 feet respectively; the grass arena 492 feet by 260 feet; the football pitch 360 by 240 feet.

The terraces and stands were constructed throughout of concrete, reinforced by steel. In all, 2,000 tons of steel and 25,000 tons of concrete were used.

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