

ON FIGHTING TERMS!

By OWEN CONQUEST



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OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

£20,000 TO BURY A FLY!

If ever you visit Hyde Park, in London, and explore the corner where it joins Kensington Gardens, you will find a cemetery that houses the remains of pets of famous people of long ago. Each grave has its little headstone, proclaiming the feelings of the owner when his pet died. Princes, great writers, poets, and titled ladies—all are found in the names of the dead animals' owners.

But one has to go across the world to find a memorial stone for frogs! Yes, there really is one—in the grounds of a hospital at Tokio, Japan—and it commemorates the thousands of frogs which have been dissected by students there in their studies of anatomy.

"Man-o'-War's" Memorial.

Race-horses frequently have elaborate memorials erected to them. Some years ago there was bred in the United States a race-horse named Man-o'-War which its admirers considered the greatest horse of all time. Man-o'-War won a fortune of hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize-money, and was never beaten in a straight race. When he died, his owner erected a marble statue to him, costing £20,000, and this statue still stands in the paddocks where Man-o'-War spent most of his life.

In Ireland there is a memorial to a horse which superstitious people believe to this day has god-like powers. The statue was erected by one of the many "Kings of Ireland" to his favourite charger, and there are still people who believe that, by wishing when they are touching its cold stones, their luck will be changed for the better!

Week, a little village in the Lake District, has an even stranger

memorial—it commemorates wasps! The memorial was erected to mark a strange plague of wasps which descended on the countryside in that part of England during the nineteenth century.

Funeral of a Fly.

But the strangest story of all has yet to be told. It is of the funeral of an ordinary house-fly, and its burial in a golden coffin, which cost no less than twenty thousand pounds!

"You've all heard of the great Latin poet, Virgil, I expect. This erratic genius was the man responsible for the fly's elaborate funeral. He carried it out chiefly as an expensive joke, and even managed to get the other great men of Rome to help him in making flowery speeches, participating in the funeral banquet, and so on, of the dead fly!

But you don't have to go all the way back to the days of Ancient Rome for stories of these crazy ceremonies for dumb creatures. Only the other day, in America, a banquet was held in honour of a cat, to celebrate its birthday, and two hundred people were present.

The cat had been elected to an Elks' Club for business men, and it received on this occasion dozens of birthday presents, ranging from a cod's head to a silk sleeping cushion, and even to a private banking account opened in its name! Arrangements have already been made for an elaborate funeral for the cat when it dies!

The usual way of setting up a memorial to a dead pet is, of course, to have it stuffed and mounted in a natural pose. This is frequently done with dogs, cats, horses, and birds which have won fame in championships. France has a museum filled with pets given fame in this way; they are all French poodles, champions of the past twenty years, housed in glass cases within their own private museum!

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JIMMY SILVER, LOVELL, NEWCOME and RABY, of the Rookwood Fourth, have always been true comrades through thick and thin. Now comes a rift in the lute which puts the hitherto inseparable "Fistical Four" on fighting terms!

CHAPTER I.

A Startling Surprise!

"If he doesn't come soon——" murmured Newcome.
"We'll scrag him!" hissed Raby.

Jimmy Silver made no remark.

He was just as annoyed and impatient as his comrades; but "Uncle James" of Rookwood was something of a philosopher. Arthur Edward Lovell was keeping the Co. waiting, and there were unnumbered reasons why Lovell shouldn't keep them waiting. But it couldn't be helped. Grousing would not make Lovell any quicker.

"Isn't it just like him?" went on Newcome.

"Oh, just!" said Raby.

"He couldn't remember that he had a letter to post when we passed the post-office."

"Of course he couldn't!"

"And he couldn't keep it a bit longer in his pocket, and post it at Rookwood."

"Oh, no! Of course not!"

It was a duet between Newcome and Raby. Jimmy Silver smiled in the dusk. Raby and Newcome were growing more and more exasperated, as they had good reason to do.

The chums of the Fourth were late

for call-over. There was a keen east wind blowing. They were waiting under the tree near the entrance of the Bird-in-Hand Inn, and the trunk gave them little shelter from the wind.

They had reached that point, on their way back to the school after a long ramble, when Lovell had suddenly remembered that he had the letter to post. He had remembered that he had forgotten, so to speak. Raby and Newcome would have explained to him that, after carrying the dashed letter about in his dashed pocket all the dashed afternoon, he might as well carry it there a little longer. But Arthur Edward Lovell seldom or never listened to reason. He had rushed back into the village without even waiting for his chums to expound their views on the subject.

Now they waited.

With every minute of waiting the cold wind seemed to grow colder and sharper. On the other hand, tempers were growing hotter and hotter. It really looked as if Arthur Edward Lovell was booked for a ragging when he rejoined his chums.

"Not in sight yet!" said Raby, in concentrated tones. "We've missed roll. I'm jolly nearly freezing!"

"Let's go on without him," suggested Newcome desperately.

"Oh, give him a few more minutes!" said Jimmy Silver, as cheerily as he could. "Even Lovell can't be much longer."

"B-r-r-r!"

"The ass!"

"Nice for us, if somebody should come along from the school and see us hanging about here," said Raby savagely. "Might be taken for merry blades, like that cad Peele!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at the windows of the inn and frowned a little. The Bird-in-Hand was strictly out of bounds for Rookwood fellows. Peele of the Fourth had once been flogged for setting foot within the forbidden precincts. Fellows like Peele, who

prided themselves upon being doggish, sometimes sneaked down the side way to the back of the place, to pass a stolen hour in Mr. Stiggins' smoky parlour or the billiards-room.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Jimmy Silver. "Nobody would suspect us of playing the giddy ox."

"I don't know!" grumbled Raby. "I jolly well know I don't like hanging about here!"

"Neither do I," said Newcome; "and I'm not hanging about much longer. That crass ass Lovell can go and eat coke!"

"Hallo! Here's somebody coming!" murmured Jimmy.

There were footsteps in the lane, but not from the direction of the village. From the opposite direction, that of the school, the footfalls came, and from the lane a figure in an overcoat emerged.

The light was not very good, but the three juniors recognised the newcomer at a glance.

It was Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

He stopped near the hedge which surrounded the inn garden.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, behind the trunk of the tree at a little distance, were invisible to him, and they took care to remain so.

Although they considered that they were above suspicion, even if they were seen hanging about in the vicinity of that disreputable resort, they had no desire whatever to meet their Form-master on the spot. Moreover, if Mr. Dalton had seen them he would have ordered them to Rookwood at once, without waiting for Lovell.

So they stood close round the trunk of the tree, and said no word, with their eyes fixed on the handsome, athletic figure standing at a little distance.

For a couple of minutes Mr. Dalton stood there, looking round him, and the juniors wondered why.

Then, to their intense amazement, he

turned into the path beside the inn, and disappeared from sight.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood silent.

They were too astonished to speak.

That path led nowhere but into the garden of the Bird-in-Hand, and Mr. Dalton's destination could only be the back door of the inn. Indeed, as they stood there came to their ears in the silence the sound of a knock, and they thought they heard an opening door.

Jimmy Silver was the first to recover himself.

"Let's get away!" he whispered.

"But Lovell!"

"Blow Lovell!"

The three juniors left the sheltering shadow of the tree, and hurried on up the lane towards Rookwood. Richard Dalton, the master of the Rookwood Fourth, had gone into that disreputable inn—secretly, as it seemed, after looking about him—into the place that was "taboo" for all Rookwood—a place that any junior would have been flogged, and any senior expelled, for entering. The chums of the Fourth could scarcely credit it; but they had to believe the evidence of their own eyes.

Richard Dalton was popular in his Form. If Richard Dalton had fallen into bad company it was not for his Form to spy upon him. That was Jimmy Silver's first thought.

And so, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell to his own devices, Jimmy Silver hurried on with Raby and Newcome to Rookwood, only anxious to get away from the spot and to see nothing more.

CHAPTER 2.

A Secret for Three!

"NOT a word!"

Jimmy Silver made that observation in the end study, and Raby and Newcome nodded assent. The three juniors had gathered in the end study to a very late tea. But late as tea was, and healthy as their appetites generally were, the trio did

not enjoy the meal on this occasion. They were worried.

Lovell had not come in yet. But they were not thinking about Lovell. Richard Dalton, their popular Form-master, occupied their thoughts.

They had had time to think over the matter now; and the more they thought over it, the more it worried them.

There were "bad hats" at Rookwood School, as everywhere else—fellows who did not play the game. Peele and Gower of the Fourth, Tracy of the Shell, one or two of the Fifth, and Carthew and some others of the Sixth; it was more or less known or suspected that such fellows as these were given to surreptitious dingy blackguardism.

But a master in the school!

It was unbelievable!

And of all masters, Richard Dalton, the most popular of the masters, the keen footballer and cricketer and boxer—the man of whom all Rookwood was proud!

Yet with their own eyes the three juniors had seen Richard Dalton sneaking in at the back way of the Bird-in-Hand. And for what object could he have done so? The Bird-in-Hand was so disreputable a place that the local police had a sharp eye on it. It was known as a resort of shady bookmakers, and when the races were on at Latham, it was often the headquarters of a crowd of turf loungers and touts. It would have been amazing for a Rookwood master to enter such a place openly in the light of day. To enter it quietly by the back door, seemed to the worried juniors a thing that bore only one construction. Once they had happened to see Carthew of the Sixth sneaking into the place by that door; and they knew very well that Carthew had been engaged in transactions with a bookmaker there. Was it possible that Dicky Dalton had fallen to that?

"It's no hisney of ours, of course," said Newcome.

"Not in the least," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "Dicky Dalton may have had lots of reasons for going there. He's not the sort of man to play the goat like that footling ass Caribew, or a giddy ox like Tracy of the Shell."

"But why——"

"It doesn't matter why," said Jimmy firmly. "He may have no end of reasons we don't know about, and it's not our bizney to inquire."

"That's so; but it looks——"

"I know how it looks. The Head would be down on him like a ton of bricks, unless he could give a jolly good explanation. Perhaps he could."

"Perhaps!" said Newcome doubtfully.

"All we've got to do is to shut up," said Jimmy. "We're bound to think the best we can of anybody; and especially of Dicky Dalton, whom we know to be a white man."

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

"So, not a word!" said the captain of the Fourth. "If the yarn got round the school, it would be bad for Dicky. No doubt at all about that. Fellows like Peele would make capital out of it. We're hit on it by accident, and we're bound to keep it a dead secret."

There was full agreement on that point.

"But what about Lovell?" asked Newcome, after a pause. "Lovell will want to know why we didn't wait for him. I—I suppose we're not keeping secrets from Lovell?"

Jimmy Silver looked more worried than before.

There was always full confidence among the Fiskal Four of the Fourth; they had no secrets from one another. Keeping a secret from one member of the Co. was not pleasant.

"I—I suppose we should tell Lovell," said Newcome dubiously. "He would be awfully waxy if we kept a secret from him and he found out."

"We've no right to tell anybody," said Jimmy.

"That's so, but——"

"That applies to Lovell," said Jimmy, after a long pause. "It's not a matter to interest him in any way. No concern of his any more than it is of ours."

"Yes, but——"

Jimmy Silver was not uttering the whole of his thoughts. As a matter of fact, though Arthur Edward Lovell's loyalty was unquestionable, his discretion was by no means so.

Arthur Edward Lovell was, in fact, about the last fellow at Rookwood to be able to keep a secret.

Moreover, there was a strain of obstinacy in Lovell. He was rather prone to take a different view from other fellows, merely because it was different. That was one of Lovell's little weaknesses that his chums bore with patiently.

It was quite possible that Lovell, from that peculiar trick of opposition, might take the view that the juniors were not bound to keep the incident a secret at all. And once Lovell had an idea in his head, argument only fixed it more firmly there.

Jimmy Silver did not put this into words, but Raby and Newcome quite understood. They knew their chum's foibles as well as Jimmy did.

"Better say nothing at all," was Jimmy's decision. "Just shove the whole thing out of our heads, and carry on as if it never happened."

And Raby and Newcome assented.

They felt that it was a case of the least said, the soonest mended, and that the sooner the whole thing was forgotten the better.

Tea over, the chums of the Fourth turned to prep, and nothing more was said on the subject of Richard Dalton's strange escapade. Lovell had not come in, and the three wondered where he could be. He should not have been long behind them, but they had been

in an hour or more now, and he had not appeared.

Tubby Muffin put a fat face into the study.

"You four are wanted," he said, with a grin. "You've got to report to Dalton for missing call-over."

"Has Mr. Dalton come in?" asked Raby.

"Eh? Has he been out?" said Tubby.

"Oh, never mind! All serene," said Raby hastily.

"Where's Lovell?" asked Tubby, blinking round the study. "Didn't he come in with you?"

"No."

"My hat! He will get into a row. I say, he hasn't dropped into the Bird-in-hand, has he?" asked Tubby inquisitively.

"What?" roared the three.

"Well, there's been talk of fellows hanging about there, and as he's staying out late—Yah! Keep off, you beast!"

Tubby Muffin dodged away just in time to escape a boot. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome went downstairs to report to Mr. Dalton. They were feeling rather uneasy as they came into their Form-master's study, and they could not help giving Richard Dalton quick, curious looks.

Mr. Dalton eyed them severely.

"I sent for four!" he said.

"Lovell hasn't come in yet, sir," murmured Jimmy.

"Was he not with you?"

"He went back to post a letter."

"Why did you not answer to your names at roll?" asked Mr. Dalton.

Jimmy Silver explained meekly that the party had gone on a long ramble, and had unfortunately not allowed sufficient time for return before lock-up. Mr. Dalton listened quietly with his keen eyes on the juniors.

"Very well," he said. "It must not occur again. You will take fifty lines each."

"Yes, sir."

"Jolly cool!" murmured Newcome, as the delinquents left Mr. Dalton's study. "He was jolly well out of bounds himself. I wonder what he'd say if he knew we'd seen him."

"He ought to let us off the lines for keeping it dark," grumbled Raby. "Our good turn deserves another."

"Ars!" said Jimmy Silver. "He doesn't know we're keeping anything dark. And he's not going to know."

The three returned to the end study to peep.

CHAPTER 3.

Lovell is Wrathful!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL strode up the Fourth Form passage, breathing wrath. Several fellows loafing about the study doors glanced at him and grinned.

"Hallo! You've come in," said Putty of the Fourth.

Lovell grunted.

"Where on earth have you been all this time?" asked Mornington.

"Looking for a set of silly chumps!" snapped Lovell. "I suppose they've come in?"

"He, he, he!" from Tubby Muffin. "They've been in for hours."

Another grunt from Lovell, and he strode on to the end study. The door of that celebrated apartment was hurried open, and Lovell strode in, with thunder on his brow.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked up from their work.

"Oh, you've come in at last!" said Jimmy.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" bawled Lovell.

"We did wait ten minutes."

"Why couldn't you wait another minute or two?"

Arthur Edward Lovell glared accusingly at his chums. Evidently he was in a state of great wrath and indignation.

As there was no reply to his question, he ran on:

"If you didn't want to wait, why couldn't you say you weren't going to wait? Then a chap would have known."

"Well, you see——"

"I don't see."

"Anyhow, you could have come on, I suppose?" said Raby tartly. "You knew your way to Rookwood without us to lead you, didn't you?"

"How was I to know you'd gone on?" roared Lovell. "I've never left you in the lurch, and I didn't think you'd left me. When I didn't find you at the tree, I thought you must have gone back to Coombe for me, and missed me somewhere, so I went back to look for you."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What else was I to think?" howled the indignant Lovell. "I couldn't guess that you'd just walked home and left me to find out what had become of you."

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged uncomfortable looks. From Lovell's point of view, undoubtedly he was an injured party.

Knowing nothing of the urgent reason that had taken the three away from the spot, Lovell felt that he had been treated badly. Certainly, he might have guessed that his comrades had gone on. But he hadn't guessed that.

"Never even crossed my mind that you'd go on, and leave me not knowing where you were!" hooted Lovell. "If you didn't want to wait for a chap, you could have said so."

"Yes, but——"

"I've got a cabling from Dalton for being so late. I don't blame Dalton. I blame you!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"I suppose you were anxious to get in and get lines instead of a licking," sneered Lovell. "You didn't care a rap if I roared about looking for you, and got caned for it."

"We had to go on!" snapped Raby.

"Why had you?"

That was a difficult question to answer. Raby was silent. Lovell stared angrily at three frowning faces.

"You left me in the lurch!" he snapped. "It was a dirty trick. You know it was. I've been hunting for you—I wouldn't come in and leave you out, looking for me as I thought. Only at last I guessed you must have gone on and left me. I call it rotten."

"It's not like that," said Newcome. "We had to come on. We couldn't stay there any longer."

"Why couldn't you?"

"Well, we couldn't."

"Why not?" roared Lovell. "You say you waited ten minutes. I was back in eleven or twelve. Why couldn't you hang on another minute or two?"

"We couldn't," said Jimmy Silver.

"And you can't say why?"

"Well, something happened," said Raby desperately. "Something happened that made us clear."

"Do you mean a prefect rounded you up?" asked Arthur Edward, a little less wrathfully.

"Nunno."

"Then what do you mean?"

"N-n-nothing."

Lovell stared harder at his study-mates. He was perplexed now as well as angry. And his indignation was growing instead of diminishing. Any fellow might have been annoyed by what had happened, as the three chums realised—and there was reason for Arthur Edward's wrath.

"You're making a mystery out of something," said Lovell at last. "If anything happened, I suppose you can tell me."

"No!" blurted out Newcome.

"What! Why not?"

"Because you're such an ass," said Newcome, irritated into unusual plain speaking. "You'd shout it all over the school."

"What!" roared Lovell.

"Shush!" murmured Jimmy Silver in distress. "That isn't the way to put it, Newcome, old chap."

"Well, he would," said Newcome. "He comes in here bawling at us, without even thinking we might have had a reason for acting as we did. If we tell him, he's as likely as not to bawl it out to anybody who will listen."

Lovell's face was crimson now.

"So something did happen to make you clear off, and you won't tell me what it is, because it's a silly secret, and you can't trust me to keep a secret!" he spluttered.

"You know you can't keep a secret," said Newcome tartly. "You blurt out everything."

"You don't trust me with a silly secret, whatever it is? All right—don't!" said Lovell. "I don't want to know it. I'm pretty certain it's only some nonsense, and I shouldn't care to listen to it, anyhow. But if you think you can't trust me to keep a secret, that's enough."

Lovell, in a towering rage, strode to the door. He had been exasperated already, and Newcome's unfortunately plain English had put the lid on, as it were. Nobody, seeing the look that Lovell gave the other three as he turned to the door, would have judged just then that the Fistical Four of Rookwood were bosom chums.

"Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"That's enough, I tell you."

"Hold on—"

Lovell swung back.

"Will you tell me at once what happened?" he demanded.

"We'd rather not."

"Then shut up!"

With that, Arthur Edward Lovell tramped out of the end study, and closed the door after him with a slam that rang the length of the Fourth Form passage.

CHAPTER 2.

A Split in the Study!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON met Jimmy Silver & Co. as they went down to the junior Common-room shortly before dawn.

"What on earth's up in your study?" he asked.

"Up!" repeated Jimmy vaguely. The captain of the Fourth had no desire at all to talk about the trouble that had arisen in the happy family circle.

"Lovell's done his prep in our study," said Mornington. "Of course, we didn't mind. But what's up?"

"Nothing serious, I hope?" said Erroll.

"Oh, not at all," said Jimmy. "All serene, you know."

The three said no more than that, but they felt worried as they went into the Common-room. Lovell did not come there, and they did not see him again till bed-time.

In the Fourth Form dormitory they found him, and they looked at him, but he did not look at them. Lovell, apparently, had decided to ignore the existence of his three chums. He was labouring under a deep sense of injury, and he made no secret of his wrath.

Some of the fellows in the dormitory grinned as they noted the unusual state of affairs among the Fistical Four.

Peele and Gower and their friends seemed entertained by it; a split in the end study was very gratifying to them. But the general view was that Lovell's well-known hasty temper was the cause of the trouble, and that it would blow over by the morrow.

Jimmy Silver hoped so fervently. Lovell was generally forgiving enough after he had blown off steam.

Jimmy had to admit that there was some ground for Lovell's resentment. But he was more disinclined than ever to tell him what had happened at the Bird-in-Hand.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had said nothing, or next to nothing, of the cause of the dispute. But Lovell had talked freely about it—airing his wrongs and his indignation. Nearly every fellow in the Classical Fourth knew that Lovell regarded himself as

having been treated badly by his friends, and that he had "chucked" them in consequence.

A little discretion would have induced Lovell to keep silent, as his chums did, but discretion was not Lovell's strong point. His resentment and indignation were trailed up and down the Fourth, so to speak, and the effect they produced was usually amusement. Later on, probably, Lovell would regret that he had talked so much. But that would not alter the fact that he had done so.

And Jimmy could not help feeling that, had Lovell been told all, the secret would not have been safe. It was very doubtful whether Lovell would have promised in advance to keep it. He would have wanted to use his own judgment on that point. And his judgment was not to be relied upon.

So, whatever attitude Lovell took upon the matter, Jimmy Silver felt convinced that it was wiser not to tell him of Richard Dalton's mysterious visit to the Bird-in-Hand.

But the present state of affairs was very distressing. Jimmy called out good-night to Lovell, and received no answer. Evidently Arthur Edward was determined to slumber on his wrath.

Jimmy hoped for the best in the morning, and went to sleep.

But in the morning Arthur Edward Lovell was in the same mood. He paid no heed to his chums, and carefully refrained from catching their glances.

He went down from the dormitory with Oswald, and took another path when he came on the three in the quad before breakfast.

At breakfast he found a seat at the table at a distance from his chums.

After breakfast he ignored them, and when they came into the Form-room for class he still ignored them.

By that time all the Fourth, Classical and Modern, were aware of the trouble in the end study, and rather interested and entertained by it. It was known that Lovell, under a sense of injury,

had sent his former chums to Coventry, and dropped their acquaintance.

Many were the remarks made upon it, but Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome said nothing when they were questioned.

Lovell, on the other hand, was quite eloquent.

He saw no reason for keeping silent, and he did not keep silent. It dawned upon him, after a time, however, that he was making himself rather ridiculous. That discovery did not soften his wrath; it made him more reserved, but it made him more angry.

Jimmy Silver was puzzled and distressed.

He felt that this could not go on; the old friendship in the end study could not come to an end in this way. But what was to be done was rather a problem.

After class that day Jimmy determined to take the bull by the horns, as it were, and speak to Lovell. He joined Arthur Edward, as they came out of the Form-room.

"Lovell, old chap——" he said.

Lovell stared at him.

"Would you mind keeping your distance?" he asked, with elaborate politeness.

"En?"

"I'd rather you didn't speak to me, Silver."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"That will do."

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was celebrated for his patient and equable temper. But Lovell was trying it very hard indeed.

"What's the good of rowing, Lovell?" asked Jimmy, as patiently as he could. "We don't want to row. Come up to the study, and don't be an ass!"

"I'm not staying in your study any longer. I'm going to change out."

"Lovell!"

"You don't want me there, I sup-

pose," said Lovell sarcastically. "You don't want a pal you can't trust."

"That's all rot, Lovell! We trust you, of course, and you know we do. But we can't tell you what happened near the Bird-in-Hand last evening. It's better not."

"Well, then, leave me alone," said Lovell, and he turned away.

Jimmy Silver followed him.

"Look here, Lovell, if we tell you what—"

"I don't want you to."

"If we tell you," persisted Jimmy. "Will you promise honour bright to keep it a dead secret?"

"You know I would if it's a matter to be kept secret. But perhaps you couldn't trust my word!" sneered Lovell.

"Your word's all right, if you give it. Well, then, promise that you will keep it a dead secret—"

"Before I hear it, do you mean?"

"Of course."

"Nothing doing. I don't believe in keeping silly secrets. If it's really anything important, I should keep it dark, of course, if there was a reason. But I should have to decide that for myself."

"You mean that we're to tell you, and you can shout it out to all Rookwood if you choose?" snapped Jimmy.

"You needn't tell me. I'm not asking you; you're offering. Keep it to yourself. I'm not interested."

"I'll tell you if you promise beforehand—"

"Well, I won't! Do you think I'm such a fool that I can't tell whether a thing ought to be kept secret or not?"

As a matter of fact, that was just what Jimmy Silver did think, but he was tactful enough not to say so.

"Keep your silly secret!" said Lovell, as Jimmy did not answer. "I'm not a silly fag in the Second Form, to be making silly secrets out of trifles, and mountains out of molehills! And don't talk to me—I don't like it!"

With that, Arthur Edward Lovell turned his back and stalked away. Jimmy Silver breathed hard and deep. The temptation was strong upon him to stride after Lovell, grasp him by the collar, and bang his obstinate head against the wall.

Fortunately, Jimmy resisted that temptation. Matters would certainly not have been improved by a fight.

So Lovell went his own wilful way, instead of mending. That evening Lovell appeared in the Fourth Form passage with his books under his arm, apparently looking for quarters. A number of fellows in the passage chuckled, and Lovell flushed as he caught their amused glances. He tramped into the end study with his books, and flung them on the table. After all, it was his study, and he was going to work there.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad to see him come in. They made room for him at the table at once.

But Lovell did not speak. He did not seem to hear the remarks that were made to him.

He sat through prep with a grim, set face, in stony silence. When it was over he left the study.

The three looked at one another.

"Look here, this silly rot isn't going on!" said Raby angrily. "I'm getting fed-up with it!"

"What about giving the duffer a study ragging?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

He did not think that a study ragging would improve matters. But what was to be done was a problem even to the sagacious and perspicacious mind of "Uncle James."

CHAPTER 5.

Just Like Lovell!

"I won't do!"

Jimmy Silver made that announcement to his chums two or three days later. Raby and Newcome nodded a rather gloomy assent.

Lovell was still "keeping it up."

He came to the end study only to work, and did not utter a word when he was there. His plan of changing his study had not been carried out.

Possibly he had discovered that other studies were not so keen to take in a fellow who was only in search of quarters because he had "rowed" with his study-mates.

At all events, he stayed on in the end study; but was rather like a skeleton at a feast there.

He spent little time in the study; and, out of it, he never spoke to his former friends or looked at them.

Obviously, Arthur Edward was nursing his wrath and feeling, like the ancient prophet, that he did well to be angry.

No doubt he expected his chums, in the long run, to realise that they were in the wrong, and to "come round."

Meanwhile, the three hoped that Lovell would realise that he was in the wrong, and "come round."

Lovell, of course, had the worst of the split. The three were three; and Lovell was only one. He missed them much more than they could possibly miss him.

That worried Jimmy Silver, and other considerations worried him. Lovell was not very bright in class; and it had been Jimmy's custom to give him a little first-aid in prep. A heavy task for Lovell could be turned into an easy one by a few words from "Uncle James." Now these few words could not be uttered.

Lovell was not a fellow to accept favours from a fellow he had quarrelled with. Indeed, one evening when Lovell was wrestling with Latin translation, and Jimmy put in the right word for him Lovell deliberately wrote down another word—for which he was duly "jawed" in class by Mr. Dalton. After that, Jimmy gave up rendering unasked assistance.

But he felt that it would not do. Lovell was left very much on his own, and Peele and Gower—chiefly

with an amiable desire to annoy Jimmy Silver—were very civil to him. Lovell did not like the black sheep of the Fourth, but in his new and unaccustomed loneliness he did not repulse Peele. Once Jimmy, passing their study door, saw Lovell sitting in the room while Peele and Gower smoked cigarettes and chatted.

Arthur Edward was falling into bad company. And, though he prided himself on being a resolute character, Arthur Edward was really not the fellow to frequent bad company with impunity. He was far too easy-going for that—when he was not wroth.

So the three discussed the matter seriously and solemnly; and Jimmy Silver declared that it would not do, and Raby and Newcome agreed that it wouldn't. But as Lovell obviously did not intend to "come round," it was up to the trio to come round for Lovell's own sake—a test of friendship to which they were fortunately equal.

Only—and there was the rub—they couldn't "come round" and restore the old footing in the end study without letting Lovell into the secret regarding Dicky Dalton—and the reasons against doing so were as strong as ever.

"But it comes to this," said Raby crossly. "We're barring our own chum, or he's barring us, which comes to the same thing, because Dicky Dalton chose to 'butt into' an inn. If he does such silly things he must risk being talked about."

"And Lovell may keep his head shut," said Newcome, not very hopefully.

"He may!" said Jimmy, still less hopefully. "Not to put too fine a point on it, Lovell is a bit of an ass. Still, he's our chum; and Dicky Dalton, though we like him immensely, isn't."

"That's so."

"Well, then, do we tell Lovell and chance it?" asked Jimmy.

"Leave it to you," said Raby; and Newcome nodded assent to that. It was for "Uncle James" to decide.

"Tell him, then," said Jimmy. "We'll try to make him understand how important it is to keep it dark. After all, he's got some sense."

The decision having been come to—the only possible decision unless Lovell was to be estranged for good—the three proceeded to act upon it. Jimmy Silver rounded up Lovell in the passage after class, and put it to him plainly.

"Aren't you fed-up with this rot, Lovell?" he asked.

Lovell did not answer.

"Come up to the study, and we'll tell you the whole business," said Jimmy.

"I'm not asking you to!" said Lovell testily.

"Well, I'm asking you, fathead!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Come on!"

And Lovell condescended to come. In the end study Jimmy shut the door, after a glance up and down to make sure that Tubby Muffin was not in the offing.

Then the three juniors explained together.

Lovell listened, his eyes opening wide.

Doubtless he had wondered a great deal what the mysterious secret could be. Certainly he had not guessed that it had anything to do with his Plumber.

"You see, now," said Jimmy, when the story was told. "We couldn't hang on there, after seeing Mr. Dalton going into the Bird-in-Hand—we didn't want to see so much, and certainly not any more. That's why we didn't wait for you, see?"

"I see," assented Lovell.

"But you understand that this can't be mentioned. It would get Dicky Dalton talked about."

"Why not?" asked Lovell coolly.

"Why?" ejaculated Jimmy. "I suppose we don't want Peele and Gower, and rads like that, to make out that Dicky Dalton is a giddy blade."

"They couldn't make it out if it wasn't true."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Think of what the Head would say if he knew," urged Raby.

"The Head ought to know."

"What?" shouted the three together.

"If it's true, the Head ought to know," said Lovell calmly. "If Dicky Dalton goes round to low inns, consorting with racing sharpers, the sooner he's pushed out of Reckwood the better!"

"It's not for us to judge him, or to take it for granted that he hadn't a good reason for going there!" said Jimmy hotly.

"Rot!" said Lovell. "If you fellows saw what you think you saw, it's a plain case. Only, of course, it happens to be all rot. I don't believe a word of it."

"What?"

"You think you saw him, I mean. Of course, it was only some resemblance. Dicky Dalton was probably a mile away at the time," said Lovell cheerfully.

"Do you think we can't trust our own eyesight?" said Newcome, breathing hard.

"Perhaps you can; but I can't, when you say you saw Dicky Dalton going into the low inn," answered Lovell. "You're a set of asses, you've made a silly mistake, and you're making a mountain out of a molehill. So that's the dead secret you couldn't tell me, is it?"

"That's it."

"Then you're bigger asses than I thought. There's nothing in it—nothing at all!"

The three chums looked at Lovell. Already they were beginning to repent that they had let their chum into the secret.

"Nothing in it or not," said Jimmy at last, "I suppose you're going to keep it dark."

"That's all we want," said Newcome. "Think what you like, so long as you keep it a dead secret."

Lovell laughed scoffingly.

"Utter rot!" he said. "I shan't talk about it—because it would get you fed-

flows into a row for imagining such things about your Form-master. You really ought to have a little more sense."

"I tell you," said Jimmy Silver, breathing hard and deep, "that there is no doubt at all that it was Mr. Dalton who went into the back door of the Bird-in-Hand that evening."

"And I tell you that you were dreaming, and it wasn't," said Lovell. "I could have told you so at once, if you'd had sense enough to explain that evening, and tell me what you were fancying. What you wanted was to have a little common sense. But it was just like you fellows—making a mountain out of a molehill, and a deadly secret out of nothing. You're such kids!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had been very patient. Indeed, they felt that, in that particular line, they could have given points to Job himself. But their patience was at an end now.

As if moved by the same spring, they hurled themselves upon Arthur Edward Lovell and grasped him.

Arthur Edward was swept off his feet, in the grasp of his indignant chums, and he smote the floor of the study with a loud concussion.

Bump!
"Oh!" roared Lovell. "Ow!"
Bump! Bump!
"Yow! Why, you rotters—I'll—
I'll—"

Bump!
"There!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I hope that's done you good!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"
It had done Lovell no good at all. He scrambled up and fairly hurled himself upon his chums.

"Yaroooh!" roared Jimmy Silver, as Lovell's knuckles landed on his nose. Jimmy landed on the hearthrug.

"Chuck the silly ass out!" shouted Raby.

"Collar him!"
Jimmy bounded up. He had sought for peace, but it was war that he had found. And even "Uncle James" was angry now.

Three pairs of hands grasped the belligerent Lovell, the door was dragged open, and Arthur Edward shot into the passage.

Crash!
"Whoooooop!"
There was a yell along the corridor. "They're chucking Lovell out! He, he, he! They're going it in the end study! Fancy that, you fellows! He, he, he!"

There was a rush of Fourth Formers along the passage as Tabby Muffin yelled. Lovell was yelling, too.

Jimmy Silver slammed the door of the end study. Lovell staggered up, feeling exceedingly sore. His face was crimson with wrath.

"I—I—I'll smash 'em!" he gasped.
"What on earth's the trouble?" asked Oswald.

"What are they ragging you for?" inquired Peele.

Lovell spluttered with wrath.
"Because I don't believe they saw Dicky Dalton going into the Bird-in-Hand a few days ago!" he bawled.

"What!"
"Which!"
"Oh, gad!"

In the end study Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared at one another as they heard Lovell's howling voice.

"That does it!" murmured Raby. Undoubtedly it had "done" it. The dead secret was a secret no longer—that evening it was the one topic in the Classical Fourth.

CHAPTER 8.

Light At Last!

M R. RICHARD DALTON had always been an object of interest to his Form. He was popular, he was good at games, he had pleasant manners which inspired liking, and a resolute character which inspired respect. The Fourth thought a great deal of their Form-master. But never, even on the occasion when

he had helped the Sixth to beat the Old Boys at football, had he been so great an object of interest to the Fourth as he had now become.

Richard Dalton had been seen—actually seen—entering the Bird-in-Hand. It was amazing! It was such a story as would have been scornfully disregarded at once had it emanated from a fellow like Peele, or a tattler like Tubby Muffin. But it came from Jimmy Silver, captain of the Form, and Mr. Dalton's most loyal admirer. That it came from Jimmy Silver was clear evidence that it was true. In Lovell's lofty judgment it was all a mistake on the part of his chums. But nobody in the Fourth believed that three fellows, together, could have made such a mistake. It was true, and it was amazing—almost unnerving.

In the class the next morning Mr. Dalton found his Form more inattentive to lessons than he had ever found them before. But they were not inattentive to Mr. Dalton himself. They watched him, they hung on his looks, his words, his gestures. He seemed to have a fascination for them. Some of them wondered whether he was going to drop into the Bird-in-Hand that evening. Some debated whether he had lost much money playing cards with Mr. Stiggins and his set. Some wondered whether he had really gone home last half-holiday, or whether he had gone to the races.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were utterly dismayed. This was the end of their secret. Telling it to Lovell had had more disastrous consequences than they had dreamed of anticipating in their most pessimistic moments.

Lovell, indeed, was dismayed also. He was dismayed to find that the juniors did not share his view that it was all "rot" and all "piffle," and that the three had made a ridiculous mistake. He was dismayed and amazed to find that nobody else shared that opinion of his.

So it was at length borne in upon

the powerful intellect of Arthur Edward Lovell that he would have done more wisely to keep silent—to keep the matter a dead secret as his chums had urged him.

He realised that—too late.

Certainly it was much too late now. And Lovell, as well as the Co., wondered uneasily what would come of it. For it was quite certain that such a topic, endlessly discussed among the juniors, would sooner or later reach older ears.

As soon as a prefect heard of it he would put Mr. Dalton on his guard. Mr. Dalton would have to squash the story at once, or leave Rookwood.

And how could he squash it when it was true? Lovell, unable to hold out against public opinion, began to realise that it was true—that Jimmy Silver & Co. had not made, as he expressed it, a silly mistake. And Lovell could have kicked himself for allowing the tale to pass his lips. For whatever Dicky Dalton might have done, his loyal admirers in the Fourth still backed him up, and assuredly did not want him to be turned out of the school.

Jimmy Silver waited in deep uneasiness for the chopper to come down. He knew that it must happen. Tubby Muffin had spread the story among the Shell; other fellows had talked of it to Fifth Form chaps. By the evening, at latest, some of the Sixth must hear it, and then everybody at Rookwood would know.

Prep in the end study that evening was dismal enough. Arthur Edward Lovell was very subdued. His comrades did not reproach him—that was useless enough. But all of them were worried and distressed. Jimmy Silver was not surprised when Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in at the doorway.

Bulkeley's face was stern.

"There's a yarn going round the school about Mr. Dalton," he said. "I hear that it started in this study."

It was hard on the Co., certainly it

had started in that study; they could not deny it. Lovell came to the rescue.

"I let it out, Bulkeley," he said. "I—I never believed for a moment there was anything in it, or I'd have bitten off my tongue first."

"And what is it exactly?" asked Bulkeley. "I've heard tattle here, and tattle there, and I want to know what's the origin of it."

Jimmy Silver explained dismally.

"You young ass!" said Bulkeley. "You know, of course, that I shall have to report this to Mr. Dalton."

"I hope you'll tell him we meant to keep it secret, and it came out by accident," said Jimmy.

"You young ass!"

With that, Bulkeley left the study. The Pistical Four regarded one another with dolorous looks.

"We've done it now!" said Lovell.

"You've done it, you mean!" said Newcome fairly. And for once Arthur Edward Lovell had no rejoinder to make.

"It means the sack for Dicky, unless he can explain somehow to the Head," muttered Raby.

"And how can he?" said Jimmy miserably. "He can't deny it—he's not the man to tell a lie. And he's not a 'bad hat.' We know he's a white man, even if he was led into playing the giddy ox somehow. Oh, it's too rotten! It looks as if Dicky Dalton is done for here, and we've done for him."

The hapless four fully expected a summons that evening to the Head's study, or to Mr. Dalton's. But no summons came. Bulkeley must have made his report, as in duty bound; but no move came from the master of the Fourth.

At the breakfast-table next morning Mr. Dalton was more than ever an object of keen interest to his Form. His calm face betrayed no sign of consciousness.

When the Fourth assembled in their Form-room, Mr. Dalton came in as usual to take his class, and there was

some suppressed excitement among the juniors when the Head followed him in a few minutes later. They guessed at once that Dr. Chisholm's presence was due to the story that had been circulating about Mr. Dalton.

The Fourth Form-master glanced over the breathless class.

"Silver! Raby! Newcome! Stand up!"

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet at once. Slowly and reluctantly, Raby and Newcome followed his example.

"You will answer Dr. Chisholm's questions," said Mr. Dalton.

"We—we don't want to say anything, sir," stammered Jimmy Silver; but a gesture from Mr. Dalton stopped him.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his glasses severely on the dismayed three.

"It appears, Silver, that you and your companions, a few nights ago, saw Mr. Dalton enter an inn called the Bird-in-Hand, near Coombe."

The three juniors glanced at Mr. Dalton. They would have faced the utmost wrath of the Head, rather than have betrayed him. But the young master made them an impatient gesture to answer.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Jimmy Silver.

"You seem to have drawn conclusions from this circumstance, reflecting upon your Form-master," said the Head sternly.

"No, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "We—we know that Dicky—I mean Mr. Dalton—is—is all right. We—we're sure—"

"As the story seems to have been made public in the school, I have come here to speak on the subject," said the Head. "Mr. Dalton did indeed visit that disreputable place—at my request."

"Oh!" gasped the three. They could only gasp.

"On a recent occasion," said the Head—and his glance lingered on Peele of the Fourth—"on a recent occasion, a boy belonging to this school was flogged for visiting that place. There was reason to suppose that others had done

so. I requested Mr. Dalton to call upon Mr. Stiggins and warn him that if he allowed any Rookwood boy to enter his inn again he would be pursued and punished with the utmost rigour of the law. This duty Mr. Dalton very kindly performed."

"Oh!" gasped the three again.

They stood almost dumbfounded. Such a simple explanation as that had not even occurred to them.

They understood now. Mr. Dalton had walked down to the Bird-in-Hand at the Head's request. He had glanced round before entering, from a very natural dislike to being seen to enter such a resort. He had gone to the back door, because he did not care to walk through the crowd of loafers in the public rooms of the inn. It was all plain enough now—only too plain. The fact that Mr. Dalton had gone there at the Head's request explained everything.

"That is all!" said the Head; and he swept out of the Form-room.

"Take your places, boys!" said Mr. Dalton.

Jimmy Silver turned a crimson face on his Form-master.

"We—we're sorry, sir!" he gasped. "We never thought any harm of you, sir, really, and we meant to keep it a secret—a dead secret—only a silly fool let it out, sir——"

"There was no need to keep the incident a secret," said Mr. Dalton. "And had you not been late for roll-call that night, you would never have been aware of it. However, there is no harm done, and you may take your places."

And the three sat down at their desks.

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Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad that the explanation had been made—that they had no reasons for changing their high opinion of Dicky Dalton, after all. Lovell, indeed, took credit to himself for having brought the explanation about. He pointed out to his chums that they would always

have had a doubt about their Form-master had the affair remained secret, and so he had, after all, been right all along the line, as he generally was.

Lovell pointed this out, and would have pointed it out at greater length, had not his chums collared him, and pushed his head into the coal-box—after which Lovell dropped the subject, and Jimmy Silver & Co. dropped Lovell—hard.

CHAPTER 7.

Up Against It!

"AND sevenpence——"

Arthur Edward Lovell murmured the words, and passed his hand over his heated brow.

"And sevenpence—and elevenpence—halfpenny——"

The weather had turned warm, and it was a hot afternoon.

The end study was one of the best in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood. It had two windows, with a wide view of the green old quadrangle from one, and of the playing fields from the other. Both windows were open, and let in what breeze there was.

Nevertheless, the end study was warm, not to say hot—indeed a little stuffy.

Arthur Edward Lovell, in his shirt-sleeves and socks, endured the heat and wrestled with accounts.

It was not really a day that a fellow should have chosen to wrestle with accounts. As it was a half-holiday, Lovell might have been out of doors—and cricket was going on, on Little Side.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were at the cricket—Lovell, when he looked out of one window could see their white-clad figures against the green of the grass. When he looked out of the other, he could see fellows loafing placidly in the cool shade of the ancient beeches, in the quad.

But Lovell, though he longed to hurl

his account books across the study, and slam the inkpot into the fireplace, stuck to his task. He was a stickler—though sometimes he selected the wrong place and the wrong moment for sticking.

"And fifteen pence—that's one and threepence," murmured Arthur Edward, passing his hand across his brow again, and leaving there a trail of ink.

Lovell's chums could have told him—indeed, had told him—that he ought never to have taken on the job of secretary and treasurer of the junior cricket club. He really had not a head for figures. His arithmetic was almost a joke in the Form—in maths, he was in a "set" that included fags of the Third.

Mornington had remarked that Lovell, in adding two and two together, was likely to arrive at three or five—only by chance and luck combined was he likely to reach a total of four. This was one of Morny's exaggerations. But Lovell found great difficulties in arithmetic. One difficulty was that if he added a column of figures from the bottom, and if he added it again from the top, two different results were produced. This was enough to put any fellow off his stroke.

"And two shillings and sixpence!" murmured Lovell. "And then there was three and fivepence—or was it four and fivepence? But I think I added that before!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, being one of those fellows who know best, never listened to advice. He regarded himself as an ideal treasurer. He had a little tin box in his desk where he kept the funds, and he always kept that desk locked—excepting on occasions when he mislaid the key.

He would dun fellows dutifully for their subscriptions—sometimes twice over by mistake. In compensation, he sometimes forgot to collect subscriptions even once from other fellows.

Integrity, which is a great quality in a treasurer, Lovell possessed in abundance. Other qualifications were a little wanting; but Arthur Edward declined to realise that.

On this hot afternoon Lovell was determined to get through with his accounts. They had accumulated a little.

Jimmy Silver had urged him to leave them over a little longer—put them by for a rainy day, in fact. Lovell explained that they had already been left over rather too long.

"If you can put them off for weeks, old man, you can put them off for a day," said Jimmy.

Lovell shook his head.

"It's because they've been put off for weeks that they can't be put off any longer," he explained logically.

Jimmy Silver gave it up at that; he knew from of old that it was useless to argue with Arthur Edward.

So Lovell sat and wrestled with accounts, and perspired, and discarded his jacket, and then his waistcoat, and then his boots. His face was red, his forehead damp and corrugated. He gnawed the end of his pen, and he inked his fingers, his accounts, his nose, the table, and most of the articles that lay about on the table.

Lovell was in this happy state when Tabby Muffin blew in.

The door stood wide open, for coolness; and Reginald Muffin's fat figure rolled in unchecked. Reginald Muffin stopped and stared, at the sight of the cash on the table.

There were several currency notes, fastened together by an elastic band.

There was a little pile of half-crowns. There was a five-shilling-piece. There were some dozens of shillings and sixpences, all in neat little stacks. There was a heap of copper.

So much cash dazzled the eyes of Reginald Muffin. In the pockets of the fat Classical there was not a single solitary "brown."

Tabby, as usual, was stony; and this

was a serious matter, for it was getting near tea-time.

The fat Classical, in fact, had rolled along to the end study, in the hope of finding the cupboard door unlocked, and something in the nature of cake or tarts in the cupboard. He had not expected to find any member of the Fattest Four at home on that sultry afternoon.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"Get out, fatty!" he snapped.

"I say, Lovell, old man——"

"Buzz off!"

Arthur Edward Lovell was in no mood to be bothered by Tubby Muffin or anybody else. Indeed, he was feeling strongly disposed to kick somebody just then.

"Doing your accounts?" asked Tubby.

"Yea, ass!"

"Let me help you, old fellow."

Lovell snorted. If there was a fellow in the Fourth Form worse at arithmetic than Lovell, it was Reginald Muffin.

"Don't be an ass!" he said. "Buzz off!"

"Get 'em a bit mixed?" asked Tubby sympathetically. He showed no sign of buzzing off. The sight of the money seemed to fascinate the impunctuous Tubby.

"No, ass! I suppose I can keep accounts," said Lovell, with a sniff. Nothing would have induced Arthur Edward to admit that he had found his task a difficult one.

Tubby came nearer the table. He fairly gloated over the cash. Lovell was in difficulties over addition. But Tubby looked as if he would have found subtraction quite easy and agreeable.

"Club funds, what?" he asked.

"Yea, Clear!"

"Not your own money?" asked Tubby.

"Some of it's mine!" growled Lovell. "I've got to get it sorted out somehow. I mean, it's all right, I've got it all at my finger-tips. Only I don't

want to be interrupted by a fat idiot, sec?"

"I'll tell you what," said Tubby brightly. "You're fagged, old fellow. You'd handle this matter much better after tea. Let's have tea, and then pile into it together."

Lovell grunted. He wanted his tea, and a cup of tea would have revived him for his task, he felt. But he was determined to get through his task.

"I'll get the tea," went on Tubby. "I'll cut down to the shop and get the stuff, and—and everything."

"And pay for it?" asked Lovell sarcastically.

"Well, no," said Tubby. "I happen to be short of ready cash, old chap. But you've got a lot of money there."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "Do you think I'm going to use the club funds to stand a study feed?"

"Well, there's a lot of it," said Tubby, "and you say some of it's yours. Besides, you can make it up again."

"Get out!"

"Well, look here, old chap," said Tubby. "Lend me ten bob out of all that money——"

"Lend you ten bob!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Yes; and I'll square to-morrow. You can put off paying some bill or other till I square. Is that all right?"

Arthur Edward Lovell did not seem to think that it was all right.

Tubby Muffin stretched out a fat hand towards the pile of half-crowns. He seemed to have an impression that Lovell was going to accede to his extraordinary request.

"Good man," he said. "Of course, I'll square to-morrow—or—the next day. Shall I take some of these half-crowns, Lovell? Come to think of it, you may as well make it a pound while you're about it. That will be eight half-crowns—and, I say—Whooooooop!"

It happened so suddenly that Tubby Muffin hardly knew what had happened. But he found himself extended in the passage, and he had a feeling

that he had landed there with a considerable concussion.

Lovell glared at him from the doorway.

"Now cut!" he roared.

"Ow!"

"Buzz off, you fat chump!"

"Wow!"

"If you want me to kick you along the passage, just wait till I get a boot on—"

"Yow-ow!"

Tubby Muffin did not wait. He rolled hurriedly out of reach, and bolted into the box-room at the end of the passage, the nearest refuge. The box-room door slammed after him with a slam that rang like a thunder-clap along the Fourth Form passage.

Dick Oswald looked out of Study No. 6.

"Hallo, Lovell! You look warm!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Come in and have a cup of tea, old bean—I've just made it," said Oswald.

"Thanks, old chap! That's just what I want," said Lovell, and he crossed into No. 6.

Lovell had laboured long over his accounts, and he was warm and dry and thirsty. He felt that he was entitled to take off a few minutes for a refreshing cup of tea.

Being entitled to do so, he did so. It was natural that over the cup of tea, and the bun that accompanied it, there should be a little chat, and that the chat should refer to cricket. As it happened, Arthur Edward Lovell had been cultivating a late cut, of which he was rather proud, but the beauty of which was hidden from the other fellows. Lovell told Oswald all about it, at considerable length, hardly listening to Oswald's remarks about bowling.

And so it was that the accounts remained unfinished, and Lovell had almost forgotten their troublesome existence, when Jimmy Silver and Ruby and Newcome, ruddy from the cricket, came tramping in to tea.

CHAPTER 8.

Arithmetical!

"LOVELL—"

"It's Tubby!"

"You fat boulder!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. expected to find Lovell in the end study. They hoped that he had finished his accounts and got tea ready. Both hopes proved illusory.

Lovell had not finished his accounts and had not got tea ready. He was not even there.

But Reginald Muffin was there.

Reginald Muffin was hanging over the table, eyeing with greedy eyes the currency notes, and the coins that glimmered in the sunlight.

Reginald Muffin was struggling with temptation.

Having peered out of the box-room and found that the coast was clear, the fat Classical had ventured out, and so observed that the end study was empty, and the money still on the table.

He hung over it, struggling with temptation, and feeling his inward resistance growing weaker and weaker.

Of course, Tubby would not have thought of purloining money. Tubby was honest. He had a conscience, although it was a remarkably elastic one, and generally accommodated itself to whatever Tubby felt disposed to do.

Stealing was a crime that Tubby would have regarded with disgust and horror. But borrowing was another matter.

Why should he not borrow ten shillings, or a pound or so, and stand himself a tremendous blow-out at the tuckshop? He could leave on the table his I O U for the amount.

In making up his accounts Lovell could count in that I O U as cash, so it would be all right. Tubby would redeem it for cash as soon as he was in funds!

This seemed an excellent idea to

Reginald Muffin; but he could not help thinking that Lovell would not be satisfied. Personally, he did not care much whether Lovell was satisfied or not. But he did not want to be booted, and he did not want to be rewarded with "six" from a cricket-stump or a five-bat.

Tubby Muffin gave a jump as the three juniors entered. He faced round with a red face.

"I—I haven't touched it!" he gasped.

"You fat boulder! What are you doing in this study?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"I—I came to help Lovell with his accounts——"

"Get out!"

"I—I say, Jimmy——"

"That duffer Lovell has gone out and left the cash spread all over the table," said Raby. "I think that's about the limit!"

"I—I was looking after it for him," gasped Tubby. "That—that's why I came in."

"Look here, you fat chump, have you been meddling with that money?" asked Newcome suspiciously.

"Nuhno! I—I haven't——"

"Well, travel!" said Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin, with a last longing glance at the cash, travelled. Jimmy Silver frowned as he looked at the table. Lovell had left the money there, open and unguarded; and this seemed unusually careless even of Lovell. Any fellow might have come along and helped himself; and it was only too clear that Reginald Muffin, whose ideas on the subject of mium and taum were a little mixed, had been thinking of helping himself. It really was too bad of Lovell.

"The ass!" said Jimmy.

"The chump!" agreed Newcome. "I suppose there isn't any heastly thief in the Fourth, of course. Still I——"

"Still, a chap ought to be careful with money," growled Jimmy. "We were dufters to back up Lovell when

he put up for treasurer. Only he was so jolly keen on it."

"Where the dickens is he?" asked Newcome.

"Goodness knows!"

Jimmy Silver stepped into the passage and shouted.

"Lovell! Pathead! Lovell! Ass! Lovell!"

Arthur Edward Lovell looked out of Oswald's study. He stared at the captain of the Fourth.

"Hallo! What are you yelling about?" he asked. "Is the study on fire?"

"You silly ass!" said Jimmy. "You've left a stack of money lying about on the table——"

"Oh, I forgot! I mean, I was just coming back," said Lovell, coming across to the end study. "It's all right! I just dropped in to see Oswald. The money's safe enough. Everybody's out of doors, too."

"We found Tubby Muffin gleating over it," said Raby.

"Well, if you did, I suppose he isn't a pickpocket, is he?" snapped Lovell. "I don't think you ought to suspect Muffin of being dishonest, Raby."

"You silly owl!" roared Raby. "Who suspects him of being dishonest?"

"Well, I supposed you did, from what you said. But if you don't, what does it matter whether he was in the study or not?"

"You know jolly well you shouldn't leave money about. If this is the way you keep your accounts lying——"

"You can't teach me anything about keeping accounts, Raby, so you'd better dry up. I stepped out of the study for a minute," said Lovell. "You talk as if Rookwood was stacked with burglars. Nice opinion for a fellow to have about his own school!"

George Raby breathed hard and deep. There were times when it really seemed that the only way of dealing with Lovell was by punching his nose.

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver, hastening to pour oil on the troubled

waters. "No harm done, anyhow. But you'd better lock up the money, Lovell. You can't be too careful."

"I haven't finished my accounts yet."

"Is it an all-night job?" asked Raby sarcastically.

"It's a job I'm going to do properly, and take my time about," said Lovell firmly. "You're not going to make me hurry over my accounts and get them wrong."

"Look here——"

"What have you fellows come in for, anyhow?" asked Lovell, impatiently.

"Tea!"

"You don't want your tea yet," Lovell, being greatly refreshed with tea and buns in Oswald's study, did not see any immediate necessity for a meal. "Blessed if you fellows aren't always guzzling!"

"Don't you want your own tea?" demanded Newcome.

"I can wait, when there's business on hand," said Lovell loftily. "Look here, if you chaps want to guzzle, go and guzzle with Oswald. He's got tea going, and stacks of buns."

"We've come in for tea in our own study," growled Raby. "Shift your rubbish off the table!"

"I'm not shifting anything till I've finished my accounts. I'm not going to get my accounts mixed because a greedy ass wants to guzzle!"

"Oh, let's go and stick Oswald," said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Anything for a quiet life. I hope you'll be done in time for prep, Lovell."

"Not likely," said Raby, still sarcastic. "This is going on till bedtime, and Lovell will bring his jolly old accounts up to the dorm to finish them."

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"Oh, come on!" said Jimmy Silver.

The juniors quitted the end study, and found hospitality in Study No. 6 with Oswald and Flynn. Meanwhile, Arthur Edward Lovell sat down to finish his accounts.

He wrestled with them manfully.

Items of expenditure were totalled up at last, and items of revenue were totalled up, and it only remained to subtract the smaller sum from the larger, the remainder being the cash in hand, now stacked on the study table.

Arthur Edward Lovell applied himself to his final task. And his final sum worked out as follows:

	£	s.	d.
To subs, etc.	11	10	6
Expended	7	15	4
Balance, cash in hand	4	15	2

"That's all right," said Lovell, after going over it twice. "Now, there's four pounds fifteen-and-twopence here in cash—— But I'd better count it. Nothing like being careful."

Lovell counted his cash.

"Three ten-bob notes—that's thirty bob—eight half-crowns—that's two pound ten—five bob bit—that's two pounds fifteen. Fourteen shillings—no, fifteen—sixteen—no, fifteen, that's right; that's three pounds ten. Eight sixpences—that's four bob—three pounds fourteen. Fifteen pennies—no, sixteen—sixteen pennies is one-and-fourpence—that makes three pounds fifteen-and-fourpence. Twopence is mine, so that makes three pounds fifteen-and-twopence."

Lovell paused.

"There's a two-shilling bit, but that's mine. I remember getting it in change, and I know I had two-and-twopence altogether. That makes three pounds fifteen-and-twopence. Instead of four pounds fifteen-and-twopence. Where's the other blessed pound?"

Lovell was annoyed.

A whole pound seemed missing, somehow, and he was very anxious to finish before his comrades came back. He did not want any feebly humorous remarks on his system of keeping accounts.

He was puzzled as well as annoyed. A shilling or a half-crown might have rolled to the floor, but a whole pound in silver couldn't have done so. He knew there had been no pound notes, and only three ten-shilling notes.

The missing pound must have been in silver and coppers, and it was therefore large enough to be seen, but it was not to be seen.

Lovell displaced and replaced every article on the table in the search for the missing pound. But not a single coin turned up.

"My hat!" murmured Lovell in dismay. "I know I had all the money; it was in the tin box." A bright thought struck him. "Perhaps I've left it there!"

He jumped to his desk, almost convinced that he would find the missing pound in the tin cashbox.

But the box was empty. Lovell searched through the desk. It might have dropped out somehow. But it hadn't!

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "That villain Muffin!"

He caught his breath. There was no need to search further.

CHAPTER 4.

A Serious Affair!

"WHAT'S up?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. asked that question with one breath as they came back into the end study after tea.

It was clear at a glance, from the look on Lovell's face, that something was up—something serious.

Lovell had gathered up his accounts—the fragments of mapot paper and old envelopes on which he had made his arithmetical calculations. The money remained on the table—three pounds fifteen shillings and twopence. Twice again had Lovell counted it, note by note and coin by coin. But he could not make it come to four

pounds fifteen shillings and twopence; the thing was impossible.

Certainly he had once made it come to three pounds fourteen-and-tenpence, and once to three pounds fifteen exactly. But these little variations did not affect the matter at issue—a pound was missing.

Lovell looked grimly at his study-mates.

"You fellows think I can't do arithmetic," he said, rather aggressively. "Well, count that money yourselves. We've got to be sure about it."

"Anything wrong with the accounts?" asked Raby.

"Nothing," said Lovell disdainfully. "As soon as there's something wrong with my accounts I shall chuck up the job. It's not likely to happen, I hope."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Count that money?"

"That's soon done," said Jimmy Silver. He counted the cash on the table. "Three pounds fifteen-and-twopence."

"Sure?" asked Lovell.

"Yes, ass!" Jimmy Silver smiled. Really, it was not a difficult arithmetical exercise.

"You other fellows count it," said Lovell. "I've done it myself, and Jimmy's done it. Now you do it."

"But what——" asked Newcome, perplexed.

"Count the money."

"Oh, all right!" Raby and Newcome counted the money in turn. They made the result the same as Jimmy had done.

"That's all right, then," said Lovell. "There can't be any mistake when we've all four gone through it."

"Would you like Mr. Dalton or the Head to go through it?" asked Raby, who seemed in a sarcastic vein that afternoon. "A sum like that is a bit steep for the Fourth Form."

"You may as well be serious, Raby. This is a serious matter," said Lovell.

"Blessed if I see it."

"There's a pound gone."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You've lost a pound," exclaimed Newcome.

"I haven't lost a pound, Arthur Newcome."

"You said it's gone."

"It's gone, because it's been taken," answered Lovell. "The money was there when I went across to Oswald's study for tea, and it ought to have been there when I came back. It wasn't."

"Phew!"

"I know you fellows never touched it, of course," said Lovell.

"Thanks!" said Raby.

"It's clear enough, of course. That fat idiot Muffin was in here when you came in from the cricket. You said you found him gloating over the money."

"And you said he wouldn't have touched it," rejoined Raby.

"I thought he wouldn't, of course."

"And I jolly well know he wouldn't!" said Newcome.

"I'm afraid he would," said Lovell.

"You see, the fat idiot asked me to lend him some of it, though I told him it was the club's money. The silly ass thought it would be all right—he hasn't sense enough to understand that a fellow can't touch money that isn't his own. I'm not saying that he's stolen it—but it's quite clear that he's taken the pound."

"He couldn't take it without stealing it, I suppose," said Newcome.

"Well, no, but I fancy he's got some fatheaded idea in his thick head that he's only borrowed it—you know what a fool he is," said Lovell.

"Not the only fool in the Fourth!" murmured Raby.

"Eh! What!"

"Oh, nothing! So you think Muffin bagged a quid from the table, when he was in here?"

"If he didn't, who did? Did you fellows see anybody else hanging about?"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Only Muffin," he answered.

There was a deep silence in the end study. Jimmy Silver & Co. remembered how Reginald Muffin had been hanging greedily over the money, eyeing it. Certainly he had been tempted—not to steal, doubtless, but to borrow without leave—which came to the same thing for any fellow less obtuse than Tubby.

If Tubby had not "borrowed" some of the cash, it was probably only because the sudden arrival of the three juniors had prevented it. Only too well they knew Reginald Muffin's easy notions about money.

If the pound had really gone, it was fairly obvious in whose fat paws it had gone.

"You're sure it's missing?" asked Raby at last.

"You've counted the money yourself, haven't you?" growled Lovell. "There ought to be four pounds fifteen and twopence. There's three pounds fifteen and twopence."

"You haven't mucked up your accounts somehow?"

Arthur Edward Lovell disdained to reply to that question. He only gave George Raby a withering glare.

"Well, you know what an ass you are, old chap," said Raby. "But if you know the money was there—"

"The money was there, exactly as I took it from the cash-box," said Lovell acidly. "You've counted it yourselves. There's a pound short. Of course, you can make out that I've embezzled the pound, if you like. Perhaps that would suit you."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, if you can help it," said Raby angrily. "If the money was on the table, and it's not there now, Muffin must have taken it. I'm pretty certain that he was thinking of bagging some of it when we butted in."

"I'm glad you can see it," said Lovell dryly.

"Of course, we shall have to go into this," said Jimmy Silver, with a deeply troubled brow. "Muffin's quite fool enough to do it. He can't keep the money—but we don't want to show him up as a thief all over Rookwood, when he's only a potty ass."

"Just what I was thinking," said Ruby; "and we don't want to tell all Rookwood how accounts are kept in this study, with money lying loose about the room for any chap to pick up if he wants to."

Lovell breathed hard.

"We don't want a lot of fuss," he said. "The fellow's a fool, not a thief. We want to get the money back, and thrash him, and let the matter end."

"That's right," said Jimmy Silver. "We'd better look for Muffin—"

"And pretty quick, too, or the cash will be gone to the tuckshop," said Newcome. "You know Muffin!"

"My hat! Yes—come on."

The Fistical Four hurried from the study. They wanted to find Reginald Muffin, and they wanted to find him quick.

CHAPTER 18.

After Muffin!

"SEEN Muffin?"

Valentine Mornington stopped, as four excited juniors asked him that question in the Fourth Form passage.

"Muffin?" he repeated.

"Yes—seen him?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Certainly."

"Where?"

"At dinner," said Mornington cheerily.

"You—you silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"Have you seen him since dinner, you frabjous chump?"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Jimmy; and the Fistical Four scudded on to the stairs, leaving Mornington laughing.

Putty of the Fourth was coming up-

stairs. Teddy Grace was one of Tubby's study-mates, so the four juniors stopped to ask him about Tubby.

"Seen Muffin?"

"Yes."

Putty of the Fourth was a humorist, and always prepared to pull any fellow's leg. So Arthur Edward Lovell growled:

"No larks, you ass! I don't want to know if you saw him at dinner, or in class this morning. Have you seen Muffin lately?"

"Five minutes ago."

"Oh, good! Where?"

"In the tuckshop."

"Might have guessed that," said Newcome. "Come on—we shall find him grubbing, of course."

"Look on the counter!" called out Putty of the Fourth, after the four as they hurried downstairs.

Lovell glanced back.

"On the counter?" he repeated.

"Yes—they're all there, in a big dish. A fresh lot in to-day, Mr. Kettle said."

"A—a—a what? A fresh lot of what?" yelled Lovell.

"Muffins!" said Putty.

The Fistical Four turned round on the staircase. Putty of the Fourth grinned down at them serenely. Apparently the humorous Putty was making a pun on Tubby's surname, instead of giving Jimmy Silver & Co. the information they sought.

"Is that a joke, you ass?" roared Jimmy Silver. "Look here, we were asking you about Tubby Muffin?"

"Oh, my mistake!" said Putty blandly. "I was telling you about Mr. Kettle's muffins in the tuckshop."

Putty smiled cheerily. Perhaps he thought that the Fistical Four would be amused by his harmless little joke. They weren't! If Putty had been a little less overpoweringly humorous, he might have hesitated to joke with four fellows evidently in a breathless hurry.

For a moment Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at him in surprise and wrath;

and then they charged up the stairs at him.

Putty was collared by four pairs of hands, almost before he knew what was happening to him.

Bump!

"Oh!" roared Putty, as he set down on a stair. "Ow! You dummies—oh! Yoooooop! Wow!"

"Bang his head!" roared Lovell. "Bang it on the banisters!"

"I say—ow—oh—yaroooh—help!"

Bang! Bang!

The yells of Putty of the Fourth rang down the big staircase. Jimmy Silver & Co. dropped him, and raced down the stairs. They left Putty sitting on a step, rubbing his head in anguish, and probably wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had not been so humorous.

The Fistical Four came breathlessly out into the quad, and ran for the tuckshop. They did not wait to ask for any further information from fellows they met.

If Tubby was in possession of funds, the tuckshop was his likeliest destination, and they resolved to look there first.

"There he is!" exclaimed Lovell, as the four burst into Sergeant Kettle's little shop, in the secluded corner of the quad behind the trees.

There was Muffin!

He was seated on a high stool at the counter in the outer shop. The inner room was used only by seniors. So there was Tubby, in full view, as the Fistical Four came in.

He had a plate of tarts before him and a glass of ginger-beer at his elbow, and seemed to be enjoying his podgy self.

There were a dozen other fellows in the shop. Jimmy Silver & Co. pushed their way through without ceremony; there was not a moment to waste. Tubby was already spending money.

"Here! Whom are you shoving, young Lovell?" shouted Adolphus Smythe at the Sheriff indignantly.

"You, you ass!" snapped Lovell. "Can't you see for yourself?" And with another shove he sent Adolphus against the wall, spluttering with indignant wrath.

A moment more and the Fistical Four were round Muffin.

If they had had any doubts, those doubts were solved now. Tubby was piling into tuck; and well they knew that he had been "stony" earlier that afternoon, for he had made attempts to raise a small loan from each and every member of the Co.

Four pairs of hands were laid on Reginald Muffin, and he came off the high stool with a crash.

There was a gurgling roar from Tubby.

Nearly a whole jam-tart was in his capacious mouth. Tubby was accustomed to taking in his stores in bulk.

Some of that tart went the wrong way, as Reginald Muffin sprawled suddenly on the floor.

"Now, you fat rotter!" roared Lovell.

"Goooooogh!"

"Own up, you villain!"

"Goooooogh!"

"Where's that quid, you fat frog?"

"Mmmmmmm!"

"By gum, I'll shake it out of him if he doesn't own up!" exclaimed Lovell, grasping the breathless Tubby by the collar.

"Yugurrrgggghh!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Don't choke him! Now, then, Tubby!"

"What the tump's the row?" asked Conroy of the Fourth. "What are you fellows pitching into Tubby for?"

"Bullyin' I call it!" sneered Peele.

Arthur Edward Lovell turned on Cyril Peele with a look that made him jump backwards as if moved by a spring. Peele of the Fourth departed rather hurriedly from the shop.

Tubby Muffin sat up.

"Ow! Gooooogh! Ooooooh!" he spluttered. "You rotters! Ow! Wharrrr!"

you ragging a chap for? Ooooh! I'll jolly well lick you all round! Minnimim!"

"Look here!" roared Lovell. "We want——"

"Don't shout it out here!" said Jimmy Silver hastily. "Come out of the shop, Tubby. We want to speak to you quietly."

"Shan't!" roared Tubby. "Grooo! I don't want to speak to you! You're beasts! Rotter, in fact! I haven't finished my tarts!"

"Don't be a silly ass!" whispered Raby. "We want a pound from you, you duffer!"

"I'm not lending you a pound, Raby. You refused to lend me sixpence this afternoon."

"You silly owl!" gasped Raby. "I mean——"

"I don't care what you mean!" Tubby Muffin staggered to his feet. "Leave a chap alone when he's having his tea. Don't you try bagging my tarts, you rotters! Go and eat coke!"

"Look here!"

"Oh, shut up!" howled Muffin. "I don't want to have anything to say to you. You're beasts—especially you, Lovell! I despise you! If you think I'm going to stand you tea, now I'm in funds, you're jolly well mistaken. See?"

Lovell breathed hard.

"Will you come out where we can speak to you quietly?" he demanded.

"No, I won't!" retorted Tubby.

"Then you can have it here!" exclaimed Lovell savagely. "Hand over the pound you pinched from my study, you fat rascal!"

Tubby Muffin's fat jaw dropped, and he blinked at Arthur Edward speechlessly. From the other fellows, crowding round the scene, there came a buzz. Evidently there was no hope now of keeping the incident dark, as the Fistical Four had intended. Openly and publicly, Reginald Muffin had to come up for judgment.

CHAPTER II.

Brought Before the Head!

"HAND it over!"

Tubby Muffin was still speechless, Arthur Edward Lovell stretched out his hand for the pound, but Muffin only blinked at it. He seemed to be in a dumbfounded state.

"Muffin, you ass!" said Jimmy Silver anxiously. "For goodness' sake hand over the pound, or what's left of it! You don't want the masters or prefects to get on to this, do you?"

"Muffin's been pickin' and stealin'?" grinned Townsend of the Fourth. "Fat little blighter! He pinched a cake out of my study the other day. Look here, if he's taken money, you ought to take him to Mr. Dalton. It's too thick!"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Topham.

"The silly owl would call it borrowing," said Newcome. "We don't want to get him dogged or sacked. The Head doesn't know him as we do."

"Hand it over, Muffin!" said Lovell.

Reginald Muffin found his voice at last.

"Yah!"

"Muffin, old man!" urged Raby.

"Yah! Rotters! I never pinched anything!" gasped Tubby. "I might have borrowed a few bob. But I didn't. Those beasts came in, as you know jolly well. Besides, I wouldn't have. I knew you'd make a rotten fuss if I did. Yah!"

"If you don't hand it over, Muffin, we shall take you to Mr. Dalton."

"Take me as soon as you like. Yah! I'll jolly well ask Dick Dalton whether I'm to be accused of stealing!" howled Tubby. "Yah!"

"You took a pound off the table in my study——"

"I didn't!" howled Muffin.

"Why, we've just found you spending the money!" exclaimed Newcome.

"I wasn't!"

"Look here, Muffin——"

"Putty of the Fourth lent me two

beb!" howled Tubby Muffin. "He's had a remittance to-day, and he stood me two bob not ten minutes ago. You can ask him. Yah!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"I never went near your study!"

"We found you there!" hooted Baby.

"I—I mean, I never touched the money!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I wouldn't! I hope I'm an honourable chap!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look here, what's all this about?" exclaimed Conroy. "If Muffin's pinched money it's jolly serious. But has he?"

"No!" howled Tubby.

"It looks certain," said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell was doing his accounts with the club's money on the table. He went out of the study and left it there."

"My hat! What a way of doing accounts!"

"That's not your biane, Conroy!" snorted Lovell. "If you can do accounts better than I can, perhaps the club will make you treasurer. How was I to know that that fat villain would dodge into my study and pinch the money?"

"I never did!" shrieked Muffin.

"We found him in the study, Conroy," said Jimmy Silver. "He was hanging over the money, and after that Lovell found that there was a pound missing. It looks clear enough. And we all know Muffin."

"We do!" assented Conroy. "Tubby, old man, the best thing you can do is to own up and keep clear of Mr. Dalton."

"I haven't touched it!" shrieked Tubby. "I tell you I wasn't—I mean, I never did——"

"But you're a fibber, old man—you roll out whoppers all the time. Anyhow, if you deny it, it will have to go before the Form-master. Better think twice."

"Yah!"

"You fat duffer!" exclaimed Lovell. "Don't you know that you'll get sacked

for this? The Head won't make allowances for you being a born fool!"

"Well, I like that!" said Muffin. "If there's a bigger fool in the Fourth than you, I'd like to have him pointed out to me."

"Why, you cheeky barrel——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at!" roared Lovell. "Look here, I'm fed up with Muffin's cheek. He won't hand over the money——"

"How can I hand it over when I haven't got it?" howled Muffin.

"Oh, chuck that! For the last time, will you hand me back the pound you took from my study?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yah!" hooted Tubby. "If there's a quid missing, I expect you've had it. I wanted the fellows to make me treasurer. I'd have taken care of their money for them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell grabbed the fat Classical by the collar. Tubby's last suggestion was too much for him.

"Come on!" he growled. "You're going to Mr. Dalton."

"Leggo!"

"You'll have to go to Mr. Dalton, Tubby, if you don't own up!" urged Jimmy Silver, deeply troubled.

"I don't care! I never did it. You're welcome to all the pounds I've got on me!" snorted Tubby.

"That means that you've hidden it somewhere, I suppose," said Lovell.

"Come on, you fat villain!"

With a swing of his sinewy arm Arthur Edward Lovell hooked the fat junior out of the shop. His comrades followed, and most of the fellows present followed them.

They wanted to see the finish of the affair—which was possibly to be the finish for Reginald Muffin also. Nobody attached any importance to Tubby's denials. And if he was adjudged a thief it was improbable that there would be much mercy for him. Obdurate or not, the fat Classical knew very well

that he ought not to touch money not his own.

Quite a little army of Classical fellows marched up to the House. Tubby in the lead in the midst of the Fistical Four.

On the way, Jimmy Silver hoped that Muffin would see reason, and realize that the best way out of the affair was by owning up. But Tubby did not seem to see it.

The "Army" arrived at the door of Mr. Richard Dalton's study. Jimmy made a last appeal to the fat junior.

"Now, Muffin, before we go in to —"

"Yah!"

"For you own sake, Tubby," urged Ruby.

"Rats!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, out of all patience, knocked at the Form-master's door. The quiet voice of Mr. Dalton bade him enter.

Mr. Dalton was talking cricket with Bulkeley of the Sixth in the study when the Fistical Four entered with Reginald Muffin. Master and prefect stared at the invaders in surprise.

Round the half-open doorway congregated a dozen of the Fourth and some of the Shell. There was a buzz of excitement from the passage, which was plainly heard in the Fourth Form master's study.

"Well!" ejaculated Mr. Dalton. "What is all this? What does this mean, Silver?"

Jimmy looked at Lovell. It was for Arthur Edward to explain. Arthur Edward proceeded to do so with somewhat breathless emphasis.

Mr. Dalton's brow grew stern as he listened. He eyed Tubby Muffin, and he eyed the Fistical Four.

"We didn't want to bring him to you, sir," concluded Lovell. "But he gave us no choice. He won't own up that he's got the pound, and, of course, we can't let him keep it."

"Certainly you cannot, if he has taken it," said Mr. Dalton.

"I haven't!" yelled Tubby.

"We're not accusing him of theft, sir," said Lovell hastily. "Muffin's a born fool, sir, as all the Form knows. You must have noticed it yourself, sir."

"Hem!" Mr. Dalton's face twitched a little, and Bulkeley smiled. "Muffin, do you deny this?"

"Yes, sir. I wasn't there——"

"We saw him there, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"I—I mean, I—I was there—that is, in a manner of speaking," stammered Tubby Muffin. "I—I mean——"

"You will find it better to tell the truth, Muffin. Did you, or did you not take money from Lovell's study?"

"No!" gasped Tubby.

And there was a pause.

CHAPTER 15.

Just Like Lovell!

MR. DALTON looked very thoughtful. The juniors waited for him to speak. The buzz in the passage outside was subdued.

The Fourth Form master broke the silence at last.

"If the pound is really missing, the circumstantial evidence is certainly very strong against Muffin," he said. "His own utterly unreliable character adds to it, and justifies the suspicion to some extent. But is it established beyond doubt that a pound is actually missing, Lovell?"

"Quite, sir."

"It appears that you left a certain sum on your study table. What was the amount?"

"All there was in the cash-box, sir," said Lovell. "When I counted it afterwards there should have been four pounds fifteen and twopence. But there was only three pounds fifteen and two."

"That is not very clear, Lovell. Had you not counted it before Muffin came to the study?"

"No, sir. I counted it after doing the accounts. It was only the balance of cash in hand," explained Lovell.

Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows.

"Did you know exactly how much cash there was in the cash-box?"

"Oh, no, sir; I hadn't done the accounts for some time. I put the money into the cash-box as it came in, a bit at a time."

"That is a very irregular way of keeping accounts, Lovell. You should have known the amount to the last farthing, and it should have been entered in writing in an account-book."

Lovell suppressed an indignant snort.

"That's my system, sir. Only I don't do the accounts every day, what with cricket and lines and things. I made up the accounts this afternoon right up to date."

"Then it appears that it was an unknown sum that you took from the cash-box in the first place."

"More or less, sir; but that doesn't make any difference."

"It may make a great difference, Lovell. If you were ignorant of the exact amount of money, how can you possibly tell that any is missing?"

Lovell smiled the superior smile of knowledge.

"That's all right, sir. It's in the accounts. I had so much in hand last time I did the accounts—since then I've received so much—expenditure so much—balance cash in hand. The balance ought to be four pounds fifteen and twopence. It's plain enough."

"You are quite sure that your calculations were correct?"

"Quite," said Arthur Edward Lovell confidently. "You know I'm pretty good at arithmetic, sir."

"On the contrary, Lovell, I am very far from satisfied with your ability in that direction."

"Oh, really, sir—"

Lovell suppressed his indignation. It really was too bad of Mr. Dalton to take the same view as Fourth Form chaps in these matters. Lovell had expected more sense from his Form-master.

"Let me see the account in question," said Mr. Dalton.

"I've got it all here, sir. That's the final balance," said Lovell, laying a paper on the table.

Mr. Dalton looked at it.

He looked at it again.

He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated.

It was quite an interesting balance of accounts. But the arithmetical ability it displayed was not really striking.

	E s. d.
To subs, etc.	11 10 6
Expended	7 15 4
Balance, cash in hand	4 15 2

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at their Form-master. They had not seen Lovell's precious balance of accounts, but they could see now that there was something amiss with it. They had taken it for granted that Lovell had known how much money was on the table when he declared that a pound was missing from the amount. It dawned upon them now that they had taken a little too much for granted.

"You'll find that all right, sir," said Lovell, wondering why Mr. Dalton looked so queer.

"Is it on this, Lovell, that you have accused Muffin of taking a pound from your study?"

"Certainly, sir! A pound is missing—"

"Look at it, boy! You have subtracted seven pounds fifteen shillings and fourpence from eleven pounds ten shillings and sixpence. Does that leave four pounds fifteen and twopence?"

"Certainly, sir!"

There was a chuckle in the passage.

"In doing this exceedingly simple sum," said Mr. Dalton, "you have forgotten to carry one pound to the pounds column."

"Eh?"

"The result should be not four pounds fifteen and twopence, but three pounds fifteen and twopence," said Mr. Dalton, in a grumbling voice.

"Whe-e-a-a-a!"

"My only Uncle John!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell picked up the paper and looked at it. Slowly a wave of crimson overspread his face.

Now that his little error was pointed out, even Arthur Edward Lovell could see it.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Do you see your mistake, Lovell?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes!"

"So it appears," said Mr. Dalton grimly, "that there is not a pound missing at all, as you have the required balance of three pounds fifteen and twopence."

"Oh! Yes. Ah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the crowded passage.

Tubby Muffin grinned.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked at one another, wishing that the floor of the study would open and swallow them up. Arthur Edward Lovell stood crimson and dumb.

"Mumma," said Dr. Dalton, "you are completely cleared. It is a silly and childish mistake on Lovell's part. Lovell, you will take a thousand lines of Virgil. Silver, I recommend you and your friends to select a new treasurer. You may go."

And the juniors went.

Outside the study Arthur Edward Lovell spoke no word. He tramped away with a burning face through a crowd of yelling juniors. For once even Arthur Edward Lovell had nothing to say for himself.

• • • • •
 Loud and long the Classical Fourth of Rookwood roared over it. Lovell could see nothing whatever of a comic nature in the episode. But the other fellows could, and they roared.

Lovell had bagged a thousand lines. He considered this a much more than

adequate punishment for what was, after all, only a small arithmetical error, which any fellow might have made. His three comrades, on the other hand, regarded it as inadequate. They considered it necessary to add to it. Lovell had made an egregious blunder, he had made a howling ass of himself, and he had made the end study look foolish, and he was still fairly well satisfied with himself, which was Arthur Edward Lovell all over, just like Lovell, in fact.

The Co. were not satisfied, and they proceeded to make their dissatisfaction clear. That evening yells of anguish were heard from the end study.

Fellows who looked in were treated to the interesting view of Arthur Edward Lovell bending over a chair in the grasp of Raby and Newcome, while Jimmy Silver laid on a cricket stump.

Arthur Edward Lovell was getting what he really had asked for. Stern justice was administered. It was, in the opinion of Arthur Edward's comrades, just what Arthur Edward wanted. And he got it.

And even then Lovell was not pleased, which again was just like Lovell.

CHAPTER 11.

Left in the Lurch!

"LOOK out for trouble!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

Three juniors of the Rookwood Fourth were sauntering along the towing-path by the river, when trouble appeared in the offing.

Trouble loomed up in the shape of four Bagshot juniors.

It was a half-holiday at both schools; and destiny had led the footsteps of Jimmy Silver & Co. along the river from one direction and those of the Bagshot Bounders from the other.

It was but seldom that Rookwooders and Bagshot fellows met without a "rag." On such occasions as football and cricket matches, they buried the

hatchet. On most other occasions they brandished it.

Pankley, Price, Poole and Sanderson of the Bagshot Fourth smiled genially as they bore down on the three.

Had the Fistical Four of Rookwood been all there probably a scrap would have resulted.

But one member of the four—George Raby—was not there, so the odds were in favour of the Bagshot heroes.

Consequently, instead of a sparring-match, Pankley & Co. contemplated a rag.

Their looks indicated as much as they quickened their pace at sight of Jimmy Silver, Lovell, and Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell pushed back his cuffs.

"We'll lick 'em!" he said.

"We'll try, anyhow!" remarked Newcome.

"Oh, we'll lick 'em!" said Lovell confidently. "I'll take two, and you chaps can take one each!"

Newcome grunted, and Jimmy Silver smiled.

"I wish Raby would come up!" said Jimmy with a glance over his shoulder. "He can't be far away."

"Oh, never mind Raby! Leave two of 'em to me!"

"Willingly, old chap, if you could handle them," said Jimmy Silver affably. "But you couldn't, you know."

"Look here——"

Jimmy Silver did not "look here"—he looked back along the towing-path. George Raby had started out from the school with his comrades, but had lingered behind on the towing-path. Jimmy would have been very glad to see him arrive just then on the spot, to make the odds equal.

But it was Pankley & Co. that arrived.

"Fancy meeting you chaps!" said Pankley politely. "Unexpected pleasure, and all that! Seen my minor about?"

"Haven't seen any monkeys at all,

till you fellows came up!" said Lovell, with equal politeness. "Perhaps somebody's found him and sent him back to the Zoo!"

Pankley's comrades smiled; but Pankley frowned.

"You see," said Price, "we came along to look for Panky's minor, who's always landing into trouble. But Panky minor can wait while we duck you Rookwood rotters."

"Poor Panky minor!" said Lovell. "He's booked for a long wait, then—say about a thousand years!"

"Not quite so long as that, I fancy!" grinned Pankley. "Anyhow, we'll see. Go for 'em!"

And the four Bagshot fellows made a rush.

Three Rookwooders stood up gallantly to the rush. All three were good fighting-men; but the heroes of Bagshot, too, were quite distinguished in that line.

Jimmy Silver was hotly engaged with Cecil Pankley. Price tackled Newcome. Poole and Sanderson devoted themselves to Arthur Edward Lovell.

That was what Lovell had wanted, according to his statement. But when it came about, Lovell found that it was rather too large an order.

In theory, Arthur Edward Lovell felt himself a match for two Bagshot Bounders, or even three or four. In actual practice, two of them were precisely twice as many as Arthur Edward could tackle with success.

Lovell put up a great fight; but he found himself whirled off the ground, and a few seconds later he found himself on his back, with Sanderson sitting on his chest.

Lovell wriggled and struggled.

"Take it easy, old scout!" said Sanderson.

"Gerroff!"

"You see, I shall tap your nose like that if you wriggle——"

"Ow!"

"And like that!"

"Whoooooop!"

Poole, grinning, ran to Pankley's help. Jimmy Silver was jerked off, having his hands too full with Pankley to attend to Poole. He was extended on the grass, and Poole sat on him, smiling, leaving Cecil Pankley at liberty.

Pankley immediately collared Newcome, and Newcome joined his chums on the grass, and Price sat on him.

Three Rookwooders lay on their backs and wriggled, firmly sat upon, while Pankley, with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face, surveyed them.

"Looks like a win for us!" he remarked. "What's your opinion, Silver?"

"Gerroff!"

"What do you think, Newcome?"

"Ow!"

"How does it strike you, Lovell?"

"I'll smash you!" roared Lovell.

"Mustn't lose its 'lekle temper!" said Pankley soothingly. "Only our fun, you know—merely a little jape! It was really kind of you fellows to happen along like this, and provide us with a little harmless and necessary entertainment!"

"Gerroff! I'll——"

"Rescue, Rookwood!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Pankley looked round quickly.

"Any more of your crowd hanging about?" he asked.

"Raby!" yelled Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver hoped that Raby was within hearing. He twisted up his head and stared round for him. The arrival of the fourth member of the Fistical Four would have made all the difference.

"Raby!" shouted Lovell.

"Raby!" howled Newcome.

"Hallo—there he is!" exclaimed Sanderson. "Look out, Panky!"

"I'll take care of him!" said Pankley, with a grin.

George Raby had appeared at last. He came in sight round a clump of bushes on the towing-path at a little

distance, evidently having heard his name shouted.

All the juniors could see him, and Raby could see his chums in the hands of the Bagshot Bounders. He made a step towards the scene.

Pankley waved a hand to him.

"Come on!" he called out. "Ready for you, Raby!"

George Raby stopped.

Instead of coming on, he suddenly looked back over his shoulder, as if something on the other side of the thicket had called his attention. Then he turned again towards the scene of the struggle, and seemed to hesitate a second.

But it was only for a second.

The next moment Raby had turned his back on the scene, and was running away up the towing-path as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER 14.

"Funk!"

"GREAT pip!"

Pankley uttered that exclamation in sheer amazement.

It was only for a moment or two that George Raby remained in sight; he was running as hard as he could go, and he vanished from view in a few seconds.

Jimmy Silver & Co., in their blank amazement, ceased to struggle in the grasp of their captors.

They had all seen Raby's flight, and it astounded them—utterly. Never, in the career of the Fistical Four, at Rookwood, had a member of that celebrated Co. shown the white feather.

Raby, it was true, was a much less belligerent fellow than Lovell, and certainly not such a fighting-man as Jimmy Silver. But nobody had ever suspected him of funk.

The chums of Rookwood could scarcely believe their eyes.

Pankley whistled.

Pankley of Bagshot was a hefty fellow, and more than a match for Raby; but that was no excuse or ex-

planation. He had taken it for granted that Raby would come up at top speed to the rescue of his chains. Four to four—there would have been an equal battle.

And Raby had fled!

"Well, my hal!" said Pankley. "This beats it! Javver see such a frightful funk?"

"Never!" grinned Price.

"Hardly ever!" chuckled Poole.

"You fellows seem to be left in the lurch!" remarked Sanderson. "If you go home through Coombe, drop in at the poulterer's. He'll let you have some white feathers for your pal!"

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

Jimmy Silver crimsoned with rage. Lovell gasped and spluttered.

"The awful funk! The rotter! I'll punch him! I'll—I'll——"

Words failed Arthur Edward Lovell.

"He'll come back!" gasped Newcome.

"Doesn't look like it!" chuckled Pankley. "Blessed if I should care to compete in a foot-race with Rookwood chaps. They're too good at running."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Certainly there was no sign of George Raby coming back. He had vanished at top speed, and he did not reappear.

"Now, we can't waste time on these fags," said Pankley. "I've got to look for my dashed minor. I've got some whiplcord here."

"Look here——" began Jimmy Silver savagely.

Pankley waved a soothing hand.

"You're dead in this act," he explained. "We've got you. Give me your wrist, dear boy!"

"Go and eat coke!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Naughty!" chided Pankley.

Jimmy struggled desperately, but with Poole sitting on his chest he had no chance. The end of the cord was firmly attached to his wrist. Then Newcome's wrist was pulled close and tied to it.

Newcome's other wrist was tied to

Lovell's; then Lovell's other wrist was tied to Jimmy Silver's other.

The three Rookwood juniors were now tied in a circle, facing one another, and utterly helpless.

They were lifted to their feet, and they stood in a circle, with red and wrathful faces.

Pankley & Co. stuffed their caps down their backs, and jerked out their collars, smiling genially as they bestowed these kind attentions on the hapless Rookwooders.

"I think that will do!" said Pankley thoughtfully. "Think you can get home like that, you fellows?"

"No, you beast!" roared Lovell.

"That's rather rotten, then," said Pankley sympathetically, "for if you can't get home like that you're booked to pass the rest of your natural lives standing here in a giddy circle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, old dears!"

Pankley & Co. walked on cheerily, leaving the three Rookwooders fairly spluttering with wrath. It was only a little Bagshot joke—such a little jape as the Pistical Four might have played on Pankley & Co. in different circumstances. But in matters of this kind, it was more blessed to give than to receive.

"The rotters!" gasped Lovell. "I'll smash 'em! And—and as for that rotter, Raby——"

"They couldn't have handled us like this if Raby had chipped in!" groaned Newcome.

"They couldn't!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "I wonder why Raby scooted like that!"

Lovell snorted with fury.

"He scooted because he's a funk!" he roared. "What else should he scoot for, you thumping ass!"

"I can't think——" said Jimmy.

"You can't," said Lovell; "not if you think Raby isn't a funk! And we've called that fellow our pal! I'll give him pal!"

"He's never——"

"I'll boot him out of the end study, I know that!" howled Lovell. "Leaving his pals in the lurch—fairly turning tail and bolting! It's simply sickening!"

"But——"

"Won't Bagshot crow over this!" growled Newcome. "They'll call us all lunks—they'll be sending us white feathers!"

"Let's clear!" said Jimmy. "We'll speak to Raby about it, of course——"

"Speak to him—I'll smash him!"

"Oh, let's get going," said Jimmy. "We can't hang on here while you exercise your voice, Lovell!"

"How are we going to get along like this, lathhead?"

"We've got to, somehow."

The three hapless juniors made a move. They left the towing-path and cut across fields in the direction of the Rookwood road, hoping to fall in with Rookwooders. Progress was slow and difficult. From a distance the trio must have presented a remarkable spectacle as they wriggled their way across the field.

They reached a stile on the road, and negotiated it with difficulty. In the road they leaned on the stile to rest and wait.

Unless fairly driven to it, they did not want to wriggle their way back to Rookwood in this condition. Certainly the Modern juniors would have chipped them without mercy—and their own comrades, the Classics, would not have let them off lightly. They waited and hoped for a Rookwooder to pass.

Unluckily, the first Rookwooder to pass was Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth, on his bicycle, going to the village. Tommy Dodd almost fell off his machine at the sight of the three Chuslicks.

"Step!" shouted Newcome.

Dodd jumped down.

"What on earth's this game?" he ejaculated.

"Let us loose, old man, and don't jaw!" said Jimmy Silver.

"But who's tied you up like this?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"The Bagshot Bounders!"

"And you let 'em?" grinned the Modern junior.

"Looks as if we did, as we couldn't help it!" said Jimmy tartly. "For goodness' sake cut this dashed cord, and don't cackle!"

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

"Look here, you Modern ass——" bawled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd took out his pocket-knife to cut the cords. But he chuckled and chortled all the time. He found entertainment in the episode, to which the Classics were blind.

"It wasn't our fault, you cackling ass!" growled Newcome.

"It was Raby's fault!" roared Lovell. "Raby ran away and left us in the lurch!"

"Shut up!" said Jimmy hastily.

Jimmy had no desire to publish the disgrace of the Co., especially to the Modern fellows. But Arthur Edward Lovell was too infuriated to think of considerations of that kind.

"I tell you Raby funkcd and ran away!" howled Lovell. "I'm going to kick him for it! Rotten sneaking funk!"

"Well, you Classics ain't much good at scrapping, anyhow," said Tommy Dodd consolingly. "There you are!"

He remounted his machine and rode on to Coombe, grinning. Jimmy Silver & Co. tramped on to Rookwood with grim and lugubrious faces. All three of them were anxious to see Raby; Jimmy with a faint hope that the runaway might have some explanation to offer; Newcome, angry and resentful; and Arthur Edward Lovell in a towering rage, prepared to greet the runaway at first sight with a torrent of righteous wrath.

It was not a happy half-holiday for the Pliskal Four of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

CHAPTER 15.

Pals Parted!

"WHAT'S makin' you look so merry an' bright?"

Valentine Mornington of the Fourth asked that question as Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the School House.

The question was somewhat sarcastic; the chums of the Fourth were looking anything but bright and merry.

"Raby in?" asked Jimmy.

"Haven't seen him. Not been rowing again, have you?" asked Morry, in astonishment.

"Not sneaked in yet?" said Lovell fiercely. "Ashamed to show his face, I dare say."

"Wha-a-a-!" ejaculated Mornington. And one or two other juniors looked round in surprise.

"What's that?" exclaimed Conroy.

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Lovell, and he tramped on.

"We've had a row with Bagshot," Jimmy Silver explained. "They were four to three, and got the best of it."

"Is that why Lovell is like a bear with a sore head?" grinned Putty Grace.

Lovell looked round.

"No, it isn't!" he snorted. "I'm wild because of that rotter Raby finking a row with the Bagshot Bounders, if you want to know."

"Rot!" said Putty of the Fourth incredulously. "Raby isn't a funk."

"He ran away!" roared Lovell.

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Putty, if you want a thick ear——"

"Keep it for Raby, old man," answered Putty. "Keep your presents for your pals. I don't believe a word of it about Raby, either."

"I'll jolly well——"

"He did run away," said Newcome.

"My hal!"

"Raby showed the white feather in a row?" asked Mornington. "Blessed if I'd have thought it."

"I don't think it, now," said Kit Ervell, in his quiet way; "you fellows are making some mistake."

"We saw him!" roared Lovell.

"Well, it's jolly odd."

"He turned and bolted like a frightened rabbit!"-breathed Lovell. "He's a funk—a beastly funk—funkier than Tubby Muffin——"

"Why, you cheeky beast!" exclaimed Reginald Muffin, in great indignation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell strode on towards the stairs, and went up to the Fourth Form passage. Jimmy Silver and Newcome followed. They left the juniors in a buzz of talk behind them. The news about Raby excited a good deal of interest in the Classical Fourth, and a good deal of incredulity. Fellows like Peele and Gower were glad enough to believe anything against a member of the celebrated Co., but most of the Fourth, when they heard the news, felt incredulous.

Jimmy Silver was frowning when he came into the end study after Lovell.

"No need to shout it out to all Rookwood," he said tartly. "It doesn't do this study any good."

"Rot!" snapped Lovell.

"Raby's one of us——"

"No, he jolly well isn't!" exclaimed Lovell. "A fellow who runs away and leaves his friends in a scrap, isn't a friend of mine."

"Well, he may be able to explain somehow——"

"Utter rot! He left us in the lurch because he was afraid of a Bagshot rotter. Do you think he ran away because he was in a hurry for his tea, or had forgotten to post a letter?" jeered Lovell.

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He simply did not know what to think; but in his hopeful way he hoped for the best.

"I must say I agree with Lovell," said Newcome. "Of course, Raby may have something to say. We'll give

him a chance. But—a chap who's afraid to back up his friends in trouble isn't a chap I want to chum with."

"I should think not!" snorted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver, without pursuing the subject further, proceeded to get tea. He was worried and troubled about the strange and unexpected happening; but further argument was likely to lead to a quarrel with his hot-headed chum, Arthur Edward.

Lovell's indignation was natural enough, and he had the support of Arthur Newcome, who was a quiet and cool-headed fellow, and not at all hot-headed or hasty. Jimmy was in a minority of one; though Jimmy himself had to admit that he did not see what Raby possibly could have to say for himself. All three of the juniors had seen him turn and flee, with his comrades' shouts for rescue ringing in his ears. Perhaps it was natural that Lovell did not require any more proof than that.

The trio had sat down to tea, when Jimmy, from the window, caught sight of George Raby coming towards the House.

"He's coming in!" said Jimmy.

Lovell breathed hard.

"I'll talk to him!" he said.

"Look here, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver very quietly. "Don't be an ass. We four have been friends too long to break it up if it can be helped. Give Raby a chance to speak before you jump on the chap."

"What can he have to say?" snapped Lovell.

"I don't know till I hear him, but give him a chance. I dare say he'll speak about it the minute he comes in. He must know what we think."

Lovell growled under his breath; but he nodded. A minute or two later Raby's footsteps were heard in the passage.

The door of the end study opened, and George Raby of the Fourth walked

in. Three pairs of eyes were fixed on him at once; but nobody spoke. Raby looked tired, but otherwise his usual self; certainly he did not look in the least like a criminal entering the presence of stern justice. He gave his chums a careless nod.

"Oh! You're in?" he said.

"Here we are, Raby," said Jimmy Silver, striving to speak carefully as usual, and failing a little.

Raby gave a quick glance at the three. It did not need a second glance to show him that something was wrong.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"Anything up?" repeated Lovell, his eyes beginning to gleam. "You ask that?"

"Eh! Yes! I've just asked."

"Well, then—" began Lovell.

"Shut up, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "I tell you—"

"Rot!" roared Lovell. "Look here, Raby—"

"I'm looking!" said Raby coolly. "You seem excited about something, old bean. That's nothing new for you, though. What's biting you?"

"You cheeky rotter!"

"What?"

"Cheeky, finking, sneaking rotter!" bawled Lovell.

George Raby started back. There was astonishment in his face—he seemed too astonished to be angry. He blinked at Lovell.

"Finking!" he repeated.

"Yes, finking!" shouted Lovell.

Raby smiled slightly.

"I like that!" he remarked. "I don't know why you're calling me a funk, Lovell. I don't think the Bagshot fellows think me one."

"Don't they?" sneered Lovell. "Well, they jolly well do, and we shall hear no end of it from them. What have you got to say for yourself, before we kick you out of the study you're a disgrace to?"

Raby's eyes glinted.

"Kick me out of the study?" he repeated.

"Do you think we're going to let you stay, after what you've done?"

"Yes, I think so, as it's my study. But what have I done, if a fellow may venture to put a question to your Majesty?" asked Raby.

"You don't know what you've done? You ran away from the Bagshot Bounders, and left us in the lurch. You're a coward, and no fellow here wants to speak to you again!" shouted Lovell. "That's what!"

"If you've got anything to say, Raby——" began Newcome.

Raby's plump face was quite pale. He looked at Lovell, and then at Newcome, and then fixed his eyes upon Jimmy.

"So I'm on my defence, what?" he asked, with a curl of the lip.

"You know you left us, Raby," said Jimmy, rather nettled. "The Bagshot Bounders were ragging us, and you could have helped, and turned the tables on them. We got a ragging, because——"

"Because Raby ran away!" interjected Lovell.

"Did you get a ragging?" asked Raby. "I'm sorry! I couldn't chip in, you see—because——"

"Because you were afraid!" shouted Lovell. "What's the good of talking? A dashed coward can talk all right."

Raby set his lips, breathing hard.

"This is a jolly sort of greeting to get in my own study!" he said. "Go on—don't mind me."

"It's not your study now," said Lovell. "You're going out of it on your neck if you won't walk out! No cowards wanted here."

"You fellows say the same?" asked Raby.

"Yes, rather!" snapped Newcome.

"If you can't explain, Raby——" said Silver.

Raby laughed.

"What is there to explain," he said.

"Didn't you see me run away—leaving you in the lurch? What could possibly have called me away—excepting cold feet?"

"You admit——" exclaimed Lovell.

"Anything you like," said Raby. "Have it your own way! Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

With that, George Raby strode out of the end study, and closed the door after him with a bang.

CHAPTER 15.

Silver Bleed!

THAT evening there was something like a sensation in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood.

The Fistical Four—the inseparable Co.—true comrades through thick and thin hitherto—were divided.

It was not merely a little rift in the fate—not a little row that would heal in a few hours. Far enough from that!

Tubby Muffin—who heard most things—had heard all that was said in the end study and reported it far and wide. Tubby's exciting narrative was borne out by subsequent happenings.

George Raby had had his tea in Hall, Jimmy Silver and the other two having theirs in the study. In times of stress, the Fistical Four sometimes had their tea in Hall, when money was tight; but on such occasions, they had it all together. When funds ran to tea in the study, funds had to run to a tea for four.

Obviously, there was a split.

Jones minor, athirst for information, applied to Raby as he came out after tea.

"Rowed with your pals?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Why, it was only the other day that Lovell was off on his ear! What's the trouble now?"

"Find out."

That answer was not polite; and it really was superfluous, because the enterprising Jones actually was then trying to find out. But he did not succeed. Raby did not seem disposed to talk on the subject.

Raby did not go to his study. H.

went to the Common-room. There Higgs tackled him.

"What's the row in your study, Raby?"

"Mind your own bizney."

"Well, I'll ask Lovell!"

"Ask him and be blowed!"

Off went Alfred Higgs to the end study to inquire. He found three juniors there who did not look happy.

"What's the row?" asked Higgs.

"Only your voice, at present," said Jimmy Silver crossly. "Shut up, and the row will stop." That most certainly was not polite of Jimmy Silver, but he was worried and distressed.

"No need to keep it a secret!" exclaimed Lovell. "We've turned Raby out of the study because he's a rotten funk."

"Oh, my hat!" said Higgs.

He retired with that information, which confirmed what the juniors had already heard. Obviously, Raby was turned out; because at the hour of prep he asked Oswald if that youth would mind letting him do prep in his study. Oswald assented at once, and Flynn and Hooker, his study-mates, concurred.

Raby went to the end study for his books.

Jimmy Silver and Newcome did not look at him; but Lovell gave him a glare and half rose.

"What do you want here?" demanded Lovell.

Raby did not answer. With a set, quiet face, he began collecting his books. Lovell saw then what he wanted, and sat down again, saying no more.

In a few minutes George Raby was gone from the study again, closing the door after him—quietly, this time.

"Good riddance!" growled Lovell. "Jeyver see such a funk? If he hadn't the whitest liver ever beard of, he wouldn't be turned out of his own study."

"Cheese it!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "You're a silly ass, Lovell. Even if poor

old Raby did funk, it was only once, and it's jolly queer. He's been a good pal."

"I don't see turning him out of the study," said Newcome slowly. "Can't help being down on him; but after all—"

Snort from Lovell.

"A funk isn't a pal of mine!" he said. "Raby's disgraced the study. We shall be chipped to death over this. The Modern cads will make a regular song about it."

"Oh, blow the Moderns!" said Jimmy Silver irritably. "I can't make it out about Raby. I'm not going to drop him."

"I am!" shouted Lovell.

"Well, I'm not," answered the captain of the Fourth hoily, "and you'll talk differently when you're cool."

"Who's not cool?" bawled Lovell, looking anything but cool, as he asked that question in a voice that could be heard from end to end of the Fourth Form passage.

Jimmy Silver did not answer, and three worried or angry juniors put what attention they could into prep.

After prep, Arthur Edward Lovell was the first to leave the study. In the Fourth Form passage he came on Raby, chatting at the door of Study No. 6 with Dick Oswald.

Lovell did not look at his chum—his former chum. He deliberately nodded to Oswald, taking no note of Raby's existence. Then he walked on, only indicating by a contemptuous curl of the lip that he was aware that there was such a person as George Raby in the wide world.

Raby's face was crimson. Dick Oswald, feeling extremely uncomfortable, stepped back into his study. Raby went slowly down the passage.

In the Common-room the parted chums encountered again a little later. Raby was seated with a book when Arthur Edward Lovell came in. There was a vacant chair close by Raby—into which Lovell naturally would have

dropped, in old circumstances. Instead of which, Lovell picked up the chair, moved it to some distance, and sat down with his back to Raby.

That was demonstration enough, if the Fourth Formers had wanted it, that the trouble in the end study was deep.

It caused a sensation. Some of the juniors laughed—Cyril Peele seemed vastly entertained. Erroll looked troubled; Mornington shrugged his shoulders. Newcome came into the Common-room a little later, and passed Raby without a word, and joined Lovell.

"I say, it's a real row, you chaps!" said Tubby Muffin. "Fancy Raby being a funk, you know! I say, Raby, what made you funk?"

Raby lifted his eyes from his volume, and gave the fat Classical a look. Some of the fellows expected him to get up and kick Tubby; even a funk could not be supposed to have any fear of Reginald Muffin. But Raby did not. He dropped his eyes to his book again in silence.

There was much suppressed excitement when Jimmy Silver came in. The juniors wondered what he would do. If Uncle James of Rookwood was down on Raby also, like his chums, that could be considered as a proof of guilt—and the fellows felt that they would know what to think of Raby. Funks were not popular in the Rookwood Fourth. Even Tubby Muffin would have been expected not to run away from the Bagshot Bounders.

All eyes were on Jimmy Silver. He strolled into the room, and stopped by Raby's chair. Raby did not look up.

It seemed that Jimmy was prepared to recognise the junior who was in disgrace—while the disgraced junior was not specially keen on being recognised. That was unexpected, and rather perplexing.

Raby kept his eyes glued on his book, as if to make Jimmy's position as uncomfortable as possible. Jimmy flushed a little.

"Got an interesting book there,

Raby?" he asked, trying to speak casually.

"Yes, thanks."

"Well, what is it?"

"'Holiday Annual,'" said Raby briefly.

"Good! Let's have a look at it," said Jimmy, with a heartiness that was perhaps a little overdone. "It's big enough for us to read together."

Raby smiled faintly. There was a roar from Arthur Edward Lovell across the room.

"Are you talking to that funk, Jimmy Silver?"

"Do shut up, Lovell, old man!" implored Jimmy Silver. "I've told you lots of times that you talk too much."

"Let that coward alone, then!" roared Lovell. "He ought to be sent to Coventry, and you know it."

Jimmy looked uneasily at Raby. To his surprise, Raby only smiled. He seemed impervious to the most galling accusation that could be brought against a member of the Pistical Four. Raby looked at him, and met his glance.

"You hear Lovell?" he said with a yawn. "What are you talking to a funk for, Jimmy Silver? I haven't asked you to, have I?"

"Look here, Raby——"

"Rats!"

Raby closed his book, put it under his arm, and walked out of the Common-room. Jimmy Silver, in a perplexed frame of mind, followed him. The friendship of the Pistical Four was of long standing; it should not end like this, if Jimmy could help it. In the corridor he overtook Raby, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hold on, old chap!" he said.

Raby stopped.

"Why 'old chap'?" he said. "You don't want to be chummy with a funk, I suppose. Better stick to Lovell."

"Look here, Raby," said Jimmy Silver earnestly, "we've been friends ever since I came to Rookwood. You were Lovell's pal before you were mine. This will blow over."

"What will blow over?" asked Raby coolly.

"Well, what's happened," said Jimmy. "I don't pretend to understand it—whether it was nerves, or what it was—but I'm sticking to you, if you'll let me. One swallow doesn't make a summer, and I don't believe you're a funk, though you did—" Jimmy paused.

"Though I did what?" asked Raby jolly.

"Well, you did bolt, you know," said Jimmy. "I—I suppose you lost your nerve for once—"

"You suppose I lost my nerve? Good?"

"Well, that's the only way I can account for it," said Jimmy. "You're not the fellow to leave your friends in the lurch, as a rule."

"Not as a rule," said Raby mockingly, "only sometimes. Go it."

"Let it drop," said Jimmy. "We'll forget all about it. Lovell will come round in a day or so."

"How good! And you'll all three condescend to pal with a rotten funk—because he's only a funk sometimes—when Lovell condescends to come round! Not good enough, thanks!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Jimmy, his own temper beginning to rise. "Cheek won't do any good. Are you asking us to believe that you didn't funk, when we saw you run away and leave us to be ragged?"

"I'm not asking you to believe anything. But you'd have to believe that, without my asking you, if you wanted to keep friends with me."

"Why, you cheeky ass—" exclaimed Jimmy in exasperation.

Raby's lip curled.

"That's enough!" he said. And he turned his back on Jimmy Silver and walked away.

Jimmy breathed hard. For a moment or two he was strongly tempted to follow Raby up and take him by the collar—a state of resentful wrath that really was unworthy of the calm serenity of

Uncle James of Rookwood. Fortunately, he restrained the impulse.

That night, in the dormitory, every fellow in the Classical Fourth was deeply interested in the Fistical Four. Three members of that once united Co. elaborately ignored the existence of the fourth member; and the fourth member, with equal deliberation, ignored the existence of the three. The chums of the end study had allowed the sun to go down on their wrath—and the Co. was hopelessly split. But while they nursed their mutual wrath, and felt, like the prophet of old, that they did well to be angry, probably the disunited quartette were the four most miserable fellows within the walls of Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 17.

Adolphus Smythe—Haro!

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE, of the Shell at Rookwood, smiled.

He was standing at his study window, looking out into the quadrangle.

What he beheld in the quad seemed to interest Adolphus, and afford him some entertainment.

He had a view of the gravel path near the beeches, and along that path were walking Jimmy Silver, Lovell and Newcome.

From the opposite direction came George Raby, also of the Classical Fourth.

Twenty-four hours ago those four juniors had been bosom pals, the inseparable "Fistical Four" of Rookwood.

Now George Raby passed his three old chums with averted eyes.

The three passed him—with eyes also averted. Only Arthur Edward Lovell gave a slight sniff.

Adolphus Smythe grinned.

The friends of Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather distressed by the disunion in the Co., but Adolphus of the Shell was not exactly a friend of the end

study. Adolphus was a lofty youth—an exceedingly lofty youth—and on more than one occasion the Flathead Four had had trouble with Adolphus, the results in Adolphus being generally painful.

Adolphus would have licked these cheeky juniors all round, and thus imbued them with a proper respect for their betters. But Adolphus was not a fighting man—and, for the most part, he considered it judicious to regard the Flathead Four with distant scorn.

Now, however, other thoughts were working in the powerful intellect of Adolphus. Hence his cheeky smile.

He turned back from the window. Howard and Tracy, his study-mates, were in the room. Tracy was smoking a cigarette—Howard had just smoked one, and was looking a little pale and troubled.

"I've been thinkin', you chaps!" announced Adolphus.

Tracy and Howard looked up.

"We've stood a lot of cheek from those cheeky young cads in the Fourth," went on Adolphus. "Properly speaking, I ought to be junior captain, but Silver's got it. They cheek us—one of them knocked your topper off the other day, Howard."

Howard frowned.

"I'd have thrashed him," he said, "but, dash it all, a fellow can't keep on gettin' mixed up in scraps with fags."

"And you remember Lovell shoving your cigarettes down the back of your neck, Tracy?" said Adolphus.

Tracy scowled.

"You didn't wallop him, old man," said Smythe.

"I've never noticed you keen to tackle that crowd," snapped Tracy.

"That's just what I've been thinkin' of," said Adolphus. "Usually, of course, a fellow disdains to take notice of fags. Can't be always mixin' up in scrappin', as Howard says. All the same, I think it's up to us, considerin' our position in the school, to give those

cheeky young cads a lesson occasionally."

"They're a bit tough," said Howard doubtfully, "and they always stick together, you know. Start raggin' one, and the others trickle in at once."

Adolphus smiled.

"I'm not thinkin' of a rag," he said. "I'm goin' to fight one of the crowd, fair an' square, an' lick him, as a lesson to the lot."

"Great Scott!"

If Adolphus Smythe had stated that he was going to fight Tommy Farr or Max Baer, it could scarcely have astonished his comrades more.

They blinked at him.

"You're goin' to fight one of that lot in the end study?" exclaimed Howard blankly.

"Yaas."

"Not Jimmy Silver?" exclaimed Tracy.

"Nunno! I'll let him off," said Smythe rather hastily.

"Lovell's a bit of a nut to crack," said Howard.

"I wasn't thinkin' of Lovell."

"Newcome's the easiest of the lot," remarked Howard thoughtfully. "But he can use his hands all right."

"I'm not pickin' out the easiest, of course," said Adolphus loftily. "I wa thinkin' of Raby."

"More power to your elbow, old man," said Tracy. "Raby is a bit of a hood-gan, mind."

"I think I can handle him."

"Hem!"

Howard and Tracy exchanged glances. As a matter of fact, they did not believe for a moment that their elegant pal could handle George Raby of the Fourth. This sudden desire of battle on the part of Adolphus was amazing. It seemed as if the fighting-blood of the Smythes, after coursing calmly and peaceably through the veins of Adolphus for whole terms, had all of a sudden reached boiling-point.

There really seemed no account for this sudden belligerency on the part

of Smythe of the Shell. Tracy and Howard wondered whether, after all, Adolphus was not the fussy noodle they had always deemed him.

"Think I can't lick him?" demanded Smythe warmly.

"Here! I hope so, old chap!" said Howard. "We'll come and see fair play, if you're goin' to tackle the cad."

"I'm goin' to knock him right out," explained Adolphus. "It will show those Fourth Form cads that the Shell must be respected."

"It will, old bean—if you knock him out. Let's go and look for him!" exclaimed Tracy with alacrity.

Tracy and Howard jumped up. Perhaps they were keen to see Adolphus in the unaccustomed role of fighting-man; perhaps they wanted to ascertain whether the elegant youth was simply "gassing." On the latter point they were quickly reassured. Adolphus Smythe followed them out of the study without the slightest hesitation.

Obviously, Adolphus meant business. It was amazing—but there it was. Tracey and Howard couldn't even begin to understand it; but they had to admit the fact.

In the corridor they came on Tubby Muffin of the Fourth. Adolphus called to him.

"Muffin, you fat boulder! Where's young Raby?"

"Blessed if I know!" answered Muffin.

"Find him in the end study, most likely," said Tracy.

Muffin gave a chuckle.

"Raby's not there," he answered. "Didn't you know they'd kicked Raby out of the study?"

"What?" exclaimed Howard.

"Haven't you heard?" Tubby Muffin was quite keen to impart information.

"Raby farked in a row with the Bagshot Bounders yesterday, and Silver and Lovell and Newcome won't speak to him."

"Raby farked?" ejaculated Tracy.

"Yes, rather! Ran away top speed,

and left his pals to be ragged by the Bagshot rollers!" chuckled Tubby. "They were awfully wild! Why, all the Fourth know about it, and lots of fellows won't speak to Raby now. Higgs is going to get a white feather for him. He, he, he!"

"Come on, you fellows!" said Adolphus hastily. "Don't stay listenin' to that fat animal's chatter!"

Tracy and Howard exchanged a glance. Then they grinned. Tubby Muffin's information had enlightened them. They had not heard before of the split in the Co., of the disgrace of George Raby, of his condemnation as a "funk" who had left his comrades in the lurch. Evidently Adolphus Smythe had been better informed.

The unexampled heroism of Adolphus was explained now—fully explained. Tracy and Howard grinned—the grin grew into a laugh—and the laugh into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, what are you fellows cacklin' at?" exclaimed Smythe angrily. "Come on, and let's look for Raby!"

"All right!" gasped Tracy. "Ha, ha, ha! We're comin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Howard. "We're comin', my heroic old bean!"

"Look here—"

"Lead on, MacDuff!" grinned Tracy.

And Adolphus, with a lofty frown, led the way, and Howard and Tracy followed him, still chuckling.

CHAPTER 35.

The Napster Victim!

JIMMY SILVER wore a worried look as he came towards the School House with his chums, Lovell and Newcome.

Jimmy was feeling deeply distressed. The quarrel with Raby hit him hard. Newcome was feeling it, too, and probably Lovell also, though Arthur Edward would not have admitted it for worlds.

Raby was in disgrace, for most of the Fourth, taking their cue from the end study, looked on the hapless junior as a funk, and did not conceal what they thought of such a character. Jimmy had hoped that Raby would be able to make some explanation, but he had made none; indeed, he seemed to disdain to make any. Raby's attitude was, in fact, extremely irritating to his old friends. A fellow who had funk'd, and left his comrades in the hands of the ragers, ought at least to have been contrite and apologetic. Raby was neither the one nor the other. One might almost have fancied, from his attitude, that he regarded himself as the injured party.

That was exasperating enough.

Nevertheless, friendship was not a thing that could be cast aside at a moment's notice. Even if Raby had shown cowardice, his old chums realised that they couldn't forget that Raby had been their pal for a long time. Even Lovell realised that. It wasn't as if the fellow had always been a funk, like Tubby Muffin, or Smythe of the Shell, or Leggett of the Modern Fourth. It was the first time Raby had shown the yellow streak, and if Raby had been properly contrite and apologetic, doubtless his chums would have made an effort and condoned his offence, at least, if it was never repeated. Instead of which, Raby had assumed the attitude of an injured party, so far as Jimmy Silver & Co. could see, and evidently had his back up.

"The cheeky rotter!" Arthur Edward Lovell murmured. "A cringing funk, looking at us as if we'd done him some injury, you know!"

"Cheek, and no mistake!" agreed Newcome. "Still——"

Jimmy Silver's brow was wrinkled.

"I can't get on to it," he said. "There can't be any mistake—Raby couldn't have had any reason——"

Snort from Lovell.

"He saw us wriggling with Pankley

& Co. ragging us, didn't he?" demanded Lovell. "We hadn't any chance against the odds. They ragged us, and made us look a set of asses. Didn't Raby run away—pelling along the towing-path as if he was scared out of his wits?"

"He did!" assented Jimmy Silver.

"Well, then! If he'd come back—but he didn't! Never showed up at all—and never even said he was sorry! Just got his back up as soon as I spoke to him about it——"

"You spoke rather emphatically, old chap."

"Rot! Chap shouldn't funk," said Lovell. "Pankley and Price and those Bagshot cads will be shortling over it; no end. We shall never hear the end of it. I'd never have believed it of Raby—turning tail and running away from Pankley! Pah!"

"I'd never have believed it, either," said Jimmy slowly. "It beats me! What reason could he have had, unless——"

"Funk," said Newcome. "It's odd, but there you are. Why, Tubby Muffin wouldn't have scooted like that, and left Rookwood chaps to be ragged by Pankley's crowd."

Jimmy nodded, and was silent. He was perplexed, and he was worried. But even if Raby was not what his pals had always believed him to be, he was still old Raby, and Jimmy wanted to stick to him. If there was something the matter with his nerves, he needed his friends to stand by him, not to desert him. It was hard to believe that old Raby was actually a coward.

Yet the circumstances seemed to speak for themselves.

The end study felt it deeply. The very title of the Fistical Four had become a mockery now. Never before had cowardice been imputed to a member of the Co. Now Raby's chums felt his shame much more keenly than the delinquent appeared to feel it himself.

"Hallo, you fellows!" Adolphus Smythe and his friends met Jimmy

Silver & Co. outside the School House.

"Seen Raby?"

"Now Raby!" growled Lovell.

"I'm lookin' for him," said Adolphus.

"What the thump do you want Raby for?" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Last week," said Adolphus, "he checked me."

"Fatted!"

"I'm goin' to tick him for it, that's all," said Adolphus. "Come on, you fellows, I think I see Raby over by the brooches!"

Adolphus & Co. walked on, and the three Fourth-Formers turned and stared after them. Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"So that's it!" he said. "Now Raby's supposed to be a funk, even that funky cad Smythe is going for him!"

"Raby shouldn't be a funk!" growled Lovell. "It's asking for trouble, to show the white feather at Hookwood."

Jimmy's eyes glinted.

"Funk or not, nobody's going to pick a row with Raby and pitch into him," he said.

"Are you going to fight his battles?" snapped Lovell.

"Yes!" said Jimmy coolly.

And the captain of the Fourth walked after Smythe & Co. with a grim look on his face. Lovell and Newcome exchanged a look, and followed him. Three or four other fellows, who had observed that something was on, took the same direction.

Raby was walking under the beeches by himself, his hands in his pockets and a grim expression on his rather plump face. Probably Raby was feeling the estrangement quite as much as his former friends, though he made no move towards a reconciliation.

His reflections, whatever they were, were interrupted by the arrival of Smythe & Co. The three Shell fellows stopped in Raby's path, and the ostracised junior came to a halt, giving them anything but a friendly glance.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"You!" smiled Adolphus.

"Well, here I am!" snapped Raby. "The want's all on your side. Take your face away, for goodness' sake!"

"You cheeked me the other day," said Adolphus, unheeding. "At the time, I thought it hardly worth while to thrash you, as you deserved."

"Who-a-at?"

"Thinkin' it over, however, I've come to the conclusion that you cheeky fags must be kept in your place," said Adolphus, shaking his head. "There's such a thing as the fitness of things, you know."

"You silly clump!" snapped Raby.

"That's enough! Put up your hands!"

And Adolphus Smythe, pushing back his cuffs in a businesslike way, put up his hands and advanced upon Raby of the Fourth. And there was a rush of a dozen fellows from different directions.

"A fight!" yelled Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. "Raby—my hat! —and Smythe! Ye gods, this will be worth watching."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Raby, evidently astonished by this amazing belligerency on the part of Adolphus Smythe, stood staring at the hero of the Shell with his hands still in his pockets. Adolphus pranced up to him, brandishing his fists.

"Come on!" he shouted. "I—Yaroooooh!"

A grip of iron fell upon Smythe's collar, and he was whirled away from George Raby in the grasp of Jimmy Silver.

CHAPTER 18.

The Awful Mistake of Adolphus!

JIMMY SILVER swung the startled Adolphus round almost in a circle. He put all his beef into that powerful swing, and Smythe of the Shell fairly spun. When Jimmy let go, the Shell fellow went sprawling breathlessly, spreadeagled on the ground.

There was a roar of laughter from the juniors. Even Raby grinned. The sudden and complete downfall of Adolphus was quite startling and extremely entertaining.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow!" gasped Adolphus, quite bewildered. "Oh, gad! Ooooooh! Wharrer you up to? Moooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Adolphus Smythe sat up. His collar had been jerked out, and his necktie streamed. He was utterly breathless and dumbfounded.

"Ooooooh!" he spluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that enough for you to go on with?" inquired Jimmy Silver. "If not, there's some more on tap!"

Howard and Tracy helped Adolphus up. He needed help. He stood, with their chummy support, and pumped in breath.

"Groogh! You cheeky end! Ooooo! Wharrer you buttin' in for? Moooooh!"

"Looking for trouble, you know," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You've been looking for trouble, so why shouldn't I?"

"Oh! Ow! Look here, you rotter——"

"You've found the trouble you've been looking for, Smythey!" chuckled Mornington. "It's named Uncle James!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I—I—I'm fightin' Raby," gasped Adolphus. "I'm not rowin' with you, Jimmy Silver, you ruffian!"

"You are!" answered the captain of the Fourth tersely.

"Look here, if Raby's afraid——" hooted Adolphus. "I say—— Ooooooh!"

A tap on the nose interrupted Smythe of the Shell, and he roared instead of finishing his remarks.

George Raby pushed forward. He gave the captain of the Fourth a shove—not a gentle one.

"Mind your own business, please!" said Raby curtly.

"What?"

"Smythe's after my scalp. What are you buttin' in for?"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"Can't you mind your own business?" asked Raby unapologetically.

"Well, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver could only stare. For a funk, George Raby seemed to be pretty cool in the hour of peril—if there was peril in an encounter with Adolphus of the Shell. Indeed, he seemed to have no objection to a row with Jimmy Silver himself—the great chief of the Physical Four, and the acknowledged warrior of the Fourth.

Taking no heed of Jimmy and his astonishment, Raby stepped up to Adolphus Smythe. He put up his hands cheerfully.

"Ready?" he asked.

"By gad, I'm goin' to smash you!" shouted Adolphus. "If you're not goin' to hide behind Jimmy Silver——"

"Am I hiding?" smiled Raby. "I'm waitin' for you to come on, old top. Shall I start you with a rap on the nose?"

Raby reached out, evidently intending to suit the action to the word.

If Raby was a coward, he certainly was the most warlike funk that Smythe of the Shell had ever happened upon. The hapless Adolphus was conscious of an inward misgiving.

Had he made a mistake? But how could he have made a mistake, when Raby was turned down by his own chums for having shown the white feather?

It was a problem, and one the Smythe of the Shell had no time to think out. For Raby was following him up, and Smythe, as he backed away step by step, found Raby still at hand all the time, tapping at him and rapping at him, amid howls of laughter from the juniors.

"Is this a walking match, you Shell chaps?" called out Conroy. "Smythey going back as far as School House?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smythe, old man, stand up to him!" exclaimed Howard. "You asked for it, you know."

"He's a funk, you know!" said Tracy. "Stick to him, Smythe!"

"Pile in, Adolphus! Never mind your nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trouble was that Smythe of the shell did mind his nose. That nose had already received three distinct raps; now it received a double rap, and Smythe yelled dismally. He did not like a postman's knock when it alighted upon his nose.

"Go it, Smythe!" shouted several shell fellows.

"Go it, Raby!" called out Mornington.

Raby was going it—hard and fast. Smythe backed away, and away, right round one of the beeches, and then round another. The spectators had to follow the combatants up.

Adolphus was realising, by this time, that he had taken too much for granted, that he had made an awful mistake.

Whether or not George Raby was afraid of the Bagshot Bounders, it was only too obvious that he was not afraid of Adolphus Smythe of the Rookwood Shell. That was as clear as daylight.

How a chap could be afraid of one fellow, to the extent of running away and disgracing himself with his chums, and not in the least afraid of another, was a mystery. But there it was. Smythe had taken too much for granted—and now he had to pay for it. For even Adolphus could not give in without a struggle, or take to his heels. He was strongly inclined to flee across the quad, regardless of public opinion. But a licking was better than that—even Adolphus felt that it was. So he screwed up his courage—what there was of it—and put up the best fight he could.

As Smythe was a good deal older than Raby, and half a head taller, he ought to have been able to give an

account of himself in the combat. But the account he gave was dismal.

Once or twice he got home a drive, but all the time Raby was knocking him right and left. Smythe went to grass at last; and it was only the laughter and jeers of the Rookwood juniors that drew him up to his feet again. Smythe tottered up at last, and renewed the combat—or, rather, he renewed the knocking right and left.

Perhaps Raby was not sorry for an opportunity of showing that he had been misjudged. Certainly he "sailed" into Smythe in the most thorough-going manner. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, and they felt their hearts warming towards their old chum. If Raby had funk'd the day before, he was not funk-ing now. True, Smythe was a much less dangerous enemy than Pankley of Bagshot. Nevertheless, he was a good deal bigger than Raby; and Raby was walking all over him with coolness and ease.

Crash!

Adolphus went down again; and this time all the laughter of the juniors could not induce him to rise. He lay and gasped.

He realised his awful mistake, and he had had enough. Raby dropped his hands and stood looking down at the Shell fellow grimly.

"Put him on his feet, Howard," he said. "I've not finished with him yet."

"Up with you, old chap!" said Howard.

Groan from Adolphus.

"Not finished, old fellow?" asked Tracy.

Groan!

"What about the lesson you were goin' to give those Fourth Form cads?" grinned Tracy.

Groan!

"Looks as if he's finished," chuckled Valentine Mornington. "Poor old Smythe, he seems to have woke up the wrong passenger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Raby shrugged his shoulders con-

temptuously and turned away. Smythe could have gone on well enough, but wild horses would not have dragged him into another round.

Howard and Tracy helped their crest-fallen chum away at last. Perhaps they sympathised. Certainly they grinned. Adolphus' actual performances, compared with the programme he had mapped out, struck them as funny. But the humour of the situation was hopelessly lost on Adolphus. He groaned and gasped dismally as his chums helped him away; and he made a mental resolve to be quite, quite sure that a funk really was a funk before he let himself in for a combat again. It was days and days before Adolphus fully recovered from the effects of his dreadful, disastrous mistake.

CHAPTER 25.

Brought to Light

JIMMY SILVER, Lovell, and Newcome, followed Raby of the Fourth, as that victorious youth walked away after the combat.

Raby looked round, stopped, and stared at the three with a grim, uncomprehending stare.

"Well?" he snapped.

"You put up a good fight with Smythe," said Jimmy.

"Well?"

"You didn't funk to-day," said Newcome.

"Well?"

"Well," said Lovell, with an effort, "you seem to have got over it, whatever it was. Yesterday was the first time I ever saw you show the white feather, and you seem to have got over it."

"Well?"

Raby's vocabulary seemed to be limited. He contented himself with that single monosyllable, rapping it out at his former chums in the most uncompromising way.

"Well, we don't want to row, old

chap," said Jimmy, in his most conciliatory way. "Join up again and let's forget all about it."

"You can come back into the study," said Lovell.

Raby laughed harshly.

"If I wanted to come back into the study you wouldn't keep me out," he said.

"Oh, wouldn't we?" exclaimed Lovell, nettled.

"Not! But I don't want to come back! I'm fed up with you! Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

"That's enough for me!" said Lovell savagely, and he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Isn't it enough for you two?" asked Raby, staring at Jimmy and Newcome. "Do you want me to put it plainer?"

"No!" said Newcome tartly. "You did funk the Bagshot Bounders, and cheek won't make any difference. You've found pluck enough to whack a dummy like Smythe, but I expect you'd run for it if Pankley came along!"

And Arthur Newcome walked off in great dudgeon.

Jimmy Silver still lingered.

"Look here, Raby, old man——" he murmured.

"Oh, give us a rest!" snapped Raby. "You butted in to protect me from Smythe, didn't you?" His eyes glittered. "You thought me such a funk that I couldn't handle that dandy fool! You cheeky dummy!"

"I—I only meant——" stammered Jimmy, rather taken aback.

"I know what you meant. You're a meddling ass, Jimmy Silver, and you can keep your distance!"

"Look here, Raby, old man, I can't help thinking there's been some mistake," said Jimmy Silver, keeping his temper. "You left us in an awful scrape yesterday, and you couldn't expect us to like it. But if you had any explanation to give——"

"I shouldn't give it!" said Raby bitterly. "Why should I? I know the sort of pals you fellows are now, and

"I don't want any more to do with you. I'd rather pal with Tubby Muffin, or Peele, or that fool Gunner than with any of you chaps. Keep your distance!"

The bell for afternoon classes rang just then.

Raby walked away towards the School House.

Jimmy Silver followed more slowly, much troubled and perplexed in his mind. It is much to be feared that Jimmy Silver did not that afternoon bestow upon Mr. Dalton, his Form-master, all the attention that that gentleman was entitled to, considering the valuable instruction he was imparting to the Fourth Form.

Jimmy was perplexed, puzzled, and worried—seldom, indeed, had Uncle James of Rookwood had so distressing a problem to deal with.

Raby was the object of many glances in the Fourth class-room, though he did not appear to notice them.

His conduct was inexplicable to the Fourth Formers. Even Smythe of the Shell would not have acted as Raby had done the day before; yet to-day he had walked all over Smythe of the Shell, obviously unafraid.

Uncle James was not the only fellow whom Raby had perplexed.

After lessons, Raby left the Form-room by himself, taking no notice of his old chums, who, indeed, took no notice of him. It appeared that the breach was past healing now; certainly neither side seemed disposed to make any advance.

Jimmy Silver had earned fifty lines during the afternoon—for bestowing more attention upon his personal affairs than upon the Form work—and he retired to the end study to scribble Verse. When he came down, not in his happiest mood, he found a grinning group of juniors by the School House doorway.

"Where's Raby?" two or three fellows were asking.

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin. "Pankley's come, Jimmy!"

"Pankley!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

Tubby jerked a fat thumb in the direction of the gates. The rather lanky form of Cecil Pankley of the Bagshot Fourth was visible there. The Bagshot Junior had just entered.

"Looking for Raby very likely!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

"Chance for Raby!" chuckled Peele. "He was no end of a giddy warrior with old Smythe—now we'll see him run away from Pankley again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver frowned and went out into the quadrangle. If the Bagshot Junior had walked over to Rookwood to hunt for trouble, the captain of the Fourth was prepared to give him all he wanted, and a little over.

Cecil Pankley was crossing towards the House, when Raby appeared on the path under the beeches. Pankley caught sight of him and changed his direction, heading for Raby.

"Now for the giddy circus!" said Peele.

Raby stopped.

Cecil Pankley walked directly up to him, and the Fourth Formers stared at the scene with breathless interest. They did not doubt for a moment that Pankley's intentions were hostile, and they fully expected to see Raby back off. Certainly it was an unheard-of cheek for a Bagshot fellow to walk into the Rookwood quad to look for trouble. But, as Peele remarked, probably he thought he could do anything he liked with a funk like Raby. From all sides the juniors gathered round, looking on eagerly.

"Run for it, Raby!" yelled Peele.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put it on!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.

"He, he, he!"

Raby did not seem to hear. To the amusement of the juniors, he smiled and nodded to Pankley of Bagshot. To their further and intense amazement,

Pankley held out his hands to Raby. They shook hands in sight of two or three dozen staring fellows.

"How is he?" asked Raby.

All the fellows, converging round the two, heard that question, without in the least knowing what it meant.

"All serene!" said Pankley. "Thought I'd walk over and tell you that he's all right now."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Of course, he's caught a cold," said Pankley. "That doesn't matter—in fact, it serves him jolly well right! He'll think twice before he does stunts on the river again!"

Raby laughed.

"He's sent you a message," continued Pankley. "The young ass will be in sunny for a week, so he can't come over. He's asked me to tell you that he's no end obliged."

"All right," said Raby. "It was nothing."

"Nothing, wasn't it? My minor thinks it was a lot!" chuckled Pankley. "He's got an idea in his head that he's of some value. And—and, old chap, I'm not much of a hand at faw, but—but I'm really grateful. Just to think that young Dick might have been done in, while I was ragging. Instead of looking after him, as I ought to have been——" Pankley's voice trembled.

"Isn't there going to be a fight?" demanded Tubby Muffin, in an aggrieved voice.

Pankley looked round.

"Fight!" he repeated. "What are you burbling about, you fat duffer? Think I've come over here to row with the chap who pulled my young brother out of the river yesterday?"

"What!" roared Lovell.

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"What's that?" gasped Newcome.

Cecil Pankley stared at them in amazement.

"Didn't you know?" he asked.

"Didn't we know what?" howled

Lovell. "What yarn are you spinning us? Who pulled your silly minor out of the river?"

"Raby did."

"Raby!" stammered Lovell blankly.

"Mean to say he hasn't told you?" asked Pankley. "What the merry thump is he keeping it secret for? What's this game, Raby?" And the Bagshot junior stared at Raby.

George Raby did not answer, but his plump face flushed.

"When did he do it, then?" articulated Lovell, at last. "Raby was with us all the time until that rag——"

"That was the time," said Pankley.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"Member I told you I was looking for my minor?" said Pankley. "The young ass was gone up the river, and I was after him. Well, he wasn't a hundred yards away when we met you chaps and ragged you. Raby was just coming to your rescue, you remember——"

"Well?"

"Well, then, it seems that he heard young Dick howl for help," said Pankley. "I thought he was fawning. Sorry, Raby, but—but you know what it looked like, when you turned round and bolted—awfully sorry, old chap. We couldn't see Dick from where we were."

"I know," said Raby quietly.

"After we left you fellows tied up to wriggle home," continued Pankley, "we went on up the river. Then we came on Raby; he'd just landed Dick. The young ass had gone floating out of the river on a plank—one of his dashed tricks. Of course, he was upset, and Raby was just near enough to him to hear him howl. That's why Raby bolted; he was just in time to get hold of my minor and lug him out of the river."

Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome stood silent. Their looks were quite sickly.

So that was it!

That was why Raby had bolted—the

was why he had come in late. And the three Rookwooders, wriggling their painful way homeward, with their hands tied in a circle by the playful Bagshot fellows, had known nothing of it. And Raby had not told them!

"But how the thump don't you know about it?" asked the bewildered Pankley. "Is Raby playing the modest hero stunt and hiding his giddy light under a bushel?"

"What rot!" growled Raby. "I ran no risk. I fished your minor out without any trouble!"

"So—so—so that's why you belted, Raby?" stammered Arthur Edward Lovell, colouring as he remembered how he had greeted Raby on his return.

Raby's lip curled.

"That's why!" he said sarcastically. "I thought it was a little bit more important to fish out a drowning kid than to save you fellows from a ragging. My mistake, I dare say!"

"You ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "If you'd told us—"

"Did you give me a chance to tell you?" exclaimed Raby angrily. "The minute I got in Lovell jumped on me and called me a funk—"

"Just like old Lovell," remarked Mornington. "Guaranteed to put his hoof into it at the earliest opportunity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley whistled.

"You fellows been rowing?" he asked. "Glad I butted in and let in some light on the subject, then. Ta-ta!"

And the Bagshot junior gave Raby a cordial slap on the shoulder, and nodded to Jimmy Silver & Co., and walked away to the gates. The crowd of juniors broke up, leaving the Fistical Four to themselves. Three members of that famous Co. were looking very contrite.

"I—I said I thought there was some mistake," said Jimmy Silver. "But—but we couldn't guess all that, Raby—"

"You didn't tell us you'd been in the

river, old chap," said Newcome. "I never noticed you were wet when you came in—"

"I wasn't wet!" granted Raby. "I dried my clothes at Giles' farmhouse. Ought I to have walked back to school wet?"

"N-no," said Lovell; "of course not! But—but—you see— You ought to have told us—"

"How much time did you give me to tell you before you jumped on me?" asked Raby sarcastically.

Lovell was silent. He could not help remembering that, regardless of the sage counsels of Uncle James, he had given his hapless chum no time whatever to speak before the row started.

"But after—"

"Yes, after—"

"Well, I didn't choose," said Raby.

"And I'd never have said a word if that ass Pankley hadn't butted in. You can think me a funk if you like, and be blowed to you!"

"We don't—now—"

"But you did!" said Raby bitterly.

"It's all over, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. "We're sorry—and we want to make it up!"

"Well, I don't!" said George Raby. And he turned and walked away, with his head very erect, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. staring after him quite blankly.

CHAPTER 21.

Morphy Means Well!

"THIS won't do!" said Jimmy Silver.

"It won't!" said Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell nodded assent. He agreed that it wouldn't do without demur, which was rather a concession for Arthur Edward Lovell to make.

It was sometimes suspected in the end study at Rookwood that Lovell would wait for a fellow to express an opinion, in order to follow it up with a contrary one.

Undoubtedly Arthur Edward was a

little given to argument, and he was blessed—or the reverse—with a complete and unwavering faith in his own judgment.

But on the present occasion, Arthur Edward was in accord with his comrades, and he expressed the fullest agreement with Jimmy Silver and Newcome that it wouldn't do.

"It" was a rather serious matter.

The Classical Fourth had come out of their Form-room after lessons; and Jimmy, Newcome, and Lovell had made a move towards their old chum George Raby, now unhappily estranged. Raby, without even seeming to see them, had walked out into the quadrangle on his lonely own.

A good many of the Fourth had observed that incident, and remarked on it in their own ways. Tubby Muffin gave a fat chuckle; Peete and Gower grinned sarcastically; Erroll looked concerned. But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not heed the Fourth Formers. They were not worrying about what the Fourth thought. They had enough to worry about in the disunion of the end study—the rift in the lute which had separated the hitherto inseparable "Pistical Four."

"It won't do!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "We've got to make it up with Raby somehow."

"The silly owl oughtn't to be keeping his back up like that," said Lovell. "We've told him we're sorry."

"Yes; but——"

"A fellow can't say more than that," argued Lovell. "We've even admitted that we were in the wrong. Not that we were so jolly much in the wrong, either. It looked bad, and we——"

"And we made a fatheaded mistake," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "We played the goat and hurt poor old Raby's feelings. He's not got over it."

"Oh, blow his feelings!" said Lovell. "Fellow shouldn't have a lot of feelings in the Rookwood Fourth. Suppose we give him plenty of rope, and leave him to come round when he chooses."

"Cheese it, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver. "If you'd had a bit more tact, Lovell, we shouldn't have rowed with Raby at all. If you'd given him time to explain. It's time for you to lie low, old fellow."

"Hear, hear!" said Newcome heartily.

Short from Lovell.

"We've got to manage Raby somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "He's got calas to feel sore; no getting over that. Hallo, Morny!"

Mornington strolled up to the perplexed trio with a smile on his face. Lovell looked grim. He did not want anybody butting into the private concerns and disputes of the end study.

But Mornington did not heed Lovell's grim look.

"I want you chaps to come to tea in my study," he said cheerily. "Erroll and I are standin' a little spread."

"Thanks, old scout," said Jimmy Silver; "but——"

"Oh, do come!" said Mornington. "I'm askin' another fellow you'd like to meet."

"The fact is, I'm a bit bothered just now," said Jimmy frankly. "I was trying to think out some way of getting old Raby to come to tea in the end study. He's having tea in Hall now, you know, except when some fellow asks him."

"Keepin' his silly back up, you know," grunted Lovell. "Keeping it up all this time!"

Mornington smiled.

"The fact is, Raby's the other chap who's comin' to tea," he explained. "Erroll's asked him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver smiled, and Newcome laughed. The three juniors understood now.

"You're a good chap, Morny," said Jimmy. "Nothing like getting chatty round a spread to make troubles blow over."

"Just what I thought," said Mornington. "It was my little idea; and

Erroll thought it a good one. So we've been blowin' huge sums in tuck; and if Raby's heart isn't softened by a big cake and three kinds of jam, not to mention tarts—well——"

"We'll come with pleasure."

"Yes, rather!" said Newcome.

"Half-past five, then!" said Mornington.

"Right-ho!"

Valentine Mornington strolled away and rejoined Erroll. Jimmy Silver's face was brighter now.

"Morny's a good fellow," he said. "I dare say it will work all right. Raby can't keep it up when we're all at tea together. He's bound to speak, anyhow, if a fellow asks him to pass the cake."

"Well, we'll try it on," said Lovell, with an air of a fellow making a concession. "We'll give him a chance."

"Mr. Dallon's noticed that there's something up," said Jimmy Silver. "It's time it ended. I hope Morny's stunt will be a success. We've all got to be very civil to old Raby, and get him to come back to the end study."

Arthur Edward Lovell granted, but he acquiesced. And before half-past five the three guests presented themselves in Mornington's study, with their best manners on, so to speak.

Study No. 4 in the Fourth presented a festive appearance. Quite a handsome spread was on the table, and a kettle sang cheerily on the fire. Morny and Erroll greeted the trio cheerily, and the five juniors waited for the arrival of Raby, the sixth member of the tea-party.

Promptly at five-thirty footsteps approached the door of Study No. 4.

"Here's Raby!" said Erroll.

The door opened.

George Raby stepped in.

He stopped in the doorway at the sight of Jimmy Silver & Co., and the cheery expression faded from his plump face.

"Trot in, old top!" said Erroll.

"Tea's ready, old bean," said Morn-

ington, with great heartiness. "Give Raby a chair, Silver."

"Here you are, Raby!" smiled Jimmy Silver.

Raby did not move or speak. He stood staring into the study, and there was an uncomfortable moment.

Then he stepped back into the passage.

"Sorry I can't stay to tea, Morny," he said politely. "Thanks all the same."

The door closed.

"Oh!" murmured Mornington.

George Raby's footsteps retreated down the passage. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another. Their feelings were too deep for words.

Morny and Erroll's benevolent little plot had failed. That was clear. George Raby, his back still emphatically up, had refused to sit at the same table with his old chums. And tea in Study No. 4 was not the happy feast of reconciliation that Jimmy Silver had hopefully anticipated.

CHAPTER 22.

Lovell the Peacemaker!

"LEAVE it to me!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that suggestion, or rather, issued that command.

The three chums of the Classical Fourth were in the end study, after prep.

Raby had not come to the study. The end study was Raby's study. It had been shared by the Fistical Four. But at the time of that unhappy misapprehension, when Raby's chums had found him guilty of funk, on what had turned out to be deceptive appearances, they had testified a desire to be relieved of Raby's company. Raby had taken them at their word, and retired from the study, and not all the blandishments of his repentant chums could tempt him back.

What Raby felt personally about

this estrangement his old friends had no means of guessing. But the three certainly felt it keenly enough, though in different ways. Jimmy Silver was distressed, Arthur Newcome was also distressed, but a little impatient. Arthur Edward Lovell was undoubtedly distressed, but his impatience outweighed his distress to a very considerable extent.

"Leave it to me!" repeated Lovell. "The fellow's an ass! He's in Oswald's study now, doing his prep. He won't do it here. Look here, I'm jolly well going to deal with Raby!"

"Don't make matters worse, old chap!" advised Newcome.

"Rot! It's time Raby stopped playing the goat," insisted Lovell. "I'm going to talk to him plainly."

"For goodness' sake, Lovell, don't play the goat," said Jimmy. "You've caused most of the trouble already with your fatheadedness."

"Rubbish!"

"Lovell, you ass——"

"Leave it to me!"

Arthur Edward Lovell rose from the table, and quitted the end study with an air of determination. Jimmy Silver and Newcome exchanged a hopeless look. They had no faith whatever in the diplomatic powers of their chum Lovell. Still, Lovell had faith enough for three.

Arthur Edward explored the Fourth Form passage from end to end without finding Raby. Then he went downstairs.

Raby had his prep to do, and as he was not in any of the studies, Lovell looked for him in the Fourth Form Room, the next likely place. There he found the missing junior.

Raby was at his desk in the Form-room, at work. He had not finished his prep yet.

"Look here, you silly ass!" was Lovell's tactful greeting.

Raby glanced up for a moment and

then looked down at his books again, without answering. Lovell came up to his desk.

"Look here, Raby!"

No answer.

"Can't you speak to a fellow?" roared Lovell.

Raby looked up then.

"I'm busy," he said briefly.

"You ought to have finished by this time."

"Well, I haven't."

"Rowing with Flynn, as well as with your old chums?" snorted Lovell. "You seem to be fond of rowing."

Raby made no answer to that.

"Look here, you silly owl. How long are you going to keep in the sulks?" demanded Lovell.

Silence.

"You're making yourself a ridiculous ass!" went on Lovell, apparently under the impression that this was the way to bring Raby round and restore the lost harmony of the end study. "Sulking like a baby."

Raby looked up.

"Are you bound to come here to wag your chin, Lovell?" he asked.

"What?"

"Can't you wag it in the Common-room?"

"Eh?"

"Or in the study?"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Lovell.

"I've a jolly good mind to mop you away from that desk and wipe up the floor with you!"

Raby shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you hear me?" roared Lovell, greatly incensed by that shrug of the shoulders, which only too clearly implied disdain.

"I should think you could be heard over in Manders' House," answered Raby coolly. "I dare say they'll think a bull has got loose in the school."

"Why, you—you——" Lovell stammered with wrath. "Look here, Raby, I'm fed up with your silly rot. See?"

"I've been fed up with yours for a long time," remarked Raby.

"Oh, you have, have you?" snapped Lovell. "It would serve you jolly well right to give you a jolly good hiding. That's what you want."

"But who's going to do it?" inquired Raby, with an air of polite interest. "You couldn't!"

"Couldn't I?" roared Lovell.

"Not in your lifetime."

Lovell gasped.

"I'll jolly well show you!"

Arthur Edward Lovell had come to the Form-room after Raby, with the intention of putting the trouble to an end, in his masterly way. This, seemingly, was how he was going to do it. He made a ferocious jump at his estranged chum, grabbed him by the collar, and fairly yanked him out in front of the desks.

"Now, you cheeky cad!" he gasped. "I—yareooooh!"

Raby whirled round in Lovell's grasp rather breathlessly, and then he hit out. Lovell caught the punch with his chin, and staggered away and went with a crash to the floor of the Form-room.

Raby leaned against a desk, breathing hard, and staring down at the sprawling Fourth Former.

There was a shout in the passage. —

"They're going it—Lovell and Raby! This way!"

Before Arthur Edward Lovell was on his feet half a dozen interested faces were looking in at the Form-room doorway. Lovell staggered up, rubbed his chin, and glared at Raby.

"Come on, you rotter!" he gasped.

He rushed forward, and Raby put up his hands promptly enough. There were wrathful exclamations at the doorway, as two juniors drove recklessly through the crowd and ran into the Form-room. But Jimmy Silver and Newcome did not heed. They were in too great a hurry to be respecters of persons just then.

"Stop it!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Chuck it!" yelled Newcome.

Lovell and Raby showed no sign

whatever of stopping it or chucking it. They were hammering away furiously.

But Jimmy Silver and Newcome did not waste time in words. They rushed at the two belligerents, and seized them and dragged them apart by main force. Jimmy grasped Lovell and whirled him away, and Newcome collared Raby and rushed him back towards the desks.

"Now, you silly asses—" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Let go!" roared Lovell.

He struggled with the captain of the Fourth.

"Let him go," said Raby coolly. "What are you holding the silly dummy for? He's asking for a licking. Let him have it."

"You hear that?" spluttered Lovell. "Let go, Jimmy Silver, or I'll jolly well punch you!"

"Keep that other silly idiot back, Newcome," said Jimmy. "Come on, Lovell."

"I tell you— Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver fairly whirled Lovell out of the Form-room. The juniors in the doorway parted to let them pass, and closed up in the doorway again, laughing loud and long. The domestic troubles of the end study seemed, somehow, to afford entertainment for the rest of the Classical Fourth.

CHAPTER 21.

Pelle Does Not Prosper!

"RABY, you silly ass—"

"Newcome, you silly fat-head—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, go and eat cake!"

Arthur Newcome breathed hard. In the tussle to keep Raby away from Lovell, Newcome had had an elbow jammed into his ribs hard! Doubtless it was accidental; nevertheless, it was painful. So for the moment Newcome's temper was not at its best.

"I've a jolly good mind——" began Newcome, forgetting temporarily that he had rushed to the scene with Jimmy Silver to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"You haven't," said Raby coolly, "I don't believe you've got a mind at all. No brains, anyhow."

"You cheeky rotter!" exclaimed Newcome, "I dare say Lovell was quite right to punch your cheeky head. Sorry I stopped him now."

"Well, you can begin, if you like."

"I jolly well will!"

Jimmy Silver had succeeded in getting Lovell along the passage. He was urging his chum to depart when he was interrupted by a delighted yell from Tubby Muffin.

"I say, Jimmy, they're going it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy spun round.

"Eh? Who are?"

"Raby and Newcome!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped the unfortunate Uncle James of Rookwood. He rushed back to the Form-room.

"Look out, you kids! Uncle's coming!" shouted Peck. And there was a roar of laughter from the juniors.

"Stop that!" shrieked Jimmy Silver, rushing into the Form-room, where Raby and Newcome were scrapping away at a great rate. Uncle James had barely succeeded in getting Lovell off the scene when he was called back to deal with Newcome. He dealt with him unceremoniously. He grasped the back of Newcome's collar with both hands, and fairly yanked him backwards.

"Grooooooh!" gasped Newcome.

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy. "You're as bad as Lovell!"

"Ugh! Gugh! You're chok-chok-choking me!" spluttered Newcome, wriggling wildly in the grasp of Uncle James.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

Jimmy Silver, without relaxing his grasp, whirled the hapless Newcome to

the door, and spun him out of the Form-room. The crowd of juniors there jumped out of the way—excepting Tubby Muffin. Tubby was doubled up in an excess of merriment, and he had no time to escape. Newcome crashed into him, and Tubby went sprawling with Newcome rolling over him. There was a fearful yell from Tubby Muffin, and a roar of laughter from the thickening crowd of juniors in the passage.

Jimmy turned back breathlessly into the Form-room. He was quite angry now—with his chums and with Raby. George Raby looked at him with a defiant grin.

"You—you——" gasped Jimmy.

"Give us a rest!" suggested Raby. "You talk too much, Jimmy Silver. What are you chipping in for?"

Jimmy clenched his hands hard. The juniors looked on with delighted anticipation, fully expecting a fight, after all. But Uncle James of Rookwood restrained his wrath.

"I—I won't pitch into you, Raby——" he gasped.

"Oh, do!" said Raby.

"You're a sulky ass——"

"And you're a cheeky rotter!"

Jimmy Silver choked back his wrath and turned away. A taunting laugh from Raby followed him, and it almost made Jimmy turn back and rush upon his old chum with his hands up. But he controlled his temper and hurried out of the Form-room.

"The giddy circus is over, gentlemen!" murmured Mornington. "Happy family circle in the end study, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver found Lovell and Newcome raging in the passage. Both of them wanted to return to the Form-room and finish matters with George Raby, and apparently they wanted it very much.

"Oh, cheese it, the pair of you!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Let's get out of this!"

And he almost dragged his chums

away. The crowd of Classical Fourth Formers broke up, most of them laughing. Cyril Peele strolled into the Form-room, where Raby was dabbing his nose with his handkerchief, preparatory to resuming his work. Peele gave Raby a very affable nod and smile. The cad of the Fourth, who was always up against the end study, was delighted by the unfortunate turn affairs had taken in that celebrated study, and anything that he could do to make the breach wider the amiable Peele was prepared to do with his whole heart.

"Good for you, Raby!" said Peele admiringly.

Grunt from Raby.

"You stood up to that bullying rotter splendidly, old man," said Peele.

Raby left off dabbing his nose and looked at Peele.

"What?"

"That bullying brute Lovell——"

The next moment Cyril Peele met with the surprise of his life. Raby hit out with his left. Peele caught it with his chin, and sat down on the floor with a terrific bump.

Raby glared at him.

"Get up and have some more!" he snapped.

"Ooooooch!"

Peele sat on the floor, holding his damaged chin in both hands, and blinking at Raby with almost idiotic astonishment.

"Groogh! Wharrer you up to? I was only saying——" he spluttered.

"Do you want some more?" interrupted Raby. "If you don't, shut up and get out of this Form-room."

Peele staggered to his feet.

"Look here——"

"Outside!" snapped Raby.

"I can tell you——"

Peele did not finish. George Raby was coming for him with his hands up and his eyes glittering behind them. Peele backed to the door and dodged out, astonished and enraged. Such a reception of his sympathy and support

was enough to surprise and enrage any mischief-maker.

Raby slammed the door after Peele, and returned to his prep when he had finished dabbing his nose.

Peele of the Fourth went into the junior Common-room with a black brow. Jimmy Silver and Newcome and Lovell were there, engaged in a warm argument. Peele joined them.

"Blow him!" Lovell was saying. "I tell you I don't want to make it up now. I'm never going to speak to the cad any more! If he comes back to the end study now, I'll jolly well boot him out. I'm done with him for good, the rotter!"

"Hear, hear!" said Peele.

Lovell stopped his wrathful tirade at once and turned a far from amiable look on Peele.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"Just what I'd do," said Peele. "The rotten cad——"

"What? Who?"

"That rotten outsider Raby——"

For the second time that evening Cyril Peele met with a surprise. Arthur Edward Lovell ought really to have been pleased to hear a fellow endorsing his views like this. But he did not look pleased. He did not act as if he were pleased. He collared Peele before that youth had time to finish his remarks, and there was a sharp commotion as Peele's head came into violent contact with the wall.

Crack!

"Yaroooooch!"

Peele uttered a fiendish yell.

"Now, anything more to say about Raby?" demanded Lovell ferociously.

"Ow, wow, yow! No!" yelled Peele.

"Then get out!"

Lovell slung Peele half across the Common-room. He did not seem satisfied with that, but started after him, with the obvious intention of taking a goal-kick.

Peele dodged out of the Common-room and fled for his life.

In his study he rubbed his chin and

rubbed his head alternately, and the observations he made on the subject of the Fistical Four were emphatic and almost blood-curdling. There never was any telling how to take those rotters, he informed Gower and Lat-trey; and Peele wisely made up his mind not to take a hand further in the domestic politics of the end study. It really was not a paying game.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Dalton's Tea-Party.

"TEA with Dicky!" said Arthur Edward Lovell with satisfaction.

Jimmy Silver looked pleased. Arthur Newcome looked up from the botanical specimens he was arranging in the study and gave a nod.

"Good!" he remarked.

"At five," said Lovell. "Dicky's just asked me, and told me to tell you chaps. I saw Tupper taking a parcel into his study after lessons. Looks like a spread."

The three juniors were naturally pleased. Dicky was their pet name for Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth. They liked Mr. Dalton—even Peele & Co. did not quite dislike him. Mr. Dalton was very popular in his Form. The Fistical Four had liked their old Form-master, Mr. Bootles, but Mr. Dalton was a regular hero. He played football in great style. Sometimes he would referee in a junior match, and he knew the great game from start to finish, and took a great interest in junior matches. Tea with any other master at Rookwood was a great honour, but rather a bore; tea with Dicky Dalton was a pleasure, as well as an honour. So the end study were all pleased.

"I say, though, he'll expect four of us," said Jimmy Silver dubiously. "He knows there were always four of us. He'll wonder——"

"Can't be helped," said Lovell.

"Besides, I know jolly well that Dicky has noticed that we're off with Raby. He notices everything."

"Yes, that's so," said Newcome. "Anyhow, we can't take Raby, as we're on fighting terms with him now."

"I wish the ass would make it up," said Jimmy.

"Well, he won't," said Lovell, "and I'm not going to ask him again."

"No, don't," said Jimmy, with a faint smile. "It won't do much good, the way you do it. I'm surprised at Raby keeping it up like this. He never used to be sulky. Dicky won't expect to see him with us, when I come to think of it."

The three made some little preparations for tea in Mr. Dalton's study. On such occasions it was needful to sport a spotless collar and to have a tie tied tidily, and so forth. Details like that were not always carefully observed in the end study; but in a short time Jimmy Silver & Co. made themselves beautifully presentable, and they had a newly swept and garnished look when they arrived at Mr. Dalton's study door. Jimmy Silver tapped.

"Come in!" said Richard Dalton's deep, cheery voice.

The three juniors entered.

Mr. Dalton was not alone.

He was standing on one side of the fireplace, chatting cheerily with a junior who was standing on the other side. That junior was George Raby of the Classical Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped dead as they saw Raby. They were completely taken aback.

In a flash they understood, and Raby understood. It was Morny's game over again, played this time by their Form-master. Mr. Dalton, as they had suspected, had observed the rift in the lute in the end study, and in his kind way he was trying to bring the old Co. together again.

It was an awkward moment. Certainly the newly-arrived guests could not act as Raby had done in Morny's

study. Invitations to tea from a Form-master were requests that amounted to commands. Lovell frowned, Newcome coloured, and Jimmy Silver, after the first moment of surprise, looked pleased. Raby turned red, and set his lips.

Mr. Dalton appeared to notice nothing.

He greeted the newcomers cheerily and heartily, just as if there was no cloud on the horizon.

"Now we're all here," said Mr. Dalton, with a smile, "perhaps you will brew the tea, Raby."

"Oh, yes!" gasped Raby.

"Tupper has not opened the jam," said Mr. Dalton. "Perhaps you will perform, Lovell."

"Oh, yes!"

"Who can cut bread-and-butter without cutting his fingers?" inquired Mr. Dalton genially.

It transpired that Jimmy Silver could, so he set to work. Newcome sorted out chairs for the guests.

In a few minutes the tea-party sat down to the table, somewhat mute. But Mr. Dalton, not generally a great talker, talked quite a great deal now, in a very genial, chatty way. He asked Jimmy Silver about the junior cricket and the prospects for the St. Jim's match, a topic that naturally interested the juniors and helped to break through the barrier of reserve. He interrupted himself to ask Raby to pass the cake to Lovell, and Raby passed it silently.

"Thanks," said Lovell, with an effort.

"Raby's cup is empty," said Mr. Dalton. "Another cup of tea, Raby? Pour out another cup for Raby, Lovell."

"Oh, yes!"

Lovell refilled Raby's cup.

"Thanks!" gasped Raby.

"St. Jim's, I believe, are in great form," remarked Mr. Dalton.

"Topping, I believe, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "They've got a jolly

good team, I know, and their star bowler is a fat chap, but in splendid form."

"But you are going to beat them," said Mr. Dalton.

"We hope so, sir. We've got a good slow bowler in Rawson——"

"And the batsmen?"

"Morrington, and Erroll, and Cook, and Newcome, and Raby," said Jimmy Silver.

Raby gave a little start.

"A very good lot," said Mr. Dalton approvingly. "I hope you are keeping up your practice. You've been rather giving the cricket a miss, I think, Raby."

"Oh!" stammered Raby. "I—I didn't know you noticed, sir——"

Mr. Dalton smiled.

"I keep my eyes on the junior eleven," he said. "I want to see you win matches this season. Practice together is the thing; and you must remember, my boys, not to let any little personal differences make any difference to that."

And Mr. Dalton, without giving the juniors time to speak, which might have been a little awkward, went on talking cricket; but his word in season had fallen upon fertile soil, as it were. Under the influence of Mr. Dalton's genial kindness, and his good advice, and tea and cake, the estranged chums of the Fourth unbent, and Raby, rather to his surprise, found himself speaking quite cheerily to his old comrades, just as if there had never been any trouble in the end study at all.

Mr. Dalton noticed it, with a glimmer of satisfaction in his eyes. He liked all four of the cheery juniors, and he was pleased with the success of his little plot. It was fairly clear that when the Fistical Four left their Form-master's study after tea, they would leave it on friendly terms. But there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. In the midst of Mr. Dalton's cheery flow of talk there came a tap at the door, and Tupper put in his shock head.

"If you please, sir, the Head would like you to step into his study for a few minutes."

"Very good!" said Mr. Dalton.

The master of the Fourth rose from the table.

"Continue your tea, my boys. I will rejoin you in a few minutes," he said, and he left the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were negotiating a cake. They continued to negotiate it, with satisfaction. It was a large cake and a good cake, and there were plums in it—plenty of plums. Mr. Dalton knew youthful tastes well, as that cake demonstrated.

"Any more tea in the pot?" asked Jimmy Silver suddenly.

"Blow the tea!" growled Lovell. "If Raby's going to sulk after this ripping spread——"

"Who's sulking?" flared out Raby.

"You are," exclaimed Lovell, "and I jolly well think——"

"You don't! You can't!"

"I don't want any more of your cheek, Raby!" roared Lovell. "If you're going to sulk, I say——"

"Shut up, Lovell!" implored Jimmy Silver.

"Rats! Rubbish! If Raby's going to sulk——"

"Cheese it!" said Raby. "Can't you behave yourself in a Form-master's study?"

"Who's not behaving himself?" hooted Lovell.

"Lovell, old man——"

"Rot! If Raby says——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Raby angrily. "No good talking to you. You don't understand anything but a punch on your silly nose!"

Lovell jumped up.

"You cheeky cad——"

"You ridiculous ass——"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

"Stop it!" roared Jimmy Silver, as Lovell and Raby, utterly forgetful of the important circumstances that they

were in a Form-master's study, closed in combat.

Crash! Tramp! Scuffle! Bump! Crash!

"Oh, my hat! You mad duffers——"

"You silly asses——"

Crash!

Lovell and Raby lurched against the tea-table, and it rocked. There was a crash of crockery on the floor. Jimmy Silver and Newcome stood overcome with dismay. Lovell and Raby, lost to all things but their mutual wrath, punched and struggled with terrific vigour. They trampled on the fallen crockery right and left—they trampled the fender out of place—they swept half a dozen articles from the mantelpiece. Tabby Muffin's fat face blinked in, scared, at the doorway.

"Look here! Dalton's coming!" he gasped.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Lovell and Raby separated at that. Mr. Dalton was coming back to his tea-party. The study was almost a wreck. Lovell and Raby, with their collars rumpled, their ties torn out, their hair ruffled, looked considerably wrecked also. And Mr. Dalton was coming——

With one accord the Fistical Four rushed from the study.

They vanished breathlessly in one direction as Mr. Dalton approached from the other.

"Well, my boys——" Mr. Dalton stepped into the study with a genial smile on his face. Then he stopped suddenly.

The study was vacant. His guests were gone. Fender and fire-irons and broken crocks were strewn on a crumpled rug amid overturned chairs. Mr. Dalton gazed at the startling scene, and drew a deep, deep breath—what time Jimmy Silver & Co. were making themselves as scarce as they possibly could.

What Mr. Dalton thought of the result of his tea-party he never con-

ded to the Fiscal Four. The matter was not mentioned at all. But it seemed probable that it would be a long, long time before Jimmy Silver & Co. were asked to tea in their Form-master's study again. And the rift in the lute was still unrepaiied.

CHAPTER 25.

Raby's Reply!

GEORGE RABY was feeling glum. There was a shadow on his pun of passion as he sat slumped free under the old beeches in the Rookwood quad.

It was a sunny afternoon, and it was a half-holiday at Rookwood school. And George Raby, just then, sorely missed his old chums, Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome, with whom he was no longer on speaking terms.

Raby had a grievance, there was no doubt about that. Like the prophet of olden time, he felt that he did well to be angry.

But he was wondering now whether he had done well in refusing his old chums' overtures towards a reconciliation.

Certainly he missed them; certainly he would have been glad of their company that sunny afternoon. But—

There was a "but."

His old chums had given deep offence. When he thought of that offence, though it was weeks old, Raby's cheeks still burned.

Deep down in his heart the old friendship was as strong as ever; but on the surface, at least, he was unforgiving.

Yet he was conscious that the breach would probably have been healed before this, but for a certain want of tact on the part of Arthur Edward Lovell. Lovell had an unfortunate way of putting his foot in it, as it were. Generally Lovell could be relied upon to say the wrong thing at the wrong moment.

Tubby Muffin came across the quad from the School House, and blinked at the solitary junior with a grin.

Raby answered the grin with a dark frown.

He was feeling annoyed, dissatisfied with himself and things generally, and he was in no mood for Tubby's grinning.

"Oh, here you are!" said Muffin. Grant from Raby.

"Feeling down, what?"

"Oh, roll away!" snapped Raby.

"Feeling rather left, eh?" said Tubby Muffin sympathetically.

As a matter of fact, Raby was feeling rather "left." But he did not want to hear that remarked upon. And it occurred to him that, in the present state of his feelings, there would be some solace in kicking somebody. So he took the fat Classical by the collar and twirled him round. Tubby Muffin, for once in his fat career, was coming in useful.

There was an apprehensive yell from Muffin.

"I say, hold on! I've got a letter for you."

"Oh!" said Raby.

He released the fat junior unlicked. Muffin hurriedly handed over the letter, and backed out of reach.

"There's an answer," he said.

Raby jerked the envelope open. There was no superscription on it, and he wondered why the dickens anybody at Rookwood should send him a note. He understood, as he glanced at the contents of the letter.

It was written in Jimmy Silver's hand, and it was signed by three names. It ran;

"Dear Raby,—We're taking a boat up the river this afternoon, to picnic on the island. Will you come, old chap?"

"J. SILVER.

"A. NEWCOME.

"A. E. LOVELL."

Raby grinned faintly as he read.

More than once there had been overtures from his old comrades, and he had rebuffed them.

So this time the overture was despatched in writing, which gave Raby time to reflect before he answered.

The junior stood with the letter in his hand, thinking.

He was tired of the present state of affairs, and nothing would have pleased him better than to join his old chums in a picnic up the river—on the old terms. But—

Tubby Muffin watched him curiously.

"Jimmy asked me to take back your answer," he said. "Buck up; he's going to give me a jam-tart for this."

Raby did not answer.

"I say, Raby—"

"Dry up for a minute!"

"Yes, but I say, did you really funk the Bagshot Bounders that time?" asked Tubby Muffin.

Raby flushed, and a glint came into his eyes. That unfortunate remark of Tubby Muffin's was enough. Raby, like Pharaoh of old, hardened his heart.

He jerked a stump of pencil from his pocket, scribbled for a second on the letter, and replaced it in the envelope.

"There's your answer," he snapped.

He tossed the letter at Muffin, and turned his back on the fat Classical and walked away.

"Grumpy beast!" murmured Tubby.

He picked up the envelope, which had fallen at his feet, and rolled away to the School House. He rolled at an unusual rate, eager to annex the jam-tart that had been offered for his services as messenger. So keen was his interest in the jam-tart that Tubby did not even look into the envelope to read Raby's reply, which certainly the inquisitive Tubby would have done had not his mind been occupied by much more important matters.

He rolled into the end study in the Fourth Form passage, where Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting for him.

"Oh, here he is!" said Lovell.

Jimmy held out his hand for the letter.

"Where's the tart?" asked Tubby. "Oh, good!"

Reginald Muffin annexed the tart and rolled away with it before Jimmy had extracted the paper from the envelope. Jimmy unfolded the sheet and looked at it, and a change came over his cheery face.

"What's the answer?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy frowned.

"Look!"

He held up the letter that had been sent to Raby. Across it was pencilled, in large letters:

"RATS."

That was Raby's reply.

CHAPTER 20.

A RAID ON THE RIVER!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL gave an angry snort.

Newcome looked a little exasperated.

Even Jimmy Silver frowned with annoyance, in spite of the placid temper that was a distinguishing characteristic of Uncle James of Rookwood.

"Cheek!" growled Lovell.

"Dash it all, I'm getting fed up," said Newcome. "If Raby doesn't want to make it up, we may as well give him a rest."

"I believe he does, though," said Jimmy.

"Then why doesn't he?" snapped Lovell.

"It's all rot, you know," went on Newcome. "I know it was rough on Raby, and we made a rotten mistake but we've apologised for it, and we can't do more than that. He oughtn't to keep it up like this."

"Sulky ess!" growled Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded slyly.

"I wish he'd come round," he said. "The study isn't the same with o

Raby out of it and keeping his blessed back up in this way. But it's up to us to keep patient, as we were to blame. No fellow likes being called a fusk, and poor old Raby feels very sore about it."

"That's all very well," said Lovell. "But—"

"Anyhow, he won't come," said Newcome. "So we may as well get off."

"That's so."

The three juniors were ready to start: they had been waiting only for the answer from their estranged chum. Lovell picked up a packed lunch-basket, and Jimmy Silver a bag, and they left the end study.

Mornington of the Fourth met them downstairs. Morny had his cricket rig on and looked very cheery. The Fourth were playing the Third that afternoon, and the match—not an important one—had been left in Morny's hands.

"You fellows off?" he asked.

"Just off," said Jimmy. "Made up your team yet, Morny?"

"Nearly. I've been looking for Dodd and Cook and Doyle—but the Modern asses have gone out for the afternoon," said Mornington. "They don't think the Third worth their while—like you fellows. But there's plenty of recruits."

"You might try Raby!" said Jimmy.

"Raby! Isn't he going with you?"

"Nunno. He might like a game of cricket."

Mornington nodded with a smile.

"I'll ask him," he said.

It was just like Jimmy to think of his estranged chum "mooching" about by himself that bright afternoon—in spite of the curt and irritating reply he had just received from George Raby.

The three juniors left the House, and they caught sight of Raby under the beeches as they went down to the gates.

Raby glanced in their direction for a moment, and turned away at once.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked out of gates and took the path down to the boat-house.

They selected their boat and ran it out into the water from the raft, and jumped in. On that sunny afternoon there were several boats and canoes out. As the three Classical juniors pulled up the river, they sighted a skiff with three Modern juniors in it: Tommy Cook, Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern Fourth. Tommy Dodd waved a hand to the Classics and hailed them.

"Hold on, you Classical chaps! We've got something for you."

"What's that?" asked Lovell.

The Modern skiff ranged closer.

"Here you are!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Go it, you fellows!"

Cook and Doyle produced pea-shooters. Peas, apparently, were what the Modern juniors had for the Classics; and they proceeded to deliver the goods with rapid and unerring aim.

"Yow-ow!" roared Lovell, as a tiny missile caught him on the nose. "You cheeky Modern cads—ow!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Jimmy Silver jerked in his oar, and lifted it, and brought it down flat on the water close by the Modern skiff. There was a terrific splash; and there was a terrific yell from the Moderns. Cook and Doyle ceased pea-shooting quite suddenly as they were drenched.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ooooh!"

"Oh, you Classical rotter!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckled, and pulled on up the river, leaving the three Moderns shaking their fists.

The Modern skiff was left behind as the chums of the Fourth pulled on. It was a long pull up to the little island in the middle of the river, and warm work on that sunny afternoon. But the island was reached at last, and the Classics jumped ashore, tying the painter to a low-hanging branch.

"Here we are," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Nobody else here—that's luck. I wish old Raby was here."

"Oh, blow Raby!" grunted Lovell.

The juniors pushed through the thickets that grew down to the water's edge.

It was a little island, thick with trees and bushes, much frequented on Sundays by picnickers, but quite deserted now. The chums of the Classical Fourth had it all to themselves. They proceeded to picnic.

Sticks were gathered for a fire. They were damp, but a can of paraffin had been packed in the bag, and with the aid of the oil a fire was soon going. Over it, from a branch, a tin kettle was suspended on a whipecord to boil. Sandwiches and a cake were sorted out of the basket, and tin cups and other articles. It was early for tea, but the pull up the river had freshened the juniors' appetites. Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome sat round the fire on fallen logs, and fully enjoyed the open-air feed.

They were busy, when Jimmy looked round suddenly in the direction of the boat.

"Some other party coming along," he remarked. "I think I heard an oar."

"I didn't!" remarked Lovell.

Jimmy stood up and looked towards the river. The bushes were thick, and shut off the view. A sound of a grating boat and a mutter of voices came to his ears. He was sure that he heard a chuckle.

"I fancy I'll look to the boat," he said. "Somebody's there——"

"It's all right, ass!" said Lovell.

"Br-r-r-r!"

Jimmy Silver strode back through the bushes towards the landing-place. He came quite suddenly in sight of the boat.

The Classics had tied it up and left it empty. It was not empty now. A skiff was close to it, with Tommy Doyle at the oars. Tommy Cook and Tommy Dodd had boarded the Classical boat. Dodd had cast off the painter, and the two Moderns, with the oars in their hands, were pushing off shore. That

was the startling sight that met Jimmy Silver's surprised eyes.

He rushed forward with a shout.

"You Modern rotters! Stop!"

Tommy Dodd looked up quickly.

"Buck up, Cooky!" he exclaimed.

"What-ho!"

Jimmy Silver rushed desperately towards the boat. The Moderns had not succeeded in getting it away yet.

But, as he reached the water's edge Tommy Dodd lunged with the oar and caught the captain of the Fourth on the chest.

"Ow!"

"Thud!"

Jimmy Silver sat down, hard.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the three Tommies.

Another shove, and the boat was off. The two boats rocked away on the shining river, while Jimmy Silver sat and gasped for breath.

CHAPTER 27.

Stranded!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON tapped Raby on the shoulder of the estranged member of the Fistical Four was mooching under the beeches on his lonely own, with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his brow. Raby looked round gloomily at the dandy of the Fourth.

"Want you, old fellow," said Mornington amiably.

"What's on?"

"Cricket," explained Mornington. "Jimmy's left me to make up a tea to beat the Third. I want you to play."

Raby shook his head. He was fed up and out that afternoon. Cricket would have done him good. But he was not feeling inclined for it—or anything in particular. He was so that he had sent so uncompromising answer to the polite note from his chums; he had realised, on reflection, that it was Tubby Muffin's obtuse remarks that had caused him to do

which was quite illogical. But it was too late to think of that now. Mornington regarded him rather curiously.

"None of your old pals playin', if that's what's worryin' you," he said lightly. "It's my team—a poor thing, but mine, you know."

Raby smiled faintly.

"I'd rather not play, thanks. You don't need any help to beat the Third."

"No; but—"

"Leave me out."

"You're an ass, old chap," said Mornington. "What's the good of moochin' and grousin'? Come and play cricket."

Raby shook his head and walked away. Valentine Mornington shrugged his shoulders, and went to look for another man. There was no difficulty in finding one, and the match was soon in progress. George Raby walked round the quadrangle gloomily, and gave the players a look-in after a time; and as he looked on at the game, and heard the cheery shouts, he regretted a little that he had not accepted Morny's invitation. Better to have been playing cricket, than mooching about by himself doing nothing—shaking away a half-holiday like Peele or Gower or Smythe of the Shell.

But it was too late again—really he seemed to be able to do nothing right that afternoon. He walked away to the gates at last.

There he came on Tubby Muffin.

That fat youth came up to him with an ingratiating smile. Sergeant Kettle, at the tuckshop, had thrice refused that afternoon to part with jam-tarts on "tick." Every fellow whom Tubby had tackled on the subject had declined to lend him even a humble "tanner." So Reginald Muffin rolled up to Raby with a faint hope in his podgy breast.

"Raby, old chap——" he began.

Raby glared at him.

But for Tubby's unfortunate remarks, which had revived his sense of

injury and grievance so inopportunistically, he would have answered Jimmy Silver's note in the same friendly spirit in which it had been written—and he would now be up the river with his chums, instead of mooching around like a lost chicken. Tubby had arrived just in time to relieve Raby's feelings on that subject.

"Can you lend me a bob, old chap?" asked Muffin hopefully. "I say, old Kettle's got some lovely tarts. I—I say—— Yarnooop!"

Bump!

In the grasp of vengeance Reginald Muffin sat on the ground with a concussion that knocked nearly all the breath out of his podgy person.

"Whooop!" gasped Tubby.

"You fat rotter——"

"Yow-ow-ow-woop! Groogh!"

Raby jerked off the astonished Tubby's cap and rammed it down the back of his neck. Then he walked on, feeling solaced, leaving Tubby Muffin anything but solaced. The fat Classical sat and gasped and spluttered for a good five minutes after Raby was gone.

Raby strolled down to the boat-house; but he did not feel disposed to take a boat out by himself. Townsend and Topham were taking out a very handsome and elegant skiff belonging to Towny. They smiled as they saw Raby come down to the raft, and Towny called out:

"Come and steer for us, Raby."

Townsend really meant it kindly, seeing the junior on his "lonely own." But Raby was irritated by any appearance of compassion, and he flushed and answered most ungratefully:

"Go and eat cake!"

He left the raft and walked along the towing-path.

"Ass!" called out Towny politely.

"Horrid cad!" said Topham.

Raby did not heed. He jammed his hands into his pockets, and tramped up the towing-path with a gloomy brow. Round him the countryside was bright

and sunny, the woods leafy with their summer foliage, the river shining in the sunlight. But Raby's face was shadowed. He was dissatisfied with himself for rejecting the overtures of his old comrades, and feeling at the same time that it was impossible for him to make the first advances. His old chums had wronged him, but they had made all the amends in their power; and by keeping up resentment like this he felt that he was transferring the wrong from their shoulders to his own. Which was a very uncomfortable reflection.

And he missed his old friends and wanted their company. He wondered whether they missed him and wanted his. He was sure of Jimmy Silver—sure of Newcome, too. And even Arthur Edward Lovell, tactless as he might be, was a good pal.

He came in sight of the island, and as he sighted it, he remembered that his former chums were picnicking there, as the note had informed him. Two boats were rocking under the branches by the island, and Raby looked at them with interest. Doyle of the Modern Fourth was in one of them; Dodd and Cook in the other. They had pushed well away from the island, and were looking back with grinning faces.

Raby stood in a clump of willows on the river-bank, and watched the island, realising that something was up. He saw Jimmy Silver scramble to his feet on the island. Jimmy's voice reached his ears.

"You Modern cads! Bring that boat back!"

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

Then Raby understood.

It was a House rag; and the Modern fellows had captured the Classical boat, leaving the Classics stranded on the island. Raby grinned faintly as he stood among the willows and watched.

Lovell and Newcome appeared among the thickets on the island and joined Jimmy Silver.

The three Classics shook their fists

at the Moderns in the boats. So far from reciprocating, the Moderns kissed their hands in return.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath; but that rejoinder from the Moderns seemed to intensify the wrath of the stranded Classics.

"You cheeky rotters!" bawled Lovell. "You Modern cads!" yelled Newcome.

"Bring back that boat!" roared Jimmy Silver. "By Jove! We'll joll well mop up the quad with you when we come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tommy Dodd, you worn——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies were almost doubled up with merriment. As Raby, in the willows on the river-bank, grinned and watched.

CHAPTER 25.

Tommy Dodd's Triumph!

JIMMY SILVER & Co, shook their fists furiously; but they desisted at last from that useless demonstration. The shaking of fists had no effect whatever upon the playful Moderns.

"Look here, Tommy Dodd," called out Jimmy, calming himself at last. "This jape has gone far enough. You want our boat."

"Will you have it now——"

"Yes."

"Or when you can get it?" further inquired Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "We've got to get back to Rookwood pretty soon. Bring that boat here."

"Swim for it!" suggested Tommy Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at the channel between the island and bank. The river was deep, and he swam swiftly; and the distance was considerable. The swim would not have been an easy one; and after that

would have been a tramp of two miles back to the school in wet clothes. That prospect did not attract the Classical chums.

"Now, you really want this boat?" called out Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, you Modern worm!"

"Are you coming to terms?"

"Terms, fathead? What do you mean, ass?" roared Lovell.

"You've got to own up that you're licked——"

"Rats!"

"And write it down and sign it, for us to frame and hang up in our Common-room," continued Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Cook and Doyle, delighted with the idea.

"Something like this," went on the cheerful Tommy. "We—Silver, Lovell, and Newcome—own up that we're licked to the wids, and beg the respected young gentlemen of the Modern Side to take pity on us."

"You silly chump!" howled Lovell.

"Write that down and sign your names to it, fair and square," said Tommy Dodd. "A leaf of your pocket-book will do. I'll pay out of my own pocket to have it mounted and framed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it to me here, and there's your boat in exchange."

"I'd sooner stay on this dashed island all night!" howled Lovell furiously.

"Please yourself, old bean!"

"Look here, Dodd——"

"Are you coming to terms?" demanded the Modern leader.

"No, you cheeky ass! But——"

"We'll give you time to think it over!" chorled Tommy Dodd. "We'll pull over to the bank and wait half an hour. We've got some ginger-pop and sandwiches in our boat, and we can spare half an hour. When you decide to surrender, wave a cap to us."

"Never, you cheeky chump!"

"We'll see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two boats pulled away, slanting

across the river towards the bank, heading for a clump of willows ashore. Neither of the contending parties was aware that that clump of willows concealed a watching junior of the Classical Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. shook their fists again as the boats pulled off. They were tempted to rush into the water and make a desperate attack; but it was clear that they could not reach the boats. Instead of that, they brandished impotent fists at the Moderns, and bawled out uncomplimentary remarks, to which the three Tommies replied only with chuckles.

"Well, my hat!" said Newcome.

"They've done us this time!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.

"The boat oughtn't to have been left unguarded," he said.

"Well, we didn't know the Moderns were on the war-path," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"All the same, the boat ought to have been watched."

"Yes; but——"

"It ought to have been watched."

"Then why the merry thump didn't you watch it, Lovell?" demanded Newcome rather acidly.

That pertinent question seemed to take Arthur Edward rather aback. It did not appear to have occurred to him that the blame, if any, was not wholly somebody else's.

"Yes, why?" inquired Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

Lovell granted.

"Oh, don't jaw!" he said. "If we ever land in a scrape, you fellows are bound to jaw. What good's jaw?"

"Well, you cheeky ass——" began Newcome indignantly.

"We're landed in it now," interrupted Lovell. "I'm jolly well not going to surrender, for one!"

"No fear!"

"Those Modern cads will have to let us have our boat before lock-up. They're only pulling our leg."

Jimmy Silver looked dubious.

"I'd like something more certain than that to rely on," he remarked. "They've caught us fair and square, and if we don't surrender——"

"Are you thinking of surrender?" bawled Lovell.

"Fathend!" was Jimmy's reply to that.

"Look at the cheeky rotters!" said Lovell, watching the Moderns across the expanse of river. "They're landing and taking it easy. Picnicking under our noses, the cheeky cads!"

The three Tummies had pulled the boats up close under the willows, and both painters were tied to a drooping bough. Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle jumped ashore, watched from the islands by the exasperated Classics.

They clambered up the steep bank and disappeared behind the willows. They came into sight again in a few minutes, on the towing-path, where they turned to wave their hands to the Classics on the island. A shaking of fists from the island was the response to that.

"Poor little fags!" remarked Tommy Dodd compassionately. "They think they can keep their giddy end up against the Modern Side. I don't think!"

"No giddy fear!" chuckled Tommy Cook. "They'll surrender, right enough, when it gets towards lock-up."

"And we'll have the giddy document of surrender hung up in our Common-room, bedad!" said Tommy Doyle. "It will make all the Classics as wild as tigers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Modern heroes were enjoying the situation. They sat on a grassy slope, on the farther side of the towing-path, and proceeded to discuss sandwiches and ginger-beer, in great spirits. From the island, across the gleaming river, came an occasional shout—conveying the Classical opinion of the Moderns and all their works. The Moderns, busy with their picnic, did not take the trouble to respond.

"Not much good yelling at the cads," Arthur Lovell remarked at last.

"What the thump are we going to do?" growled Newcome.

Jimmy Silver made a grimace.

"We're not going to do," he answered. "We're going to be done."

"Hullo!" ejaculated Lovell suddenly.

"What——"

"There's somebody at the boat!"

"My hat!"

And a startled ejaculation broke from all three of the stranded Classics:

"Raby! Old Raby!"

CHAPTER 29.

Raby to the Rescue!

GEORGE RABY had lain very low when the Moderns pulled to the bank, scarce six yards from where he was standing.

As the boats came across, Raby dropped on hands and knees among the willows, and, like Brer Fox, he lay low and said "nuffin'."

Utterly unconscious of his proximity, the three Moderns did not even dream of danger.

Tommy Dodd & Co., busy with sandwiches and ginger-beer, and enjoying their triumph over the Classics had not the remotest suspicion that the bunch of willows between them and the river concealed the missing member of the Fistical Four.

Raby grinned, in his cover, as he heard the popping of corks and the buzz of voices on the farther side of the towing-path. With the caution of a Boy Scout or a Red Indian he crept through the willows, closer to the water's edge.

His long-standing quarrel with his old comrades was forgotten now. His chums were stranded, at the mercy of the Moderns, and Raby's only thought was to go to the rescue.

But he knew that he had to be cautious. Once spotted by the enemy he was one against three, and he had

no chance at close quarters. His design was to capture the boats before the enemy were aware of his presence.

He reached the nearest boat, crawling, and then raised his head to look back.

The straggling willows hid him from the view of the Modern juniors on the high bank. But he could not have risen to his feet without betraying himself.

Slowly, cautiously, silently, Raby crept over the gunwale and rolled into the boat.

There, as he lay, he drew out his pocket-knife and opened it. The keen blade was placed across the rope, and the boat rocked free.

By that time the three Classics on the island had seen him. They watched him in tense silence.

Even Arthur Edward Lovell realised that it was a moment for caution. There was still time for the three Moderns to rush down to the boats, if the alarm was given, and the adventure would have ended in a ducking for George Raby.

Raby crept silently into the second boat, and gave the Modern skiff a powerful shove, which sent it rocking out into the river. There the current caught it and twirled it away.

Tommy Dodd's boat, with nobody in it, started on its voyage home to Rookwood.

Raby cut loose the Classical boat, seized on oar, and planted it against the bank to shove off.

At the same moment there came a shout from above. The Modern boat, floating out into the middle of the river, came into view of the Tommies beyond the willows.

"Ben's loose!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "You ass, Doyle!"

"Sure, I tied it safe——"

"Looks like it!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "Come on! We can catch it with the other."

Even yet the Moderns did not know that the boats had been raided. They

concluded that the escaped craft had fallen loose. But as they ran down the bank, crushing through the willows, they sighted George Raby, upright in the remaining boat, shoving off with an oar.

"Raby!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Classical cad! Collar him!"

Tommy Dodd put on a desperate spurt, and his comrades followed him fast. Raby shoved with the oar, desperately, and the boat rocked out on the water. There was a widening stretch of water between the willows and the boat as the three breathless and enraged Moderns reached the river's edge.

Doyle and Cook came to a halt. But Tommy Dodd was made of sterner stuff. There was one chance—and Tommy took it! Without a second's pause, he made a flying leap as he reached the water's edge.

He fairly flew over the intervening water and landed with both feet in the boat.

"Good egg!" panted Cook and Doyle.

The boat rocked violently, almost capsizing under the terrific shock as Tommy Dodd landed. It was a splendid leap. But Tommy Dodd rolled over helplessly in the rocking boat as he landed; and for the moment he was at Raby's mercy.

Raby dropped his oar, almost losing his footing; but not quite. In a twinkling he was upon the Modern junior.

"Ow!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

Splash!

Before the Modern could put up a struggle, he was seized in Raby's grasp, and whirled over the slanting gunwale.

Tommy Dodd went head-first into four feet of water and the boat rocked away, and was a dozen feet distant when Tommy's head came spluttering up. There was a yell of delight from the island.

"Well done, Raby!"

Tommy Dodd spluttered and gasped as he swam. He swam a few yards

after the boat, and Raby flourished a boathook. As the hook missed Tommy's nose by an inch or so, the Modern junior suddenly ceased his pursuit.

"Come on!" grinned Raby. "You'll get punctured—but come on."

Tommy Dodd did not seem to consider it good enough. He swam back to the bank and clambered out of the water, and rejoined his comrades. Three pairs of Modern fists were shaken after Raby.

Raby put the oars out, and rowed for the island. He grinned back at the defeated Moderns as he rowed.

Raby was not feeling "down and out" now. He was in great spirits, and victorious and gleeful. Loud shouts from the island welcomed him as he toolled the boat across.

"This way, Raby!"

"Good for you, old chap!"

"Good old Raby!"

Those welcoming shouts had a very pleasant sound in George Raby's ears. Bump! The boat's nose bumped on the island, and Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome rushed down to seize it and pull it in—and then they seized Raby and dragged him ashore on the island in triumph.

"Hurrah!" roared Lovell.

"Good man, Raby!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat! What a stroke of luck! Good man!"

Raby laughed.

"I thought I'd chip in."

"Of course you did, old top! Just in time for the picnic, too," said Jimmy. "We'd only just started when those Modern worms crawled along. Come on!"

It was a merry picnic on the island after all, and all the Fistical Four were there—and all four of them enjoyed it. Especially they enjoyed the wrathful shouts of the Moderns, and the brandishing of infuriated fists by Tommy Dodd & Co. The Modern boat had disappeared from sight, and evidently was not to be recovered before it reached the Rookwood raft; and

Tommy Dodd & Co. had a two-mile tramp before them to get back to the school, which was nothing like the programme they had mapped out. With a final yell to the Classics, and a final brandishing of fists, they started, and vanished from sight.

But on the island all was merry and bright. The Fistical Four seemed to have forgotten that there ever had been any division in their ranks—the trouble was over without a word being said on the subject. The chums of the end study were reunited, and that was enough. After the picnic, the Fistical Four pulled back to Rookwood in the highest of spirits—what time the hapless Moderns were still tramping on their homeward way.

Four juniors marched into the School House at Rookwood with their arms linked, in a merry row, with smiling faces. Which was an indication to all whom it might concern that the end study was united once more—Raby had "come round."

CHAPTER 20.

Gunner Knows!

REGINALD MUFFIN, of the Classical Fourth, was evidently "bucked."

Anybody could have seen at a glance that Tubby Muffin was bucked.

His fat face was irradiated with smiles. Had Muffin of the Fourth been asked to tea in the prefects' room, or given the free run of the school shop, he could not have looked more merry and bright.

Jimmy Silver & Co. noticed it when they came in to tea. Tubby Muffin met them in the Fourth-Form passage, and the Fistical Four could not help observing the happy satisfaction in his exceedingly plump countenance.

"Tubby's had a remittance!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Or somebody else has!" suggested Jimmy Silver.

Tubby greeted the four with a happy grin.

"You fellows go in for numismatics?" he asked.

"Which?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Numismatics."

"What on earth is numismatics?" asked Raby. "Is it a game?"

Tubby sniffed—the sniff of superior knowledge.

"It is the science of coins," he explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Do you mean numismatics?"

"I dare say that's it," admitted Tubby. "I know it's a jolly long word, and begins with 'numis,' anyhow. Gunner knows all about it, and he told me. You fellows go in for it?"

"Well, I prefer cricket, as a game," said Jimmy Silver. "But you're not looking so bucked over numismatics, Tubby, surely? Of course, I know you've always been keen on collecting coins—you owe a few to every fellow in the Fourth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not exactly taking up numismatics—I mean numismatics," said Tubby Muffin. "But Gunner goes in for it, you know, and he knows all about it—at least, he says so. He's told me about my guinea. Like to see it?"

"Your guinea?"

"Yes, my King George the First golden guinea!" said Tubby, beaming. "Gunner says that George guineas are worth a lot of money. He's got one in his collection at home that's worth three pounds, he says. If his guinea is worth three pounds, mine is worth three pounds, isn't it? Fancy that, you fellows!"

"Where on earth have you dug up a George the First guinea?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver in amazement.

"I bought it!"

"For three pounds?" ejaculated Lovell.

Tubby gave a fat, happy chuckle.

"No—for threepence! You see, I've got a business head on me. You fellows

mayn't have noticed that I've got the sharpest head in the Fourth——"

"I thought you had the fattest," said Lovell.

Sniff from Tubby.

"Well, you fellows may be jolly clever, but you've never picked up a George guinea at a second-hand stall for threepence, and found out that it was worth three pounds," he said.

"And have you?" demanded Newcome.

"Just that!" grinned Tubby. "It was on a stall in Latham market, you know, last term. Everything in the tray was threepence, and that guinea was among the lot. Of course, the man didn't know its value. He must have thought it was an imitation. It was rather old and dirty. I thought I'd polish it up, you know, and put it on my watch-chain, and fellows wouldn't know it wasn't real, would they? Well, I was going to polish it, only——"

"Only you were too lazy!" suggested Raby.

"Well, it got left over," said Tubby. "But the other day I came across it and I polished it up, and then Gunner saw it. Gunner's great on numismatics—I mean numismatics. He spotted it at once, and told me it was a genuine guinea, just like his, and worth three pounds. Fancy that!"

"Chiefly fancy, I should say!" grinned Lovell.

"Well, Gunner knows!"

"Gunner's the biggest ass at Rookwood, present company excepted," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's got one like it!" hooted Tubby.

"Look here, if you fellows care to go in for numismatics I'll let you have it to start a collection. It's worth three pounds, but I'll let it go cheaper to an old pal. You can have it for two pounds nineteen and six, Jimmy."

"Not really?" asked Jimmy, with gentle sarcasm.

"Yes, really, old chap! I believe in being generous to an old pal," said

Tubby. "Come into my study and see it."

"Well, we'd like to see it," said Lovell.

And the Plutical Four followed Reginald Muffin into Study No. 2.

Tubby Muffin sailed along as if he were walking on air.

The discovery that what he had taken for a cheap imitation was in reality a genuine golden guinea had bucked him immensely.

Three pounds was the value, according to Gunner of the Fourth—and three pounds was a huge sum to Tubby. The amount of tuck it represented fairly dazzled him.

Tubby's studymates were in the room—Putty Grape, Higgs, and Jones minor. They were passing a glimmering coin from hand to hand, and examining it. Tubby gave a whoop.

"Here, mind what you're up to with that guinea! It's jolly valuable."

Tubby grabbed his guinea and handed it to Jimmy Silver.

"Look at that!" he said.

The Plutical Four looked at it with interest. If Tubby had had such a stroke of good fortune, they were glad of it. But they could not help having some doubts. Such things happened, that was certain, but such happenings were rare. Rare old coins and priceless old editions of books were sometimes picked up on a second-hand stall for a mere song. But not often!

But the guinea—now brightly polished—certainly looked very imposing. If it was not gold it was a good imitation. Gunner of the Fourth looked into the study while the juniors were examining Tubby's prize. Peter Cuthbert Gunner was looking very pleased with himself. It was seldom—very seldom—that Gunner's opinion on any subject was heard with respect. It was true that he regarded himself as an authority on most subjects, especially cricket and football. Other fellows regarded him as a first-class duffer on all subjects, especially

cricket and football. Gunner, who had plenty of money, sometimes had expensive hobbies, which he took up and dropped as the spirit moved him. Among other things, he had given his attention to numismatics, and fellows who had been home with Gunner had seen his collection. So it had to be supposed that, on that subject at least, Gunner had some idea of what he was talking about. And it was so rarely that fellows acknowledged that Gunner knew what he was talking about that Peter Cuthbert was now feeling almost as bucked as the happy owner of the coin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed the George guinea from hand to hand, and then they passed it to Gunner and looked at him inquiringly.

"The goods—what?" asked Lovell, doubtfully.

Gunner nodded.

"Yes, look at it! I've got one just like it—best of George the First, with GEORGIUS 'D. G. M. BR. FR. ET. HIB. REX F.D. Then, on the other side, four crowned shields—one for England and Scotland, one for Ireland, one for France—you know our kings had the title of King of France in those days—and one for the Electorate of Hanover, where old George came from—Star of the Garter in the centre—Oh, quite genuine!"

Gunner spoke in an off-hand way, like a fellow to whom such knowledge was familiar.

"But imitations of these things are made sometimes, for chaps who can't afford the genuine article," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"I know that!" Gunner was disdainful. "This is genuine, though. Just the same as mine."

"It doesn't seem very heavy for gold."

"Same as mine," said Gunner.

"Well, if it's all right, good luck for you, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver. "Congrats, old man!"

"Like to buy it?" beamed Tubby.

"Thanks, no," said Jimmy, laughing. "Three pounds would want a lot of looking for in the end study."

"I'll let you have it for two-seventeen-six if you're taking up numis-what-d'ye-call-it," said Tubby.

"But I'm not!" grinned Jimmy.

"I'd buy it myself, only I've got one like it," said Gunner. "You can take it to the dealer at Latcham, Tubby. Of course, he won't give you three quid—he has to make his profit. He might give you two quid or thirty shillings."

Tubby's face fell.

"I'd rather sell it about the school for three pounds," he said. "I say, Peele!" Peele of the Fourth looked into Study No. 2, probably attracted there by the fame of Tubby's golden guinea. "Like to buy this coin, Peele, old man? Two pounds seventeen and six to an old friend like you!"

"Let's look at it," said Peele.

Jimmy Silver & Co. quitted Study No. 2, leaving Peele examining the lucky find. They walked on to the end study to tea. Apparently Cyril Peele did not buy the George guinea, for a little later Tubby Muffin looked into the end study.

"Jimmy, old man," he said, "you being an old pal, I'll let you have that guinea for two-fifteen."

"Nothing doing!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Dash it all, two pound ten!" said Tubby. "There!"

"But I don't want it, old man!"

"I've offered it to every chap in the Fourth," said Tubby plaintively. "Only Gunner would care to have it, and he doesn't want it as he's got one. Look here, Jimmy, numis-thingummy is a great science! You learn no end of history and things from it. Why not take it up, and start with my guinea?"

"Bow-wow! Try next door!" said Jimmy, laughing.

And Tubby Muffin grunted and departed. He was still greatly bucked by the discovery of his unexpected treasure; but evidently golden guineas

were a drug in the market in the Rookwood Fourth. Reginald Muffin unwillingly made up his fat mind to leave the sale over till the following day, when he would be able to get across to Latcham, and bargain with a dealer.

In the meantime he remained hugely bucked by his good fortune, and that night he dreamed of golden guineas and of unlimited luck, and a sweet and happy smile lingered on his fat features as he slumbered.

CHAPTER 31.

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed!

"HELP!"

"What?"

"Help!"

"Thieves! Fire!

Grooooooh!"

Reginald Muffin was a little incoherent.

He bounced out of Study No. 2 and ran into Jimmy Silver, sending that youth staggering against the passage wall. It was no joke to be run down by a fellow of Tubby Muffin's weight and circumference.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a sunny half-holiday. Rookwood fellows had various schemes for the afternoon, and Jimmy Silver & Co. intended to take a little run on their bicycles. Tubby Muffin's intention was to take the train from Coombe to Latcham with his precious George guinea in his pocket to drive a bargain with the antique dealer in the market town. The cause of Tubby's sudden excitement was a mystery.

Jimmy leaned on the passage wall and gasped for breath. Lovell grasped Tubby as the fat Classical staggered from the shock, and righted him.

"What's the matter, you fat duffer?" he exclaimed.

"Ow! Thieves! Wow!"

"What?" yelled Lovell.

"Help! Thieves! Murder! My gig-gig-gig—"

"Your what?" shrieked Raby.

"They've stolen my gig-gig——" stammered Tubby.

"Your gig!" exclaimed Newcome. "Gone potty? You never had any gig, you fat chump!"

"My gig-gig-gig-gig-guinea!"

"Oh, your guinea, you ass! Have you lost it?"

"I haven't lost it!" yelled Tubby. "It's been took—I mean taken! Taken away from my study! My guinea—three pounds! I'm going to Mr. Dalton! I'm gig-gig-going to the Head! I—I—I——"

Arthur Edward Lovell grasped Tubby by the shoulder and shook him vigorously.

"Shut up that rot!" he commanded.

"Yooop!"

"Your silly guinea may have been lost, but it hasn't been stolen!" snapped Lovell. "If you say it has again I'll bang your silly napper on the wall!"

"It's been stolen—— Yaroooop!"

Bang!

Arthur Edward Lovell was as good as his word.

The concussion between Tubby Muffin's bullet head and the passage wall rang loudly. Still more loudly rang the fiendish yell uttered by Tubby.

"There!" said Lovell. "Now talk sense!"

"Yaroooop!"

"That isn't sense!"

"Whoooo!"

"Ner that," said Lovell, shaking the fat Classical. "You've lost your silly guinea!"

"Groogh! Ow! I haven't!" wailed Tubby. "I put it away safe last night. Now it's gone!"

"What rot!" broke in Valentine Mornington. "There's nobody would steal it even if it was genuine, which I don't believe!"

"It was genuine enough," said Gunner. "Whoever has bagged Tubby's guinea has bagged three quid!"

"I don't think!" said Morny, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Look here!" roared Gunner. "If you think I don't know anything about numismatics, Mornington, I'm ready to punch your head!"

"Which would be proof?" remarked Potty of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, have you got it, Mornington?" yelled Tubby.

"What!"

"Well, somebody's got it, and you're making out that it's of no value!" howled Tubby. "Hand it over, or I'll go to the Head!"

"You silly owl!" roared Mornington, while the Classical Juniors roared with laughter. The passage was crowded with fellows now, called to the scene by Tubby's frantic uproar.

"Better keep that fat fool quiet!" remarked Peele of the Fourth. "We don't want the other Forms to begin chippin' us about havin' a thief in the Fourth!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell emphatically. "Smythe and his lot would be glad to get hold of it—and the Moderns, too. If Muffin says another word about his silly guinea being stolen I'll bang his silly head again!"

"But it's gone!" howled Muffin. "Guineas can't walk, you ass!"

"Silly chumps can lose them though!" said Peele.

"Have you got it, Peele?"

"Eh?"

"You're making out that I've lost it. If you've got it you just hand it over, or I'll go to the Head!"

"You silly owl!" exclaimed Lovell. "Will you shut up?" And Arthur Edward Lovell tapped Tubby's head of the wall again, by way of reminder.

"Yooop! I say, make him leggo!" howled Tubby. "He's got it!"

"Who's got it?" hooted Lovell.

"You have!"

"It's splattered Arthur Edward.

"Yes, you rotter! That's why you're

hanging my head!" howled Muffin. "You hand it over, or I'll go to Mr. Dulton!"

"Why, I—I—I—" gasped Lovell.

"Are you going to accuse everybody in the Form, one after another, you fat duffer?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Dry up!"

"I won't dry up!" panted Tubby.

"If you've got it, Jimmy Silver, you just hand it over—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!" shouted Lovell.

"Oh, don't bully him," said Gower, who was Peele's chum, and always "up against" the Fictical Four.

"Who's bullying him?" bawled Lovell.

"Well, let him alone," said Gower.

"If his guinea's been stolen, he's a right to say so."

"I say, have you got it, Gower?" panted Tubby Muffin.

Gower jumped.

"I—you fat dummy!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you admit it's been stolen, so—"

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

Gower's face was a study.

"Why, I—I—I'll burst him!" howled Gower. "Let me get at him and—Ow, you beast!"

Gower staggered back from a hefty push on the chest delivered by Arthur Edward Lovell.

"No, you won't!" said Arthur Edward coolly. "You won't bully him, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We'd better see to this before that fat duffer starts a lot of talk in the school. Roll him into his study."

"The fat duffer's dropped it somewhere," said Peele. "It will turn up again."

"I'm pretty certain of that," said Jimmy Silver. "Bring him in."

Reginald Muffin was pushed into his study, and that room, and the doorway, and the passage outside swarmed with

Classical Fourth Formers. The various occupations planned for the afternoon were "off" now, while the mystery of the missing guinea was inquired into. All the fellows present agreed that Tubby should not be allowed to spread a yarn through the school that his guinea had been stolen—the honour of the Fourth was at stake; and even Cyril Peele, the blackest sheep in the Form, was as keen on that as any other fellow. Tubby Muffin's desire was to rouse up the Head, and the Fourth Form master, and the police—indeed, he would have been willing to call out the military. But Tubby Muffin was not allowed to have his way. A swarm of the Classical Fourth hemmed him in his study—while Jimmy Silver, taking the lead as captain of the Fourth, proceeded to investigate.

CHAPTER 32.

Serious for the Fourth!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. did not believe for a moment that the golden guinea bearing the effigy of his deceased Majesty, King George the First, had been stolen. They were quite certain that it was only some of Tubby's "rot." But that opinion was shaken very soon.

Tubby frantically explained where he had left the guinea—in his study, in a cardboard-box once devoted to pen-nibs, in the drawer of the table. He had placed it there, after showing it round the junior Common-room the previous evening. As it happened, Jones minor had been in the study when he did so, and had left the study with Muffin afterwards. After that, Muffin had not re-entered the study before bed-time.

That morning, as he excitedly ascertained, he had not been in the study at all. He had come up after dinner to fetch the guinea and take it over to Latham. And he had found the cardboard-box empty—the golden guinea conspicuous by its absence.

In these circumstances it was readily impossible to suppose that Tubby had dropped it anywhere. Tubby was a first-class duffer; but it had to be admitted that he must know whether he had gone to the table drawer and taken the guinea out of the box where Jones minor had seen him place it. And Tubby earnestly, passionately, and frankly asseverated that he hadn't.

"Uncle James" began to look worried. It was a horrid thought, that there was a fellow in the Form base enough to commit a theft. But the guinea was gone.

According to Gunner, the guinea was worth three pounds. Whether Gunner was right or wrong, certainly most of the fellows believed that he knew what he stated so positively. Most of the Fourth believed that that old coin would sell at Latham for at least thirty shillings. A good many fellows in the Fourth were hard up—some of them in a perennial state of hard-upness. Was it possible that some miserable rascal had descended so low as to purloin the guinea, to sell it for what it would fetch?

It was a hideous thought; and yet, there seemed no other explanation. Jimmy Silver looked round with a clouded brow when Tubby had finished spluttering out his statements.

"I say, this is pretty rotten, you fellows!" said Jimmy.

"Looks rotten for Tubby's study-mates," said Peele.

Putty of the Fourth turned on him.

"How's that?" he demanded fiercely.

"You needn't jump down a fellow's throat!" said Peele coolly. "I only mean that Tubby's study-mates would know where the guinea was, and would be able to bag it without being noticed."

"Look here——" roared Higgs.

"I'm not accusing anybody," said Peele hastily. "I've already said that I don't believe it was stolen."

"Where is it, then?" howled Tubby. Peele hesitated.

"If you've got anything to say, Peele, you'd better cough it up," said Jimmy Silver, with a glance of disavour at the black sheep of the Fourth.

"Well," said Peele, "we all know that there's a practical jokin' ass in this study always playin' some trick or other. Looks to me as if Tubby's leg is bein' pulled—some ass has hidden his silly guinea for a jape."

Jimmy Silver drew a breath of relief. The suggestion was quite a plausible one, and it banished the horrid thought that a thief had been perpetrated.

All eyes turned on Putty of the Fourth. Putty's practical joking proclivities were well known.

Putty Grace turned crimson.

"Of course, you're alluding to me, Peele," he exclaimed. "I shouldn't be fool enough to play practical jokes with money, I hope. Anyhow, I never touched the guinea—I didn't even know where Tubby had put it. I haven't even seen it since yesterday afternoon."

"Same here," said Higgs.

"And here," said Jones minor.

"That settles that!" said Jimmy Silver. "Putty's a japing ass, but we all know we can take his word."

"And any fellow could have come into the study, in the evening after Tubby put it away," said Lovell. "Most of the fellows were downstairs, and nobody would notice. Any fellow might have come up to his study, and slipped in here. Why, you were in your own study yourself, Peele, till close on dawn."

Peele shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, my belief is that it's a joke on Tubby, and I think it will be pretty rotten if there's a yarn spread about that there's a thief in the Fourth," he said.

And with that, Cyril Peele left the study and walked away with Gower.

"That much is right enough, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "You ought to have locked it up, Tubby. Anyhow, you're not to talk about a theft unless we can make sure."

"I want my guinea!" bawled Tubby. "I'm going to the Head—I'm going to the police—I'm going to—"

"You're going to shut up!" roared Lovell.

"Look here—"

"Don't be an ass, Tubby!" said Mornington. "If any fellow has got hold of your guinea for a joke, he will chuck it away as soon as the Head gets going. He won't risk being accused of stealing it."

"Oh! Oh, dear!" gasped Tubby Muffin, quite aghast at that dreadful possibility.

"It's almost unbelievable that the beastly thing has been stolen," said Jimmy Silver. "Anyhow, we'll put it down as a joke so far, and give the silly fool a chance to return it. I'll put up a notice at the end of the passage."

"Good idea," said Erroll.

"But, I say—" howled Tubby.

"You've said enough! Shut up!"

And, heedless of the wrathful ejaculations and lamentations of Reginald Muffin, the Classical juniors decided the matter according to Jimmy Silver's view. Tubby was warned with dire threats to say no word of a theft outside the Fourth; and Jimmy, before he went out, pinned up a notice at the head of the stairs for all the Classical Fourth to read. It ran:

"The silly owl who has hidden Tubby Muffin's silly guinea is hereby ordered to return it to Study No. 2 before call-over. Otherwise he will be found out, and will get a Porm ragging."

"(Signed) J. Silver."

Then the Fictical Four went out to their bicycles, hoping that the missing guinea would have turned up by the time they came in for call-over.

CHAPTER 22.

Dark Suspicion!

"THAT'S Peele!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

The chums of the Fourth were pedalling into the market town of Latcham, which lay on their route that afternoon. Ahead of them, on the sunny road, they had a view of a cyclist's back.

The juniors had been out some time, and had not ridden direct to Latcham. They were quite near the market town when they turned into the main road from a leafy lane, and the cyclist was some little distance ahead of them then.

They did not see his face, as he did not look round; but they knew it was Peele. He was not in Etone, and he was not wearing a Rookwood cap, but the look of him was familiar. He was grinding rather hard at his pedals; the ride from Rookwood to Latcham was rather a long one for a slacker like Peele.

The Fictical Four had been round and about in the lanes, and covered a much greater distance, but they were as fresh as paint. They glided on behind Peele in a cheery bunch on the wide, country road.

"Peele's bucking-up, getting out as far as Latcham on a bike," remarked Raby. "He looks nearly done, though."

"My hat!" ejaculated Arthur Edward Lovell suddenly.

Lovell looked startled.

"It—it can't be possible!" he exclaimed.

"What's that?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"What the thump is Peele biking over to Latcham for?" said Lovell.

"He's a dashed slacker. He never does five miles on a bike, and this is a jolly long ride. Muffin was going over to Latcham with his blessed guinea, if it hadn't been missing. He was going to call at Sanderson's, the antique place, to sell it if he could."

Jimmy gave Lovell a sharp look.

"Old man, that sounds a bit sus-

picious," he said. "You can't suspect that Peele's got Tubby's guinea in his pocket."

Lovell reddened.

"Well, no," he said. "I admit it flashed into my mind. We know Peele's a shady card, and he goes in for betting on gee-gees. It struck me as queer that he should come over to Latcham. But I suppose even Peele wouldn't be such a rotter!"

"I hope not," said Jimmy.

"Sanderson's shop is in the market square," said Raby. "We pass the top of the square, getting through the town. If Peele stops at Sanderson's and— But we're jolly well not going to watch him."

"Of course not!" said Lovell hastily.

The Fistical Four pedalled on in silence. They were entering the town now, a little behind Peele. Had they come on Peele farther back on the country road they would have passed him very quickly; but in the narrow old streets of the ancient Hampshire market town they could not put on speed. Once or twice now they caught Peele's profile as he turned his head slightly, and there was no doubt that it was Cyril Peele of the Classical Fourth Form of Rookwood. Peele kept ahead, and pedalled into the market square, and a few minutes later he stopped, and the Fistical Four rode past him.

He had stopped at an old shop, outside which a wooden post stood, a relic of old days when horses had been tied there. Peele had leaned his bicycle against the post, and was going into the dusky old shop, down two steps from the square, as the four rode by. And the shop was Sanderson's. The little window contained cases of coins, sheets of foreign stamps, stuffed birds, and a stuffed monkey, and other such articles dealt in by old Mr. Sanderson. The Fistical Four had not the slightest desire to spy on Peele; but they simply could not help seeing that the cad of the Fourth entered the

shop that Tubby Muffin had intended to visit for the purpose of selling his George guinea.

They rode on in silence, feeling extremely uncomfortable.

It was a strange coincidence, at the least.

Peele certainly might have had some business that afternoon at the antique dealer's. He might; but it was improbable. The coincidence was altogether too odd.

Even Jimmy Silver, much as he hated to be suspicious, could not help thinking it likely that, if they entered Sanderson's at that moment they would find Cyril Peele dealing with Mr. Sanderson on the subject of a George the First guinea.

Nothing would have induced the chums of the Fourth to follow Peele into the shop, to watch him, on bare suspicion.

But they felt very uncomfortable as they pedalled on, unable to drive suspicion from their minds.

No member of the Fistical Four broke the silence till they were a long way out of Latcham, on the road to Rookham. Arthur Edward Lovell spoke at last.

"It looks queer, you fellows," he said.

"Beastly queer!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"What the thump was Peele doing at that shop?"

Jimmy did not answer.

"I—I suppose it's only a coincidence," said Raby hesitatingly.

Grunt from Lovell.

"I—I hope Tubby's guinea will turn up," said Jimmy Silver. "Peele's a bad bat, and we all know it; but we can't find him guilty of an awful thing like that without jolly strong evidence. Better not think about it—anyway till we're certain that Tubby's guinea is gone for good!"

"That's right," agreed Newcome.

But it was a little difficult not to think about it. If Tubby's guinea

mained missing Peele's visit to the antique shop at Latcham could only be considered very suspicious. They remembered, too, that Peele had not been wearing a Rookwood cap—but an ordinary cloth cap instead. Why had he not wanted Mr. Sanderson to know that he was a Rookwood fellow—for what other object could he have had?

The chums of the Fourth succeeded in dismissing the matter from their minds at last. They stopped at the inn at Rookham for tea, and after that, pedalled home to Rookwood School at a leisurely pace, timing themselves to get there for call-over.

One of the first fellows they noticed as they came in was Peele of the Fourth. He was talking to Gower, and he took no heed of the Fistical Four. They had been behind him all the time at Latcham, and he had not seen them there. The four looked at him; but if they were looking for signs of a guilty conscience they did not observe any. Peele's manner was quite normal.

"Just in time for call-over," said Mornington, coming in with Erroll. "Hallo, Tubby! Pound your giddy guinea?"

Tubby Muffin rolled in from the quad, fat and glum. He shook his head.

"No! It's been stolen!" he growled. "I say, Jimmy, that guinea hasn't turned up yet. I knew it wouldn't. And it's call-over now, and something's got to be done."

"After call-over," said Jimmy Silver. Cyril Peele glanced round.

"Better make sure before you talk about your bogus guinea bein' pinched, Muffin," he said.

"It's not a bogus guinea, and I'm quite sure!" hooted Tubby.

"Peele seems rather keen that fellows shouldn't suppose that there'd been a theft!" murmured Lovell as the Fistical Four went into Big Hall.

Jimmy Silver nodded. He remembered that Peele had taken that line all along, and that he had been rather

surprised by Peele's unexpected concern for the honour of the Form. Unwilling as he was to think evil even of the black sheep of the Fourth, a conviction was forcing itself into Jimmy's mind that the George guinea had really been stolen, and that Cyril Peele was the thief.

CHAPTER 36.

Found!

M R. DALTON was taking roll-call. Calling-over seemed a long process to some of the Fourth on this occasion. Tubby Muffin had agreed—reluctantly—to let the matter of the missing guinea stand over till after roll; he was eager for the theft to be proclaimed, and investigation commenced. Jimmy Silver & Co. were anxious now for the matter to come to a head. And most of the Classical Fourth were curious to know whether the notice, posted in the Fourth Form passage by the captain of the Form, had produced any effect. Certainly, if the guinea had been abstracted for a foolish practical joke, it was likely that the jester would have returned it by this time.

The juniors crowded out after roll, and most of the Classical Fourth headed for Study No. 2 at once.

That study and the passage outside were crowded. Jimmy Silver glanced over the room, hoping to see the guinea; but it was not to be seen there.

"It's not been brought back!" hooted Tubby Muffin. "I knew it wouldn't be! The thief's sold it by this time, Jimmy Silver, and you're jolly well responsible."

"Yes, Silver's responsible," said Gunner, in his positive way. "If the guinea doesn't turn up, Silver ought to compensate Muffin."

"What rot!" said Mornington. "If the guinea doesn't turn up," said Jimmy Silver quietly, "the matter will have to be reported to Mr. Dalton.

It doesn't seem to have been brought back."

"I'm going to Mr. Dalton now!" exclaimed Tubby.

"I—I suppose you'd better!" admitted the captain of the Fourth.

"The sooner the better!" said Gunner. "That guinea was worth three pounds, as I've said before."

"Three farthings, more likely," said Peele.

"I tell you I know something about numismatics!" roared Gunner.

"About as much as you know about cricket, I fancy," sneered Peele. "But before you go to Dicky Dalton, Silver, hadn't you better look round the study? The jolly old joker may have brought it back, you know."

"It isn't here."

"You haven't looked yet," said Peele.

"Well, I can't see it," snapped Jimmy, his suspicions of Peele deepening every moment.

Peele jerked out the table drawer.

"Might be there!" he said. "That's where the fat duffer kept it, and that's where it might be put back."

"Oh, rot— My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy, as a golden glimmer caught his eye.

"My guinea!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

"Great Scott!"

Muffin pounced on the guinea. There it was, glimmering in the table drawer, among papers and pens, pencils and nibs, and old letters. The George guinea had turned up, after all.

"So it was a giddy jest, and the practical joker has brought it back!" exclaimed Mornington.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

Their faces were red and they were feeling utterly sheepish and sick with themselves. For by that time they had grown convinced that Peele had stolen Tubby's guinea. Circumstantial evidence, and their knowledge of Peele's shady ways, had convinced them. Had the unknown jester kept the guinea back, they would not have

had the slightest doubt that Peele had taken it and sold it in Latham that afternoon. They would have condemned him, in their own minds at least, and the condemnation would have been unjust!

That reflection was enough to make the Physical Four feel very sick with themselves. They stood flushed and silent, scarcely daring to look at Peele.

Had he been aware of their suspicion they would have asked his pardon at once. As he knew nothing of it, however, it was better to say nothing. It was a case of the least said the soonest mended.

"Well, there's your spoof guinea, Muffin," said Peele, with a sneering grin. "You've got it!"

"Tain't a spoof guinea, you beast!"

"Quite genuine!" said Gunner. "I'll stake my knowledge of numismatics on that! I think I know something about numismatics."

"Think again!" sneered Peele.

"Well, there the rotten thing is, anyhow!" said Putty of the Fourth. "You'd better keep it in your pocket now, Muffin. If you leave it about the study again I'll scalp you!"

"How was I to know you were going to play tricks with it, you silly ass?" demanded Tubby.

"I!" roared Putty.

"Well, somebody did, and you're such a funny ass I suppose it was you."

"I tell you I never touched it, you fat rotter!"

"You may as well own up now, you did!" said Peele. "No harm in a practical joke! Only it was silly!"

"Fatheaded!" said Lovell. "You really ought to have a little more sense, Putty!"

"Haven't I told you I never touched it!" shouted Putty.

"Well, if you didn't, you didn't! At the same, you're always playing some game or other!" said Lovell. "You put ink in my marmalade once."

"That's different from playing the goat with money, you ass!"

"Well, I know it is, and I take your word, of course; but you should be more careful, all the same."

"You silly chump——"

"Look here, Putty——"

"Look here, you dummy——"

"I'll jolly well——"

"Order!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Chuck it, Lovell! Putty never touched it, if he says he didn't! I'd like to find the silly ass who played the trick, though!"

"You wouldn't have to look outside this study for him, I fancy," sneered Peele.

Putty made a stride towards Peele, who promptly stepped out of Study No. 2 and walked away. The crowd of juniors broke up, all of them glad that the missing guinea had turned up, and that there was no longer the shadow of a suspected theft over the Classical Fourth. Most of them were disposed to think that Putty had been the practical joker, in spite of his angry denials. Putty's reputation as a jester was great in the Fourth, and it told against him now.

Tubby Muffin did not return the guinea to the table drawer. He was taking no more risks with it. He disposed of his valuable prize in an inner pocket, there to remain till he could dispose of it for cash.

In the end study Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"You were wrong about Peele, after all, Jimmy!" said Lovell.

"You started the idea," said Jimmy tartly.

"Now look here, Jimmy——" said Arthur Edward, always ready to be argumentative.

"Oh, chuck it!"

"When a fellow's wrong he ought to be willing to admit that he's wrong," said Lovell.

"Ass!"

"Peele's a bad hat, but he's not a thief," said Lovell. "We know now

that it was only a jape on Tubby. A fellow ought never to take any notice of circumstantial evidence."

"Oh, don't give us a sermon," said Ruby testily.

Lovell frowned. Apparently, by this time, Arthur Edward was satisfied that he had been the champion of suspected innocence, and he felt called upon to speak a word in season to his erring chums.

"I'm only speaking to you for your own good," he said. "I think——"

"You don't," said Jimmy. "you can't! Dry up, fathead, before we bump you!"

Lovell snorted, but he dropped the subject. He shook his head seriously at his chums several times during tea. But they looked so restive that he did not speak to them for their own good any more.

CHAPTER 26.

Terrible for Tubby!

"SIXPENCE!" said Tubby Muffin.

It was the following day, after classes. During that day Tubby Muffin had been making a collection for his return ticket to Letcham. With a golden guinea in his possession, worth anything from thirty shillings to three pounds, Tubby was still in his usual impecunious state. He came up to Jimmy Silver & Co. and held out a fat hand.

"Just sixpence more," he said. "I'll settle it out of what I get for the guinea."

Jimmy Silver & Co. sorted out coppers, and the required sum was made up. Then Reginald Muffin, in high feather, trotted out of the school gates, on his way to Coombe to take the local train. The George guinea was safe in his pocket. Gunner of the Fourth called to him as he started.

"Don't take less than thirty bob, Muffin! It will go cheap at that."

"I won't!" agreed Tubby.

And he trotted away in great spirits.

Tubby was expected back to tea. In Study No. 2 there was some expectation. With ready cash in his possession, Tubby was going to stand a study spread—howsoever large the sum he received for his guinea, it was not likely to last Tubby very long. Higgs and Jones minor and Putty considered that it was, indeed, high time that Tubby stood a feed—he generally shared them, but seldom stood them. And Tubby had graciously invited the Pistical Four and several other fellows. With this chance at last of spreading himself, Tubby was going to do the thing in style.

So at ten-time Jimmy Silver & Co. came in, and instead of going on to the end study as usual, they stopped at No. 2. The table was set for tea—crockery and chairs had been borrowed along the passage. All was ready for the spread—with the exception of the spread itself. That had to wait till Tubby came back with his new supplies of cash.

"Not back yet?" asked Lovell.

"No. He won't be long now," said Putty of the Fourth. "Hallo, trot in, Gunner."

Gunner trotted in. The numismatist was on the list of invited guests. He brought his study-mate, Dickinson minor, with him. Oswald and Topham and Townsend came in a little later. It was quite a gathering.

"Here he comes!" said Putty, who was looking from the study window. "I can see him. I suppose he'll stop at the tuckshop as he comes across—no, he's coming right on."

A few minutes later the heavy footsteps and stertorous breathing of Reginald Muffin were heard in the Fourth Form passage.

Tubby appeared in the doorway.

"Welcome home, old man!" said Higgs.

"All ready, Tubby!" said Jones minor.

Tubby did not answer. He blinked in at the assembled company, and

they could not possibly fail to observe that the expression on his fat face was not happy. It was, indeed, glum, to the deepest depth of glumness. He came dismally into the study.

"Haven't you sold it?" exclaimed Jones minor in alarm.

"Ow! No."

"Then what about the spread?" demanded Jones indignantly.

"Oh, dear! There won't be any spread."

"Well, you fat chump——"

"Shut up, Jones!" said Gunner. "Tubby's quite right not to sell it if he couldn't get the value. How much did old Sanderson offer you, Muffin?"

"Twopence!" groaned Muffin.

"What?"

Tubby groaned again deeply.

"Twopence!"

"Twopence!" said Gunner dazedly. "It's worth three pounds—two at the very least! Is the man mad?"

Crack! Tubby Muffin threw the golden guinea on the table. He did not seem to care where it fell.

"He says it's an imitation," mumbled Tubby. "He says it's a dummy coin, the kind they make to put in a showcase, or something. He says they're quite common—only yesterday a fellow came in to sell one to him, thinking it was a real guinea. Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver gave a start.

"A fellow tried to sell one to him yesterday!" he exclaimed.

"Ow! Yes! And Mr. Sanderson told him it was bogus," said Tubby dismally. "He says it was exactly the same as mine! Oh, dear!"

Jimmy Silver compressed his lips. He had little doubt of the identity of the fellow who had tried to sell an imitation George guinea to Mr. Sanderson the previous day—thinking it was real. He understood, too, how it was that the missing guinea had been returned to Tubby's study. Even Peole had not cared to become a thief for the sake of a few pence.

"Mr. Sanderson's got a dozen of

them," groaned Tubby. "He says I can have them at twopence each if I like. Ow!"

"Rot!" said Gunner.

"He said he didn't want any more, but he would give me twopence for this one, if I liked. I gave threepence for it, you know."

"Well, you ass!" said Lovell.

Tubby Muffin groaned.

"You footlin' ass!" said Townsend.

And he walked out of the study with Topham, Oswald and Dickinson minor grinned and followed them. Evidently the spread was "off"—very much off.

Tubby Muffin sank into a chair, with a woe-begone face. He had counted his chickens rather too early, and now they were never to be hatched. It was a terrible blow for Tubby. Since Gunner had informed him of the value of his George guinea, Tubby had dreamed of tuck—he had lived, moved, and had his being in visions of tuck. And now there was to be no tuck!

"It's utter rot!" exclaimed Gunner. "I know something about numismatics—I can tell you all about coins and—"

"More than a dealer in them!" grinned Patsy.

"Certainly. I tell you that George guinea is exactly like the one in my collection at home, that I gave three pounds for."

"Very likely," said Lovell. "You're the kind of footling chump that would give three pounds for a threepenny medal."

"Buck up, Muffin," said Gunner encouragingly. "You can take my word for it that—"

"You silly ass!"

"What?"

"You thumping idiot!"

"Are you calling me names, Muffin?"

Tubby glared at him.

"You burbling jabberwock!" he howled. "You don't know what you're talking about! You never do! I might have known you were only gassing out

of the back of your neck! Making me believe that bit of gilded tin was worth three pounds! Yah!"

"Why, I—I'll—"

"Fathead! Chump! Ass!" roared Tubby. "Now I've been all over to Latham for nothing—you—you—you silly owl! You ought to be put in a home for idiots! You know as much about numismatics as you know about cricket! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner made a jump at Tubby. At the same time, three or four fellows made a jump at Gunner, and collared him.

"Bump him!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gunner's the cause of all the trouble, with his fatheaded cocksureness. He doesn't know enough to go in when it rains, and he sets up to teach us numismatics. Bump him!"

"Leggo! Yaroooh! I—oh, my hat!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

The juniors felt that Gunner had asked for it, so they gave it to him. Peter Cuthbert Gunner smote the study carpet with his burly person, and smote it again and again. Then half a dozen boots helped Gunner out of the study—and the foot that landed hardest was the fat foot of Reginald Muffin.

CHAPTER 38.

Rough Justice!

JIMMY SILVER beckoned to his chums and walked along the Fourth Form passage to Peele's study. He threw open the door, and Peele, who was smoking a cigarette, gave him an impudent glance through the smoke. Lovell and Raby and Newcome followed the captain of the Fourth into the study.

"I don't remember askin' you fellows to call!" drawled Peele.

"We've come on business," said Jimmy Silver grumpily. "Yesterday Muffin's guinea was taken from his study, Peele—"

"Has he lost it again?" yawned Peele.

"Nobody's likely to take it again, as it turns out to be a medal worth a few pence. But yesterday it was supposed to be worth some pounds," said Jimmy Silver. "That is why it was taken."

"Didn't it turn out to be a giddy practical joke?"

"So we thought. We don't think so now," said the captain of the Fourth. "Yesterday Mr. Sanderson was offered a guinea just like Tubby's—by a fellow who thought it was real and wanted to sell it. That guinea was Tubby's guinea—and you were the fellow, Peele."

Peele sat up.

His face was a little pale, but he was quite cool.

"Sanderson's at Latcham, isn't he?" he asked.

"You know he is."

"Well, I never went near Latcham, yesterday."

"You didn't——" ejaculated Lovell.

"Not at all."

"May a fellow ask where you did go, as you were out of gates?" said Jimmy Silver very quietly.

"No bizney of yours, but I don't mind mentionin' it. I had a spin on my bike Rookham way."

"And you didn't pass through Latcham?"

"No," yawned Peele.

"Yesterday," said Jimmy Silver grimly, "we rode through Latcham, Peele, behind you, and saw you get down and go into Sanderson's shop."

Peele sprang to his feet. The cigarette dropped unheeded on the floor.

"You—you——" he gasped. "You rotters—the guinea was put back—it wasn't stolen—it——" he panted helplessly.

"You put it back, after hearing from Sanderson that it was worthless," said Jimmy Silver. "We know it all now. And now——"

"You can't tell the Head—you can't prove——"

Cyril Peele's coolness had gone now, and he fairly panted with terror.

"We're not going to tell anybody," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to give you a lesson, you horrid cad, to keep your dirty paws from stealing and disgracing your school! Bend him over."

The next five minutes were purgatory to Peele of the Fourth. He did not even dare to yell, lest he should attract a prefect to the study, to hear for what he was being punished. Lovell had brought a stout stick, and Peele, bending over a chair, took a tremendous licking without a word. A Head's flogging would have been a jest to that licking—Lovell's powerful arm was quite tired when he had finished.

Then, without a word to the cad of the Fourth, the Fistical Four quitted the study, leaving Cyril Peele groaning.

Tubby Muffin mourned long over his disappointment. Gunner recalled the episode with painful feelings. But it was Cyril Peele who retained the longest and more painful recollection of the episode of Tubby Muffin's golden guinea.

CHAPTER II. The Literary Man!

"GO away!"

"Eh?"

"Go away!" repeated Gunner. Dickinson minor did not go away. He stood in the doorway of Study No. 7 and stared at Gunner.

It was time for prep, and Dickinson minor had arrived at his study for prep. He saw no reason whatever why he should go away. In fact, he couldn't go away—he had his prep to do.

Gunner seemed busy.

He appeared to have quite got over the bumping he had received over the episode of Tubby's guinea, and was very busily occupied indeed.

He was seated at the study table, which was covered with scribbled sheets of impot paper. More sheets lay on the carpet, where they had fluttered from the table.

Gunner's face was serious, not to say solemn. He looked as if he had found out like the gentleman in the poem, that life is real, life is earnest. His rugged brows were deeply corrugated, his lips were set. There was a daub of ink on his prominent nose, there were many daubs on his fingers and cuffs. Ink had been shed in the study apparently in great quantities.

"What is it—lines?" asked the puzzled Dickinson.

"No!"

"Well, what—"

"Don't interrupt!"

"Prep," said Dickinson minor patiently.

Gunner looked up wrathfully.

"I've told you to go away!" he said.

"I want the study to myself. Don't talk any more—you'll break the thread."

"The—the what?"

"The thread, you ass!"

Dickinson looked round the study. He could not see any thread.

"I don't see it," he said.

"You don't see what?" snapped Gunner.

"The thread! Have you been sewing on buttons?" asked the perplexed Dickinson.

"You silly owl! I mean the thread of my thoughts. Haven't you sense enough not to jaw when literary work is going on?"

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Dickinson.

Gunner made an impatient gesture of dismissal, and dipped his pen into the ink again. Dickson in sheer amazement, stepped in, and glanced at the paper over Gunner's shoulder. But for the information Gunner had given him, he would not have taken it for literary work. What he read was as follows:

"By this time the sunn had sett,

and a kloke of darkness kuvered the erth. In the dedly stillness not a sownd was herd saive the howl of the wind in the trees, the roar of the kataract, and the rumble of distant thunder."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Dickinson minor involuntarily. "Is—is is that literary work, Gunner?"

"Of course it is."

Dickinson felt that if Gunner was right, he would have to revise all his previous ideas about literary work.

"Now go away!" continued Gunner. "I'm just in the vein. I never realised before what a gift I had for descriptive writing. It fairly flows off my pen. I'm doing this story—"

"Oh, it's a story!" gasped Dickinson.

"What the thump did you think it was?"

"I—I couldn't imagine what it was," confessed Dickinson.

"You silly ass! I'm writing this for the 'Pictorial Popular,'" said Gunner. "They're offering twenty pounds for the best complete story. I'm not hard up, but I may as well bag the quids. They'll come in useful."

"You—you think you'll bag 'em?" stuttered Dickinson.

"Well, others may put in something as good as this, of course," admitted Gunner. "It's not likely, but it might happen. But I'm practically sure of the prize. It says plainly that the prize will be given for the best story. That makes it fairly a cert."

"Oh!"

"Now go away!" said Gunner, settling down to literary work again. "I can't be bothered while I'm in the throes of composition."

"But prep—"

"I'm leaving my prep. Leave yours."

"But Mr. Dalton—"

"Bother Mr. Dalton!"

"Look here, Gunner, I've got to do my prep."

Gunner glared.

"You've got to shut up!" he said.

"That's what you've got to do, Dickinson, and the sooner you do it the better it will be for your nose."

Dickinson minor breathed hard. Peter Cuthbert Gunner was accustomed to carrying matters with a high hand in his study. He was always ready to introduce a formidable set of knuckles into any argument. Argumentatively, Dickinson minor could have walked all over Gunner. Fistically, Gunner could have walked over two or three Dickinsons. So Gunner generally had his way.

But it is said proverbially that the worm will turn. Dickinson minor had his prep to do, and he did not see being turned out of his study, and left to face the wrath of the Form-master in the morning. Gunner could risk it if he liked. Dickinson minor didn't see risking it.

So instead of going away and leaving Gunner in peace to his descriptive writing, Dickinson minor slammed the door, remaining inside the study.

"Now I want some of that table," he said.

"What?"

"Make room for a chap."

"Haven't I told you to go away?" roared Gunner.

"I've got my prep to do."

Gunner eyed him in wrathful amazement for a moment or two. He was so unaccustomed to contradiction in his study that he did not realise at once that Dickinson minor was rebelling. When he did realise it he jumped up.

"You cheeky young ass! Get out!" roared Gunner.

"Look here——"

Gunner strode to the door and hurled it open.

"Outside!"

"I won't!" yelled Dickinson. "It's my study, ain't it? I've got my prep to do, and I can tell you—— Yoop!"

Gunner grasped his study-mate in hefty hands. Dickinson struggled, but he was propelled to the doorway.

In the doorway he put up a brief resistance. Then he went whirling into the passage.

Crash!

Dickinson's roar echoed the length of the Fourth Form passage.

"Now are you clearing?" roared Gunner.

"Yew-ow!"

Slam! The door closed on Dickinson minor. Gunner returned to his literary work. Slowly and painfully Dickinson picked himself up. He shook his fist at the study door, but he did not venture to open it. He had a good allowance of aches and pains already, and he did not wish to add to the number.

Disnally Dickinson minor limped along the passage and looked into the end study. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome were at work there.

"I—I say, can you make room for a fellow?" mumbled Dickinson.

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"We're four here," he said. "What's the matter with your own study?"

"That ass Gunner has turned me out."

"More duffer you to let him," sniffed Lovell.

"Well, you see——"

"We'll come along and talk to Gunner, if you like," said Jimmy Silver.

Dickinson minor shook his head hastily.

"No, no! He's not a bad sort, only a thundering ass! I don't want to row with him. He's doing literary work, he says——"

"What?" yelled the Fistic Four.

"Writing a story for the 'Pictorial Popular.'"

"Great Scott!"

"He's expecting to win a big prize and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's turned me out," mumbled Dickinson. "I say, can I do my prep in this study?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We'll make room," he said. "Trot in!"

And Dickinson minor ensconced himself in the end study, and gave his attention to prep. In his own study that evening there was no prep. Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in his new role of literary man, was going strong. Sheet after sheet of paper was added to the stack on the table, or fluttered to the litter on the carpet. More and more corrugated grew the brows of Peter Cuthbert—inkier and inkier his fingers and cuffs.

CHAPTER 33.

Gunner Gains Gaiety!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. regarded Gunner of the Fourth with some interest that night, when they saw him in the Fourth Form dormitory. Gunner had been glued to his study all the evening, and was not seen by any of the Classical Fourth till dawn.

Gunner looked tired, but pleased with himself. There were a good many traces of ink about him.

The chums of the Fourth could not help smiling. Gunner was popularly supposed to be every imaginable kind of an ass. But apparently he had found a new way to display his asinine characteristics. Gunner as a footballer was a good joke; Gunner as a cricketer was a standing jest; Gunner in an exam was a shrick! But Gunner as a literary aspirant was really better than all the rest put together. This really put the lid on. A fellow who spelt like a fag in the Second—a particularly backward fag—and whose grammar would have made Quintilian stare and gasp, was not the fellow Jimmy would have expected to "commence author." The Classical Fourth had supposed erroneously—that they knew every kind of duffer Gunner was. Now he was startling them with a new variation.

Gunner was by no means indisposed to talk about this new feat. Indeed,

he was more than willing to talk about it.

It seemed that P. G. Gunner had discovered, quite by chance, that he possessed literary gifts. He confessed that he had never given much thought to such things. True, he had never really doubted that he could write if he had time. But he had never had time. Only the time, it appeared, had been wanting.

The offer of a handsome prize in the "Pictorial Popular" had caught his eye. He had determined to find time.

That was how it was—quite simple. Having set his mind to the task, he found the task unexpectedly easy. Descriptive writing flowed from his pen, almost like water from a pump. His literary output, it seemed, was limited only by the quantity of ink and paper at his disposal.

Gunner seemed surprised when the Classical juniors greeted his remarks with chuckling and chorling. He did not see anything to chuckle or chortle at. Gunner took himself quite seriously as a literary man, just as he took himself quite seriously as a great man at games. He was the only fellow at Rookwood who did.

"And you're really going to send that stuff to a real live editor, Gunner?" asked Dickinson minor.

"Of course! It goes to-morrow."

"You've really got that much neck?" inquired Arthur Edward Lovell incredulously.

Snort from Gunner! He did not deign to answer such a frivolous question by anything but a snort.

"Don't forget to put some stamps in, old bean," said Mornington, with a laugh.

"Eh? Why should I put stamps in?" asked Gunner.

"They'll send the stuff back, if you do. And it's got some value. Waste-paper fetches somethin'."

"You silly ass!" said Gunner. "I don't want them to send it back. I want them to print it!"

"You're quite sure it will be accepted?" inquired Punt of the Fourth sarcastically.

"Yes. I believe they're quite straight," said Gunner.

"Straight! I dare say they are. But what's that got to do with it?"

"Well, if they're straight, they're bound to give the prize to the best man. That's me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"So you're not going to put in the return postage?" chuckled Peele.

"Certainly not! What's the need?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner stared round the dormitory. He found a grin on every face.

"I don't see anything to cackle at," he said. "I know what I can do. Tain't as if I was an ass like Lovell or—"

"Eh?" ejaculated Arthur Edward.

"Or a nipcompoop like Newcome or—"

"What?" howled Newcome.

"Or a dummy like Raby, or a duffer like Silver, or a tailor's dummy like Mornington, or a grubby swot like Rawson," continued Gunner. "You see, I've got brains. That's where it is. I don't brag of it. It just happens. I've got literary gifts, just the same as I've got unusual powers as a footballer and cricketer and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Brains does it," said Gunner. "You fellows wouldn't understand, naturally. You see, they left you out when the brains were handed round."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Anyhow, you'll see," said Gunner confidently. "You'll see what you will see."

That much, at least, was undeniable, and nobody denied it. Bulkeley came in to put out the lights, and the Classical Fourth turned in, most of them chuckling. Gunner went off to sleep cheerily—to dream of literary triumphs, which would silence the voice of detraction in his Form.

The voice of detraction, as Peter Cuthbert regarded it, was often heard on the subject of Gunner. Nobody shared his opinion of himself.

But even sneering fellows like Mornington would have to admit that Peter Cuthbert was their superior when he handled a cheque for twenty pounds, paid for a literary gem carelessly dashed off in a single evening! Gunner felt that.

He felt that this literary prize would set him at his right place in his Form and in the school. As for the money itself, he cared little. He had plenty of money, derived from the profits on Gunner's Celebrated Hardware. When the cheque came—not if it came, but when it came—Gunner was going to stand a tremendous spread to the whole of the Classical Fourth. He was a generous fellow, and he was going to do the thing in style. Fellows to whom he had mentioned that generous intention hoped sincerely that he would capture the prize. Tabby Muffin wished him success from the bottom of his podgy heart. They hoped—but they did not expect.

The next morning Gunner turned out cheerily at the sound of the rising-bell. He dodged into his study before breakfast to pin together the sheets of his literary work, and jam the bundle into a packet and seal it, with a letter inside in his own original and startling orthography. He had the packet in an inside pocket when he came in to breakfast, bulging his jacket a little.

Fellows who saw that bulge grinned and winked at one another. At breakfast Gunner was very bright and cheery. After breakfast Dickinson minor, who really felt friendly to Gunner, in spite of Peter Cuthbert's high-handed ways, attempted gently to reason with him.

"You're really going to post that stuff, Gunner?" he asked.

Gunner stared at him.

"Do you mean my literary work?" he asked.

"Oh! Ah! Yes!"

"Don't call it stuff, then," said Gunner, frowning. "You should speak more respectfully of literary productions, Dickinson. A common sort of fellow like you should respect his intellectual superiors."

Dickinson gasped.

"Of course I'm going to post it," went on Gunner. "You see, the office is in London, so I can't call in personally with it. I don't suppose Mr. Dalton would give me an exact for the day."

"I—I don't suppose he would," gasped Dickinson. "Nunno—it's not likely. But, I say, Gunner, old man, hadn't—hadn't you better get some other chap to copy it out for you—"

"Copy it out? Why?"

"Well, the spelling you know—"

"What's the matter with the spelling?"

"And the—the list, you know—"

"What's the matter with the list?"

"And—and the grammar," hinted Dickinson.

"I'm sorry to see this, Dickinson," said Gunner, more in sorrow than in anger. "Very sorry, indeed. I didn't expect my own studymate to give way to jealousy and envy in this manner."

"Eh?"

"Be a man, old fellow," urged Gunner. "Be a man! Try to be pleased by your pal's success—remember that it brings credit on the study, and you can never bring any credit on it yourself, you know, being such a fool. Try to be pleased—but if you can't be pleased, at least don't shout out your envy and jealousy."

And Gunner shaking his head solemnly at the dazed Dickinson, turned and stalked away.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickinson.

"Oh, my only hat!"

That was all he could say. He did not venture to give Peter Cuthbert Gunner any further good advice.

CHAPTER 25.

"The Pirate's secret!"

MR. DALTON, the master of the Fourth Form had never known, till that morning that there was a literary genius in his class.

Had he suspected the existence of such a genius in the Fourth, he never would have suspected that the name of the said genius was P. C. Gunner.

That morning he made both discoveries. For P. C. Gunner was called on to construe, upon which it transpired that Gunner had not, the previous evening, prepared the passage for translation. Mr. Dalton was a kind and patient man, who made every allowance for a dunce. So he had often been very easy with Gunner. But he was not accustomed to making any allowances for laziness or carelessness—it being in a fellow's own powers to correct those faults. A fellow who muffed his Latin exercise because he was too dense to understand it was sure of Mr. Dalton's kind sympathy. A fellow who neglected his work was pretty certain to have the vials of wrath poured upon his devoted head. And so it was with Gunner.

"You have not prepared this!" said Mr. Dalton, when Gunner had caused a smile to extend from one end of the Classical Fourth to the other.

"No, sir," said Gunner.

"And why have you not prepared your lesson, Gunner?" inquired the master of the Fourth.

"I hadn't time, sir."

"What?"

"I'm sure you'll understand, sir," said Gunner brightly. "Last evening I was very busy on literary work."

"On what?" stammered Mr. Dalton.

"Literary work, I've written a splendid story for a prize—"

"Gunner!"

"I'm sure you'll be pleased, sir, to see a Fourth Form fellow bring literary glory and distinction on his Form," said Gunner modestly.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Dalton, while the Classical Fourth grinned.

"So you'll excuse me, sir, for not having done any prep," said Gunner. "I was sure you'd understand."

"You foolish, conceited boy——"

"Sir!"

"With any nonsense you may have written, I have no concern," said Mr. Dalton. "But it is my concern to see that you do not neglect your work, Gunner. You will take three hundred lines of Virgil."

"But I've explained——"

"That will do."

"But I tell you, sir——"

"Silence!"

"Shurrup, Gunner, you ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver anxiously.

But it was one of Gunner's distinguishing characteristics that he opened his mouth too often and too wide. He never seemed to realise that it ever was time to shut up.

"You don't seem to catch on, quite, sir," Gunner persisted. "I haven't been slacking. I worked hard last evening. It isn't every fellow who could have written 'The Pirate's Secret' at a single sitting. I fairly fagged at it, sir, all the time, except for a few minutes when I was chucking Dickinson out for interrupting me. I thought that prep didn't matter in the special circumstances, sir. Don't you agree with me?"

"I do not agree with you, Gunner. Now be silent."

"But, sir——"

"You will go on now, Silver."

"But I say, sir——" exclaimed Gunner.

"Silence!"

"I don't think you ought to give me three hundred lines, sir, for trying to bring credit on the Form. It's not much encouragement to a clever chap to use his unusual intellectual powers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the Form!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "This boy's obtuseness is not a laughing matter. Gunner, you

will write out five hundred lines of Virgil instead of three hundred and ——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And if you utter another word I shall cane you!"

Any other fellow in the Fourth would have dropped it at that. But it was said of old that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Peter Cuthbert Gunner did not drop it.

"I really think, sir——" he persisted.

"You are speaking again, Gunner."

"Yes, sir. I think I ought to point out to you——"

Mr. Dalton stepped to his desk, and picked up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Gunner."

Swish!

"Now be silent!"

"Ow!"

After that, even Gunner was silent. As he said afterwards to sympathising but ginning juniors, a fellow couldn't argue with a beast who yanked a cane into the argument. The cane being at Mr. Dalton's disposal, Gunner realised that he had to drop it, and he did.

"That's the worst of having an ignoramus for a Form-master," he told Jimmy Silver & Co. after lessons. "Of course, Dalton doesn't know anything about literature, and doesn't care. But even Dalton will come round, I think, when he sees my work in print."

"When!" chorled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"It's only a matter of a couple of weeks," explained Gunner. "I'm posting it to-day. You can cackle if you like——"

"Thanks, we will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Gunner scornfully. "You're as jolly ignorant as Dalton himself, which is saying a lot. You don't deserve to have a literary chap in your Form, any more than he does. Still, when it comes off I expect to hear you bragging that you know a chap who writes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fiscal Four.

And Gunner snorted and stalked away. Dickinson minor walked down to the village with him, and saw the precious packet duly registered at Coombe post-office.

"You won't get it back, as you haven't put in any stamps," Dickinson remarked, as they walked home to Rookwood.

"I don't want it back. The printed copy will be good enough for me," said Gunner.

"You—you really think it will be printed?" murmured Dickinson.

Gunner shook a warning finger at him.

"Envy again!" he said. "Drop it, old chap. You can't imagine how small it makes you look! Drop it!"

Dickinson minor dropped it. He told the Rookwood fellows that Gunner really had posted that "piffle"—that unspeakable "tripe." Out of Gunner's hearing, of course: Dickinson actually described Gunner's literary work as piffle and tripe. In Gunner's hearing, it was more than his life was worth to give that description of it. That Gunner actually had posted it really dazed the Rookwood fellows. They had felt that, even Gunner ought, somehow, to have sense enough to stop short of that. They wondered dizzily what effect it would have upon the unfortunate editor of "Pictorial Popular."

"It won't hurt him!" said Jimmy Silver. "He won't be able to read it! Nobody can read Gunner's fist. And if he could read it he couldn't understand it—nobody can understand Gunner's spelling. Poor old Gunner!"

Jimmy Silver really felt quite a kind consideration for Gunner, deemed to disappointment. But Gunner did not commiserate himself. He was very merry and bright—and his anticipations were rosy. Other fellows in Gunner's situation might have hoped for the best, and yet been troubled with

slight doubts of success. Not so Gunner. He had no doubts. The thing, he explained, was not a swindle. If it was "straight," the prize had to go to the best man. Gunner was the best man. So there you were!

During the next few days Gunner was the object of much hilarious interest. But the matter was soon forgotten—by all but Gunner. While the Classical Fourth in the stress of other interests, forgot that they had a literary man in their midst. Peter Outlibert Gunner was counting the days that had to elapse before the announcement of his success should cause the sensation of the term at Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 30.

Money Talks!

"By cheque, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner made the remark with studied carelessness. He did not choose to appear to be excited about it.

There was a letter for Gunner, and the sight of that letter reminded the Classical Fourth of Gunner, the literary man. For on the envelope was printed, in large letters:

"THE PICTORIAL POPULAR."

Tubby Muffin had seen that letter in the rack. He had raced away with the news to Gunner. Gunner had deliberately left it on view for a good quarter of an hour—controlling his own impatience to see the contents. So when he arrived to take his letter, he found quite a crowd of his Form-fellows assembled. All of them were curious to know what was in the letter—though certainly nobody but P. C. Gunner supposed that it contained a cheque.

Gunner took the letter with a careless air. He seemed in no hurry to open it. Undoubtedly he was enjoying the keen interest which the Fourth were at last displaying.

"Well, let's see what's in it," said

Arthur Edward Lovell. "Tain't the type sent home, anyhow. The envelope isn't big enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some of these editorial johnnies are jolly polite," said Putty. "They may have written to say that they'll send Gunner's tosh back if he sends stamps for postage."

"Very likely," agreed Jimmy Silver. "I don't see what else they should be waiting to Gunner for."

"You wouldn't," said Gunner contemptuously. "I fancy there's a cheque in the letter—though, of course, it may only be the announcement that I get the prize."

"Let's see it, old chap!" urged Dickinson.

Gunner opened the envelope at last. He drew out a slip of paper, which he calmly unfolded, under a score of pairs of interested eyes. From inside the slip of paper he drew another—which, as he opened it, was seen to be engraved.

It was a cheque!

There was a buzz of astonishment among the juniors. They could see the words "Bank of England" on the cheque! Putty of the Fourth broke the amazed silence.

"Queer that they should post somebody else's cheque to Gunner by mistake! Very careless to put it in the wrong envelope."

"Oh!" gasped Raby. "That's it, of course!"

Gunner smiled, and held up the cheque.

"Look at it!" he said calmly.

The juniors looked. Obviously Putty's explanation was not the right one. For the cheque was payable to Gunner.

Plain as plain English could make it, there it was—"Pay P. C. Gunner, Esq., the sum of twenty pounds."

Peter Cuthbert Gunner smiled cheerily and serenely.

"You fellows seem surprised!" he remarked.

"Surprised!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Surprised isn't the word for it! Knocked right out!"

"We're dreamin' this!" said Mornington.

"Let's see the letter!" gasped Lovell.

Gunner showed the letter. It was merely a printed form stating that payment was enclosed, and that a receipt for the same would oblige.

Gunner was the only fellow present who was not astounded. The rest of the fellows could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Well, congratulations, old chap!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I'm jolly glad! But it beats me hollow!"

"Beats me to the wide!" said Lovell. "But I'm glad!"

"Gunner's got it—got the twenty quid!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Fancy that, you fellows!"

"Didn't I tell you I should get it?" said Gunner.

"You did, old chap, you did!" said Dickinson minor. "You were right all along the line, old fellow. Good old Gunner!"

"I—I say, I—I really thought Gunner would bag it, you know," said Tubby Muffin. "You remember my saying so, Jimmy—"

"I don't!" said Jimmy Silver.

"The fact is," said Gunner severely, "nobody here believed that I should bag it. A lot of doubting Thomases. I don't put it down to envy—I put it down to sheer stupidity. You've got a clever chap among you, and you haven't the brains to recognise plain facts. That's how it is."

"Go it!" grinned Mornington.

"I'm not a fellow to brag—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But facts speak for themselves," Gunner held up the cheque. "I'm paid twenty pounds for literary work that I knocked off in a single evening. There's the money."

"No getting out of that," concurred Jimmy Silver. "Gunner can't be such

a howling ras as we've always supposed."

"After all, even a born idiot like Gunner may be able to do just one thing!" remarked Newcome thoughtfully.

"Lunatics have been known to be sane on one point!" said Ruby, following the same line of argument. "Gunner is a dummy at everything else, but it seems that there's one thing he can do. I suppose they wouldn't send him twenty pounds for nothing."

"Must be a mistake somewhere," said Mornington.

"Blessed if I can see where the mistake could come in," said Jimmy Silver. "The cheque's payable to Gunner—P. C. Gunner! That settles it."

"It does—it do!" agreed Lovell.

There was a natural revulsion of feeling in the Classical Fourth. Gunner's enterprise had been the subject of nothing but hilarity. Yet it had been a success. Money talks—and there was no gainsaying a cheque for twenty pounds payable to P. C. Gunner. The juniors felt that they must have misjudged Gunner somehow. Nobody had supposed for a moment that Gunner had any brains—yet surely only a brainy fellow could have walked in and bagged a literary prize first shot. Like Caesar of old, he had come, and seen, and conquered. Gunner, for once, was the centre of the limelight, the admired of all admirers.

Gunner was pleased, but serenely so. Had he entertained doubts of success he might have been more overjoyed. But he had expected this. There was nothing for Gunner to get excited about. The matter was simple. A prize was offered for the best story. Gunner had decided to enter for it, had entered, had, naturally, written the best story—as he did the best of everything—and he had received the cheque. There was no cause for surprise or excitement. That was how Gunner looked at it.

But the other fellows didn't, and they

were as surprised as if Gunner had scored a goal at football, or kept his wicket up against Jimmy Silver's bowling at cricket.

The Fourth Form of Rookwood buzzed with it.

From the Classics it spread to the Moderns, from the Fourth to the Sixth and the Fifth, and the name of Gunner was on almost every lip.

It was glory for Gunner at last.

He basked in the sunshine of fame. Suddenly he had jumped into prominence, and now he was very prominent indeed. And the Classical Fourth remembered how Gunner had arranged to spend his cheque when he got it. They found that Gunner was keeping to his programme. Dickinson minor was seen giving magnificent orders in the tuckshop on behalf of

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Gunner. The great spread which was to celebrate Gunner's success as an author was coming off, and just then there was no doubt that Gunner was popular.

CHAPTER 31.

Gunner the Great!

"DICKY DALTON!"

"We'll come with you, Gunner!"

"Come on!" said the great man.

Sergeant Kettle, in the school shop, smiled and shook his head when offered a cheque for twenty pounds to cash. The sergeant's till did not contain any such sum.

It was Tubby Muffin who suggested Dicky Dalton, and Gunner adopted the suggestion. Mr. Dalton sometimes kindly cashed a postal-order for a member of his Form, and Gunner saw no reason why he should not cash a cheque. Indeed, somebody had to cash it for Gunner, as it was drawn on a London bank and crossed. And Gunner was rather pleased by the thought of presenting it to Mr. Dalton. Mr. Dalton had characterised his literary work as nonsense. He had contemptuously applied that expression to "The Pirate's Secret." Gunner bore no malice, but he did contemplate with pleasure showing Mr. Dalton the cheque he had received for the "Pirate's Secret." It would be an eye-opener for Dicky Dalton. Perhaps he would comprehend at last what a genius he had in his Form?

Quite a little crowd of fellows walked to Mr. Dalton's study with Gunner. They were rather curious to see the effect of the news on Dicky Dalton.

Peter Guthbert was a great man now. Fellows felt rather remorseful for having written him down an ass, so to speak. And some fellows realised that it would be rather a good thing to be on pally terms with a chap who could bag twenty-pound cheques whenever he

liked. Tubby Muffin already loved Gunner like a long-lost brother. Dickinson minor realised that he had always—or almost always—looked on Gunner as somebody very much out of the common. Peete and Gower and their set were already handing out flattery in great chunks. But the chunks could never be too large for Gunner. He swallowed them whole and asked for more.

Other fellows felt that somehow they must have misjudged Gunner, and they owned up that it was rather a distinction for the Classical Fourth to have a literary fellow in it—a fellow who had simply to dash off something, send it along to London, and then cash a cheque. Such things seemed almost too good to be true.

So an admiring crowd accompanied Gunner wherever he went, and they accompanied him to see Mr. Dalton. That gentleman was rather surprised when Gunner presented himself, with half a dozen friends, in the study, and with a dozen more friends hanging about the doorway and the passage.

"What is all this?" asked Mr. Dalton.

Gunner laid the cheque on the table.

"Would you mind cashing this little cheque for me, sir?" asked Gunner with elaborate carelessness.

"What?"

"A little cheque I've had for some literary work, sir," said Gunner casually.

Mr. Dalton picked up the cheque with blank astonishment in his face. He looked at the cheque, he looked at Gunner.

Never in his life had the master of the Fourth been so astonished.

"Is it possible, Gunner, that you have received a cheque for twenty pounds, for—for—for something that you have written?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Looks like it, sir," said Gunner, with a smile. "There's the cheque."

"There it is, sir," grinned Tubby

Muffin. "Twenty pounds, sir, Gunner's an awfully clever chap, sir."

Mr. Dalton seemed utterly perplexed.

"Are you sure there is no mistake in the matter, Gunner?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"If you have gifts of this kind, it is extremely odd that you should have displayed no sign of them, to my knowledge," said the puzzled Form-master. "I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake."

Gunner smiled rather bitterly. Even his Form-master envied him! It was rather rotten of Dicky Dalton, he felt.

"There can't be any mistake, sir," said Dickinson minor. "The cheque's payable to Gunner, and it came in a letter from the 'Pictorial Popular.' Gunner's got the letter."

"Show me the letter, Gunner."

Gunner handed over the letter, and the envelope, which bore the style and title of the "Pictorial Popular," and was addressed to P. C. Gunner, at Rookwood School.

Mr. Dalton looked as he felt—more and more perplexed.

There was no denying the evidence of his eyes, but he could not understand it.

For he did not merely think that P. C. Gunner was a dunce and a duffer—he knew it!

There was a long silence. Gunner was smiling, rather ironically. He wondered how long Mr. Dalton was going to take to admit self-evident facts.

"Well, Gunner," said the Form-master at last, "if this is quite in order I congratulate you."

"Oh, thanks!" said Gunner. "I assure you that it's in order, sir."

"I cannot cash a cheque for this sum," said Mr. Dalton. "Neither should I care to do so without passing it through the bank. If you like, I will pay it into my bank to-day, and when it has been honoured I will hand you over the money."

The juniors' faces fell. The cash was

wanted at once for the great celebration. But Gunner did not turn a hair.

"Very well, sir," he assented. "I am much obliged."

"You must endorse the cheque, Gunner."

"Certainly!"

Gunner endorsed the cheque, and left the study with his little army. Mr. Dalton was left staring blankly at the cheque in a state of amazement, from which he did not soon recover.

"I—I say, Gunner," stuttered Tubby Muffin, in the passage. "I—I say, what about the spread?" The spread, in Reginald Muffin's estimation, was the most important incident in the transaction—the brightest jewel in the great man's crown.

"That's all right," said Gunner. "I've got a fiver in my pocket—that will see us through. Dalton can take as long as he likes over the cheque."

"Bravo!"

"Good old Gunner!"

"Every chap in the Fourth is invited, Classical and Modern," said Gunner. "We'll have it in the Form-room. No room in the study. I want all my friends round me now."

"Bravo!"

Gunner was gratified by having all his friends round him at the spread in the Form-room, and the name of his friends was legion. No fellow at Rookwood, indeed, had so many friends as Gunner had on this particular afternoon.

A dozen fellows helped to carry in the supplies. Sergeant Kettle had seldom or never had such a rush of custom.

Jimmy Silver & Co. honoured the occasion with their presence. They were as perplexed as Mr. Dalton; but they were pleased, and they congratulated Gunner sincerely. How on earth he had done it they did not understand; but he had done it, and they were glad. And there was no doubt that Gunner was celebrating his success

In a hearty and open-handed way. Gunner might be every known kind of an ass, but he had his good points.

The Fourth Form of Rookwood turned up to a man. All the Classics were there, and the Moderns came over led by Tommy Dodd. Gunner's generous hospitality was not confined to the Fourth, either. Symthe & Co. of the Shell drifted in, and were welcomed. Alsy Silver and Teddy Lovell brought a gang of the Third. Even Snooks of the Second was allowed to wedge in with some of his inky-fingered compatriots.

It was a glorious occasion.

Gunner did the honours, loftily but graciously. He was, of course, called upon for a speech. There was really no need to call upon him—he intended to make a speech, anyhow. But it was universally felt that a fellow who was standing such a spread had a right to talk as much as he liked, and fellows were not bound to listen.

"Gentlemen——" said Gunner.

"Hear, hear!"

"This is a great occasion."

"Bravo!"

"Pass the cake!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"A great occasion for the Fourth, and a great occasion for Rookwood," resumed Gunner. "Rookwood has turned out great men in its time—great generals, and great diplomats, and great artists and literary men. Now it has turned out another."

"You're not turned out yet, Gunner," said Dickinson minor, misunderstanding.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be a silly ass, Dickinson. Old Boys of Rookwood have covered themselves and their school with glory, in all the corners of the earth," said Gunner eloquently. "In fact, Rookwood's cup of glory is overflowing. But it is not full yet."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Go it, Gunner!"

"It was reserved for me to achieve distinction in the literary line while still a junior in the school," went on Gunner. "Properly speaking, of course, I shouldn't be a junior. I ought to be in the Shell, or the Fifth, but the Head doesn't see it. The Head's rather dense."

"Oh!"

"Owing to (the Head being dense, and not seeing that he's got a fellow of uncommon intellect here, I'm in the Fourth," said Gunner. "I'm treated just as if I were an ordinary fellow like you fellows."

"Oh!"

"But I don't mind," said Gunner magnanimously. "Genius will out! Genius can't be kept down."

"Bravo!"

"It's not my way to brag——"

"Oh!"

"I state facts. What I've done, I've done. The Rookwood Fourth has produced a literary genius. It's me. I've pointed out to you fellows, lots of times, that I'm the only chap in the Form with any brains to speak of. You've never believed me."

"Oh! Nunnio!"

"Now you see it for yourselves," said Gunner. "This is only a beginning. I'm going on. I don't boast. I don't swank! I only say that in time to come Rookwood will be known as the school where Peter Cuthbert Gunner was educated. That will be its greatest title to fame."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner sat down amid cheers and roars of laughter.

"Rather a neat speech, what?" he whispered to Dickinson minor.

"Oh, great!" gasped Dickinson.

Gunner was satisfied with his speech. The other fellows were satisfied with the spread. So there was general satisfaction; and the great celebration ended with satisfaction all round.

CHAPTER 42.

Quite a Surprise!

"BLESSED if I understand this!" It was the following day.

For twenty-four hours the glory of Gunner had been undimmed.

It was known that he had started a new literary work; and Dickinson minor, so far from thinking of beating into the study when Gunner was in the throes of composition, not only kept outside, but warned other fellows, in a deep whisper, to tread lightly as they passed the door.

The great man's meditations were not to be disturbed. His literary work was not to be interrupted. Dickinson minor was quite enthusiastic about it. Indeed, he realised that it would be rather a good thing for him to be the studymate of a fellow who could bag twenty-pound cheques almost without effort, and who handed out his literary gains in so open-hearted a manner.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had grinned when first they heard of Gunner as a literary man. But they did not grin now. Money talks; and if there was money in Gunner's scribbling, it was not a matter for grinning. That day, at least, Gunner, the literary man, was taken quite seriously in the Rookwood Fourth.

But when a letter came for Gunner, with the style and title of the "Pictorial Popular" on the envelope, even Dickinson minor admitted that Gunner might be interrupted. There might be another cheque in the letter. It might contain a request for more literary works. It was a matter of intense interest in the Classical Fourth.

So Dickinson minor carried the letter up to the study with a crowd of the Fourth at his heels.

Gunner looked up, and passed his hand across his brow with a gesture of a literary man interrupted in the midst of deep intellectual efforts.

Dickinson, with great respect, handed him the letter.

"Oh! Another letter from my editor!" said Gunner carelessly.

"Open it, old bean," said Love.

"We're awfully keen, you know."

"Oh, all right!"

Gunner opened the letter, watched by eager eyes. It was then that he remarked that he was blessed if he understood it.

"No cheque?" asked Dickinson minor.

"Eh? No."

"Let a chap see it."

"Blessed if I catch on to it," said Gunner. "The man seems to be a fool. You can read it."

Jimmy Silver held up the letter, and the juniors crowded round to read it. It ran:

"Dear Sir,—Owing to a clerical error, caused by the similarity of names, a cheque which should have been sent to one of our authors, Mr. P. C. Gunter, was despatched to you yesterday.

"We shall be obliged if you will return this cheque in the enclosed stamped envelope.

"Apologising for any inconvenience to which you may have been put, we are, dear sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"The 'Pictorial Popular,' Ltd."

There was a moment of silence in the study when that letter had been perused. The juniors looked at one another. Gunner, whose powerful intellect did not work rapidly, still seemed puzzled. But the meaning of the letter was clear enough to everybody but Gunner.

"I think I remember mentionin' that there was a mistake somewhere," murmured Mornington.

There was a postscript to the letter. Jimmy Silver could not help feeling sorry for Gunner. But also he could not help grinning as he read the postscript.

"P.S.—Your manuscript entitled 'The Pirate's Secret,' which we regret to say we cannot use, will be returned to you

on receipt of stamps to cover the postage."

"The sting's in the tail!" murmured Putty of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The man's a fool!" said Gunner. "According to that, they're turning down my work."

"Go hon!" murmured Lovell.

The powerful brain of P. C. Gunner worked slowly. But it worked. He grasped the terrible truth at last. By a clerical error, such as occurs now and then in a busy office, a cheque had been sent to him which should have been sent to P. C. Gunter; and the return of that payment was now required. And his own literary masterpiece—

"All your own fault, Gunner," said Dickinson minor. "I told you you'd better put stamps in."

"You're a silly ass, Dickinson! It seems they've turned it down!" said Gunner. "The man's a fool! A dummy! In fact, a blithering idiot! What did they make him an editor for, when he doesn't know a good thing when he sees it? That's what beats me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall send the stamps," said Gunner. "I shall demand the return of the manuscript. I shall refuse to let him have it now, if he begs for it."

"I—I would!" gasped Dickinson.

"And I shall tell him what I think of him!" said Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As for the cheque," said Gunner, "That's nothing; I don't care about that. But the man's cheek—his colossal ignorance—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle in my study!" snapped Gunner. "I don't see anything to cackle at myself! What are you cackling about, you dummies?"

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

They crowded out of Gunner's study, still cackling. Gunner did not see anything to cackle at, but it was evident that the Classical Fourth did.

Mr. Dalton did not smile when Gunner, showing him the new communication from the "Pictorial Popular," reclaimed the cheque to be returned. It was rather difficult not to smile; but Mr. Dalton contrived not to do so. He did not smile till after Gunner had left his study.

But in the Classical Fourth there were many smiles.

For twenty-four hours there had been glory for Gunner, but now the glory was gone. Having gone up like the rocket, he had descended like the stick. Gunner, the literary man, was now a subject only for hilarity. Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, he had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

Gunner was not down-hearted. His excellent opinion of himself was unabated. He explained that there was nothing to be surprised at in the occurrence; it was simply that he had been dealing with a crass ass!

And the Classical Fourth agreed that there was undoubtedly a crass ass in the affair. But according to the Classical Fourth, the name of the ass was Peter Cuthbert Gunner.

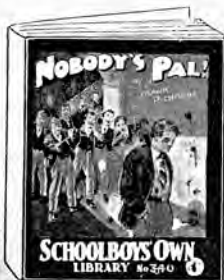


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