



The Mystery of the Priory!

By Owen Conquest.

Illustrated by G.W. Wakefield!

A GRAND, COMPLETE STORY OF AN AMAZING HOLIDAY ADVENTURE!

THE FIRST CHAPTER Breaking up at Rookwood!

THERE was a cheery buzz of voices and hurrying of footsteps in Rookwood School.

Rookwood was breaking up for the Christmas holidays.

Brake after brake had rolled away to the station laden with Rookwood fellows and their belongings.

But the old quadrangle was still buzzing with merry voices.

Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth Form had not departed yet. A brake, crowded with juniors, was starting, and a dozen voices from it hailed the Fistical Four as they stood on the steps of the School House.

"Room for yez, Jimmy!" sang out Flynn.

"Jump in!" said Dick Oswald. "You fellows will lose the train!"

"Come on, Jimmy!"

"Coming later!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

The brake rolled off.

Jimmy Silver's chums—Lovell and Raby and Newcome—looked at him inquiringly.

"Why don't we get off?" demanded

Lovell. "We don't want to go in the next brake with Smythe and his crowd."

"And we don't want to catch the next train," said Raby.

"What are you up to, Jimmy?" asked Newcome. "What the dickens are we hanging about for?"

"I've got an idea——" began Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, blow your ideas!" said Lovell. "Let's catch the train!"

"There goes Smythe!" said Raby. "Merry Christmas, Smythey! And go easy on the smokes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Adolphus Smythe of the Shell did not deign to reply to Raby's humorous remark. He walked on loftily.

"There's something on your back, Smythey!" called out Newcome.

Adolphus spun round.

"Is there?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"Yes, rather!"

"Brush it off, there's a good chap!"

Adolphus was very concerned about his clothes.

"I don't think I could," said Newcome doubtfully. "You'd better keep it there, Smythey."

"By gad!" Adolphus nearly gave himself a crick in the neck by trying to look over his shoulder. "What is it there?"

"Only your overcoat," said Newcome sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smythe gave the playful Fourth-Former an expressive look, and walked on with a sniff.

The Fistical Four chuckled.

"Let's get off," urged Lovell. "Those bounders will crowd the train from end to end, Jimmy."

"I tell you I've got an idea," said Jimmy Silver. "Look here, it isn't a long run to my home, and we shall be in pretty early, anyway. Suppose we walk to Latcham?"

"What the merry thunder do you want to walk to Latcham for?" exclaimed Lovell, in astonishment. "It's miles!"

"Well, don't be a slacker, you know. We can easily get a train at Latcham a bit later. The bags have gone on."

"But what do you want to get a train at Latcham for, when we can get the train here at Coombe?" bellowed Lovell.

"Lend me your ears, my son. My uncle's there."

"Bless your uncle!"

"You remember my Uncle John?"

"Yes; shocking bounder," said Lovell.

"Well, he was a bit of a bounder," agreed Jimmy; "but he turned over a new leaf when he went into the Army."

"Has he become a field-marshal yet?" grinned Raby.

"No; he's still Private Silver. Now, why shouldn't we walk over to Latcham, drop in at the barracks and see him?" said Jimmy.

"We can catch a later train. I want to ask him to come down to the Priory for Christmas if he can get off. He's quite made it up with my pater since he went into the Army, and he ought to come if he can get leave. What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't mind!" yawned Lovell. "I can see that you mean to walk to Latcham, anyway."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Well, a walk won't hurt you," he said. "We can shy some snowballs at Tommy Dodd & Co., too, in the lane."

"Good!"

The Fistical Four went in for their coats.

They came out, and started for the gates in a cheery mood. A fresh brake was departing, laden with juniors belonging to the Modern side at Rookwood. The four Classics followed it out of the gates.

"Good-bye, you Classical duffers!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Make up your minds to be licked next term!"

"Make up your minds to be licked now!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

The grinning Classics stooped by the roadside for snowballs. Snow was piled up against the hedges.

"Look out!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

"Don't you shy at us, you Classical beasts!" roared Doyle.

"Buck up, driver!"

Tommy Dodd shook his fist at the Classical juniors.

There was no ammunition in the brake, and the Moderns had to receive the fire without returning it.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were good shots.

Four snowballs whizzed through the air at the same moment.

Tommy Dodd, and Cook, and Doyle, and Towle received them, and there was a roar of wrath as the missiles smote them and broke.

"Yaroo!"

"Grooch!"

"Oh, you rotters!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. clutched up more snow; and pursued the brake along the road. A volley whizzed into the vehicle from behind, smashing among the furious Moderns.

"Stop the blessed brake!" shouted Tommy Dodd, as a snowball burst under his chin. "We'll get down and scalp them!"

The brake halted.

Tommy Dodd & Co. poured down into the road, breathing wrath and vengeance.

"Go for 'em!" roared Tommy.

"This is where we slide!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four dodged through the hedge as the Moderns rushed down upon them. They trotted away across the snowy field.

"After them!" roared Doyle.

"Fathead! The brake's waiting!" growled

Tommy Dodd, shaking his fist after the Classics. "Come on!"

Jimmy Silver waved his hand across the field at the baffled Moderns. A general shaking of fists replied, and Tommy Dodd & Co. scrambled back into the brake and rolled on to Coombe.

Much cheered by that victory over the Modern juniors, the Fistical Four tramped away across the fields, heading for the barracks at Latcham.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

A Shock for Jimmy Silver!

JIMMY SILVER whistled cheerily as he tramped on over the powdery snow on the moor. He was in great spirits that day. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, his best chums, were going home with him for the vacation, and the chums of Rookwood were looking forward to a good time.

Later in the vac. there were to be visitors—Harry Wharton and his friends from Greyfriars and Tom Merry & Co. from St. Jim's—and the Rookwooders looked forward to some footer when the numerous guests were assembled at the Priory. D'Arcy of St. Jim's, too, was to bring his Cousin Ethel; and Jimmy's Cousin Phyllis would be there.

The Priory, Mr. Silver's residence, was an interesting place, too; and Jimmy's chums looked forward to exploring it. It was an

ancient monastic establishment, turned into a country residence, with ancient oak-panelled rooms, echoing corridors, secret passages, and, as Jimmy solemnly assured his chums, a Christmas ghost. The Co. took the ghost with a grain of salt—a very large grain.

"What about that giddy ghost you were telling us of, Jimmy?" said Lovell, as the juniors tramped on cheerily. "What is it like?"

Jimmy Silver's merry face became serious at once.

"Like a spook, of course," he said. "What would you expect a ghost to be like?"

"Fathead! I mean, whose ghost is it?"

"The prior's of course! The house used to be a priory, but it was sold up hundreds of years ago. My grand father bought it before I was born. I was

brought up there, so I ought to know about the ghost," said Jimmy. "My Uncle John went hunting it one Christmas, when I was a kid——"

"The chap who's Private Silver now?"

"Yes."

"When you were a kid!" said Raby sarcastically. "What are you now?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Did you see the ghost?" asked Newcome.

"Well, we didn't exactly see it," admitted



"There's something on your back, Smythey!" called out Newcome.

"Is there?" exclaimed Smythe, anxiously. "Brush it off, there's a good chap." (See page 228)

Jimmy Silver. "But it could be heard quite plainly."

"Groaned, of course, and dragged chains?" grinned Lovell.

"Groaned!" said Jimmy. "Uncle John got after it, and he found there was a secret passage, and he explored it. He said the groan was made by the wind getting into the passage. That would account for the ghost only walking at Christmas when the weather's rough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But lots of people have seen it, only you can't exactly get hold of anybody who has. People know of people who've seen it, you know. The old prior walks about at Christmas bearing a candle in his hand—a grim, dark figure, awfully terrifying!"

"Well, we'll have a look for it," said Lovell. "We'll explore the secret passages, anyway. Is the place full of 'em?"

"There are two," said Jimmy. "I shouldn't wonder if there are more that have never been found. They used to make 'em at the time the priory was built. They always needed some dodge for escaping in bad times. I can't exactly promise you there'll be a ghost——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the secret passages are there, right enough."

"We'll explore them," said Lovell, "and I'll undertake to eat all the ghosts we find there."

"Hallo, there's the barracks!" exclaimed Newcome.

Latham barracks was in sight.

The Fistical Four, quite fresh after their long walk, came up to the barracks cheerily, and Jimmy spoke to the sentry at the gate.

The man in khaki looked at him curiously.

"I've got a relation here," said Jimmy. "Would it be possible for me to see him?"

"That depends," said the sentry good-naturedly. "Who is it?"

"Private Silver, of the Hallamshire Regiment."

The sentry gave a start and eyed Jimmy keenly.

"You're a relation of Private Silver?" he asked.

"Yes; his nephew."

"And you want to see him?"

"Yes; if it's allowed."

"Oh!" said the man in khaki.

He seemed to reflect for a moment or two.

"You know him?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, yes, I know him!" The man grinned.

"Wait here a few minutes and I'll speak to my officer."

The sentry called to another soldier, who took his place at the gate, and disappeared into the barracks.

The juniors looked at one another.

They could not help seeing that the man's manner was very peculiar, and that he had been surprised and startled when Private Silver was asked for.

"Something's up!" murmured Lovell.

"I say, Jimmy, your uncle hasn't been getting into trouble, has he?"

Jimmy's brow clouded.

"Not that I know of," he said.

"He was a bit of a scorcher before he went into the Army."

"That's all over," said Jimmy quietly.

"He's been a good soldier. There's nothing against him now. But—but that does look queer."

The juniors waited, Jimmy in a somewhat uneasy mood.

There had been a good deal against John Silver in his early days. He had been a scapegrace and a rolling stone, and he had certainly gathered no moss. He had tired out the patience of his brother, Jimmy's father, and Mr. Silver had washed his hands of him. But the scapegrace of the family had redeemed himself by going into the Army. From the hour he donned the King's uniform there had been no whisper against him.

Jimmy had believed that the shadowy past was buried for ever, that Private Silver's course was all plain sailing now.

Had something transpired, after all? Had the scapegrace's old recklessness revived and caused him fresh trouble?

Jimmy's brow was clouded.

The juniors waited a good quarter of an hour, and then a young man in a lieutenant's uniform came out. He gave the juniors a sharp look.

"Which of you was askin' for Private Silver?" he rapped out.

"I was!" said Jimmy.

"Do you know where he is?"

Jimmy stared.

"Isn't he here?" he exclaimed. "I understood that he was stationed here?"

The officer looked grim.

"He isn't here," he said curtly. "If you know anything about the man, it's your duty to tell me!"

"I don't know anything about him except that I supposed him to be here," said Jimmy, in dismay. "Is anything wrong?"

"You did not know that he had deserted?"

Jimmy staggered back.

"Deserted?" he panted.

"He committed a theft, and deserted after being placed under arrest," said the officer, not unkindly. "He has been gone two days. I am sorry, my lad!"

He turned back.

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the ground, his face white. Lovell & Co. did not speak. They felt for their chum at that moment more deeply than words could have told.

Jimmy found his voice at last.

"A thief and a deserter!" he muttered huskily. "My uncle!"

"Poor old Jimmy!" said Lovell softly. "Come on, old son. Don't think about it! He's broken out again! It's not your fault!"

Jimmy Silver groaned.

He turned away without another word, his face very white. The chums of Rookwood did not speak as they walked into Latcham and made their way to the railway station.

Jimmy Silver had received a shock it was not easy to recover from.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Cousin Phyllis!

JIMMY SILVER sat silent, in a corner seat, as the train ran out of Latcham.

Lovell & Co. did not speak.

They gave their study-leader time to recover from the shock he had received. Jimmy Silver looked white and troubled.

He had started from Rookwood School in the highest of spirits, looking forward to a happy vacation at home in company with his chums.

The cheery horizon had been clouded now.

Jimmy had taken it for granted that his uncle, scapegrace as he was, had reformed. He had had good rea-

son for thinking so. He remembered how Private Silver had dragged him from the river on one occasion, and probably saved his life. Surely the man who had risked life itself for him deserved to be trusted?

And he had broken out again. The old recklessness of the scapegrace had gained the upper hand. Theft and desertion! The bitter shame of it was a heavy blow to Jimmy Silver.

"Don't think about it, Jimmy," said



"Which of you was askin' for Private Silver?" rapped out the young lieutenant.

"I was!" said Jimmy.

"You did not know that he had deserted?"

"Deserted!" panted the junior, staggering back. (See this page)

Lovell, at last. "It can't be helped, you know. The poor brute may have got at the drink again, you know."

"He gave that up when he went into the Army," said Jimmy.

"It may have been too strong for him. Besides," added Lovell, as a new thought struck him, "there may be some mistake. He mayn't have done it!"

Jimmy brightened a little.

He had not thought of that.

"Mistakes do happen," remarked Raby, willing to give what comfort he could. "Your uncle may be innocent, Jimmy."

"It's possible," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "But—but, even if he's innocent of the theft, there's no doubt about the desertion. He's gone."

"Bunked to get out of it, when he was suspected," said Newcome. "If he was innocent, Jimmy, he couldn't be expected to stay to be punished."

Jimmy shook his head.

"It's rotten to desert!" he said.

The train rushed on, and Jimmy's face gradually cleared. He realised that it was "up" to him to look a little more cheerful, as he was taking his chums home for the holiday. His family troubles could not be allowed to darken the Christmas vacation for his friends.

But it was not easy to turn his thoughts from the wretched fugitive.

Where was John Silver now?

A fleeing fugitive, hunted for far and wide, that was certain. There might have been a mistake in the accusation against him—Jimmy hoped so, at least—but he was a deserter; he was guilty of a military crime. He would be searched for, hunted for—there was no rest for him. Where was he? Hiding in some obscure corner—doubtless in want—perhaps starving.

What resources had he? Jimmy wondered whether he would go home, to Mr. Silver's house, to seek help.

Jimmy's father was not likely to shelter a deserter. If John Silver sought help there, he would seek in vain.

His brother stood by him for many years, but had washed his hands of him at last. He

had given him one more chance when he entered the Army. Now that he had broken out again, he had nothing but cold condemnation to expect from Mr. Silver.

Where was he—where would he be that Christmastide?

Jimmy strove to dismiss the matter from his mind at last, and chatted with his chums about the coming holiday, and the footer match that was to be fixed up with the St. Jim's and Greyfriars' fellows when they came.

The train stopped at Lexham at last, and the four juniors of Rookwood alighted.

"Phyllis, by Jove!" exclaimed Jimmy, as a bright-faced, bright-eyed girl came across the platform towards them, smiling.

"I came to meet you, Jimmy," said Cousin Phyllis. "You missed your train, so I waited for the next, you careless boy."

"Awfully sorry, Phyllis," said Jimmy, colouring. "I didn't know. You know these chaps, Phyllis?"

"Yes. I remember tea in the study at Rookwood," said Phyllis, laughing, as she shook hands with the Co. "The trap is outside, and I'm going to drive you home."

Jimmy wondered whether Phyllis had heard of Uncle John's disaster. He did not mention the visit to Latcham barracks. If Phyllis did not know what had happened to her uncle, there was no need to cloud her happiness by telling her.

The four juniors clambered into the trap, and Phyllis took the reins.

"Hallo, you've been shopping in Lexham," remarked Jimmy, as he glanced at a little pile of parcels in the trap.

Phyllis looked round quickly.

"Yes, I had to get some things, Jimmy," she said. "Don't sit on my parcels, there's a good boy."

"By Jove, are you standing somebody a feed, Miss Phyllis?" grinned Raby, looking at the parcels.

Phyllis coloured.

She did not reply to the question, however, but gave all her attention to the horse. It was a pleasant drive through the country lanes, powdered with snow, to Jimmy Silver's home.

Lovell & Co. looked about them with interest as the Priory came in sight.

The ancient building had been converted into a modern country house, but it still bore its old name.

The grey old walls, that had withstood the storms of six or seven centuries, rose amid the trees, leafless now and white with snow. The trap followed a drive between rows of ancient oaks and beeches, under the branches of which the old monks had walked in days that were long past. On the east side of the rambling buildings a grey old tower rose against the sky.

"What a jolly old place!" said Newcome. "Looks as if there might be a cheery Christmas ghost there, by Jove!"

"There is a ghost!" said Phyllis, laughing. "Nobody has seen it, but most of the country people believe in it."

"Have you heard him groaning?" asked Lovell. "Jimmy says he groans."

"Ha, ha!"

"I think it is the wind in the passages that groans," said Phyllis, with a smile. "On windy nights it is quite distinct."

"Good!" said Lovell.

"Jimmy's going to show us the secret passages, and we're going to hunt the ghost."

The girl turned.

"You're going to what?" she exclaimed.

"Hunt the ghost," said Lovell, with a laugh.

"It will be fun."

"But—but—"

Lovell looked at the girl's startled face curiously.

"You don't believe in ghosts, surely, Miss Phyllis?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis hastily.

"That's a ripping old tower," said Raby. "Something like our old tower at Rookwood. Good view from the top, I should think."

"Nobody ever goes there," said Phyllis. "It's not quite safe. That part of the house isn't inhabited."

"Oh, we'll go there," said Lovell. "We may find the ghost there. Just the place for him. Hallo, there's somebody there now!"

"Surely not!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, rather! Look!"

Lovell pointed to the

tower.

In the distance a figure could be seen for a moment on the summit of the tower. It disappeared from sight the next moment.

"Somebody exploring the place," said Jimmy Silver. "By Jove, you've dropped your whip, Phyllis. I'll get it for you!"

Jimmy jumped down from the trap and fielded the whip. Phyllis thanked him with a smile.

"Here we are," said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four entered the Priory with Phyllis.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Little too Hasty!

MR. SILVER greeted his son's guests cordially.

Jimmy's father had met Jimmy's chums at

Rookwood, and learned to like them. Lovell & Co. felt quite at home with the kind old gentleman. Jimmy's mater was equally cordial to the three. Jimmy marched them off to



"It sounds hollow," said Lovell, rapping on the panelled wall. Rap! Rap! And then he jumped back, startled. "Great Scott! I—I rapped, and there was a rap back!" (See opposite page)

their quarters. Two rooms adjoining Jimmy's own had been prepared for the Rookwood juniors, and, as the rooms communicated, the Fistical Four were together as they had been in the Fourth-Form dormitory at Rookwood.

"Jolly comfy quarters!" said Lovell approvingly. "You're a lucky dog, Jimmy Silver." He glanced round the panelled walls. "Jolly old place, this—jolly old. Any of the secret passages here?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Not in these rooms, that I know of. There's a secret door in the library. I'll show it to you, presently."

"Might be one here, all the same," said Lovell, tapping the wall with his knuckles. "I shouldn't wonder if there's lots you haven't found out. These old places are full of 'em. How jolly for a mysterious panel to open, and a merry old phantom to come groaning in in the middle of the night!"

"Yow!" said Raby. "Don't be so creepy, you ass!"

"It sounds hollow," said Lovell, rapping on the hard wall.

Rap! Rap!

Lovell jumped back, startled.

"Great Scott! Did you hear that?"

"Eh? What?" asked Jimmy, looking round.

Lovell was staring blankly at the oaken panel he had rapped.

"I—I rapped it!" he gasped. "And—and there was a rap back!"

"What?"

"An answering rap on the other side," gasped Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Lovell, warmly, as his chums burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha! It was the echo, you duffer!"

"Rats! I tell you——"

"Nerves, old chap!" said Raby, chuckling. "Don't think about the ghost, or you'll be hearing spirit-rapping!"

"You silly ass!"

"It must have been the echo," said Jimmy Silver. "Rap again!"

Lovell rapped hard on the panel with his knuckles. But there was no sound in response.

"Well, I'm sure I heard a rap last time," he said, regarding the oaken wall with a somewhat uneasy look.

"Imagination, old chap," said Newcome. "Never mind spirit-rapping now. Mrs. Silver said tea would be ready when we came down. Get a move on."

Lovell turned from the panel, evidently still a little uneasy in his mind.

"I suppose it was imagination," he said at last. "But—but it sounded just like a rap on the other side of the wall. What's on the other side, Jimmy?"

"Nothing," said Jimmy Silver. "That wall's about six or eight feet thick. It's an outer wall. There's a stone platform on the other side, leading to the old tower, that's all. You couldn't hear a rap through that thickness."

Jimmy Silver left his chums removing the stains of travel, and hurried downstairs. He was anxious to see his father and ask him if he had news of Private Silver.

He found the old gentleman in the library, a handsome, oak-panelled apartment looking out over the park.

There was a wrinkle in Mr. Silver's brow, but he smiled as he saw his son.

"Father," said Jimmy, coming to the point at once, "have you heard anything about Uncle John?"

Mr. Silver gave a start.

"So you have heard, Jimmy? Has he written to you?"

"No, dad. I called at Latcham Barracks to-day on the way home, to see him, and—and they told me——"

"I did not intend to tell you, Jimmy," said his father gravely. "Your uncle has falsified his promises, and has brought disgrace again upon his name—and, worse than that, upon the uniform he wore. He is a fugitive now."

"Has—has he been here?"

"Here? He would not be likely to come here, Jimmy. He would not be foolish enough to expect me to shelter a deserter."

"Then you don't know what's become of him, dad?"

Mr. Silver shook his head.

"I know nothing of him, Jimmy. The

police called here yesterday to inquire if I knew anything of him, as he was wanted on the double charge of theft and desertion. That was the first news I received. I knew nothing of him, and could tell them nothing."

"But—but—" Jimmy faltered, "isn't it possible, dad, that—that there's some mistake? I'm sure uncle meant to go straight."

"I think he did, Jimmy," said Mr. Silver quietly. "He kept straight for a long time. But I suppose the orderly life was too much for him. He was always wild and reckless. I fear that there is no mistake in the matter."

"Has he confessed, father?"

"No. I learned that when he was arrested he protested his innocence."

"Then—then——"

"But the matter was investigated, Jimmy. I learned that there had been a series of thefts in the barracks, and a watch was kept. The thief was not seen, but a watch stolen from an officer was found in John Silver's greatcoat pocket. A good deal of money had been taken also, but that was not found. It is supposed to have been sent away, and doubtless he is living upon it now. At all events, he didn't stay to face his court-martial, but deserted."

"He would have been found guilty, then, you think?"

"Undoubtedly. He had taken a hundred pounds in banknotes, as well as other things. The thefts had been going on for some time, and the evidence seems clear enough."

"He—he may have cleared because he thought he hadn't a chance——"

"If you find it in your heart to believe in your uncle still, my boy, do so by all means," said Mr. Silver, with a slight smile.

"But you don't believe in him, dad?"

"I cannot, Jimmy."

"Does Phyllis know?" asked Jimmy, after a pause.

"No. I thought it best not to trouble her with the knowledge. The less said about such a disgraceful affair the better. You will not tell her?"

"Not a word," said Jimmy. "My chums know; but I'll give them the tip not to speak about it to Phyllis."

"That is all right. We'll keep quiet."

Lovell looked in.

"Come on, Jimmy; tea's ready."

Jimmy followed his chum. The Rookwood juniors had expected to see the bright face of Cousin Phyllis at the tea-table; but Jimmy's fair cousin was not there. After tea, the Rookwooders were keen to begin the exploration of the secret passage, which appealed to their imaginations very much.

"You will not find the ghost in the daytime," said Mrs. Silver, with a smile, when she heard the juniors' intention.

"Might find his tracks," said

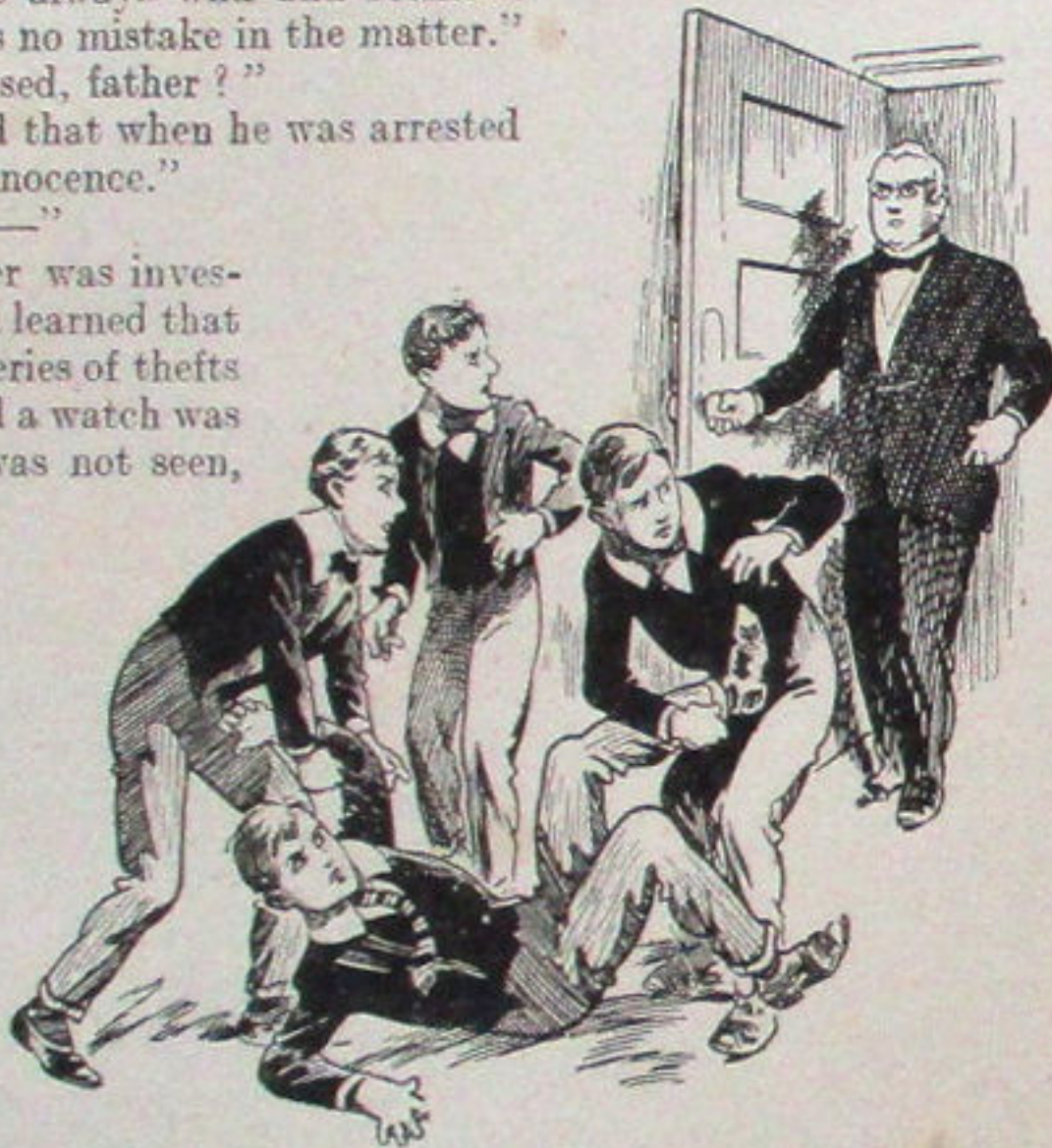
Lovell, laughing. "We're boy scouts, you know."

Mrs. Silver laughed, and Jimmy led his chums away to the library. Mr. Silver had gone out, and the Fistical Four had the room to themselves.

"Now, where's the giddy door?" said Lovell.

"Let's see if we can find it," said Raby. "I'll bet you I'll spot it."

"Try!" said Jimmy, with a grin.



"Bump him!" said Lovell.

Bump! "Yoooop! You silly chumps!"

"My dear boys," said a mild voice, as Mr. Silver entered the room. "Is that a new game?" (See page 238)

The three juniors started a search. They examined and tapped upon the panelled walls, and scanned the bookcases with which half the wall-space was covered. But after a quarter of an hour's search they gave it up.

"Show it to us, you grinning ass, Jimmy," grunted Lovell.

"Here you are," said Jimmy.

He stepped to a panel in the centre of the wall, and felt over it.

"Does that move?" asked Lovell.

"Yes."

"I've tried all over it."

"You have to press the spring," explained Jimmy. "Here you are. It's hidden in the cornice here. See?"

"I see. Go ahead!"

Jimmy pressed the hidden spring.

The panel did not move.

"Well?" said three voices together.

Jimmy looked astonished.

"My hat! It's got jammed somehow. It won't open!"

"Did it ever open?" said Lovell suspiciously. "Have you been pulling our leg, you funny ass?"

"Fathead!" growled Jimmy. "I tell you it opens as easy as anything."

"It doesn't seem to."

"I tell you I've been through it, lots of times," howled Jimmy, glaring at the three doubting Thomases. "There's a passage in the thickness of the wall, leading down to the vaults, and another branching off leading to the old tower. I went through them with my uncle when I was a kid, and I looked into them last vac, too. The door opened all right then."

"Well, open it," grinned Newcome.

Jimmy jammed on the spring.

He felt a slight movement under his finger, but that was all.

"The panel ought to spring open," he said. "It always did! It's jolly queer. But—but it won't open now."

"Keep it up," grinned Lovell. "You've been pulling our legs!"

"You silly ass!"

Lovell took out his watch.

"We'll give you one minute to open the weird panel," he remarked. "I'll time you.

If it isn't open in one minute we give you a bumping."

"Look here——"

"Ten seconds!" said Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it does open!" roared Jimmy.

"It's opened lots of times."

"Twenty seconds!"

"Better get on with opening it," chortled Raby. "You're jolly well going to be bumped if it doesn't open, Jimmy. You can't be allowed to play these little jokes on your old pals."

"You frabjous ass!"

"Are you always as polite as that to visitors?" chuckled Newcome.

"Fifty seconds!" said Lovell grimly.

Jimmy pressed desperately on the spring. But the panel in the open wall remained immovable.

Lovell snapped his watch shut

"The minute's up!"

"Look here——"

Lovell slid his watch back into his pocket, and the three juniors advanced on the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

"Now, look here, you asses!" said Jimmy, leaving the troublesome panel, and facing round. "I tell you——"

"Bump him!"

"I say! Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Jimmy Silver.

But his guests did not let go. They collared their host, and he was swept off the floor.

Bump!

"Yoooooop!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow! You silly chumps!"

Bump!

"My dear boys!" said a mild voice.

The juniors spun round, reddening, and Jimmy Silver sat on the floor and gasped. Mr. Silver had entered the library.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

"Nothing Doing!"

"AHEM!" stuttered Lovell.

"H'm!" murmured Raby.

"Oh!" ejaculated Newcome.

Jimmy Silver gasped. He could not find words just then.

Mr. Silver, to the relief of the three, did not look angry. But he looked very much surprised, and regarded the Fourth-Formers of Rookwood curiously.

"Is that a new game?" he asked.

"Ahem!"

"The silly duffers!" gasped Jimmy Silver, finding his voice at last.

"I hope you have not been quarrelling already," said Mr. Silver, raising his eyebrows a little.

Lovell & Co. turned crimson at the suggestion.

"Oh, no!" ejaculated Lovell. "Only—only—"

"Exactly," said Raby. "Only—ahem—"

"Only playing the silly ox, dad," said Jimmy Silver, scrambling to his feet. "I was going to show them the secret panel, and—"

"Jimmy was spoofing his old pals, sir," explained Newcome. "So we just bumped him for his own good!"

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy. "I

wasn't spoofing. The panel does open!"

"Oh, you were showing them the secret panel?" said Mr. Silver, with a smile.

"Yes; and it wouldn't open, and the silly duffers thought I was spoofing them," growled Jimmy.

Lovell stared.

"Is there really a secret panel, then?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mr. Silver. "You have been a little hasty."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"We take back that bumping, Jimmy," said Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you open it, dad?" asked Jimmy.

"The blessed thing won't open for some reason!"

"That is very odd," replied his father. "It usually opens quite easily."

Mr. Silver approached the panel, and the juniors looked on curiously. The old gentleman touched the spring, but the panel did not move.

Jimmy's father looked perplexed.

"It is extraordinary!" he said. "It certainly does not open. It has not been opened for a long time, and perhaps the springs have jammed somehow. Yet it has certainly

been in working order for a very long time."

He pressed the spring again, but it was useless. The secret panel remained immovable.

"Nothing doing," remarked Raby.

"No go," said Lovell.

"The ghost may be there holding it," grinned Newcome.

Mr. Silver laughed.

"It certainly will not open," he said.



An irreverent youth of Wayland had hurled a snowball which sent Arthur Augustus's gleaming topper flying. Arthur Augustus glared round in search of the delinquent.

(See page 240)

"It must have become jammed somehow. I am sorry for your disappointment, if you wished to explore the secret passage."

"Isn't there another entrance, sir?" asked Lovell.

"It is quite possible that one exists, or, indeed, probable, but it has never been found," said Mr. Silver.

"It would be easier to find from the other side," remarked Raby. "Might be easy to find from the secret passage."

"Only we can't get into that passage without finding it first, fathead!" said Lovell. "Now we sha'n't be able to track down the ghost."

The juniors left the library, considerably disappointed.

It was really exasperating that the secret spring, which had worked without fail for centuries, should have jammed at this special time when they were keen to explore the secret recesses of the priory.

"What a rotten sell!" growled Lovell. "It's just as if the ghost knew we were after him, and meant to disappoint us. Rotten!"

Cousin Phyllis met them in the hall.

Her bright eyes scanned the four frowning faces curiously.

"Is anything wrong, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing much!" said Jimmy Silver. "The blessed panel won't open for some reason, and I was going to show these chaps the secret passages."

"It will not open?"

"No. Jammed somehow, I suppose."

"Then you will have to give up the exploration?"

"No jolly fear!" said Lovell emphatically.

"We'll jolly well find another way of getting in! There must be other ways. I say, Jimmy, I suppose there isn't anybody playing a little game on us, is there?"

Phyllis started.

"Why should you think so?" she exclaimed.

"Well, if some practical joker was having a game with us that would explain," said Lovell. "Jolly queer the thing should get jammed now, after working for hundreds of years without a hitch. And there's that rapping I heard in Jimmy's room!"

"Imagination, fathead!" said Raby.

"What was that?" asked Cousin Phyllis quickly.

Lovell explained, and the girl listened with intent interest.

"I dare say the secret passage runs behind that wall," concluded Lovell. "Is there a practical joker in the house, Jimmy?"

"Well, the pater and mater wouldn't be playing practical jokes," said Jimmy, laughing.

"I don't mean them, fathead!"

"Or Phyllis," chuckled Jimmy.

Phyllis coloured.

"Of course not, ass!" said Lovell. "Don't be a funny duffer!"

"Well, there isn't anybody else, excepting the servants. And I don't suppose they've got much time for practical joking in secret passages."

"What about the johnny we saw on the tower when we came in?" said Lovell.

"Who was he?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy. "Somebody looking over the tower, I suppose. It wasn't the pater."

"Can you get into the tower from outside?"

"Oh, yes! It's partly in ruins."

"Some stranger, then, perhaps," said Lovell. "Like his cheek, if it was. But look here, Jimmy, you said that secret passage led to the tower."

"Yes."

"Then there's a way of getting out into the tower from it?"

"Of course!"

"Well, where you can get out, you can get in," said Lovell. "Fathead not to think of that before. Let's go and try."

"Good egg!" said Jimmy. "You coming, Phyllis?"

The girl nodded, and she accompanied the juniors across the gardens to the doorway of the old tower. The door had long gone, and the stone steps within were in a somewhat shaky condition.

"You have to be jolly careful here," said Jimmy. "Hardly safe for you, Phyllis."

"I will wait," said the girl. "Tell me if you discover anything."

"Yes, rather!"

Jimmy Silver led the way up the spiral stone stairs, the juniors following him, treading very cautiously. Jimmy stopped at last in a little room with loophole windows.

"Here you are!" he said.

"Well, where's the place?" asked Lovell, looking round. "I don't see it."

Jimmy placed his hand upon one of the large blocks of stone that formed the wall.

"That stone turns on its centre," he explained. "There's a pivot in it. I suppose it opens from outside. I've never tried."

He pressed on the stone.

But it did not move.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome added their efforts. But the stone was as immovable as the thick wall round it.

The juniors gave it up at last in disgust.

"Rotten sell!" growled Lovell. "I'm fed up! Blessed if I think much of your giddy secret passages and things, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy laughed, and they descended again. Phyllis met them with an inquiring look.

"N.G.," said Lovell. "The blessed thing won't open!"

"The river's frozen hard," said Phyllis. "Do you care for skating?"

"What-ho! We've brought our skates," said Lovell eagerly.

In a few minutes the Fistical Four were skating on the smooth ice with Miss Phyllis, and they forgot all about their disappointment.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Tom Merry and Co. Arrive!

"BUCK up, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

"Look here——"

"Wubbish!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's spoke emphatically.

Arthur Augustus was not usually emphatic.

But the present occasion was an occasion that required emphasis. For once, Arthur Augustus's manners had lost the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Six juniors of St. Jim's were howling to Arthur Augustus to hurry up, in the old High Street of Wayland town. St. Jim's had broken up that day, and seven juniors were

going to Jimmy Silver's place instead of going home. They were D'Arcy, Blake, Herries and Digby, of the Fourth, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell.

And Monty Lowther had suggested stopping at Wayland to see the pictures on the cinema—a suggestion his chums had agreed to, as there was lots of time to catch the second train for Lexham. And they had stayed rather longer than they had intended seeing the pictures, and there was just time for a run to the station when they came out. And an irreverent youth of Wayland had hurled a snowball which sent Arthur Augustus's gleaming topper flying.

Hence the trouble.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fielded his topper, jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye, and glared round in search of the delinquent.

In reply to the urgings of his comrades, Arthur Augustus answered:

"Look at my toppah!"

"Blow your topper!" roared Jack Blake. "The train goes in four minutes!"

"Come on, Gussy!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! There he is!"

The youth who had hurled the snowball was grinning from a corner. Arthur Augustus caught sight of him, and rushed towards him, his muddy topper in one hand, and the other fist clenched hard.

"Come back!" roared Tom Merry.

"Gussy!" shrieked Manners. "The train——"

"The train!" bellowed Herries.

"The train!" bawled Digby.

"The train!" shrieked Blake.

The swell of St. Jim's did not heed. He was rushing on the grinning snowballer for vengeance. The chums of St. Jim's rushed after him to haul him back. And the grinning youth ceased grinning and took to flight as the whole party came tearing towards him.

Arthur Augustus sped on his track, and Tom Merry & Co. sped on Arthur Augustus's track, and they went down Wayland High Street as if they were on the cinder-path.

The cheery youth who was the cause of all the trouble vanished round a corner, and Arthur Augustus stopped at the corner pant-

CUTTING A FINE FIGURE!



To face page 240]

BILLY BUNTER DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF ON THE ICE!

ing. His chums overtook him, panting, too. The chase had only lasted five minutes. But they were now a quarter of a mile from the station, and it was a minute past the time for the express to leave.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The young wascal seems to have disappeared, deah boys. I was goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"You frabjous ass!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You burbling cuckoo——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"We've lost the train!" roared Herries.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. Look at my toppah!"

"I've a jolly good mind to jump on your topper," howled Manners. "The train's gone

—the last direct train—and Jimmy Silver will be expecting us before dark."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah unforch!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I dare say there will be anothah twain. Pway don't get excited!"

"You cheerful idiot——"

"I wefuse to be called a cheerful idiot, Lowthah!"

"Why can't you refuse to be one?" howled Digby.

"I wegard that wemark as personal, Dig!"

"Bump him!" growled Herries.

Arthur Augustus backed away in alarm.

"I wefuse to be bumped! The pavement is feahfully mudday. Pway, don't make me start the Chwistmas holidays by givin' you a feahful thwashin' all wound!"

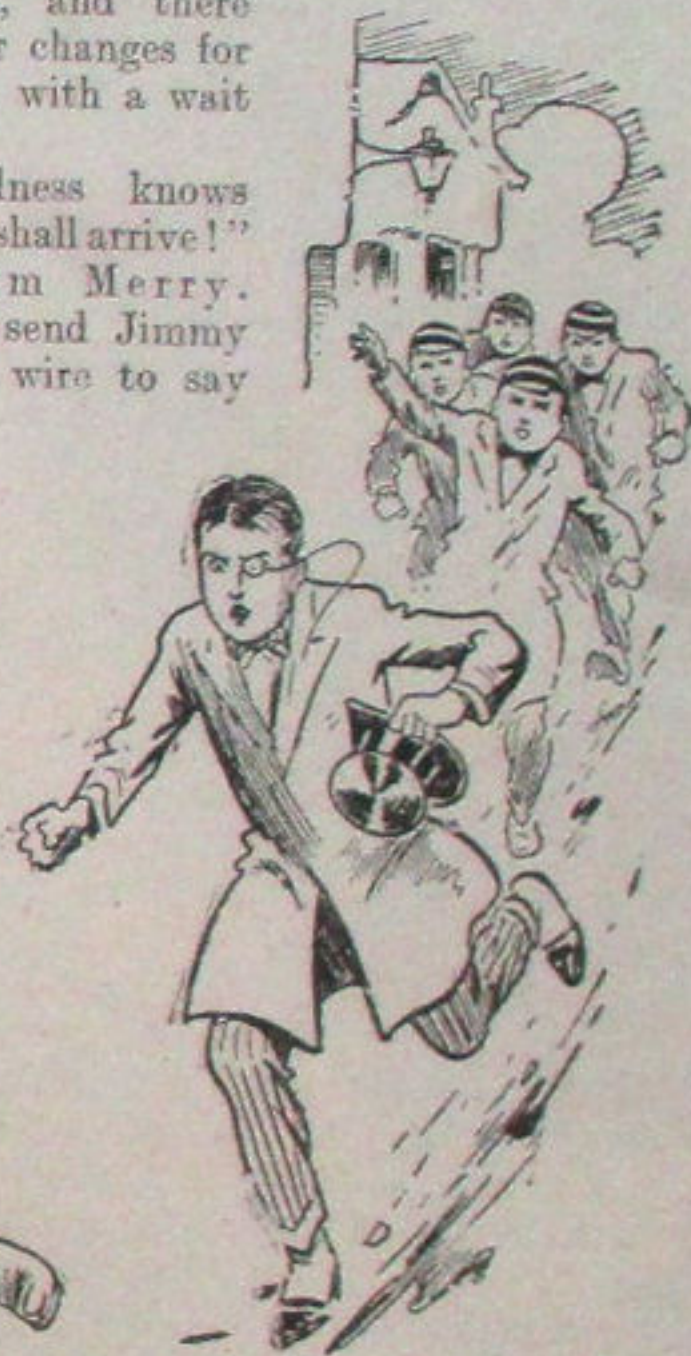
"Let's get to the station," said Tom Merry, "the train may have been delayed.

If not, I'm blessed if I know how we shall get to Lexham Priory!"

The wrathful party took their way back to the station, Arthur Augustus rubbing his topper as he went. But Tom Merry's hope was ill-founded. The express had long gone. The next train was in half an hour, and there were four changes for Lexham, with a wait at each.

"Goodness knows when we shall arrive!" said Tom Merry. "Better send Jimmy Silver a wire to say

Arthur Augustus caught sight of the youth who had hurled the snowball at him, and rushed towards him, his muddy topper in one hand and the other fist clenched hard. "Come back!" roared Tom Merry. (See opposite page)



we're late. Can't be helped."

"All that fathead's fault!" growled Manners.

"I wefuse to be called a fat-head, Mannahs!"

Tom Merry & Co. waited for the train, filling in the time by telling Arthur Augustus what they thought of him. The train came in at last, and the juniors took their seats in it.

"It's all wight," Arthur Augustus announced as the train started.

"All wrong, you mean," growled Digby. "We shall arrive in the middle of the night at this rate."

"I was not thinkin' of that, Dig. I was alludin' to my toppah. I have got it quite clean at last, and it's all wight!"

And Arthur Augustus smiled a contented smile, while his comrades looked as if they would eat him.

Tom Merry had sent the wire, but he had been told that delivery could not be guaranteed at an early hour. It was a chance whether Jimmy Silver would receive it before midnight. He would wonder why they did not come, and would probably conclude that they had put it off for some reason till next day. They would, no doubt, arrive after the Silver household had gone to bed—a very uncomfortable prospect. So during the journey they further acquainted Arthur Augustus with what they thought of him.

Four changes, and four long waits, crawling in local trains, did not make a pleasant journey. It was the last local that landed them at Lexham at eleven o'clock. They came out of the station in the winter darkness, and soon ascertained that there was no conveyance to the Priory. Apparently the telegram had not yet reached Jimmy Silver.

"Well, we've got to hoof it," growled Blake. "What the dickens will they think of us, arriving at midnight? We had better explain that it's owing to Gussy being born potty!"

"I wefuse to allow you to say anythin' of the sort, you uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

The juniors knew the direction, and they started for the Priory, tramping along under a light fall of snow.

The Priory came in sight at last, and they passed the gate, and tramped up the drive to the house.

Every window was in darkness.

"Gone to bed, of course," grunted Herries. "They don't expect us till to-morrow now."

"Blessed if I like ringing 'em up," said Tom Merry uneasily.

"Well, we can't camp in the park!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

"Hallo, there's a light!"

A flickering light gleamed out suddenly from a dark window. The juniors paused and fixed their eyes upon it.

"Thank goodness, they're not all gone to bed!" said Tom Merry in relief. "That's the library, I think. There's somebody up. Hallo, the light's gone."

The window was suddenly dark again.

The juniors went on to the door, and Tom Merry pulled at the bell.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

Arthur Augustus is Suspicious!

JIMMY Silver sat up in bed.

"Hallo!" he murmured drowsily.

"What the merry dickens is that?"

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

"The bell, by Jove! Those bounders have come, after all."

Jimmy Silver slipped out of bed and turned on the light. He hurried on a pair of slippers and a dressing-gown—one of his home luxuries. Lovell sat up in the other bed.

"What's the row?"

"Somebody ringing," said Jimmy. "Must be the St. Jim's chaps. I'd given them up for to-day."

"I'll come down with you," said Lovell.

"Shove this coat on, old chap."

Jimmy Silver and Lovell descended the stairs. Jimmy unchained the big door and blinked out into the wind and snow. Outside, seven juniors with their collars turned up were grouped.

"Awfully sorry," said Tom Merry, colouring. "It's too bad to fetch you down like this!"

"So it's you!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Bai Jove, we owe you an apology, Silvah, deah boy! These fellahs lost the twain, and we've had a feahful journey."

"You lost it," said Herries in sulphurous tones.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Our champion idiot lost it!" said Blake.

"That is hardly a complimentawy way of alludin' to Tom Mewwy, Blake——"

"Fathead!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Well, trot in," he said. "Better late than never."

"You didn't get the wire?"

"No; I thought you'd left it till to-morrow for some reason. Never mind, your rooms are ready—the mater's seen to that—and I'll jolly soon get you some supper," said Jimmy, as the juniors crowded in.

"Don't mench, deah boy!"

"Don't trouble," said Tom quickly, "we—ahem—aren't hungry."

"Rats! You must be. Look here, Lovell will take you up to your rooms and I'll scout round the pantry," said Jimmy cheerily. "I'll bring up what I find. No need to wake the house."

"You're awfully good."

"Weally, we cannot sufficiently apologise——"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy.

"Everybody in bed?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, rather. It's past twelve."

"We thought somebody would be up when we saw a light in the library," said Tom. Jimmy stared.

"You saw a light where?"

"In a ground-floor room—the library, I think."

"My hat! Everybody's in bed," said Jimmy. "If you saw a light in the library, that wants looking into. Come this way."

Jimmy led the way, and the St. Jim's fellows followed him.

"Bai Jove, it must have been a burglah, deah boys!" said D'Arcy in a whisper. "We have arrived just in time to pwevent Mr. Silvah fwom bein' wobbed."

"Bow-wow!" murmured Blake. "Somebody came down for something, that's all."

They followed Jimmy into the library.

Jimmy Silver switched on the electric light. The great apartment was quite deserted.

"Nobody here," said Jimmy Silver. "Sure you weren't mistaken about the light?"

"It wasn't the electric light," said Tom. "It flickered, like a candle, and it only just showed through the blinds."

"Jolly queer!" said Jimmy. "If anybody came down, they ought to be here; it could only have been a few minutes ago."

"Pwobably a burglah, deah boy."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"We'll look round at the doors and windows, if you like," he said.

"I wegard that as a good ideah, deah boy."

They left the library, and Mr. Silver's voice called down from the stairs.

"All serene, dad!" called back Jimmy. "The St. Jim's chaps; they lost their train, and got in late. I'm looking after them."

"Pway don't come down, deah sir!"

"Jimmy will take care of you," said Mr. Silver. "Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, Mr. Silver!"

Mr. Silver, like a sensible man, went back to bed. Jimmy and Lovell were quite equal to taking care of the guests.

The juniors made a round of the house, but all the doors and windows were secure.

"Must have been mistaken about that light," said Lovell. "The fire in the library isn't quite out, and it may have flashed up."

"Well, it might have," said Tom Merry. "I certainly thought it was a candle."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it seems all serene," said Lovell, with a yawn. "This way to your quarters!"

"Pewwaps it is a burglah."

"Oh, rats! I—I mean, let's get upstairs."

"I will keep watch to-night, if you like, Silvah, deah boy."

"Not at all," said Jimmy, laughing.

"Didn't you tell us you have secwet passages and things heah, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps the burglah has hidden in the secret passage."

"As it happens, the secret passage can't be got into—the door's jammed," said Jimmy. "We found that out to-day."

"Oh, bai Jove! However, I feel convinced that it was a burglah."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "Let's get up to bed; I'm tired."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Come on!" said Lovell.

The tired juniors followed Lovell upstairs, Arthur Augustus giving a final suspicious glance round. The swell of St. Jim's evidently was not satisfied in his mind.

Lovell showed them into a large, lofty room, half the size of a dormitory at St. Jim's, where seven beds were arranged in a row.

"Jimmy thought you'd like to be together," said Lovell.

"Wippin', deah boy!"



A flickering light gleamed out suddenly from a dark window. The juniors paused and fixed their eyes upon it. "Thank goodness they've not all gone to bed!" said Tom Merry. "That's the library, I think. There's somebody up."
(See page 242)

The St. Jim's juniors peeled off coats and mufflers, and began unpacking their bags.

Jimmy Silver arrived in a few minutes with a large tray, laden with bread-and-butter, cheese, and ham, cake, and biscuits.

"The best I can do," he remarked.

"That's topping!" said "Come to think of it, we're a

Lovell stirred the fire in the wide, old-fashioned grate, and threw some logs on it. Tom Merry. bit peckish."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You get back to bed," said Tom.

"Oh, I'm not so very sleepy!" said Jimmy Silver, who was, as a matter of fact, nearly yawning his head off.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Buzz off to bed!" he said. "We shall be in in two ticks."

"Well, if you're all right——"

"Wight as wain, deah boy!"

"Then, good-night!"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell went back to bed, not sorry to get there. Tom Merry & Co were left to enjoy their improvised supper over the fire. They made a rapid inroad upon the tray.

"Well, I feel better now," remarked Herries, as he began taking his boots off. "Jimmy has taken this very decently. All Gussy's fault."

"Wats! As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I wegard it as wathah fortunate that we dwopped in at this late houah. Otherwise, we should not have spotted that burglah."

"Eh! What burglar?"

"It was a burglah in the libwawy, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am quite suah of that."

"Rats!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Tom Mewwy. I am quite suah that it was a burglah, and that he is hidin' some-whah, and I am goin' to keep watch to-night. I wegard that as a dutay towards our kind host, Mr. Silvah."

"Don't you think Jimmy Silver's the best judge whether that's necessary?" inquired Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus shook his head sagely.

"Not at all, Lowthah. Jimmay Silvah is a wippin' chap, but wathah lackin' in tact and judgment."

"Well, I'm tired; I'm going to bed," yawned Blake.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah. You fellahs would only be in the way," agreed Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to be awf'ly cautious."

"Fathead!" growled Manners. "You're not going wandering about Mr. Silver's house in the middle of the night?"

"Certainly not. I am goin' to station myself in the libwawy, and keep watch. I am quite suah that that wascal is hidden there somewhah."

"What rascal, you ass?"

"The burglah."

"You frabjous chump!" said Blake. "There isn't a burglar."

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous chump!"

"What will they think when they find you asleep in the morning?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"I shall not go to sleep in the libwawy, you ass! I am goin' to keep watch!"

"Bow-wow!"

Tom Merry & Co turned in. They were tired and sleepy. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sleepy, too, certainly; but Arthur Augustus had a powerful sense of duty. He was convinced that there was a burglar, and he thought with satisfaction of the gratitude of the whole household in the morning when he had "nailed" the intruder.

Jimmy Silver would admit that he was a fellow of tact and judgment, Mr. Silver would shake him by the hand fervently, Cousin Phyllis would give him a glance of her bright eyes. Indeed, it was the thought of Cousin Phyllis' bright eyes that spurred Arthur Augustus on more than anything else. It was some time since Arthur Augustus had met that young lady, but he had not forgotten her bright eyes.

"Why don't you turn in, fathead?" asked Blake.

"I am not goin' to turn in."

"You're not going down, image!"

"I am goin' down. I wegard it as a dutay."

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus turned out the light and quitted the room. He had changed his boots for soft slippers, realising that it would not do to risk awakening anybody—in which case he might be taken for a burglar himself!

Blake gave an expressive snort.

"Ass!" he remarked.

And he went to sleep, and Tom Merry & Co. followed his example, without the slightest expectation of being aroused by the alarm of burglars.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

A Startling Discovery!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY pushed open the big, heavy door of the library softly and cautiously. He was very careful not to make a sound.

The great room was in darkness. Only a faint glimmer on the blinds came from the direction of the windows.

The swell of St. Jim's picked his way cautiously into the room.

The idea was firmly rooted in his mind that the light the juniors had seen in the library had been in the hands of a housebreaker.

The rascal was concealed somewhere, and when the household were asleep he would creep forth to do his nefarious work. That was Gussy's belief. And, instead of finding a sleeping household at his mercy, he would find Arthur Augustus wide awake and on the watch, and his little game would be nipped in the bud. In that good cause, D'Arcy did not mind losing his night's rest.

He groped his way to the big palm he had noticed in the corner of the room, and crept behind it. The thick bunch of fronds quite hid him there. There he waited.

He waited patiently.

It was cold, and he rather wished he had thought of bringing his overcoat. But he did not falter.

A quarter of an hour passed, and Arthur Augustus began to nod a little in spite of himself.

A sudden sound startled him into broad wakefulness.

Click!

Arthur Augustus rubbed his eyes.

In the darkness he could see nothing. But he could hear. There was a faint sound in the big, silent room, as of a dress brushing.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He had expected it—quite expected it, yet it startled him, and his heart was beating in great thumps.

There was someone else in the room now, and that someone had not entered by the door. Evidently the someone had been hiding behind the secret panel, which Jimmy Silver believed to be jammed and unworkable.

A minute passed silently. Just as if he could read the someone's thoughts, D'Arcy knew that the intruder was listening to make sure that no one was at hand before he turned on the light.

The St. Jim's junior waited in grim silence. Scratch!

It was a match striking.

There was a flicker of the lighted match, a guttering of a candlewick, and then the steady flame of a candle.

Arthur Augustus peered through the fronds of the big palm.

He intended to be very cautious—to choose his own moment for giving the alarm. But what he saw as he gazed on the candlelight overcame all his caution.

It was a small, white hand that held the candlestick.

The light shone upon—not a masked or bearded face, as Arthur Augustus had expected.

It shone upon a fair, girlish face, framed in dark hair.

Arthur Augustus stood frozen for a moment, dumbfounded.

Then he gasped:

"Gweat Scott!"

His startled exclamation echoed through the silent room.

The girl holding the candle was crossing to the door. At the sound of D'Arcy's voice she spun round with a little cry.

"Bai Jove!" stuttered D'Arcy. "Miss Phyllis!"

It was Jimmy Silver's cousin!

The girl's face was deadly pale, her eyes wide and startled.

"Who—who is there?" she panted. "Jimmy?"

Arthur Augustus stepped out of his place of concealment.

"Pway don't be alarmed, Miss Phyllis——"

"Oh!"

"It is not Jimmay; it is I, deah gal. I am sowwy I startled you," said Arthur Augustus in dismay. "I—I was watchin' for a burglah, you know——"

The girl pressed her hands to her heart. It was evident that she had received a very painful shock.

Her dark eyes searched D'Arcy's concerned face.

"Who—who are you?"

"Don't you wemembah me, Miss Phyllis—D'Arcy of St. Jim's?" said Arthur Augustus, a little reproachfully.

"Yes, yes; I remember now. But—but how——"

"We aw-wived wathah late, owin' to that ass Low-thah stayin' at a cinemah," said Arthur Augustus. "We saw a light heah, and I supposed it was a burglah, so I came down to keep watch. I am awfly sowwy I startled you, Miss Phyllis!"

"Oh!"

The girl's face was crimson now in the candlelight.

Arthur Augustus looked at her.

The swell of St. Jim's was neither inquisitive nor suspicious, but he could not help thinking it extraordinary that Miss Phyllis should be there. Evidently it was the girl who had shown the light the St. Jim's fellows had seen through the blind. Evidently she had slipped behind the secret panel to escape discovery.

Why?

What was Phyllis doing there?

It was amazing. Arthur Augustus felt almost as if his head were turning round with astonishment.

The girl read his thoughts easily enough, and her colour deepened and deepened.

"I am awfly sowwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway excuse me for makin' this feahful blundah, deah gal! I—I—I—did not guess——"

Phyllis's lips moved tremulously.

"Of course you could not guess," she said, in a low voice. "But—but you are very much surprised, of course, to—to see me here?"

"Yaas, wathah!" confessed Arthur Augustus. "But it is no bizney of mine, of course."

"I—I—I cannot explain——"

"Pway do not suppose that I wequest any explanation, deah gal! I know how to mind my own

bizney! I was taught that, deah gal!" Phyllis smiled slightly.

"But—but you must think it very strange——"

"Not at all, Miss Phyllis," said Arthur Augustus bravely. "I—I suppose you have been explorin' the secwet passages——"



The light shone—not upon a masked or bearded face, as Arthur Augustus had expected. It shone upon a fair, girlish face framed in dark hair. "Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus. (See opposite page)

He paused.

"May I ask you not to mention this to anyone?" asked Phyllis quietly.

"Of course, I shall not say a word!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am only sowwy that I have—have——"

"Good-night!"

"Good-night, Miss Phyllis!" said D'Arcy dazedly.

The girl left the library. Arthur Augustus followed like a fellow in a dream. Phyllis blew the candle out in the hall and vanished. Arthur Augustus took his way back to his quarters in a dazed frame of mind. Evidently there was no burglar to be watched for, and the best thing to do was to go to bed. He sincerely wished he had gone to bed in the first place. The astounding discovery in the library had quite thrown him off his balance.

There was a grunt from Blake's bed as the Swell of St. Jim's turned in.

"Hallo! Is that you, fathead?"

"Wats!"

"Found any merry burglars?" asked Blake, with a sleepy chuckle.

"No."

"Found anything?"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus went to bed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

Phyllis's Secret!

JIMMY SILVER'S guests appeared to a late breakfast in the morning.

Cousin Phyllis did not come down to breakfast.

Tom Merry & Co. were a little disappointed not to meet her, only Arthur Augustus being aware why the girl was not down.

And Arthur Augustus did not say a word.

His promise of silence to Cousin Phyllis had to be kept, and the more he thought about the matter—he could not help thinking about it—the more puzzled he was. He would gladly have allowed the whole matter to be forgotten, but the fact that he had kept watch for a burglar was too good a joke to be missed, and his chums related it to Jimmy Silver & Co. at the breakfast-table.

The Rookwood juniors chortled gleefully over it.

"How long did you stay down?" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Augustus coloured.

"Only about half an hour, deah boy."

"That wasn't giving the burglar a fair chance," remarked Lovell. "If he was hiding in the chimney, it might have taken him longer than that to get out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lovell——"

"And you didn't find anything at all?" grinned Raby.

"Pway pass the toast, deah boy."

"Not even a mouse?" asked Raby.

"I did not see any mice, Waby."

"Too bad!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I thought we should find you asleep on the floor in the morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sure it was very courageous of D'Arcy to keep watch for the burglar," said Mrs. Silver kindly.

"Thank you, madam!"

"And I am sure D'Arcy would have given a good account of himself if there had been a burglar," said Mr. Silver, smiling. "It is rather fortunate that there was not, however."

"See anything of the ghost?" asked Raby.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Hallo! Is there a ghost here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather; a phantom prior who groans behind the wainscot!" said Lovell. "He glides through the secret panels, and so on, doesn't he, Jimmy?"

"He does—he do!" said Jimmy Silver. "I suppose nobody came gliding through the secret panel while you were on the watch, D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy's face crimsoned.

"Weally, you know——" he stammered.

Jimmy regarded him rather curiously. He could not see why his playful question should cause such evident confusion on D'Arcy's part.

"Hallo, hallo!" said Lovell, grinning. "He did see something, after all! Was that why you chuckled keeping watch, D'Arcy?"

"I—I——"

"People often see ghosts in the dark!" chuckled Raby. "Ha, ha! D'Arcy saw a shadow move and bunked——"

"Did you, Gussy?" chortled Blake.

"Wats!"

The subject was so plainly distasteful to Arthur Augustus that the juniors let it drop at last, and ceased to chip him. After breakfast, Lovell proposed having another "go" at the secret panel, to show it to the St. Jim's fellows.

"I'm afraid it's no go," said Jimmy Silver. "It was jammed yesterday, but we'll try."

Arthur Augustus felt very uncomfortable as he went with the party. That the panel was not "jammed," he knew, because Miss Phyllis had opened it the night before. Was it the girl who fastened it, not desiring, for some reason, that the secret passage should be explored by Jimmy Silver's guests?

There was little doubt that such was the case. But what could possibly be Phyllis's motive?

That the girl could be playing practical jokes like a fag at school was simply inconceivable.

What was her secret?

Arthur Augustus told himself that it was no business of his, and tried not to think of it. But, in spite of himself, he found himself incessantly thinking of it.

Jimmy Silver tried the panel, but it was fast.

"Nothing doing!" he announced.

"Bai Jove! Won't it open, Silvah?"

"No; it's jammed."

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Pewwaps it is fastened."

"There isn't any fastening on this side," said Jimmy Silver. "There's a bolt on the inner side, in the secret passage; but, of course, it can't be bolted, as nobody's there."

"Good gwacious!"

Arthur Augustus almost fell down.

He turned away to hide his confusion.

Jimmy Silver's answer let in a flood of light upon his perplexed mind.

The panel was bolted!

It could not be bolted from the side of the library. It had been fastened on the other side. By whom?

After Miss Phyllis had come through the secret door the previous night, the panel had been bolted behind her. By whom?

Someone!

Who, then, was there? Who—what was it that Jimmy Silver's pretty cousin had gone down to see at midnight?

D'Arcy felt his brain in a whirl.

One thought drove itself into his mind. Whoever had bolted that panel after Miss Phyllis was still there, hidden in the secret recesses of the mysterious old Priory.

What could it mean?

The juniors went out to skate in the morning, and Miss Phyllis joined them on the frozen river. She gave D'Arcy one quick look, and that was all. Arthur Augustus had the pleasure of skating with her, and he drew her away from the rest of the party.

"May I speak to you, Miss Phyllis?" he asked, when they were out of hearing of Jimmy Silver & Co.

The girl laughed.

"Certainly!"

"I twust you will excuse me," said D'Arcy, flushing crimson, "but—but as an oldah chap and a fellah of tact and judgment, I feel bound to speak, deah girl. I—I—"

"Please go on," said Phyllis quietly.

"Jimmy thinks that panel in the libwawy is jammed. Of course, it isn't, because you—you passed through it last night."

"Yes."

"And—and so it can only be bolted on the othah side, and that is why it does not open." Phyllis's face paled.

"Yes?" she said, almost in a whisper.

"I—I—excuse me, deah gal, but—but that pwoves that somebody is there! There is some person in the secwet place, who fastened the panel aftah you!"

The girl was silent. Her very lips had gone pale.

"I can't help thinkin'," went on Arthur Augustus uncomfortably, "that—that someone has induced you to let him hide there, Miss Phyllis, and so he must be some wottah to be doin' such a thing, and—and pewwaps you would like me to take him in hand and deal with him. I don't undahstand the mattah at all, but it looks to me as if you are in some sewape, and I should like to help you. I look aftah my Cousiu Ethel a gweat deal, you know," added Arthur Augustus,

apparently as a hint that he was quite an old hand at looking after distressed young ladies.

Phyllis smiled tremulously.

"You are a good, kind boy," she said softly, "but—but I can't tell you anything! I can only ask you to say nothing about it, and I am sure I can trust you. I am forced to keep a secret, much against my will, and that is all I can tell you."

"I am afraid you are bein' imposed upon by some unscrupulous person."

"No, no!"

"Very well. I felt bound to offer you my assistance if you required it," said Arthur Augustus. "I will not mention the matter again, but please remember that I am always at your service if you require me."

"Thank you," said Phyllis tremulously.

They skated back towards the house.

"Coming to the station?" called out Tom Merry. "Cousin Ethel's coming by the next train in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And quite a little army marched to the station to meet Cousin Ethel and escort her to the Priory.

Arthur Augustus, concerned as he was about Phyllis, did not mention the matter again; neither did Phyllis. In spite of the girl's strange secret, she was quite cheerful and smiling; and Jimmy Silver, though he thought sometimes of his fugitive uncle, was a cheery host. Christmas passed merrily

enough at the Priory. A few days later Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars were to arrive, an event that was looked forward to keenly by Jimmy Silver and his little party.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

Bunter is not Left!



Arthur Augustus had the pleasure of skating with Phyllis, and he drew her away from the rest of the party.

"May I speak to you, Miss Phyllis?" he asked, when they were out of hearing of Jimmy Silver and Co. (See page 249)

ver's place in the holidays, when Billy Bunter chipped in. The fat junior blinked indignantly at the Co.

"I say, you fellows——"

"We ought to be able to get some footer there," Bob Cherry remarked. "There'll be four Rookwood chaps."

"And seven from St. Jim's, I hear," said Johnny Bull.

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Dry up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Er-r-r!" said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, were chatting over the supper-table at Wharton Lodge. The Famous Five of Greyfriars were there for the Christmas holidays, and Billy Bunter was with them. Not that William George Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, found his company yearned after; but Bunter had decided to come, and he had come.

The Famous Five were chatting over the forthcoming visit to Jimmy Silver's

"And Cousin Ethel," remarked Nugent. "I don't know whether she plays footer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Cousin Phyllis," said Wharton. "She may be a footballer. Anyway, there's eleven of them, and five of us."

"Six!" howled Billy Bunter.

"The sixfulness is not correct, my esteemed Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The worthy fat Bunter is not an esteemed footballer."

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I could play your head off," he said loftily. "In fact, with me in the team, we could play that lot on our own—a side of six instead of eleven. In that case, I should expect Wharton to ask me to captain the team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at."

"Is Bunter going?" asked Bob Cherry.

"It doesn't seem quite the fair thing to plant him on Jimmy Silver."

"Why, you fathead——"

"Well, I don't know," said Wharton dubiously. "Jimmy Silver didn't know Bunter was with us when he asked us. Bunter visited him at Rookwood, and Silver was quite fed up with him. He mayn't take it kindly if we bring Bunter."

"If you think you're going to leave me behind, Wharton——" began Billy Bunter indignantly.

"You can stay here and tuck into the grub," said Johnny Bull. "That's all you want, isn't it?"

"Oh, really, Bull! I shall go to Silver's place, of course. In fact, I should be missed if I didn't," said Bunter, with a fat smirk. "Ethel and Phyllis would miss me a lot, you know. Girls rather take to me."

"You silly fat duffer!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I don't know that I specially care about going," said Bunter. "But I'm not going to disappoint the girls when they're looking forward to seeing me. A chap who's popular with girls is bound to take some notice of them. Yaroooh! What silly idiot chucked that egg-shell at me?"

"I did!" said Bob Cherry, in sulphurous

tones. "And if you don't shut your silly head you'll have an egg next!"

"Yow! Wow! If this is the way you look after your guests, Wharton——"

"Oh, dry up, there's a good chap!" said Harry Wharton. "I suppose if Bunter wants to come he'd better come, though goodness knows how they'll stand him."

Billy Bunter snorted and went on with his supper. He was quite determined not to be left out of the merry party at Lexham Priory.

"We start by the nine train in the morning," added Harry. "You'll have to be down sharp at eight, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton! Of course, you can catch a later train."

"Rats!"

"Look here, I'm not coming down early in the morning. We ain't at Greyfriars now, you ass!"

"Bow-wow!"

Bunter snorted again, and rolled away to bed. Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle.

"Look here, it's rough on Jimmy Silver to plant Bunter on him, especially as he hasn't asked him," he remarked.

"Blessed if I know what to do with him!" said Harry. "I didn't ask him, but he's here all the same."

"Well, suppose we leave him snoozing in the morning, and start! That will settle it. He never comes down till ten."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that's fair. I've told him what time the train goes, and if he doesn't choose to be down in time, that's his look out. You're a giddy genius, Bob!"

"He doesn't know where Silver's place is, so he can't track us down," chortled Johnny Bull. "Your uncle can stand him here, Harry. The colonel's a real brick, and Miss Wharton is awfully patient with him. They can stand him better than we can."

And the Famous Five went to bed, sincerely hoping that William George Bunter would oversleep himself, as usual, in the morning.

Promptly as usual the Famous Five were down to breakfast the next morning. Billy Bunter had been called, and he had snorted

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

An Unexpected Discovery!

BILLY BUNTER sat and pumped in breath for some minutes.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him expressively.

Mr. Bleazer sat, mumbling and scowling, in the corner.

"I say, you fellows, wasn't that lucky?" grinned Bunter, when he had recovered his breath. "Jolly nearly missed it!"

"I don't see where the luck comes in," growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull!"

"I thought you were still asleep, you fat owl," grunted Bob Cherry.

Bunter chuckled.

"You see, I happened to remember that Colonel Wharton was going to Latcham on business this morning," he explained airily. "No need to catch that early train, as there was room for one in the colonel's car. I asked him to give me a lift, and he

took me to Latcham when he went, and there you are. You didn't know I knew the time you changed trains, did you?"

"No, you fat bouncer!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Perhaps you thought I was left behind."

The Co. laughed; they could not help it. While they had supposed that Bunter was

left behind safe in the arms of Morpheus, the fat junior had simply been taking an extra snooze, relying on getting a lift in Colonel Wharton's car to Latcham. There was room for one passenger in the little car, and Bunter had calmly decided to be that passenger.

"Jolly lucky, I call it," said Bunter. "Might have missed going, you know. And

the girls would have been disappointed. He, he, he! You fellows needn't expect to monopolise Ethel and Phyllis like you do Marjorie; I jolly well sha'n't stand it. I warn you of that. I—I say—wharrer marrer?" roared Bunter suddenly.

Mr. Bleazer had sat for some time in silence, glaring at Bunter. In his muddled brain there was evidently a sense of injury. The big man in khaki at Latcham had overawed the intoxicated rascal, but there were only schoolboys on the scene now. Mr. Bleazer decided that his time had come. He lurched across the carriage and grasped Bunter.

He just roared.

"Leggo! Rescue, you fellows!"

"What the thunder are you at!" exclaimed Wharton. "Get into your seat, man, or you'll be put there!"

"Shoved into me, he did!" roared Mr. Bleazer. "Me, a 'ard-workin' man! Knocked me fair hover! I'll smash the fat bouncer, I will!"



"Who yer shoving?" roared the rough fellow, turning furiously on the fat junior. "I—I say, sorry, you know!" gasped Bunter. "Yaroooh! Leggo!" The man had seized him by a fat ear and was twisting it. "Yow-yow! Rescue!" roared Bunter. (See opposite page)

and turned over; merely that and nothing more.

"Is not Bunter going with you?" Colonel Wharton asked, at breakfast, as the Greyfriars juniors were finishing their meal.

"He doesn't seem to care about it," said Harry. "Do you mind if we leave him here, uncle?"

"Not at all."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Time we were off!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter had not put in an appearance.

The Famous Five bade good-bye to the colonel and Miss Wharton, and took their bags. They were walking to the station, a mile distant. They looked back as they reached the road, but there was no sign of Bunter.

In cheery spirits they started for the village.

"The fat bouncer won't come down till ten," grinned Johnny Bull. "Then he'll gorge, and won't mind a bit so long as the grub lasts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors half expected to see the fat Removite pattering along the road after them on the way to the station. But he did not appear, and they reached the station. The train came in.

"We change at Latham," remarked Harry Wharton, as they sat down in the carriage. "That's only about ten miles from Rookwood, I believe. No sign of Bunter."

"Good egg!"

The train started. Billy Bunter was probably still sleeping the sleep of the just at Wharton Lodge. Through the snowy winter morning the train rushed on, and the Greyfriars juniors, chatting cheerily, forgot all about William George Bunter.

"Latham!" said Harry Wharton, at last.

The Greyfriars party alighted from the train, and crossed the platform. The other train was in, but there was a long wait before it started. They secured an empty carriage. There were a good many men in khaki in the station from the neighbouring barracks.

"Dashed long wait here!" yawned Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! My hat!"

"Bunter!" yelled Nugent.

"Great Pip! Bunter!"

The fat figure of the Owl of the Remove

suddenly appeared on the platform. Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles, evidently in search of the Famous Five.

"How on earth did he get here?" groaned Bob.

"He was bound to turn up like an esteemed bad penny," grinned Harce Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter caught sight of the juniors in the waiting train, and a grin overspread his fat face. He waved a fat hand, and started towards them at a run. The guard was slamming the doors now, ready to start.

Bunter put on a spurt.

A man with a lurching gait was coming down the platform, blinking at the carriages. He was a rough-looking customer, and plainly the worse for drink. He stopped at the door of the juniors' carriage, just as Bunter came panting up. The Owl of the Remove butted fairly into him, unable to stop in time.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Who yer shoving?" roared the rough fellow, turning furiously on the fat junior.

"I—I say, sorry, you know!" gasped Bunter. "Yaroooh! Leggo!"

The man had seized him by a fat ear, and was twisting it.

"Yow-wow! Rescue!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton jumped out of the carriage.

"Let him go at once!" he rapped out.

A big sergeant in khaki strode up.

"Enough of that, Bleazer!" he snapped.

Mr. Bleazer released Bunter suddenly. He was not in khaki, but evidently he was in awe of the big sergeant. Wharton guessed that he was a civilian employed about Latham barracks, probably in the canteen.

"All right, sergeant," mumbled the man.

"The young 'ound run into me——"

"Don't let's have any more of it!" snapped the sergeant, with a look of disgust at the intoxicated man.

Mr. Bleazer stepped into the carriage without another word. He scowled at the juniors, and plumped down in a corner seat.

"Right away!" shouted the guard.

Bunter scrambled in. He stumbled over Mr. Bleazer's legs, which were outstretched across the carriage, and the man uttered an angry oath. Wharton pulled Bunter in, and the door slammed, and the train started.

"Let him alone at once, or you'll get hurt!" snapped Wharton.

"Yaroo! Rescue!" yelled Bunter frantically.

Mr. Bleazer was jamming his head against the back of the seat in the most reckless way, and Bunter was hurt.

Harry Wharton & Co. promptly laid hands upon the ruffian.

Mr. Bleazer was dragged off Bunter, and bumped down in the bottom of the carriage.

"Yow-ow-ow!" gasped Bunter. "He's drunk! Keep him off!"

"Lemme gerrup!" roared Mr. Bleazer.

"You'll do very well there," said Bob Cherry, jamming his foot on the prostrate man's chest. "You can cool down on the floor, my pippin."

Bleazer struggled savagely, but the five juniors of Greyfriars were rather too many for him. He was pinned down and he could not rise.

"I'll out yer for this!" he gasped.

"Bow-wow!"

A torrent of bad language came from Mr. Bleazer, which Bob Cherry promptly stopped by jamming his boot on the abusive mouth. Mr. Bleazer spluttered, and relapsed into silence.

"Will you lemme gerrup?" he mumbled at last.

"Are you going to keep the peace?"

"I'm goin' to out yer!" yelled Mr. Bleazer.

"I don't quite know what it's like to be outed," said Wharton. "But I'd rather not. You can stay there!"

And Mr. Bleazer stayed there. Whenever he made an attempt to rise a heavy boot jamed him down again, and he remained in a recumbent, if not comfortable, position on the floor, till the train steamed into Lexham, and stopped.

There the Greyfriars juniors had to let him get up.

"No larks, mind!" said Bob, as he removed his foot.

Mr. Bleazer gave him an evil look.

The juniors jumped out of the carriage, and Mr. Bleazer jumped after them. Between fury and drink, Mr. Bleazer was in a boiling state. The moment he was on the platform

he made a jump at Bob Cherry and grasped him.

"Now, you young 'ound!" he hissed.

"Yow-ow! Help!" spluttered Bob.

The juniors grasped Mr. Bleazer and dragged him off. Bob was dragged down to the platform with him. They rolled over in a struggling heap, and there was a crowd of porters and passengers round at once.

"Police!" yelled Bunter, dodging out of the way of the combatants.

"Wot's all this 'ere?"

It was the voice of authority. A policeman came up. Mr. Bleazer was fighting like a lunatic, and the juniors had their hands full to hold him and keep him from doing serious damage.

"The rotter's drunk!" panted Wharton. "Collar him!"

The constable laid his hand on Mr. Bleazer, and was promptly "dotted" in the eye by that irate gentleman. That was enough for him. He collared the drunken ruffian in a very vigorous way, and they struggled.

"My eye!" ejaculated the constable. "Lend me a hand with him, young gents!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We'll help you to get him to the station, if you like!"

"Kim along, my tulip. You're in custody!"

Mr. Bleazer did not seem to realise that he was in custody. The potations, in which he had indulged not wisely but too well, were raging in his head, and he was quite beside himself. He fought furiously with the policeman, and the juniors lent their aid, as in duty bound, to the officer of the law. Among them, the intoxicated rascal was hustled out of the station into the road.

"Help me to get him to the station, young gents!" panted the constable.

"You bet!"

"I say, you fellows, we shall be late for dinner!"

"Shut up, you fat bounder!"

Down the street ran Mr. Bleazer, still fighting, and he was still resisting furiously as he was run into the police-station.

There two or three constables collared him, and he was run into a cell before he knew what was happening to him.

Harry Wharton & Co. had to stay to answer the questions of the inspector-in-charge. They could only say that he had got into the train at Latcham, and had been fighting drunk, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

One of the constables who had taken the ruffian into the cell came back with a packet in his hand.

"We found this on him, sir!"

"By gad!" said the inspector. "Banknotes!"

"Hidden under his weskit, sir, and sewn in," said the constable, with a grin. "It stuck out where his weskit was torn in the row."

The inspector glanced sharply at the juniors.

"You say this man got in at Latcham?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did he come from the barracks?"

"I think so," said Harry. "I noticed a sergeant at the station telling him to be quiet."

"By gad!"

The inspector was examining the wad of banknotes. He ran over a list he took from his desk. The juniors watched him in wonder. They could see that there was at least a hundred pounds there, and it was quite certain that Mr. Bleazer had not come by such a sum honestly. They could not suppose that his wages were paid in bundles of fivers.

The rascal's violent outbreak had been the cause of the detection of a theft, that was clear.

"By gad, what a stroke of luck!" smiled the inspector. "The numbers are the same!"

"The notes were missing, sir?" asked Harry.

The inspector nodded.

"Yes; I had to go over to Latcham a week ago about this case. A soldier was suspected of the theft. A stolen watch was found on him, but the banknotes were missing. It's pretty clear who was the thief now, and that scoundrel must have slipped the watch into an innocent man's pocket, to throw suspicion off himself."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You young gentlemen have done a good

day's work," smiled the inspector. "This means clearing an innocent man, as well as recovering stolen property."

"I'm jolly glad of it!" said Bob, rubbing his nose where Mr. Bleazer's fist had fallen with dire effect. "I don't mind this nose now."

And the juniors took their leave, greatly elated. They walked in very cheerful spirits from the police-station to Lexham Priory—only Billy Bunter grumbling all the time that they would be late for dinner.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

News for Jimmy Silver!

"Bai Jove! Heah they are!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were punting a football about when the Greyfriars fellows arrived. Both Rookwood and St. Jim's fellows looked rather curiously at Harry Wharton & Co., who bore very visible signs of the struggle with Mr. Bleazer.

"Railway accident?" grinned Lovell.

"Run your nose on a motor-car, Cherry?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"We got into a dust-up," explained Wharton, colouring. "A boozey rascal in the train cut up rusty, you know. Not our fault."

"Bai Jove, that was wathah wuff!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I twust you gave him a feahful thwashin'."

"Well, he got rather handled," said Harry, laughing.

"Come in and wash off the gore," smiled Jimmy Silver.

The Famous Five gladly followed him. Billy Bunter had not suffered in the combat, and he did not need washing. He proceeded to make himself agreeable to Cousin Ethel and Phyllis.

"Jolly glad to see you, you know!" said Bunter affably. "I made it a point to come over. I knew D'Arcy would be here, and I couldn't disappoint an old pal. How do you do, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his celebrated monocle upon Bunter, with a look that ought to have frozen the fat junior, but didn't.

"I am vewy well, thank you!" he replied frigidly.

Bunter gave him a playful poke in the ribs. "Oh, good gwacious!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He proceeded to beat a prompt retreat. He found William George Bunter quite intolerable at close quarters.

Harry Wharton and Co. were none the worse for their adventure, and in the afternoon they joined the skating-party on the river. Billy Bunter distinguished himself on the skates—spending a considerable amount of time hopping on one leg, and the rest on his back, till he gave it up in disgust.

He decided to talk to Ethel and Phyllis on the bank instead. To his surprise, Ethel and Phyllis somehow seemed to keep out of his way and the only fellow who appeared to be willing to endure the delights of Bunter's conversation was Jimmy Silver, who felt that it was up to him as host.

Bunter referred to his visit to Rookwood, and told Jimmy that he would look in again next term.

Jimmy could rely on that. At which Jimmy Silver suppressed a dismal groan.

"We've got rather a treat in store for you chaps," remarked Jimmy Silver, when the numerous party came in to supper. "There's going to be a ghost hunt—we left it till you came. D'Arcy saw a ghost the other night——"



Mr. Bleazer was dragged off Bunter and bumped down in the bottom of the carriage. "Yow-ow-ow!" gasped Bunter. "Keep him off!" "Lemme gerrup!" roared Mr. Bleazer. "You'll do very well there!" said Bob Cherry. (See page 254)

"Bai Jove! I did not see a ghost, Silvah, deah boy!"

"What did you bolt off to bed for, then, instead of keeping watch?" chuckled Blake.

"I had my weasons for not keepin' watch, Blake."

"Well, what reasons?" asked Lovell.

"I—I—I decided to go to bed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy is awfully secretive about what happened that night," grinned Tom Merry. "He was scared at something, and bunked——"

"I was not scared, Tom Mewwy."

"Then why did you bunk?"

"Wats!"

"I am sure D'Arcy was not scared," said Phyllis quickly.

Arthur Augustus gave Phyllis a grateful look.

"Thank you vevy much, deah gal," he said. "I wegard all those fellahs as uttah asses."

"But it seems that you went down to keep watch, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel, smiling, "and you went back to bed in-

stead. Were you sleepy?"

"N-n-not exactly."

"Behold, he blushes," chuckled Monty Lowther. "Never mind, Gussy—we're going to hunt the ghost and lay him."

"That's the idea," said Jimmy Silver. "The ghost is supposed to walk at midnight, and the library is his happy hunting-ground."

The old prior is supposed to have been killed in that room. If you fellows feel inclined to stay up, we're going to watch for him to-night."

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy doesn't want to!" grinned Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Gussy can go to bed," said Tom Merry.

"We're going to hunt the giddy ghost."

"What larks!" said Bob Cherry. "We're on, of course."

"The giddy rendezvous is midnight in the library," said Jimmy Silver. "Will you stay down, Phyllis, and you, Miss Cleveland?"

"Certainly!" said Cousin Ethel, smiling.

Phyllis did not speak.

Her face had changed colour. Most of the juniors noticed it, though only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy knew the reason.

"You're not scared, Phyllis?" exclaimed Jimmy, in wonder.

"No, no!"

"You'd rather not stay down?"

"Yes, if Ethel does," stammered Phyllis.

"Don't be scared," said Billy Bunter encouragingly. "I shall be there, you know."

Phyllis did not seem to hear.

"Jolly good idea for Bunter to be there," said Bob. "One glance at Bunter's chivvy ought to be enough to lay any self-respecting ghost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, you beast——"

Phyllis was very silent at supper. Cousin Ethel glanced at her two or three times, wondering what was the cause of her friend's sudden strange preoccupation. Arthur Augustus knew, and he was in a state of keen distress. After supper he contrived to draw Jimmy Silver aside, with a mysterious manner that made the Rookwood Fourth-Former stare.

"Pway excuse me, Silvab——" began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't mench," said Jimmy, in surprise. "Anything up?"

"Yaas, wathah! You are goin' to watch for the ghost to-night?"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Yes; we kept it till the whole party were here," he said. "It's fun, you know. But you needn't stay down, unless you like, of course."

"I twust you do not think I believe in ghosts, Silvab. But—but if you will allow me to offah you a word of advice——"

"Any charge?" asked Jimmy humorously.

"No, you duffah."

"Then go ahead."

"I should wecommend you not to stay up to-night in the libwawy."

Jimmy Silver stared.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"It would be bettah not, deah boy."

"But why?"

"I weally cannot explain that, but undah the cires——"

"What cires?"

"Oh, the—the cires, you know. Undah the cires it would be bettah not to watch for the ghost. I twust you will take my advice. You can wely on me as a fellah of tact and judgment, you know."

Jimmy Silver regarded the swell of St. Jim's in blank astonishment.

"Blessed if I see what you are driving at," he said. "Do you mean to say that you did see something in the library the other night?"

"Nevah mind that, deah boy!"

"Then you did?" exclaimed Jimmy, in utter wonder.

"Pway don't inquiah, deah boy. But I weally twust that you will take my advice and go to bed as usual to-night."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Sorry. But the fellows are looking forward to it. It's fun. You can go to bed, you know."

"Wats! I shall stay up if the othahs do."

Evidently there was nothing doing. The whole Christmas party was looking forward to watching for the ghost of the Priory, though they did not expect anything to come of it. Still, there was some fun in staying up late and hearing the midnight chimes, and telling ghost stories.

Owing to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's peculiar mysteriousness, the juniors concluded that he had seen, or fancied he had seen, something on the night of his vigil, and that added to the interest of the ghost hunt.

Jimmy Silver joined Phyllis and Ethel, whom Billy Bunter had cornered, as it were. Bunter was relating the combat with the

ruffian in the train from Latcham, and, according to Bunter's account, there was only one fellow in the Greyfriars party who had really handled the rascal in a plucky way—that one being William George Bunter.

"How lucky for you to go through such a struggle without getting even a mark," said Miss Phyllis, with a smile. "And poor Bob has a swollen nose."

Billy Bunter did not detect the sarcasm in that remark.

"Yes, wasn't it?" he said fatuously. "I handled him rather well, you know. But the other fellows helped me a bit—I will say that. As a matter of fact, I had my suspicions of that chap from the very start," said Bunter sagely. "He turned out to be a burglar, you know!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, excitedly.

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell unceremoniously. "Not too thick, old chap, you know."

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at the Rookwood junior.

"Oh, really, Lovell! I tell you they found hundreds of pounds in banknotes on him at the station."

"Not millions?" asked Blake, laughing.

"You can ask Wharton if you like," said Bunter warmly. "The inspector specially complimented me about it. He said I had helped to clear an innocent man—a soldier boy at Latcham—so there!"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, with interest.

"It's a fact," said Bob Cherry, chiming in. "Bunter hadn't anything to do with it."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's the fact that the man turned out to be a thief, and a lot of stolen banknotes were found on him," said Bob. "The inspector had the numbers, as he had been to Latcham Barracks about the thefts a week or so ago."

Jimmy Silver changed colour.

His heart was beating hard, as a wild, sudden hope leaped up in his breast. It seemed too good to be true, yet——

"The man came from Latcham Barracks?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I think he was employed there."

"A civilian employed in the canteen, I think," said Wharton. "Chap named Bleazer."

"How much was it in banknotes?"

"A hundred quid."

"One hundred pounds?" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"The inspector told us that a soldier had been suspected and accused," said Bob. "That awful rascal had slipped some of the loot into his coat-pocket—a watch, I think. He kept the banknotes."

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

To the astonishment of the juniors he dashed out of the room without another word.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry in amazement. "What's the matter with Jimmy?"

"Knows the soldier chap, perhaps," said Lovell, with a grin. "This is jolly good news for old Jimmy, I think."

Jimmy Silver dashed away to the library, where he found his father. Mr. Silver looked at the excited junior in astonishment as he burst in.

"Jimmy! What——"

"Oh, dad!" Jimmy panted breathlessly. "I've just heard news about uncle!"

"What?"

Jimmy Silver explained breathlessly. His father listened with deep attention, his brow very grave.

"Of course, it mayn't be Uncle John," said Jimmy. "But it sounds like it, doesn't it, dad? You know a stolen watch was found in his coat, and the banknotes were missing—a hundred pounds. It must be the same affair, dad."

Mr. Silver rose to his feet.

"Heaven grant that it is the case, Jimmy! Your uncle may be innocent, after all. I shall go to Latcham at once, and see the commanding officer."

"Oh, good! What luck, dad! All through the Greyfriars chaps coming here!"

Five minutes later a buzzing car was bearing Mr. Silver away through the winter night. And Jimmy rejoined his friends in great spirits.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

The Ghost of the Priory!

"TIME!" said Tom Merry.

And there was a laugh.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were gathered in the old library, round the log fire that blazed on the wide old hearth. Mr. Silver was still absent at Latcham, and Jimmy's mater had retired; but Phyllis and Ethel stayed down. Billy Bunter, on second thoughts, had gone to bed.

Midnight had chimed out now—the hour when, according to the legend, the ghost of the Priory was timed to walk—hence Tom Merry's remark.

The juniors had been telling ghost stories to pass the time, with the result that some of them were already in a somewhat creepy state. Phyllis was looking quite pale.

"Midnight!" said Jimmy Silver.

"'Tis now the witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn, according to Shakespeare," remarked Monty Lowther. "No wonder they yawn, at this time of night."

But Monty Lowther's little joke only elicited a feeble grin. Somehow, the juniors were in a subdued mood. Outside, the wind was wailing through the leafless trees, and strange sounds were heard in the recesses of the old

house. As they sat round the glowing logs, the juniors glanced towards the secret panel, and their glances were not wholly easy. Lovell had related how he had rapped on the wall in Jimmy Silver's room the day he came to the Priory, and an answering rap had come—or so he had fancied.

"Of course, it was the ghost," said Bob Cherry, with a faint grin. "Give him another trial now. If he's got any manners, he's bound to answer."

"Ha, ha!"

"By Jove, so I will!" exclaimed Lovell, jumping up.

He crossed to the secret panel and raised his hand, and then hesitated a moment. Phyllis started to her feet.

"Don't!" she exclaimed.

But Lovell's knuckles had already rapped sharply on the panel.

Rap! Rap!
The juniors listened tensely.

There was a sudden catching of breathing as

from behind the secret panel came sharply:
Rap! Rap!

Jimmy Silver & Co. sprang to their feet.

Lovell started back from the panel, his ruddy face growing pale. He looked round with startled eyes.

"You—you heard that!" he breathed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Somebody's there!" exclaimed Harry



Bunter proceeded to make himself agreeable to Cousin Ethel and Phyllis. "Jolly glad to see you, you know!" said Bunter affably. "How do you do, Gussy?" and Bunter gave a playful dig in the ribs to the Swell of St. Jim's. "Oh, good gwacious!" gasped Arthur Augustus. (See page 256)

Wharton. "It was quite distinct! Hark!"

Rap! Rap!

In the dead silence the rapping from the other side of the secret panel came clearly and distinctly.

Click!

It was a faint sound of a bolt being pushed back on the other side of the panel.

The juniors stood rooted to the floor.

"It—it's coming!" muttered Blake.

Click!

The panel opened.

"Good heavens! What——"

Phyllis sprang up with a cry.

"Don't! Don't——"

"Phyllis!" exclaimed Ethel.

Every face was white now.

The secret panel, as if of its own accord, had opened, and the black orifice in the wall was disclosed.

A figure stood there.

The light gleamed upon a pale, startled face.

But it was not a ghostly face.

It was a human face of flesh and blood, and as Jimmy Silver's eyes fell upon it, he gave a sudden cry.

"Uncle John!"

Phyllis gave a low moan.

"Uncle!" she murmured. "Oh, heavens! Now all is lost!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

Light at Last!

JIMMY SILVER rushed forward. He caught the startled, hesitating figure by the arm, and Private Silver, of the Hallamshire Regiment, was dragged into the room.

"Uncle!" said Jimmy Silver, like a fellow in a dream. "You—you here!"

"Private Silver!" stammered Lovell.

"The deserter!"

"Deserter!" murmured Arthur Augustus, understanding at last. "Bai Jove, it was your uncle all the time, Miss Phyllis."

John Silver pulled himself together. He was evidently astounded by the sight of the numerous party in the library, and he had been taken quite aback. His face was pale and worn.

"Yes, Jimmy," he said in a broken voice.

"I'm here. I—I'm sorry you've found me. I'll go! But—but don't blame Phyllis for

befriending me. She believed in my innocence if no one else did."

"Phyllis!" ejaculated Jimmy. "Phyllis knew!"

"She was my only friend," said the outcast miserably.

"But—but what on earth does it all mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry in utter amazement.

"This is my uncle," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "He enlisted in the Hallamshire Regiment. He was suspected of a theft at Latham barracks, and was placed under arrest—and deserted. I suppose he has been hiding here."

"Oh!"

"I was innocent," said John Silver proudly. "They found a stolen watch in my greatcoat. It must have been placed there by the thief, who kept the valuable part of the plunder. I would not stay to be condemned and turned out of the Army in disgrace. I fled. I had no refuge. I came here. I threw myself on my niece's mercy and she befriended me. Heaven bless her for it!"

"I knew he was innocent," said Phyllis bravely. "I hid him in the old tower. I was afraid to let Mr. Silver know. I hoped the truth would come out. I prayed that it would. Jimmy, you can't betray your uncle. You must keep the secret—all of you. D'Arcy knows already."

"D'Arcy does!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah."

"D'Arcy found me here when he was keeping watch," said Phyllis, with a faint smile. "I came down every night to see my uncle, and to take him food. I used to purchase it in the village."

"I remember. You had a lot in the trap the day we came home."

"Yes. And—and Uncle John found a moving panel in your room, Jimmy, and I used to go there to speak to him. I rapped on the wall, and he answered. That is how Lovell heard."

"By gad!" said Lovell.

"But after you came home, I couldn't go there, and I had to use the panel here in the library, and that could only be done at night. I was here the night Tom Merry and his friends

came—and D'Arcy found me. I had to hide behind the panel when you reached the library, and I came out when all was quiet, as I thought—but D'Arcy kept the secret."

"Father will have to know!" said Jimmy.

"Your father knows already, Jimmy," said the voice of Mr. Silver.

Jimmy spun round.

The library door had opened, and Mr. Silver stood on the threshold.

The outcast raised his head.

"You have found me, Brother James," he said bitterly. "Well, I shall not trouble you long—I am going!"

"You are going—with me," said Mr. Silver.

"I have heard all, and I do not blame you, Phyllis, my dear girl. Brother John, I did not believe you were innocent, and I beg your pardon."

"You—you believe now?" stammered John Silver.

"Your innocence is proved."

"What?"

"I have just returned from Latcham barracks," said Mr. Silver. "The real thief has been arrested, and the stolen notes found upon him and identified. He has since confessed all. Your honour is cleared, John, and your commanding officer is prepared to overlook your flight, under the circumstances, on the condition that you rejoin your regiment at once. I never dreamed that I should find you here, but"—Jimmy's father held out his hand to his brother—"thank heaven I have found you. The car is ready. Come with me to Latcham."

The outcast could not speak. He pressed his brother's hand in silence. The tears were running down Phyllis' face.

"Bai Jove! I wegard this as vevy lucky all wound," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hurrah!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Private Silver rejoined his regiment, his name cleared, his honour unstained. The mystery of the Priory was a mystery no longer. Needless to say, John Silver's good fortune caused much rejoicing among Jimmy Silver and his chums, and it would have been difficult to find within the three kingdoms a happier crowd than Jimmy Silver's Christmas party.

THE END

Sports and Sportsmen

No. 12.—PILLOW FIGHTING



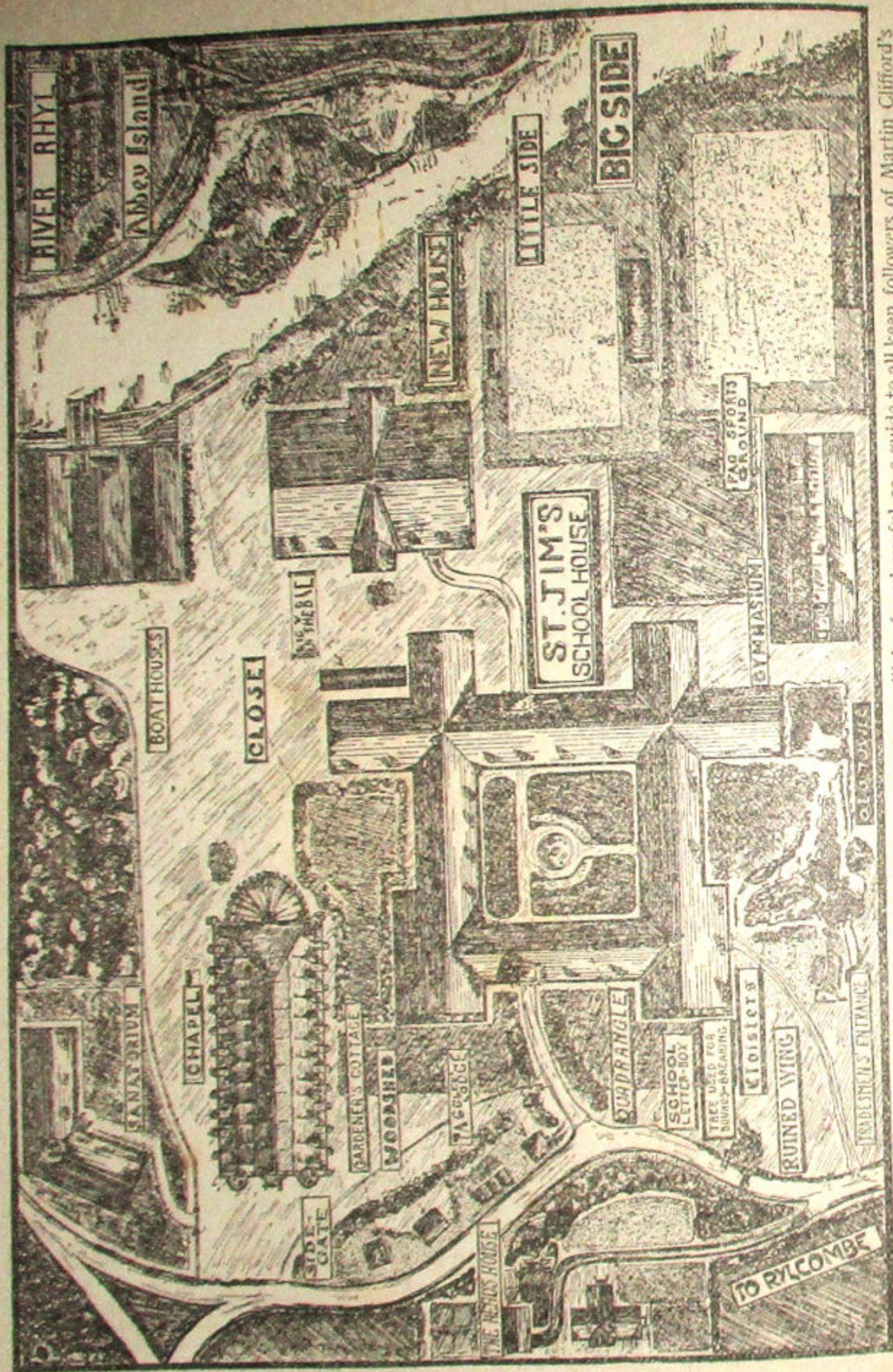
A fast and furious sport is this,
In which all juniors revel;
With clarion shouts of warlike bliss
Their pillows they will level
Against the foes who, in the night,
Invade their sleeping quarters.
A grim, exciting pillow fight
Will always gain supporters.

Removites launch a midnight war
On Temple and on Coker;
In the delightful days of yore
They'd use a club, or poker.
But now, new methods are revealed,
They seize the bulging pillow,
And wield it just as they would wield
In summer time, the willow.

The fight continues fast and fierce,
And no one will surrender;
Attackers vainly try to pierce
The ranks of the defender.
Then suddenly the shouts and cheers
Diminish into silence;
A master on the scene appears,
And cries, "What means this violence?"

The pillow fight, to our regret,
Thus ends with "no decision."
And every warrior has to sweat
Upon an imposition.
But every fellow will agree
The game was worth the candle.
Here's to the next delightful spree
When pillows we will handle.

A Bird's-eye View of St. Jim's



This plan of the famous old school and its immediate surroundings will be found useful as a guide to all keen followers of Martin Clifford's wonderful stories of Tom Merry & Co. and the other schoolboy heroes who have made St. Jim's probably the best-known school in the world.