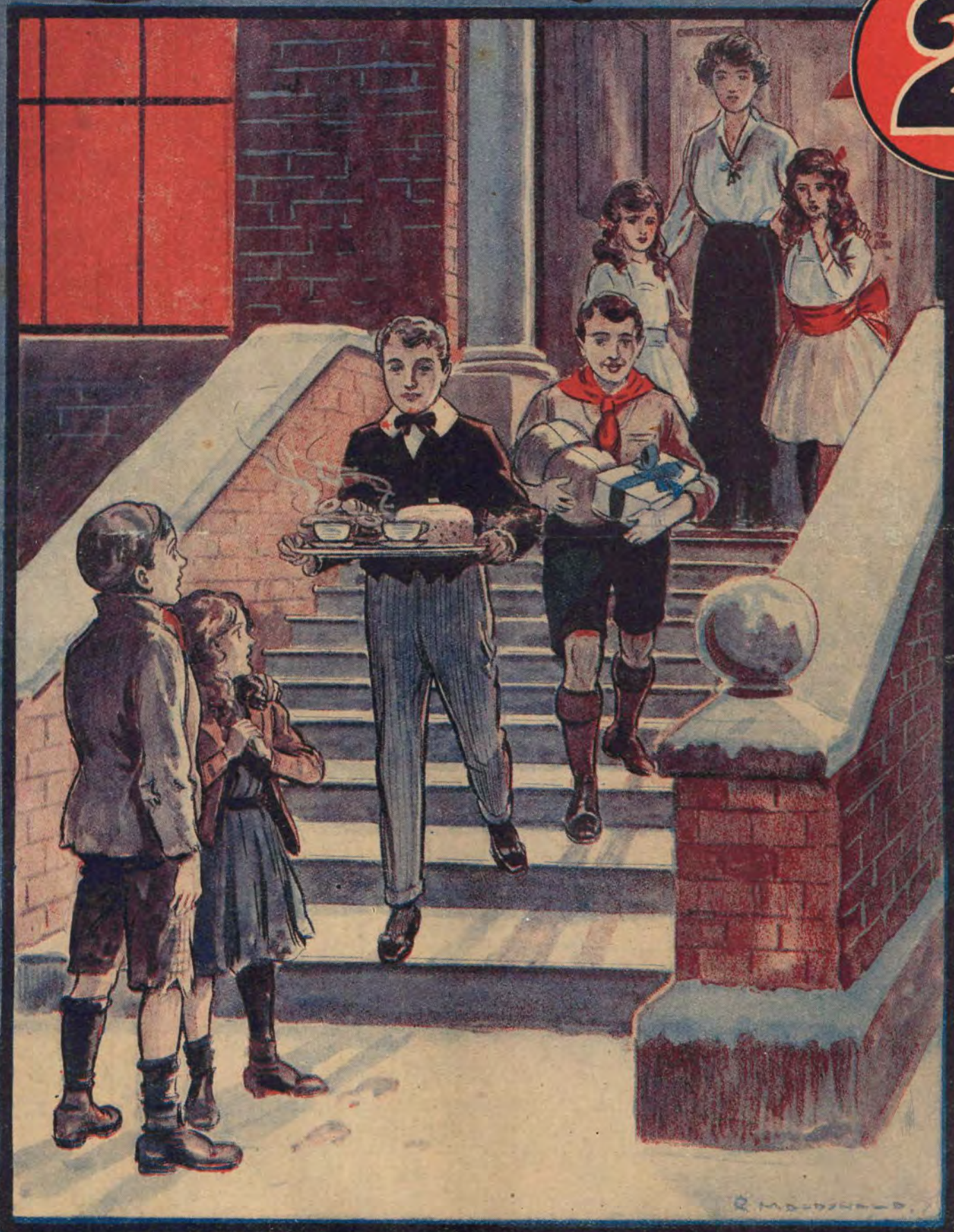


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THE BOYS' FRIEND

2^D



Christmas Bumper Number

THE ROOKWOOD RAIDERS!

A Magnificent Double-Length School Tale, dealing with the Exciting Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co.
Specially Written for This Number.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



TOMMY DODD & CO. HOP IT BACK TO ROOKWOOD SCHOOL! WHO HAVE THEY MET?

The 1st Chapter.

Hopping It!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver was chatting with his chums—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—under the old beeches in the quad at Rookwood. He looked round towards the school gates in surprise as he heard that sudden outburst of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A crowd was gathering in the old gateway—fellows were running from all quarters to join it. Loud shouts of laughter rang across the quad.

"Something going on, it seems," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four hurried down to the gates. Something evidently was going on in the road outside—something that tickled the Rookwood fellows immensely, to judge by the roars of laughter.

"What's the row?" asked Lovell, as they came up breathless.

"Ha, ha!" roared Oswald of the Fourth. "Look at the duffers! Look at them! Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. elbowed their way through the thickening crowd in the gateway. Then they had a view of the road, and they joined in the yell of merriment.

They could not help it. Three juniors were coming up the road. They were Rookwood juniors, and they belonged to the Modern side at the school, as the blue badge on their caps testified. But their features were quite recognisable, having been thickly daubed with whitewash. Their hands were tied

down to their sides, and their right legs were bent, and tied up, so that they could only progress by hopping on their left legs. The sight of the three whitewashed juniors hopping on their left legs was too much for the Classical Four. They shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are they?" gasped Lovell. "Moderns, of course! Classical chaps wouldn't let themselves be japed like that."

"Who are you?" roared Raby.

"Silly asses!" came a panting voice from one of the whitewashed trio. "Get out of the way!"

"Tommy Dodd!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The three Tommies!" chuckled Lovell. "What a giddy sight! Anybody got a camera?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you bring a camera near me, and I'll bust it over your silly head!" bellowed Tommy Dodd.

"Hook it, Newcome, and get your camera!"

Newcome bolted for the School House.

The three whitewashed juniors hopped painfully up to the gate. They were panting for breath. Such a mode of progress was decidedly laborious. Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the heroes of the Modern side at Rookwood, had never been seen in such a parlous strait before. Evidently they had been in the hands of the enemy, and had had the worst of it. They leaned against the gate, and panted.

"You thumping chumps!" gasped

Tommy Dodd. "There's nothing to cackle at. This ain't funny!"

"It looks funny!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat! Who tied you up like this?"

"The Bagshot beasts—"

"And you let 'em?" howled Lovell.

"How could we help it, when there were a dozen of them?" roared Tommy Dodd, in great exasperation. "There were Pankley and Poole and a dozen more. They collared us, and did this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up with that camera, Newcome!" yelled Lovell. "We'll hang a picture of them in our common-room."

"You—you Classical rotter!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Let us loose, you beasts! We can't hop into the place like this. There'll be a row if old Manders spots us!"

"Oh, get on as you are!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "You look simply ripping—a little pale, perhaps! Hop it!"

"Ha, ha! Hop it!" yelled the Classical juniors.

But several of the Modern fellows rushed to the aid of Tommy Dodd & Co. They were laughing, too; they couldn't help it. But they lent a willing hand. Jimmy Silver & Co. were almost in hysterics. There was always warfare between the Rookwood juniors and the fellows of Bagshot School, and Rookwood prided itself upon more than keeping its end up. But Bagshot had scored this time—there was no doubt about that.

"The awful duffers!" chuckled

Lovell. "To let Bagshot bounders handle them like that—"

"I tell you they were three or four to one!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, rats! Why couldn't you lick 'em?" Classical chaps would have

licked 'em!" said Lovell.

"You silly ass—"

"Here comes Newcome! Got the camera?"

"Buck up, Towle!" howled Tommy Dodd, to the Modern junior who was cutting his bonds. "Some of you bump that idiot Newcome, and smash his camera!"

The Modern juniors loyally rushed to screen the unfortunate Tommies from the amateur photographer. The Classics rushed to clear them out of the way. That photograph would have been highly prized on the Classical side of Rookwood.

There was a scuffle in the gateway, and in the midst of it the three Tommies were cut loose at last. They bolted for the Modern side.

"Snap 'em, Newcome!" shouted Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snap!

Newcome chanced it, and he snapped the heels of the trio as they vanished through the bushes. He shook his head regretfully.

"No go!" he said. "There's a jolly good picture wasted, all through these Modern asses!"

The Fistical Four sauntered away, chuckling. They were as much "up against" Bagshot as the Moderns were, but the downfall of the great Tommy Dodd made them chuckle. But Jimmy Silver soon ceased to chuckle, and looked very serious.

"It won't do," he said. "It won't do at all, my infants! Of course, those Modern bounders can't keep their end up; but we can't let Bagshot crow over Rookwood. It's up to us!"

"What's the game?" asked Lovell.

"We're going to down the Bagshot bounders, and then perhaps those Modern worms will own up that we're top side of Rookwood."

"Bet you they won't!"

"Well, whether they do or not, it will be a fact, all the same. Pankley & Co. have got to die the giddy death!" said Jimmy Silver seriously. "Let's hold a pow-wow!"

And the Fistical Four held a pow-wow, debating the plan of campaign against their ancient rivals.

The 2nd Chapter.

The Great Wheeze.

"Letter for you, Jimmy!"

Dick Oswald called to Jimmy Silver as the Fistical Four came into the School House. The Classical chums had held the pow-wow. They had held it in the tuckshop, and stimulated their mental efforts with ginger-beer the while. But the outcome had not been satisfactory.

They were quite agreed that Bagshot had to be downed. About that there could be only one opinion. The Moderns couldn't tackle Pankley & Co., but the Classics could, and would. Thus declared Jimmy Silver and his chums cordially agreed. But further than that they did not seem able to proceed. Exactly how Bagshot was to be downed remained a problem.

Jimmy Silver took the letter



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

Oswald tossed to him carelessly enough. He wasn't much interested in letters from anywhere at that moment. But his expression changed as he noted the postmark.

"This is from Bagshot!" he exclaimed.

"Chuck it into the fire. It's only some cheek from those bounders!"

"Most likely. But we'll see what particular kind of cheek it is."

Jimmy slit open the letter.

"Cheeky ass!" he exclaimed, as he read it.

"What did I tell you?" said Lovell.

"Listen to this," said Jimmy wrathfully. And he read out:

"Dear Silver,—Having been amused very often by watching Rookwood footer, I feel that one good turn deserves another. If you Rookwood kids would like to see a good game, and pick up some tips how footer should be played, you can't do better than come over to Latcham to-morrow afternoon. We're playing Latcham Ramblers. I dare say you're aware that beginners can learn a lot by watching really good play. Our brake leaves here at two, and we'll pick you up on the Latcham road if you like.—Always yours,
"CECIL PANKLEY."

The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"Swank!" growled Raby.

"We can beat 'em at footer!" snorted Newcome.

"Watch 'em, and pick up tips!" howled Lovell. "The cheeky ass! Of course, he knows we won't do anything of the kind."

"Fancy getting over to Latcham to watch those duffers play!" exclaimed Oswald. "It's only swank, of course. Just one of Pankley's digs."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"We've only got footer practice on for to-morrow," he remarked. "We can get out in the afternoon."

"Why, you fathead," almost shouted Lovell, "are you thinking of going to Latcham to see those idiots play? If you do, you can jolly well go alone!"

"Pankley don't expect us to go," said Raby. "It's only one of his fat-headed jokes. I'm not going."

"Listen to your Uncle Jimmy!"

"Rats!" said Lovell. "I tell you we're not going, and if you go, Jimmy Silver, we'll jolly well scrag you!"

"Will you dry up?" roared Jimmy Silver, exasperated. "I tell you we're going out to-morrow afternoon."

"We're not."

"We're going to meet their brake on the Latcham road."

"Rot!"

"And mop them up!"

"Oh!"

"Now do you understand?" said Jimmy Silver, with great severity.

"Pankley's written this as a dig at us. Well, he's put the wheeze into my head with his blessed swank. We're going to ambush that brake on the Latcham road!"

"Good!"

"We'll take about twenty chaps, so that they won't have an earthly."

"Hurrah!"

"We'll mop them up, tie them to the seats in the brake, paint their faces green and yellow, and drive 'em on to Latcham ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if the Latcham chaps don't laugh 'em to death—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical juniors.

Lovell thumped Jimmy Silver ecstatically on the back. It was a "wheeze" after his own heart.

Pankley of Bagshot had fairly played into their hands by sending that "swanky" letter to Jimmy Silver. The chopper was to come

down upon the self-satisfied bounders of Bagshot at last.

Jimmy Silver & Co. discussed their plans that evening in the end study with great hilarity. They made all their preparations. They laid in a supply of cord for tying up the Bagshot "Bounders"; they laid in a supply of green and yellow paint for the faces of Pankley & Co.; they decided upon the exact spot where the ambush should be laid.

They took their comrades of the Classical Fourth into their confidence, and formed the party that was to waylay Bagshot on the morrow. Flynn and Hooker and Jones minor and the rest entered into the scheme with great heartiness. Even Townsend and Topham, the slackers of the Fourth, joined in. A strong force was required to deal with Pankley & Co., and Jimmy Silver meant the odds to be on the Rookwood side.

The triumph would be a double one—over Bagshot and over the Rookwood Moderns, who would have to hide their diminished heads when they saw how easily Jimmy Silver & Co. dealt with the enemy.

The next morning the Classical Fourth were full of suppressed excitement on the subject. Even in the Form-room, Mr. Bootles noticed an unusual restiveness in his class. Glad were the Fourth-Formers when lessons were over, and they were free for the remainder of the day.

After dinner, Jimmy Silver & Co. came out, with nearly all the Classical members of the Fourth Form, and some of the Third and the Shell.

The party numbered twenty in all. As they marched down to the gates they encountered the three Tommies, who were on their way to the footer-ground.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "You Classical bounders slacking, as usual? What about footer practice?"

"Something else on, my infant," said Jimmy Silver. "You run away and play footer, while we give Bagshot socks!"

"Bagshot will eat you!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully.

"Well, they ate you!" grinned Lovell. "It's up to us to wipe out the defeat. You Modern bounders can't do it!"

"You Classical ass—"

"You Modern duffer—"

"Come on!" rapped out Jimmy Silver. "No time to rag Modern duffers now. Follow your uncle!"

The Classical army marched off, and Tommy Dodd & Co. glared after them.

"Sure they'll make a muck of it!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Bound to!" said Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd growled.

"Lot of good those duffers tackling Bagshot!" he said. "They'll come home licked, you can bet your hat!"

The three Tommies went down to the footer. Jimmy Silver & Co. marched out of the gates of Rookwood, on the war-path!

The Third Chapter, Caught!

"Halt!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Halt it is!" said Lovell.

"This is the place."

The Rookwood crowd halted on the Latcham road. It was a country lane, between high banks clothed with grass and shaded by trees. The road made a deep dip, and even in the early afternoon it was a shadowy spot. On the rise following the dip in the road, the Rookwooders stationed themselves.

The rise was a steep one, and as Jimmy Silver sagely foresaw, the Bagshot brake would have to slow down there to a walking pace. Escape would be impossible when the Rookwooders attacked. The Bag-

shot Bounders would have to "scrap," and the Rookwooders had no doubt of the result. Even without the odds on their side, they would have had no doubt on that point.

Jimmy Silver looked at his watch. "Quarter-past two!" he announced.

"They'll be along here in about a quarter of an hour. Get into cover. You take the other side of the road, Lovell, with ten chaps. We'll stay on this side. When I whistle, go for the bounders!"

"Right-ho!"

"You collar the horse, Raby, to make sure, though they won't have much chance of bolting on this rise!"

"You bet!"

In the thick hedges on either side of the road the Rookwooders took cover, and watched eagerly for the Bagshot brake.

There was a rumble of wheels in the distance at last.

Jimmy Silver peered out eagerly from behind the trunk of a big tree.

Only a couple of cyclists had passed so far. The road was a solitary one. But the rumble of wheels told of a large vehicle. Round a bend in the lane a big brake came in sight. It was crowded with Bagshot fellows.

Jimmy Silver recognised Pankley and Putter and Poole, of the Fourth Form at Bagshot. They were chatting cheerily in the front of the brake. There were ten other fellows, making thirteen in all. The brake came rumbling down into the dip in the road at a good speed, and slowed down as it took the rise on the opposite side of the dip. It was going very slowly as it approached the Rookwood ambush.

Jimmy Silver chuckled softly.

"Fairly walking into the trap!" he murmured.

"Looks like a win for us—what?" grinned Oswald.

"What-ho!"

"Let's go for 'em!" muttered Flynn.

"Wait till they're right up to us," said Jimmy Silver, watching from behind the tree. "No hurry; we've got 'em safe enough. What the dickens is Pankley doing with that bugle?"

"We'll bugle him!"

Pankley of Bagshot had a bugle on his knee, apparently for the purpose of cheering the journey with sweet music. But he was not blowing it; he was chatting with Putter and Poole, and seemed to have no eyes for the road or a possible enemy. As a rule, Pankley was as hard to catch napping as a weasel, but on this occasion he seemed to be falling blindly into the trap.

Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden, sharp whistle.

As it rang out over the road, the Rookwooders rushed out from their cover, on both sides of the brake. Raby ran to the head of the leading horse, and held on. The brake came to a sudden halt, surrounded by Rookwooders.

"My hat!" said Pankley.

"Caught!" roared Lovell.

"Fairly nailed!" chirruped Jimmy Silver. "Now, then, jump out of that brake, you duffers!"

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

Pankley put the bugle to his lips, and blew a cheery blast. It rang sharply through the frosty air.

"Chuck that!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "What are you up to?"

"Only celebrating the occasion," said Pankley. "It's such a pleasure to see your innocent faces!"

"Are you coming down?"

"No fear!"

"Then we'll jolly soon have you out!"

"Go for 'em!" roared Lovell.

With a rush on both sides and in the rear, the Rookwooders assailed the brake. The driver sat in his seat, blinking. He could not drive on, and he did not feel inclined to share in the scrap. He shrugged his shoulders, and sat tight.

But the occupants of the brake were very busy.

Pankley & Co. did not surrender.

They manned the brake against the attack, and put their "beef" into the tussle.

The Rookwooders, clambering over the wheels and the sides, met with a determined resistance.

Jimmy Silver rolled back into the road with a yell; but he was up again in a twinkling, and springing on. This time he landed in the brake. He grasped Pankley, and

they rolled in the bottom of the brake together.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Lovell.

"Back up, Rookwood!"

"Go for 'em!"

Lovell was over the back of the brake now, hitting out right and left among the Bagshot footballers. Newcome was over the side, with Oswald after him. Flynn was the next in, and he dragged down two of the Bagshot juniors. Then the rest of the assailants came pouring in, and the brake fairly swarmed.

The Rookwooders were nearly two to one, and the tussle was not in doubt from the start, determined as the resistance was.

In five minutes the Bagshot fellows were all down, and the victorious Rookwooders were sitting on them, panting.

"Hurrah!" roared Lovell. "Rookwood wins!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Sit on the beasts!"

"Pin 'em down!"

"Grooh!" said Pankley, gasping under the weight of Newcome and Oswald. "Keep your silly knee out of my ribs, you duffer! Gerroff my neck, you rotter! Yoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got the rotters!" chirruped Jimmy Silver. "You ain't dealing with Moderns this time, Panky! We've done you brown! Why, what—hallo! Look out! Great Christopher Columbus!"

It was a yell of dismay from the Rookwood junior captain.

There was a whirr in the road—a whirr and rattle of many bicycles. Down the road came a swarm of cyclists, on the track of the brake—Bagshot fellows, and apparently in myriads.

Jimmy Silver stared at them dumbfounded.

There were thirty fellows, at least, riding like the wind, and they swept up from the dip in the road in a yelling swarm, and jumped off their machines round the brake.

And there was a yell from Pankley:

"Rescue! Pile in, Bagshot!"

The 4th Chapter. Turning the Tables.

"Great Scott!"

"Back up!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Dismay had fallen upon the Rookwood raiders.

How on earth had thirty Bagshot cyclists arrived on the scene at that critical moment? It was the last thing the raiders had expected. But there they were, evidently ready for business.

The machines spun anywhere, as the rescuers rushed on the brake from all sides.

Pankley & Co. were down, and sat upon. But the Rookwooders had to face the new enemy, and then Cecil Pankley and the rest "bucked up" with renewed vim. Jimmy Silver & Co. were attacked front and rear.

The odds were so tremendous that the Rookwooders had not the ghost of a chance from the beginning.

But they fought hard.

They realised that somehow the astute Pankley had planned this for them, and that they, and not the Bagshot bounders, were caught in a trap. Jimmy Silver could have punched himself hard for being so caught. But he had plenty to do to punch the Bagshot juniors.

The Bagshot brigade fairly swarmed over them.

"Back up!" gasped Lovell, as he went down in the brake, with two or three of the foe sprawling over him.

"Back up!" echoed Jimmy Silver, and he went down, too.

Right to the last the Rookwooders resisted. Heavy as were the odds, and hopeless the struggle, they fought to a finish, and of all the party only Townsend and Topham jumped out of the brake, and fled. And they did not flee far. Three or four Bagshot fellows rushed after them, and dragged them back.

In less than ten minutes it was all over.

The tables had been turned with a vengeance.

The Rookwood party were all on their backs, in the brake or in the road, with Bagshot juniors sitting on them.

The triumphant enemy were chortling with glee.

"Take it calmly, Silver, old chap," advised Pankley, as Jimmy struggled wildly under Putter and Poole.

"Keep smiling, you know!"

"Ow! You rotter!" gasped Jimmy.

"It was so jolly good of you to walk into a trap like this!" grinned Pankley. "That is what I like about you Rookwood chaps; you're so jolly innocent and unsuspecting! Such beautiful, childlike innocence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bagshot, with one voice.

"It's perfectly exhilarating to see it," said Pankley sweetly. "It's refreshing—decidedly refreshing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, we anticipated this!" yawned Pankley. "That's why I wrote to you yesterday, Silver, dear boy. I thought it would put this idea into your head—I knew you wouldn't miss such a chance. I would have bet ten to one in jam-tarts that we should meet a Rookwood crowd on the road."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver simply writhed.

"Oh, you deep rotter!" he gasped. Pankley chuckled.

"It wasn't very deep," he said. "One doesn't have to be very deep to deal with Rookwood innocents. Such sweet, confiding natures—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Such childlike trustfulness—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ring off, you burbling ass!"

"It revives one's faith in human nature, to see it," said Pankley calmly. "We knew we could depend on your delightfully simple nature, Silver, old scout. So we arranged for the bicycle brigade to follow us about a quarter of a mile behind, and to come on like steam if I blew the bugle. You didn't guess why I was bugling, dear boy? You wouldn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver would have been glad to sink through the bottom of the brake and into the earth. He was quite overwhelmed. He understood now how the astute Pankley had taken him in.

The letter had been written for the especial purpose of putting it into his head to ambush the Bagshot brake.

And a crowd of Bagshot fellows, who had doubtless intended to cycle over to Latcham any way to see the match, had biked a quarter of a mile behind the brake, instead of accompanying it, for the especial purpose of letting Rookwood make the attack, if they were indeed on the road.

Then Pankley's bugle had brought them swarming up.

It was very deep of Pankley; but Jimmy Silver could have kicked himself for not guessing the ulterior of that letter. But it was rather too late to think about that now. The Rookwooders were in the hands of the Philistines.

Jimmy Silver relapsed into grim silence. He had to go through it now.

Pankley took a coil of rope from under a seat in the brake. Jimmy gritted his teeth as he saw that the Bagshot bounders were quite prepared. They had anticipated the attack—and the victory.

It was useless for the Rookwooders to resist. Two or three Bagshot fellows had hold of each of them.

Wriggling and gasping, the Rookwooders were planted in the road, in a long file, one behind the other.

Pankley did not need to give directions to his followers. The plan was evidently cut, and dried already.

The Rookwooders' hands were tied to their sides, and then the rope was run along the file, knotted on each junior in turn. Jimmy Silver was placed at the head of that peculiar column. Lovell was behind him, then Raby, then Newcome, then Oswald, and so on till the whole party was secured.

The Rookwood party looked like a very queer kind of centipede, when their triumphant foes had finished. Their looks were almost homicidal—their remarks almost Hunnish. But there was no help for it.

Jimmy Silver was thankful that the green and yellow paint had not come to light. Had Pankley suspected that, he would certainly have used it to decorate the faces of the Rookwood prisoners. Fortunately, he did not.

"There!" said Pankley, when the



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from
the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

work was finished. "I think that's all right. Feel all right, Silver?" "Br-r-r-r!" "You comfy, Lovell?" "Go and eat coke, you rotter!" "Anything more I can do for you, Raby?"

Snort! "They seem satisfied," said Pankley. "Get into the brake, you chaps! We've got to get to Latcham by three."

Jimmy Silver writhed with rage. Pankley had even allowed time for this on the journey. They would not have needed to start at two o'clock—excepting to allow time for this. It was the last straw.

"Oh, you spoofing rotter!" gasped Jimmy. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"My dear kid, you couldn't make a white rabbit sit up," said Pankley. "Now, good-bye! Wriggle off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're not going to leave us like this!" gasped Lovell.

"Why not? You can wriggle home to Rookwood, I suppose. It's only about a mile. Now wriggle away, you worms!"

"We won't—we—" "Anybody got a squirt?" said Pankley. "There's some water in the ditch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver did not wait for Poole to fill his squirt. He started. The rest of the file followed. Stumbling and kicking one another's heels, the Rookwood juniors limped up the road. Pankley & Co. and the brake rolled away. The cyclists, gurgling with merriment, followed it. The Bagshot Bounders departed in great glee for their football match at Latcham. Jimmy Silver & Co. wriggled away painfully in the direction of Rookwood.

The 5th Chapter. A Painful Predicament.

"Oh, dear!"

"Jimmy Silver, you ass—"

"Jimmy, you fathead!"

"Oh, you burbling duffer!"

"You frabjous ass!"

Every fellow in the unhappy file had some remark to make to Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was feeling very bad himself. His followers were furious. They had been caught in a trap, and they put it all down to their leader. Jimmy was the leader, and he had led them into this.

Naturally they were wrathful. From behind Jimmy, as he led the way, came remarks that ought to have made his hair curl.

Jimmy halted at last. The Bagshot brake was out of sight, rolling merrily away to Latcham. The long column wriggled to a stumbling halt.

"We can't go back to Rookwood like this," gasped Jimmy, "we shall be laughed to death. The Modern asses will cackle themselves blind."

"Oh, you fathead!" gasped Hooker.

"We won't dare to show our faces in the quad after this, by gad!"

mumbled Townsend.

"It's no good ragging me," growled Jimmy, "I couldn't help it. How was I to know—"

"Sure, you're leader, ain't you?"

howled Flynn. "Tain't a leader's business to lead us into this, is it intirely?"

"We want a new captain," howled Topham. "Old Smythe wouldn't have landed us in a pickle like this."

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Jimmy, crossly. "Can't be helped. Keep smiling!"

"Why, you ass—"

"Why, you jabberwock—"

"We can't go home like this. We've got to get loose somehow. The beasts have tied us pretty tight—"

"I can't get loose," groaned Lovell.

"Oh, the rotten Huns! I must say you are a born idiot, Jimmy."

"And a howling ass," said Raby. "And a burbling cuckoo," said Newcome heartily.

"Cheese it!" roared Jimmy Silver, exasperated. "What's the good of ragging now? We've got to get out of this. Somebody will pass along the road soon, and we'll get them to untie us."

"Pretty idiots we shall look!"

groaned Oswald.

"Better than wriggling home to Rookwood like a centipede."

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you fathead!"

The whole party seemed unanimously agreed that it was all Jimmy

ran down his face, while the Classical juniors glared at him as if they would eat him. The situation did not strike them as in the smallest degree comic. But the Modern junior evidently saw something funny in it.

"When you've finished, perhaps you'll come and let us loose, Towle," said Lovell, in tones of concentrated fury.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Towle.

"You cackling fathead—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've been tackling Bagshot," shrieked Towle, "and this is what it's come to! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, you Classical mugs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you let us loose?" bellowed Lovell.

"No jolly fear!" gasped Towle. "This is too good a joke to be spoiled. I'm jolly well going to fetch the chaps to see you."

"Towle—"

"I say, Towle, be a good chap—"

"Towle—Towle, old fellow—"

Towle was deaf to entreaties. He jumped on his machine, and tore away towards Rookwood, gasping with laughter. He vanished in a moment or two round the bend in the lane. Jimmy Silver looked quite sickly.

"Now, we'll have a crowd of

"Law!" he gasped.

"We—we're tied up!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Come and cut us

lose, and I'll stand you half-a-crown."

"Oh laws!"

The countryman came out into the road, his eyes open like saucers with astonishment.

"Cut us loose!" snorted Lovell.

"I beant got no knife."

"There's one in my jacket pocket," said Jimmy Silver. "For goodness sake buck up and get it out!"

"You be in a fix, zur."

"Yes, yes. Buck up!"

"Wot moight be the reason of this yere, zur?"

"It's a lark—a lark of some beasts. Get a move on!"

"Oh, law!"

The juniors were trembling with impatience. But the movements of the countryman were very leisurely. He was not in the habit of hurrying, and apparently he saw no reason for changing his habits now. However, he opened Jimmy Silver's knife at last, and sawed through the cord.

As soon as he was free, Jimmy snatched the knife and cut rapidly through the rest of the bonds. The Rookwooders gasped with relief as they stood among fragments of rope. Towle and his friends were not in

Moderns followed them, chuckling. Never had the Fistical Four been so glad to get out of sight into their own study.

The 6th Chapter.

In the Enemy's Camp.

Jimmy Silver snorted.

It was not a sniff; it was a snort—an emphatic snort, like unto that of an angry war-horse.

Jimmy was fed-up.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome had been telling him what they thought of him and of his generalship. That was not the worst. It was not so bad to be slanged by his own pals. But the Modern juniors were persistently shrieking over the ludicrous ending of the raid on Bagshot. Even after Jimmy Silver justly considered that the fun was worn threadbare, the Moderns persisted in shrieking with delight over it.

Then the Classics, too, howled over it. All the fellows who had joined the raiding-party were furious. But all the rest howled with merriment over the story. Adolphus Smythe of the Shell, and his nutty pals simply gloated over it. Even Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, who seldom condescended to notice junior rags, was seen to laugh when Smith of the Fifth told him the story, which he had heard from Smythe of the Shell.

As Lovell remarked, the end study had become the centre of merriment for the whole school, and the prestige of the Fistical Four was at its lowest ebb.

Jimmy Silver stood it with patience for some time. At last he gave that emphatic snort, a warning that his patience was running out.

"Nuff said!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you must admit you are an ass," said Lovell.

"And a howling duffer," said Raby.

"And a silly goat," said Newcome.

"That'll do," said Jimmy tersely.

"Keep your breath, if you've got any left, for scrapping with the Bagshot bounders. We're not finished with them yet."

Lovell sniffed.

"Don't say you've got a new wheeze," he implored. "Anything but that."

"I have."

"Go and bury it!" said Raby beseechingly. "Go and bury it deep in some quiet corner."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Give us a rest," said Newcome. "I've had enough of performing like a centipede in a circus."

Jimmy Silver rose, and crossed to the door, with a determined expression on his face.

"Where are you going, fathead?" asked Lovell.

"To Bagshot."

"Bagshot!" howled the three together.

"Yes."

"Wha-a-at for?"

"Never mind what for, as you're not backing me up," said Jimmy Silver coldly. "You stay here and grouse."

"You're jolly well not going to Bagshot," said Lovell warmly.

"They'll scalp you."

"Well, that won't worry you, will it?" said Jimmy Silver, with crushing irony. "You can cackle over it, if they do."

"Look here, Jimmy, don't be an ass."

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver walked out of the study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome hurried after him at once. Critical as they were of their unfortunate leader, they did not mean to let him tackle the enemy without backing him up.

"Jimmy, old man!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver walked on merrily.

"I say, Jimmy!" murmured Newcome.

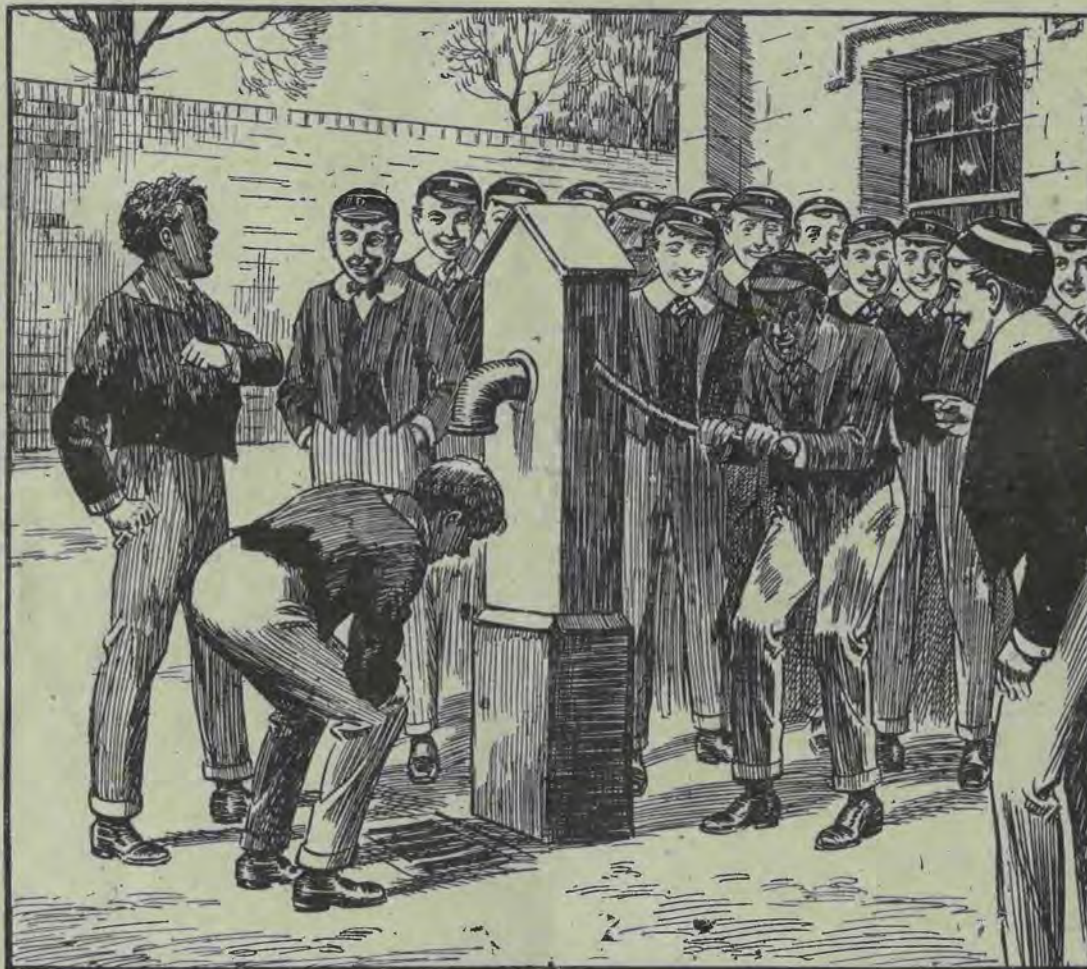
Jimmy strode out of the School House. His anxious chums followed him to the bike-shed. Jimmy wheeled out his machine. Lovell grabbed him by the shoulder as he was wheeling it away.

"Look here, you chump!" roared Lovell. "Tell us what the little game is, and we'll back you up, if there's anything in it."

"Now you're talking," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm going to Bagshot."

"But they'll slaughter you."

"They're at Latcham, fathead."



"Black, but comely," yelled Tommy Dodd, as he surveyed the sooty Classics. "Look at their complexions!" "Clear off, you silly asses!" bellowed Lovell. "We—we've had rather bad luck, but there's nothing to cackle at!"

Silver's fault. That was one of the pleasures of captaincy.

"Here comes a giddy cyclist," said Lovell hopefully. "Call to him—any chap would help us out of this."

"Let's hope it isn't a Rookwood chap," said Jimmy. "Oh, what rotten luck—it's Towle!"

"A rotten Modern! Oh dear!"

Towle of the Fourth was pedalling cheerily along the road from Rookwood. Towle nearly fell off his machine as he caught sight of the human centipede. His bike wobbled, and he jumped down just in time—gasping.

"What the merry thunder—"

gasped Towle.

"Towle, old chap—"

"Come and help us! We—we're tied up."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Towle.

"What are you cackling at, you Modern idiot?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver ferociously. "Come and get us loose, you owl!"

Towle held on to his machine and roared. He almost doubled up over the bicycle. He laughed till the tears

Modern rotters coming to look at us," groaned Lovell. "Oh dear! Jimmy Silver, if ever you propose a jape on Bagshot again—"

"Oh, dry up!" Jimmy Silver scanned the road wildly in search of help. He would have given a term's pocket-money to be released from the ridiculous position, before Towle could return with a crowd of mocking Moderns.

"There's a chap in the fields yonder," he said. "Yell to him."

The Classics peered through a gap in the hedge. On the other side of the field a labourer was digging. He was at a good distance, but the juniors united their voices in a desperate yell.

"Hi!"

They yelled "Hi!" a dozen times with the full strength of their lungs, before the labourer glanced round.

"Hi! Hi! Help!"

The man laid down his fork at last, and came in a leisurely way across the field. He blinked through the hedge, and gave a jump at the sight of the human centipede.

sight yet. It was a relief they were very thankful for.

"Thanks!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Here's your half-crown. Come on, you chaps!"

In a disconsolate crowd, the juniors walked away to Rookwood. Halfway to the school they came upon a crowd of cyclists—all Moderns. Tommy Dodd & Co. had turned out in great force, to behold the wondrous sight described by Towle.

"Here they are!" shouted Towle.

"Hullo! They've got loose!"

"Had a good time?" asked Tommy Dodd blandly. "Lemme see! You went out to lick the Bagshot bounders, didn't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did you get loose for?" demanded Cook indignantly. "I've taken the trouble to bring a camera, and now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not even answer. They were too dispirited for an argument with the Moderns. They marched on glumly, and the



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from
the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

That worm Pankley said they were to kick off at three. So they can't finish the match at the earliest till after half-past four. Then they've got to get home from Latcham. It's a long drive. I don't suppose they'll hurry, either. Well, it's barely half-past four yet. They're still playing at Latcham, and most of the Fourth are there watching them. See? We shall find the coast clear."

"There will be lots of Bagshot fellows at home."

"We can chance them, as Pankley & Co. are away. We're going to ride over, hide our bikes outside, and sneak in—"

"My hat!"

"And rag their show," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "That's a thing they could never do to us. We'll rag their studies, rag their dorm, rag everything we can lay our hands on, and leave a written notice telling 'em who's done it, for them to see when they come home. That'll level up a bit."

"It's too jolly risky, you duffer."

"We shall be spotted, and—"

"You're a fathead, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders and wheeled his bike away. Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances, and then wheeled out their machines. Jimmy Silver had made up his mind, and they were not going to leave him in the lurch.

The four juniors mounted in the road and pedalled away for Bagshot.

"So you're coming!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, we're coming," grunted Lovell. "But we think you're an ass, all the same. We shall be spotted and ragged."

"Bow-wow!"

"Oh, let's chance it," said Raby. "The fellows can't cackle at us more than they are doing already, that's one comfort."

"Bow-wow!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four covered the ground quickly. They soon arrived in sight of Bagshot School. Four bicycles were concealed behind a hedge, and the Rookwood four strolled in coolly at the gates.

A senior match was going on on the football ground, and a crowd of fellows were watching it. The quadrangle was almost deserted. The Fistical Four sauntered across to the big red-brick School House, a modern structure which they compared very unfavourably with the grey old pile of Rookwood. With as much coolness as if the place belonged to them, they sauntered in at the big doorway. A Bagshot junior was in the hall, and he stared at them.

"Hallo, Rookwood bounders!" he exclaimed.

"Pankley at home?" asked Jimmy Silver calmly.

"No; he's over at Latcham with the team," said the Bagshot fellow, Higgs of the Fourth.

"Thanks! We'll wait."

Jimmy Silver sat down on a settee in the hall, with a grave and patient expression. The Co. followed his example. The Bagshot junior stared at them and strolled away after a few minutes. A master passed through the hall and glanced at the four waiting juniors, but passed on without remark. Higgs had disappeared.

Then Jimmy Silver rose quickly to his feet, beckoned to his chums, and ran lightly up the stairs, taking advantage of the moment when the coast was clear. In a minute or less the juniors were among the Fourth Form studies. Nearly all the Fourth were at Latcham with Pankley, and the passage was quite deserted.

"What price this?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Coast's clear," agreed Lovell. "That fellow Higgs looked rather suspicious, I thought."

"He's gone out, anyway. Don't imagine trouble, old chap."

"Oh, rats! Where's Pankley's study? We'll start there."

The Fistical Four had been to Bagshot before, and they knew their whereabouts. Jimmy Silver opened the door of Cecil Pankley's study, and the four hurried in, and the door was closed again. The room was empty, as they expected. The quarters of the Bagshot junior captain were at their mercy.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome had brightened up considerably. Jimmy Silver's venture had seemed to them utterly reckless, but it seemed to be "panning out" all right. While the cats were away the mice would play—and the Fistical Four lost no time. They had a good many studies to attend to. They devoted themselves to Pankley's quarters first.

With methodical care they ragged the study. The table was overturned, the study carpet yanked up and draped over the up-ended legs of the table, and the rest of the furniture was piled upon it in a heap. Fender and fireirons were added, and as much as they could collect from the grate and all the soot they could persuade down the chimney. Then the study cupboard was opened, and Pankley's provisions were dragged out. Jam and marmalade streamed liberally round the study, followed by pickles and ginger-beer. Pankley had a good supply of good things—probably intending a spread when the footballers came home. It was a spread of a very different kind that was taking place.

The Fistical Four chuckled as they surveyed the havoc they had wrought. They had made a considerable amount of noise, but no one seemed to have taken note of it.

"Looks rather cheery—what!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy looked at his watch.

"We've time for another study before we have to clear. Come on!"

He grasped the handle of the door to open it.

The door did not open.

Jimmy pulled at it.

Still it did not budge.

A queer expression came over Jimmy Silver's face. He grasped the handle with both hands and pulled, and pulled.

The door did not yield half an inch.

"Why don't you open it?" exclaimed Lovell.

"I—I can't!"

"But—"

"It's fastened!"

"Fastened!" yelled the three.

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"Yes—fastened outside!"

The 7th Chapter.

"A Black, But Not Comely."

"Fastened outside!" breathed Lovell.

The Fistical Four looked at one another with sickly expressions.

They were trapped.

They knew that.

While they had been busy wrecking the study somebody—probably the iniquitous Higgs—had stolen a march on them. The door was fastened on the outside, and they were prisoners!

"Well," said Lovell at last, "this beats the whole giddy band! We're fastened in! We—we're prisoners!"

Jimmy Silver groaned.

"Who'd have thought it?"

"Not you, certainly!" said Lovell witheringly.

"Oh, pile it on!" said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Rub it in!"

His chums nobly forbore to rub it in. It was, indeed, no time for ragging. They were fastened up in Pankley's study, and escape was impossible. What was to be done, excepting to wait for the return of Pankley & Co.?

They shivered at the bare idea of that.

Jimmy Silver threw open the window and looked out almost desperately.

There was a yell below as his head appeared. There was the iniquitous Higgs of the Fourth, and half a dozen Bagshot juniors were with him.

"Here he is!" yelled Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha! Caught again!"

Jimmy Silver glared down at the merry Bagshot fellows. He shook his fist at Higgs, who yelled with laughter.

"Wanted to wait for Pankley!" chuckled Higgs. "And never expected me to smell a rat—oh, no! Sneaked upstairs to Pankley's study, and never guessed that I had an eye open—oh, no! Ragged the study like thunder, and never heard me come up—oh, no! Never knew I'd fastened a dog-chain to the door-handle—oh, no! Never heard me screw it to the doorpost—oh, no! No! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the crowd.

Jimmy Silver drew his head in and looked at his chums.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome gave him eloquent looks, but they said no word.

"There's a—dog-chain fastening the door outside—screwed in!" said Jimmy Silver faintly. "We—we can't break that!"

"Oh, no!" said Lovell, in imitation of the humorous Higgs. "And you never expected anything of the kind—oh, no!"

"What the merry dickens is going to be done?" said Raby, in dismay.

"Pankley & Co. may be back any minute now."

"We can't even climb out, with that crowd of beasts waiting for us down there!" groaned Newcome.

"This is a holy pickle, and no mistake!"

Jimmy Silver stood dumb. For once even his fertile brain was at a loss. He cudgelled his brains—but without result.

There was a shout in the quad a little later, and Jimmy looked from the window.

A brake had arrived, and he saw Pankley & Co. descend in coats and mufflers. Higgs rushed away to join them, and the roar of laughter from the footballers told that Higgs had explained the predicament of Jimmy Silver & Co.

Pankley and his comrades disappeared into the House. There were warning footsteps in the passage, loud voices and laughter. Then a thump on the door.

"Hallo, you Rookwood bounders! Caught again!" yelled Pankley.

The Fistical Four were silent.

"Get that screw out, young Higgs! Let's get at the cheeky rotters! We'll soo't 'em from head to foot, and put glue in their hair! We'll teach 'em a lesson about ragging chaps' studies! Buck up with that screwdriver!"

"Soo't!" murmured Lovell. "Glue! Oh, Jimmy, you chump, you've landed us this time!"

Jimmy Silver sprang to the door and turned the key in the lock.

Click!

"Locking themselves in, by gum!" came Pankley's voice. "Hallo, you Rookwood duffers! Do you want to stay there all night?"

"What's the good, Jimmy?" murmured Raby. "We can't stay here! We've got to get back to Rookwood for call-over!"

"Let's rush 'em!" said Lovell desperately.

"Rush fifty chaps!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Don't be an ass! We couldn't get two yards! I've got an idea!"

"More ideas!" snorted Lovell.

"Do you know a way out?" demanded Jimmy.

"Of course I don't, fathead! There isn't any way out!"

"Then follow your uncle!"

Jimmy Silver stooped, put his head over the grate, and squinted up the chimney. He withdrew his head quickly as a fragment of soot landed in his eye.

"Yow!"

"The—the chimney!" gasped Lovell.

"Shush! They'll hear you!"

"But—but what about our clothes?"

"Hang your clothes! What will your clothes be like, anyway, when they've sooted and glued us?"

"But—but we can't—"

"We can—and we're going to!"

whispered Jimmy. "It's a wide chimney; and I know there is a box-room over this study, with the same chimney and a big grate. We can get out there and hook it."

"But—but think of the state we shall be in!" spluttered Lovell. "We—we couldn't go back to Rookwood in such a state—"

"What state shall we be in if they collar us? And we can't stay here, can we?"

"Oh, my hat! What a raid!"

groaned Lovell. "I suppose you were born to catch Tartars, Jimmy Silver! Shall we chance it, you fellows? It's about the only thing we can do. They'll simply mop us up when they see what we've done to the study!"

Raby and Newcome assented grimly. It was the only way—though a decidedly disagreeable way.

Jimmy Silver led. He squeezed himself into the chimney. Once inside, there was plenty of room. Judging by the amount of soot there, it was a considerable time since the chimney-sweep had visited Pankley's study. Jimmy wedged himself desperately against the bricks, and climbed. It was not a difficult climb to an active junior; but the atmosphere in the chimney was simply awful as Jimmy's movements stirred up the soot.

It descended round him in clouds. Lovell, looking up to see how he was progressing, received a shower in his eyes and nose and mouth, and Lovell's remarks were positively Hunsish.

It seemed about a century to Jimmy Silver before he clambered out into the open, wide grate in the box-room above. He was simply reeking with soot. Face and hands and clothes were as black as the ace of spades. He coughed and sneezed as if for a wager.

Lovell came next. In about ten minutes he emerged from the chimney, gasping and sneezing, and black as a Hottentot.

Jimmy Silver could not help grinning at the sight of him.

"Wow—wow—wow!" gasped Lovell.

Raby came next, and then Newcome. They stood in a sea of soot in the box-room, another, swamped with soot, utterly unrecognisable.

"Groooh!"

"Yooohh!"

"Gurrurr!"

Such were their remarks.

"When you've finished, we'll bunk!" said Jimmy Silver politely.

"Keep smiling, you know."

"Oh, slaughter him!" mumbled Raby.

Jimmy Silver opened the box-room door, and crept out into the passage. Below, there was a buzz of voices, and the sound of knocking on a door. Pankley's voice came up the stairs.

"They won't answer, the beasts!" Pankley was saying. "Sulky—ha, ha, ha! Well, let 'em stay there as long as they like; they can make a night of it if they choose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bagshot crowd in the passage below chortled merrily. Jimmy Silver looked round him. He had hoped to find a back staircase, but there was not one to be seen. A door that led somewhere was locked, and there was no key. Raby and Lovell and Newcome stood sniffing and sneezing, while he made his investigations. He came back to them on the landing.

"That's the only way out," he muttered. "Wait till they clear off, and then we'll make a rush for it."

"Like this!" gurgled Lovell.

"Like that!" assented Jimmy Silver. "You don't look pretty, I know. Still, it's covered up your face, that's one comfort." Perhaps Jimmy's temper was suffering a little.

"You frabjous idiot!" snorted Lovell. "What will they say when we crawl in at Rookwood like this?"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Newcome.

"I'm jolly nearly choked."

Knock! Knock! came from the passage below.

"I can't hear 'em moving," came Pankley's voice. "They can't have bolted; the other chaps are watching the window. I suppose they haven't crawled up the chimney?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They might have," said Poole.

"I'll jolly well go up and lock the box-room, in case they do!"

Poole's steps were heard on the stairs.

"Game's up!" muttered Lovell.

Jimmy Silver clenched his hands.

"We've got to rush for it. Follow me!"

Poole was coming up the stairs two at a time. He halted, his jaw dropping at the sight of four sooty and unrecognisable figures.

"Why—what—who—which—?" stuttered Poole.

He had no time for more. The Fistical Four rushed at him, and he was seized and hurled aside, somewhat sooty from contact with the Rookwooders. Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed down the stairs.

There was a roar from the juniors in the passage below.

"Look!"

"It's them—it's them! They did the chimney!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at the Christy minstrels!"

"Collar 'em!"

But though several fellows shouted "Collar 'em!" nobody stretched out a hand to do the collaring. Nobody wanted to come into close contact with those sooty figures. Jimmy Silver & Co. had expected a terrific scrap. But it did not happen. As they rushed at the crowd in the passage, that crowd melted away as if by magic. Even the great Pankley himself bolted. They were too sooty to touch.

Quite unexpectedly the four Rookwooders found the passage clear.

"Come on!" panted Jimmy Silver.

Like lightning the Fistical Four rushed down the lower stairs. In the hall below they passed several fellows who yelled and dodged as they came near. In a few seconds they were in the quad, and fleeing for the gates. Pankley & Co. swarmed after them, but at a safe distance.

"Get out the hose!" yelled Pankley. "They want a wash! Get out the hose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood raiders did not wait for the hose, badly as they wanted a wash. They sprinted out of the gates, and streaked for their bicycles. In a few moments they were mounted and pedalling away desperately for Rookwood.

The 8th Chapter.

Nice For Jimmy Silver.

Old Mack, the porter at Rookwood, had the shock of his life when he went down to lock the school gates. Just as he was about to close the gates, four black and unrecognisable cyclists shot up, and dashed in. Old Mack staggered back with a yell of alarm.

"My, hey! Wot the—"

Four bikes were pitched against the lodge, and four sooty juniors streaked through the dusk across the quad, leaving old Mack rubbing his eyes.

"Get round the back," panted Jimmy Silver. "We can get a scrape down under the pump before we go in—we can't be seen like this—"

"Hallo, hallo!" roared a voice.

"What the merry thunder—Here, what are you sweeps doing here?"

It was Tommy Dodd. He stopped, and stared at the four. For the moment he did not recognise them.

"Bump the Modern worm!" howled Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was longing to bump somebody.

"Jimmy Silver!" shrieked Tommy Dodd, recognising the voice. "Oh, crumbs! Another raid on Bagshot—what? Ha, ha, ha!"

The sooty four rushed at him, and Tommy Dodd dodged and fled yelling.

"After him!" roared Lovell.

"Fathead! Let's go and get clean; it's call-over in ten minutes!"

The Classical Four rushed for the pump. But Tommy Dodd had spread the news. Fellows came pouring out from all sides—Classicals and Moderns. There was a roar of laughter as they sighted the Fistical Four. Fifty fellows at least crowded round them, shrieking.

"Black, but comely!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Look at their complexions!"

"By gad, ain't they shockin'!" chuckled Snythe of the Shell. "Oh, by gad, what a sight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear off, you silly asses!" bellowed Lovell. "We—we've had rather bad luck, but there's nothing to cackle at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver swished on the pump. Hurriedly the Fistical Four cleansed themselves under the streaming water. It was the best they could do. The water, blackened by the soot, ran



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

round them in inky streams. As they performed those hurried ablutions, they were surrounded by a yelling crowd, almost in hysterics. Classics and Moderns were almost doubled up with merriment.

"There goes the bell!" gasped Lovell. "Oh, what a state we're in!"

"Bootles will like you like that!" shrieked Flynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no help for it; the Fistical Four had to go in to call-over. They were about half-cleansed, but still decidedly grimy. Mr. Bootles' eye fixed upon them very severely when they answered their names.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "You are—or in a disgusting condition Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome. Dear me! What is the meaning of this? What! What!"

"We—we've had rather an accident, sir!" mumbled Jimmy Silver. "We—we—"

"Go and change your clothes at once, and take two hundred lines each," said Mr. Bootles majestically. "Boys, there is nothing to laugh at in this occurrence; pray cease this untimely merriment immediately."

But it was very difficult for the Rookwood fellows to cease that untimely merriment.

The 9th Chapter.

Uncle James at a Discount.

Dick Oswald looked in at the door of the end study. There was a buzz of excited voices in that famous apartment.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, the Fistical Four of the Fourth, were holding a discussion, and their voices could be heard half-way down the passage.

"Something's got to be done!" Lovell was saying, emphasising his remark with a bang of his feet on the study table, which made the table jump.

"We're being chipped to death by all the school—Classics and Moderns alike," exclaimed Raby.

"They're calling us the Fatheaded Four, and we jolly well deserve it, after the way we've let the Bagshot bounders walk over us!" said Newcome hotly.

To which Jimmy Silver responded:

"Keep smiling!"

"Keep smiling, be blowed!" roared Lovell. "I tell you, we've got to get our own back on the Bagshot Bounders. Haven't they japed us, and dished us, and spoofed us, and isn't all Rookwood cackling about it?"

"Cackling no end!" said Raby dolorously. "Our giddy prestige is gone! They call this study a home for idiots now!"

"Well, that ain't far wrong, so far as three of us are concerned!" said Jimmy Silver tartly.

"Why, you ass—"

"Why, you fathead—"

"Why, you burbling duffer—"

"You leave it to your Uncle Jimmy!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly.

"Put not your faith in princes—put it in Uncle James!"

"Yes; we've heard all about that!" snorted Lovell. "And didn't you land us beautifully last time—right into the hands of the Philistines! Everybody's still cackling about it."

"And when I proposed a new wheeze, you shoved my head in the coal-locker!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"Yes; that's what you want for your wheezes!" said Lovell. "That's about what they're worth! This study had better go out of business altogether, I think, and give Bagshot best."

Dick Oswald grinned. His cheery face, looking in at the study doorway, had not even been noticed by the excited four.

"Busy, you fellows?" he demanded.

"Hallo, Oswald! Come in!" said Jimmy Silver, looking round. "We're holding a pow-wow. Bagshot have got to die the giddy death! Tell these duffers to leave off burbling and trust their Uncle James."

"Oh, blow Bagshot!" said Oswald. "Give Bagshot a rest! Besides, they always give you the kyboosh, you know—"

"Why, you cheeky ass—" roared Lovell.

"Something else on," explained Oswald. "I've looked in to see if you fellows would like to come along with me. Lots of the chaps are going. Ever heard of the Great Springer?"

"The which?"

old quadrangle of Rookwood the leafless beeches were simply weeping with rain. Footer was out of the question that afternoon. The Fistical Four had been improving the shining hour, by holding a council of war. But they agreed that a conjuring entertainment was a little better than "jawing" in the study. The iniquitous bounders of Bagshot were granted a respite.

"All the same," said Jimmy Silver as they followed Oswald down the passage, "we've got to down Bagshot, or our prestige is gone for ever. I've got an idea—"

"Go and boil it!" said Lovell.

"I've been thinking—"

"Bow-wow! You haven't anything to think with!" said Raby. "Don't suggest any more raids on Bagshot—I'm fed-up! I've had enough of their soot, for one!"

"Look here—"

"Rats!" said Lovell and Raby and Newcome together.

Jimmy Silver sniffed, and dropped the subject, and the chums of the Fourth went for their coats and mufflers.

It was a deplorable state of affairs. Never had the prestige of the Fistical Four, the great chiefs and leaders of the Classical Fourth, been at so low an ebb.

And even inside his own study, his own stronghold, so to speak, Jimmy

the Rookwooders squelched through the mud, and made remarks about the weather, and arrived at last in the little village of Coombe. In spite of the weather, a goodly audience was turning up at the village room for the conjuring entertainment. Entertainments of any kind were rare in the quiet village, and as the charges were decidedly reasonable, the good folk of Coombe were extending a hearty support to the Great Springer.

The village room, where "Pleasant Saturday Afternoons" could be spent under the kindly auspices of the vicar, was not a palatial building. It was an edifice of corrugated iron, and, architecturally considered, it was a blot upon the landscape. But it was dry and warm, and its shelter was very welcome to Jimmy Silver & Co.

Oswald, who was in funds, took five tickets for his party, at sixpence each. There were reserved seats at a shilling each, and Smythe of the Shell, of course, bagged some of them for his party. Adolphus Smythe never did anything like a common mortal.

Long wooden benches accommodated the audience, and a temporary stage, at one end of the long room, was concealed—or partly concealed—by curtains which Lovell described as cock-eyed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. secured front

fully. Jimmy Silver sat down, with his ears burning. Lovell snorted.

"Nice, ain't it?" he growled. "Nice ain't the word for it!" said Raby. "They did us in the eye—we can't deny it. But trust your Uncle James—don't forget to put your money on Uncle James!"

"I don't think!" grunted Newcome.

"Cheerful set of Job's comforters, ain't you?" said Jimmy Silver. "For goodness' sake, dry up! Here comes the giddy Springer!"

The curtains which Lovell had described as cock-eyed were drawn aside—looking considerably more cock-eyed after that operation. A little gentleman in black, with a black box, was disclosed to view.

Professor Springer was worth a second glance. He was a very small man physically, but he had a very important manner. His evening-clothes made him look still slighter. He had a thick head of hair, evidently a wig, and he wore an enormous beard. The beard would probably have been grey if left to itself, but as a matter of fact it was jet-black, with a bluish tinge when it caught the light. The Great Springer had undoubtedly dyed it. He had a large, bushy moustache of the same hue, and big, bushy, black eyebrows. Never had the juniors seen so hairy a gentleman. He wore also a pair of large gold-rimmed pince-nez, which justified their name by pinching his nose cruelly, and causing the end of it to glow with a fiery red.

"That chap's worth the tanner just to look at him," said Lovell, somewhat restored to good-humour by the sight of the professor.

"Worth the bob, by gad!" said Smythe of the Shell. "Where did he dig up that face, dear boys? Might offer him twopenny for a shave, by gad!"

But, queer-looking as the Great Springer undoubtedly was, he was a good entertainer in his own line. He proceeded to open his black bag, and astonish the simple folk of Coombe with his mysterious tricks. Though fortune had apparently not smiled upon the Great Springer—to judge by the evident age of his evening clothes, and by the fact that he was giving entertainments in the little village at all—he was certainly a clever conjurer.

Jimmy Silver & Co. watched him with great interest. When the professor requested assistance from the audience, Pankley of Bagshot went on the stage. Pankley was always ready for the limelight. He looked a little uneasy when the professor reduced his watch to powder, and was greatly relieved when the watch was handed back to him uninjured, amid cheers from the audience.

Then the professor asked for a silk topper, and Adolphus Smythe obliged. Adolphus' face was a study when the Great Springer lighted a fire in the hat; but the hat was returned undamaged.

"Jolly clever, by gad!" Adolphus confessed.

Jimmy Silver was looking thoughtful. The professor was decidedly entertaining, and an idea had come into Jimmy's active brain. During a pause in the proceedings he whispered to his chums:

"I've got a dodge."

"At it again!" said Lovell.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy.

"Look here, we've been thinking of raising a fund at Rookwood for sending grub to the prisoners in Germany—giving a show and charging for admission, you know. It's a bit difficult to make up a show that the fellows would pay to see."

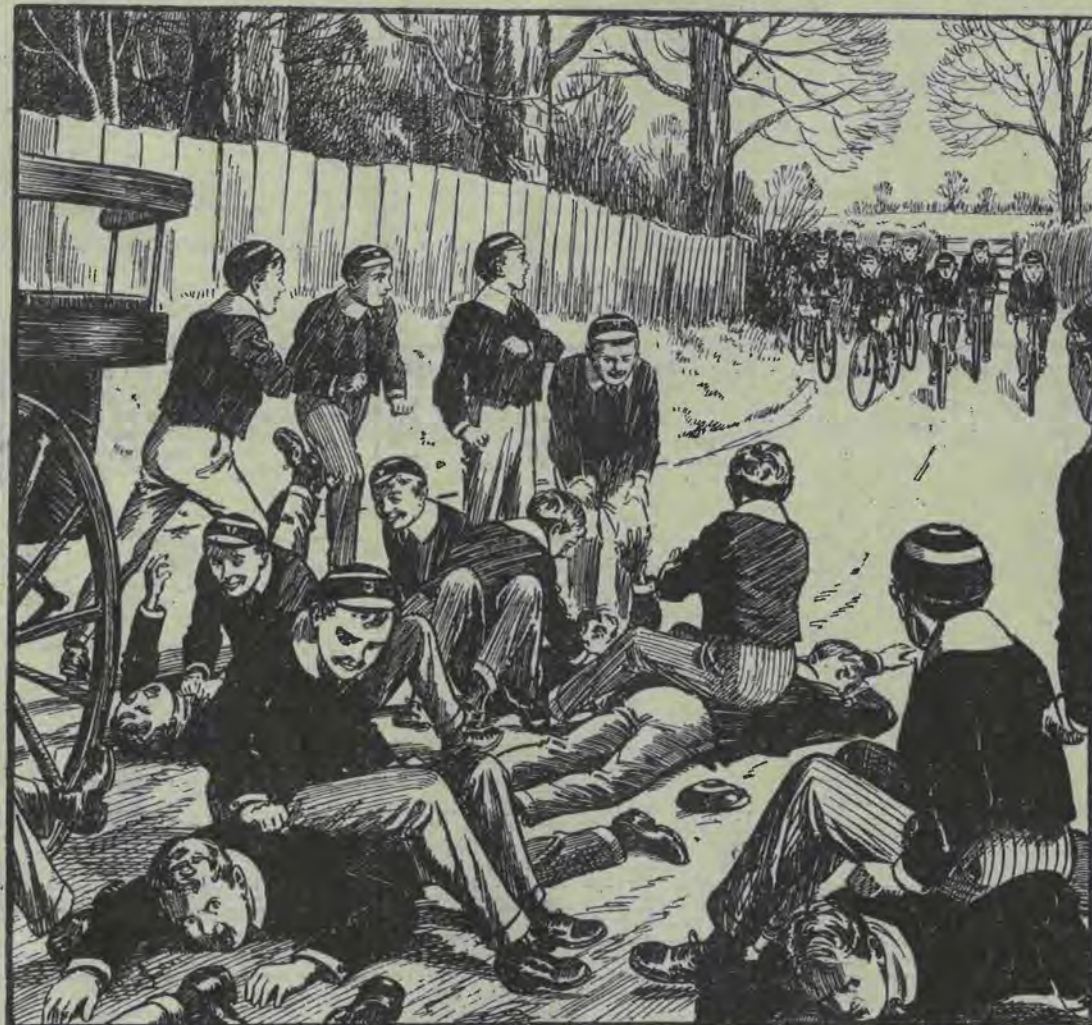
"More than a bit difficult," said Raby.

"Well, I've got a wheeze. What about getting Springer to come and entertain?"

"My haf!"

"Everybody would come and see him, and we could have the Form-room for the show," argued Jimmy. "We could charge threepence a head—tanner each for the Sixth. This chap would do it cheap. He don't look like a millionaire. Suppose he came for a guinea? Well, we might take three or four pounds if we rushed all the fellows into taking tickets—see? That would be a good whack for our fund."

"Well, that's not bad," agreed Lovell. "Pankley's doing the same thing at Bagshot. As soon as he heard we were raising money for the prisoners, he bagged the idea. He



There was a whirr in the road—a whirr and a rattle of many bicycles. Down the road came a swarm of cyclists, on the track of the brake. "Rescue!" shouted Pankley. "Pile in, Bagshot!"

"Chap who does the long jump?" asked Lovell, a little interested.

Lovell was rather good at the long jump himself.

"Ha, ha! No! Professor Springer, the conjurer. Does conjuring tricks, you know—fishes loaves out of your hat, and whales out of your watch-cases—more or less. He's called the Great Springer on the posters. Some chaps have seen him in Latcham, and they say he's good. He's giving a matinee show at Coombe this afternoon, and, as it's too wet for footer, I'm going. Come along—my treat!"

"Not a bad idea," said Raby. "I remember seeing it in the local rag now. Better than staying in, listening to Jimmy Silver's rot!"

"Much better!" agreed Newcome.

"We'll come!"

"Trot along, then!" said Oswald.

"Begins at three!"

"Right-ho!"

The pow-wow in the end study was indefinitely postponed. Outside the

Silver was no longer regarded with unquestioning faith. The Co. no longer trusted implicitly their Uncle James. It was indeed a sad state of affairs—and all due to Pankley & Co. of Bagshot.

The 10th Chapter.

Pankley Secres.

"Nice weather for ducks!" growled Lovell.

The rain was coming down in a steady drizzle. The football ground was swimming with it. The beeches in the old quad creaked and wept.

Quite a little army of Rookwood fellows marched out when the Fistical Four started for Coombe. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side were there, and Adolphus Smythe and his nutty friends of the Shell. In overcoats and macintoshes, and with an army of umbrellas, the juniors started.

The lane was wet and muddy, and

seats, and Jimmy surveyed the audience. A howl from a group of fellows at a little distance came to his ears:

"Hallo, Rookwood duffers! Do you want any more soot?"

"Bagshot bounders!" growled Jimmy.

Pankley and Poole and several other juniors from Bagshot School were there. They grinned amiably at the Rookwood fellows. Their late encounters with Rookwood had ended entirely in their favour, and Pankley & Co. were feeling very pleased with themselves.

"When are you coming to Bagshot again?" inquired Poole, over the heads of the intervening audience. "We've got lots of soot—tons of it!"

"We could easily spare you what you took home with you last time," said Pankley. "We've got lots more, when you pay us another call!"

The Bagshot fellows chuckled glee-



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

says we bagged it from him, the bounder!"

"Well, lots of people are doing it," said Jimmy. "It's up to everybody to shell out for chaps who are being starved by the Huns. With this nobby wheeze we ought to raise more money than Pankley will get at Bagshot."

"Good egg!" said Raby. "We'll beat him in that, at least."

"I'll get round and speak to the professor after the show," said Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy smiled to himself, very pleased with his idea, as the show proceeded. That idea of raising a fund for the benefit of the British Tommies in Germany was a good one, but it had been hanging about a long time. Pankley, never to be outdone by Rookwood, was working on the same lines at Bagshot, his idea being to give an amateur theatrical show. But with the Great Springer to provide the entertainment, Jimmy Silver felt confident that the takings at the Rookwood show would far exceed anything that Pankley would raise at Bagshot with his miserable amateur theatricals.

For once, at least, Bagshot would be outclassed.

Jimmy glanced towards the Bagshot crowd. Pankley and Poole had disappeared. The rest of the Bagshot fellows were watching the entertainment. The Great Pankley had apparently left early.

The last trick having been performed, and the last round of applause delivered, Professor Springer retired from the stage with many bows, and the audience rose.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "We've got to get round and speak to him as he comes out. He'll leave by the side door."

The Fistical Four and Oswald shoved their way through the crowd. They were soon out of the hall, and they made their way round the building.

As they reached the side door, it opened, and Professor Springer appeared, muffled up in a greatcoat.

He did not come out alone. Two juniors followed him out, and Jimmy Silver started as he recognised Pankley and Poole of Bagshot. What were the Bagshot bounders doing there?

"Hallo!" said Pankley, with a cheery smile. "Enjoying the rain, dear boys?"

"Don't bother!" said Jimmy Silver. "Mr. Springer, will you stop a minute? We want to speak to you."

"Certainly!" said the Professor, stepping back into the porch.

"You Bagshot bounders can clear off!" said Jimmy Silver.

Pankley leaned against the porch. Poole followed his example.

"Don't mind us, dear kid," said Pankley. "We're seeing the professor home."

Jimmy frowned. He did not want to reveal his ripping scheme in the presence of the Bagshot juniors. But Pankley and Poole evidently intended to stay, and the Great Springer was waiting.

"Never mind them," said Lovell.

"Fire away, Jimmy!"

"The fact is, sir," said Jimmy Silver, "we've been awfully struck with your show—awfully! It's simply ripping! We want you to come and give us an entertainment at our school."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley and Poole.

"Shut up, you worms!" growled Lovell.

Professor Springer smiled.

"I shall be very pleased, young gentlemen!" he said, rubbing his hands. "My charge for two hours' entertainment, in the evening, will be one guinea."

"Good enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "Could you come to Rookwood to-morrow evening?"

"I am sorry—no. I have already promised these young gentlemen—"

"What!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley and Poole.

"They—they've bagged you already?" exclaimed Lovell.

"Yes; I am engaged to appear at Bagshot School to-morrow evening," said the professor.

"These young gentlemen are raising a fund in aid of the prisoners in Germany, and my assistance—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Pankley and Poole were almost doubled up with merriment. The Rookwood juniors looked daggers at them. The same scheme had evidently occurred to Pankley's active brain, and he had been first in the field. That was why he had cleared off before the entertainment ended, evidently.

"Dished again!" grunted Lovell.

"Same old tale!" sniffed Raby.

"But trust your uncle Jimmy! Oh, trust your Uncle James!"

"Oh, dear!" said Jimmy Silver.

"The next evening I should be quite at your service," suggested the professor. Mr. Springer did not want to lose an engagement if he could help it.

"What about to-night?" asked Jimmy. "We might manage it in the time. If you could come to-night—"

"I am engaged for this evening, as I have already told Master Pankley—"

"Dished!" said Lovell again.

"Hang the evening after next! We don't want Pankley's mouldy old ideas when he's done with them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley.

"Oh, cheese it, you Bagshot worm!"

"I—I say, we'll let you know about Friday evening, professor," said Jimmy Silver, much discouraged.

"Good-night! Come on, you chaps!"

The Rookwood party turned disconsolately away, followed by merry chuckles from Pankley and Poole, who walked off triumphantly with the professor. Jimmy Silver did not speak a word on the way home to Rookwood.

The 11th Chapter. Simply Stunning!

"What the merry dickens—" Lovell uttered that exclamation as he came into the end study that evening.

Jimmy Silver was there.

Jimmy was bending over an open box—the box in which the juniors kept the properties for their amateur theatricals. He was sorting out clothes, and wigs, and beards, and moustaches, and grinning the while. Raby and Newcome followed Lovell in. It was time for prep. They all stared at Jimmy Silver.

"Amateur theatricals now!" grunted Lovell. "Chuck it, for goodness' sake! We may as well give up the idea of that fund. We don't want old Springer when Pankley's done with him. We're not going to have Bagshot leavings."

"Fathead!" said Jimmy Silver politely. "We're going to dish Pankley—at least, I am. You can stay at home and grouse."

"Another blessed wheeze?" said Raby.

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver impressively. "The wheeze of the season! I've been doing a big think, and I've got it."

"Well, now you've got it, go and bury it!" said Lovell. "We're fed up on your wheezes in this study!"

Jimmy Silver snorted.

"I'm jolly nearly fed-up on your grouching," he replied. "Why can't you keep smiling, as I tell you? We're above Pankley's weight, really—"

"Looks like it, when you let him

bag your professor under your nose," said Newcome.

"All serene; I'll go over to the Modern side and get Tommy Dodd & Co. to take a hand," said Jimmy. "I dare say they'll manage it better than you duffers!"

"Oh, don't be an ass! If you've really got a wheeze, we'll hear it."

"That's better! Now, look here, Pankley's got the professor for to-morrow evening at Bagshot, to give a show for his prisoners' fund. We could have him the next evening if we liked—"

"We don't like. All Bagshot would be sniggering at us. They say now that we can't think of anything for ourselves."

"Quite right. We don't like," agreed Jimmy Silver calmly. "So my idea is to have him the same evening."

"Eh?"

"At the same time precisely."

"What!"

"We'll get the notices out, and make the tickets, and so forth, for our show in the Form-room at seven to-morrow," said Jimmy coolly. "I'll put up a big announcement that Professor Springer is coming."

"But he isn't coming!" shouted Lovell.

"He jolly well is! But Bagshot are going to have their Professor Springer, too. See?"

"No, I don't see, you ass! How can old Springer be in two places at once?"

"He can't, of course. His double's going to Bagshot."

"His—his double?" stuttered Lovell.

"Exactly!"

"Has he got a double?"

"No; but he's going to have one to-morrow night," said Jimmy Silver.

"Eh! What? Which? Who?"

"Me!"

"You!" yelled the three juniors in chorus.

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver calmly. "You saw the professor? Didn't he look as if he were specially built to be caricatured? Any chap his size, with a false scalp and a yard of whiskers, could make up exactly like him."

"M-m-make up! Oh, my hat!"

"We've done a lot of amateur theatricals, and made-up harder characters than Mr. Springer. I could do it with my eyes shut. He's no taller than I am, and he's thick with whiskers and barnacles. It's as easy as falling off a form. I'm going to do it."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"And when I get to Bagshot and start playing conjuring tricks to them, they'll wish a Zeppelin had come instead," said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell.

"What a wheeze! If it could only be brought off! But it can't!"

"It can—and it's jolly well going to be," said Jimmy Silver. "This is where Bagshot gets it fairly in the neck. Pankley & Co. are going to be done in the eye, all along the line!"

"But—but the professor will go there, as he's arranged—"

"He won't! Springer is putting up at the Black Bull. Well, to-morrow evening a car will call for him, to take him to the school."

"A—a car!"

"Well, a taxi-cab," said Jimmy Silver. "There will be two or three fellows—Tommy Dodd & Co. can do that; he's never seen them. They'll say they've called to take him to the school—he's bound to think they mean Bagshot—and he won't find out they mean Rookwood till he's here."

"Great pip! Kidnapping!" gasped Raby.

"When he gets here, he'll find it's too late for the Bagshot show, even if he went there; it's a good step from here to Bagshot, and the taxi will be gone. If he's a wise man, he'll decide to give the entertainment here. We'll pay him a double fee, to make up for losing his guinea at Bagshot. We don't want him to lose money over it, of course."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Meanwhile," pursued Jimmy Silver victoriously—"meanwhile, as they say in the novels, I shall be gone to Bagshot got up as Springer!"

"They'll bowl you out!"

"If they bowl me out, I'll let them eat me!" said Jimmy, dis-

dainfully. "I could play the part on my head. We've got all the props here—black beard and moustache, bald scalp, gold-rimmed glasses, seedy evening-clothes—the whole boiling, in fact. I'm going to be Professor Springer—for one night only! They want him there to play tricks—well, I shall play tricks, I give you my word!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you think it's a good wheeze, do you?" said Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Stunning—ha, ha, ha!—if it comes off!"

"Oh, it will come off! Leave it to your Uncle James!" said Jimmy loftily. "So you're going to back me up, you doubting Thomases?"

"Yes, rather," said Lovell heartily. "It's the wheeze of the season—the outside edge, by gum! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have a jaw with Tommy Dodd & Co. and some of the other fellows," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got to raise some tin; every chap can shell-out what he can afford. It's worth a bit to dish Pankley & Co. in this style. Come on!"

In great spirits, the Fistical Four proceeded to the Modern side, where they found Tommy Dodd & Co. in their study. Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle listened with wide-open eyes as Jimmy Silver expounded that stunning "wheeze."

The three Tommies gasped at first, and then they yelled with laughter.

"Ripping!" said Tommy Dodd.

"First-class, by gum! There's only one point you've got wrong—"

"What's that?"

"You'd better let me play Professor Springer. You see, we do acting so much better on the Modern side—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Now, look here, Jimmy Silver—"

"Encore bow-wow!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "That's my little bit. Besides, we want you to bag the professor in the taxi-cab. It won't be easy, but you three are just the fellows to pull it off."

"Oh, all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "Rely on us."

"Now we'll settle the details—"

"What about prep?" asked Tommy Cook.

"Blow prep!"

Preparation was accordingly "blowed," and the rivals of Rookwood, united heartily against the common foe, discussed the great scheme in every detail.

The "blowing" of prep led to some trouble with Mr. Bootles in the Fourth-Form room the following morning. But, as Jimmy Silver remarked, it was all in the day's work, and they bore it philosophically.

The 12th Chapter.

Great Preparations.

"GRAND ENTERTAINMENT!"

In aid of the Fund for providing Grub for Prisoners in Germany.

TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!
TO-NIGHT!

6.30 in the Form-room.

A Grand Entertainment, by Professor Springer, the Great Conjurer and Mystery Merchant. The Great Springer's Unique Performance will be given positively on this occasion only.

Admission 3d. 6d. to the Sixth.

Roll up! Remember the Tommies, and remember this is a record entertainment.

Roll up with your threepenny bits!

(Signed) JIMMY SILVER.

That notice, in letters of great size, daubed with a brush, appeared upon the notice-board at Rookwood in the morning. When morning lessons were over, and the fellows came out of the Form-rooms, crowds gathered to read the stirring announcement.

There was a general buzz of approval.

Fellows who had seen the professor's performance, announced that it was ripping. It was well worth the money. And all the takings were to go to providing food for prisoners in Germany. From the first hour there was never any doubt that there would be a tremendous audience in the big Form-room, which would probably tax its accommodation to its utmost capacity.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had written out tickets on fragments of impot paper, and they sold like hot cakes. A few reserved seats at half a crown each were sold to masters and prefects. Nearly every fellow in the Sixth took a sixpenny seat. As for the threepenny tickets, they were wanted in sheets.

"My hat! There'll be a crowd!" said Lovell, after dinner. "The tickets are nearly all gone already. Of course, the fellows are backing up because it's for the prisoners."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"That's so. But I fancy they wouldn't back up like that for an amateur theatrical show by our noble selves!" he grinned. "They couldn't be expected to. The great Springer has done the trick."

"I—I say, suppose something goes wrong, and we don't bag him after all?" murmured Raby.

"Well, in that case, we've only got to give the money back, and no harm done," said Jimmy Silver. "But nothing will go wrong, my infant. Isn't it in the hands of your Uncle James?"

"So was the raid on Bagshot, and you know how that ended—"

"Oh, don't jaw, old chap! Write out some more tickets!"

Perhaps Jimmy Silver felt a little anxiety inwardly. The wheeze was such a tremendous one! If it came off, Bagshot would undoubtedly be dished to the wide, and would have to admit that Rookwood had scored heavily. The lost prestige of the end study would be more than restored.

But if Jimmy had any anxieties, he did not show them. He lived up to his own favourite maxim, and "kept smiling."

A dozen fellows who could be relied upon had been taken into the plot—Flynn, and Hooker, and Oswald, and Jones minor, Towle and Lacy, and several more. They had entered into the scheme heartily, and subscribed cheerfully to the expense.

There was a taxi-cab to be paid for, and an extra guinea for the professor. His fee of one guinea was to be paid out of the takings, but the extra guinea fell on the plotters of the plot. But they all agreed that it was worth it, and, whacked out among nearly twenty fellows, it did not come very heavily.

During afternoon lessons there was a considerable amount of grinning and whispering in the Fourth, which led to a liberal distribution of lines; but Jimmy Silver & Co. did not mind.

What were lines to them at that moment, when they were about to "dish" Bagshot, and make Pankley & Co. sing small, and hide their diminished heads—at all events, if all went well?

The early winter darkness had set in when afternoon lessons ended. The conjuring entertainment having been fixed for after tea, Jimmy Silver & Co. had plenty of time to act.

The peculiar rig Jimmy Silver was to wear in his character as the Great Springer's double had been packed carefully in a bag, after being tried on in the end study, amid general satisfaction and approval.

Jimmy Silver had planned that disguise very carefully, and he had a keen eye for effect. His chums and Tommy Dodd & Co. had pronounced it simply ripping. The face and figure of Professor Springer, in fact, lent themselves to imitation, and it was the easiest character Jimmy Silver had essayed in his experience of private theatricals.

The bag was carried out into the wood-shed, where Jimmy was to make up for the impersonation, when the time came.

The three Tommies, meanwhile, had started on their mission. Lovell, doubtful about the abilities of mere Moderns, impressed upon them to be awfully careful with the professor—to which Tommy Dodd replied with a request that Lovell would depart and masticate coke. So they started!



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued
from
the
previous
page.)

RAIDERS!

full of confidence, leaving Lovell shaking his head.

"It's all right, fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy Dodd's just the chap to do it! Now let's go and see about the show!"

There was a good deal for the juniors to do in the Form-room, in preparing it for the entertainment. Many hands lent their aid, however, and made light of the work.

The stage was rigged up, with a curtain that would move if carefully persuaded, and forms and chairs arranged to fill the apartment from end to end. Oswald and Flynn and Jones minor were appointed ushers to show the audience to their places, and Tracy and Howard of the Shell consented to act as doorkeepers, to see that only fellows with tickets came in.

"There is a postcard for you, Silver," said Oswald, as Jimmy came out of the Form-room, a little dusty, but very cheerful.

Jimmy took it from the rack.

"From Bagshot!" he said. "My hat!"

"Some blessed cheek!" said Lovell. "Read it out!"

"Dear Silver," read out Jimmy. "As you know, we're giving a conjuring show this evening, at seven. Glad to see any of you that care to come over. Must charge you three 'd' for admission, as it's for the fund. Come over and swell the takings, like good little boys. We won't lick you."

"CECIL PANKLEY."

Lovell breathed hard through his nose.

"Won't lick us!" he gasped. "My hat! I've a jolly good mind to go over, just to lick him!"

"Lickings are off," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got a game on worth a dozen of that. Look here, you fellows, come. Bootles will give you a pass, if you show him this postcard. Somebody ought to be there with me!"

"Good egg! But what about the show here?"

"Oswald can manage it, with Tommy Dodd to help. I can give you a lift in my taxi nearly as far as Bagshot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, kindly bestowed a pass on the Fistical Four, when they showed him that kind invitation. He observed that he was glad to see them supporting Pankley in this way, so unlike the usual rowdy dealings of the Rookwood juniors with the Bagshot fellows.

The chums thanked him meekly, and withdrew with the pass.

Armed with that valuable paper, they proceeded to the wood-shed. Time was getting close now. In that wood-shed, by the aid of a lamp and a glass, Jimmy Silver donned the hirsute adornments he was to wear as Professor Springer's double. Lovell and Raby and Newcome lent him their assistance.

Jimmy Silver simply disappeared; the new Professor Springer grew, as it were, under their skilful hands.

Jimmy was very nearly as tall as the professor. In seedy evening-clothes, with an expansive shirt-front, with a huge black beard and moustache, thickened and blackened eyebrows, and large, gold-rimmed glasses, Jimmy became the twin brother of the great Springer.

Lovell chuckled gleefully as he added skilful touches of grease-paint to Jimmy's countenance, where it was not hidden by hair.

"Blessed if it ain't the great giddy Springer himself!" said Raby, in great admiration.

"It's simply ripping!" grinned Newcome. "Pankley won't spot Jimmy under all that in a month of Sundays!"

at our school every day," said Tommy Doyle.

The Great Springer smiled. He was not impervious to flattery. Neither was he insensible to the advantage of travelling to the school in somebody else's taxi, instead of hiring the station hack for himself. Money was an object with the worthy professor.

"Very well; I will get ready at once," he said. "I shall not keep you waiting long."

In ten minutes the professor came down. He was in evening-clothes under his greatcoat, and carried his black bag in his hand. The taxi was waiting outside, the driver contentedly watching the twopences ticking off.

Professor Springer entered the taxi, followed by the three Modern juniors of Rookwood. Not for an instant did it enter the professor's mind that those three cheery young gentlemen did not belong to Bagshot.

The taxi buzzed away. The driver had received his instructions already. Through the dusky winter evening the taxi buzzed along muddy lanes for Rookwood.

It did not take long to reach the school. Tommy Dodd jumped down

jolly well won't go in a taxi, that's a cert!"

Tommy Dodd spoke in a low voice to the driver, who nodded, and toiled the taxi down to the gates. The three Tommies went into the house. Lovell met them on the stairs.

"I've put him in the end study," he said, in a whisper. "Go and talk to him. Keep him quiet till the taxi goes, at least!"

"What-ho!"

The three Tommies hurried on to the end study, with the excellent object of keeping the professor from "smelling a rat," until the taxi was gone. Lovell ran to the wood-shed.

He gave a chuckle at the sight of the bearded gentleman within.

"Blessed if you ain't as like as two peas!" he ejaculated. "Oh, it's a corker. The professor's come — Tommy Dodd's in the end study with him. They'll manage him. You ready, Jimmy? Put your coat on, and keep your face out of sight. It's jolly dark in the quad, though—safe as houses."

Jimmy picked up the bag, and the Fistical Four hurried out of the wood-shed. Taking great care to keep out of the lights from the house,

But Bagshot won't lose its conjurer. One conjurer is as good as another, what!"

"Better," grinned Lovell.

"Hurrah for us!" chortled Raby.

The taxi rushed on through the winter evening. It was close on seven when Bagshot School appeared in sight. A score of yards from the gates, Jimmy Silver signed to the driver to halt. Lovell and Raby and Newcome stepped out into the road. It would not have done for them to arrive at Bagshot with the professor—they did not want to afford Pankley & Co. the slightest grounds for suspicion. The driver was looking a little surprised. He had driven Professor Springer to Ro okwood—now he had driven him, as he believed, to Bagshot, and it was certainly a little odd.

"Drive on to the school, please!" squeaked Jimmy, in the voice of the professor, which he imitated very closely. "Good-evening, little boys! I am glad I have been able to give you a lift—hem!"

"Good-night, professor!" said Lovell & Co.

The taxi drove on, and the three juniors disappeared in the darkness. At the gates of Bagshot, the driver descended and rang the bell. The gate was opened. Inside, there were half a dozen juniors waiting, Pankley at their head.

"That must be the professor," said Pankley. "He's late, and he's got a taxi."

Professor Springer, the Second, glanced at the taximeter. It indicated nineteen shillings. He handed the driver a sovereign hastily, and said good-night to him. He did not want the Bagshot juniors to see the amount he had paid.

The taxi whirled away down the dark road and vanished.

Professor Springer stepped towards the gates.

"Here you are, sir!" said Pankley.

"You're rather late."

"I trust I am not very late, Master Pankley," squeaked the new professor. "I think the driver did not take the direct road—in fact, I am sure he did not."

"Well, never mind, as you're here," said Pankley. "This way, sir."

Jimmy Silver grinned under his big black beard as he followed Pankley into the house. True, the juniors had only seen him in the gloom so far—he had a harder test before him when he came into the light. But he was quite confident.

Seven was striking as Pankley led the professor into the house. In the lighted hall a score of pairs of eyes were turned on the disguised Rookwood junior.

Jimmy drew a deep breath for a moment.

But there was not a shadow of suspicion in any face.

"I say, the audience are nearly all in the lecture-room," said Poole.

"Will it take you long to get ready, professor?"

"I need only remove my coat," said the professor. "Now—I am ready."

"Oh, good!"

The little black-bearded gentleman followed Pankley and Poole into the lecture-room, blinking round him through his big glasses. The room was crowded—Pankley had evidently got a good audience. Nearly all Bagshot School was there. A cheer or two greeted the professor as he made his way to the platform.

The 14th Chapter, Soft Sawder.

"Dear me," exclaimed Professor Springer, "I am turned half-past six!" he exclaimed. Professor Springer the First, in the end study at Rookwood.

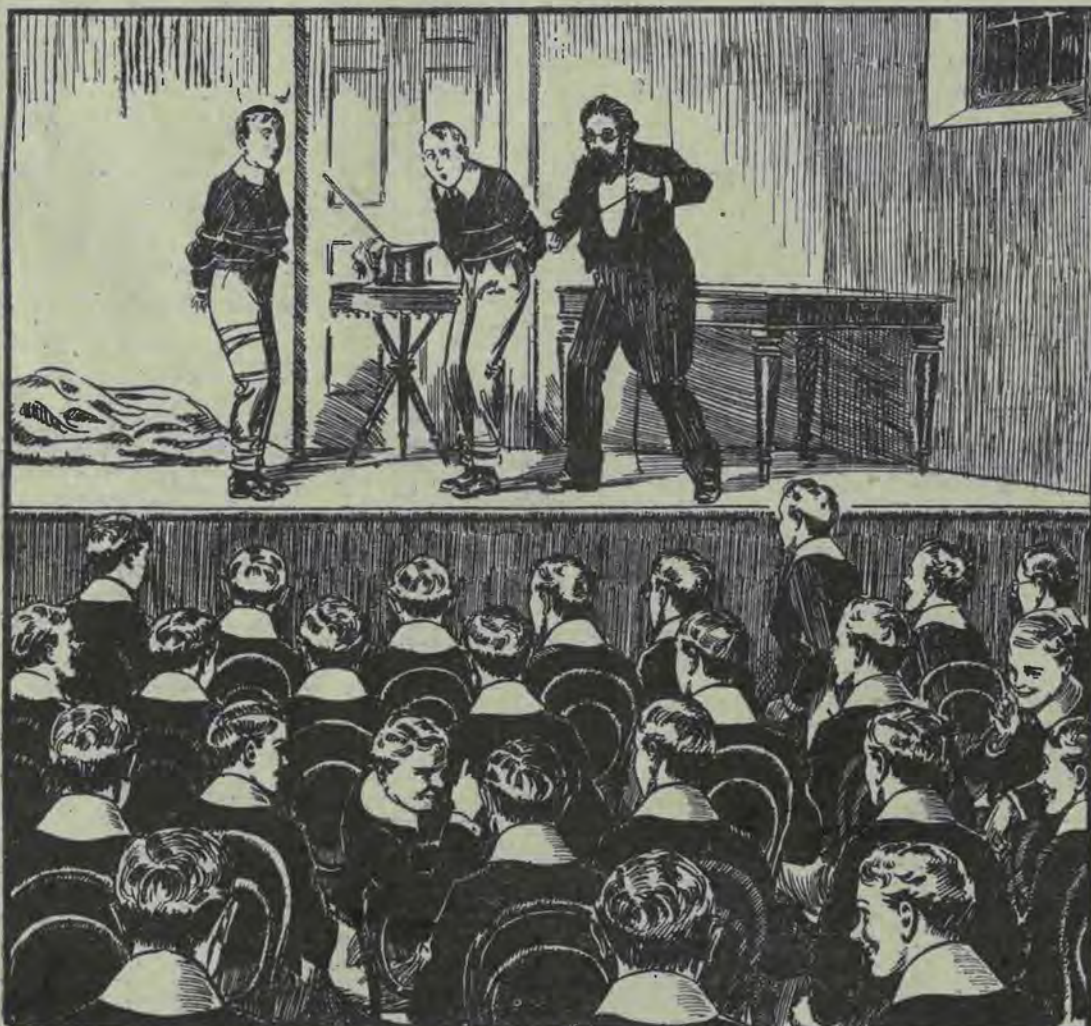
The three Tommies and Oswald were in the study with him. They had been talking nicely to the professor. They asked him about the performances he had given before the crowned heads of Europe, and drew him out skilfully. Professor Springer was a great talker on the interesting subject of himself. The juniors hung upon his words, so to speak, as if they were pearls of wisdom. Mr. Springer chatted on, forgetting time and space. It was a chime from the tower that reminded him of business.

"Half-past six!" repeated Tommy Dodd. "Oh, that's all right! The audience won't mind waiting a few minutes."

But the professor rose.

"I am quite ready," he remarked.

(Concluded on cover page 48.)



All the Bagshot audience watched the conjurer closely as he proceeded to fasten the rope round Pankley and Poole. He bound their arms and their legs till they could not move a limb, and it was noted that he tied the knots with genuine tightness.

The 13th Chapter, Two of Them!

"Good-evening, professor!"

Professor Springer, in the reading-room at the Black Bull, laid down his paper, and turned his gold-rimmed glasses upon the three Tommies. He smiled benignly.

"Good-evening, young gentlemen! You are from the school, I suppose?"

"Just so," said Tommy Dodd. "We've come to fetch you, professor!"

"It is hardly time yet," said Mr. Springer, glancing at the clock. "I arranged with Master Pankley to reach the school at a quarter to seven. It is barely six."

"We've fixed it for six-thirty, after all," explained Tommy Dodd. "I hope you can come, sir? We've got a taxi-cab all the way from Moordale, and it's ticking off twopences!"

"Dear me! You have gone to a very great expense, then!" said Mr. Springer, in surprise.

"We don't have the Great Springer

and rang the bell, and old Mack came out of his lodge and opened the gates.

The taxi halted outside the School House, and Lovell came speeding round from the direction of the wood-shed. He looked into the cab, and gave a jump as he saw the professor.

The latter was so exactly like the "double" Lovell had just quitted that it gave him, as he said afterwards, quite a "turn."

"Good-evening, professor!" said Lovell cordially. "Come with me! We've arranged our study as a dressing-room for you!"

"Thank you very much. Is Mr. Pankley here?"

"Not at the present moment. This way!"

Professor Springer, bag in hand, followed Lovell into the house. The three Tommies exchanged joyous glances.

"Bagged!" murmured Tommy Dodd.

"Fairly nailed!" grinned Cook.

"And if he cuts up rusty and goes, he

they hurried round the quadrangle to the gates.

No one was there but Mack, the porter, who was looking out into the road. Lovell reached the taxi first and opened the door, and Jimmy ran up and dodged in. Raby and Newcome followed him quickly, screening him from Mack's direction. Then Lovell spoke to the driver, and jumped in.

The taxi buzzed away.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome carefully blocked the windows with their persons as they passed Mack. But the porter did not think of looking into the cab. He waited till the vehicle was outside, then clanged the gates shut and locked them, and returned to his lodge.

There was a merry chuckle in the taxi as it sped down the dark road.

"Safe as houses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's hope the professor will listen to reason," grinned Jimmy Silver. "I'm pretty certain of that. He's lost his Bagshot job, anyway."



THE ROOKWOOD

(Continued from page 475.)

RAIDERS!

"Where is Master Pankley? I expected to see him here."

The Rookwood juniors exchanged glances. The hour had come. They could hardly hope to keep the professor in ignorance of the fact that he was at Rookwood, and not at Bagshot, when he came to give the entertainment. He was bound to make that discovery, and they considered it best to let him make it in the study—where they could deal with him.

"It—it's all right, sir," murmured Tommy Dodd. "As a matter of fact, it's left till a quarter to seven."

"I have some little preparations to make—"

"The—the fact is—"

"Yes?"

"Lemme see—perhaps we'd better settle in advance about your fee, sir, as—as it may be forgotten."

"Just as you like, young gentleman," said the professor. "I should not be likely to forget it, however."

Tommy Dodd laid two currency notes and two shillings on the table. The professor looked at them curiously.

"That's two fees," explained Tommy Dodd. "One for the Rookwood entertainment, and the other for the Bagshot entertainment. I suppose you don't mind giving only one entertainment instead of two, if both fees are paid."

"N-n-no!" ejaculated the professor in astonishment; "but—but I don't quite understand—"

"You—you see, we—we've brought you here to give us the show," explained Tommy Dodd. "This place isn't—ahem!—Bagshot—"

"What!"

"It's Rookwood."

"Bless my soul!"

"You see, we're Rookwood chaps, and we're up against those Bagshot bounders," said Tommy Dodd. "We've got a fund here for the prisoners in Germany, and those worms have bagged the idea for their rotten show. They wanted to bag you, too—see?"

"Master Pankley engaged me—"

"stuttered the astounded professor. "Ahem! Exactly. That was because Jimmy Silver—a Classical duffer—was too late to bag you first. So—so we came in the taxi for you. Of course, we couldn't miss a chance of getting the celebrated Professor Springer here."

"Couldn't be expected we would, be-dad," said Tommy Doyle.

"The whole school's simply dying to see you, you see," said Tommy Cook.

"They'd have been fearfully disappointed," said Oswald. "We simply couldn't lose you, sir. You understand that?"

If "soft sawder" could placate the worthy professor, "soft sawder" was not likely to be wanting. Professor Springer smiled genially. It was really the first time in his career that his services had been so generously appraised.

"But Master Pankley—" he said. "He will be expecting me—"

"That's all right, we've arranged about that. Some of our fellows have gone over there, and they'll see that Pankley doesn't expect you."

"But—but I must really go to Bagshot. I think I had better go at once in the taxi. You are very flattering, young gentlemen, but my engagement—"

"The taxi's gone," said Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "It's been gone a long time. You'd have to walk."

"Oh!"

"Three miles by muddy lanes," said Cook. "I should think you'd lose your way in the dark, sir. Hardly a finger-post the whole way."

"And too dark to see 'em," said Oswald.

"Dear me!"

"And it would take an hour to get the hack from Coombe," said Tommy Dodd, "and it's getting on for seven already. You see, it's too late for the show at Bagshot, anyway, this evening."

The professor was silent for a few moments, and the juniors watched him anxiously.

He smiled at last. "You are sure Master Pankley will not be waiting for me?" he asked.

"Quite sure!" said Tommy Dodd. "Four of our fellows have gone over there, and I answer for it that Pankley's not expecting you."

"Very well," said the professor, smiling. "You have played a trick on me, but really, I have little choice in the matter."

"I knew you'd play up, sir," said Tommy Dodd heartily. "I knew you wouldn't leave us in the lurch, with the whole school waiting to see your splendid performance."

"Well, well, I consent."

The delight of the juniors was very flattering to the professor, and he laughed heartily. Oswald cut off to announce that the professor was coming. The three Tommies escorted him in state to the Form-room. To add to the professor's satisfaction, he was informed that the village hack would call to take him back to his hotel without expense to himself. Seldom, or never, had the Great Springer been made such a fuss of.

He was smiling genially as the three Tommies escorted him into the crowded Form-room.

"Here he comes!" shouted Flynn. "Sure, it's the Great Springer himself, begorra. Three cheers for Springer!"

The Rookwood juniors cheered heartily.

Professor Springer, quite cheery and elated, went on the platform, and the entertainment commenced.

Tommy Dodd & Co. led the applause at every point, and the entertainment proceeded amid great satisfaction on all sides. Indeed, all things considered—especially the two guineas the Great Springer was rather pleased than otherwise that he had arrived at Rookwood instead of Bagshot.

The 15th Chapter. The Vanishing Trick.

Pankley & Co. smiled serenely as they led Professor Springer's double into the lecture-room at Bagshot. Pankley & Co. were feeling decidedly satisfied with themselves. They had forestalled Jimmy Silver in "bagging" the professor for an evening's entertainment, and the fact that the Rookwood fellows wanted him that evening, made him all the more valuable in Bagshot eyes. Jimmy Silver could have him another night, certainly—after they'd done with him, as Pankley gleefully remarked to his chums. It was good enough for Rookwood to follow in Bagshot's footsteps. And if they got on their dignity, as they probably would, and didn't have him at all, so much the worse for them. Pankley's fund for the prisoners of war would beat Jimmy Silver's fund hollow.

The Bagshot Bounders felt that they had ample reason to be pleased with themselves. Their satisfaction would have been considerably dashed however, if they could have guessed the identity that was hidden under the big glasses and bushy whiskers and beard of the professor.

The curtain was drawn back, and the whiskery gentleman appeared on the platform. At the same moment three more members arrived to swell the audience. They were Lovell and Raby and Newcome from Rookwood. They gravely paid their threepences at the door, and took their seats.

"Some of the bounders have come over," grinned Pankley. "Only three—but every threepenny-bit tells when you're raising a fund. Hallo, Lovell, why didn't you bring Jimmy Silver?"

"Your face worries him, old chap," said Lovell politely.

"Rookwood fathead!"

"Bagshot ass!"

After that exchange of compliments, the juniors settled down to watch the performance. The whiskery gentleman on the stage had

made his bow to the numerous and distinguished audience.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, in his squeaky voice, "some of you have seen the entertainment as given at the village room. I am about to introduce some variations in the show. The first performance will be that of the Indian Rope Trick. I require the assistance of two members of the audience. Perhaps Masters Pankley and Poole will kindly oblige?"

Up jumped Pankley and Poole at once. With all eyes upon them, they made their way to the stage. From his bag, the professor produced a long cord, and several folds of thick canvas.

"Here we are, sir," said Pankley cheerily.

"Thank you, young gentlemen. You have no objection to being blindfolded?"

"Oh, no!" said Poole.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, addressing the audience, "you will watch me bind these young gentlemen hand and foot, and roll them up in this canvas. They will disappear entirely from sight. Kindly watch me closely. I desire that there shall be no deception—no deception whatever!"

"I'm jolly well going to watch," murmured Putter to Higgs. "I don't see how he's going to make 'em disappear!"

"Oh, it's a trick!" said Higgs. "I've heard of that trick before, but I don't know how it's done. Watch him!"

All the Bagshot audience watched the conjurer closely.

He proceeded to fasten the rope round Pankley and Poole. He bound their arms and their legs, till they could not move a limb, and it was noted that he tied the knots with genuine tightness. There was no deception whatever on that point. Pankley and Poole were a little puzzled, but they submitted cheerfully. Having reduced them to a state of utter helplessness, the conjurer laid them on their backs on the stage. Then he extracted their handkerchiefs from their pockets, and rammed them into their mouths.

Pankley spluttered.

"I—I say—hold on—is that necessary?"

"Absolutely necessary—the trick could not proceed without it. Silence is absolutely required."

"Oh, all right!"

The handkerchiefs were jammed in, effectually gagging Pankley and Poole. They were reduced effectively to silence. To make assurance doubly sure, as it were, the professor tied twine round their heads with a liberal hand, to make it utterly impossible for them to eject the handkerchiefs. Then he solemnly rolled them up in the canvas, and tied more cord round the bundles, till they resembled rolls of goods.

Then he turned them on their sides, so that they could look into each other's faces. Then he knelt close, and whispered:

"And what he whispered made their eyes open wide.

"Panky, my son, you're spoofed!"

The cautious whisper of the professor reached only the ears of the two juniors rolled up in the canvas on the stage. Not a sound of it was heard by the audience.

Pankley wriggled spasmodically. For in that whisper he recognised a voice, no longer disguised.

He could not speak, he could only glare.

"Spoofed to the wide!" whispered Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "No good wriggling, old chap, you can't get loose, and you can't speak. Guess who I am!"

"Gurrrr!" came in a faint gurgle from Pankley. Poole's eyes were almost starting from his head.

"You bagged the giddy professor," went on Jimmy Silver, in the same sweet whisper. "Well, we've bagged him over your fat heads, my infants. At the present moment he's giving our show at Rookwood."

"Grooogh!"

"I've come here in a new set of whiskers, to make you sit up, dear boys. There's going to be a ripping entertainment—very. By Professor Jimmy Silver, you know."

Pankley looked Hunnish.

"I'm your old Uncle James!" murmured Jimmy. "Know me now, my innocent infant? Why don't you thank me for taking all this trouble, Panky?"

Pankley could not thank him. But he did not look as if he wanted to thank him.

"Now, you stay quiet, and enjoy the performance," said Jimmy. "I'm doing all this for your benefit, you

know. I fancy you'll have to own up that Rookwood is top dog, after this—what!"

"Gurrrr!"

"Dear little innocent lambs!" murmured Jimmy affectionately. "How easy it is to take them in and do for them! Panky, old chap, you ought to have a medal for sweet and simple innocence. You ought to be in the Foreign Office, by Jove! Such sweet and lovable trustfulness—"

"Gur-r-r!"

"Now, lie quiet, and enjoy yourselves, dear boys!"

"Gur-r-r!"

Jimmy Silver covered the flap of the canvas over the heads of Pankley and Poole, and rose, smiling, to his feet.

Under the canvas, the Bagshot chums were not smiling. The expressions on their faces would have done credit to the most Hunnish of Huns. Fortunately, their faces could not be seen by the audience. What their thoughts were could only be guessed. But no doubt their thoughts were Hunnish, too.

"Gentlemen," said the professor to the audience, "that is the first trick. Those rolls of canvas will remain as they are until I perform the vanishing trick. I guarantee that the vanishing trick will astonish you. Meanwhile, let us proceed to the next. I require further assistance. Perhaps Master Putter will oblige?"

Master Putter came on the stage. The professor took a bottle of glue from his bag, and held it up to view.

"Gentlemen, this is glue! Master Putter, you may examine it. There is no deception. You have probably never seen glue coated upon a human head, and then removed by the wave of a wand. Your head, please, Master Putter!"

"I—I say—" stammered Putter. "I—I don't want—"

"Come, come; it is merely a trick! You will understand it afterwards. Your head, please!"

squeaked the professor.

Putter advanced his head in a very gingerly manner. The professor solemnly poured the glue over it, and Putter gurgled. The audience watched, spellbound. If the professor could remove that glue by a wave of the wand, he was certainly a most remarkable conjurer. Putter's head fairly streamed with glue.

"Now, sit down, young sir!" said the professor. "A quarter of an hour must elapse—"

"It will harden in that time!" shrieked Putter. "Look here—"

"Are you performing this trick, or am I?" snapped the professor. "Grooh!"

"Please sit down!"

Putter sat down, grunting very discontentedly. The glue was running down into his collar, and he felt most uncomfortable.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell & Co. suddenly.

They could keep it back no longer.

The professor looked sternly at the three Rookwood fellows.

"Young gentlemen, you are interrupting the performance—"

"Shut up, you Rookwood bounders!" called out Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!"

"These three young gentlemen will kindly step outside!" said the professor snappishly. "I shall not proceed otherwise!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome jumped up. They understood. With cheery grins on their faces, they walked out of the lecture-room, and waited for Jimmy Silver in the passage. There, they gurgled with glee.

"Oh, what a jape!" murmured Lovell. "What a stunning jape! Poor old Putter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," the professor was going on, "the next trick must be performed in the darkness. I must request that all the lights are turned out. Keep your eyes on the stage, and kindly do not move!"

The lights were turned out for the next trick.

Darkness reigned.

Jimmy Silver slipped from the stage in the darkness, and felt his way along the wall to the door. In a couple of minutes he had joined Raby and Lovell and Newcome in the passage. The opening of the door let a shaft of light into the darkened hall, but it was closed again at once.

"Here we are again!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "How long do you think they will sit in darkness, like the giddy heathen? Time enough for us to visit the studies—what?"

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

The four Rookwood juniors ran up

the stairs. For the next ten minutes they were very busy. Then they hurried down again. The passages were deserted—all Bagshot was in the lecture-hall, waiting.

The Fistical Four slipped out into the dark quadrangle. A couple of minutes more, and they were scaling the wall, and dropping into the road. They secured the Combe Station fly, and proceeded to Rookwood.

In the cab, Jimmy Silver removed his disguise, chuckling the while. He was wondering what was happening at Bagshot.

Meanwhile, the Bagshot audience waited patiently in the darkened lecture-hall.

Ten minutes elapsed—fifteen. The audience showed signs of impatience. They were growing fed-up.

"I've jolly well had enough of this!" growled Higgs. "The professor's gone out—I saw him! Why don't he come back?"

"Professor! Professor!" shouted the audience. "Get a move on!"

But there was no sign from the professor. Several more minutes passed, amid impatient exclamations and stamping of feet from the audience. By that time all of them were fed-up. Some of the seniors left their seats, and turned on the lights. Several fellows left the hall in search of the professor. Higgs of the Fourth came rushing back in a few minutes, wildly excited.

"I say, you chaps, he's gone—can't be found anywhere!"

"What!"

"And those Rookwood bounders have gone; and they've wrecked half the Fourth-Form studies!" raved Higgs.

"Grooogh!" came from Putter. "Oh, my hair! Oh, I'm sticky! Oh, dear! I'll slaughter that professor! Grooogh!"

"Gurrrrrg!" came from the rolls of canvas.

Fellows spread all over Bagshot in search of the professor. It was soon evident that he had vanished. The vanishing trick had been performed. There was no doubt about that; but in a very unexpected way.

Higgs ran on the stage, and unrolled Pankley and Poole. Their faces were furious. Higgs dragged the gags from their mouths.

"I say, Pankley, the professor's been!"

"Fathead!" roared Pankley. "It wasn't the professor at all; it was Jimmy Silver!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"It was Jimmy Silver, got-up!" shrieked Pankley. "He whispered it to us when he'd got us safe! Oh, you fatheads, if you've let him get away! Get me loose—cut these cords! Quick—quick!"

"Great Scott! But—but—Oh, what—Ah—"

"Get me loose, you idiot!" yelled Pankley.

Pankley and Poole were cut loose by the dumbfounded Higgs. They bounded from the stage. The lecture-hall was in an uproar. Some of the seniors were laughing. But Pankley & Co. were furious. Far and wide they searched for Jimmy Silver. But the cheerful Jimmy was far beyond their reach.

The performance was over at Rookwood when the Fistical Four arrived in the cab from Coombe. Professor Springer—the genuine article—took the cab home. The performance had gone splendidly. Tommy Dodd gleefully assured the newly-arrived juniors. And there was a chorus of inquiry as to what had happened at Bagshot.

And when the Fistical Four explained there was a roar of merriment. The description of Pankley and Poole rolled up in the canvas, of Putter with the glue in his hair, of the audience waiting patiently in the dark while the Fistical Four ragged the junior studies—made the Rookwood fellows shriek.

"I rather think," remarked Jimmy Silver, "that Bagshot have been done in the eye this time. I rather think that Rookwood has scored—what! I rather think that Rookwood is top-dog, and Bagshot simply nowhere. And now, you bounders, perhaps next time you'll put your money on your Uncle James!"

And the Co. vowed solemnly—as solemnly as they could at that moment—that never, never again would they doubt the wisdom of their Uncle James.

THE END.

Next Monday: "Dishing the Dandy." Don't miss it. Remember that next Monday's issue of the Boys' Friend will cost you one penny, as usual.)