

"THE PERILS OF THE AIR!" MAGNIFICENT ARTICLE INSIDE!

The BOYS' FRIEND Id.

OUR MOTTO IS: "PLAY THE GAME!"

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ONE PENNY.

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WHY DID THE BULLY JUMP? See Our Grand School Tale!

THE ROOKWOOD VENTRILOQUIST!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story, dealing with the Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

An Amazing Mystery.

Jimmy Silver jumped. Jimmy had come along to Study No. 3 to call for Van Ryn, the new boy in the Fourth, to take him down to the football.

There was a conversation going on in the study, and though the door was closed, the voices came quite distinctly to Jimmy's ears as he stopped. And this is what Jimmy Silver heard, with great amazement:

"Help yourself to the smokes, Towny, dear boy!"
"Thanks! Got a match?"
"Here you are."
"Rippin' fags, these!"
"Oh, toppin'!"

Jimmy Silver simply blinked. The voices were the voices of Townsend and Topham, the nuts of the Fourth. Such talk between the two nuts was not surprising in itself—Jimmy knew their little ways. But it was going on in Van Ryn's study, and Van Ryn was not in the least nutty, and, more-

over, he was on the worst of terms with Townsend & Co. The nuts of Rookwood had fallen foul of the South African junior on his first arrival, and they were down on him with a very heavy down.

"Well, my hat!" Jimmy Silver ejaculated.

It looked as if Van Ryn had made it up with his foes in the Form, and adopted their nutty manners and customs, with a vengeance. If the latter was the case, Jimmy Silver intended to speak a word in season—an emphatic word. He rapped

sharply at the door, and turned the handle.

But the door did not open. It was locked on the inside.

"Van Ryn!" called out Jimmy sharply.

The conversation in the study ceased suddenly at the first knock.

"Hallo!" called out the cheery voice of the new junior.

"Let me in, you young ass!"

"Certainly!"

The key turned, and the door opened. Jimmy Silver strode into the study. The sturdy South African

greeted him with a smile. He had been on the best of terms with the captain of the Fourth from the day he came.

"Time for the footer?" he asked.

"All serene!" Jimmy Silver stared round the study.

Townsend and Topham were not visible. Neither, to Jimmy's surprise, was there any aroma of cigarette-smoke in the room.

"What the thunder—" began the astonished Jimmy.

"Anything the matter?"

"Look here, Van Ryn," said Jimmy directly. "I heard Towny and Topy talking here! Where are they?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"What was the door locked for?"

"I've been studying."

"And you sported your oak because you were studying?"

"Yes."

"No smoking going on?"

"Smoking! Certainly not! I don't smoke!"

"Well, I hope you're not such a silly ass," said Jimmy Silver. "But I heard what was said. I couldn't help it, as I had just stopped at your door. I thought you were a straight chap, Van Ryn. But I tell you I know that Townsend and Topham are here, and you say you don't know where they are."

Van Ryn nodded calmly.

"I don't know where they are," he replied. "I haven't seen either of them since lessons."

Jimmy gave him a grim look.

"That'll do," he said. "It's no business of mine, of course. I thought you were straight, and I made a mistake. So-long!"

Jimmy Silver turned to the door.

"Hold on!" said the new junior quietly. "You think that Townsend and Topham are in this study at this minute—"

"I know they are—hiding some where."

Van Ryn smiled.

"Well, look for them," he said.

"If you find them I'll eat them!"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily.

"Do you think I was dreaming I heard voices?"

"If they're in this study, you can use my head for a footer," said Van Ryn coolly.

"You're calling me a liar, you know. Put it to the proof."

"I'll jolly soon do that!" growled Jimmy Silver.

He dragged up the table-cover and looked under the table, naturally supposing that the smokers had dodged there out of sight. But there was nothing under the table. He looked behind the armchair, but the space behind the armchair was vacant. He pitched aside the screen in the corner, but there was nothing behind the screen. He looked into the study cupboard, though certainly there was no room there for two juniors to hide. The study cupboard was drawn blank.

Van Ryn watched him with a smile and a merry gleam in his eyes.

Jimmy gave up the search at last, thoroughly bewildered.

"Where are they?" he ejaculated.

"You said they were in this study."

"I heard them talking here!"

roared Jimmy Silver.

"Well, find them."

"They—they must have got out somehow."

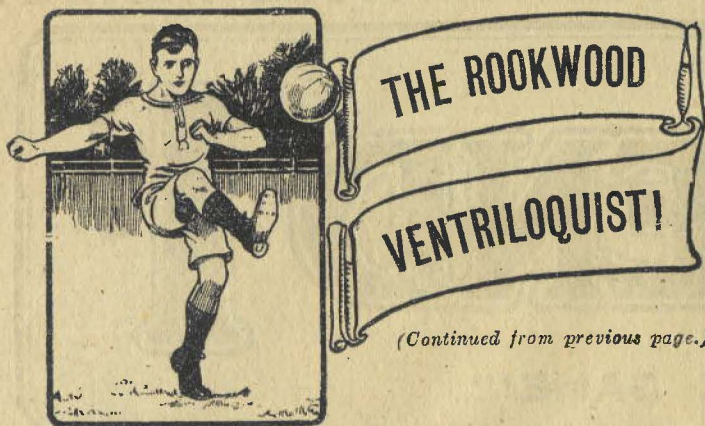
Jimmy looked from the window, but it was evident that Towny and Topy had not negotiated a thirty-foot drop. He even looked up the chimney, but there was no room in the chimney for Townsend and Topham.

Jimmy Silver looked bewildered.

"Well?" grinned Van Ryn.

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Jimmy Silver, rubbing his nose in

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amazement. "Unless I was dreaming, I heard their voices here. I—I couldn't have supposed that they came from this study if they didn't. But they're not here. How did they get out?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you Dutch image?"

"I'm waiting for you to find them," chuckled Van Ryn. "I told you they weren't here. Are we going down to the footer?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"Well, I'm ready."

Van Ryn followed the captain of the Fourth from the study. Jimmy was in a state of utter amazement. Unless his ears had deceived him, he had heard Townsend and Topham talking in the study. Van Ryn's assertion that they were not there he had regarded as a palpable whopper. Yet they were not there.

As the two juniors left the School House they sighted three elegant juniors chatting in the quadrangle. They were Smythe of the Shell, and Townsend and Topham of the Fourth. Jimmy stared at them.

"Hallo, here they are!" smiled Van Ryn. "Not in my study, you see."

"Well, my hat!"

Jimmy strode up to the three nuts. "Have you been in Van Ryn's study ten minutes ago, Towny?" he asked.

Townsend sniffed. "I'm not on speakin' terms with the cad," he said. "I'm hardly likely to go into his study."

"Or you, Topham?"

"No," snapped Topham. "I shan't be goin' there unless it's to punch his nose. What are you drivin' at?"

It was evident that Townsend and Topham, though not always truthful youths, were speaking the truth on this occasion. Jimmy Silver did not explain. He walked on after Van Ryn, leaving Towny & Co. staring.

"Satisfied?" asked Van Ryn, as Jimmy joined him.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Yes. I'm sorry I doubted your word; but—but I could have sworn—Dash it all, I must have been dreaming! It's jolly queer! Blessed if I can understand it! Let's get to the footer!"

The 2nd Chapter. Beaumont is Wrathful.

"Wherefore that worried brow, O King?"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question. The Fistical Four were at tea in the end study, after the footer practice. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were ruddy and cheery, but Jimmy Silver, usually the cheeriest of the four, was plunged into deep thought.

"Anything wrong?" asked Raby. "You've been looking like a boiled owl for a long time, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"It's awfully queer!" he said.

"Are you alluding to your face?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy peevishly. "I tell you it's jolly queer! I'm not the sort of chap to imagine things, am I?"

His chums stared at him.

"Well, that depends," said Lovell. "You imagine you're better at taking penalty-kicks than I am, Jimmy. Pure imagination!"

"Fathead! Look here, listen to me, and give me your opinion!"

"Fire away, my son! Pass the jam first!"

"And the pickles!"

"Listen to me, you frabjous asses, and dash the jam and the pickles!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Keep your wool on, dear boy! Go ahead; we're hanging on your words!"

Jimmy Silver related the peculiar incident in Van Ryn's study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome listened in astonishment at first, and then with broad grins.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Jimmy.

"I think you're a bit off your rocker, old chap!" said Lovell judicially. "Does it run in your family, do you know?"

"Fathead!" roared Jimmy.

"It's a sure sign, when a chap hears voices!" grinned Raby. "Poor old Jimmy! But I must say I've seen it coming on for some time!"

"Ass!"

"Next time the study's in funds we'll get you a strait-waistcoat, Jimmy," said Newcome comfortingly. "Rely on your old pals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver glared at his old pals.

"You howling asses! This is a serious matter! I tell you I heard Towny and Tophy talking in Van Ryn's study, as plain as I hear you now. But they weren't there!"

"If they weren't there, they weren't there," said Lovell. "That's a dead cert, like anything in Euclid. Ergo—that's Latin—you imagined it! I suppose it's old age coming on suddenly!"

"Unless you're trying to pull our leg," said Raby. "But if this is one of your little jokes, I'm blessed if I see the point!"

"It isn't, fathead! It makes me feel jolly uncomfortable!" said Jimmy. "They weren't there, right enough, and I as good as called Dutchy a liar over it. But I heard their voices!"

"You've been drinking too much ginger-beer, Jimmy!"

"Br-r-r!" growled Jimmy Silver.

And the subject dropped, though the three juniors eyed their study-leader very curiously. Jimmy Silver, cool and clear-headed as he was, was the last fellow in the world to be afflicted by strange fancies.

The door of the end study opened suddenly, and Higgs of the Fourth rushed in excitedly.

The Fistical Four jumped up. Higgs was the bully of the Fourth, though he had mended his ways very much since he had chummed with the new junior, Van Ryn. But Higgs was not on the warpath this time.

"Come on, you fellows!" he shouted.

"What's on?"

Higgs chuckled gleefully. "Beaumont, you know—Beaumont of the Sixth! Ha, ha, ha! He's in an awful wax!"

"Well, I'm jolly well not going to leave my tea to see Beaumont in a wax!" growled Lovell. "I've seen the cad in a wax often enough!"

"He can't get into his study!" shouted Higgs.

"Well, let him stay out!"

"Fathead! I tell you, it's awful fun! Knowles of the Sixth has locked himself in Beaumont's study, and won't let him in!"

"Gammon!"

"Honest Injun!" yelled Higgs. "I came to tell you chaps! Come on!"

Higgs rushed out of the study in great excitement.

"What rot!" said Lovell. "He's pulling our leg! Knowles wouldn't play a silly trick like that!"

"My hat! I'd like to see Beaumont and Knowles punching one another!" ejaculated Raby. "A pair of rotten bullies!"

"Let's go and see, anyway," said Jimmy.

The Fistical Four hurried out of the study. They found a number of the Fourth-Form fellows hurrying the same way, to the Sixth-Form passage. The exciting news had spread.

There was already a crowd on the spot when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived. Beaumont, the bully of the Sixth, the most unpopular prefect on the Classical side, was thumping at his study door. The door was evidently locked. Beaumont's face was red with rage.

He thumped and hammered furiously. The passage was crowded with fellows. Van Ryn and Tubby Muffin and Oswald and Flynn were

leaning in a row on the wall opposite the door. Beaumont was hammering at, grinning gleefully. Van Ryn, now as he was to Rookwood, had felt the heavy hand of the Classical bully, and he was evidently enjoying Beaumont's curious predicament. The prefect was not enjoying it, to judge by appearances.

"Open this door, you rotter!" shouted Beaumont.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bulkeley of the Sixth came out of his study, and pushed through the grinning crowd.

"Beaumont, what on earth are you up to?" he exclaimed.

Beaumont turned round a red and furious face.

"That idiot Knowles has locked himself in my study, and won't let me in!" he shouted.

"Knowles?"

"Yes, Knowles!"

"What an awful cheek—a Modern cad!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Bulkeley looked astounded.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "As if a prefect would play such a silly trick!"

"I tell you he's here!" howled Beaumont. "He's been talking to me through the keyhole! Lots of fellows heard him!"

"That's right enough," said Johnson of the Fifth. "I heard him!"

"He must be out of his senses, then, to play such a trick!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "Let me speak to him!"

Beaumont drew aside, panting, and Bulkeley knocked sharply on the door.

"Knowles! Are you there, Knowles?"

"What-ho! Here I am!" came a sharp, unpleasant voice, with a slight nasal sound—the well-known tones of Knowles, the Modern prefect.

"What are you doing in Beaumont's study?"

"Scoffing his tea."

Bulkeley jumped. Such a reply from a cheeky fag would not have been surprising, but from a prefect of the Sixth Form it was simply astounding.

"Knowles, are you mad?" exclaimed Bulkeley. "What have you locked Beaumont out for?"

"Oh, I like to hear him ramp!"

"Open the door at once!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Knowles—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bulkeley gasped. "He must be out of his senses!" he exclaimed.

"I'm going into my study!" howled Beaumont. "My tea's getting cold, and that Modern cad is scoffing it, too! I just went out for a minute to speak to Neville, and that rotter must have slipped in! Fancy a prefect japing like a fag! Why, I'll hammer him till he yells, I tell you! Open this door, Knowles, you Modern cad!"

"Rats!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The 3rd Chapter. Where is Knowles?

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, highly amused, but greatly astonished. The Classical chums did not like Knowles, the Modern prefect. He was a bully, and he was a rotter generally, according to the juniors. But with all Knowles' faults, they would never have expected him to play a trick like this, like a cheeky fag of the Third Form. He might have been expected to have some sense of the dignity of the Sixth Form.

Beaumont was astounded, too, but he was still more enraged. Prefect or no prefect, Knowles was locking him out of his study and scoffing his tea, and Beaumont intended to take summary vengeance as soon as he could get at him.

He hammered on the door with growing fury.

"Better chuck that!" said Bulkeley at last. "You'll have the masters coming up here, Beaumont!"

"I don't care! Do you think I'm going to be locked out of my study?" shrieked Beaumont.

"Knowles must be mad!"

"I'll hammer it out of him if he is! Open this door, you Modern cad!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Somebody get me something to smash in the door!" roared Beaumont. "Silver—Lovell—Jones, get me a form or something!"

"What-ho!" grinned Jimmy Silver. There was a rush to obey Beaumont's excited command. The smashing in of a Sixth Form study was quite a delightful prospect to the juniors, and there wasn't a junior present who wouldn't have given a week's pocket-money to see the two unpopular seniors hammering one another.

The Fistical Four came rushing

back along the passage, dragging a form with a terrific clatter.

"Here you are, Beaumont!"

Bulkeley interposed.

"Beaumont, you can't smash in the door!"

"Can't I?" roared Beaumont. "Do you think I'm going to be kept out all the evening, then? I've got my work to do!"

"Blessed if I understand it!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "But you'd better get a Modern master here, and he'll order Knowles to open the door."

"Oh, rats!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The heavy form crashed on the lock, and the door groaned and creaked.

"Look out, here comes Bootles!" called out Flynn of the Fourth.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, came rustling along the corridor, with a very angry face.

"What is this uproar?" he exclaimed. "Bulkeley, I am surprised that you allow this! Beaumont, are you out of your senses? What are you doing?"

"Knowles is keeping me out of my study!" gasped Beaumont. "He's locked me out! He's scoffing my grub!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir!" said Bulkeley. "Bless my soul!"

Mr. Bootles rapped sharply on the door.

"Knowles! Are you there, Knowles?"

The crowd in the passage listened breathlessly. They wondered whether Knowles would venture to reply to Mr. Bootles as he had replied to Bulkeley. But there was no answer from the study.

Mr. Bootles rapped again. "Knowles! Knowles!"

No reply.

"You must be mistaken; Knowles is not there!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "It is quite inconceivable that a prefect would play such a trick!"

"I tell you he spoke to us."

"What—what? Nonsense! He cannot be there! Knowles, if you are there, I command you to reply!"

Silence.

"You see, he is not there," said Mr. Bootles severely. "Doubtless you locked the door yourself, Beaumont."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Probably you have the key in your pocket at this moment."

"I—I—"

"Doubtless this is sheer absent-mindedness on your part, Beaumont."

"But—but Knowles is in there, sir!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "He was answering us through the keyhole."

"Then why does he not answer now?" snapped Mr. Bootles. "You are mistaken. I am sure that a prefect would not play such a trick. Look in your pockets for the key, Beaumont."

Beaumont spluttered.

"If you please, sir," said Van Ryn of the Fourth, "there's a key lying on the floor."

He pushed it forward with his foot. Jimmy Silver gave him a quick glance. He had an idea that Van Ryn's foot had been on that key, concealing it, until that moment. But Van Ryn's face was quite innocent.

Mr. Bootles blinked at the key over his glasses.

"Is that your doorkey, Beaumont?"

"It—it—it looks like it, sir," stammered Beaumont, utterly taken aback.

"Try it on the door at once!"

Beaumont, like a fellow in a dream, stooped and picked up the key. He inserted it in the lock, and it turned. It was evidently the key belonging to the door. But how had Knowles locked himself in the study, while the key was on the floor outside?

Beaumont threw the door open. He stared into the study.

It was empty!

"Where on earth is Knowles?" ejaculated Bulkeley.

"Hiding somewhere!" exclaimed Beaumont furiously.

He rushed into the study, followed by half a dozen fellows. Their impression was that the practical joker was hiding, to avoid meeting Mr. Bootles' wrathful eyes. But a few minutes' search was quite enough to prove that there was no one in the study, excepting the searchers themselves.

"I told you Knowles was not here!" snapped Mr. Bootles. "But—but somebody was there!" gasped Bulkeley.

"Nonsense! The study must have been locked from the outside, or the key could not have been outside."

Beaumont blinked round the study. "He—he must have got out of the window," he stammered.

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Bootles rustled away, frowning.

"All the same, Knowles was here, and he must have cleared off, by the window," said Beaumont, between his teeth.

"He hasn't touched your grub," remarked Bulkeley.

"No; I suppose that was only his rot." Beaumont stared at the tea-table. Nothing had been disturbed there. "He must have bolted by the window when he heard Bootles. Fancy a prefect playing such a fool-trick! I'll jolly well go over and talk to him about this."

"But how on earth did the key get outside?"

"Might have shoved it under the door."

"There isn't room."

"The cad may have a key that fits, then. I'll jolly well teach him not to play tricks in my study!" snarled Beaumont.

And the Classical prefect, leaving his tea untouched, strode away, and hurried over to Mr. Manders' house to see Knowles. He came back in about ten minutes, looking rather dusty and rumped. Evidently there had been a warm argument on the Modern side.

The 4th Chapter!

The Persecution of Mr. Bootles.

Mr. Bootles was cross that morning. As a rule, the Fourth-Form master was a kind and good-tempered little gentleman. But there were times when he was cross, and this was one of them.

Some thoughtless youth had played a trick on Mr. Bootles that morning. When he sat at his high desk at the beginning of lessons, Mr. Bootles had reposed on his stool for about the millionth part of a second, and then leaped up with a yell that would have done credit to a Hun. There was a bent pin on his stool, and Mr. Bootles had found it.

It was not surprising that Mr. Bootles was annoyed. The trick was a foolish and dangerous one, and was probably the work of Higgs. But the culprit did not own up, and the whole class was sentenced to an hour's detention. And Mr. Bootles' temper had suffered so much, that he was ratty all the morning, and, indeed, seemed to have changed characters with Mr. Manders of the Modern side. The Modern juniors were quite glad to get out of the Form-room; but the unfortunate Classics had to stand Mr. Bootles all the morning. And towards third lesson, he was beginning to have a wearing effect on them.

"Blow the silly ass who played that silly trick!" Jimmy Silver muttered wrathfully. "Bootles won't get over it for hours!"

"Silver!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You were speaking to Van Ryn?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Take a hundred lines! You will take a hundred lines also, Van Ryn!"

"Van Ryn didn't speak, sir," said Jimmy meekly.

"Silence!"

"But I didn't speak, sir!" protested Van Ryn.

"Take two hundred lines, Van Ryn!"

Mr. Bootles evidently was not in a reasonable mood.

"Right on the warpath, by gad!" grinned Mornington.

Mr. Bootles' ears seemed as sharp as needles that morning.

"Take a hundred lines for talking in class, Mornington!"

"Oh, by gad!" grunted Mornington.

There was no more talking in class. Mr. Bootles was in a dangerous mood, and had to be treated tactfully. But there was an interruption before last morning lesson was over. The big Form-room windows were wide open, to admit the fresh morning air. Mr. Bootles' voice was droning away, when a strange voice was suddenly heard, apparently calling in from the quadrangle.

"Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars!"

The juniors simply spun round towards the window, and Mr. Bootles ceased speaking suddenly, and blinked in the same direction.

"Hany ole rags an' bones?" went on the same sing-song voice. "Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

The juniors grinned.

It was the first time, in their experience, that an itinerant merchant in rags and bones had called to ply his calling in the quadrangle of Rookwood School.

"Hany ole rags an' bones?"

Mr. Bootles strode to the window angrily.

"Go away!" he exclaimed. "How dare you come here? Go to the back door, if you have any business here!"

The Form-master came back to the

class, quite supposing that the interruption was at an end. But it wasn't. Just as he began droning again, that sing-song voice floated in at the window.

"Rags an' bones! Bottles an' jars! Many ole rags an' bones!"

There was a chuckle from the Fourth. The Classical juniors were tickled by the persistence of the rag merchant, and they welcomed the interruption to the lesson in the thundery atmosphere of the Form-room.

Mr. Bootles did not welcome it. He breathed hard through his nose. Once more he strode, rustling, to the window, and stared out angrily into the quad.

"Will you go away?" he shouted. "Keep yer wool on, guv'nor."

Mr. Bootles blinked to and fro from the window. The rag merchant was not to be seen, though his voice sounded quite close.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"Many ole rags an' bones, guv'nor?"

"Certainly not!"

"I'll give you a shillin' for that there gownd."

"What—what?" gasped Mr. Bootles, purple with indignation. Mr. Bootles' gown had seen service, but certainly it was worth a good deal more than a shilling.

"Many ole rags an' bones?"

"Where is the insolent knave?" exclaimed the exasperated Mr. Bootles. "I cannot see him! Where are you, man? How dare you hide behind that tree and call out your offensive remarks?"

"Eighteenpence for the gownd, guv'nor."

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

Mr. Bootles spun round from the window.

"Silence! Silence immediately! There is no occasion for merriment in the absurd insolence of that intrusive person! Silence!"

"Many ole rags an' bones!"

"Goodness gracious, this is unendurable!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. And he rushed from the Form-room to interview the rag merchant personally outside.

"My hat! What larks!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "That ragman is a boon and a blessing. But what's he doing it for?"

"I wonder!" grinned Van Ryn.

The Classics rushed to the window.

Mr. Bootles came whisking out into the quadrangle, with the evident intention of making some emphatic remarks to the persistent merchant.

But, to his amazement, the merchant had disappeared.

Certainly there was no sign of him to be discovered anywhere near the windows of the Fourth Form-room. He was not hiding behind the big tree opposite the window. He was not to be seen anywhere.

Mr. Bootles, breathing hard, came back to the Form-room. The juniors hurriedly resumed their places before he arrived.

With a heightened colour, Mr. Bootles resumed the lesson. But barely had he started, when the sing-song voice floated in at the windows again.

"Many ole rags an' bones! Tuppence for that gownd, guv'nor."

"Dear me!"

"And tuppence fur yer face, guv'nor."

"Bless my soul! What—what insolence! I—I—I—" Mr. Bootles fairly leaped to the window.

"Ruffian! Rascal! If you do not immediately go, I will come forth and—personally chastise you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am aware," roared Mr. Bootles from the window, "that you are hiding behind that tree, you insolent knave."

There was no reply, and Mr. Bootles, with a snort, slammed the window hard, and returned to the class, who made heroic efforts to become grave.

"Silver, you are laughing!"

"I, sir?"

"Were you not laughing, Silver?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Take a hundred lines."

"The same hundred you gave me before, sir?" asked Jimmy Silver innocently.

Rap!

"Yarrah!" yelled Jimmy.

Mr. Bootles was in no humour for witticisms. His pointer came down on Jimmy's knuckles.

"I will keep order in this class," gasped Mr. Bootles. "Van Ryn, you were laughing. There is no cause for laughter, Van Ryn; neither is the Form-room the proper place for unseemly merriment. Hold out your hand."

Swish!

"Wow-wow!"

"Silence!"

The lesson was resumed in a high-explosive atmosphere. But Mr. Bootles was hardly going again when the voice of the rag merchant was heard, and this time it came from the door.

"Many ole rags an' bones! Rags, bones, bottles, an' jars!"

Mr. Bootles stood thunderstruck.

"The—impertinent rascal has actually entered the house!" he ejaculated.

He ran to the door with whisking gown.

"Rags an' bones!"

Mr. Bootles flung the door open, and rushed into the corridor without, gripping his pointer. If he had discovered the rag merchant there that gentleman would certainly have felt the weight of the pointer.

But the passage was empty!

Mr. Bootles blinked along it in amazement.

Surely the man had not had time to flee along the corridor and dodge round the corner? Yet he was not there!

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

He closed the door, and came back to the class in great amazement. Hardly had he turned his back on the door when the sing-song voice was heard there!

"Rags, bones, bottles, an' jars!"

Round whisked Mr. Bootles like a spinning-top, and he hurled himself at the door. It flew open, and he

Silver and Van Ryn were just coming downstairs. The prefect spotted them before they could dodge.

"Fag wanted!" he exclaimed. "Buzz off to my study, both of you."

Jimmy looked rebellious.

"Just going out to the footer, Beaumont," he demurred. "Flynn's your fag. Find Flynn."

"Puzzle, find Flynn!" grinned Van Ryn. Patrick O'Donovan Flynn had heard Beaumont's dulcet tones, and he was already at a safe distance.

"Don't give me any of your cheek," said Beaumont. "Get to my study at once."

The ashplant slid down into his hand.

"Anything to oblige, dear boy," said Jimmy Silver, as there was no help for it. "Come on, Dutchy."

The two juniors walked in front of Beaumont to his study. The prefect did not intend to give them a chance of dodging round a corner. Beaumont's study was in a dishevelled state. Apparently some merry ragger had been there, for the cinders were over the carpet, the ink was spilt on the table, and books and papers were strewn about the floor. Some junior, upon whom Beaumont's ashplant had fallen, had "got his own back" in this peculiar manner.

"I dare say you young scoundrels did this, if the truth were known," said the Sixth-Former, with a scowl.

"Not guilty, my lord," said Jimmy

Van Ryn busied themselves about the study. Suddenly the Sixth-Former gave a jump. From the box beneath him there came the sudden, savage growl of a dog.

The senior rose hastily, and stared at the box.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"What the dickens?" exclaimed Beaumont, in amazement.

"My hat! Do you keep a dog in the study, Beaumont?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Beastly, to keep him shut up in a box like that!"

"There can't be a dog in that box!" exclaimed Beaumont. "It's locked."

Gr-r-r-r!

"Sounds like one," grinned Jimmy.

"Bow-wow-wow!" yelled Beaumont.

"My only hat!" yelled Beaumont. "Some young rotter has put the beast in there! My Sunday clobber's in that box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "I'm sorry for your Sunday clobber."

"Shut up, you young villain! I dare say you did it!" shouted Beaumont.

"Not guilty, your Majesty!" chuckled Jimmy, dodging round the table as Beaumont made a lash at him with the ashplant. "But it's a ripping idea—ripping."

Beaumont tore at the lid of the box. As a dog was growling inside it, he naturally concluded that he must

it! Those fags heard it, too! Silver, you heard—"

Beaumont became aware that the fags were no longer in the study. He rushed furiously to the door.

"Silver! Van Ryn!"

There was a patter of feet in the distance, and that was all. The fags were gone. Beaumont rushed to the window. Out in the quadrangle Jimmy Silver and Dick Van Ryn came in sight, sauntering cheerily along. Beaumont waved a furious fist at them.

"Silver! Come here!"

Jimmy Silver looked round and kissed his hand to the enraged prefect. Van Ryn raised his cap politely. Then they strolled on.

Beaumont panted.

He knew that the young rascals would be in cover before he could get along the passage and out of the door of the School House. It was not exactly dignified for a prefect of the Sixth to scramble through a window. But Beaumont was too furious to think about his dignity. He scrambled out, dropped in the quadrangle, and started towards the juniors at a run.

"Look out!" yelled Van Ryn.

"My aunt! I didn't know old Beaumont was an acrobat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Run for it!"

The bully of the Sixth was bearing down on them at top speed. Jimmy and Van Ryn ran for it, speeding across to the Modern side. Owing to Beaumont's late troubles with Knowles, they hoped that he would not pursue them into Mr. Manders' House. But Beaumont came on savagely, his coat-tails flying.

"Dodge in!" gasped Jimmy. "Tommy Dodd'll let us into his study."

The fleeing juniors "dodged" in, and unfortunately dodged right into Mr. Manders, the Modern master, who was just coming out.

"Oh! Ah! Op-p-p-p!" gasped Mr. Manders.

The lean, angular gentleman staggered back from the impact. Jimmy and Van Ryn reeled, too. Beaumont came to a sudden halt, and burst into a chuckle. He strolled away, more than content to leave the fags in the hands of Mr. Manders. That sharp-tempered gentleman was not likely to have much mercy on two juniors who had "biffed" him in that reckless manner.

The Modern master straightened up, gasping for breath.

"Boys! Silver! Rascals! How dare you?" he stuttered.

"Sorry, sir! Quite an accident!"

"Awfully sorry, sir!"

"Follow me to my study!" gasped Mr. Manders.

The two Classics had escaped Beaumont, but they had escaped out of the frying-pan into the fire. In great dismay they followed Mr. Manders to his study.

The 6th Chapter. A Wonderful Parrot.

Mr. Manders selected his stoutest cane, gasping the while. He was winded. Strictly speaking, Mr. Manders had not authority to cane Classical juniors, who did not belong to his division at all; but he was assuming the right for the occasion. And it was plain that argument on the subject would not be any use.

Jimmy Silver and Van Ryn stood waiting while Mr. Manders pumped for breath. Van Ryn's eyes wandered round the study, and rested upon the parrot in the cage before the window. The parrot was cackling, and blinking at the juniors with evil eyes, quite as if he understood and enjoyed their position.

Mr. Manders' parrot was very like his owner in temper. He delighted in bestowing sharp pecks upon anything that came within his reach—unsuspicious fingers that offered him sugar often received a savage pinch—and there were a dozen Modern fellows who had sworn solemn vows to wring Polly's neck at the first convenient opportunity.

Van Ryn's merry eyes glimmered as he looked at the parrot.

"You young rascals!" gasped Mr. Manders. "I shall impress upon your minds that you must not—"

"Cut it short, cocky!"

Mr. Manders jumped almost clear of the floor.

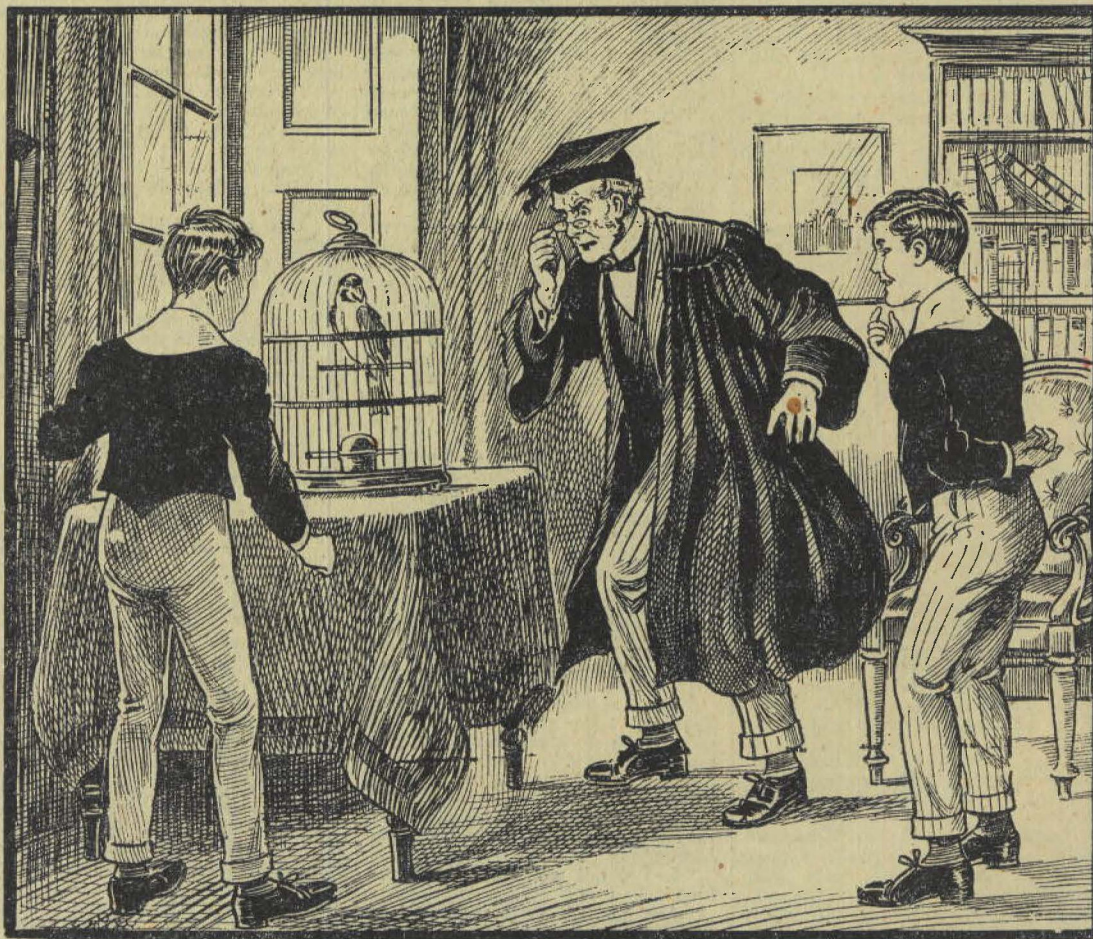
"Wha-at? Who spoke?" he stuttered.

"Keep your wool on, cocky!"

The Modern master blinked at the parrot.

Jimmy Silver stared at the bird blankly. He knew that the Modern master spent hours in trying to teach that ill-favoured fowl to talk, but Polly had never got further than "Good-morning!" and "Polly wants sugar!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Manders.



"Where did you dig up those features, Mandy?" said the parrot. "Oh, what a chivvy! What a benighted chivvy! Ha, ha!" The expression on Mr. Manders' face was extraordinary.

rushed out—into an empty corridor.

"Rascal!" roared Mr. Bootles. "How dare you? How dare you? How dare you, I say, enter these premises and play these tricks? I will have you flogged! I—I mean locked up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bootles spun round again.

"Boys, the class is dismissed! Kindly search the passages for that disreputable and insolent rascal, and bring him to me. You are permitted to use force."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" chorused the Classical Fourth.

And they rushed out pell-mell, in great delight to hunt for the rag merchant. They hunted high and low. But, to their astonishment, they did not find him. Not a corner was left unexplored. But nowhere within the walls of Rookwood was a rag-and-bone merchant to be found!

The 5th Chapter. Very Mysterious!

"Fag!"

Beaumont of the Sixth called out from his study doorway. And the answer to his call was a scurrying of feet in various directions.

Nobody was anxious to fag for Beaumont.

"Fag!" roared Beaumont.

The bully of the Sixth came down the passage, with a frowning brow and his ashplant under his arm.

As ill-luck would have it, Jimmy and

Silver cheerfully. "Never thought of it, by gum!"

"Well, clear it up, and make the study tidy, and lay the table for tea, and look sharp about it!"

"Are we bound to do all that, Silver?" asked Van Ryn rebelliously. Fagging at school was a new experience for the South African junior.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all in the game," he said. "When you're in the Sixth, you'll be able to play the Hun like Beaumont. Won't he, Beaumont?"

"Hold your tongue, and get to work," scowled Beaumont.

"But what about footer?" said Van Ryn.

"You've got a lot to learn here, you young Hottentot," said Beaumont angrily. "That will teach you to do as a prefect tells you, without jawing." And he gripped Van Ryn's ear, and twisted it.

The new junior gave a yell.

"Yow! Leggo, you rotter!"

"Now pile in," said Beaumont; "and no more jaw!"

The South African junior clenched his hands hard, and measured the senior with his eye.

Jimmy caught his arm.

"Cheese it, Dutchy! You mustn't hammer a prefect; against the rules of the school. Pile in! Can't be helped. Keep smiling."

Beaumont sat on a chest under the window, ashplant in hand, to see that the fags did their work. Jimmy and

have left it, inadvertently, unlocked. But the lid was locked.

"Locked!" stuttered Beaumont.

Gr-r-r-r! Bow-wow! Br-r-r-r!

The prefect thrust a key into the lock and threw up the lid.

The big chest was almost full of clothes. Beaumont of the Sixth was a dandy, and his wardrobe was extensive. A neatly-folded evening-coat lay at the top. Beaumont lifted it and looked under it.

He dropped the coat and jumped back.

"Some beast has shoved a dog under my clothes there!" he hissed. "I'll skin him! I'll smash him! I'll—"

Gr-r-r-r!

Beaumont flung himself at the box and dragged the clothes out, with the ashplant all ready to lash as soon as he saw the hidden dog. Van Ryn touched Jimmy's arm, and pointed to the door. Jimmy nodded.

While Beaumont was busy with the box the two juniors tiptoed out of the study and vanished.

The prefect tore out article after article, but the sweet canine voice was no longer heard.

He stopped at last.

It was evident that there was no animal, canine or otherwise, among the clothes in the chest.

"My only hat!" stuttered Beaumont. "I—I couldn't have fancied



THE ROOKWOOD VENTRILOQUIST!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Bless your boots!" came from the parrot.
"Dear me! Polly—it is the parrot! Bless my soul!"
"Cackle, cackle, cackle!" from Polly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Manders, laying down the cane and approaching the parrot's cage. "This is extraordinary! My trouble has not been expended in vain. The parrot has learned quite suddenly to talk. This is very satisfactory."
"Oh, what a face!"
"Wha-a-at?"

"Where did you dig up those features, Mandy?"
"G-g-goodness gracious!"
"Oh, what a chivvy! Cackle, cackle! What a benighted chivvy! Ha, ha!"

The expression on Mr. Manders' face was extraordinary. It was satisfactory to find his parrot talking with such facility. But Polly's remarks in themselves could not be considered flattering.
"Polly!" gasped Mr. Manders.
"Oh, cheese it, old scout!"
"Goodness gracious!"

"What a voice! Oh, what a voice! Funny old file! Laugh at him!" came from the cackling parrot.
"What a funny old file!"
Mr. Manders stuttered.

"I saw you, Mandy!" pursued the astonishing bird. "Who goes down to Coombe and ogles the milliner? Ha, ha!"
"Ha, ha!" echoed Jimmy Silver involuntarily.

Mr. Manders spun round, his face crimson.
"Silence! Someone has been teaching the bird to say those dreadful things!" he gasped. "Knowles!—Knowles was passing the door, and he stopped—Knowles, are you aware of any—any junior having been in my study, teaching my parrot to—to repeat atrocious expressions?"

"No, sir!" said Knowles, in astonishment.
"He has learned atrocious expressions from someone!" exclaimed Mr. Manders.
"I didn't know he could talk at all, sir," said Knowles.
"Nonsense, Knowles—nonsense! A very intelligent bird—very. But—but he shall not be taught such vile expressions. I shall inquire very strictly—"

"Cackle, cackle! Polly wants sugar!" said the parrot.
"No harm in that, sir," said Knowles, "is there?"
"N-no; but he was saying something—something quite different—personal references of the most unpleasant kind. Strange to say, he has stopped it now," said Mr. Manders.

"Well, that beats it!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, as the two juniors hurried out of Mr. Manders' House. "Fancy that silly parrot talking like that! Some of the Modern kids have been teaching him, I suppose. Letting poor old Manders' secrets out, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Jolly lucky for us, too!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Mandy didn't want us to hear any more."
"Jolly lucky, wasn't it?" agreed Van Ryn.

And the two Classics went down to the football in high good humour.

The 7th Chapter.
Mysterious Voices.

"Hullo, what's the row?" asked Jimmy Silver, as he came into the Common-room that evening.
"The blessed place is haunted, I believe!" growled Townsend. "I thought I'd sat on a dog. I heard it yelp distinctly. And—and—"

"And there was no dog there," remarked Van Ryn. "Wonderful!"
"Jolly queer," said Topham. "I could have sworn I heard a dog yelp when Topham sat down."
Townsend sat down in the armchair again, looking puzzled and disturbed. Jimmy Silver looked puzzled, too.

There had certainly been several queer happenings at Rookwood during the past two or three days—happenings that could hardly be accounted for. Jimmy Silver had been thinking about the matter a good deal.

Townsend and Topham, with one eye on Van Ryn, began a pleasant conversation on the subject of South Africa. Topham and Toppy had found by experience that Van Ryn was a hard hitter, and they no longer thought of ragging the new junior, but they were still as much down on him as ever.

Now they were holding an agreeable debate concerning Van Ryn's native land, for the South African to hear, Townsend averring that Boers were cannibals, and Topham suggesting referring the question to Van Ryn, as a fellow who ought to know. Some of the Classics expected to see Van Ryn break out, but the new junior only smiled. Topham and Toppy's pleasant little talk was interrupted, however.

"Oh, you're a silly idiot, Topham!"
"Oh, am I?" said Townsend, staring at his chum. "You silly ass—"

"Feh, what's that?" asked Topham. "I didn't speak."
"Don't you tell whoppers!" growled Townsend. "I'll jolly well punch your silly head if you open your silly mouth again."
"What?" yelled Topham. "I—I—"

Townsend stared about him in bewilderment. "I didn't say that—"

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Topham. "Don't tell lies! I'd like to see you punching my head, you tailor's dummy!"
"I—I didn't! You're a funk, Topham!"
"Look here, do you want a thick ear?" shouted the astonished Topham.
"I—I didn't say anything of the kind! I—I—"

"Are you off your rocker?" demanded Topham. "First you say a thing, and then you say you didn't say it!"
"I didn't! I—I never—"

"Oh, shut up! You're a rotten funk yourself!"
"Well, you two chaps are gettin' to one another, I must say," remarked Smythe of the Shell.

"I didn't say that!" howled Topham. "Somebody else—Don't you shove your oar in, Smythe, or I'll dot your silly nose!"
"Oh will you, by gad!" exclaimed Adolphus Smythe wrathfully. "I'll soon show you who will get his nose dotted!"
"Here, hands off!" shouted Topham, as the indignant Adolphus rushed at him. "I didn't speak! I never—"

Adolphus was not a fighting man as a rule, but Topham was a very easy opponent. Adolphus howled over at the first rush.

Topham blinked up at him from the hearthrug.
"Groo! Oh, my hat! I tell you I never said—"

"If you want a jolly good lickin', get up an' have it!" said Smythe. "I tell you I never said—"

"Oh, rats!"
Van Ryn strolled out of the Common-room, leaving Smythe and Townsend and Topham engaged in a heated argument. Jimmy Silver cast a very peculiar look after the South African junior.
"Come on, you chaps!" he said to his chums.
"Hullo, what's on?" yawned Lovell.
"Follow your Uncle James, and don't jaw!"
"Oh, rats! All right!"
The Fistical Four strolled out of the Common-room. As they passed down the passage there was the sudden yap of a dog from a dark corner, and they jumped back.
"Look out!" ejaculated Lovell. "There's a blessed dog loose here!"
"Gr-r-r!"
The chums of the Fourth peered about them. But there was no dog to be seen. Lovell rubbed his eyes.
"Is the blessed place haunted?" he exclaimed.
"I rather think it is—in a way," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, we're going to lay the ghost!"
Van Ryn was on the stairs, and Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him up. The South African junior went into his study, and the four followed him.
"What the thunder have we come here for?" demanded Raby.
"To lay the ghost!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.
"What the merry dickens—"

began Lovell.
"Shut the door," said Jimmy.
"Hullo, what's the game?" asked Van Ryn.
"You are!" said Jimmy Silver coolly. "You're going to get the bumping of your life, my son, for spoofing the end study. Collar the cheeky bouncer!"
Van Ryn backed round the table. But Jimmy Silver's followers, for once, did not obey the order of their great leader. They stared at him blankly instead.

The 8th Chapter.
Jimmy Silver Solves the Mystery.

"Jimmy, you ass—"

"Jimmy, you fathead—"

"What the dickens are you driving at?"

"Didn't you say that Rookwood was haunted?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Well, we've come here to lay the ghost!"
"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" said Lovell peevishly. "What has Van Ryn got to do with it?"
"Lots, I think."
"A little off your rocker, perhaps?" suggested Van Ryn. "You know you've been hearing voices and things—"

"Yes, I know I've been hearing voices," said Jimmy Silver grimly; "and I've found out where the voices come from, too!"
"Look here, what are you getting at?" roared Lovell. "If you're not talking out of the back of your neck—"

"Shush, and listen to your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver chidingly. "There's been too many jolly mysterious things happening lately, and your Uncle James has put two and two together. First of all, the day before yesterday I heard voices in this study—Topham and Toppy's voices—and they weren't here."
"Oh, you were dreaming!" said Lovell, while Van Ryn grinned.
"Then Beaumont heard Knowles' voice in his study, and Knowles wasn't there," said Jimmy.
"Wasn't he there?" said Raby.
"No, he wasn't. Then Bootles heard a rag-and-bone man hooting in at the window, and when we hunted for a rag-and-bone merchant, there wasn't one to be found."
"Well, he had cleared off!"
"He hadn't cleared off!"
"You ass, he must have cleared off, as he wasn't there when we looked for him!" said Newcome, puzzled.
"He wasn't there, because he never had been there," said Jimmy Silver. "That rag-and-bone merchant hasn't been born yet."
"Wha-a-at!"
Jimmy's chums blinked at him, seriously alarmed for the state of his sanity. But Jimmy went on cheerily:
"Then there was a dog in a locked box in Beaumont's study, and Beaumont didn't find it—it wasn't there. Then Mr. Manders' parrot began to talk in a wonderful way—never talked like it before—and he said things that made old Manders anxious to get us

out of hearing, and saved us a licking."
"Well, that was jolly lucky!"
"Yes, wasn't it? Then Topham hears a dog yelp when he sits down and thinks he's sat on a dog—which wasn't there! Then Topham and Toppy begin to slang one another, and each of them declares that he never said what he said. And then we hear a dog in the passage; but there isn't a dog to be found. But your Uncle James has worked it out. Rookwood isn't haunted, and there is such a thing in existence as a ventriloquist, and that's what's the matter."
"A—ventriloquist!" ejaculated Lovell.
Jimmy Silver nodded calmly.
"Yes; that's the only way of accounting for it."
"My hat! I shouldn't wonder," said Raby thoughtfully. "Blessed if there's any other way of accounting for it. But who's the chap? We should jolly well know if there was a tricky beast like that at Rookwood!"
"That's what I'm coming to," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "There certainly wasn't a ventriloquist at Rookwood before Van Ryn came; but there's one soon after he came. Putting two and two together, my sons, and making four of it, I conclude that Van Ryn is the giddy ventriloquist, and the time's come for him to own up."
"Oh, crumbs!"
Van Ryn laughed.
Jimmy Silver pointed an accusing finger at him.
"You're a funny beggar," he remarked. "You've been pulling our leg. You were studying, you told me, when I heard those voices in your study. I rather think you were studying to reproduce Topham and Toppy's voices—what? You have been on the spot every time these weird voices have been heard. You're the giddy Polonius behind the curtain, and you're bowled out!"
"Bowled out, by gum!" said Lovell. "Pulling the leg of the end study, too! Collar him!"
"Leggo!" roared Van Ryn, as the Fistical Four seized him. "I own up. I—It was only a joke. I—Yah! Yoop! Yarooop!"
Bump! Bump! Bump!
"Yow-ow-woop!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Give him another!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "He's a funny merchant, but he mustn't be too funny with the end study!"
Bump!
"And another to show our appreciation of the joke!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Bump!
"Leggo!" roared Van Ryn. "I own up, you silly asses! Chuck it!"
"Give him another for his cheek and another for his neck—"

"Ha, ha!"
Bump! Bump!
Justice having been done—overdone, as it seemed to the unfortunate victim—the Fistical Four released Van Ryn. The South African junior sat on the floor and gasped.
"You silly asses!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You frabjous chumps!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Silver! What is this? What—what?" It was Mr. Bootles' staccato voice at the door. "Silver, I am surprised—shocked! What—what?"
Jimmy Silver spun round.
"Only—only a joke, sir!" he gasped. "Only a—Why—what—where—where's Bootles?" gasped Jimmy Silver.
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Van Ryn. Then Jimmy Silver understood.
"You japing bouncer! Was that you again? Collar him!"
Van Ryn caught up a cricket-bat. "Chuck it! Pax!"
"That's all very well—"

"Of course it is," said Van Ryn, laughing. "Pax, you duffers! I've pulled your silly legs, and you've bumped me, so we're quits! Chuck it!"
And the Fistical Four, on consideration, "chucked" it.
"So the bouncer's a giddy ventriloquist," said Lovell. "I say, what larks we can have with the Moderns before they could find out!"
"Hear, hear!" said the Co. all together.
And that happy prospect quite reconciled the Fistical Four to the Rookwood ventriloquist.

THE END.

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