

CARTHEW GOES TOO FAR!

by Owen Conquest



When Carthew, the unpopular prefect, is attacked and tarred, things look black for Jimmy Silver & Co., of the Rookwood Fourth. But in his thirst for revenge, Carthew oversteps the mark, with totally unexpected results.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

BEND OVER!

"BEND OVER!"

Carthew, of the Sixth Form, rapped out the order.

He stood in the doorway of the end study in the Classical Fourth passage at Rookwood, the official ashplant in his hand.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, Lovell, and Newcome were standing in the study, their eyes on Mark Carthew.

They heard his command; but, like the celebrated Dying Gladiator, they heard it, but they heeded not.

"Bend over!" repeated Carthew. "Do you hear me, Lovell?"

Arthur Edward Lovell nodded.

"I'm not deaf!" he remarked.

"Bend over, then!"

Carthew twirled the ashplant, evidently anxious to get to work with it.

Still Arthur Edward Lovell, the member of the Fistical Four upon whose devoted head Carthew's wrath had fallen, made no movement to obey.

No doubt Lovell was wrong.

Carthew, as a prefect of the Sixth Form, was invested with the power of the ashplant. At his command to bend over, a Lower School fellow was supposed to bend and to be caught bending. And, indeed, an order from

Bulkeley or Neville or any other prefect of Rookwood never was disputed. But with Carthew it was different.

True it was that he was a Sixth Form prefect. True it was that Arthur Edward Lovell had descended the staircase an hour ago, not by the stairs according to rule, but by the banisters, with arms and legs wildly flying, to the imminent risk of the said arms and legs if not of his valuable neck. True it was that any junior doing the same was liable to a prefect's licking.

In fact, it is much to be regretted that Arthur Edward Lovell was in the wrong all along the line.

Still, there were extenuating circumstances.

Carthew had been hanging about in his silent, spying, stealthy-footed way and Lovell had not seen him till too late, so he felt that he had been unfairly caught out. And Carthew had an old grudge against the end study, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were all quite assured that he had seized upon that trivial incident as an excuse for administering punishment there.

So Arthur Edward Lovell, instead of bending over, gave Mark Carthew a glare of truculent defiance. And Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome joined in the glare and the defiance. The Fistical Four stood in a row in the study, facing the prefect in the doorway with the fairly evident intention of standing by one another and putting up resistance if the bully of the Sixth came too close with the ashplant.

Carthew waited.

He was waiting for Lovell to bend over a chair. But he might have waited till he was an old, old man; Arthur Edward had no intention whatever of bending over.

There was a long pause.

"Lovell!" rapped out Carthew at last. "I've ordered you to bend over!"

"You've ordered me!" agreed Lovell.

"Are you going to do it?"

"Not this afternoon!" said Lovell pleasantly. "Call another day, and we'll see what we can do for you."

And the Fistical Four grinned.

"That's enough!" said Carthew; and he strode at Arthur Edward Lovell and grasped him by the collar with his left hand, the ashplant flourishing in his right.

Whack!

"Whoooooo!"

There was one hefty whack from the ashplant, one formidable roar from Arthur Edward Lovell as he struggled.

Then the Fistical Four closed on Mark Carthew as one man, and the bully of the Sixth was collared and swept over.

"Hands off!" yelled Carthew.

But it was a case of "hands on." And Carthew, big Sixth Former as he was, found himself not quite able to handle four of the Fourth. And Carthew, a funk at heart, weakened when a firm grasp was laid on him. He staggered back into the doorway with the Fistical Four clinging to him like cats, and in the doorway he reeled to and fro, gasping.

"Outside!" gasped Raby.

"Chuck him out!"

Crash!

Carthew went flying.

He landed on his back in the Fourth Form passage and lay there spluttering, almost foaming with rage.

Whizz!

His official ashplant came whirling out after him. It landed on Mark Carthew's nose, gently tapping that feature.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shout from a crowd of

the Fourth, rushing out of their studies at the sound of the uproar. Carthew was not popular in the Fourth or in any other Form at Rookwood, even his own. The sight of Carthew of the Sixth sprawling breathlessly on his back in the Fourth Form passage was a quite agreeable one to the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Putty of the Fourth, the first to arrive; and his roar was echoed by a swarm of Classical juniors.

Carthew sat up quite dazedly.

He had been ejected from a junior study; he, a prefect of the Sixth Form! It was incredible; but it had happened. Only too assuredly it had happened. The ache in Carthew's bones was an indubitable proof that it had happened.

"Oh!" gasped Carthew.

"Come back and have another?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price dribblin' him along to the stairs?" said Valentine Mornington cheerily. "Let's make a job of it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Erroll. "Don't be an ass, Morny!"

"Bosh! Let's boot him out!"

"After all, he's a prefect," said Peele. "It means a frightful row with the Head! I wouldn't care to be in Jimmy Silver's shoes!"

Carthew staggered to his feet.

He gripped his ashplant and seemed for a moment about to make a fierce rush into the end study. The juniors watched him breathlessly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood firm in their doorway, grimly defiant. They were ready to handle Carthew again if he came. Precisely for that reason he did not come.

"I shall report this to your Form-master!" he gasped.

"Report and be blowed!" said Lovell.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Rats!"

"Get out!"

Almost choking with rage, the discomfited prefect swung away towards the stairs. He had to pass through a grinning crowd of the Fourth. Certainly the prefect's report meant serious trouble for the end study; but Carthew himself was defeated and discomfited, and his defeat and discomfiture caused gleeful rejoicing in the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew paused as he passed Mornington and caught the mocking grin on Morny's face.

Smack!

"Oh!" gasped Morny.

He reeled away from a savage box on the ear and went sprawling along the floor.

Carthew strode on to the stairs, rather quickening his pace. He disappeared down the staircase as Mornington staggered up, his face convulsed with rage.

Morny was speeding towards the stairs when Erroll caught him by the arm.

"Let me go, you fool!" shouted Mornington.

"Stop!"

"I tell you——"

"Stop!" said Erroll quietly.

And, almost by force, Erroll led his excited chum into Study No. 4 and slammed the door.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

FOR IT!

"WELL, this does it!"

Raby made that remark in the end study.

His chums nodded rather gloomy assent.

It did ; there was no mistake about that.

Even Arthur Edward Lovell was beginning to doubt whether he would not have done well, after all, to have bent over at the prefect's command.

"He's gone to Dalton, of course," said Newcome.

"Of course."

"That means being up before Mr. Dalton or the Head," said Jimmy Silver. "Well, it can't be helped ! Keep smiling !"

"He's a beastly bully!" said Lovell.

"He is—he are !"

"He didn't care a rap about my sliding down the banisters ! He wouldn't have seen me, anyhow, if he hadn't been sneaking about like a cat ! 'Tain't a prefect's bizney to spy on fellows !"

"True, O king !"

"We can explain to Mr. Dalton——" Lovell paused.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing to explain, and he realised it. Mr. Dalton, master of the Fourth Form, had more than once checked Carthew's bullying proclivities, especially in the direction of the end study. He held the scales of justice with a firm and impartial hand. Had Mark Carthew been bullying as usual, his report to the master of the Fourth would not have mattered very much.

But in this case it could not be denied that Carthew had been within his rights and duties. He had acted as any other Rookwood prefect would have acted in the same circumstances ; even "old Bulkeley" himself.

There was the rub.

Jimmy Silver & Co. realised that they were "for it," and that, practically, they hadn't a leg to stand on.

They had only to wait for the chopper to come down.

It was not long in coming.

The chortling in the Classical Fourth passage died away as the stalwart figure of Bulkeley of the Sixth came along. The captain of Rookwood School had a very grave and serious face, and his look showed that the end study were up against it.

He looked into the end study grimly.

"Come along, you four !" he said. "Mr. Dalton wants you."

"Right-ho, Bulkeley !"

In a rather dismal mood, Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the captain of the school. Sympathetic glances followed them along the Fourth Form passage. They went down the staircase and on to Mr. Dalton's study.

In that apartment they found their Form-master and Carthew.

Mr. Richard Dalton was looking very stern.

He fixed his eyes on the four culprits as they came rather sheepishly into his study.

Carthew eyed them malevolently. As a rule, he had little sympathy to expect from Mr. Dalton ; but in the present case he was sure of support from the master of the Fourth Form.

"I have sent for you on Carthew's report to me!" said Mr. Dalton sternly. "You have attacked a prefect of the Sixth Form !"

"Hem !"

"You laid hands on Carthew and ejected him from your study ?"

"Hem !"

"Yes or no ?" snapped Richard Dalton.

"Yes, sir !" said Jimmy Silver.

"What excuse have you to offer, if any ?"

"Hem !"

"You have nothing to say ?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Carthew was going to lick me, sir !" mumbled Lovell. "He's down

on our study, sir, and always looking for a chance against us."

"In the present instance, Lovell, Carthew informs me that he saw you sliding down the banisters, and that you ran off when he called to you. He came to your study later to deal with you. Do you deny this?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you resist punishment, which you know very well was just?"

Lovell hung his head.

He had nothing to say—except that Carthew was a bully, and that he, Arthur Edward Lovell, disliked him,

that you others helped him in assaulting Carthew."

"Hem!"

It came to that, really, though that was not exactly how the Fistical Four looked at it.

"I doubt whether I ought not to report this matter to Dr. Chisholm



Crash! Carthew went flying out of the study and landed on his back in the Fourth Form passage. Whizz! His official ashplant came whirling out after him.

and was, personally, a rather hot-headed and unreflecting fellow. But it was not of much use saying that. So Arthur Edward was silent.

"It comes to this, then," said Mr. Dalton, taking up his cane. "That Lovell disobeyed a prefect who was exercising his proper authority, and

and leave the Head to deal with it!" said Mr. Dalton sternly. "If, however, you apologise to Carthew at once, I will deal with the matter myself. You will, of course, be severely punished in any case."

"Oh!"

Carthew's eyes gleamed.

He was hardly sorry by this time that he had been "chucked" out of the end study. He had his old enemies now just where he wanted them, as it were.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged dismal glances.

Apologising to the bully of the Sixth was a bitter pill to swallow, even though they realised that for once they had been in the wrong in their contest with their old enemy.

"You hear me?" snapped Mr. Dalton. He was very angry, and it dawned upon the juniors that he was annoyed not only at their lawless action, but at having to admit that the bully of the Sixth had just cause for complaint against boys in his Form. They had, in fact, placed their Form-master in a very uncomfortable position.

"Very well, sir," said Jimmy Silver with an effort. "We were in the wrong, I suppose."

"I am glad you can see that, at all events," said Mr. Dalton dryly.

Jimmy looked at the prefect.

"Sorry, Carthew!" he gasped.

"Sorry, Carthew!" stammered Raby and Newcome, with visible efforts.

Arthur Edward Lovell gulped.

"Lovell!" said Mr. Dalton, in an ominous voice.

"I—I——"

"I am waiting!"

"Sorry, Carthew!" spluttered Lovell, with a face crimson with rage.

"Very good!" said Mr. Dalton. "Take this cane, Carthew, and cane these boys in my presence!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Carthew, unable to restrain a grin of triumph.

He gripped the cane.

"Bend over!" he rapped out.

This time the order was not disobeyed. Under the keen, grim eye

of Mr. Dalton, there was no question of disobedience.

Four hapless juniors bent over in turn, and each of them received six from the cane, well laid on by Carthew. The whacks of the cane rang through Mr. Dalton's study.

Carthew, perhaps, was a believer in the saying of that ancient king, that to spare the rod was to spoil the child. Certainly he ran no risk of spoiling Jimmy Silver & Co. by sparing the rod. He laid it on with all the force of his arm, and it was fortunate for them that he was not an athlete like Bulkeley.

It was over at last.

Four juniors stood wriggling with anguish, their faces quite pale. Mr. Dalton made a gesture of dismissal.

"You may go!"

They went.

They wriggled out of the study, they wriggled along the passage, they wriggled up the stairs, they wriggled to the end study. They seemed unable to do anything but wriggle.

In the end study Lovell threw himself into the armchair. He jumped up again as if the seat of the chair were red-hot.

"Ow!"

"Oh dear!"

Sympathetic Fourth Formers looked into the study. They made sympathetic remarks. But sympathy, though doubtless grateful and comforting in its way, did not help the suffering four very much.

They groaned and grunted and wriggled dolorously.

"We'll make Carthew sit up for this!" gasped Lovell at last. "We'll jolly well scrag him!"

Jimmy Silver groaned.

"Oh, chuck it!" he said.

"Yes, chuck it, for goodness'sake!" mumbled Raby. "I'm fed-up with

Carthew! We played the goat and asked for this."

"Look here——"

"Chuck it!" growled Newcome. "Ow! Do you think we want any more of this, you silly owl? We asked for it and got it. We're not going to ask for any more. Wow!"

"I think——"

"No, you don't! You can't! If you were able to think, you wouldn't have landed us in this! Wow!"

"Look here——"

"Chuck it!" howled the three, in chorus.

And Arthur Edward Lovell snorted and chucked it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

TOEING THE LINE.

"WHAT are you fellows going to do?"

"Nothing!"

It was the following day, after morning class.

Valentine Mornington joined the Fistical Four as the Fourth came out of their Form-room and walked out into the quadrangle with them.

Morny's face was dark, and there was a glint in his eyes.

He had been rather troublesome in class that morning, being in one of his bitter tempers, and Mr. Dalton had given him lines. Mr. Dalton, however, was not the object of Morny's wrath. All the Fourth knew what was the matter with Morny; it was the box on the ear he had received from Carthew the previous day.

That box on the ear had hurt Morny, especially in his pride. He had been savage and sulky ever since, even with Erroll, his best chum. Erroll had prevented him seeking instant vengeance on the bully of the Sixth; rightly judging that "punching a prefect" was rather too risky a

proceeding for a junior of the Fourth Form. Besides, Morny had given provocation. He had grinned mockingly at the discomfited prefect, which was not respectful and was very irritating to Carthew. Really, he had no reason to be surprised that Carthew had smacked his head on that occasion. But, undoubtedly, he was deeply incensed and vengeful.

Morny's lip curled sardonically as Jimmy answered his question. The Fistical Four had recovered from their licking now and were in their usual cheery spirits. They were thinking chiefly of cricket and not at all of vengeance, which certainly was a much healthier frame of mind than Morny's.

"So you're taking it lyin' down?" asked Mornington.

"We took it bending over," grinned Newcome.

"You lettin' Carthew have the best of it?"

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "What's the good of that sort of talk, Morny? We played the goat, and got what we asked for. Carthew happened to be in the right for once."

"What a good little boy!" said Mornington admiringly. "Keep on like this, Jimmy, and you'll be a real shinin' light in the school!"

Jimmy Silver flushed angrily.

"Dry up, Morny," he said. "That's enough!"

"If you want to handle Carthew I'm willin' to help," said Mornington. "He smacked my head, and I'm not lettin' him off."

"Oh, rot!"

"You're lettin' it drop, then?"

"We've let it drop—or, rather, there's nothing to let drop," said Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Talk about something else, or don't talk at all!"

Valentine Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Go an' eat coke!" he said politely; and he walked away.

Lovell looked rather rebellious.

"That's all very well, Jimmy Silver!" he said.

"Of course it is," said Jimmy.

"But I think——"

"Don't begin thinking, old chap; you're not used to it, and goodness knows what might happen!"

"I think——" roared Lovell, "I tell you, Jimmy Silver, I think it's up to us to make Carthew sit up."

"What's that?"

It was Carthew's voice. He stepped out from behind a big beech as the Fistical Four came along. They had not seen him there. Carthew had a way of appearing silently and unexpectedly.

"Well, what are you young rascals plotting?" he asked.

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"Nothing!" he answered.

"What did you say, Lovell?"

"You heard what I said!" retorted Lovell. "You were listening!"

"So you are going to make me sit up, are you?"

Lovell did not answer.

"Is that the way to speak of a prefect, Lovell?"

No reply.

"You will take a hundred lines, Lovell!" said Carthew. "I'm going to teach you cheeky fags manners, or know the reason why. I shall expect those lines by tea-time!"

Lovell gasped with rage.

"You can expect!"

"If they're not handed in I shall look in at your study and bring my ashplant with me!" smiled Carthew.

He walked away airily.

"Do you think I'm going to stand this?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell,

in a suppressed voice, glaring at his comrades.

"Don't be a goat!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "You keep on putting us in the wrong. Any prefect would give you lines for talking like that!"

"Any other prefect wouldn't listen without letting a fellow see that he was there."

"I know that! But that doesn't alter the case. If you don't do the lines, you get a licking; if you don't take the licking, it means another row with Dicky Dalton. We've got to wait till Carthew puts himself in the wrong before we go for him."

"I'm not going to do the lines!"

"Oh, rats!"

There was rather a rift in the lute among the Fistical Four that day.

The hot-headed Lovell was determined not to do the lines, reckless of consequences. Jimmy Silver took quite a different view, and impressed it on Lovell without being heeded. Lovell was in the wrong again, and it was useless to let the matter go before Mr. Dalton. But Arthur Edward declined to listen to reason, and, instead of settling down to write his lines before tea, he picked up his hat in the study to go down to the nets.

Whereupon Jimmy Silver put his back to the study door.

"You haven't done your lines, Lovell!"

"I'm not going to do them!"

"Now look here, Lovell, don't be a silly ass! We don't want another row with Mr. Dalton, and we jolly well don't want another licking! Get your lines done before tea!"

"Bosh!"

"Then it's a study ragging for you!" said Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed wrath. He looked extremely belligerent; but fortunately he decided to

yield to the voice of the majority. With a very bad grace, he sat down to his lines. Even upon Arthur Edward's unreflecting mind it dawned that the end study's feud with Carthew would not prosper if they placed themselves in the wrong all the time.

The lines were duly written, and Lovell, with suppressed feelings, went to Carthew's study with them.

Carthew grinned as they were handed in to him.

"Thought better of it—what?" he asked pleasantly.

Lovell did not answer; he could not trust himself to speak. He backed out of the prefect's study, leaving Carthew grinning.

"Lovell!" shouted Carthew.

"Yes?" gasped Lovell.

"Come back and shut the door!" Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were waiting for Lovell in the passage, sagely keeping an eye on their irate chum. Lovell gritted his teeth; but the whispered urging of his comrades influenced him, and he went back and shut Carthew's door.

"Now for the cricket!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"I shall land that jeering cad in the eye one of these days!" hissed Lovell.

"Oh, never mind him! Let's get some cricket."

And the Fistical Four walked away to Little Side and soon forgot Carthew of the Sixth and all his work.

Carthew was feeling quite pleased with himself.

"Carthew, you will cane these boys in my presence," said Mr. Dalton. "Certainly, sir," said Carthew, gripping the cane. "Bend over!"



He had a bitter dislike of the end study, formed chiefly upon the cheery independence of Jimmy Silver & Co. He flattered himself that he was bringing the cheeky young sweeps to heel at last. He was quite prepared for some reckless attempt at vengeance on their part, and prepared to make the most of it to their detriment if it happened.

But he was not quite prepared for what was to happen to him, all the same.

Carthew of the Sixth crossed over to Mr. Manders' House that evening for a visit to his friend Frampton there. When he came back the quadrangle was dark; the Houses were closed for all, except masters and prefects. It was a dark night; scarcely a glimmer of stars in the sky. In the distance, as Carthew walked along under the beeches, there was a glimmer of lighted windows in the House.

Certainly no thought of danger crossed Carthew's mind, but the danger was close at hand. There was a sudden rush of footsteps in the darkness and a whisper.

"Down him!"

And in the darkness hands closed suddenly and fiercely upon the bully of the Sixth, and he went with a crash to the ground.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

CARTHEW CATCHES IT.

CARTHEW of the Sixth lay and gurgled.

He was taken utterly by surprise, and the crash on the hard earth dazed him a little. His unseen and unexpected captors were not handling him ceremoniously.

"Groogh! Oh! Ooooooh!"
Smack!

A hand came sharply over his

mouth and closed there hard. Carthew was only spluttering for breath, but the unseen owner of the hand was taking precautions against a yell for help.

A knee was planted on Carthew's chest, pinning him down; another hand was added to that over his mouth, effectually silencing him; and his wrists were strongly grasped. Someone was trampling on his struggling legs at the same time.

Four of them—Carthew could feel four separate assailants—and he had no doubt about the identity of the four, though he could see hardly an inch from his nose in the thick darkness under the wide-spreading branches of the beech-trees.

The four chums of the end study, of course—Jimmy Silver and Lovell, Raby and Newcome! Carthew had not a doubt of it. This was the revenge of the Fistical Four—this was their retaliation, which he had been expecting more or less, though certainly not in this style.

Enraged, dazed as he was, Carthew could not help wondering at the reckless temerity of the four. This was a terribly serious matter—an attack on a Sixth Form prefect in the dark. It would mean a Head's flogging at least, if not the "sack," for the fellows concerned. And they could not hope to conceal their action. Carthew was absolutely assured that he knew into whose hands he had fallen. Indeed, it did not cross his excited mind for a single moment that his assailants were any other than Jimmy Silver & Co.—though, as a matter of fact, his bullying had made for him enemies enough in all the Lower Forms of Rookwood School.

He lay gasping, half-choking, under the grasp of the unseen juniors. The

hands over his mouth gripped hard ; he was unable to utter a cry.

Suddenly the hands were withdrawn ; but before Carthew could yell a cloth took their place, and it was wound round his face and head, not only gagging him, but blindfolding him as well.

He gasped helplessly.

Evidently his assailants had come prepared. This was no chance attack due to the juniors happening to see their opportunity. It was plain that he had been seen leaving the House, and that these young ruffians had watched and waited for him to return from Manders' House. It was an ambush that Carthew had blindly walked into.

But what did they mean ? What did they intend to do with him ?

A vague alarm crept over Carthew. They might intend to give him a licking, perhaps with a borrowed ashplant from a prefect's study. That would have been bad enough. But he was beginning to dread that something worse was intended.

He struggled ; but as he did so his head was seized and banged on the ground, as a warning to cease.

He ceased at once.

He was no match for the four fellows who had him in their grasp, and they had him at too great a disadvantage, too. And that reckless banging of his head warned him that he was in ruthless hands.

He lay quivering and gurgling, by this time in a state of something like terror. What was their game ?

His wrists were drawn together, and a cord was slid round them. The cord was securely knotted.

Then his ankles were tied together.

After that another cord was wound about the cloth that circled his face, and tied over his mouth.

His assailants were leaving nothing to chance.

All the time not a word had been spoken ; the unseen enemy worked in a silence that had something terrifying in it. Since the two whispered words that had precluded the rush he had heard no word spoken even in a whisper. They did not want him to hear their voices, doubtless. As if he was in any doubt of their identity whether he heard their voices or not !

His heart was throbbing with rage and fear as he felt himself lifted from the ground.

The four were moving away with him in the darkness. Whither ? He gasped under the gagging cloth as his head knocked on the trunk of a tree.

" Careful ! "

It was a whisper, but he heard it, though it was impossible to recognise the whispering voice. But, assured as he was that he was in the hands of the Fistical Four, he was quite certain it was the voice of one of the Co., and he thought it was Jimmy Silver's.

He was swung on—whither he could not even guess, but he knew that it must be in a direction away from the House. They would never dare to carry him near the lighted windows.

A door opened ; he heard the creak of a hinge.

Then he was dumped down.

There was a sound of falling fag-gots, and two or three from the displaced heap knocked against him ; and by that he knew that he was in the woodshed. The woodshed was locked up at night ; apparently these young rascals had forced the padlock.

Carthew palpitated.

Why had they brought him there—a lonely and utterly deserted spot at night-time ? A beating could have been administered under the beeches in the quad. Why was he taken there ?

The cloth was drawn from his face. He opened his mouth for a yell, though it was very doubtful whether anyone was near enough to the woodshed at that hour to hear him yell. But a crumpled handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth as it opened—his own handkerchief, taken from his pocket. It effectually gagged him, jammed between his open jaws, and unseen hands ran the cord round it and secured it there. He glared about him in the darkness of the interior of the woodshed, but he could see nothing. He wondered savagely why his face had been uncovered. He was soon to learn.

The cloth—by its chalky smell he guessed that it was a duster annexed from a Form-room—was bandaged across his eyes. Then he heard a match strike, but still he could see nothing.

A familiar scent greeted his nostrils—the scent of tar. It reminded him of the fact that old Mack kept his tar-bucket in the woodshed.

Carthew shuddered.

He knew now what was coming, and he wriggled furiously in his bonds, but he wriggled in vain.

Cold and thick and clammy, the tar was daubed on his face.

He shuddered and wriggled.

There was a suppressed chuckle, and several matches were struck one after another. No doubt Carthew's face, blackening under the tar, afforded entertainment to the young rascals who were tarring him.

Thicker and thicker the tar was daubed on.

It was daubed on Carthew's hair, on the bandage over his eyes, on the stuffed handkerchief in his mouth, it oozed round his ears and down his neck, it trickled all over him.

And still it was daubed on thicker and thicker.

The chuckling was incessant, but no word was spoken. The tar-brush was stuck back into the bucket at last.

There was a rustling sound as the juniors groped away. Carthew heard them leaving the woodshed; he heard the door close; he heard the clink of the padlock chain as it was replaced.

Carthew was left alone, wriggling in his bonds, clammy with tar, and mad with rage.

How long was he to remain there?

He felt a chill of horror at the thought that he might not be missed and might have to remain as he was till Mack or someone came along to the woodshed in the morning. The four juniors, of course, had scuttled back into the House; they had to turn up for dorm. or be missed. But a prefect of the Sixth would not be missed after last roll unless somebody dropped into his room and noticed he was not there; after the House was locked up it would be supposed that he had gone to bed.

It was an unnerving thought. He struggled furiously in his bonds, but only succeeded in abrading his wrists and ankles. He was tied too securely to get loose. Then he concentrated on the stuffed handkerchief in his mouth, and bit and chewed at it, almost choking over the tar that oozed into his mouth as he did so. But it was a long, long time before he succeeded in getting partly rid of the gag and was able to yell.

Then he yelled, huskily and frantically, for help.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

THE FISTICAL FOUR ARE WANTED.

JIMMY SILVER looked into Study No. 4 in the Classical Fourth passage.

"Dorm!" he said. "We're going up! Hallo, isn't Morny here?"

Erroll shook his head.

There was a cloud on Kit Erroll's brow.

"No," he answered. "All serene, I'll call him!"

"Right-ho," said Jimmy, and he walked away and joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome.

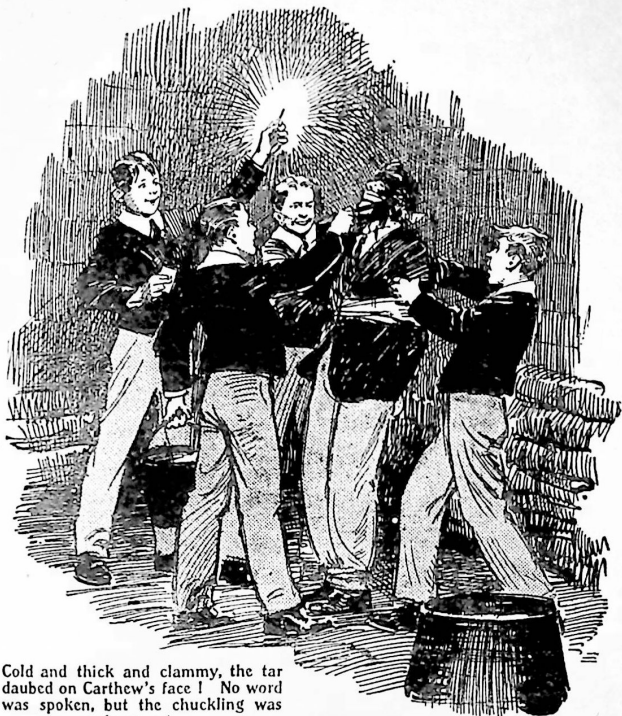
Erroll, with a clouded face, went along the passage to the first study. That study belonged to Peele, Lattrey, and Gower, the three black sheep of the Rookwood Fourth. As a rule, Valentine Mornington kept clear of that study, but when he was annoyed with his chum he

would drop in on Peele & Co., possibly because the wilful and reckless fellow knew that it troubled Erroll to know that he was in bad company.

Erroll knocked at the door, and heard a chuckle as he opened it. There was a whiff of smoke in the study, and Peele, Lattrey and Gower grinned at him over cigarettes.

Valentine Mornington was there, though he was not smoking like the three shady rascals with whom he consorted.

"Hallo, old Sobersides!" said Morny cheerfully. He had been ratty with his chum all day, and had wholly



Cold and thick and clammy, the tar daubed on Carthew's face! No word was spoken, but the chuckling was incessant.

deserted him that evening; but he seemed to be restored to good humour now.

"Looked in to join us in a smoke, what?" asked Peele, with a grin.

Erroll's lip curled. He was not likely to join the dingy trio in any of their delectable pursuits.

"I've looked in to mention that it's bedtime, Morny," he said, taking no notice of Cyril Peele. "Better not let a prefect come and look for you and find you here like this."

"What-ho!" chuckled Peele. "Thanks for the tip, Erroll! Blessed if I noticed it was so late. We've

been rather busy this evenin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Valentine Mornington left the study with his chum, with a nod to Peele & Co., and followed more slowly.

Erroll's face was set and clouded. Morny grinned as he glanced at him.

"Missed me this evenin'?" he asked.

"Not specially," answered Erroll shortly.

"Thanks!" grinned Mornington. "You've been enjoying yourself with jolly old Euripides, what?"

"Yes. I've been putting in some Greek."

"Then you didn't want me," yawned Mornington.

"You're your own master," said Erroll. "You know I'm sorry to see you playing the goat again, but it's your own bizney."

Mornington laughed.

"You think I've been playin' banker in Peele's study?" he asked.

"I know you have."

"Off-side!" chuckled Mornington. "I haven't touched or even seen a giddy card all the evenin'! You're caught out, old man! Ha, ha!"

Erroll looked at him.

"Well, I know what usually goes on in Peele's study when those fellows stay up after prep," he said. "Naturally, I supposed——"

"Naturally!" agreed Mornington. "Nevertheless, my beloved 'earers, you were wrong for once."

"I'm glad of it. But"—Erroll looked puzzled—"I can't imagine what you've been up to, then. An hour with that crew would bore me to tears—and you, too, without nap or banker to pass the time."

"Oh, they can be entertainin' at times," said Morny. "They're fellows I can ask to back me up in a stunt that you would turn down at once."

"I'd back you up in anything, and you know it, Morny—if it was anything a fellow ought to do."

"It might be something a fellow oughtn't to do!" chuckled Morny. "Depends on the point of view! Might be some awfully lawless proceedin', with the jolly old sack loomin' in the distance. Fancy you backin' me up in anythin' you might be bunked for."

"I don't quite follow. You haven't been out of school bounds during the evening, have you?"

"Oh, no! I've been applyin' some salve to my damaged ear."

"What?"

"Don't you remember Carthew smacked my ear yesterday? It hurt me fearfully—in my jolly old dignity. I had to apply a healin' salve; and that's what I've been doin' this evenin'. Those fellows helped me."

"I don't understand you in the least."

"No need," said Mornington coolly.

They arrived in the dormitory and nothing more was said, Erroll remaining very much puzzled. Bulkeley of the Sixth was there to turn out the lights for the Classical Fourth.

"Hallo, there's Dicky!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell, as Mr. Dalton appeared in the doorway.

The Fourth Form master glanced in, and the juniors observed that his face was very grave.

Mornington started a little. Peele and Lattrey and Gower exchanged quick glances uneasily and avoided looking at the Form-master.

Mr. Dalton stepped in.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

"You and Lovell and Raby and Newcome will follow me. The rest of the Form will go to bed, as usual," said Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, my hat! I mean—yes, sir."

Bulkeley looked inquiringly at the Form-master. Mr. Dalton gave no explanation, however.

He waited while the Fistical Four put on their shoes, which they had already removed.

Then they followed him from the dormitory. A buzz of excited voices broke out after they were gone. Bulkeley, in great astonishment at the unusual proceeding, stepped into the passage and glanced at the Form-master and the four juniors following him to the stairs. He was quite in the dark as to what had happened.

"What on earth——" said Putty of the Fourth. "Anybody know what's up?"

"Goodness knows!" said Conroy. "Those chaps are for it, anyhow," said Townsend. "I could see that in Dicky Dalton's face."

"They've been goin' for that cad Carthew, I'll bet my hat!" said Topham.

"Yaas, that's it," agreed Towny.

Erroll crossed over to Mornington, who was sitting on the side of his bed, taking his shoes off in a leisurely way.

"Morny, do you know what's up?"

Valentine Mornington looked at him with a smile.

"How should I know?"

"You've been up to something with Peele's gang. They looked scared when Mr. Dalton showed up and——"

"Did they? What eyes you've got. Did I look scared?" smiled Morny.

"No. But——" Erroll breathed hard. "Morny, old man, if you've been playing some fool trick you can't leave others to take the blame of it."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Am I the kind of fellow to hide behind other chaps?" he asked disdainfully.

"No; I'm not sure. But——"

"Leave it alone, old man! The less you know about it the better," said Morny coolly. "It's a bunkin' job if it comes out. I'm not exactly yearnin' to be sacked from the school. And for that jolly good reason I'm not goin' to open my mouth too wide. Catch on?"

"But——" muttered Erroll.

"Assez, mon cher!" grinned Mornington.

Bulkeley came back into the dormitory.

"Now then, turn in, you kids!"

"What's up, Bulkeley?" asked a dozen voices.

"I don't know. Turn in!"

The Classical Fourth turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light and left the dormitory. But the juniors were not likely to settle down to sleep. From one end of the dormitory to the other ran an excited buzz of talk.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

ACCUSED!

HORACE GREELY jumped. It was enough to make any man jump, even a heavy-weight like Horace Greely, master of the Rookwood Fifth.

Mr. Greely was taking a little walk and smoking a cigar in the pleasant summer evening. The night was soft and still and dark. Only a whisper of a breeze stirred the leaves of the old beeches. And suddenly from the silence came a hoarse, husky howl.

"Help!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Greely.

"Help! Help!"

"Upon my word!"

The Fifth Form-master removed the cigar from his mouth and stared about him. The husky shout was

repeated again and again, and then Mr. Greely got his bearings.

He rolled off towards the woodshed, whence the husky shouting proceeded. Something had happened to somebody there, that was certain. Mr. Greely had a vague idea that perhaps old Mack had had a fall, perhaps with a stack of logs tumbling over him, or something of the sort. Anyhow, Horace Greely was prepared to render first aid.

He reached the woodshed and struck a match. It was very dark. The padlock appeared to be in order, and he was puzzled. But from the interior of the building came the husky shouting.

"Bless my soul! Who is calling?" exclaimed Mr. Greely.

"Help! It's me—I—Carthew!"

"Carthew of the Sixth Form!" exclaimed the astonished Mr. Greely.

"Ow! Yes."

"Bless my soul! Are you hurt?"

"Groogh! I'm tied up. Help!"

"Tied up?" repeated Mr. Greely. "How can you be tied up in the woodshed, Carthew? This is absurd!"

"Wow! Help!"

"I am quite unable to enter Carthew, as the door is padlocked. I will call Mack."

"It isn't locked!" howled Carthew.

"It appears to be locked."

"It isn't!" yelled Carthew. "It can't be, as those young scoundrels brought me in here. Try it!"

"I will try it, Carthew. But it certainly appears to be locked," said Mr. Greely.

He struck another match and examined the padlock. He discerned now what had escaped his first glance—that the lock had been forced and replaced to give it an appearance of being fastened. It was,

however, easy to jerk open, and Mr. Greely jerked it open and threw back the door.

"Where are you, Carthew?"

"Here," hissed Carthew, wriggling painfully. "I'm tied hand and foot."

"Absurd! Who could have tied you hand and foot, Carthew?"

Carthew spluttered with rage. He recognised Mr. Greely's fruity voice and he would have been glad to tell Mr. Greely what he thought of him. Obviously, however, it was not a judicious moment for doing so.

"A gang of fags—Silver and his friends. I was rushed in the dark and brought here, tied up!" he gasped.

"Bless my soul!"

"Let me loose!"

"Certainly, Carthew! This is a most extraordinary occurrence—most extraordinary!" said Mr. Greely, in great astonishment. "A most lawless proceeding—extremely lawless! I am surprised and shocked."

"Will you let me loose?" hissed Carthew, not at all interested in the surprised and shocked state of Horace Greely.

"Certainly—certainly!"

Mr. Greely struck another match and blinked round for Carthew. He gave a jump as a black face stared at him the eyes blindfolded.

"Who—who is that?" The match burned his fingers, and he dropped it with a sharp exclamation. "Ow! Oh! Oh dear! What—what is that? Is—is there a negro here, Carthew?"

"No!" shrieked Carthew.

"I—I saw a black face—a hideous black face!"

"They've tarred my face."

"Oh!"

Another match gleamed out, and the Fifth Form master stooped over Mark Carthew. He stooped over him



"Who is that? What—what—" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, startled. "Is it possible that that is a Rookwood boy?" "I'm Carthew!" shrieked the tarry object. "I'm going to the Head."

very gingerly. In his present state, with clammy tar oozing all over him, the bully of the Sixth was not nice to touch.

"There's a cord knotted round my wrists and another round my ankles!" gasped Carthew. "Take this rag off my eyes and let me see!"

Mr. Greely removed the tarry duster, and Carthew's glaring eyes glowed at him. The ferocity in Carthew's glare quite startled Mr. Greely.

"You've got a penknife, sir?" gasped Carthew.

"Yes, I—I certainly have a penknife, Carthew. But I really do not see how I can touch you without

becoming very unpleasantly tarry, Carthew. You are—hem—in a disgusting state!"

"Please cut the cords, sir!"

Mr. Greely eyed him very dubiously in the light of a match.

"I will call Mack, Carthew," he said.

"I say, sir, don't go!"

"I will tell Mack to come quickly."

"I—I say—"

No answer.

Mr. Greely was gone. Carthew really was too tarry for a particular gentleman to touch.

Carthew of the Sixth lay, gritting his teeth, for long minutes. Mr. Greely had promised to send Mack

quickly, but old Mack was a leisurely man in his movements. It seemed to the hapless Carthew an age before the glimmer of a lantern broke into the darkness of the woodshed.

Old Mack came in grunting.

"Cut me loose, Mack!" howled Carthew, glaring at him.

"Mr. Greely, he says——"

"Will you cut me loose?"

"Jest what I've come 'ere for, sir," said old Mack stolidly. "You ain't nice to touch, sir, but 'ere goes."

Mack set down the lantern and, with maddening slowness, opened an old, horn-handled pocket-knife. Carthew looked at him as if he could bite him the while. But at last old Mack began to saw the cords.

There was a fiendish yell from Carthew.

"Yaroo!"

"What's the matter, sir?"

"You silly idiot!" shrieked Carthew. "You're sawing my skin."

"P'raps you'd rather I didn't cut these 'ere cords, sir?"

Carthew ground his teeth.

"Get on with it, you fool!"

Old Mack got on with it.

He did not get on very fast, and perhaps by accident he sawed the hapless Carthew several times in the process. Possibly he did not like being called an idiot and a fool by the fellow he had come there to help.

But Carthew was released at last.

He squirmed to his feet, panting for breath, giving Mack a glare of rage in return for the grin that wrinkled old Mack's ancient countenance.

Then he rushed out of the woodshed.

Black and tarry, dishevelled and breathless, he rushed for the House. The door had been left ajar by Mr. Greely, and Carthew hurled it open and rushed in. There was a yell from

Neville of the Sixth as he sighted him.

"Who — what — what — who's that?"

"Who's that dashed nigger?" yelled Hansom of the Fifth. A dozen senior fellows stared at Carthew blankly.

"It's Carthew!" yelled Talboys of the Fifth suddenly. "I know his bags. I don't know his face. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew cast a tarry glare of fury round him. Mr. Dalton came quickly out of his study with a startled face.

"Who is that? What—what— Is it possible that that is a Rookwood boy? What does this mean?"

"I'm Carthew!" shrieked the tarry object. "I'm going to the Head. Your boys have done this, Mr. Dalton. Silver and Lovell and that lot. I'm going to the Head!"

"Carthew, you accuse——"

"I've been kidnapped, tied up, tarred!" Carthew choked with rage. "They'll jolly well be bunked for this! Grooogh! I'm going to the Head!"

"You had better not go to the Head in that state, Carthew!"

"I'm going!"

Carthew rushed on. Mr. Dalton stared after him, and then quietly ascended the staircase to the Fourth Form dormitory, to call the accused juniors. The Classical Fourth had gone to bed, but this was a matter that would not wait.

"Well, Carthew got it this time!" chuckled Hansom of the Fifth. "He's a beastly bully, anyhow. I dare say he asked for it."

"But it's the sack for the johnnies who did it, all the same!" remarked Talboys.

"Oh, no doubt about that! It's the sack for Silver of the Fourth and

his pals!" agreed Hansom. And that remark greeted Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came down the staircase at the heels of Mr. Dalton.

Jimmy Silver started.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"The jolly old sack for you!" grinned Hansom. "I suppose you knew what to expect when you handled Carthew like that?"

"What do you mean? We haven't touched Carthew."

"He says you have, and he seems to know!" chuckled Hansom.

"Follow me, my boys!" broke in Mr. Dalton sternly. "Carthew is with Dr. Chisholm now, and you must see the Head at once."

"But, sir——" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Follow me!"

And in a surprised and extremely unquiet frame of mind, Jimmy Silver and Co. followed their Form-master to the Head's study.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

CARTHEW'S REPORT!

"WHAT—what—what——"

Dr. Chisholm started to his feet.

He started so suddenly that he dropped his pen, scattering blots over the sheet of paper on his writing table that was half-covered with Greek.

He was startled.

It was enough to startle any old gentleman, to hear a sudden, piercing scream ring out in the corridor outside his study door.

The Head of Rookwood had been deep in a pleasant task—elucidating some of the little difficulties in one of the more obscure passages of Sophocles. This was the kind of occupation that made Dr. Chisholm really happy and contented, and helped him to realise that life really

was worth living. But as that loud, terrified scream rang through the House he forgot even Sophocles.

"What—what—— Bless my soul, what——"

There was a patter of flying feet in the corridor.

The Head's study door burst open.

A female figure rushed in, still screaming.

"Janet!" gasped the Head.

It was the duty of Janet, the maid, to close the corridor windows in the evening. Apparently she had been occupied with that duty when something had happened.

And quite evidently that something had scared her.

Janet was pale with terror, and screaming, as she flew into the Head's study, the nearest refuge.

"Oh, save me!"

"What—what——"

"Save me!"

The Head came round from behind his writing-table. Sophocles lay unheeded; a dozen blots congealed on the Head's masterly elucidation of the obscurities of that great poet. A terrified housemaid was not really of much importance, in comparison with Sophocles; but the Head was a kind-hearted old gentleman. Moreover, he was startled and alarmed.

"Janet! What—what——"

Scream from Janet.

"Oh, save me!"

She flung herself into the protecting arms of the headmaster. She clutched him for support.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Dr. Chisholm. "Janet, calm yourself! Release me at once, my good girl! For goodness' sake——"

"Save me! Keep him off!"

"He—— Who—— What?"

"That dreadful negro—— Save me!"

" Good heavens ! Janet, I command you to release me ! This is most—most embarrassing ! " gasped the Head.

There were footsteps in the corridor. Someone was hurrying towards the Head's study. Apparently it was the dreadful apparition that Janet had seen, and that had so terrified her.

The Head stared at the open doorway.

It was impossible to get rid of Janet ; the terrified girl was clinging to the Head for protection quite convulsively, and still screaming. Really, it was a very embarrassing position for the old gentleman.

" What— Who—who— " stuttered the Head, as a startled figure appeared in the doorway.

A black face—black as the ace of spades—glared into the study. For a second the Head was petrified.

Janet shrieked.

" Keep him away ! Save me ! "

" Who—what—who are you ? " shouted the Head.

His alarm was only momentary ; it quickly changed to wrath. In the dimly lit corridor Janet had taken that fearsome figure for a " dreadful negro " ; but in the light of the study the Head saw, at the second glance, that the blackness of the face was caused by tar. Tar, thick and clammy, covered the face of the newcomer and oozed over his clothes. But his clothes were the ordinary garb of a Sixth Form fellow of Rookwood.

" Sir— "

" Who are you ? " thundered the Head. " What does this mean ? "

" I'm Carthew— "

" Carthew ! Are you Carthew of the Sixth Form ? "

" Yes, sir ! I— "

" How dare you ? How dare you play these pranks, Carthew—you, a

Sixth Form prefect ! " exclaimed the Head passionately. " Upon my word ! You have dared to blacken your face and frighten the maids, you—you utterly absurd and idiotic boy ! Are you in your right senses, Carthew ? "

" I—I—I— "

" Janet ! Calm yourself ! Release me instantly ! " roared the Head. " Cannot you see, you foolish girl, that this is not a negro at all ? It is simply a foolish boy playing an absurd trick ! Release me, I tell you ! "

With more energy than courtesy, Dr. Chisholm jerked away Janet's clutching arms and fairly shoved her off.

His face was crimson with anger and mortification.

The situation was ridiculous ; and the Head was keenly sensitive on the point of his dignity ; ridicule and the Head of Rookwood ought to have been as far as the poles asunder.

Janet tottered and blinked uneasily and fearfully at the amazing figure in the doorway.

" I—I—I—was frightened ! " she stammered.

" Naturally, " said the Head. " I excuse you ! It was natural ! The blame is this foolish boy's ! I shall punish him with the greatest severity ! "

" I—I thought it was a burglar. "

" Yes, yes ! "

" A dreadful negro— "

" Yes, yes, yes ! "

" I was so frightened— "

" Yes, yes, yes, yes ! Pray go now, Janet, and leave me to deal with this stupid, this reckless trickster ! "

Janet tottered from the study, still very much upset.

Dr. Chisholm fixed an almost deadly look on Carthew of the Sixth.

" I shall now deal with you, Carthew ! " he said. " Your conduct

is inexplicable—absolutely inexplicable. Such a trick in a junior boy of the Fourth Form would be inexcusable; but in a Sixth Form boy—a prefect——”

“It isn’t a trick, sir!” stuttered Carthew. “Let me explain, sir.”

“What do you mean?” thundered the Head.

“I’ve been attacked, sir.”

“What?”

“I was collared——”

“Collared?”

“Yes, sir!” gasped Carthew.

“What do you mean by ‘collared’?”

“I—I mean, collared, sir—that is, seized.”

“If you mean that you were seized, why do you not say that you were seized! Cannot you, a Sixth Form boy, speak English?”

“Yes, sir!” gasped Carthew.

“I mean I was collared—that is, seized—suddenly in the quad, in the dark, and tied up—tied hand and foot, sir——”

“Nonsense!”

“I was, sir!” spluttered Carthew.

“Four Fourth Form boys did it. They tied me up and yanked me——”

“They what?”

“I mean, dragged me, sir—dragged me away to the woodshed, and smothered me with tar, sir——”

“Impossible!”

“They left me tied up, sir, and gagged, and—and I should be there

now, only I managed to shout, and Mr. Greely heard me——”

“Incredible!”

“On my word, sir! I—I came at once to tell you, sir—to report what had happened. I thought I’d let you see me like this, sir, so that you would know——”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the Head, aghast. “A Sixth Form prefect of Rookwood seized in the dark, tied up, tarred—impossible! I could



A black face—black as the ace of spades—glanced into the study. For a second the Head was petrified, and Janet shrieked: “Keep him away! Save me!”

never have believed that such a thing could happen at Rookwood! If matters are as you state, Carthew, of course you are not to blame, though it was very unfortunate that you frightened that foolish girl. Who were the boys that attacked you as you describe?”

“Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome, of the Fourth Form, sir.”

“I will send for them at once!”

And Carthew of the Sixth grinned

under his coating of tar. At long last he had downed Jimmy Silver and Co. This was a "bunking" matter, and it was the "long jump" for the end study, a very satisfactory ending to the feud, so far as Mark Carthew was concerned.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

THE CHOPPER COMES DOWN!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. followed Mr. Dalton, their Form-master, to the Head's study with grave and troubled faces.

It was past the bedtime of the juniors; all other fellows of Forms below the Fifth were in their dormitories. But behind the Fistical Four, as they followed Mr. Dalton, was a buzz of voices. The amazing appearance of Carthew, covered and smothered with tar, had caused a sensation in the House.

Janet was not the only person who had been startled.

Hansom & Co. of the Fifth were chuckling; they were greatly entertained by Carthew's misadventure. Most of the Sixth Form fellows had come out of their rooms, but these fellows took a more serious view of the matter than the Fifth did.

Carthew was not popular in his own Form, but he was a Sixth Form man and a prefect, so the affair seemed serious to the Sixth. When a Sixth Form prefect was treated like this, it was time for the skies to fall—in the opinion of the Sixth, at least.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were worried and troubled. They hardly knew yet what had happened, only that something of a startling nature had happened to Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, their old enemy. But they knew that they were accused, and that they had been fetched away

from their dormitory to appear before the Head. Innocent or guilty, it was not a light matter to be called on the carpet before the Head.

Mr. Dalton shepherded them into the study.

"Here are the boys, sir, whom Carthew accuses," he said.

"Very good, Mr. Dalton."

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at Carthew.

Had they not known that the tarry, blackened fellow was Carthew of the Sixth, certainly they would not have recognised him. His features had disappeared under the tar.

Carthew's eyes glittered at them.

To do him justice, Carthew had no doubt—no doubt whatever—that the Fistical Four were the authors of this unexampled outrage.

In the whispering voices he was assured that he had detected the tones of the juniors of the end study. He had, in fact, heard what he expected to hear!

And now they were going to get the "chopper." An affair like this would not be dealt with by a flogging. It was the "sack," short and sharp, for Lower boys who had handled a prefect in this manner.

This was the hour of Carthew's triumph, and it solaced him for the tar and for the long time he had spent tied up in the woodshed.

The Head's face was dark with anger.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Jimmy Silver & Co. could scarcely repress a grin at the sight of Carthew's extraordinary aspect.

The Head's deep voice boomed at them.

"This is not a laughing matter!"

The four juniors became serious at once.

It was not, indeed, a laughing

matter, for the fellows who had handled Carthew! They were not the fellows, as it happened; but, obviously, they were going to be accused.

"Silver! Lovell! Raby! Newcome!"

The Head rapped out the names like pistol-shots.

"Yes, sir!"

"Carthew accuses you of seizing him in the quadrangle, in the dark, and treating him in this disgraceful manner. You must be aware that if your guilt is proved, you will leave Rookwood School immediately! Have you anything to say?"

"We didn't do it, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"You deny it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"We never knew anything had happened, sir, till Mr. Dalton came to the dormitory for us," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I shall not condemn you lightly," said the Head. "The matter will be dealt with at once, and you will be allowed to defend yourselves. You have no doubt, Carthew, as to the identity of your assailants?"

"None whatever, sir."

"You definitely accuse these boys?"

"Yes, sir."

Carthew glared at the four with contempt, as well as anger. Assured as he was of their guilt, he was taken aback by their prompt denial. He disliked Jimmy Silver & Co. intensely, but, somehow, he could not help respecting them; he had never expected to hear them tell falsehoods, even to avert the "sack."

Somehow or other, he had expected them to stand manfully by what they had done, in spite of the serious consequences.

But it was rather a satisfaction to him, than otherwise, to hear them utter false denials, as he supposed. It seemed to justify, to some extent, his dislike of them.

Carthew was a bad-hearted fellow; but he did not like to admit to himself that he disliked fellows for their good qualities.

There was a pause in the Head's study.

Mr. Dalton broke in:

"Dr. Chisholm, I am bound to say that I have always found these four boys truthful, and should have no hesitation in relying on their word."

"They are lying, sir!" said Carthew contemptuously.

"That must be proved!" said the Fourth Form master tartly.

"Undoubtedly!" said the Head.

"The authors of this outrage will be expelled from the school without mercy. But the punishment must fall on the right shoulders. Carthew, tell me precisely what occurred."

"I'd been over to Mr. Manders' House, sir, to see Frampton about—about the cricket. I was coming back, when these four juniors rushed on me under the beeches, and knocked me over."

"You recognised them?"

"It was very dark, sir, under the trees."

"You did not recognise them?" asked Mr. Dalton coldly.

"I couldn't in the dark!" said Carthew savagely. "That is why they chose that place where the trees are thick over the path. But I jolly well recognised their voices when they spoke!"

"And what occurred next?" asked the Head.

"I was tied up, sir, like a— a turkey, hand and foot, and carried away to the woodshed. There they

smothered me with tar, as you see me now, sir. I was left tied up, with a handkerchief stuffed in my mouth."

"Outrageous!"

"I think I must have been there hours—anyhow, it was a long time," said Carthew. "It seemed a jolly long time. But I got the handkerchief out of my mouth at last, and shouted, and Mr. Greely heard me, and came. I never expected them to deny it. They knew I knew them at the time."

"What have you to say now, Silver?"

"Only that we never touched Carthew, sir," said Jimmy.

"You have heard Carthew state that he recognised your voices."

"He must have been mistaken, sir."

"Have you had any trouble recently with these juniors, Carthew, to cause a desire for revenge?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Dalton knows," said Carthew. "I had to punish Lovell yesterday for breaking the rule about sliding down the banisters. The four of them set on me——"

"Upon my word!"

"Mr. Dalton sent for them, and they were punished," said Carthew.

"That is correct," said the Fourth Form master.

"Only to-day, I heard Lovell uttering threats against me," went on Carthew. "I gave him a hundred lines for it."

"I did the lines!" growled Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome gave Arthur Edward expressive glances. Often and often they had told Arthur Edward that he opened his mouth too wide. Once more he had done so, with unfortunate results. They realised very clearly how much reckless talk would tell against them now, if the real culprits were not discovered.

"You threatened Carthew, Lovell?" said the Head grimly.

"Not exactly threatened him, sir!" stammered Lovell.

"What words did you use?"

"I—I said we'd make him sit up."

"Sit up!" repeated the Head. Apparently the headmaster of Rookwood was unacquainted with that slangy expression; or, at least, chose to appear unacquainted with it. "What did you mean by that, Lovell?"

"I—I mean we'd make him squirm, sir!" said Lovell, reddening.

"Squirm?"

"I—I mean——"

"Well, what do you mean?" snapped the Head. "Cannot the boys of your Form express themselves in their mother-tongue, Mr. Dalton?"

"I—I only meant we'd go for him. I mean I meant we'd—we'd retaliate!" gasped Lovell.

"I understand! You assaulted a prefect who was carrying out his duties and your Form-master very properly punished you; and then you threatened to retaliate on the prefect?"

Lovell was silent.

Put like that, it sounded serious enough; but, of course, it had never presented itself to Lovell's mind quite like that. But it was obviously useless to attempt to explain further.

"And your retaliation, it seems, has taken place," said the Head grimly. "It took the form of seizing upon Carthew and treating him in this disgraceful and disgusting manner?"

"No, sir!" gasped Lovell.

"You admit——"

"I—I said we'd make him sit up," groaned Lovell. "I—I never meant anything in particular, sir. I was

waxy—I mean, wild—that is annoyed."

"You are absolutely certain, Carthew, that you recognised the voices of the juniors here present?"

"Absolutely, sir!"

"You have no doubt whatever that they were your assailants?"

"None at all, sir! I know they were! I can't understand their impudence in denying it."

The juniors looked at Carthew. He was speaking with bitter emphasis and undoubted earnestness. He believed what he said, they could see that; at all events, he believed so deeply and sincerely that they were the guilty parties that he allowed himself to stretch a point to prove what he believed to be the truth.

Had Carthew been lying—had he simply taken this opportunity of "downing" his old enemies, regardless of the truth—doubtless the Head would have discerned some clue to it; he was an extremely keen old gentleman, and thirty years' experience with boys of all sorts and conditions had enabled him to sift the false from the true.

But the fact was that Carthew was not lying. He was mistaken; but he was saying what he believed to be true, and that was quite a different matter.

His words carried conviction.

Not only in the Head's face, but in that of Mr. Dalton the hapless four could read conviction.

There was a long, long pause, during which the hearts of the four juniors beat painfully.

The Head's face was hardening grimly.

"It comes to this!" he said at last, with the manner of a judge summing-up. "You four juniors assaulted Carthew, and were punished for it;

you were heard uttering threats against him; and this was followed by this outrage. And Carthew states explicitly that he recognised the voices of his assailants, and that the voices were yours. It is impossible for any doubt to exist in the matter. You agree with me, Mr. Dalton?"

"I can only assent, sir," said the master of the Fourth reluctantly. "If Carthew is positive that——"

"Absolutely, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand and regarded Jimmy Silver & Co.

"To-morrow morning you will leave Rookwood!" he said. "This matter is too serious for a mere flogging. Boys who are guilty of such an outrage as this cannot be suffered to remain in the school, or, indeed, to associate in any way with other Rookwood boys. Mr. Dalton, you will kindly see that the punishment-room is prepared, and that these boys are placed in it for the night; they are not to be allowed to return to their dormitory. They will leave by the first train in the morning!"

"Very well, sir!" said Richard Dalton heavily.

Jimmy Silver's heart thumped.

The "chopper" had come down—come down so suddenly, so overwhelmingly, that it was bewildering.

"We did not do it, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"That will do!"

"We never touched Carthew, sir!" exclaimed Raby.

"Falsehood will not serve you now!" said the Head coldly.

"But we—we didn't, sir!" gasped Newcome, in bewildered dismay. "You—you can't bunk us for something we never did, sir!"

"Silence!"

"But, sir——"

"The matter is closed! Mr. Dalton,

kindly take these boys to the punishment-room."

"But, sir——" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Come, my boys!" said Mr. Dalton quietly.

And in overwhelming dismay, hardly able to believe in the reality of the catastrophe that had fallen on them, Jimmy Silver & Co. almost tottered from the Head's study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

A SURPRISE FOR THE FOURTH

VALENTINE MORNINGTON sat up in bed as the rising-bell rang out in the summer morning, and yawned. Then he glanced along the row of white beds and started a little as he noted that four of them were vacant.

Morny whistled softly.

Jimmy Silver and Lovell, Raby and Newcome, were not in the dormitory. Their beds had not been slept in.

Mornington's careless face became rather grave. He met the glance of his chum Erroll as the latter sat up.

"The dear boys seem to have had a night out, Erroll!" Morny remarked lightly, with a gesture towards the empty beds.

"I knew they hadn't come back," said Erroll quietly. "I was awake rather late, and they hadn't come."

"I dropped off," said Morny, with another yawn. "Why the thump have they stayed out?"

"It's trouble, of course."

"Looks like it!" agreed Morny. And he turned lazily out of bed.

There was a buzz of excited comment in the Fourth Form dormitory as the other fellows turned out and all the Form became aware of the fact that Jimmy Silver & Co. had passed the night elsewhere.

It was an extraordinary happening; it was amazing. The four juniors

had followed Mr. Dalton downstairs to see the Head the night before, and they had not returned. What had happened to them?

"The punishment-room, of course," said Conroy. "But what the thump are they there for?"

"Goodness knows!" yawned Morny.

"It's something jolly serious!" said Oswald. "It must be."

"No doubt about that!" agreed Putty of the Fourth. "But what?"

"They've been going for Carthew, you know," said Tubby Muffin. "You fellows know that Lovell has been shouting out what he was going to do to Carthew. Well, he's done it, and he's got nailed."

"Likely enough," said Oswald.

"Looks like it, by gad!" remarked Cyril Peele, and he closed one eye at Valentine Mornington, who laughed.

Peele's chums, Gower and Lattrey, looked rather uneasy. Peele was quite cool, however; and Mornington was even more airy and careless than was his wont. Kit Erroll, looking at the four many times with doubt and suspicion, wondered.

The Classical Fourth were soon down; even Tubby Muffin did not dawdle that morning. All the juniors were anxious to hear what had happened to Jimmy Silver & Co.

Erroll joined Morny going down; and the dandy of the Fourth gave him a rather cynical, mocking look. Plainly, he expected Erroll to speak and question him; but Erroll said nothing, though his handsome face, always grave, was now much graver than usual.

The big door of the House was open, and Mr. Dalton was standing there, looking out into the morning sunshine in the green old quad, with a puckered and troubled brow.

Erroll came up to the Form-master, and some of the Fourth lingered at hand to hear what was said.

"Excuse me, sir!" began Erroll. "May I ask whether anything has happened to Silver and his friends?"

Mr. Dalton nodded to him.

"Yes, Erroll! I am sorry to say that they are expelled from the school," he said.

"Expelled, sir!" exclaimed Erroll.

There was an excited buzz from the other juniors. Gower and Lattrey turned quite pale; Peel breathed deep and hard. Even Mornington started and bit his lip.

"Yes, Erroll! It is a heavy blow to me," said Mr. Dalton. "I am more sorry than I can say."

"But—but what—what——"

"What have they done, sir?" asked Mornington. "I suppose they've done somethin' to be bunked for."

Mr. Dalton glanced at him. Evidently he did not approve of Morny's light and bantering tone. But he answered quietly.

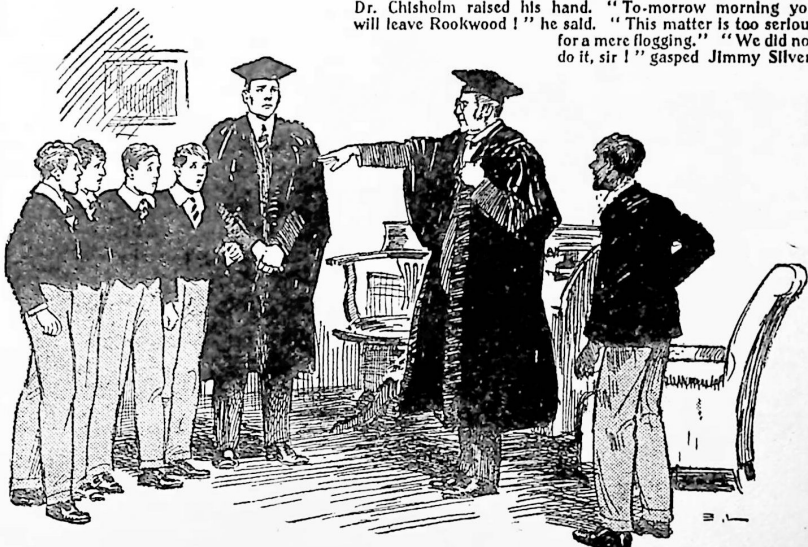
"Last night Carthew of the Sixth was attacked in the quadrangle. He was tied up, dragged to a shed, and covered with tar. Such an attack on a Sixth Form prefect is naturally followed by the expulsion of the offenders."

"Oh, gad!" murmured Peele.

Peele moved away quickly, and went out into the quadrangle with Gower and Lattrey. The three black sheep of Rookwood were anxious for reasons of their own not to meet Richard Dalton's keen eye. But Mr. Dalton did not notice them.

"I say, that sounds awfully thick, sir!" said Mornington. "A Sixth Form prefect actually tied up and tarred!"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand. "To-morrow morning you will leave Rookwood!" he said. "This matter is too serious for a mere flogging." "We did not do it, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver.



"Yes," said Mr. Dalton curtly.

"And Jimmy Silver did it?"

"Yes; he and his friends."

"Have they admitted it, sir?" exclaimed Erroll.

"I am sorry to say not. But there is no doubt on the subject."

Erroll flushed.

"I am sure, sir, that there is doubt on the subject!" he exclaimed. "I am quite sure that, if Jimmy Silver denies it, he is telling the truth."

"Yesterday, Erroll, I should have said the same," answered Mr. Dalton. "But the matter is clear."

"Silver's a friend of ours, sir," said Mornington, in his silkiest tone. "If a fellow may ask, sir, was there any evidence against Silver—apart from the fact that Carthew would like to see him kicked out of Rookwood, which really isn't evidence?"

Erroll gave his chum a warning look.

"Kindly do not speak in that flippant tone, Mornington, upon such a very serious matter!" said Mr. Dalton sharply.

"My mistake, sir! I stand corrected!" said Morny meekly. "But still, a fellow may ask why the Head has come down so heavy on these fellows when they deny, as you say, having laid hands on Carthew."

"Carthew knew them," said Mr. Dalton briefly.

"Didn't you say he was collared at night, sir? Did he recognise the fellows in the dark?" asked Mornington. "I wasn't aware that Carthew had eyes like a cat."

"I repeat, Mornington, that I will not allow you to talk in this flippant tone!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton angrily. "Take a hundred lines!"

"Oh, very well, sir! But with the greatest respect, sir, a fellow may be allowed to point out that nobody would dream of takin' Carthew's word

that he recognised fellows in the dark."

"Carthew has not stated that he recognised the boys, Mornington. He has stated that he recognised their voices."

Mr. Dalton turned his back and walked away. Morny glanced after him with a smile.

Erroll hurried after the Form-master.

"One moment, sir! Can I speak to Jimmy Silver?"

"It is forbidden, Erroll! The four boys are in the punishment-room, and they will breakfast there."

"But just a word, sir."

"The Head has forbidden any communication between them and the rest of the Fourth Form, Erroll."

"I'm quite sure there is some mistake, sir," said Erroll, in great distress. "Jimmy Silver would not tell a lie about it if he had done it!"

Mr. Dalton made no reply to that; and Erroll, deeply troubled, went out into the quadrangle with Mornington. In the quad the Classical Fourth were in a buzz of excitement over the startling news, and it soon spread to the Modern Fourth, and Tommy Dodd and Co. discussed it breathlessly.

Fellows of other Forms heard the news, and jumped when they learned that Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Fourth were "bunked" from Rookwood. The news really seemed too startling to be true.

"The silly asses!" said Smythe of the Shell. "All very well tarring a prefect—serve him jolly well right! But what silly asses to get bagged!"

"It's not really like Jimmy Silver!" Tommy Dodd remarked to his chums, Cook and Doyle. "Carthew's a cad, but smothering a chap with tar is rather too thick. And what chumps, lettin' him hear their voices, you

know, and recognise them! Just like Classical chaps!"

"Oh, just!" agreed the other two Moderns.

And both Houses at Rookwood went in to breakfast in a state of great excitement. One expulsion in the school was rare enough to cause a sensation; four in one day was catastrophic. Rookwood, from the Sixth Form to the Second, could talk about nothing else.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

UP TO MORNY!

"**C**AREFUL, for goodness' sake!"
"Mind what you're up to, Morny!"

Lattrey and Gower spoke together in low, anxious tones. It was after breakfast, and the two black sheep had got Valentine Mornington by himself in a quiet corner of the quad.

Morny was smiling jeeringly.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Well, it's rather thick, those chaps gettin' it in the neck," mumbled Gower. "I never expected anythin' of the kind, or I'm dashed if I'd have had a hand in it! Carthew's a rotter, and I was glad to down him. But—but Morny said it was all safe."

"So it was all safe!" yawned Valentine Mornington carelessly.

"Can you see any danger now?"

"No—not so long as we keep it dark, of course."

"We're keepin' it dark," said Peele, with a laugh. "We're not likely to change places with Jimmy Silver and his gang."

"It's thick, though," muttered Gower. "I say, Carthew was lyin' when he said he recognised their voices. How could he, when it was us——"

"Hush!" whispered Lattrey.

Mornington laughed.

"Carthew jumped to the conclusion that it was that gang," he remarked. "He felt quite certain of it, and invented evidence to suit."

Gower eyed Morny very dubiously.

"I hate to let those chaps get the chopper for nothin'," he said. "I don't like the fellows, but it's thick—it's too thick. But, of course, we've got to take care of ourselves first."

"Our precious selves!" chuckled Mornington.

"Well, we can't be bunked, I suppose. But—but it's rotten! I—I wish we'd never laid a finger on Carthew."

"Too late, old scout!" smiled Mornington. "You don't feel inclined to own up, do you?"

Gower almost gasped.

"You idiot, Morny! That's just what I was afraid of—that you'd get some potty idea like that into your head. A fellow never knows how to take you!"

"For goodness' sake, Morny——" breathed Lattrey.

Cyril Peele laughed.

"Leave Morny alone," he said. "Morny doesn't want to be bunked, any more than we do; and, with Jimmy Silver gone, he's got a good chance of gettin' in as captain of the Fourth. This is a bit unexpected, but it doesn't work out so badly from our point of view."

"You awful rotter!" said Mornington.

"What?"

"Precious seedy crew, aren't you?" said Mornington, surveying the three with a curling lip. "Frightened out of your wits, and ready to let other chaps get the chopper! You're worried because you think I mayn't be such a worm as to let them get it in the neck, when they've done nothin'. Well, I can tell you that

I'm not standin' by and seein' Jimmy Silver bunked from Rookwood for somethin' that I've done!"

Gower and Lattrey panted, and Peele's coolness suddenly forsook him. The three glared at Mornington.

"You—you rotter!" hissed Peele. "We backed you up. You don't dare to give us away!"

"Mornny!" gasped Gower.

"You wouldn't?" panted Lattrey.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Pull yourselves together!" he said scornfully. "Anybody seein' your faces now would jolly soon guess what's worryin' you! I'm not givin' you away. I had to get level with Carthew for smackin' my head, and I've done it; but I'm not seein' Jimmy Silver booted for it. If it all comes out, I shan't mention your names. I led you into it and I'm the man to stand the racket!"

"You're goin' to own up?" breathed Peele.

"I haven't said so."

"You said——"

"I said I'd own up and take the gruel rather than land it on another chap, and so I would!" sneered Mornington. "That's where we differ, you see. I don't happen to be a sneaking funk. But I'm not lookin' for the chopper—I fancy there may be other ways. Anyhow, you fellows are safe. Keep mum and keep a stiff upper lip and don't bother me with any more of your scared whinin', for goodness' sake!"

And Mornington walked away, leaving Peele & Co. considerably relieved, though still uneasy.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

THE WHIP HAND.

BULKELEY of the Sixth stopped at the door of Carthew's study in the Sixth Form passage and glanced in.

Mark Carthew was there, sorting out books for class, and he glanced round and smiled in a sneering way at the sight of the Rookwood captain's troubled face. George Bulkeley was booked for the task of taking four expelled juniors to the railway-station, and it was a task he disliked extremely.

"Just off?" asked Carthew, with a grin. "You'll get out of some of the Greek, Bulkeley. You're the lucky man. If you like, and if you can fix it with the Head, I'll take the fags to the station."

"I want to speak about that, Carthew," said the Rookwood captain abruptly. "Look here. Are you quite sure? I suppose you know what a serious matter this is for those fags?"

"Oh, quite!" smiled Carthew. "They should have thought of that when they collared me last night and tarred me."

"Are you quite sure they did?"

"Oh, quite!"

"They deny it."

"They would," smiled Carthew.

"Lying young rascals!"

"Well, I've never found them lying young rascals," said the captain of Rookwood. "I suppose the Head knows what he's about. But I don't feel easy about this, Carthew. It seems that it was all done in the dark. You saw nothing. It's only a question of recognising their voices. Is it possible you've made a mistake and fixed this on the wrong parties?"

"No, it isn't."

"If you're quite sure, the matter ends," said Bulkeley.

"I'm quite sure."

And the Rookwood captain went.

Carthew bit his lip uneasily as he stood staring at the open doorway, a book in his hand. He was feeling

disquieted. Carthew had a conscience, though it was a fairly tough one.

"Oh, rot!" he muttered at last. He threw aside the uneasy misgiving Bulkeley's words had caused him.

The fellows were guilty right enough. He had stretched a point to prove guilt otherwise not provable, that was all.

There was a tap at the half-open door, and Valentine Mornington stepped into the study. Carthew gave him a frown.

"What the thump do you want, Mornington?"

"About Jimmy Silver and his pals," said Mornington cheerily. "It seems that they're bunked and goin' this mornin'. I want you to get them out of this."

"What?"

"You're the man that can do it, you know," said Morny. "I want you to. I'm makin' an appeal to your tender heart, Carthew."

Carthew looked at him blackly and stepped to the table on which his ashplant lay. He picked up the cane.

"Bend over!"

Mornington smiled.

"Cut it out, old bean!" he said cheerily. "Bendin' over will be a thing of the past—a happy memory of Rookwood—if I go this mornin'."

Carthew stared at him, cane in hand.

"If you go! What do you mean? You're not sacked, I suppose?"

"Bound to be for attackin' a giddy prefect and tyin' him up and tarrin' him," drawled Mornington.

Carthew started violently.

"What?"

"Guessin' it?" smiled Morny.

"You?" gasped Carthew.

"Little me!"

"You young scoundrel!"

"You smacked my head, you

know," explained Morny. "You're rather given to smackin' fellows' heads, Carthew. But there's some heads you mustn't smack. Mine's one of them. I had to make you sorry for it, and I did. I never expected anythin' to come out. How was I to guess that you'd jump on Jimmy Silver and tell lies to fix it on him? A fellow couldn't be expected to foresee all that, could he?"

Carthew breathed hard.

"If you hadn't jumped on them I should have said nothin', of course. I'm not anxious for the long jump. But as matters stand I'm bound to speak out. Can't see another fellow sacked for what I've done."

"Who helped you?" panted Carthew. "There were four——"

"I'm keepin' that dark. Can't give pals away. But it wasn't any of that jolly old party now roostin' in the punishment-room. I was leader, anyhow, and the Head will have to be satisfied with sackin' the ringleader. Sorry I can't oblige you by bendin' over, Carthew. I shall get enough from the Head, you know."

Mornington moved towards the door.

"Stop!"

Carthew gnawed his lip. He knew that the Head would believe Morny's confession. It was true on the face of it. A fellow would not ask for the "sack" if he could help it.

And then—then what became of Carthew's statement that he had recognised the voices of the Fistical Four when he was attacked? Even Carthew did not believe now that Jimmy Silver & Co. had had a hand in the affair. Morny had found help among his own friends. That was fairly clear. Probably they would be found out when Mornington had confessed. And Carthew had

caused the Head to sentence four innocent fellows to expulsion by a statement that was now palpably a false one. He had borne false witness, and the falsity would be brought home to him beyond the shadow of a doubt.

His mind whirled as he thought of it. Morny's confession was ruin to him. Undoubtedly he would lose his prefectship; that was certain; and it was likely enough that he would be sent away from Rookwood himself.

"Look here, Mornington"—Carthew's voice was husky—"don't be a fool! I'll let you off for what you've done. Keep your mouth shut!"

"I'll mention that suggestion of yours to the Head," grinned Morny.

Carthew shivered.

"You really mean to go to the Head, asking for the sack?"

"Unless those fellows are got off some other way."

"Oh!"

"Not much more time to lose," said Mornington airily. "Look here, Carthew. Let's come down to brass tacks. You've lied about those fellows, and the Head will jump on you like thunder when he knows you've made him sack four fellows for nothin'. I shall get kicked out of Rookwood, and I fancy you won't be long in followin' in my footsteps. There's time still. If you speak before I do you can still make out that it was a mistake. Make out anythin' you jolly well like so long as Jimmy Silver and his pals are cleared. But you've got no time to lose. After all, even you can't want to see them bunked, now that you know they had nothin' to do with it. I dare say you want to see me bunked for tarrin' you," Mornington chuckled, "but you'll have to deny yourself that pleasure, old bean, un-

less you want to be bunked along with me."

Carthew gritted his teeth.

"Hold your tongue and leave it to me," he muttered.

"With pleasure, old scout."

Carthew of the Sixth hurried from the study.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

ALL CLEAR!

RICHARD DALTON unlocked the door of the punishment-room.

Four juniors rose to their feet and looked at him.

"I have good news for you, my boys," said Mr. Dalton gravely and kindly. "I am sorry—deeply sorry—that you have been put to such a trial. You will not leave Rookwood. You will go to your Form-room as usual."

Four faces brightened up wonderfully.

"But what——" asked Jimmy Silver.

"It seems that Carthew has reflected since making his statement to the Head last night," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "He has seen Dr. Chisholm this morning and informed him that upon reflection he fears that he made a mistake in supposing he recognised your voices last night when he was attacked in the quadrangle by some unknown persons."

"My hat!" ejaculated Raby.

"It appears that he felt quite certain at the time. But reflection has convinced him that he could not be sure that he was able to recognise whispering voices," said Mr. Dalton. "He has told the Head so, in time to prevent a possible injustice being done. He goes further and states that he is personally prepared to take your word that you had no hand in the attack on him."

" Oh ! "

" The Head is naturally very much surprised and very much annoyed at Carthew's recklessness," said Mr. Dalton. " But it is very fortunate that he has had the moral courage to speak out and admit his mistake. Naturally, you boys must feel some resentment ; but you must remember that it must have required considerable moral courage on Carthew's part to admit himself in the wrong so amply. The matter is now over so far as you boys are concerned, and I cannot say how glad and relieved I am. You will now go to your Form-room."

And the Fistical Four went, quite dazed by this sudden turn of fortune.

There was quite a sensation in the Fourth Form-room when Jimmy Silver & Co. walked in and took their places as usual.

Mornington gave them a nod and a grin. Erroll's face was bright and smiling. His faith in his chum had been justified. Even Peele & Co. were pleased.

It was not till after class that Jimmy Silver & Co. learned from Morny what had happened.

" You see, you never were in any danger, really," drawled Morny. " I should have owned up like a shot if it had been needed. As it happens, it isn't."

" But you ? " said Jimmy Silver. " Now Carthew knows——"

Mornington grinned cheerily.

" Now Carthew knows, he's keepin' the giddy knowledge to himself," he said. " I fancy he's rather keen to let the whole matter drop. He

doesn't want me to go up before the Beak and tell the whole jolly story of my interview with him. The Head's pretty ratty with him now, but he believes that Carthew owned up to a mistake of his own accord. If he knew that I frightened Carthew into doin' it, it would be a gee-gee of quite another colour."

" My hat, that's so ! " agreed Lovell. " Carthew will have to take it lying down, for his own sake."

" Just that," smiled Mornington. " My idea is that Carthew will let the whole thing drop like a hot brick, and the sooner the better. If it all comes out, it will come out what I said to him before he saw the Beak this mornin', and the dear man doesn't want that—not a little bit. I fancy we've heard the end of the story."

Mornington was right.

Carthew of the Sixth was only too anxious to let the whole matter drop, and to let nothing more be heard of it. By whose hand the bully of the Sixth had been tarred in the woodshed remained undiscovered by the Head. But most of the Classical Fourth knew, and they chuckled over it. The bully of the Sixth indemnified himself, so far as he could, by making things generally as warm as he could for Valentine Mornington and Jimmy Silver & Co. But he found those cheery youths, as usual, pretty well able to take care of themselves, though they were glad when the summer holidays came along and they had a long rest from their old enemy.

THE END