

JIMMY SILVER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!

by OWEN CONQUEST



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CHAPTER I.

Breaking-up at Rookwood!

ROOKWOOD was breaking up for the Christmas holidays.

Motor-coach after motor-coach had rolled away to the station laden with Rookwood fellows and their belongings.

But the old quadrangle was still buzzing with merry voices.

Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth Form had not departed yet. A coach, crowded with juniors, was starting, and a dozen voices from it hailed the

The shadow of a secret hangs over the old Priory that is JIMMY SILVER'S home—a secret which remains undiscovered until Jimmy entertains his chums of Rookwood, Greyfriars, and St. Jim's to a midnight ghost hunt!

Fistful Four as they stood on the steps of the School House.

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

"Come on, Jimmy!"

"Coming later!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

The motor rolled off.

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

"Why don't we get off?" demanded Lovell. "We don't want to go in the next coach with Smythe and his crowd."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adolphus spun round.

"Is there?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"Yes, rather!"

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

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

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

"Only your overcoat," said Newcome sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

The Pistical Four chuckled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Bless your uncle!"

"You remember my Uncle John?"

"Yes; shocking bounder," said Lovell.

"Well, he was a bit of a bounder," agreed Jimmy; "but he turned over a new leaf when he joined the army. I heard about him yesterday. He was wounded in Palestine, and sent home, and he was put on home duty."

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

"No; he's still Private Silver. Now, why shouldn't we walk over to Letcham, drop in at the barracks, and see him?" said Jimmy. "We can catch a later train. I want to ask him to come down to the Priory for Christmas if he can get off. He's quite made it up with my pater since he went into the Army, and he ought to come if he can get leave. What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't mind!" yawned Lovell.

"I can see that you mean to walk to Letcham, anyway."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

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

"Good!"

The Pistical Four went in for their coats.

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

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

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

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

"Look out!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

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

"Buck up, driver!"

Tommy Dodd shook his fist at the Classical juniors.

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

Jimmy Silver & Co. were good shots. Four snowballs whizzed through the air at the same moment.

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

"Yaroooh!"

"Grouch!"

"Oh, you rotters!"

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

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

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

The motor-coach halted.

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

"Go for 'em!" roared Tommy.

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

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

"After them!" roared Doyle.

"Fathead! The coach is waiting!" growled Tommy Dodd, shaking his fist after the Classics. "Come on!"

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

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

CHAPTER 2.

A Snook for Jimmy Silver!

JIMMY SILVER whistled cheerily as he tramped on over the powdery snow on the moor. He was in great spirits that day.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, his best chums, were going home with him for the vacation, and the chums of Rookwood were looking forward to a good time.

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

The Priory, Mr. Silver's residence, was an interesting place, too; and Jimmy's chums looked forward to exploring it. It was an ancient monastic establishment, turned into a country residence, with ancient oak-panelled rooms, echoing corridors, secret passages, and, as Jimmy solemnly assured his chums, a Christmas ghost. The Co. took the ghost with a grain of salt—a very large grain.

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

Jimmy Silver's merry face became serious at once.

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

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

"The prior, of course! The house used to be a priory, but it was sold up hundreds of years ago. My grandfather bought it before I was born. I was brought up there, so I ought to know about the ghost," said Jimmy. "My Uncle John went hunting it one Christmas, when I was a kid—"

"The chap who's Private Silver now?"

"Yes."

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

"Bow-wow!"

"Did you see the ghost?" asked Newcome.

"Well, we didn't exactly see it," admitted Jimmy Silver. "But it could be heard quite plainly."

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the secret passages are there right enough."

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

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

Latham barracks was in sight.

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

The man in khaki looked at him curiously.

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

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

"Private Silver, of the Hampshire Regiment."

The sentry gave a start, and eyed Jimmy keenly.

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

"Yes; his nephew."

"And you want to see him?"

"Yes; if it's allowed."

"Oh!" said the man in khaki.

He seemed to reflect for a moment or two.

"You know him?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, yes, I know him!" The man grinned. "Wait here a few minutes, and I'll speak to my officer."

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

The juniors looked at one another.

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

"Something's up!" murmured Lovell.

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

Jimmy's brow clouded.

"Not that I know of," he said.

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

"That's all over," said Jimmy quietly. "He's been a good soldier. There's nothing against him now. But —but that does look queer."

The juniors waited, Jimmy in a somewhat uneasy mood.

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

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

Had something transpired, after all?

Had the scapegrace's old recklessness revived and caused him fresh trouble? Jimmy's brow was clouded.

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

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

"I was," said Jimmy.

"Do you know where he is?"

Jimmy stared.

"Isn't he here?" he exclaimed. "I understood that he was in these barracks."

The officer looked grim.

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

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

"You did not know that he had deserted?"

Jimmy staggered back.

"Deserted!" he panted.

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

He turned back.

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

Jimmy found his voice at last.

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

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

Jimmy Silver groaned.

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

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

CHAPTER 2.

Cousin Phyllis!

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

Lovell & Co. did not speak.

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

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

The cheery horizon had been clouded now.

Jimmy had taken it for granted that his uncle, scapegrace as he was, had reformed. He had had good reason for thinking so. He remembered how Private Silver had dragged him from the river on one occasion, and probably saved his life. Surely the man who had risked life itself for him deserved to be trusted.

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

"Don't think about it, Jimmy," said Lovell at last. "It can't be helped, you know. The poor brute may have got at the drink again, you know."

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

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

Jimmy brightened a little.

He had not thought of that.

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

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

"Bunked to get out of it when he was suspected," said Newcome. "If he

was innocent, Jimmy, he couldn't be expected to stay to be punished."

Jimmy shook his head.

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

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

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

Where was John Silver now?

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

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

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

His brother stood by him for many years, but had washed his hands of him at last. He had given him one more chance when he entered the Army. Now that he had broken out again, he had nothing but cold condemnation to expect from Mr. Silver.

Where was he—where would he be that Christmastide?

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

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

"Phyllis, by Jove!" exclaimed Jimmy, as a bright-faced, bright-eyed

girl came across the platform towards them, smiling.

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

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

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

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

The four juniors clambered into the car, and Phyllis took the wheel.

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

Phyllis looked round quickly.

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

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

Phyllis coloured.

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

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

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

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

On the east side of the rambling buildings a grey old tower rose against the sky.

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

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

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

"Ha, ha!"

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

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

The girl turned sharply round.

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

"Hunt the ghost," said Lovell, with a laugh. "It will be fun."

"But—but—"

Lovell looked at the girl's startled face curiously.

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

"Oh, no, no!" said Phyllis hastily.

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

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

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

"Surely not!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, rather! Look!"

Lovell pointed to the tower.

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

"Somebody exploring the place," said Jimmy Silver. "Wonder who it is?"

The car drove up to the front door.

"Here we are!" said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fiscal Four entered the Priory with Phyllis.

CHAPTER 4.

A Little Too Hasty!

M^R. SILVER greeted his son's guests cordially. Jimmy's father had met Jimmy's chums at Rookwood, and learned to like them. Lovell & Co. felt quite at home with the kind old gentleman. Jimmy's mother was equally cordial to the three. Jimmy marched them off to their quarters. Two rooms adjoining Jimmy's own had been prepared for the Rookwood juniors, and as the rooms communicated, the Fiscal Four were together as they had been in the Fourth Form dormitory at Rookwood.

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

Jimmy laughed.

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

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

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

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

Rap! Rap!

Lovell jumped back, startled.

"Great Scott! Did you hear that?"

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

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

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

"What?"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

"Rats! I tell you——"

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

"You silly ass!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Silver gave a start.

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

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

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

"Has—has he been here?"

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

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

Mr. Silver shook his head.

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

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

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

"Has he confessed, father?"

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

"Then—then——"

"But the matter was investigated, Jimmy. I learned that there had been a series of thefts in the camp, and a watch was kept. The thief was not seen, but a watch stolen from an officer

was found in John Silver's greatcoat pocket. A good deal of money had been taken also, but that was not found. It is supposed to have been sent away, and doubtless he is living upon it now. At all events, he did not stay to face his court-martial, but deserted."

"He would have been found guilty?"

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

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

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

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

"I cannot, Jimmy."

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

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

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

"That is all right."

Lovell looked in.

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

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

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

"Might find his tracks," said Lovell, laughing. "We're Boy Scouts, you know."

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

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

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

"Try!" said Jimmy, with a grin.

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

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

"Here you are," said Jimmy.

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

"Does that move?" asked Lovell.

"Yes."

"I've tried all over it."

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

"I see. Go ahead!"

Jimmy pressed the hidden spring.

The panel did not move.

"Well?" said three voices together.

Jimmy looked astonished.

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

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

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

"It doesn't seem to."

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

"Well, open it," grinned Newcome.

Jimmy jammed on the spring.

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

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

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

"You silly ass!"

Lovell took out his watch.

"We'll give you one minute to open the weird panel," he remarked. "I'll time you. If it isn't open in one minute, we give you a bumping."

"Look here——"

"Ten seconds!" said Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it does open," roared Jimmy. "It opened lots of times."

"Twenty seconds!"

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

"You frabjous ass!"

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

"Fifty seconds!" said Lovell grimly.

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

Lovell snapped his watch shut.

"The minute's up!"

"Look here——"

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

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

"Bump him!"

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

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

Bump!

"Yoooonopi!"

Bump!

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

Bump!

"My dear boys!" said a mild voice.

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

CHAPTER 5.

Nothing Doing!

"AHEM!" stuttered Lovell.

"H'm!" murmured Raby.

"Oh!" ejaculated Newcome.

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

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

"Is that a school game?" he asked.

"Ahem!"

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

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

Lovell & Co. turned crimson at the suggestion.

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

"Exactly," said Raby. "Only——ahem——"

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

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

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy. "I wasn't spoofing! The panel does open!"

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

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

Lovell stared.

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

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

"Oh, crumbs!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you open it, dad?" asked Jimmy. "The blessed thing won't open for some reason!"

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

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

Jimmy's father looked perplexed.

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

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

"Nothing doing," remarked Raby.

"No go," said Lovell.

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

Mr. Silver laughed.

"It certainly will not open," he said. "It must have become jammed somehow. I am sorry for your disappointment, if you wished to explore the secret passage."

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

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

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

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

The juniors left the library, considerably disappointed.

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

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

Cousin Phyllis met them in the hall.

Her bright eyes scanned the four frowning faces curiously.

"Is anything wrong, Jimmy?" she asked.

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

"It will not open?"

"No. Jammed somehow, I suppose."

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

"No jolly fear!" said Lovell emphatically. "We'll jolly well find another way of getting in! There must be other ways. I say, Jimmy, I suppose there isn't anybody playing a little game on us, is there?"

Phyllis started.

"Why should you think so?" she exclaimed.

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

"Imagination, fathead!" said Raby.

"What was that?" asked Cousin Phyllis quickly.

Lovell explained, and the girl listened with intent interest.

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

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

"I don't mean them, fathead!"

"Or Phyllis!" chuckled Jimmy.

Phyllis coloured.

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

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

"What about that Johnny we saw on the tower when we came in?" said Lovell. "Who was he?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy.

"Somebody looking over the tower, I suppose. It wasn't the pater."

"Can you get into the tower from outside?"

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

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

"Yes."

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

"Of course!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, rather!"

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

"Here you are!" he said.

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

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

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

He pressed on the stone.

But it did not move.

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

The juniors gave it up at last in disgust.

"Rotten sell!" growled Lovell. "I'm fed up! Blessed if I think much of your

giddy secret passages and things, Jimmy Silver!"

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER L

Tom Merry & Co. Arrive!

"BUCK up, Cussy!"

"Wats!"

"Look here——"

"Wubbish!"

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

Arthur Augustus was not usually emphatic.

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

Six juniors of St. Jim's were howling to Arthur Augustus to hurry up in the old High Street of Wayland town. St. Jim's had broken up that day, and seven juniors were going to Jimmy Silver's place, instead of going home. They were D'Arcy, Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell.

And Monty Lowther had suggested stopping at Wayland to see "Mutiny on the Bounty" at the cinema—a suggestion his chums had agreed to, as there was lots of time to catch the second train for Lexham. And they had stayed rather longer than they had intended seeing the pictures, and there was just

time for a run to the station when they came out. And an irreverent youth of Wayland had hurled a snowball which sent Arthur Augustus' gleaming topper flying.

Hence the trouble.

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

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

"Look at my toppah!"

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

"Come on, Gussy!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! There he is!"

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

"Come back!" roared Tom Merry.

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

"The train!" bellowed Herries.

"The train!" bawled Digby.

"The train!" shrieked Blake.

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

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

The cheery youth who was the cause of all the trouble vanished round a corner, and Arthur Augustus stopped at the corner, panting. His chums overtook him, panting too. The chase had only lasted five minutes. But they were now a quarter of a mile from the station, and it was a minute past the time for the express to leave.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy. "The young wascal seems to have disappeared, dear boys, I was goin' to give him a fearful thwashin'."

"You frabjous ass!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You burbling cuckoo——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

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

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

"I've a jolly good mind to jump on your topper," howled Manners. "The train's gone—the last direct train—and Jimmy Silver will be expecting us before dark."

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

"You cheerful idiot——"

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

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

"I weward that wemark as personal, Dig!"

"Bump him!" growled Herries.

Arthur Augustus backed away in alarm.

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

"Let's get to the station," said Tom Merry, "the train may have been delayed. If not, I'm blessed if I know how we shall get to Letham Priory!"

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

"Goodness knows when we shall arrive!" said Tom Merry. "Better send Jimmy Silver a wire to say we're late. Can't be helped."

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

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Mannahs!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The juniors knew the direction, and

they started for the Priory, tramping along under a light fall of snow.

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

Every window was in darkness.

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

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

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

"Bat Jove, wathah noi!"

"Hallo, there's a light!"

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

"Thank goodness, they're not all gone to bed!" said Tom Merry in relief.

"That's the library, I think. There's somebody up. Hallo, the light's gone."

The window was suddenly dark again.

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

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus is Suspicious!

JIMMY SILVER sat up in bed.

"Hallo!" he murmured drowsily. "What the merry dickens is that?"

"Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

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

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

"What's the row?"

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

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

"Shove this coat on, old chap."

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

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

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

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

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

"Weally, Hewwic—"

"Our champion idiot lost it!" said Blake.

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

"Fathead!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

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

"You didn't get the wire?"

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

"Don't mench, deah boy!"

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

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

"You're awfully good."

"Weally, we cannot sufficiently apologise—"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy.

"Everybody in bed?" asked Lowther.

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

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

Jimmy started.

"You saw a light where?"

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

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

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

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

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

They followed Jimmy into the library. Jimmy Silver switched on the electric light. The great apartment was quite deserted.

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

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

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

"Pwobably a burglah, deah boy."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Good-night, Mr. Silver!"

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

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

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

"Pewwaps it is a burglah."

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

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

"Not at all," said Jimmy laughing.

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

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

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

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

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Come on!" said Lovell.

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

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

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

"Wippin', deah boy!"

Lovell stirred the fire in the wide, old-fashioned grate, and threw some logs on it. The St. Jim's juniors peeled off coats and mufflers, and began unpacking their bags.

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

"The best I can do," he remarked.

"That's topping!" said Tom Merry. "Come to think of it, we're a bit peckish."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You get back to bed," said Tom.

"Oh, I'm not so very sleepy!" said

Jimmy Silver, who was, as a matter of fact, nearly yawning his head off.

Tom Merry laughed.

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

"Well, if you're all right—"

"Wight as wait, deah boy!"

"Then, good-night!"

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

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

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

"Eh! What burglar?"

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

"Rats!"

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

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

Arthur Augustus shook his head sagely.

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

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

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

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

"Certainly not. I am goin' to station

myself in the library, and keep watch. I am quite sure that that wascal is hidden there somehow."

"What rascal, you ass?"

"The burglar."

"You frabjous chump!" said Blake.

"There isn't a burglar."

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous

chump!"

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

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

"Bow-wow!"

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

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

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

"I am not goin' to turn in."

"You're not going down, Image!"

"I am goin' down. I weward it as a duty."

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

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

Blake gave an expressive snort.

"Ass!" he remarked.

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

CHAPTER 5

A Startling Discovery!

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

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

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

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

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

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

He waited patiently.

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

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

A sudden sound startled him into broad wakefulness.

Click!

Arthur Augustus rubbed his eyes.

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

"Bal Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

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

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

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

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

Scratch!

It was a match striking.

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

Arthur Augustus peered through the fronds of the big palm.

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

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

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

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

Arthur Augustus stood frozen for a moment, dumbfounded.

Then he gasped:

"Gwent Scott!"

His startled exclamation echoed through the silent room.

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

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

It was Jimmy Silver's cousin!

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

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

Arthur Augustus stepped out of his place of concealment.

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

"Oh!"

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

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

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

"Who—who are you?"

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

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

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

"Oh!"

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

Arthur Augustus looked at her.

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

Why?

What was Phyllis doing there?

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

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

"I am awfily sowwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway excuse me

for makin' this fearful blundah, deah gal. I—I did not guess—"

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

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

"I—I cannot explain—"
"Pway do not suppose that I wrequest any explanation, deah gal. I know how to mind my own bizney."

Phyllis smiled slightly. "But—but you must think it very strange—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hallo! Is that you, fathead?"
"Wats!"

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

"No."
"Found anything?"

"Wats!"
And Arthur Augustus went to bed.

CHAPTER 5.

Phyllis' Secret!

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

Cousin Phyllis did not come down to breakfast.

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

And Arthur Augustus did not say a word.

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

The Rockwood juniors chortled gleefully over it.

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

Arthur Augustus coloured.
"Only about half an hour, deah boy."

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Lovell—"

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

"Pway pass the toast, deah boy."
"Not even a mouse?" asked Raby.

"I did not see any mice, Waby."

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

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

"Thank you, madam!"
"And I am sure D'Arcy would have given a good account of himself

"If there had been a burglar," said Mr. Silver, smiling. "It is rather fortunate that there was not, however."

"See anything of the ghost?" asked Raby.

"Nothing, dear boy."

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

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

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

D'Arcy's face crimsoned.

"Weally, you know—" he stammered.

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

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

"I—I—"

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

"Did you, Gussy?" chortled Blake.

"Wats!"

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

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

Arthur Augustus felt very uncomfortable as he went with the party. That the panel was not "jammed" he knew, because Miss Phyllis had opened it the night before. Was it the girl who had fastened it, not desiring, for some reason, that the secret

passage should be explored by Jimmy Silver's guests?

There was little doubt that such was the case.

But what could possibly be Phyllis' motive?

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

What was her secret?

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

Jimmy Silver tried the panel, but it was fast.

"Nothing doing!" he announced.

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

"No. It's jammed."

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Pewraps it is fastened."

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

"Good gwacious!"

Arthur Augustus almost fell down.

He turned away to hide his confusion.

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

The panel was bolted!

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

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

Someone!

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

D'Arcy felt his brain in a whirl.

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

What could it mean?

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

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

The girl laughed.

"Certainly!"

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

"Please go on," said Phyllis quietly.

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

"Yes."

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

Phyllis' face paled.

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

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

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

"I can't help thinking," went on Arthur Augustus uncomfortably, "that—that someone has induced you to let him hide there, Miss Phyllis; and so he must be some wottah to be doin' such a thing, and—and pewwaps you would like me to take him in hand and deal with him. I don't undahstand the mattah at all, but it looks to me as if you are in some swape, and I should like to help you. I look aftah my Cousin Ethel a great deal, you know," added Arthur Augustus, apparently as a hint that he was quite an old hand at looking after distressed young ladies.

Phyllis smiled tremulously.

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

"I am afwaid you are bein' imposed upon by some unsewipulous person."

"No, no!"

"Vewy well. I felt bound to offah you my assistance if you wequired it," said Arthur Augustus. "I will not mention the mattah again. But pway wemembah that I am always at your service if you wequire me."

"Thank you!" said Phyllis tremulously.

They skated back towards the house.

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

Arthur Augustus, concerned as he was about Phyllis, did not mention the matter again; neither did Phyllis. In spite of the girl's strange secret, she was quite cheerful and smiling, and Jimmy Silver, though he thought sometimes of his fugitive uncle, was a cheery host. Christmas passed merrily enough at the Priory. A few days later Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars were to arrive, an event that was looked forward to keenly by Jimmy Silver's little party.

CHAPTER 10.

Bunter is Not Left!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Dry up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

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

Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove Fern at Greyfriars, were chatting over the supper-table at Wharton Lodge. The Famous Five of Greyfriars were there for the Christmas holidays, and Billy Bunter was with them. Not that

William George Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, found his company yearned after. But Bunter had decided to come, and he had come.

The Famous Five were chatting over the forthcoming visit to Jimmy Silver's place in the holidays, when Billy Bunter chipped in. The fat junior blinked indignantly at the Co.

"I say, you fellows——"

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

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

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

"Ha, ha!"

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

"Six!" howled Billy Bunter.

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

Billy Bunter sniffed.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at."

"Is Bunter going?" asked Bob Cherry. "It doesn't seem quite the fair thing to plant him on Jimmy Silver."

"Why, you fathead——"

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

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

"You can stay here and tuck into

the grub," said Johnny Bull. "That's all you want, isn't it?"

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

"You silly fat duffer!" roared Bob Cherry.

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

"I did!" said Bob Cherry, in sulphurous tones. "And if you don't shut your silly head, you'll have an egg next!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Rats!"

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

"Bow-wow!"

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

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

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

"Well, suppose we leave him snoot-

ing in the morning, and start? That will settle it. He never comes down till ten."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

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

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

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

Promptly as usual the Famous Five were down to breakfast the next morning. Billy Bunter had been called, and he had scorted and turned over; merely that and nothing more.

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

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

The colonel smiled.

"Not at all."

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

Billy Bunter had not put in an appearance.

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

In cheery spirits they started for the village.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors half expected to see the fat Ramovite patrolling along the road

after them, on the way to the station. But he did not appear, and they reached the station. The train came in.

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

"Good egg!"

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

"Latcham!" said Harry Wharton, at last.

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

"Dashed long wait here," yawned Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! My hat!"

"Bunter!" yelled Nugent.

"Great pip! Bunter!"

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

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

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

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

Bunter put on a spurt.

A man with a lurching gait was coming down the platform, blinking at the carriages. He was a rough-looking customer, and plainly the worse for drink. He stopped at the door of the juniors' carriage, just as Bunter came

paning up. The Owl of the Remove butted fairly into him, unable to stop in time.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

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

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

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

"Yow-wow! Rescuel!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton jumped out of the carriage.

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

A big sergeant in khaki strode up.

"Enough of that, Bleazer!" he snapped.

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

"All right, sergeant," mumbled the man. "The young 'ound run into me —"

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

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

"Right away!" shouted the guard.

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

CHAPTER 11.

An Unexpected Discovery!

BILLY BUNTER sat and panted in breath for some minutes.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him expressively.

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

"I say, you fellows, wasn't that

lucky?" grinned Bunter, when he had recovered his breath. "Jolly nearly missed it!"

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

"Oh, really, Bull!"

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

Bunter chuckled.

"You see, I happened to remember that Colonel Wharton was going to Latham on business this morning," he explained airily. "No need to catch that early train, as there was room for one in the colonel's car. I asked him to give me a lift, and he took me to Latham when he went, and there you are. You didn't know I knew the time you changed trains, did you?"

"No, you fat boulder!"

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

The Co. laughed; they could not help it. While they had supposed that Bunter was left behind safe in the arms of Morpheus, the fat junior had simply been taking an extra snooze, relying on getting a lift in Colonel Wharton's car to Latham. There was room for one passenger in the little car, and Bunter had calmly decided to be that passenger.

"Jolly lucky, I call it," said Bunter. "Might have missed going, you know. And the girls would have been disappointed—he, he, he! You fellows needn't expect to monopolise Ethel and Phyllis like you do Marjorie; I jolly well shan't stand it. I warn you of that! I—I say—wharrer marrer?" roared Bunter suddenly.

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

The fat junior roared.

"Leggo! Rescue, you fellows!"

"Whas the thunder are you at?" ex-

claimed Wharton. "Get into your seat, man, or you'll be put there!"

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

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

"Yaroo! Rescue!" yelled Bunter frantically.

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

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

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

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

"Lemme gerrup!" roared Mr. Bleazer.

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

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

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

"Bow-wow!"

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

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

"Are you going to keep the peace?"

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

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

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

There the Greyfriars juniors had to let him get up.

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

Mr. Bleazer gave him an evil look.

The juniors jumped out of the carriage, and Mr. Bleazer jumped after them. Between fury and drink, Mr. Bleazer was in a boiling state. The moment he was on the platform he made a jump at Bob Cherry and grasped him.

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

"Yow-ow! Help!" spluttered Bob.

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

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

"Wot's all this 'ere?"

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

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

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

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

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"We'll help you get him to the station, if you like!"

"Kini along, my tulip. You're in custody."

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

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

"You bet!"

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

"Shut up, you fat boulder!"

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

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

Harry Wharton & Co. had to stay to answer the questions of the inspector-in-charge. They could only say that he had got into the train at Latcham and had been fighting drunk, as Bob Cherry expressed it. One of the constables who had taken the ruffian into the cell came back with a packet in his hand.

"We found this on him, sir!"

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

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

The inspector glanced sharply at the juniors.

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

"Yes."

"Did he come from the barracks?"

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

"By gad!"

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

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

"By gad, what a stroke of luck!"

smiled the inspector. "The numbers are the same!"

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

The inspector nodded.

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

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You young gentlemen have done a good day's work," smiled the inspector. "This means clearing an innocent man, as well as recovering stolen property."

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

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

CHAPTER 12.

How for Jimmy Silver!

"BAI JOVE! Heah they are!"

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

"Railway accident?" grinned Lovell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bunter gave him a playful poke in the ribs.

"Oh, good gracious!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

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

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

He decided to talk to Ethel and Phyllis on the bank instead. To his surprise, Ethel and Phyllis somehow seemed to keep out of his way, and the only fellow who appeared to be willing to endure the delights of Bunter's conversation was Jimmy Silver, who felt that it was up to him as host. Bunter referred to his visit to Rookwood, and told Jimmy that he would look in again next term. Jimmy could rely on that. At which Jimmy Silver suppressed a dismal groan.

"We've got rather a treat in store for you chaps," remarked Jimmy Silver, when the numerous party came in to

supper. "There's going to be a ghost hunt—we left it till you came. D'Arcy saw a ghost the other night——"

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

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

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

"Well, what reasons?" asked Lovell.

"I—I—I decided to go to bed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"I was not scared, Tom Merwy."

"Then why did you bunk?"

"Wats!"

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

Arthur Augustus gave Phyllis a grateful look.

"Thank you vewy much, deah gal," he said. "I wegard all these fellahs as utlah assees."

"But it seems that you went down to keep watch, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel, smiling, "and you went back to bed instead. Were you sleepy?"

"N-n-not exactly."

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

"That's the idea," said Jimmy Silver.

"The ghost is supposed to walk at midnight, and the library is his happy hunting-ground. The old prior is supposed to have been killed in that room. If you fellows feel inclined to stay up, we're going to watch for him to-night."

"Bal Jove!"

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

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Gussy can go to bed," said Tom Merry. "We're going to hunt the giddy ghost."

"What larks!" said Bob Cherry.

"We're on, of course."

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

"Certainly," said Cousin Ethel, smiling.

Phyllis did not speak.

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

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

"No, no!"

"You'd rather not stay down?"

"Yes, if Ethel does," stammered Phyllis.

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

Phyllis did not seem to hear.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, you beast——"

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

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

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

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

Jimmy Silver nodded.

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

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

"Any charge?" asked Jimmy humorously.

"No, you duffah."

"Then go ahead."

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

Jimmy Silver stared.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"It would be bettah not, deah boy."

"But why?"

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

"What cires?"

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

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

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

"Nevah mind that, deah boy!"

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

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

Jimmy shook his head.

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

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

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

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

Jimmy Silver joined Phyllis and Ethel, whom Billy Bunter had cornered, as it were. Bunter was relating the combat with the ruffian in the train from Latham, and, according to Bunter's account, there was only one fellow in the Greyfriars party who had really handled the rascal in a plucky way—that one being William George Bunter.

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

Billy Bunter did not detect the sarcasm in that remark.

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

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel.

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

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at the Rookwood junior.

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

"Not millions?" asked Blake, laughing.

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

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

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

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's the fact that the man turned out to be a thief, and a lot of stolen banknotes were found on him,"

said Bob. "The inspector had the numbers, as he had been to Latham barracks about the thefts a week or so ago."

Jimmy Silver changed colour.

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

"The man came from Latham barracks?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I think he was employed there."

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

"How much was it in banknotes?"

"A hundred quid."

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

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

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

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

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

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

"Jimmy! What——"

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

"What?"

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

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

Mr. Silver rose to his feet.

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

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

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

CHAPTER 12.

The Ghost of the Priory!

"TIME!" said Tom Merry. And there was a laugh.

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

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

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

"Midnight!" said Jimmy Silver.

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

But Monty Lowther's little joke only elicited a feeble grin. Somehow, the juniors were in a subdued mood. Outside, the wind was wailing through the leafless trees, and strange sounds were heard in the recesses of the old house. As they sat round the glowing logs, the juniors glanced towards the secret

panel, and their glances were not wholly easy. Lovell had related how he had rapped on the wall in Jimmy Silver's room the day he came to the Priory, and an answering rap had come—or so he had fancied.

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

"Ha, ha!"

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

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

"Don't!" she exclaimed.

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

Rap! Rap!

The juniors listened tensely.

There was a sudden catching of breathing, as from behind the secret panel came sharply: Rap! Rap!

Jimmy Silver & Co. sprang to their feet.

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

"You—you heard that!" he breathed.

"Bal Jove!"

"Somebody's there!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It was quite distinct! Hark!"

Rap! Rap!

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

The juniors exchanged startled glances.

"Somebody!" muttered Tom Merry.

"But—but nobody can be there!" stammered Jimmy Silver. "The secret passage is blocked at both ends."

"Coo-wag, deah gal," murmured Arthur Augustus, as Phyllis sank back in her chair, white as death.

Click!

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

The juniors stood rooted to the floor.
"It—it's coming!" muttered Blake.
Click!

The panel opened.

"Good heavens! What——"

Phyllis sprang up with a cry.

"Don't! Don't——"

"Phyllis!" exclaimed Ethel.

Every face was white now.

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

A figure stood there.

The light gleamed upon a pale, startled face.

But it was not a ghostly face.

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

"Uncle John!"

Phyllis gave a low moan.

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

CHAPTER 14.

Light at Last!

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

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

"Private Silver!" stammered Lovell.

"The deserter!"

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

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

"Yes, Jimmy," he said, in a broken voice, "I'm here. I—I'm sorry you've found me. I'll go! But—but don't blame Phyllis for befriending me. She

believed in my innocence, if no one else did."

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

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

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

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

"Oh!"

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

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

"D'Arcy does!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaaa, wathah!"

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

"I remember you had a lot in the car the day we came home."

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

"By gad!" said Lovell.

"But after you came home, I couldn't go there, and I had to use the panel here in the library, and that could only be done at night. I was here the night Tom Merry and his friends came—and D'Arcy found me. I had to hide behind the panel when you searched the library, and I came out when all was quiet, as I thought; but D'Arcy kept the secret."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So that was what you saw, that you've been keeping dark, you boulder," muttered Blake.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"I should not be likely to give a lady away, Blake. I assured Miss Phyllis that she could rely on me, as a fellow of tact and judgment."

"You will keep the secret?" exclaimed Phyllis, with an appealing glance round. "My uncle is innocent."

John Silver shook his head.

"I cannot remain, Phyllis," he said quietly. "I shall go and take my chance——"

"No, no!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"Father will have to know!" he said.

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

Jimmy spun round.

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

The outcast raised his head.

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

"You are going—with me," said Mr. Silver. "I have heard it all, and I do not blame you, Phyllis, my dear girl. Brother John, I did not believe you were innocent, and I beg your pardon."

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

"Your innocence is proved."

"What?"

"I have just returned from Latcham Barracks," said Mr. Silver. "The real

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

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

"Bal Jove! I wegard this as vewy luckay all wound," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hurrah!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

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

CHAPTER 15.

Back at Rookwood:

THE Christmas holidays were over. Jimmy Silver, back at Rookwood, paused outside No. 4 Study in the Fourth Form passage.

Jimmy hesitated there.

As a rule there wasn't much hesitation about Jimmy Silver. He generally knew exactly what he wanted, and went straight to the point. But he was hesitating now, and, having raised his hand to tap at the door of No. 3, he let it drop to his side again.

A buzz of voices came from the study.

It was Mornington's study, and Peele and Gower, Townsend and Topham, the nuts of the Fourth, were there with Morny.

They seemed to be in "high spirits" that afternoon, to judge by the cheery buzz of voices.

"Rippin'!" Townsend was saying. "Just like one of your toppin' ideas, Morny."

"When's the car comin'?" asked Peele.

"It will be ready for us at half-past two." It was Mornington's voice. "We're goin' to walk down the road to it; it won't do to have it come up to the school."

"Why not?" asked Topham.

Mornington laughed.

"Old Bootles was jawin' me last time about havin' a car out so often—extravagance, and all that!"

"What rot!"

"Absolute rot, old fellow! But a chap can't argue with his Form-master."

Jimmy Silver's face set a little.

He made a movement away from the door, apparently giving up his intention of entering the study.

Then he changed his mind again, and came back, and, without any more hesitation, knocked at the door.

"Come in!" called out Mornington's voice.

Jimmy Silver entered.

There was a haze of cigarette-smoke in the study. Mornington & Co. were smoking while they chatted.

The nuts of Rookwood stared at Jimmy Silver. The captain of the Fourth was a very infrequent visitor to that study.

"Hallo!" said Mornington, in surprise.

"What an unexpected pleasure!" drawled Peele. "Have a fag, Silver?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood nuts chortled in chorus. Jimmy Silver was not likely to accept a "fag."

Jimmy frowned, and coughed a little.

The smoky atmosphere of the study was not pleasant to his healthy lungs.

"Squat down!" said Mornington, with unaccustomed cordiality in his manner.

"I came in to speak to you, Mornington," said Jimmy.

"Well, go ahead!"

Jimmy paused. The nuts regarded him curiously. Jimmy Silver had always been on the worst of terms with Mornington.

"Pile in!" grinned Peele. "Are you goin' to ask Morny to let you join the merry party this afternoon?"

"Don't do it, Morny," said Townsend. "He'll be a wet blanket."

"I'm not thinking of joining your party," said Jimmy curtly. "I want to speak to you, Morny. I dare say I'm wasting my time; but as I've come, I'll say what I have to say. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, if you are."

Mornington nodded carelessly.

"I don't mind," he said.

Another pause.

"Well," said Jimmy, at last, "I don't want to preach at you, Mornington. But you have showed at times that you've got something jolly decent in you, and I think it's a pity you should waste your time playing the giddy goat with these silly asses."

"Thanks!" yawned Peele.

"Much obliged!" grinned Townsend.

Jimmy Silver went on unheeding.

"I'm speaking seriously, Mornington," he said. "You're fit for something better than smoking and slacking. Everybody's willing to give you a chance. Why not take it?"

Mornington laughed.

"I believe you're in earnest," he said, "and I think you mean well. But it's no good, old scout. I'm a bad egg. I'll take up the footer like a shot, if you like. But no sermons."

"I don't think I'm the chap to sermonize," said Jimmy.

"I mean, if I'm in the Form team, I shall go on as usual, without bein' preached at."

Jimmy shook his head.

"You wouldn't be preached at," he said. "But, of course, you'd have to chuck smoking, and all that. A footballer has to keep in form."

"Nothin' doin'!"

"Well, I thought I ought to speak to you," said Jimmy. "You're too good a chap to go to the dogs, in some ways. But I suppose I'm a fool for my pains."

"Has that only just dawned on you?" grinned Topham.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll tell you what, Silver," said Mornington, "I'm willin' to bury the hatchet, if you are. Come along with us this afternoon. Give Good Little George a rest, and come 'an' have a merry time."

"What do you call a merry time?" asked Jimmy.

"A rippin' run in a car, an' a feed at the Ship Inn—first-class feed, ordered all ready in advance—a hundred up in the billiard-room, and a little game with some sportin' fellows we're goin' to meet there. What do you say?"

Jimmy's brows knitted.

"The Ship's out of bounds," he said.

"All the more fun, you know."

"That kind of fun isn't my kind," said Jimmy dryly. "Thanks all the same, but you can leave me out. Ta-ta!"

Jimmy left the study.

He left the nuts grinning.

Lovell and Ruby and Newcome were waiting for their chum in the end study. They grinned as Jimmy came in with knitted brows.

"Well, did Morny told you to his manly bosom and weep?" asked Lovell.

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy crossly. "Let's get down to the footer, and don't jaw!"

And the Fiscal Four went down to the footer—three of them grinning, and Jimmy Silver frowning. It was evident

that Jimmy Silver's kindly impulse had been useless, and that the dandy of Rookwood was not to be plucked like a brand from the burning.

CHAPTER 16.

A Change in the Programme!

THE nuts of Rookwood sauntered down the lane towards Coombe, and turned off at the cross-roads. There a big, handsome motor-car was waiting, with a chauffeur standing by it, who touched his cap very respectfully to Mornington.

The nuts surveyed the car with admiration. It was a very big and expensive car. Mornington did everything in style.

"All ready, sir," said the chauffeur.

Mornington nodded, and stepped into the car.

There was ample room for the whole party. The chauffeur took his seat, and the car moved away up the lane.

Mornington passed his cigarette-case round, and the nuts of Rookwood lighted up, with great enjoyment.

"Let her rip!" he called out to the chauffeur.

The big car buzzed along the road at a great speed.

In those quiet lanes there were no watchful eyes to note the excess speed, and the chauffeur obeyed Morny's instructions, and let her "rip."

"We'll have a run for an hour, and get into the Ship about half-past four," remarked Mornington.

"Good idea!"

The car turned out of the lane into the road that lay across the wide expanse of heath between Coombe and the sea.

It was a sunny autumn afternoon, and from the high-road over the heath the juniors could catch glimpses of the distant Channel.

"By gad, this is like old times!" said Morny.

"The rippin' old times!" said Peele.

"The merry old times!" grinned Townsend.

"Hallo! What the merry thunder is he slackin' for?"

There was a jamming of brakes, and the car slowed down.

"Buck up!" rapped out Mornington.

The chauffeur looked round.

"Somebody in the road, sir."

"Hang him! Run him down if he won't clear!"

The juniors looked ahead at the figure in the road.

It was that of a boy, about thirteen years of age, in shabby, almost ragged clothes. He was coming along towards the car slowly, and limping as he walked, looking as if he were in the last stages of exhaustion.

His eyes were on the ground as he plodded wearily along, and he did not seem to see the big car bearing down on him or to hear the hooter.

Toot, toot, toot!

"Confounded cheek!" growled Top-ham. "Some rotten beggar, takin' up the road and stoppin' a gentleman's car, by gad!"

"Run the cad down!" growled Peele.

The chauffeur, however, was not inclined to run the lad down. The road was narrow, and the boy was plodding down the middle of it. He heard the hoot of the motor at last, and looked up.

Then he stepped aside.

The car glided on, and the juniors stared at the ragged chap angrily as they passed.

Mornington's eyes dwelt on him curiously.

The boyish face was white and pinched, the eyes deep-set and hollow. There was suffering in the pale face. Even the careless eyes of the nuts of Rookwood could read there the signs of bitter want.

"You ragged lad, why can't you get out of the way?" hooted Peele as they passed.

The lad made no reply, staring dully as the car swept by.

Mornington glanced back.

The boy remained standing where he was for a few moments, and then sunk down on the grass by the roadside.

A curiously thoughtful expression came over Mornington's face as he sat down again, and blew out a cloud of smoke from his cigarette.

The millionaire schoolboy had never known want; he hardly knew what it was. An indulgent guardian allowed him much more money than was good for him. In Merny's pocket-book there were always rivers galore. The white, pinched face of the little outcast had made a strange impression upon Mornington. It did not seem to have impressed his companions in any way.

"Cheeky, little dirty beast!" said Topham. "What was he stickin' in the road for?"

"Looked on his last legs," said Mornington. "Fagged out, I should say."

"Bearly unpleasant to see such rotters on the road," said Townsend, with a gesture of disgust. "Filthy scurrows like that ought to be kept out of sight. What are the police doin'?"

"Looked hungry," said Mornington.

"Did he?" Townsend yawned.

"Yes. I shouldn't wonder if the poor little cad's eaten nothing to-day."

"Well, there are lots of them!" said Townsend, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Everybody can't be rich, I suppose. If there weren't any poor, there couldn't be any rich, and what should we do then?"

"Why don't he work?" said Peele, with virtuous indignation.

Mornington smiled sarcastically.

"You don't work," he said. "That kid's a good two years younger than you. Why should he work, if you don't?"

Peele stared.

"Eh? I suppose he belongs to the working-classes," he said. "What the thunder are you drivin' at?"

"It's a queer world," said Mornington meditatively. "Why the merry

"dickens should we be hummin' along in a big car, and that kid trampin' along on his uppers, without a meal inside him?"

"Get out and give him a fiver," sneered Peele.

"What a rippin' idea!" chuckled Townsend. "Hallo, what are you up to now, Morny?"

Mornington had called to the chauffeur to stop.

The car slowed down.

"Yes, sir?" said the driver, looking round.

"Go back to where that kid is. I want to speak to him."

"Yes, sir."

The car backed and turned in the road. Mornington's companions stared at him in utter astonishment.

"What on earth's the little game?" exclaimed Gower.

"I'm goin' to speak to that kid."

"What for?"

"To ask him if he's hungry."

"What the dickens does it matter to you?"

"Nothin'."

"Look here, we're wastin' time," growled Townsend angrily.

"Well, what did we come out for?" asked Mornington. "We're not specially bent on improvin' the abinin' hour, I suppose. May as well waste time one way as another."

The nuts exchanged angry glances, but it was evidently useless to remonstrate with Mornington. The dandy of the Fourth intended to have his way—as he usually did. There was a sulky silence in the car as it swept back along the road over the heath.

"There's the beastly little bounder!" snapped Townsend.

Mornington nodded.

The boy was still by the roadside, lying very still in the grass. He had not moved since the car passed ten minutes before.

The car halted. Mornington jumped out and ran to the boy, and bent over him.

"He's fainted," he said.

CHAPTER 17.

The Good Samaritan.

THE little fellow's eyes opened as Mornington raised him in his arms. He blinked strangely and dazedly at the handsome, well-dressed Rookwood fellow.

Townsend & Co. looked on surlily from the car.

They felt that they were wasting time. The merry meeting at the Ship was being put off on account of Mornington's amazing interest in this ragged, starving vagrant. The nuts felt that they were being treated very inconsiderately, and they were indignant.

"By gad, he's touchin' him—actually touchin' the dirty little beast!" said Peele, in utter disgust and contempt.

"Wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole!" growled Topham.

Mornington was a dandy and a nut of the first water. He was the most elegantly dressed fellow at Rookwood, and probably spent more on his clothes than any three fellows even in the Upper Forms. But he did not seem to mind touching the dusty, way-worn vagrant, from the mere idea of which his nutty comrades shrank in disgust. One elegant arm was passed round the little fellow's shoulders, supporting him as he sat in the grass.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Mornington, and his tone was quite soft and kindly.

The lad stared at him dazedly.

"I come over bad," he murmured.

"It's all right, sir."

"You're not ill?"

"No, sir."

"What the thunder does it matter if he's ill!" muttered Peele.

"Where are you goin'?" asked Mornington.

"I—I don't know."

"Where do you live?"

"Nowhere, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you haven't a home?" asked Mornington, staring at the white, drawn face.

"I ain't got nothin', sir," muttered the vagrant. "But I ain't a beggar," he added quickly, his pale cheeks flushing. "I ain't askin' for nothin'."

"You're on tramp?" asked Mornington.

"Yes, sir."

"But where do you live?"

"I used to live with Bill Murphy till he was run down by a car," muttered the lad. "He's been killed."

"Was he your father?"

"Oh, no, I ain't got a father. He give me a 'ome."

"What's your name?"

"'Erbert."

"And your other name?"

"Ain't got one."

"Come, you've got a surname?" said Mornington.

'Erbert shook his head.

"I ain't. I been called 'Erbert Murphy, 'cause that was ole Bill's name. But I ain't got a name."

"My hat!"

"Precious little beast!" said Townsend. "Do get into the car, Morny."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here, how long are we goin' to waste time while you're talking to that filthy little toad?" demanded Townsend angrily.

Mornington did not reply.

"So your name's Herbert, and you've got no other name," he remarked, "and you've got no home. Where did you live before you were with Bill Murphy?"

"I dunno. I was left on the common at Rookham arter some gipsies 'ad been there," said 'Erbert. "I ain't a gipsy, though. Old Bill thought p'raps I'd been stolen. I dunno. He give me a 'ome; he was a good sort. Then he was killed by a motor-car."

"And where were you left?"

"Old Bill got me a job at Biggs' farm," said the lad wearily. "I worked there till two weeks ago. Then I up an' cheeked Master Alf, 'cause he laid the cart-whip round me, and old Biggs gave me the sack."

"Poor little beggar!"

The lad grinned faintly.

"How long since you've had your last meal?" asked Mornington.

'Erbert hesitated.

"Now, then, answer me!"

"Yesterday morning, sir."

"My hat!"

"Are you coming, Mornington?" bawled Townsend.

"Yes, I'm comin'," said Mornington coolly. "Come on, kid. Can you walk?"

"I'm all right, sir."

The lad staggered up. But weakness overcame him, and he would have pitched over in the grass but for Mornington's sustaining arm. The poor little fellow had evidently been at the end of his strength when he fell by the roadside.

"Lean on me," said Mornington.

"I—I say, where you takin' me, sir?"

"Get into the car."

"Wot!"

"'Erbert's eyes opened wide in amazement.

There was a howl of indignant wrath from the nuts in the car.

"Morny!"

"You silly ass!"

"You're bringin' that filthy little beast in here?"

"Are you off your rocker?"

"Lemme go, sir," stammered 'Erbert.

"The gentlemen don't want the likes of me in that there car, sir——"

"Get in!" rapped out Mornington.

'Erbert had no choice about the matter. Mornington fairly lifted him into the car. Towny & Co., with horror and disgust in their faces, shrank the farthest possible away from him.

The nuts were crimson with indignation. That this wretched, dirty,

furnished outcast should be brought between the wind and their mobility, so to speak, was a shocking outrage. But Mornington did not seem to mind their feelings on the subject. Indeed, it was probable that his peculiar humour was tickled by the horrified disgust of Towny & Co., and that he enjoyed it.

"What are you goin' to do with the little beast?" hissed Townsend. "Are you bringin' that horrid bouncer along with us?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" yelled Townsend. "Are you dotty? Do you think I'm goin' to be seen with him?"

"Just as you like," said Mornington coolly. "Sorry to lose your charmin' company, Towny, but you can step out if you like."

"Me—step out!" stuttered Townsend.

"Where are you goin' to take him, Morny?" stammered Peele.

"Rookwood!"

"What!" yelled the nuts, in amazed chorus.

"He's hungry, and he's goin' to be fed. I'm goin' to take him to the school," said Mornington coolly.

"You silly idiot!"

"Thanks!"

"What about our afternoon out?" demanded Gower warmly.

"That's off."

"Off!" stuttered Gower.

"Somethin' more important on hand, dear boy. Chauffeur, get to Rookwood School as quick as you can, please!"

"Sittingly, sir!" gasped the chauffeur.

The driver had looked on at Morny's proceedings with wide, staring eyes. But there was a new respect in his manner as he replied to the dandy of Rookwood.

Apparently the chauffeur did not disapprove of Morny's remarkable proceedings.

The car buzzed away down the road. "Erbert sat in a corner, the nuts shrink-

ing away from all contact with him. And they eyed Mornington as if they would eat him. This was the end of their joy-ride—this was their afternoon out! They simmered with indignation and fury.

But Mornington was quite unmoved. There was a grin on his handsome face as the car started for Rookwood.

CHAPTER 12.

Mornington Astonishes the Natives!

ERBERT sat in the corner, leaning back exhaustedly on the soft cushions. He looked like a fellow in a dream. What the young "toff" was doing this for him for was to Erbert a deep and strange mystery. But he was conscious of feeling very comfortable, and the prospect of a meal was extremely attractive.

Townsend & Co. sat savage and sullen. Mornington regarded them with a smile.

"Sorry to bust up your little outin'!" he remarked. "It's a pity. But feedin' the hungry an' takin' care of the homeless is more important than playin' billiards, isn't it?"

"You silly fool!" said Townsend, in concentrated tones. "What are you playin' the fool like this for? You don't dare to take that ragged scarecrow to Rookwood, an' you know it!"

"I'm takin' him there!"

"You don't dare!" howled Townsend. "What'll the Head say to your bringin' him in?"

Mornington chuckled.

"The Head can't say anythin'," he replied.

"He jolly well will!"

"He can't. Don't you remember the sermon he preached us on Sunday?"

"I never listen to his sermons!" growled Townsend. "Rotten enough to have to attend chapel, without listenin' to the sermon!"

"Well, I remember it," said Mornington calmly. "Long jaw about

feedin' the hungry, an' carin' for the sick and unhappy, an' the rest of it. If the Head says anythin' about my bringin' this kid in, I'll quote his own sermon at him. It will be a lark to watch his face!"

"Oh!" said Townsend. "If you're doin' it to rag the Head——"

"Not exactly," said Mornington. "Still, it will be a lark to rag the Head. When I sling his own gas at him, he can't say anythin'!"

"He'll jolly well do somethin'—flog you most likely!"

"Flog me for actin' on his own sermon!" grinned Mornington. "My dear man, he can't do it!"

"You wouldn't have the cheek, anyway!"

"You'll see!"

Mornington chuckled gleefully, evidently delighted at the prospect of retorting upon the reverend Head of Rookwood his own sermon. Logically, the Head would not have a leg to stand upon. But the juniors did not believe that the Head would bother about logic, when he saw that dusty and ragged ragamuffin brought into the select precincts of Rookwood School.

Mornington's cheek simply astounded them.

It was the sheer audacity of the thing, probably, that appealed to Mornington's reckless nature more than anything else. But certainly the black sheep of Rookwood must have felt a kindly and charitable impulse in the first place.

It was a savage and ill-tempered party that arrived at Rookwood School about half an hour later.

"The Head'll see the car, after all!" growled Townsend.

"It doesn't matter now, when we're doin' a good deed with it!" grinned Mornington. "Don't you feel better for doin' a good deed, Towny?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Not much in your line—what?" grinned Mornington.

"Nor in yours!" snarled Townsend.

"You're only doin' this out of sheer devilment!"

"Shouldn't wonder. But I'm doin' it!"

The car stopped at the gates, and Mornington, helping 'Erbert out of the car, dismissed the chauffeur.

"Wait till he's spotted, that's all," said Topham, as Mornington led his queer protégé in at the gates.

"Gather round, an' screen him," said Mornington.

"I'll see you blowed first!"

"Where are you goin' to take him to feed him?" demanded Topham.

"My study, of course."

"My study!" howled Peele. "It's my study, too, you rotter!"

"Well, your study, then."

"You're goin' to take that dirty ragamuffin into my study! You cheeky cad——"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Ere, wot's this?" exclaimed old Mack, the porter, coming out of his lodge as 'Erbert was piloted in at the gates. "Get hout of this, young 'un! You ain't allowed in 'ere!"

"I'll trouble you to be civil to my friend, Mack!" said Mornington.

"Hay?"

"His friend!" stammered Townsend.

"His friend! Oh, by gad!"

"Beggars ain't allowed in 'ere, Master Mornington!"

"I ain't a beggar!" flashed out 'Erbert. "The young gent 'ave asked me to come 'ere!"

"Well, you can get hout!"

"Shut up, Mack!" said Mornington coolly. "Come on, Herbert—I mean, 'Erbert! My mistake!"

"Look 'ere, Master Mornington——" protested the scandalised porter.

"Bow-wow!"

Headless of old Mack, Mornington led 'Erbert into the quadrangle. The nuts did not gather round to screen him, as Morny had requested. They did not intend to be seen in company with Morny's "friend."

Mornington did not seem ashamed of his friend, however.

He took his arm, and walked him across the quad as calmly as if 'Erbert had been a viscount at least.

There was a regular howl of amazement from the fellows who saw them.

So ragged and forlorn a figure as 'Erbert's had seldom or never been seen within the select precincts of the quadrangle of Rookwood.

"Howly smoke!" yelled Flynn of the Fourth. "What have ye got there, Morny?"

"Relation of yours, Mornington?" grinned Smythe of the Shell.

"My brother," said Mornington calmly.

Adolphus Smythe's eyeglass dropped from his eye in his amazement.

"Your—your brother?" he stuttered.

"Certainly!"

"By gad!"

"You rottin' ass!" exclaimed Tracy. "What do you mean by sayin' that ragamuffin is your brother? You haven't a minor!"

"I'm only goin' by what the Head said in his sermon on Sunday," said Mornington. "He said we were all brothers, didn't he?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Well, then, accordin' to the Head, this kid is my brother!"

"You silly ass!"

"My minor, in fact; he's younger than I am!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And as he's my brother, I'm goin' to feed him, an' get him some more decent clobber," said Mornington.

"Chap ought to look after his brother, you know!"

"You funny ass!" shrieked Smythe.

"You'll get scalped if you take him into the House!"

"Rats!"

Mornington marched on coolly with 'Erbert. The ragamuffin blinked dazedly round the handsome, green old quadrangle, and the stately buildings and ancient beeches. It was clear that 'Erbert's eyes had never beheld such surroundings before.

"Well, by gad, this takes the cake!"

gasped Adolphus Smythe. "That silly ass has brought that thing in simply to check the Head. The Head'll scalp him!"

"Serve him right!" said Howard warmly. "The horrid little beast isn't clean enough to touch!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were on the steps of the School House when Morny and his new friend came up. The Fistical Four had finished footer practice, and were chatting before tea.

At the sight of 'Erbert walking arm-in-arm with the aristocratic Mornington, the Fistical Four wondered whether they were dreaming.

"What—what—what is it?" stuttered Lovell.

"Great Scott!"

"Who's your friend Mornington?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"My brother 'Erbert," said Mornington coolly.

"Your brother!" yelled Raby.

"Yass."

"Gammon, you ass!"

"I'm surprised at you, Raby," said Mornington calmly. "Didn't you hear the Head tell us last Sunday that we were all brothers? I hope you weren't asleep during the sermon!"

"You funny ass!" gasped Raby.

"My brother's hard up, and I'm takin' him in hand," said Mornington, evidently enjoying the astonishment he was causing. "I hope Bootles won't spot him before I've given him some tea. Still, I shall insist upon keepin' him here for a bit."

"You—you'll insist?"

"Certainly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mornington minor, bedad!" grinned Flynn. "Oh, what larks! But it's a broth av a boy ye are, Morny, and I take back some of the things I've thought about ye!"

"Get round and screen him a bit," said Jimmy. "Better get him to the study without being seen, if possible."

"Thanks!" said Mornington. "My pals are too aristocratic to come near him!"

"We're not!" grinned Jimmy. "Come on!"

The Fistical Four, entering into the spirit of the thing, crowded round 'Erbert, to keep him out of sight as much as possible as he was taken into the house. Flynn and Oswald and Rawson joined in. In the midst of a crowd of juniors the little ragamuffin was rushed into the house at a good speed, up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage.

Fortunately, Mr. Bootles was in his study, and there were no prefects on the scene. 'Erbert was safely conveyed to No. 4 Study.

Outside, in the quadrangle, there was a buzz of excited voices.

The news of "Morny's latest" spread like wildfire through the school, and excited keen interest among both Moderns and Classics.

It caused great surprise that the black sheep of the Fourth should ever have troubled his head about a hungry vagrant. But it raised him in the estimation of most of the fellows. But the cool audacity in bringing a tramp to tea in a Rookwood study made the juniors gasp.

The Head of Rookwood was a kind-hearted gentleman, but he could hardly be expected to approve of visitors of that kind in a junior study. The fellows wondered what he would say if he knew—or, rather, when he knew—for 'Erbert's presence was not likely to remain undiscovered long. And the general impression was that Mornington would be in hot water.

CHAPTER 45.

'Erbert in Chains'

"SQUAT down!" said Mornington. 'Erbert hesitated as the dandy of Rookwood pointed to a comfortable armchair.

"Sit down, kid!" said Jimmy Silver. "You look tired."

"I—I ain't clean enough to sit in that there chair, sir!" stammered 'Erbert.

"Rot!" said Mornington. "Do as you're told!"

"Yes, sir."

'Erbert sat down.

"Well, this is a go!" murmured Lovell. "Can we help you in any way, Morny?"

Lovell had quite melted towards the black sheep of the Fourth. He began to agree with Jimmy Silver's opinion that the dandy of Rookwood could not be a bad fellow in the main.

"You can help me entertain my guest, if you like," said Mornington. "I hardly think my study-mates will come and help."

"Ha, ha! I think not!"

"Hungry, kid?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, sir."

"He hasn't eaten since yesterday," remarked Mornington. "Look after him while I cut down to the tuckshop, will you?"

"Any old thing!"

Mornington hurried out of the study. The Fistical Four looked at 'Erbert, and looked at one another.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Raby.

"Fancy Morny!" gasped Newcome.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"It's jolly decent of Morny," he said.

"He went out on the spree like a shady rotter, and seems to have chucked it up to play the Good Samaritan. I must say it's an improvement."

"But what'll the Head say?" ejaculated Lovell. "I hope Morny won't get into a row for this."

"I'm afraid he will. Hallo, kid! What are you shifting for?"

'Erbert had risen to his feet.

"I think I'd better go, your gents!" he stammered.

"Wait for Morny. You haven't had your tea yet."

"I—I don't want that young gent to git into trouble over me, sir!" stammered 'Erbert. "I—I oughtn't to 'ave come 'ere!"

"Sit down!" said Jimmy kindly, pushing him into the chair again. "That's all right. We'll stand by Morny!"

Erbert submitted, but there was a look of concern upon his dusty face. And his concern for his benefactor made the juniors feel very kindly towards him. Erbert was badly in need of a wash, but evidently his heart was in the right place.

While Mornington was gone for tuck the juniors busied themselves setting the table for tea. Erbert sat in the comfortable armchair, and watched them dazedly. Juniors came along the passage grinning, to peep in at Mornington's astonishing guest. Most of them had a kindly nod and smile for the unfortunate little fellow; there were few, after all, of Townsend's sort at Rookwood.

There was a sudden call from the passage, from Tubby Muffin of the Fourth:

"Look out! Here comes Bulkeley!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding along the passage. The captain of Rookwood had evidently heard of Erbert already. Peele and Gower followed him, their faces red with anger. Erbert was in their study—their sacred quarters—and they intended to have him turned out forthwith.

The prefect stared frowningly into the study. His eyes almost bulged out at the sight of Erbert.

"What—Who's that?" he ejaculated.

"Morny's friend," said Jimmy Silver.

"What?"

"He—he—he's come in to tea!"

"That's the beast!" howled Peele. "That's the filthy brute Morny's brought into my study, Bulkeley! How can I have my tea in the study with that horrid little beast there?"

"You can have your tea in Hall!" suggested Lovell.

"You cheeky rotter——"

"I ain't doin' no 'arm 'ere, sir!" said Erbert, blinking at the big Sixth Former. "The young gent asked me to come in fur something to eat, and werry kind of 'im it was, too!"

"Oh!" said Bulkeley.

The prefect seemed puzzled.

"Turn him out, Bulkeley!" urged Gower.

Mornington came into the study with a big parcel under his arm. He set it down on the table, and nodded coolly to the captain of Rookwood.

"You brought that young shaver in here, Mornington?" exclaimed the prefect.

"Yaas."

"Blessed if I know what to do about it!" said Bulkeley. "If the kid's hungry he ought to be fed! But—but——"

"Not in our study!" howled Peele.

"You could have taken him to the kitchen, Mornington."

"Take my brother to the kitchen!" exclaimed Mornington.

"What do you mean? That kid's not your brother!"

"Yaas, he is—the Head said so last Sunday!"

"Cheese it, you ass!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Bulkeley frowned.

"If you dare to make fun of the Head, Mornington——"

"I'm not makin' fun of him, unless takin' his sermon seriously is makin' fun of him," said Mornington, with perfect coolness. "I suppose the Head wasn't rottin', was he?"

Bulkeley was nonplussed. So far as argument went, Mornington had the best of the matter.

"I'll speak to Mr. Bootles," said the prefect at last.

And he went out of the study.

"Look here——" exclaimed Peele and Gower together.

But Bulkeley went down the passage without heeding them.

Mornington grinned.

"Fairly put the lid on him!" he remarked. "I'll sling the Head's sermon at all of 'em—and the Head himself, too! Now, then, Erbert, are you ready?"

"Wotso, sir!" said Erbert emphatically.

Peele and Gower shook their fists into the study, and retired. Nothing would

have induced them to come in to tea while 'Erbert was there. But Jimmy Silver & Co. preferred their room to their company, as a matter of fact.

The chums of the Fourth busied themselves attending to 'Erbert's wants.

There was no doubt that the little ragamuffin was hungry.

He travelled through cold beef and ham and tongue and pickles at a great rate. Then he started on a big cake, and there was not much of the cake left when he had finished.

Even in his more prosperous days, 'Erbert had probably never had such good fare. And a day's fasting had given him an appetite that Tubby Muffin might have envied.

He did full justice to the good things the juniors pressed upon him, and seemed not to observe that a crowd had gathered in the passage to watch him eat.

'Erbert's table manners left something to be desired. He used his knife to convey food to his mouth, and helped with his fingers.

But his kind hosts did not mind.

The chief thing was to fill the hungry ragamuffin with good food, and that purpose was thoroughly effected.

'Erbert leaned back in his chair at last, completely satisfied, with an expression of almost beatific happiness upon his grubby face.

"Prime!" he ejaculated.

"Another tart, 'Erbert?" asked Mornington.

'Erbert shook his head slowly and regretfully.

"No, thanks, sir. I couldn't 'old any more."

"Better shave some things in his pockets," suggested Lovell. "He'll get hungry again. And we'll have a whip round to raise some tin for him—what?"

"Jolly good idea," said Jimmy Silver heartily.

"That's all right," said Mornington coolly. "I've got lots of tin, and I'm lookin' after him. He's got to have some new clothes before he goes on his travels again."

"Good man!"

"Mine would be a bit too big for him," said Mornington thoughtfully. "Some kid in the Third would be about the size. There's young Wegg. Call him in."

Wegg of the Third was grinning into the study, watching Herbert.

"Come in, Wegg!" called out Jimmy Silver.

The fag came grinning in.

"We want some clobber for my minor," explained Mornington. "Do you feel inclined to do a good and charitable deed by handing him a suit of your clothes, Wegg?"

"No fear!" said Wegg promptly.

"Well, sell me your oldest suit," said Mornington. "I'll pay you anything you like."

Wegg promptly closed with that generous offer.

"Done!" he said.

"Take 'em to the Fourth Form dormitory, and I'll bring the kid there."

"Right you are."

Wegg of the Third hurried away.

"Oh, I say, sir," murmured 'Erbert, "You're awfully good to me!"

"I'm a good chap," said Mornington calmly. "My goodness has often astonished my friends."

'Erbert blinked at him. He was deeply grateful to the dandy of Rookwood; but certainly he did not know what to make of him.

"Here comes Bootles," murmured Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four looked a little alarmed as the Form-master stepped in, rustling. Mornington faced him with perfect calmness.

CHAPTER 25.

Mr. Bootles's Resolve.

MR. BOOTLES blinked at 'Erbert over his spectacles, and blinked at the Fourth Formers. Evidently Mr. Bootles was what the juniors would have called "flabbergasted."

"Dear me," said Mr. Bootles, "I—I

hear— Bless my soul, this is the boy, I presume? Mornington, you have—er—done a very extraordinary thing in introducing such an excessively dirty boy into the school."

"The Head told me to, sir."

Mr. Bootles started.

"Dr. Chishelm told you to, Mornington?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bless my soul! I was not aware of that! I trust you are speaking the truth, Mornington?"

"Honest Injun, sir!"

"When did the Head tell you, Mornington?"

"Last Sunday, sir."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances. Whether Mornington was speaking seriously, or whether he was being guilty of astounding impudence they could hardly tell. The Head certainly meant his boys to take his Sunday morning sermons seriously. But—

"The—the Head told you last Sunday to—bring this ragged urchin into the school to-day?" said Mr. Bootles dazedly.

"He wasn't referrin' to Herbert especially, sir. He told us it was our duty to care for others less fortunate than ourselves—his very words, sir—and to feed the hungry, an' clothe the poor, an' all that, sir. So I'm doin' it."

"But—the Head scarcely meant—ahem!—he was, in fact, speaking generally—he did not intend you to introduce ragged vagrants into the school, Mornington. However, I should be sorry to check a kind and charitable impulse," added Mr. Bootles kindly. "As you have brought the boy here, you may provide him with what he needs, and kindly see him safe off the premises when you have finished. I hardly suspected you, Mornington, of so much kindness of heart. It is an agreeable surprise to me, though—though you have certainly chosen a very peculiar method of exercising your—ahem!—philanthropy. It would be advisable, perhaps, to let the boy wash before he takes his departure."

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Bootles rustled away, still flabbergasted.

Mornington grinned cheerfully.

"I knew I should floor him with the Head's sermon," he remarked. "It fairly takes the wind out of their sails, you see."

"Look here, I don't like you making fun of the Head's sermon," said Jimmy Silver bluntly. "It's rotten bad taste, if not worse."

"But I'm not making fun of it—wouldn't dream of such a thing. I'm takin' the old Johnny seriously," said Mornington coolly. "Now, 'Erbert,"

"Yessir."

"Feel better?"

"Ever so much, sir," said 'Erbert, with a sigh of contentment. "I won't never forget this, sir. You're a brick, sir, like Bul Murphy."

"Thanks," said Mornington. "I'm awfully flattered, though I never had the pleasure of knowin' Mr. William Murphy. As a matter of fact, I fancy Bill Murphy was worth about a hundred of me. What are you goin' to do when you leave here, 'Erbert?"

"Look for a 'aystack, sir."

"What the merry dickens do you want with a haystack?"

"'Erbert grinned.

"Sleep under it, sir."

"Dash it all," said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "It's going to rain to-night. It's coming on already."

"I'm used to it, sir," said 'Erbert simply.

"Laying up rheumatism for your old age," remarked Mornington. "I suppose lots of the poor do that?"

"Course they does, sir."

"I think I should be a red-hot revolutionist if I were poor," grinned Mornington. "It wouldn't suit me. And what are you goin' to do to-morrow, 'Erbert?"

"Tramp, sir."

"Lookin' for a job?"

"Yessir."

"And suppose you don't find one?"

'Erbert was silent.

"Starve again, as you've been doin' lately?" asked Mornington.

"I—I s'pose so, sir."

"And you'd have a home if Bill Murphy hadn't been killed?" remarked Mornington.

"Yessir."

The dandy of the Fourth was silent, his brows knitted, plunged in thought.

Jimmy Silver & Co. watched him in silent amazement. This strange development in Mornington's character simply astounded them. Who would have thought that the hardy, reckless blackguard of the Fourth would have cared twopence whether a ragged little urchin starved or not? Jimmy Silver was really concerned about the little vagrant. But Mornington!

The dandy of the Fourth broke the silence at last.

"He's not goin' out into the rain," he said deliberately, "and he's not goin' to the workhouse. The chap who looked after him has been killed, and in common decency the kid ought to be looked after."

"That's right enough," said Jimmy heartily. "But——"

"There's only one thing to be done."

"And what's that?"

"He's goin' to stay here."

The Fistical Four stared.

"Stay here!" murmured Lovell. "At Rookwood?"

Mornington nodded emphatically.

"Yass, That kid's goin' to stay here."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm goin' to take him to the Head," said Mornington, rising.

"Great pip! Let him have a wash first!"

"And get him into Weggy's old clobber!" exclaimed Raby.

"I'm goin' to. Come on, kid! You chaps can come and lend me a hand; he may want scrubbin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

'Erbert, with a dazed look on his face,

was marched off to the Fourth Form dormitory. And for the next half-hour or so Mornington and the Fistical Four were very busy, but the result of their labour was quite sufficient to compensate them for the trouble they had taken.

CHAPTER 21.

A Home for 'Erbert

"COME in!"

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, glanced up as Mornington of the Fourth entered his study, followed by a lad a couple of years younger. The Head glanced at the second comer curiously.

He was puzzled. So far as he was aware, there was no new boy due at Rookwood.

Mornington's companion did not bear the remotest resemblance to the ragged, dusty outcast who had been picked up on Coombe Heath.

A bath and a thorough scrubbing had worked wonders. Clean from head to foot, with his hair nicely brushed, 'Erbert looked very different. Wegg's Etons did not fit him exactly, but they were a remarkable change from his rags.

In his new guise, 'Erbert would have passed muster quite well among the fags of Rookwood. Indeed, he was at the present moment a good deal neater and tidier than Wegg of the Third ever was.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "Who is this?"

"Herbert, sir."

"I do not quite understand, Mornington. Herbert whom?"

Mornington proceeded to explain.

"Ah, this is the lad!" said the Head, surveying 'Erbert's burning face. "Mr. Bootles mentioned your—ahem!—very extraordinary proceeding to me, Mornington. I am glad to see," added the Head sternly, "that my sermon had so very much effect upon you, Mornington."

The junior coloured.

Under the Head's stern gaze he did not venture to speak in the flippant manner he had adopted towards Mr. Bootles. It was not safe to jest with the Head.

And Mornington, indeed, was not in his usual flippant mood. Something deep and earnest had been stirred in his strange, wayward, nature.

"This boy does not quite bear out Mr. Bootles' description," said the Head, as Mornington did not reply.

"We've looked after him a bit, sir."

"I understand. I congratulate you, Mornington; you have risen very considerably in my estimation by this kindly action," said the Head.

Evidently Townsend had been mistaken as to the Head's view of the matter. Astonishing as it would have seemed to the worthy Towny, the Head was quite in earnest in his Sunday morning sermon.

"Thank you, sir!" stammered Mornington. "I—I know it was a bit unusual, sir——"

"I am sorry that such kind actions are unusual," said the Head quietly. "But why have you brought this lad to me, Mornington?"

"I—I—I want to ask you somethin', sir. The kid's an orphan; he hasn't any people, and he was looked after by a chap who's been killed in an accident. Under the circumstances, sir, I—I—I——"

"You may speak quite freely, Mornington," said the Head kindly.

"Well, sir, can he stay here?"

The Head started.

"Here?" he said.

"He's got no home, sir. His father was killed by a car. He can't be sent out in the rain. I'd pay anythin'——"

The Head made a gesture.

"It is a very strange request, Mornington. But I am glad to hear you make it. I certainly think that something should be done for the lad. I will think

over the matter. Meanwhile, I will ask the housekeeper to provide a room, and, for the present, until something can be done, he will have shelter and food at Rookwood."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mornington. "I know it's a cheek——"

"Not at all, Mornington. Your kindness of heart towards this unfortunate boy pleases me very much, and I trust I shall not be found wanting in taking my share of the charitable action. You may take the boy to the housekeeper's room, and tell Mrs. Wade I wish to speak to her."

"Thank you, sir! Come on, 'Erbert!"

"Oh, my heye!" murmured 'Erbert.

He followed Mornington from the study like a fellow in a dream. All the happenings of that afternoon seemed like a dream to Herbert. But he was in clover at last; and if it was a dream, it was a very pleasant one.

Jimmy Silver & Co. heard with much satisfaction that the little ragamuffin was to have the shelter of the roof of Rookwood until something could be done for him.

Towny and his nutty friends snorted when they heard it. They found it hard to forgive Mornington for that afternoon's doings. But as Mornington did not care a solitary rap whether they forgave him or not, they came round.

When Jimmy Silver passed Study No. 4 after prep there was a whiff of cigarette-smoke from the keyhole, and Morny's voice was heard within:

"Your deal, Towny."

Jimmy Silver passed on. Mornington was the same old Morny, that was evident—the same shady black sheep that he had always been. But Jimmy felt, somehow, that there was, at bottom, more of good than of evil in his strange character, and he felt kindly enough towards the fellow who had risen, from misery and want, the little ragamuffin whom the Juniors called "Mornington minor."

CHAPTER 22.

Adolphus is Disgusted!

"MORNINGTON minor, by gad!" Smythe of the Shell choristed as he made the remark. His bosom pals, Howard and Tracy, choristed, too.

The nuts of Rookwood had just come out of the School House when their eyes fell upon the little fellow who was called "Mornington minor" in the school.

He was wandering about the quadrangle, looking with awed eyes at the old grey buildings, when Smythe & Co. spotted him.

The three Shell fellows bore down upon him at once.

Adolphus Smythe extracted an eye-glass from his waistcoat, and fixed it in his eye to survey the little ragamuffin.

Erbert did not look such a ragamuffin now, as he had looked when Morny brought him in.

The cast-off suit of Wegg of the Third, plenty of soap and water, and a hair-cut had made a marvellous difference to him.

"Hallo, young shaver!" said Smythe.

Erbert looked at him.

"Allo!" he replied.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"Allo!" repeated Erbert cheerfully.

"Have you dropped anything?" asked Smythe, with exquisite humour.

Erbert glanced round him.

"No, I don't think I 'ave," he answered.

"I thought you might have dropped an aspirate somewhere," explained Smythe.

"Not that I knows an," said Erbert, looking perplexed. "I ain't dropped nothin'."

"My hat!" murmured Tracy. "He don't know what an aspirate is. Ha, ha!"

"Well, what is it?" asked Erbert, rather resentfully, as he realised that the three well-dressed fellows were making fun of him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Smythe & Co.

"I don't see nothin' to laugh at!" said Erbert.

"What a pronunciation!" murmured Howard. "Rippin', by gad!"

"What's the little beast hangin' about Rookwood for?" asked Smythe. "He can't be allowed to stay here, surely?"

"What are you doing here?" asked Smythe.

"Lookin' round," said Erbert.

"You're staying at Rookwood?"

"Master Mornington says so."

"Like his cheek!" said Smythe. "Blessed if I understand Morny! What is he playin' this fathheaded game for, you fellows?"

"Don't ask me!" remarked Howard. "It beats me. Just to get our rag out, I suppose!"

"Morny's an annoyin' beast!" agreed Smythe. "He'd play any rotten trick just to get a fellow's back up. But pickin' up a beggar on the high-road—that's rather thick!"

"I ain't a beggar!" said Erbert angrily. "And don't you say nothin' agin Master Mornington, either! 'E's a good sort!"

"Don't cheek me, you little ragamuffin!" said Smythe, frowning. "Why hasn't the Head sent the little beast to the workhouse? That's what I want to know!"

"Proper place for him, by gad!"

"Jolly queer of the Head!" said Adolphus. "Must be potty. Mornington's only doin' it to annoy his pals, but I suppose the Head kn't doin' it for that. He'll be sorry for it when the little waster bolts with all he can lay his grubby paws on!"

"I ain't a thief!" said Erbert hotly.

"Of course you are!" said Smythe calmly. "All your sort are. Better look after your watches, you fellows!"

"You're a liar!" said Erbert.

"What?" gasped Adolphus.

Erbert had evidently not been trained in the select circles of Vers de Vere. The nuts of the Shell gazed at him in angry disgust and horror.

"Well, so you are!" said Erbert.

"You ain't no call to call a feller a thief! Wot 'ave I done?"

"You horrid, disgustin' little rotter!" gasped Smythe. "My word! Somebody ought to remonstrate with the Head about this. Fancy allowin' that disgustin' little hooligan to hang round the school! Hanged if I don't write to my pater about it, if it goes on! Jolly good mind to send Morny to Coventry, too. He's no right to play a trick like this on us!"

"If the little rotter's goin' to hang about the school, cheekin' the fellows, somethin' ought to be done!" remarked Howard.

"Somethin's goin' to be done!" said Smythe emphatically. "The little beast is jolly well goin' to be bumped for his confounded cheek. Nail him!"

"Ere, 'old on!" exclaimed 'Erbert, in alarm, as the Shell fellows closed round him. "Ands off!"

"Bump the cad!"

"Oh, my eye! Leggo, es'n't yer?" roared 'Erbert, as he was seized in three pairs of hands and whirled off his feet.

Bump!

'Erbert sat down in the quadrangle with a concussion that made him yell.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Give him another!" panted Smythe.

"Look out!" muttered Tracy, as there was a rush of feet.

Smythe & Co. released 'Erbert suddenly and spun round—a little too late. The Fistical Four of the Fourth—Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Raby and Newcome—had spotted the scene from afar. They came up with a run, and their charge completely bowled over the nuts of the Shell.

Smythe and Howard and Tracy were strewn on the ground round the gasping 'Erbert, and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on them and grinned.

"Get up and have some more!" said Jimmy Silver.

To which the lofty Adolphus replied only:

"Ow, ow, ow!"

CHAPTER 21

Mornington's Protege!

JIMMY SILVER took 'Erbert by the collar, and lifted him to his feet.

'Erbert gasped for breath, and blinked at him.

"Oh, my eye!" he ejaculated. "I'm 'urt!"

"Never mind!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "Keep smiling, you know. Smythey, dear boy, what are you ragging Morny's pal for?"

"Yow! Wow!" said Smythe.

"Mind your own bizney, you inter-ferin' rotter!" shouted Tracy. "What's it got to do with you, anyway?"

"Lots!" said Jimmy Silver. "Fair play's a jewel, you know. Isn't the kid a guest at Rookwood? Where's your hospitality?"

"Oh, go an' eat coke!"

"What were you bumping him for?" demanded Lovell.

"Find out!"

"One good turn deserves another," remarked Jimmy Silver. "He that bumpeth likewise shall be bumped! Collar 'em!"

"Hands off, you rotters!"

"Leggo!"

"My eye!" murmured 'Erbert, looking on in astonishment.

The Fistical Four laid hands on the sprawling nuts.

Smythe & Co. resisted, but they resisted in vain.

They were bumped on the ground, and rolled over, yelling with wrath, till they escaped from the hands of the Fistical Four, and fled, considerably dishevelled.

"Come back and have some more!" roared Raby.

But the nuts of the Shell did not come back. Apparently they had had enough.

Jimmy Silver turned to 'Erbert with a grin.

"That's all right," he remarked. "I hope they haven't hurt you much."

"Not much, sir," said 'Erbert manfully.



"Collar him!" "Down him!" "Scrag him!" The Fags were in revolt! The luckless Mornington found himself stretched on the floor, while Jones minusus picked up the dog whip he had dropped. Swish! Swish! Swish! Morry was getting more than he bargained for!

"What did they go for you for, kid?" asked Newcome.

"I'm with the glass eye says as I was a thief," said 'Erbert. "So I told 'im 'e was a liar!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, he shouldn't have said such a rotten thing," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "So you're staying at Rook-'Erbert. "E says somethin' is going to 'Master Mornington says so," said 'Erbert. "E says somethin' is going to be done for me. Werry kind young gent. 'E's a gentleman, 'e is!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

Mornington's kindness to the little vagrant had astonished Jimmy, as it had everyone else.

Doubtless there was some good in the reckless, unscrupulous blackguard of the Fourth. But Jimmy had certainly never expected it to come out in this form.

Probably Mornington's motive was partly to exasperate his natty pals. Morny had a sardonic vein of humour in him.

Certainly very few fellows would have had the nerve to bring the little ragamuffin into the school as Morny had done. Whatever the dandy of the Fourth lacked, he certainly did not lack nerve.

"Here's Morny," said Newcome, as the elegant Fourth Former came up, with a frown upon his brow.

Mornington gave the Fistical Four a glance of dislike.

He noted the dust on 'Erbert's clothes, and frowned.

"Have you fellows been ragging him?" he exclaimed hotly.

Jimmy Silver's lip curled.

"You know we haven't," he said curtly. "Don't be a silly ass, Mornington."

"They ain't done nothing, sir," said 'Erbert eagerly. "It was that chap with the glass eye!"

"That what?" ejaculated Mornington.

"A cove with a glass in his eye, sir!"

"Oh, you'd better come with me," said Mornington.

"Yessir."

Mornington walked away with his protegee, without another look or word to the Fistical Four.

CHAPTER 24.

Friends Fall Out!

"DISGUSTIN!"

"Rotten!"

Peele and Gower of the Fourth put great expressiveness into these ejaculations.

They were looking into Study No. 4.

Mornington, their study-mate, was there. But the dandy of the Fourth was not alone.

'Erbert was there, too.

It was tea-time, and Peele and Gower had come in to tea. Tea was always a plentiful spread in No. 4. Mornington generally "stood it." The richest fellow in Rookwood did not need to count his money, and he did not care whether his pals sponged on him or not, so long as he had everything of the best.

Townsend and Topham were behind the two, in the passage. As they were going to be guests in the study, they made no remark. But their looks showed that they were as disgusted as Peele and Gower.

'Erbert was seated at the table with Mornington.

There were school books on the table, and the two were busy.

Mornington was not a favourite of his Form-master by any means. He was careless and neglectful of his lessons, and did not do his Form credit. But he was undeniably clever, and what he did learn he seemed to learn without an effort. There were few fellows in the Fourth he could not have beaten at class work, if he had chosen to take the trouble.

The fellow who never chose to take trouble with his own work, who neglected his prep in a way that some-

times brought Mr. Beetle's most thunderous wrath down upon him, was taking trouble now—with 'Erbert.

He was teaching the little ragamuffin.

Peele & Co. could scarcely believe their eyes. There was the fastidious Mornington, the dandy and aristocrat, seated at the same table with the vagrant, who was, as they noted, breathing quite audibly through his mouth. Poor 'Erbert had a good many things yet to learn.

There was no doubt that little unpleasantness of that sort got on Morny's fastidious nerves. But he did not show a sign of it.

To his own friends and equals Mornington was always offhand, and frequently insolent. To the little ragamuffin his politeness was scrupulous. That was one of Morny's whims that his pals did not understand.

Mornington looked up as he heard his study-mates at the door.

"Hallo," he said; "is it tea-time?"

"Yes, it is," growled Peele.

"What's the young roister doing in our study?" demanded Gower angrily.

"I asked him here."

"Well, if you want to know my opinion, Morny, it's like your cheek!"

"Thanks," said Mornington imperturbably. "I don't want to know your opinion, Gower."

"What are you doin'?" asked Townsend.

"Lessons."

"Oh, gad!"

"The little beggar is pretty keen," said Mornington calmly, just as if his chums were interested in a friendly way in 'Erbert's progress. "He's had some schoolin', and he remembers all he's learned; that's a good thing, isn't it?"

"You silly ass!"

"He'll have to go to school somewhere, you know, an' I thought of puttin' him through his paces for a bit, to get him ready. Good idea—what?"

"Fathead!"

"Don't you think it's a good idea, Peele?"

"You silly ass!" shouted Peele. "What are you foolin' us for? Kick the scrubby little beast out, and let's have tea."

'Erbert rose quickly, and sidled to the door.

"Stop!" said Mornington.

'Erbert stopped.

Mornington's eyes were glittering.

"There's one thing that's got to be understood," he said. "You chaps are expected to be civil to that kid. I've taken him under my protection."

"Catch me being civil to a beggarly tramp!" sneered Peele.

"I'm fed up with this funny game of yours, Morny," said Gower angrily. "Let the brat be sent to the workhouse, an' have done with him."

"Why should he go to the workhouse?" said Mornington calmly. "I don't see why he should any more than you, Gower."

"Me!" yelled Gower.

"Certainly. He's got more brains than you!"

"You cheeky rotter!"

"He's a beggar!" growled Topham.

"You mean he hasn't any money, except what's given to him? Well, we're all in the same boat. We haven't, either," said Mornington. "So we all ought to go to the workhouse, at that rate!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"Cut it short," said Mornington; "I've taken that kid under my wing. I'm going to have him sent somewhere to be educated. I've written to my guardian about it already, an' he approves. He's goin' to stay here till it's all fixed up, an' I'm goin' to look after him a bit. And you're goin' to be civil to him in this study or get out of the study."

"Get out of our own study!" gasped Peele.

"Yaas."

"Why, you cheeky cad——"

"Oh, cheese it! If you want to quarrel with me, go ahead. If you

don't keep a civil tongue in your head!"

"I don't want to quarrel with you, hang you!" growled Peele. "But you've no right to plant that ragamuffin on us, an' you know it!"

"Well, turn him out now, an' let's have tea," said Townsend pacifically.

"He's goin' to stay to tea."

"What?"

"Gettin' deaf?" asked Mornington pleasantly. "He's goin' to stay to tea!"

"I'll give you a look in another time, in that case," said Townsend dryly. And he walked away, followed by Topham.

"Please yourself, an' be hanged to you!"

Peele and Gower looked furiously at Mornington.

"Do you think we're goin' to sit down to tea with that scrubby cad?" hissed Peele.

"Yas; if you want tea in this study."

"Well, we won't!" roared Gower.

"Go an' eat coke, then!"

"That little rotter's goin' out," said Peele, between his teeth. "I'm not standin' it, an' I tell you so plainly, Morny."

"I—I say, sir," stammered Erbert, "lemme go, sir—I—"

"Stay where you are," rapped out Mornington.

"Yessir," mumbled Erbert.

Peele's eyes blazed. All the blood in Peele's snobbish veins was boiling. He did not want to quarrel with the dandy of the Fourth; but there was a limit.

"He's goin' out!" he said savagely.

"Oh, shut up!"

"I tell you I'm fed-up. You've been doin' this all the time to get our rag out, an' you know it. Now I'm done with it. He's goin' out, an' if he comes into this study again, I'll wring his neck!" shouted Peele.

He made a spring at the shrinking Erbert.

Before he could reach him, however, Mornington was between them.

"No, you don't!" said Mornington

coolly. "It's you that's goin' out, Peele, till you can learn better manners. Ah! Would you?"

The next moment they were fighting furiously.

CHAPTER 25.

Looking After 'Erbert!

"HALLO! Trouble in the family?" Jimmy Silver paused on his way up the passage, with a bundle from the tackshop under his arm.

He stared into No. 4 blankly.

Mornington and Peele were fighting savagely, and Peele was being driven towards the doorway. He was no match for Mornington.

Gower stood looking on, evidently undecided in mind.

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

Crash!

Peele came through the doorway at last, sent fairly spinning by a right-hander that landed on his nose.

He crashed down in the passage with a gasp.

"Well hit!" commented Jimmy Silver.

Mornington, panting, turned to Gower.

"Well, what have you got to say?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," said Gower hastily, dodging to the door. "I'm not goin' to stay here with that young cad, though."

Peele sat up.

His nose was streaming red, and he looked dazed and dizzy. He gave Mornington a glare of bitter rage.

"Do you want any more?" sneered Mornington.

"Hang you!" muttered Peele. "I'll make you suffer for this, Mornington, you cad!"

Mornington laughed scornfully.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders and passed on. He could see what the row was about now, and he was more surprised than ever at the line Morny took.

It had been quite certain that the nuts would "cut up rusky" about 'Erbert, and Mornington did not seem to care if he quarrelled with all his friends on account of the little vagrant. Opposition always roused the obstinacy of Mornington's nature, and the objections of the nuts only made him the more determined to have his way.

Gower helped Peele to his feet, and they went down the passage to Townsend's study. There they were sure of sympathy.

'Erbert was looking distressed and troubled, as Mornington fanned his heated face with a handkerchief and dusted his clothes after the fight.

"I—I say, sir——" mumbled 'Erbert.

"Hallo!"

"I don't like it, sir, you rowing with your friends over me, sir."

"Rot!" said Mornington. "Don't you worry, kid."

"But, sir——"

"Rats! They'll make it up whenever I ask them," said Mornington, with a curling lip. "If they don't, I don't care twopence. Now we're going to have tea."

"Ma'ave tea 'ere!" said 'Erbert.

"Yes. Come and help me do the shopping. I'll let you carry the parcels," said Mornington, laughing.

"Wotso!" said 'Erbert at once.

Mornington, having removed the signs of the combat, left the study with his protegee. They passed Smythe & Co. in the lower hall, and the nuts of the Shell sniggered at the sight of them.

Mornington halted.

"Just a word with you, Smythey," old scout!" he said.

"A dozen if you like, dear boy."

"You were ragging the kid this afternoon. I don't want you to do that any more."

Smythe yawned.

"Things that you don't like might happen sometimes," he suggested. "You'd better intrud your p's and q's,

Morny. We're getting rather fed-up with this rot."

"If there's any more of it, you're goin' to reckon with me," said Mornington calmly. "If you don't want your nose rubbed on the ground, Smythey, you'll keep your paws off 'Erbert. That's a tip."

"By gad!" ejaculated Smythey.

Mornington walked on with 'Erbert, who was grinning, leaving Smythe of the Shell pink with wrath.

"Cheeky cad!" said Tracy.

"By gad, I'm getting fed-up with him!" said Smythe. "I shan't stand much more of his cheek, I can tell you! As for that scrubby cad he's taken under his wing, I'll hand him a thick ear whenever I see him, by gad!"

The wrath and disgust of the nuts was growing. Mornington's cool and contemptuous disregard of their opinion and themselves was a bitter pill for them to swallow. They had made much of Morny, they had backed him up, and had been his admiring followers, and it was a little too "thick" for him to turn on them in this way, as they regarded it.

It did not occur to Smythe and his friends that their only real cause of complaint against Morny was that he declined to share their miserable snobishness. Perhaps it was because Morny was so wealthy and highly-connected that he could afford not to be snobbish; but certain it was that in that respect he did not resemble the other nuts of Rookwood.

Mornington's study was empty when he came back with 'Erbert and supplies for tea. Peele and Gower were keeping away, having their tea in Towny's study. Even there they were not quite happy, for Rawson, the scholarship junior, shared Towny's study, and Rawson got on their noble nerves almost as much as 'Erbert. Still, Rawson did not drop his h's and eat with his knife; that was one comfort.

"Can you cook?" asked Mornington, as he sat down in the study arm-chair.

"Wotter!" said 'Erbert.

"Let's see how you do it, then."

"You watch me!" said 'Erbert confidently.

Mornington was not averse to watching him. He sat in the easy-chair and smoked a cigarette while 'Erbert prepared tea.

Tea was an ample meal in Mornington's study. Mornny affected not to care for the plain school fare; but he "did himself" remarkably well in his study. He spent more on a single meal than Jimmy Silver & Co. spent in a week for their study brews. That was Mornny's way.

'Erbert was evidently delighted to be of use to his noble patron.

He proved himself a good cook, too.

The eggs, the rashers, and the sausages were done to a turn, the toast was beautifully browned, the coffee was delicious.

Mornny's cooking was generally done by his study-mates, the rich junior finding most of the money and Peele and Gower being quite content with that arrangement. Mornny did not like soiling his aristocratic fingers.

But 'Erbert's cooking was a good deal better than Peele's or Gower's, and Mornny found his meal quite to his liking.

"By gad, you're an acquisition, kid!" remarked Mornington. "Why aren't you having your tea? Ain't you hungry?"

"Ye-es, but——"

"But what?"

"I—I—am I to sit down with you, sir?"

"Of course, you young ass!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

"Pile in, you duffer!"

So 'Erbert piled in. Mornington grinned as he watched him.

"Would you mind usin' your fork to shove grub into your mouth, 'Erbert?" he asked.

"Not at all," said 'Erbert obligingly.

"The knife comes 'andier."

"We have a prejudice here in favour of usin' a fork."

"A—a—a what?"

"Ha, ha! I mean, use your fork, kid. It's better."

"I'll do anything you tell me, sir," said 'Erbert submissively. "It's werry kind of you to tell me things, sir."

"Good! You don't mind?"

"I'm very grateful, sir."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind breathin' through your nose?"

"Eh? My nose?" said 'Erbert.

"Yaas. It's considered rather bad form to breathe through the mouth, you know," explained Mornington.

"My eye!" said 'Erbert. This was apparently news to him, but he tried at once to carry out Mornington's instructions.

"That's better," said Mornny, approvingly. "Sure you don't mind my givin' you a tip, 'Erbert?"

"I'm werry glad, sir."

"That's right. Never be too proud to learn, you know."

'Erbert chuckled at the idea of being proud.

The strangely assorted pair were on excellent terms when they had finished tea. Mornington shifted into the arm-chair and opened his cigarette-case.

"Do you smoke, 'Erbert?" he asked.

'Erbert hesitated.

"I never 'ave, sir," he said slowly. "Old Bill Murphy told me it was bad for kids."

"Old Bill Murphy was a sensible man," said Mornington. "It is bad."

"But—but you do it, sir," hesitated 'Erbert.

"Oh, yaas!"

"But why do you do it if it's bad, sir?"

"Because I'm a silly ass."

"Oh!" said 'Erbert.

Mornington laughed, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I was goin' to offer you a fag, 'Erbert; but, on second thoughts, I won't. Better nat. Better keep clear of that kind of habit. And don't mention that you've seen me smoking; it would mean trouble for me."

"Not a word, sir," said 'Erbert loyally.

Mornington finished his cigarette, and looked at his watch.

"I shall have to be off pretty soon," he remarked. "What are you doing of an evenin', 'Erbert?"

"The 'ousekeeper lets me sit in 'er room, sir, an' read. I've got a book Master Silver lent me."

Mornington frowned.

"If you want any more books, come to me for them, 'Erbert. You can let Jimmy Silver alone. I don't like him."

"Suttinly, sir!" said 'Erbert; but he looked a little downcast for a moment. He had taken a liking to the good-natured, good-tempered captain of the Fourth; and he wondered how it was that a splendid fellow like Mornington did not get on with him.

"You can use this study just as you like," went on Mornington. "If any of my friends interfere with you, take the poker to them."

'Erbert chuckled.

"You can stay here now and read," said Mornington, rising. "Plenty of books here, without botherin' Jimmy Silver for any. Keep the fire in; it will be cold when I come back."

"Yes, sir."

Mornington lounged out of the study. But for his last remark, 'Erbert would have scuttled off to the housekeeper's room as soon as he was gone. He had no desire to come in contact with Peele and Gower, though Morny had authorised him to "take the poker" to them. But Morny had told him to keep the fire in against his return; and any wish expressed by Morny was a command to 'Erbert.

The little fellow settled down to remain in the study, chancing an unpleasant interview later with the angry nuts. He built up a good fire, and sat reading till the light failed. Then, not venturing to turn on the light on his own responsibility, he sat blinking and staring at the red embers, and thinking

dreamily over the change that had come over his life: a change due to Mornington of the Fourth.

And 'Erbert's feelings towards the black sheep of Rookwood were of passionate gratitude and affection; feelings that it was strange enough Mornington should inspire in anybody.

CHAPTER 25.

Morny on His Own

"COMIN'?"

Mornington looked into Townsend's study.

Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower, were there, chatting in low tones. Rawson was at work at the table. Rawson didn't find it easy to work with the slackers talking all the time, but he made no complaint. Not that complaint would have been of much use. The snobs of the Fourth found a charitable pleasure in making the scholarship junior uncomfortable.

The nuts stared blankly at Mornington, as he asked the question in the doorway, with as much coolness as if he had been on the best of terms with them all.

"Comin'?" repeated Townsend.

Mornington nodded.

"Yaas. Have you forgotten our appointment for this evenin'? Better get out before the gates are locked. I've got a pass from Carthew of the Sixth; it's all right."

"All right, is it?" said Peele, between his teeth. "You think we're comin' with you, you cad, after what you've done?"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Suit yourself," he said. "I'm goin'."

"Go an' eat coke!"

"You comin', Towny?"

"No!" snapped Townsend.

"All serene; I'll ask Smythe."

"Smythe won't come, either," said Townsend, with a sneer. "We're done with you, Morny. you rotter!"

"How rotten for me!" yawned Mornington.

"Until you chuck up feelin' over that tramp brat," said Topham, "an' apologise for your rotten behaviour, too!"

"Catch me apologise to anybody!" said Mornington disdainfully. "Well, I'm goin' to have a good time, an' if you choose to miss it, that's your funeral. Ta-ta."

Mornington loped away down the passage.

His manner was careless, but his eyes glittered. He had not expected this setback. In his usual arrogant way, Mornington expected to treat his friends as he liked, and find them still at his beck and call.

But the nuts, though not particularly sensitive, had their limit. Peele's nose was swollen to nearly twice its size, and he was burning with resentment and a savage desire for vengeance; and his friends shared his feelings. Morny's insolence generally passed unchecked; but the nuts agreed that he had passed the limit this time, and they meant to show him that they could do without him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were chatting in the passage when Mornington came down. They were discussing a forthcoming football match, with considerable animation.

Mornington passed them, and then stopped, and turned back.

"By the way, Silver—" he began.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm goin' out—"

"Close on locking up," said Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

Mornington smiled in a lofty way.

"I've got a pass-out, of course," he said.

"Carthew, bet you a tanner," grinned Lovell. "How nice to have friends in the Sixth!"

"Well, you haven't any friends in the Sixth, anyway!" sneered Mornington.

"I don't want any of that sort, either. Are you going to bring in

smokes for Carthew?" said Lovell scornfully.

"Find out!" retorted Mornington. "I was goin' to speak to you, Jimmy Silver, if Lovell will shut up for a minute."

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell.

"Go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "No charge."

"I'm goin' out, as I said. You've been pretty decent to that scrubby little boulder I picked up. I've left him in my study. While I'm gone, some of those cads—"

"Eh? What cads?"

"My bosom pals," said Mornington, with a grin. "They're rather up against poor old Trebert; he gets on their aristocratic nerves. I shouldn't wonder if they rag the poor little beast while I'm gone, and—and if they do, I was wonderin' if you'd care to chip in an' stop it."

"Rely on me!" said Jimmy Silver heartily. "Let me hear a whisper of it, and I'll come down on your bosom pals so heavy you won't know their faces when you see 'em again."

"Thanks!" said Mornington, and he went out of the House.

"Queer beggar," said Raby. "I know jolly well where he's going—that den in Coombe, where Joey Hook and his friends are. Beasley Blackguard, and yet he's worrying himself about that little ragamuffin. Dashed queer!"

"He's a queer beast," agreed Jimmy Silver. "But we'll do as he asks, all the same. There won't be any ragging while we're around."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver's chums agreed heartily to that.

"It's about time we got on with our prep," remarked Jimmy. "Morny isn't going to do any, I suppose. Blessed if I know what he's at school at all for! He could slack and smoke without taking the trouble to come to Rockwood to do it. I wonder how long it will be before he's bowled-out and sacked?"

And the Fistical Four went up to the end study, and began their work.

CHAPTER 27.

"Erbert to the Rescue!"

ERBERT started, and sat bolt upright in the armchair.

He had placed fresh coals on the fire, and the blaze had died away. The study was in darkness.

'Erbert had been feeling very cosy and comfortable as he sat there with his feet on the fender, thinking. It was warm by the fire, and the chair was extremely soft and comfortable—and poor 'Erbert had been very unused to warmth and comfort. It was a great pleasure to the little wail merely to sit there and feel that he was neither cold nor hungry.

But he started as footsteps came along the passage and stopped at the door. He knew that Peele and Gower shared that study with Mornington, and his protector was absent now. And 'Erbert had no intention of "taking the poker" to the well-dressed young fellows who awed him with their insolence, though Morny had recommended him to do so. 'Erbert's nerve was not quite equal to that.

His heart beat rather painfully. He had a very shrewd idea what to expect from Peele and Gower if they found him there.

The door-handle turned, and he heard Peele's voice without.

"Dark as pitch! Got a match, Gower?"

'Erbert started to his feet.

His only thought was to find a place of concealment before the gas was lighted. His vagrant life had sharpened his wits, and he did not lose a second.

While Peele was still speaking, 'Erbert dropped silently on his hands and knees, and crawled under the table.

There was a rich, handsome cover on the table, which descended almost to the floor—one of Mornington's expensive luxuries.

The little wail, hunched up under the table, was quite concealed from sight.

He grinned a little as he heard the

two juniors stumbling in. They were not likely to suspect his presence there.

A match scratched, and the gas flared. The study door closed. 'Erbert heard the movements of the two juniors, and saw a pair of elegant boots stretched out within a foot of him as Peele sat down.

"Well, what is it, Peele, old man?" asked Gower. "What is it you want to jaw about?"

Peele rubbed his swollen nose, and his eyes glittered.

"We couldn't talk before that cad Rawson," he said. "It's got to be kept jolly dark, Gower. Better not tell even Towny or Topsy."

"What the dickens are you drivin' at?"

"About that hound Morny!"

Peele hissed out the words with an intensity of hatred that made 'Erbert start, as he crouched under the study table.

"Oh, hang Morny!" said Gower.

"The rotter!" said Peele. "We've been pals the whole term, and I've stood all his confounded cheek, an' he's turned on us like this! Look at my nose!"

"It does look a beauty!" chuckled Gower.

"He'd have done the same to you if you'd had the pluck to stand up to him as I did!" said Peele savagely.

"Oh, I didn't want a row!" said Gower. "I don't like his cheek any more than you do, but—"

"He's going to be sorry for it, the cad!" snarled Peele. "I'm fed up with him. He thinks he can do anythin' he likes because of his rotten money. I'm fed up with his airs an' graces—fed right up to the chin! I'm goin' to make him sorry for givin' me this nose!"

"You can't do anythin'," said Gower, with a shake of the head. "You can't fight him. He's too much for you. And as for sending him to Coventry, that won't last. The fellows will all come round."

"He's gone to the Bird-in-Hand," said Peele.

"I know that."

"Suppose he was found there?"

"He won't be," grinned Gower. "He's too jolly careful for that. Trust Morny to look after himself. He's got a puss-out from Carthew, too."

"Well, he's goin' to be found there!" Gower started.

"How? What are you drivin' at?"

"Suppose Bootles got a telephone call from somebody in the village who saw Morny goin' into the place——"

"Nobody will see him. He will sneak in from the towin'-path. He's too cute."

"But we know he's there."

"Yes; but——" Gower paused as he understood at last. "Oh, I say! That's too thick, Peele! You can't give Morny away to Bootles like that!"

"Not after he's given me this nose?" said Peele bitterly.

"Dash it all, you know!" said Gower, in startled tones. "Morny would be sacked—or flogged, at least!"

"That's what I want!"

"Well, it would serve him right!" said Gower. "I'm sick of the swankin' cad lordin' it in this study! A chap can't call his soul his own with Morny about. But—but——"

"We can do without him," said Peele. "I tell you I'm not goin' to stand any more of his insolence. I'm fed up with him!"

"So am I, if you come to that. But——"

"Well, that's what I couldn't say before Rawson," grinned Peele. "How does it strike you?"

"It—it couldn't come out?" said Gower, hesitating.

"Of course it couldn't!"

"But—but what about the telephone? How——"

"I've thought that out. There's a telephone in Manders' study, on the Modern side. Manders is out till eleven—I got that from Leggett. He's gone to one of his blessed meetings in Coombe. We can use his 'phone,

Bootles won't know he's rung up from Rookwood, if he's told that he's rung up from Coombe."

"My hat!" said Gower. "That's jolly deep, Peele!"

"You can keep watch while I use the 'phone," said Peele. "I'll speak as if I'm in Coombe, and have just seen a Rookwood chap goin' into the Bird-in-Hand, and feel it my duty to acquaint his schoolmaster with the circumstance. Any meddlin' old duffer in Coombe might do that. Bootles will make an inquiry, an' find that Mornington is out of gates, an' he will remember his old reputation, too; and he's bound to go an' look for him, or send a prefect, at least. They'll find Morny in the place, smokin' and card-playin'—drinkin', very likely—and the game will be up for Morny at Rookwood."

"Serve the cheeky cad right!" said Gower. "Turnin' a fellow out of his own study, by gad! We'll have our own study again, at all events!"

"You're game?"

"Yes, rather! Come on!"

The two ruts left the study, turning out the light.

Under the table, Erbert had not made a sound. But he was trembling in every limb.

A good deal of the talk he had not understood. He did not know why it should be so serious for a Rookwood fellow to be found at a public-house in Coombe. But he did understand that it would be serious—that Morny's incensed pals were planning what meant his ruin.

Erbert's brain was in a whirl.

He could not stop the two plotting young rascals. It was impossible to prevent the information reaching the Form-master.

What was he to do?

Erbert crept out from under the table, his face white and set. His benefactor was in danger—deadly danger! How was he to help him?

He stood in agonised indecision.

Then the thought of Jimmy Silver

came into his mind. Mornington had told him to have nothing to do with Jimmy Silver. But it was no time to think of that. With a white, scared face, the little waif scuttled out of the room, and ran along to the end study.

He burst into Jimmy Silver's quarters breathlessly.

The Fistical Four were working there, and they all stared at 'Erbert as he burst in.

"Hallo!" said Newcome. "Hasn't Morny taught you to knock at the door, young 'un?"

"I'm sorry, sir!" gasped 'Erbert. "But—but—"

"Anything the matter, kid?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Have those cads been going for you? If they have, tell Uncle James about it!"

"No, no!" panted 'Erbert. "I—I want to ask you something, Master Silver."

"Go ahead!"

"Do you know a place called the Bird-in-And, sir?"

Jimmy gave a jump.

"My hat! Yes; it's a low pub in Coombe," he said. "What the dickens do you want to know about it?"

"S'pose a Rookwood chap was nabbed there, wot would 'appen to him, sir?"

"That depends," said Jimmy, with a smile. "He might be flogged, or kicked out of the school—one, or both."

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned 'Erbert.

The Fistical Four exchanged glances. They guessed pretty shrewdly where Mornington had gone, and it seemed that the little waif knew, too.

"Ow do you get there, sir?" asked 'Erbert.

"You're not going there, kid?"

"For 'Eving's sake, Master Silver, tell me 'ow to get there!" panted 'Erbert. "I got to waru 'im! They're tellin' his master where he is. I—I know you ain't friends with 'im, Master Silver, but you won't let that 'appen—'im turned out of the school—'im wot 'ave done what he 'ave for me." 'Erbert's voice broke, and he sobbed. "Master Silver, 'ow can I get there?"

"It's the first building as you go down to Coombe, just outside the village," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "There's a big tree outside, with a signboard on it. But——"

But 'Erbert was gone.

The Fistical Four looked grimly at one another.

"It strikes me," said Lovell, after a pause, "that Mornington did a rather good thing for himself when he brought that kid home, as it turns out."

And Jimmy Silver nodded.

'Erbert scuttled down the stairs, his heart thumping as he went. He passed Mr. Bootles' door, and heard the buzz of the telephone bell. He paused, his heart beating almost to suffocation. Peele and Gower were evidently already at work with the telephone in Mr. Manders' study.

"Yes, yes?" He heard Mr. Bootles' voice from the room. "Hallo! Yes, I am here! Who is speaking?"

A pause.

"Bless my soul! Are you sure? A Rookwood boy—the Bird-in-Hand—Mornington— Bless my soul! Yes, certainly I shall look into it—at once! I thank you for informing me! I can scarcely believe it is true! What—what? Yes, most undoubtedly I shall take immediate steps!"

'Erbert hurried on. There was no time to be lost. Mr. Bootles' door opened, and the Form-master came out in a great flurry. Carthew, the prefect, came downstairs, and Mr. Bootles called to him.

"Carthew! Carthew!"

"Yes, sir?"

The Sixth Former looked over the banisters at Mr. Bootles' disturbed face in wonder.

"Kindly ascertain at once, Carthew, whether Mornington of the Fourth is out of gates."

"I think he is, sir. He had a pass out to fetch some football things from Coombe."

"Bless my soul! Then it is true!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "Kindly help me on with my coat, Carthew, will you?"

"Erbert heard no more. He scuttled away across the dark quadrangle, clambered desperately over the school wall—with sad damage to the cast-off Etons of Wegg of the Third—and dropped into the road. Bareheaded and panting, the walf of Rookwood dashed away down the lane, and was far out of sight before Mr. Bootles, with his ponderous step, emerged from the side gate and started for Coombe.

CHAPTER 22.

A Narrow Escape!

"YOUR deal, Master Mornington," Mornington removed the cigarette from his lips.

There was a haze of smoke in the parlour of the Bird-in-Hand. Round the table sat Mornington, of Rookwood, Joey Hook, the bookmaker, and a couple of men of Mr. Hook's stamp. There were glasses and ashtrays on the table, and the Rookwood junior's flushed face showed that he had been drinking as well as gambling.

A door opened, and the fat-faced landlord of the Bird-in-Hand stepped in. There was a grim look on his beery face. A diminutive figure followed him into the room.

Mornington started to his feet.

"Erbert! You young ass! You!"

"Erbert reeled into the room, his breath coming and going in great sobs. He could not find his voice for a moment.

"The kid come to speak to you, Master Mornington," said Mr. Flack. "I wouldn't ha' let him in, only he says—"

Erbert strove to speak.

"They're after you, sir!" he got out in great gasps.

"Er?"

"They've told Mr. Bootles, and he's coming, sir."

The cards dropped from Mornington's hand.

"My Form-master!"

"Yes, sir! He's started already!

He's coming up the road now to look for you here!" panted Erbert. "I've run all the way to tell you, sir!"

"My heye!" said Joey Hook. "You'd better travel, Master Mornington! Rely on us not to give you away if the old gent comes 'ere askin' questions."

"Safe as 'ouses," said Mr. Flack.

Mornington nodded.

"He was cool again at once. The peril was near, and he knew what it meant—knew better than Erbert did. But his nerve had only been shaken for a moment. Disgrace and humiliation, and the sack from Rookwood—that was what was hanging over his head—if Mr. Bootles found him there.

"By gad!" he drawled. "This is rather excitin' for once! You're sure of what you say, Erbert?"

"I heard them talkin', sir, and then I 'eard Mr. Bootles speakin' over the telephone, sir. And he started arter 'me."

"Time I cleared, then," said Mornington calmly. "I'll get out the back way, Flack. Let the old donkey in when he comes, and be civil—very civil. Make him understand that he's made a mistake, and that you're glad to welcome any investigation."

Mr. Flack chuckled.

"Depend on me, sir," he said.

Mornington picked up a bag containing the shopping he had done as an excuse for his visit to Coombe that evening. Joey Hook opened a door into a passage, and he hurried out, putting on his cap as he went.

"Come along, Erbert!"

Erbert followed him.

They hurried down the passage. Mornington knew the way well. A door at the end gave them access to the garden. Taking Erbert by the arm, Mornington led him across the dark garden into a narrow lane. From the lane they reached the towing-path, and in silence they hurried along it for some distance, and then struck across a field to reach the Rookwood road.

Mornington did not utter a word till they were in the road and Rookwood

was in sight in the distance. Then he halted.

"How did you know, kid?" he asked quietly.

"Erbert explained breathlessly.

"Peele and Gower!" muttered Mornington, and, to Erbert's surprise, he chuckled. "What a trick! The cads! I didn't know they had their backs up to that extent. What a surprise for them when I drop in—what?" He chuckled again. "Erbert, my boy, you've saved my neck, an' no mistake! I shan't forget it! Cut back to Rookwood now. We musn't be seen together. And keep mum."

"Mum as a oyster, sir!" said Erbert.

He vanished into the darkness.

Mornington strolled easily towards the school, bag in hand. He rang the bell, and old Mack let him in, blinking at him. Mornington gave the porter a nod, and sauntered off to the School House.

Carthew of the Sixth met him as he came in.

"Have you seen Bootles?" he asked, with a curious look at the Junior.

"Bootles?" repeated Mornington.

"No. Is he out?"

Carthew grinned.

"Where have you been?"

"Hooper's—for my footer things."

"You're a lucky little scoundrel!" said the Sixth Former. And he turned away, laughing.

Mornington smiled, and went up to his study. He found Erbert there. Mornington did not lose a moment. Books were brought out at once, and he signed to Erbert to join him at the table.

It was half an hour later when Mr. Bootles, a little breathless from his rapid walk, looked into the study.

"Ha! You are here, Mornington?" he said.

"Yes, sir!" said Mornington, rising respectfully.

"Mack told me you had come in. Where have you been, Mornington?"

"Hooper's, sir, in Coombe. Carthew

kindly gave me a pass to fetch my new footer things."

"Ah! Ahem! You have not—ahem!—been to any place out of bounds?"

"I think not, sir."

Mr. Bootles gazed at him hard. Mornington's face was quite impassive.

"I have been misinformed," said Mr. Bootles. "It was a wicked, unfeeling practical joke, I presume. I shall not take notice of anonymous information on another occasion. A most unfeeling practical joke—most unfeeling! Dear me! What is this boy doing here, Mornington?"

"I'm giving him some lessons, sir, to help him on a bit," said Mornington meekly. "His education has been a bit neglected, sir."

Mr. Bootles beamed with approval.

"My dear Mornington, that is very kind and thoughtful of you. I approve—I quite approve! I am sorry, Mornington, that, owing to some wickedly false anonymous slanderer, I have done you an injustice. I am glad, Mornington, to see you are so very beneficently occupied."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Bootles puffed away.

Mornington turned to Erbert, with a smile. The door opened, and Peele looked in, with a startled face.

"You—you're back!" he stammered.

"Yes, thanks!"

Peele blinked at him as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Thanks for telephoning!" said Mornington satirically. "It was quite a clever dodge—quite up to my form!"

Peele started back.

"Tut-tut-telephoning!" he stuttered.

"Yes. It gave Bootles rather a walk; but I dare say a little exercise will do him good. Now, you can take a walk yourself! Shut the door after you!"

Peele almost staggered away from the study, lost in astonishment. How his revengeful scheme had gone wrong he could not guess; but evidently it had gone wrong. Mornington's luck had held good.

"Erbert," said Mornington quietly,

as the door closed after the astounded Peele, "do you know what you've done for me? You've saved my neck, an' no mistake. If you think you owe me anythin', you've more than made it up."

"No, I ain't, sir," said 'Erbert.

"And"—Mornington drew a deep breath—"I was thinkin' of gettin' my guardian to send you to a school somewhere; but after this, 'Erbert, that isn't good enough. How would you like to stay here?"

"I'd like to stay anywhere with you, sir," said 'Erbert.

"I could work it with the Head—my guardian could, anyway—and I could get you a coach," said Mornington. "Hanged if I don't! 'Erbert of the Second Form! Ha, ha! That will be somethin' for Peele and Gower and Smythe to chew over!"

"Wot!" ejaculated 'Erbert.

"You're goin' to stay here," said Mornington determinedly. "You're goin' to be a Rookwood chap, 'Erbert."

"Me!" yelled 'Erbert.

"Yes, you!"

"A—a—a Rookwood chap!" stammered 'Erbert. "Like you!"

"Like me," smiled Mornington.

"Oh, my 'at! Oh, crickey!" said 'Erbert.

That was all he could say. But the pleasure that glowed in his face was more eloquent than words. He had no doubt of Mornington's power to do as he said, wonderful as it was. To Mornington, as it seemed to 'Erbert—to that superb youth all things were possible.

Mornington's door was open when Jimmy Silver & Co. came down the passage a little later. Jimmy looked at Mornington curiously.

"So you wriggled out of it?" he said.

"I heard that—"

"Yaas, I wriggled out of it," said Mornington calmly. "Never mind what you heard. Would you like to be introduced to the new chap?"

"New chap?" said Jimmy in surprise.

"I didn't know there was one."

"Well, there is."

"In the Fourth?"

"No; in the Second."

'Erbert chuckled.

"You don't mean—" exclaimed Jimmy in amazement.

"Yes, I do. 'Erbert of the Second!" said Mornington. "He'll do Rookwood credit, don't you think?"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "I hope you'll be able to work it, by gum! And if the kid wants anybody to see him through, there's four of us ready to lend a hand. Good, man!"

And Jimmy Silver went on his way, feeling much more kindly to the black sheep of Rookwood than he had ever felt before.

CHAPTER 25.

The Second Form are Wrathful

"G O it, Jones!"

"Hear, hear!"
Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, looked round with a grin. Jimmy was interested and entertained.

Under the leafless beeches in the quadrangle of Rookwood there was a meeting.

It was a meeting of the Second Form.

A dozen diminutive fags were there, all in a state of great excitement, and Jones of the Second was mounted upon a bench to address the meeting.

There were three brothers who bore the famous name of Jones at Rookwood. Jones major was a prefect in the Sixth Form; Jones minimus was in the Second, and the great chief and leader of that important Form.

Jones minimus was evidently on the warpath now.

Something had happened to disturb the serenity of the second Form at Rookwood, and there was an indignation meeting in progress.

Jimmy Silver looked on with interest. But the fags did not heed the Fourth Form; they did not even see him. All eyes were fixed upon Arthur Montgomery Jones, as he stood upon the old oaken bench under the beech, and

raised a commanding if somewhat grubby hand.

"Gentlemen!" said Jones minimus.

"Hear, hear!"

"The Second Form are going to put their foot down!"

"Bravo!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

"Never!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome came out of the tickshop, and joined Jimmy Silver.

"Come on, Jimmy!" remarked Lovell.

"What are you hanging about here for?"

"There's something on," explained Jimmy. "Look at the fags!"

"Oh, blow the fags!"

"They're always ragging about something," yawned Raby. "I suppose Cartbew of the Sixth has been bullying some of them. Let's go and get the ball out, and punt it round before dinner!"

"No; listen! I fancy it's something about young 'Erbert. He's taking his place in the Second Form to-day, Mornington says."

"I don't envy him," said Lovell.

"The fags will make it warm for him."

"Sounds like it!" grinned Newcome.

"Listen to them!"

Jones minimus was going great guns.

"We're not going to stand it! I call it a rotten shame! Who is the rotter, anyway? Some young tramp that Mornington of the Fourth picked up on the road! Very likely a pickpocket! And they're going to shove him into our Form! It's time for us to put our foot down!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He calls himself 'Erbert!" resumed Jones minimus. "I dare say his name's Herbert. He's got no other name that anybody knows of!"

"Booch!"

"He's going to be called Murphy, because he was brought up, it seems, by some chap named Murphy. And that's the kind of awful outsider they're going to shove into the Second Form at Rookwood!"

"Shame!"

"Chap who eats with his knife, and picks his teeth with a fork!" roared Jones minimus. "I put it to the meeting, is that the kind of chap to be put into a Form at Rookwood—especially ours?"

"No fear!"

"We're not going to stand it!" said Tracy minor.

Tracy of the Second had a brother in the Shell, who was a great nut and dandy, and Tracy, whose great ambition it was to follow in his major's footsteps, was very nifty for a Second Form fag. All Tracy minor's aristocratic nerves were jarred by the mere idea of the little wail coming into his Form.

"Never!" roared the fags.

"Let's go to the Head!" proposed Fisher of the Second, greatly daring.

"And get licked, fathead!"

"Well, something's got to be done," said Tracy minor. "I'm not going to stand it, for one! He makes me shudder, don't you know!"

"You leave it to me," said Jones minimus. "I've got an idea!"

"Go it, Jonesey!"

"It's a matter for our Form-master to deal with," pursued Jones. "It's up to Mr. Wiggins to see that that awful outsider isn't planted on us! I propose putting it quite plainly to Mr. Wiggins, and asking him to speak to the Head about it!"

"Good!"

"We'll pitch it straight to Wiggins! I shan't stand any nonsense from him," said Jones minimus.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned at one another. Jones minimus was very daring in the absence of Mr. Wiggins; but the fags roared approval.

"We'll all go to Wiggins, and put it to him plain!" pursued Jones. "We'll tell him straight that we're not going to stand it, and he can put that in his pipe and smoke it!"

"Bravo!"

"Look out! Cave!" muttered Tracy minor, as the portly form of Mr.

Wiggins, the master of the Second, came in sight under the beeches.

But the Second Form orator had his back to Mr. Wiggins, and he rattled on in stentorian tones:

"I shall say to Wiggins, quite plain: 'Look here, Wiggins——'"

"Jones!"

The awful voice of Mr. Wiggins cut Jones' minims quite short. The orator spun round on the bench, and blinked at the Form-master. Mr. Wiggins' face was like a thundercloud. He had heard that disrespectful reference to himself. Anybody within fifty yards might have heard it.

The orator's jaw dropped.

Now that the Second Form master was present was Jones' opportunity for putting it plain to him, as he had declared he would.

But somehow the frowning face of the portly Form-master seemed to have a paralyzing effect upon Jones' minims.

He blinked at Mr. Wiggins as he might have blinked at the terrible head of Medusa, if it had suddenly appeared before him.

Deep silence fell upon the indignation meeting. Tracy minor sidled away and disappeared.

But the unfortunate orator could not disappear.

"Jones!" repeated Mr. Wiggins in thunderous tones.

"Ye-e-es, sir," gasped Jones.

"You were referring to me!"

"Oh!"

"You were referring to your Form-master disrespectfully, Jones!"

"I—I——"

"How dare you hold such a noisy and tumultuous meeting in the quadrangle? Every boy present will take fifty lines!"

"Oh!"

"You, Jones, will follow me to my study! I shall cane you!"

"Ow!"

"Disperse at once," said Mr. Wiggins.

"Follow me, Jones?"

Mr. Wiggins stalked away majestically towards the School House. The unhappy Jones followed in his wake,

looking like anything but a bold rebel, and the meeting broke up.

"Looks like a frost!" grinned Lovell, whilst his comrades chuckled. "Poor old Jones hasn't put it straight to Wiggins, after all! He hasn't said, 'Look here, Wiggins——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Physical Four of the Fourth proceeded to punt a footer about to get an appetite for dinner, what time Jones' minims of the Second Form was squeezing his hands, twisting himself into weird shapes, groaning, and mumbling, and uttering fierce threats concerning 'Erbert of the Second, to whom he rather unreasonably attributed the licking he had just received.

CHAPTER 20.

'Erbert of the Second!

"HALLO, 'Erbert!"

Jimmy Silver looked for the walf of Bookwood after dinner, and found him in the quadrangle.

'Erbert was looking very bright and cheery.

Jimmy regarded him rather curiously. He felt very friendly towards the little walf. 'Erbert, with all his shortcomings, had a heart of gold, and Jimmy Silver recognized that fact.

Jimmy Silver had his faults, but anything like snobbishness was not one of them. The fact that 'Erbert was an unknown walf, who did not even know his own name, did not matter in the slightest degree to Jimmy Silver, though it appeared to get on the aristocratic nerves of Tracy minor and his friends.

Mornington, the slacker, waster, dandy, and worse, evidently had his good points, and Jimmy Silver & Co. thought all the better of him for his kind action.

Morny's friends, the nuts, were down on him for it—as down as they could venture to be, for they did not want to quarrel with the wealthy Mornington.

How on earth Morny had persuaded

the Head to allow the little vagrant to be entered at Rookwood as a new boy was a mystery the nats could not solve. Smythe and Tracy and Howard, Townsend and Topham and Peele, discussed the mystery without finding a solution.

It did not occur to them that the Head was a kind-hearted gentleman who realised that it was his duty to assist Mornington in helping the little wail. Morny's action was decidedly unusual—it was astounding, in fact—but it had given Dr. Chisholm a much better opinion of him.

Morny's guardian, who was always indulgent to his ward, had acceded to his request to arrange for the payment of 'Erbert's fees, and Morny had fitted him out to take his place at Rookwood, regardless of expense. Morny had more money than he knew what to do with, and it made him purse-proud and arrogant; but certainly on this occasion he was spending his superabundant cash to good purpose.

Little 'Erbert was dressed better than any other fag in the Second Form—he had a larger allowance than most—and certainly he looked a very creditable member of the Form.

During the weeks he had been sheltered at Rookwood he had been kept under keen observation, and the Head had decided that he was an excellent little fellow, who fully deserved the chance Mornington wanted to give him.

And, although his education had certainly been neglected, he had picked up knowledge at a great rate, and was fitted by this time to enter a fag Form. Mr. Wiggins, at the request of the Head, was to give him special care. He had had 'Erbert under special tuition for some time, and was satisfied with his progress.

'Erbert looked quite at ease in his elegant Etons, and he grinned up cheerfully at Jimmy Silver as the captain of the Fourth addressed him.

"'Allo!" he responded.

"So you're going into the Second Form to-day?" said Jimmy Silver.

'Erbert nodded.

"Yes, sir. I begin this afternoon."

"Don't say 'sir' to another fellow, kid," said Jimmy kindly. "My name's Silver."

"Yes, Silver," grinned 'Erbert.

"Have you met any of the Second yet?"

'Erbert's cheery face clouded a little.

"Yes, I seen some of 'em," he said.

"They don't seem to like me being a Rookwood bloke some'ow. Master Tracy told me I made him sick."

"Tracy minor's a little beast!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Don't mind what the fags say, 'Erbert, and don't get your back up if you're chipped a bit at first. They'll let you alone in time. Stick it out, you know!"

"Wotto!" said 'Erbert.

"And remember you've got friends at Rookwood, if not in the Second," said Jimmy. "But you'll make friends there in time."

"I 'ope so," said 'Erbert, rather doubtfully. "But they're down on me some'ow. But I'm goin' to stick it out. Master Mornington's told me to."

Jimmy nodded, and sauntered on. It was a puzzle to him that the cad of the Fourth had taken 'Erbert up in this way. As for 'Erbert, he regarded Mornington as a godlike youth, whose slightest behest was to be obeyed without question.

"That kid's got a hard row in hoe at this school," Jimmy Silver remarked to his chums. "But I think he'll pull through; he's got lots of pluck. And the end study is going to keep a fatherly eye on him—what?"

"Any old thing!" yawned Lovell. "I suppose that means that you're going to get us mixed up in no end of fag rows. What a life!"

To which Jimmy replied politely:

"Nats!"

A little later, when the bell rang, 'Erbert joined the stream of fellows heading for the School House. Mornington stopped him in the passage.

The dandy of the Fourth gave him an approving look.

"By gad, you pay for dressin', kid!" he remarked. "You'll do!"

"Might take me for a reg'lar Rookwood bloke, mightn't yer?" said 'Erbert, with some pride.

Mornington grinned.

"Rookwood chisp," he said—"not bloke! We're not blokes here, you know."

"I keep on forgettin'," said 'Erbert apologetically. "I tries to remember bever'ying you says to me, Master Mornington."

"There's the rotten cad!" remarked Tracy minor. And there was a jeering chuckle from a crowd of the Second.

'Erbert coloured, and Mornington looked round with gleaming eyes.

"You confounded young cads!" exclaimed Mornington. "Look here, if you give Murphy any of your rot you'll have to deal with me! Understand that!"

There was a howl from the fags at once. The bare idea of a Fourth Former interfering in the affairs of the Second was enough to put up every Second Form back on the spot. The arrogant Morny was not exactly the person to make matters pleasant for his protege in his new surroundings.

"You mind your own business, you Fourth Form cad!" shouted Jones minimus.

"Kick him out!" roared Fisher.

Mornington clenched his fists, but the fags were not afraid of his fists. They closed round him. Fortunately, Mr. Wiggins came along the passage just then.

"Come! What is this?" snapped the Form-master. "Go into the Form-room at once!"

The fags marched in, 'Erbert following them. Mornington made his way to the Fourth Form-room, still looking angry. He might have expected something of the sort from the Rookwood fags; but any disputing of his lofty will and pleasure was enough to make Mornington angry.

CHAPTER II.

A Form Ragging!

ERBERT took the place indicated to him by Mr. Wiggins in the Second Form Room. Tracy minor was on the same Form, and he ostentatiously squeezed as far away as he could from the newtonet, as if in fear of contamination.

The little wall's face flushed as he noted it.

'Erbert was sensitive—a good deal more sensitive than Tracy minor, as a matter of fact.

He realised that he was not booked for a pleasant time in the Second Form. But for the fact that Mornington wished it, 'Erbert would not have chosen to enter Rookwood as a new boy. But Mornington's will was law, and 'Erbert was prepared to "stick it out," whether the fags liked it or not.

'Erbert was so new and strange to the Rookwood fags that it was not surprising that there was some prejudice.

He was, in fact, somewhat in the position of a strange dog in a kennel, and the mere strangeness was a sufficient cause for enmity and contempt.

Some of the Second ostentatiously ignored him; some watched him in the malicious expectation of seeing him make egregious "bloomers" in the Form work.

But that expectation, at least, was disappointed.

Certainly 'Erbert's choice of diction was entertaining, and the way he dropped his aspirates made even the solemn Mr. Wiggins smile sometimes.

But 'Erbert was quick and intelligent, and he had made the best use of a few weeks of careful tuition.

To the surprise—and, in fact, the mortification—of the fags, he made few mistakes, and was commended more than once by Mr. Wiggins.

Tracy minor whispered to Snooks that the grubby little beast was a "swot"—which was another count in the indictment against 'Erbert. In fact, it was a case of the wolf and the lamb over again. If 'Erbert had shown

ignorance he would have been despised for it; if he showed knowledge and aptitude he was a "swot."

"Erbert was safe, however, for his Form-master's good graces, whatever the rest of the Second thought of him.

Even his dropped "H's" and peculiar diction did not worry Mr. Wiggins so much as Tracy minor's slackness and Jones minimus' slowness.

"Erbert got through the Form-work much more creditably than he had expected, and he was feeling quite cheerful again when the time came to dismas.

After pronouncing the word "Dis-miss!" Mr. Wiggins left the Form-room immediately, leaving the Form to their own devices.

Jones & Co.'s devices were already planned.

"Erbert was heading for the door, when Jones minimus stepped to it and slammed it, and put his back to it.

"Erbert stopped.

"I want to go hout," he said mildly.

"Oh, you want to go hout, do you?" said Jones minimus, with heavy sarcasm. "You don't want to stay him!"

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

"Erbert crimsoned.

"I don't see that you've got any call to 'owl at a bloke," he remarked.

"Hark at him!" said Snooks.

"What language!" said Tracy minor, with a shudder.

"What a rotten outsider!" said Fisher.

"What a beastly worm!"

"And that!" said Jones minimus, pointing the finger of scorn at the wall of Rookwood. "That's in the Second!"

"Shame!"

"What are workhouses for?" demanded Tracy minor indignantly.

"Ow, would you like to go to the workus?" asked Erbert.

Tracy minor made a gesture of disdain.

"Master Mornington brought me 'ere," said Erbert. "I ain't done nobody no 'arm. I don't see wot you've got your rag out for."

"Horrid little beast!"

"Look here," said Jones minimus, "we've got something to say to you, Murphy, if your name's Murphy. We don't want you in our Form."

"You got to lump it, then," said Erbert sturdily. "I'm 'ere."

"You've got to clear out. You're a disgrace to Rookwood, and you know it. You're not our sort," said Snooks.

"No, I ain't," assented Erbert. "I wouldn't be down on a wote wot 'adn't done nothing."

"Oh, what language!" shuddered Tracy minor.

"And look 'ere, I want to go hout!"

"You're not going hout just yet," grinned Jones minimus. "You're a-goin' to stay 'ere till we've done with yer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want you to clear out of our Form," said Jones. "I dare say you can't help being a grubby little beast!"

"I ain't so grubby as wot you are, and chance it!" said Erbert.

Some of the lags chuckled at this retort, which certainly was well-founded.

Jones minimus glared round.

"If you're going to chortle at this rotten's cheek!" he began furiously.

"Your 'ands could do with a wash, anyway," went on Erbert.

"Shut up, you cheeky little beast!" roared the incensed Jones. "Don't talk to me!"

"Well, you're a-talking to me, ain't you?"

"I put it to you," said Jones. "We want you to leave us alone. You're a disgrace to the Form, and the other fellows will chip us no end about having a workhouse rotten in the Second. Tell the Head you don't want to stay, and he'll let you go, and be glad of it. That's what we want."

"You ain't going to get it, then!"

"You won't!"

"No bloomin' fear!"

"Then we'll jolly well make the Second Form too hot to hold you!" declared Jones minimus. "Collar him,

and we'll give him a Form ragging to start with!"

"Bravo!"

"Collar the cad!"

'Erbert put up his hands defensively.

"You leave me alone," he exclaimed in alarm. "Mind, I shall hit out if you touch me!"

"Collar him!"

The crowd of fags rushed upon 'Erbert from all sides.

The new junior kept his word. He hit out, and Tracy minor retired from the scene holding his nose, and spluttering, and Snooks was stretched on the Form-room floor. But 'Erbert had no time for more.

Many hands closed upon him, on all sides, and he was pinioned.

He still struggled in the grasp of the fags, but his resistance was unavailing.

"Now give him the frog's-march!" shouted Jones malicious.

"Hurrah!"

"Eip!" yelled 'Erbert.

"Bring him along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The new fag went round the Form-room in the frog's-march. Round and round he went, bumping on the floor. His collar and his tie were torn out in the struggle, his new jacket split up the back, and most of the buttons flew off his waistcoat.

The fags halted at last, with the breathless and dishevelled 'Erbert still wriggling in their grasp.

"Now are you going to clear out?" roared Jones.

"No, I ain't!" gasped 'Erbert.

"Bump him!"

"Oh!" gasped the new junior. "Oh, crikey! Ow!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

'Erbert smote the Form-room floor with great force, and every bump elicited a yell of anguish from the victim of the raggers.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow! 'Eip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

'Erbert was left sitting on the floor in a dazed state. The fags circled

round him, jeering and shouting with laughter.

"Had enough?" demanded Jones.

"Ow, ow, ow! Yus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now are you going to clear out of our Form?"

"No!" panted 'Erbert.

"Blessed obstinate little beast!" ejaculated Tracy minor, rubbing his nose. "Give him some more!"

'Erbert sprang to his feet, and made a wild rush for the door. He felt that he could not stand any more ragging just then.

"Stop him!" roared Jones.

Three or four hands clutched at 'Erbert, but he tore on, and dragged the door open. With the whole crowd whooping at his heels, he ran.

He headed for the Fourth Form passage, whither he knew the fags would not venture to follow. And Jones & Co., catching sight of a prefect in the passage, crowded back into the Form-room.

CHAPTER 32.

Morny Takes a Hang!

"**M**Y hat! What's the matter?" Jimmy Silver stared at the dusty, dishevelled figure that came tearing into the Fourth Form passage.

'Erbert reeled against the wall, panting.

"They're after me."

Jimmy glanced down the stairs.

"There's nobody after you, kid," he said kindly. "What on earth's happened to you?"

Mornington came along the passage from Townsend's study, and he stopped at the sight of 'Erbert, frowning darkly. "What's happened to you?" he exclaimed.

"I—I been in a row," gasped 'Erbert. "It wasn't my fault, Master Mornington, it wasn't really. They set on me."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"The Second?" he asked.

"Yes," panted 'Erbert.

"Better come to the dorm and get yourself tidy," said Jimmy.

"They set on you, did they?" said Mornington, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes, arter Mr. Wiggins 'ad gone out. They don't like me in the Second Form, some'ow," said 'Erbert dolorously.

"They'll get used to you in time," said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "Keep smiling, you know!"

"I ain't complaining, sir," said 'Erbert bravely. "I come 'ere to get away from 'em, that's all. I—I don't mind."

"I'm goin' to see to this," said Mornington. "I'll make the young rascals sorry for it!"

Jimmy Silver gave him a quick look.

"You're going to chip in, Mornington?" he asked.

"Yes, by gad!"

"It's rather rotten of them," remarked Jimmy, "but it won't do 'Erbert any good for an upper Form fellow to take his part in fag rows. It will put their backs up, and make them more down on him, don't you think?"

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it, Jimmy Silver," said Mornington coolly.

He walked away, leaving Jimmy with his lips set. He was very near at that moment to taking the dandy of the Fourth by the neck, and "mopping" up the passage with him. But he refrained.

Jimmy's advice was good; interference from Mornington was about the worst thing that could happen for 'Erbert. The bare idea of being dictated to by a Fourth Former would make the fags join together as one man, and fellows who were not "down" on 'Erbert already would join in against him, if only to show that the Second did not mean to be dictated to.

But considerations of that sort were lost upon Mornington.

His lofty will and pleasure had been disregarded and disputed, and he was going to make the weight of his anger

tell by the delinquents; that was his idea.

He strode into Townsend's study with a frowning brow. Towny and Topham, Gower and Peele were there.

"Got the smokes?" asked Townsend.

"Hang the smokes! There's some (thin) else on," said Mornington savagely. "I want you fellows to back me up!"

"Anythin' you like, dear boy," said Topham.

"Row with Jimmy Silver?" asked Gower uneasily. "Look here, Morny, it's no good gettin' into a rag with those rollers."

"It isn't that. I want you to come to the Second Form Room with me."

"The Second Form? What on earth for?"

"I'm goin' to make the little beast sit up! They've been raggin' the new kid, an' I'm not goin' to allow it."

The nobs of the Fourth stared at Mornington. As a matter of fact, they were in full agreement with the Second Formers on the subject of 'Erbert. But if they had sympathised with the little wail to any extent, they would not have been likely to go on the war-path with a fag Form.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Topham. "You ass, Morny!"

"Catch me raggin' with fags!" said Townsend disdainfully. "Ask Jimmy Silver, if you like; it's more in his line."

"Leave me out," grinned Peele.

Mornington spowled at his chums.

"Then you won't back me up, you finks?" he exclaimed.

"No, fear!"

"Let the little cad take his chance!" said Townsend. "I wouldn't stand him in the Fourth, I know that. You'd no right to plant the little beast on Rookwood, Morny, an' you know it!"

"Blessed if I know what the Head was about to let you!" said Peele. "I've thought of writin' to my people about it."

Mornington turned his back on the nobs and strode out of the study. He left Townsend & Co. grinning.

"So the little bouncer's got the chopper," chuckled Townsend. "Scrive him right! I hope the fags will make him sick of Rookwood. I asked Tracy of the Shell to speak to his tailor about it, an' get him to rag the little beast. No good tellin' Morry that."

And the nuts chuckled in chorus.

Mornington strode down the passage with a lowering brow. He did not feel inclined to ask the end study for help in the matter, as Townsend had suggested. But though he was left alone to carry out his project, he did not falter. Along with obstinacy and wilfulness, Mornington had unbounded pluck.

He stepped into his study, and took a dog-whip as he descended the stairs. Smythe of the Shell met him in the hall.

"Comin' up to the study, Morry?" he asked.

"No!" snapped Mornington. And he strode on.

Adolphus Smythe elevated his eyebrows, and looked at Howard and Tracy, his pals.

"Lovely manners, what?" he yawned. "Do you know, I'm gettin' rather fed-up with Morry."

Mornington, quite reckless as to whether the great Adolphus was fed-up with him or not, strode on to the Second Form Room.

There was a sound of laughter and loud voices in that apartment as the dandy of the Fourth threw open the door.

Jones minimus & Co. were chattering over the way they had handled the rank outsider. They flattered themselves that, with a little more of it to follow, 'Erbert would get tired of Rookwood, and take his departure—a consummation devoutly to be hoped in the eyes of Jones & Co.

"Hallo, Fourth Form cad!" sang out Fisher as Mornington came in.

All eyes were fixed on Mornington.

The savage gleam in his eyes, and the dog-whip in his hand, warned the fags of his warlike intentions at once. Though they were in a quite different

form, they had had some experience of Mornington's insolence; but this, as Jones remarked afterwards, was the limit.

"What do you think you're going to do with that?" asked Jones minimus, pointing to the dog-whip, his eyes blazing.

"I'm going to thrash you, you young cad!" said Mornington, between his teeth. "You've been raggin' my young friend Murphy."

"We'll rag him again, too!"

"I want to know which of you did it."

"All of us," said Fisher; "and we'll rag you, too, if we have any of your cheek, you Fourth Form cad!"

"I suppose you were the ringleader, Jones?"

"Right on the wicket," said Jones coolly.

"Then take that!"

Mornington rushed at Jones minimus and grasped him by the collar. The dog-whip sang and lashed round Jones with terrific vim.

"Yarrah!" howled Jones. "Yow-ow! Rescue, you chaps! Pile on him!"

The Second Formers did not need bidding; they were already swarming round Mornington.

"Stand back!" roared Mornington furiously, and he lashed out fiercely on all sides with the dog-whip.

"Collar him!"

"Down him!"

"Scrag him!"

Mornington was dragged down by a dozen pairs of hands, and the angry fags fairly swarmed over him. The whip was snatched away, and Mornington struggled in vain under his swarm of assailants. He had woke up a hornets' nest with a vengeance.

"Turn him over!" roared Jones minimus. "I'll give him some of his own medicine!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Mornington.

"Hold him!"

Mornington, in spite of his struggles, was pinned down, with his aristocratic nose grinding on the Form-room floor.

Three or four fags sat on his head and shoulders; three or four more trampled on his legs. That left him in a very favourable position for a flogging, and Jones swung up the whip.

CHAPTER 32.

A Friend in Need:

SWISH!
"Gurrirt!"
Swish! Swish! Swish!
Jones was in deadly earnest. He had received four or five cuts, and he intended to repay them with interest.

He laid on the lashes with all his force.

Mornington struggled furiously under the fags, yelling with pain. His yells came out muffled and choked from under the swarming fags.

"Gurr! Oh! Ah! Grooogh! Ow!"

"Go it, Jones!"

"Lay it on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Mornington had been flogged by the Head in his time. But a flogging by the Head was hardly so severe as this. Jones minimus seemed to be under the impression that he was beating a carpet, and that Mornington of the Fourth was the carpet.

He laid on the lashes with all the force of his arm, till his arm ached and he was breathless.

Mornington wriggled spasmodically as he took the punishment. His yells rang through the Form-room.

The door had been left open, and the noise travelled a good distance. Bulkeley of the Sixth looked into the room as Jones paused to take breath.

"What's this thumping row about?" roared Bulkeley.

"Yaroooh! Grooh! Help!"

Jones minimus looked round defiantly.

"It's nothing to do with you, Bulkeley."

"What!"

"We're ragging a Fourth Form cad, that's all."

The captain of Rookwood strode into the room. He took Jones minimus by the ear, and there was a wail of anguish from Arthur Montgomery Jones.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo, Bulkeley!"

"Give me that whip!"

Jones minimus handed it over, and rubbed his ear ruefully.

"Let that fellow get up at once," said Bulkeley, frowning.

The fags obeyed. Bulkeley, the head of the Sixth, was not to be argued with. Mornington staggered to his feet, breathless, crimson and gasping.

"So it's you, Mornington," said Bulkeley grimly. "What were you doing here?"

Mornington panted.

"He brought that whip here!" howled Snooks. "He was going for Jones with that whip, Bulkeley."

"Is that correct, Mornington?"

"Yes, it is," panted Mornington. "I came here to thrash the young scoundrel!"

"Then you seem to have got what you asked for," said Bulkeley dryly. "You can't take the law into your own hands like that."

"I shall do as I like."

"Will you," said Bulkeley. "Well, you'd better like to take two hundred lines for your cheek. I shall expect them after tea."

"Look here——"

Mornington was interrupted. 'Erbert came dashing into the Form-room. He had heard the disturbance from afar, and learned what was toward, and had come valiantly to the aid of his patron.

"You rotten bloomin' monkeys!" yelled 'Erbert. "If you're a-touching Master Mornington——"

"Come here, Murphy!"

"Oh, I didn't see you, Master Bulkeley!" stammered 'Erbert.

"Come here!" said Bulkeley, frowning. And the wail of Rookwood approached. "How came you in that state?"

"I—I—I——"

"I suppose there has been ragging here, is that it?" demanded Bulkeley, with an angry glance at the fags.

There was a grim silence. 'Erbert did not speak. He had been hardly used, but he was not inclined to complain to a prefect.

"Jones, answer me at once!"

Jones minimus looked sullen.

"We ragged the young rotter!" he said.

"And why?"

"We don't want that sort in our Form!"

"You cheeky little rascal!" said Bulkeley. "The Head's decided that. Are you going to set yourself up against the Head?"

"We don't want low ruffians here!" said Tracy minor.

"Is that why you came here with this whip, Mornington?"

"Yes!" growled Mornington.

"Well, you shouldn't have done anything of the kind. You can get out of this room and don't come here again!" said Bulkeley. "I'll take this matter in hand myself. This kid has been ragged, it seems, by all of you here."

"Yes, he has!" growled Fisher.

"What has he done?"

"He's a rotten outsider!"

"He's a low hound!" said Tracy minor. Disgusting!"

Bulkeley's lips set.

"Now, listen to me!" he said. "The Head's put Murphy in this Form, and he's got to be treated decently. I shall report this matter to Mr. Wiggins, and you can be sure that he will cane you all round!"

"Oh!"

"And after this I shall keep a very special eye on you!" continued the captain of Rookwood. "Let me hear the merest whisper of a ragging, and you'll be sorry for it. Mind, I mean what I say!"

And Bulkeley strode out of the Form-room, taking the whip with him. Mornington had already gone.

"Erbert was left alone with the fags.

They eyed him almost wistfully, but not a hand was raised to touch him. Bulkeley's authority was not to be lightly disregarded. After that warning from the head prefect of Rookwood even the truculent Jones was not inclined to begin another ragging.

Erbert left the Form-room and went up, with a heavy heart, to the dormitory to put himself to rights. Ten minutes later Jones & Co. were called into their Form-master's study, where Bulkeley had made his report. Mr. Wiggins gave them a severe lecture and a caning all round, which did not improve the feelings of the Second Form towards Erbert.

The wail of Rookwood came down from the dormitory, and, after some hesitation, looked in at Mornington's study. He was greatly concerned for his benefactor. He found the dandy of the Fourth alone, arranging his tie before a glass. Mornington looked round impatiently.

"I hope you wasn't hurt, sir?" faltered Erbert.

"Of course I was hurt," said Mornington irritably. "I'll make those little rascals sit up for it, though, somehow! What do you want?"

"N-n-nothin'!" stammered Erbert.

"Then cut along!"

Erbert withdrew from the study, his lips trembling a little. Mornington was in a savage temper, and in no mood to be bothered by his unfortunate protege. Erbert stopped in the window-recess at the end of the passage, his heart heavy, and dangerously near "blubbing."

"I wish I hadn't come 'ere!" he muttered desolately. "I ain't their sort, and I shan't never 'ave any friends, excepting Master Mornington. I—I wish he 'ad let me alone where I was, I do!"

"Hallo, kid!" came a cheery voice. Jimmy Silver came upstairs with a parcel under his arm—good things for tea in the end study. "Feeling fit again—what?"

"Ye-es!" stammered Erbert.

"Had your tea?"

"Nunno!"

"Fags generally have tea in Hall," remarked Jimmy. "If you're not keen on tea in Hall, young 'un, come along with me."

'Erbert was not keen on tea in Hall, where he would have to sit at the table with Jones minimus & Co.

His face brightened up.

"Come on, kid!" said Jimmy kindly.

And he marched the new fag off to the end study.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome stared a little as Jimmy came in with 'Erbert of the Second, and then they grinned. But the end study was famous for its hospitality, and Jimmy Silver's chums exerted themselves to keep up its reputation. And, under their combined efforts, 'Erbert forgot his troubles, and began to feel that life at Rookwood was worth living, after all.

CHAPTER 34.

The Outcast!

ERBERT joined the Second Form again for evening preparation in the Form-room, which was taken under the eye of Mr. Wiggins. He received many truculent glares from Jones minimus and his friends.

It was possible that, if 'Erbert had been left alone to "shake down" in the Form, the fags would have ceased to bother about him in a short time, though he would always have had petty persecution to expect from snobbish fellows like Tracy minor.

But Mornington's intervention had had a result which the arrogant dandy of the Fourth might have expected if he had been a little less headstrong and high-handed.

Mornington had come to their Form-room with a dog-whip to chastise the fags who had offended his lofty will, and the bare idea of that made the Second Form furious. 'Erbert was booked for continual trouble now, if only to "show" Mornington, as Jones & Co. expressed it.

Members of the Form who had been quite indifferent to him—even good-natured fellows who would not have thought of troubling him—had been set against him by Mornington's high-handed proceeding.

To be commanded to do this or that by a fellow in a higher Form—with the commands backed up by a dog-whip—was more than enough to set the mildest fag at Rookwood upon the war-path.

The casting from Mr. Wiggins had not improved their tempers, but it was Mornington's lofty arrogance that made them most bitter.

As Jones minimus said, in sulphurous tones, Mornington should jolly well see whether they'd take any notice of him. Who was Mornington, anyway? Like one man, the Rookwood Second was determined to show Mornington of the Fourth that they regarded him as very small beer indeed.

Jimmy Silver had spoken to Jones minor of the Fourth, with whom he was on very friendly terms, and the good-natured Jones had spoken to his young brother on the subject of 'Erbert.

But Jones minimus was adamant. He asked Jones minor whether he thought a fellow was going to be ordered about by Mornington, and added disrespectfully that Jones minor could go and eat coke.

Whereupon Jones minor promptly punched the head of Jones minimus—which was some satisfaction to Jones minor, but did not otherwise improve matters.

During prep an ink-ball landed in 'Erbert's neck, and he found his ink-pot full of gum, and the leaves of his school-books gummed together. Bulkeley's warning had stopped ragging, but there were other ways of "getting at" the obnoxious newcomer.

Mr. Wiggins left the Form-room when preparation was over, and 'Erbert rather anticipated a renewal of hostilities. But the thought of Bulkeley coming in with a cane prevented that.

Jones minimus threw open the door,

"Get out, you cad!" he said briefly. "We don't want you here!"

"I'll stay as long as I like!" said 'Erbert defiantly.

But he left the Form-room.

The fags were gathering round the fire to cook one of the weird and fearsome suppers in which the Second Form indulged, and 'Erbert would gladly have joined them. But there was no place for him there—nothing but contemptuous and hostile glances. He did not want to stay where he was not wanted.

He wandered out of the Form-room into the wide old passages.

He would have been glad to go to Mornington's study, but he felt that his patron did not want to be troubled with him. He thought of the end study, but a feeling of pride kept him from inflicting himself upon the Fistical Four, though he knew they would have made him welcome.

He wandered about by himself, feeling utterly lost and lonely in the great school.

Mornington had acted kindly and generously towards him, but just then poor 'Erbert wished with all his heart that the dandy of Rookwood had left him where he had found him.

His life had been hard enough since the kind-hearted man who had befriended him had lost his life in an accident, but even hunger and cold were hardly so bitter as scorn and contumely.

Even when tramping on the road, doubtful about his next meal and a shelter for the night, 'Erbert had never felt so lonely as he felt now.

He was staring out of a window into the shadowy triangle, when he felt a touch on the shoulder. He looked round cheerlessly, and found two juniors of the Fourth smiling at him. They were Van Ryn and Pons, the two Colonial chums.

"I've been looking for you," said Van Ryn cheerily.

"Lookin' for me!" muttered 'Erbert, wondering that anybody at Rookwood

should take the trouble to look for him.

"Yes; come on!"

"It's a baked chestnut party in the study," explained Pons.

'Erbert grinned, and followed the two Colonials up to Study No. 3. The Fistical Four were there, and Rawson and Fisher and Jones minimus of the Second. Fisher and Jones were looking very pleased with themselves. They were not often asked into a Fourth Form study.

But at sight of 'Erbert their pleased looks vanished.

They exchanged a quick glance, and rose to their feet.

"Here we are," said Van Ryn cheerily. "Trot out the chestnuts!"

"Hallo, not going, young Jones," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, I'm going," said Jones minimus sarcastically. "So's Fisher. Come on, Fishy!"

"But you haven't had any chestnuts," said Rawson.

"Thanks; I don't want any!"

And Jones minimus and Fisher left the study with their noses high in the air.

They understood now why the good-natured South-African had asked them there; and they intended Van Ryn to see very plainly that they weren't taking any.

'Erbert's face was crimson. He understood, too.

"Sit down, kid," said Jimmy Silver, pulling 'Erbert into a chair.

And, in spite of the lofty departure of Fisher and Jones minimus, 'Erbert spent a very pleasant half-hour before bed-time.

Jimmy Silver gave him a word of advice, when he had to go to the dormitory at nine o'clock.

"If there's any trouble, kid, pick out the biggest chap and fight him," he said. "The fags will give you fair play. And hit your hardest."

'Erbert grinned and nodded, and went up to the Second Form dormitory.

Black looks from the Second greeted him. Jones minimus had detailed to

his comrades how a cheeky, meddling Fourth Former had asked him to a chestnut supper, to make him civil to the rotten outsider. Jones had magnanimously declined to be corrupted by baked chestnuts. And the fact that 'Erbert was making friends outside his own Form was against him in the eyes of the fags.

Neville of the Sixth saw lights out for the Second, and he gave the fags a word of warning.

"Any ragging here, and I shall come back with a cane," he said. And he departed.

'Erbert lay quietly in bed, wondering whether there would be trouble, now that he was at the mercy of the incensed fags.

Jones minimus sat up in bed. Jones & Co. had been laying their plans for the night.

"You awake, you measly worm?" asked Jones politely.

'Erbert did not reply.

"Don't you hear me, Murphy?" howled Jones.

"I hear you," said 'Erbert.

"Then why don't you answer?"

"I thought p'raps you was speaking to Master Tracy, from what you said," retorted 'Erbert.

There was a chuckle from some of the beds, and a snort of indignation from Master Tracy's.

"Well, get up, you worm," said Jones. "Bulkeley's down on us for ragging you. Just like you to sneak behind a prefect!"

"I never asked him to interfere."

"Oh, dry up! We're not going to rag you. But I'm going to take you on, and give you a thumping good licking," said Jones darkly. "That's what you want, and that's what you're going to get. See?"

"I see," said 'Erbert, not appearing much alarmed. As a matter of fact, 'Erbert had roughed it during his short career to such an extent that he had learned to take care of himself re-

markably well, and his private opinion of the Second Formers was that they were a "soft" lot, and that he could make rings round any of them.

"Better wait a bit to give Neville time to get clear," said Snooks.

"Oh, that's all right; there's a meeting of the footer committee in Bulkeley's study, and Neville won't come back unless there's a row."

The fags turned out of bed, and candle-ends were lighted.

'Erbert stepped out with the rest. There was no help for it, and he was not particularly averse to a "scrap," as a matter of fact.

"You ain't got any gloves 'ere," he remarked.

Jones minimus sneered a tremendous sneer.

"Afraid of getting hurt?" he asked.

"No, I ain't. Jimmy Silver says that fightin' without gloves ain't allowed."

"We allow it on special occasions," grinned Jones minimus. "Such occasions as teaching manners to a rotten outsider, you know."

"Rotten outsider yourself!" said 'Erbert.

"Oh, wallop him!" exclaimed Snooks.

"You're my second, Fisher. Who's that rotter's second?"

There was no answer. Nobody wanted to be a second to the unpopular newcomer.

"I don't want no second," said 'Erbert sturdily. "I s'pose you're goin' to give me fair play?"

"You'll get fair play, you worm!" said Fisher. "We play the game here."

"Fust I've 'eard of it, if you do!" retorted 'Erbert.

"Enough jaw," snapped Jones minimus. "Stand up and take your gruel."

"Time!" said Tracy minor.

And in the glimmer of the candle-ends, with a circle of excited faces round them, the combatants met, and the fight began.

CHAPTER 15.

Jones Minimus Meets His Match.

JONES MINIMUS started work with a terrific rush.

The Second Formers looked on grinning.

Jones was the great fighting-man of the Form. He had even achieved the distinction of licking Wegg of the Third; and there was not a fellow in the Second who could have stood against him for two rounds.

The fags expected to see the obnoxious new boy fairly pulverised by the mighty Jones, and they were prepared to cheer Jones' victory loudly—as loudly as was advisable in the circumstances. Form ragglings were barred; but it was scarcely possible for even Bulkeley to put a stop to individual "scraps" in the Form, and with a fight on his hands every day regularly, it was probable that the new "boulder" would be glad to relieve Jones & Co. of his presence at Rookwood.

Jones minimus was quite proud of that deep-laid scheme. Its success, of course, depended upon his being able to administer a licking; but on that point nobody in the Form had any doubts.

Fighting in the Second Form was not conducted on scientific principles. There were no regular rounds, and "time" was called at quite various intervals, and by several timekeepers. But Jones did not expect his opponent to last more than a few minutes.

Greatly to his surprise, 'Erbert stood up like a rock to his onslaught.

Still more to his surprise, his terrific drives were knocked aside apparently with the greatest ease, and a set of knuckles that seemed as hard as iron were planted on his nose.

Jones minimus went over backwards as if he had been struck by a bullet. Crash!

"Owl! Oh!"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tracy minor. Jones was down! The great fighting-

man of the Form was gasping, on his back, on the floor of the dormitory.

The Second Form could scarcely believe their eyes.

Fisher ran to pick his principal up. A slow grin crept over 'Erbert's face. He had hardly been touched, so far.

Jones was raised to his feet. He dabbed at his nose, and his fingers came away crimson.

The fags regarded 'Erbert a little more respectfully, and some of them edged away from him. It dawned upon them that Jones minimus had awakened the wrong passenger, so to speak, and they were quite contented that it was Arthur Montgomery Jones, and not themselves, who had to face the outsiders' hard knuckles.

But Jones minimus was game. He had plenty of pluck, and after a minute or two of gasping he came on again.

This time the combatants closed in a deadly clinch, and 'Erbert's head went into chancery.

But 'Erbert's head came out of chancery, and Jones own head took that unenviable position, and 'Erbert's hard knuckles pounded away at him with great vim.

Jones minimus uttered stifled gasps and howls as he struggled in vain, in the grip of the wail of Rookwood. Jones was bigger than 'Erbert, but he made the discovery that the little wail was as hard as steel, and had a "pinch" that seemed to the unfortunate Jones like a steam-hammer. Jones' features seemed to be driven back into his face, and he roared and gasped and gurgled wildly.

"Break away!" shouted Tracy minor.

'Erbert released his adversary, with a bitter smile. There had been no call to "break away" when his head was in chancery.

Jones staggered back, and Fisher supported him, looking very dubious. The rank outsider's licking seemed a good distance off at this rate.

'Erbert stood waiting. The rest this time lasted four or five minutes,

but Jones minimus toed the line again at last.

"Go it, Jonesey!" said Snooks encouragingly.

Jones minimus "went" it to the best of his ability. Several of his drives got home, and 'Erbert's nose assumed a bulbous appearance, and one of his eyes persisted in winking uncomfortably. But all the time he was dealing out terrific punishment to Jones, and that hero at last went down on his back with a thump that made the floor shake.

He did not rise, even when Fisher gave him a helping hand.

"Ow-ow-ow-ow!" was Jones' reply to Fisher's inquiry as to how he felt.

"I say, you're going on?" asked Fisher anxiously.

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"You're not goin' to let that cad lick you?" booted Tracy minor.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The fight was evidently over. It was as much as the unhappy Jones could do to limp back to his bed and collapse in it. His friends gave the victor very curious looks.

Jones' great scheme was not a success. The fight every day would not come off now. After Jones' experience there was nobody in the Second Form who was keen to face the outsider's fists in single combat.

"Rag the cad!" said Tracy minor. "If we can't lick him, we can rag him!"

"Shut up!" came an unexpected voice from Jones' bed. "Let him alone!"

"Perhaps you like bein' licked!" sneered Tracy.

"I'll lick you to-morrow," groaned Jones minimus. "Ow! My eye! Oh, my nose! Oh, crickey!"

"If you're done, I'll be gettin' back to bed," said 'Erbert sarcastically. "If there's any other young gent what's spoilin' for a fight, I ain't tired yet."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Fisher. "Just like your sort, to crow!"

'Erbert crimsoned.

"I never meant to crow!" he exclaimed. "Tain't that. And—and I'm sorry if I've hurt Master Jones, too. He was tryin' to 'urt me."

"Oh, shut up!"

Jones minimus sat up in bed, blinking painfully at the fags through his switching eyelids.

"Let that rotter alone," he said. "We said we'd give him fair play, and he's going to have it. You've licked me, you cad, fair and square. I own it. Let him alone, you fellows. He's going to be sent to Coventry. If we can't get rid of him out of the Form we needn't speak to the cad. He's going to be sent to Coventry by the whole Form for good, and any chap who speaks to him will get it in the neck!"

"Nobody wants to speak to him, I fersy," sneered Tracy minor.

"I don't see wot you want to be down on a bloke like this 'ere for," said 'Erbert. "Wot 'arm 'ave I done?"

There was no answer to that remark. Tracy blew out the candle-ends, and the fags returned to bed. 'Erbert turned in, in silence.

When the rising-bell clanged out in the morning, and the Second Form turned out, Jones' face was, as Fisher said, a picture. 'Erbert glanced at him somewhat contitely.

"I'm sorry you're 'urt so much, Master Jones," he said.

Jones minimus gave him a cold stare, and did not answer.

'Erbert set his lips, and did not speak again. He left the dormitory in silence. That morning the sentence of Coventry was in full force. The Second Form appeared to be utterly oblivious of the existence of the new junior. And the outcast of the Form was soon feeling that he would have preferred even the raggings Bulkeley had saved him from.

"Well, how are you gettin' on to-day?" asked Jimmy Silver, meeting 'Erbert in the quadrangle after lessons.

"Oh, alright!" said 'Erbert bravely. He did not intend to worry his kind friend in the Fourth with his troubles.

"Good! Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

And Erbert tried to act upon that good advice; though it was not easy to "keep smiling" while he was scorned by the fags.

CHAPTER 24.

A Problem for Uncle James

"COME in here, James Silver!"

Jimmy Silver was passing the door of Mornington's study, when the dandy of the Fourth called out to him.

Jimmy paused, and looked in.

As the captain of the Fourth was on the worst of terms with Mornington, he was surprised. But Jimmy Silver was always good-natured. Jimmy had a footer under his arm, and was bound for Little Side. But he stopped.

"Hallo!" he said cheerily.

"Come in," said Mornington. "I want to speak to you."

"Well, I'm just going down to the footer," said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell will be yelling for me in a tick or two. But what is it?"

"Sorry to encroach on your valuable time," said Mornington, with a sarcastic smile; "but I understand that you play the role of Uncle James to the Fourth Form, an' Rookwood generally, and I'm in want of advice."

"You've come to the right chap for it," said Jimmy Silver heartily. "I'll give you some good advice. Chuck that packet of cigarettes in the fire——"

"Eh?"

"Pitch your cards and bridge-markers after them——"

"Look here——"

"And come down to footer practice instead of slacking in the study," continued Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Or get out your skates and have a run on the river—it's frozen hard as bricks. It will do you no end of good. That's good advice, if you want it."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" growled Mornington. "Look here, it's about that kid Murphy, in the Second Form."

Jimmy Silver became serious at once.

"What about 'Erbert?" asked Jimmy. "I thought he was getting on better with the fags. I haven't heard of any ragging lately."

"No; they've given that up," said Mornington, "and they've chucked scrappin' with him. He's licked Jones minibus who seems to be their great fightin'-man, and they don't want any more. They've sent him to Coventry."

"Poor old 'Erbert!"

"I didn't know it for some time," continued Mornington. "The little boulder doesn't complain. But I've found it out. Of course, 'Erbert is a bit queer for Rookwood. My own pals won't speak to him. He offends their aristocratic nerves."

Mornington sneered bitterly. With all his faults, the dandy of the Fourth was not troubled with snobbishness. He was arrogant, self-willed, purposeful, and full of "swank," but that meanness of all weaknesses was not a part of his character.

"'Erbert's good enough for me, you know, but not for 'Towmy an' 'Topsy an' 'Pete an' the rest," he continued. "But they don't matter so long as he can get on all right in his own Form."

Jimmy Silver nodded. He had thought a good deal about 'Erbert, and the problem of his getting on at Rookwood.

"They've got it up against him that I picked him up on the road," continued Mornington, "and that my guardian pays his fees here. And, of course, he drops his H's, and does things. No harm in him, but he's a bit queer for Rookwood, as I said. The little beasts have made a set against him, and it must be pretty hard for the kid. He don't complain, but he looks down in the mouth. I think he'd like to get away from Rookwood altogether. That would be losin' what is really a big chance for him. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; he ought to stay," said Jimmy.

"I've tried thrashin' the fags," said

Mornington. "That didn't seem to do any good."

"You're such a swanking ass, Morny," said Jimmy crossly. "That only made matters worse. Why the dickens should they take any notice of you?"

Mornington scowled.

"Well, I had to admit my interferin' didn't do any good," he said. "But I don't like to see the poor little beast with a face as long as a fiddle. I can't think of anythin', an', if you could, I'd be much obliged. You seem to have taken some interest in the kid, an' he's a good little beast, too, in his way."

Jimmy Silver looked curiously at the duck of the Fourth.

It was a never-ending puzzle to him why Mornington, the blackguard and "rotter" of Rookwood, had taken so much trouble about the unfortunate little waif.

It reminded him of Shakespeare's remark that there is "some soul of goodness in things evil."

Mornington's character was about as full of faults, and most unpleasant faults, as a character could be. Yet there was a streak of good running through it.

"I suppose you're surprised at my askin' you," said Mornington, with a sneering smile. "But it's no good askin' my pals for advice. They agree with Jones minimus and his gang. They'd be glad to see 'Erbert booted out of Rookwood."

"Precious pals!" growled Jimmy Silver.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, can you suggest anything?" he asked.

"It's a giddy problem," said Jimmy Silver. "I didn't know they'd sent the kid to Coventry. He hasn't said anything about it to me, and I often speak to him. I'll think it over, and see whether there's anything doing."

"Jimmy!" roared Lovell from the stairs.

"Jimmy, you ass, where's that footer?" yelled Raby.

"Jimmy, you fathead, where are you?" came Newcome's inquiring voice in stentorian tones.

"I'll think it over, Mornington," said Jimmy, and he quitted the study, and joined his chums on the stairs.

"Waiting for you, you duffer!" growled Lovell. "Jawing to Mornington?"

"Yes."

"Does he want a place in the eleven again?" grinned Raby.

Jimmy laughed.

"No; it's 'Erbert this time. The Second Form have sent the poor little chap to Coventry. We ought to do something or other."

"Let's take some of the fellows and mop up the Second Form," suggested Lovell. "Thrash the whole gang of 'em."

"Well, that would be some satisfaction; but it wouldn't do 'Erbert any good," said Jimmy, laughing. "They're not bad kids, most of them. It's just a rotten prejudice."

"Well, let's get down to the footer now. 'Erbert will keep," suggested Newcome.

The Fistical Four left the School House, and proceeded to Little Side. There was not much time for practice before afternoon lessons.

Some of the Second Form fags were punting a ball about—Jones minimus, Fisher, Snooks, and some others. Near the ground, with his hands driven deep in his pockets, looking on, was 'Erbert. The little fag was watching the punters with a clouded face. He would have been very glad to take his place in the rough-and-tumble which the Second Form called footer. But there was no place for him.

Jimmy Silver clapped the fag on the shoulder.

"Hallo, standing about to get your feet cold?" he asked.

'Erbert looked up with a grin.

"I'm just a-watchin'," he said.

"Well, come and do some practice, instead of watching," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's see what you can do at footer."

"Wot-ho!" said Erbert at once.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned, but they welcomed the fag cordially on Little Side. Some of the Fourth stared at him. Townsend and Topham and Peole, who happened to be at practice for once, ostentatiously walked off the ground. But the other fellows did not seem to mind.

Erbert joined in the Fourth Form practice with great zest, and he soon showed, too, that he knew something about football. His face brightened up wonderfully, and was full of healthy colour.

But when the bell rang for classes Erbert's cheery face clouded over as he joined the Second on the way to the Form-room.

The kindness of Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth brightened his life at Rookwood. But his immediate surroundings were icy. Since Jones minimus had sought to lick the "rank outsider," and had failed ignominiously, the fags had left Erbert severely alone. They ignored his existence. No remark was ever addressed to him, and if he spoke he was never answered. And poor Erbert found that icy silence harder to bear than raggings or "scrapping."

But for the fear of displeasing Mornington, his benefactor, Erbert would have been glad to shake the dust of Rookwood from his feet.

So long as Mornington wanted him to remain, he meant to "stick it out." But the prospect was dreary.

CHAPTER 37.

"Erbert Loses His Temper!"

"I ain't no bloomin' good!"
Erbert of the Second was continuing with himself.

The new fag had strolled out of

the school gates after lessons on his "lonesome." Erbert had a sensitive pride that few would have suspected. His own Form-fellows did not want his company, and Erbert shrank from inflicting himself upon the Fourth-Formers who had been kind to him.

He was always welcome in the end study, but he never went there unless Jimmy Silver fairly ran him down and took him there. Van Ryn and Pons, too, sometimes looked for him to give him a cheery word or two; but Erbert did not seek them.

As for Mornington, he was not always in a good humour. When he was in a good temper he was kindness itself to Erbert; but when he was ratty, which was frequent enough, he would speak sharply, and so even his benefactor was never sought out by the lonely little fag.

Hanging about the school grounds by himself was a way of drawing attention to the fact that he was shunned by his Form, and Erbert was sensitive about it. He did not want contemptuous compassion.

"It ain't no blooming good!" murmured Erbert, in the language he was accustomed to, and which offended the Rookwood fags with a great offence. "I'd better be off, if Master Mornington would let me slide. Rookwood ain't no place fur me; I knowed that from the start. I don't see wot they want to be so down on a cove for; but they is!"

He passed a group of fags in the lane—Jones minimus and Fisher and Sneeks. He glanced towards them and they ostentatiously looked another way.

Erbert's face flushed with anger.

He was getting tired of "Coventry."

"Look here," he exclaimed hotly—"look 'ere, you, Jones! Wot's the matter with you—eh?"

Jones minimus looked at Erbert then.

He looked first at his flushed face, and let his glance travel down Erbert's

person to his boots. Then it came up again to Erbert's face. That was what Arthur Montgomery Jones described as "lookin' the measly rotter up and down!"

The process was supposed to have a withering effect. Having made that crushing examination of Erbert's person, Jones minimus turned his back.

"You silly howl!" roared Erbert, apparently not in the least crushed.

"Come on, Fishy!" said Jones.

Erbert jumped in the way as the fags were moving off with elevated noses. They had to stop.

"Wot 'ave you got agin me?" demanded Erbert resentfully. "Wot 'ave I done? Give it a name, can't you?"

Grim silence.

"And if you sneer at me, young Jones, I'll jolly well wipe up the blooming road with you!" said Erbert. "I've licked you once, and I can do it again!"

Jones flushed.

That licking at the hands of the outsider of the Form was a sore point with Jones minimus. It had taken him a long time to recover from it, and even his own pals had grinned at the picture his face had presented for many days.

"Bump the cad!" said Fisher.

"Yes, come on!" said Erbert disdainfully. "I don't mind givin' you a lickin' all round if you come to that!"

"Come on!" said Jones shortly.

"You can't answer a cove, can't you?" said Erbert bitterly.

No reply.

"Fur two pins," went on Erbert, "I'll pile in now, an' wipe up the blooming road with the lot of yer!"

"You cheeky cad—" began Jones minimus furiously.

"Don't speak to him!" interrupted Snooks. "He's in Coventry!"

Jones checked himself.

"You ain't goin' to speak to a bloke—wot?" sneered Erbert. "Well, if you can't speak, you can put up your 'ands, and that's for a start!"

And Erbert hit out.

Jones gave a roar as he caught the ragamuffin's knuckles with his nose.

"Scrag him!" yelled Fisher.

The three fags seized Erbert at once. They did not speak, but their actions were more expressive than words.

Erbert hit out savagely; his blood was up. Snooks rolled in the dust, and Fisher rolled after him; but they were up again in a twinkling, and rushing on.

Erbert went down with the three sprawling over him.

"Ere, give a cove fair play!" yelled Erbert.

"You rotter!" said Jones. "You licked me fair and square, and I owned it. Do you think you're going to bully a chap because you've licked him, you measly cad?"

"I—I didn't mean that!" gasped Erbert, in dismay. "I never meant that at all, s'elp me!"

"Bump the cad!"

"And don't speak to him, Jonesey!" growled Snooks. "You're speaking to him, you silly ass!"

Bump, bump, bump!

In his excitement and anger, Erbert had not shrunk from tackling the three Rookwood fags at once. But he hadn't much chance against three. He was bumped in the dusty road, and Jones & Co. marched on, and left him sprawling there.

Erbert sat up dizzily.

"Oh, my hey!" he gasped.

He picked himself up slowly. Jones & Co. had disappeared in the direction of the school.

Erbert limped to the stile beside the lane, and leaned on it, breathing hard. His face was dark and despondent.

Jones' taunt had hit him hard—harder than the bumping on the road. The fags seemed to take it for granted that the outsider was mean enough to bully a fellow he had licked.

"Nothing I can't do won't go right!" muttered Erbert miserably. "They

looks on me as dirt. I wish I was miles away! I won't speak to them no more!"

He dusted down his clothes.

While he was thus engaged there was a patter of feet in the road, from the direction of Coombe, and 'Erbert looked up.

Tracy minor of the Second came panting up the road.

He paused as he saw the fog by the stile, and turned towards him. Tracy minor, the younger brother of the superb Tracy, of the Shell, had been one of 'Erbert's bitterest persecutors in the Second Form.

Jones and his friends were actuated rather by thoughtless prejudice than any other feeling, but Tracy minor was as snobbish as Tracy major.

But now he came up to 'Erbert quickly, apparently quite forgetting the contempt and enmity he had never failed to display towards the little out-cast.

'Erbert had gone on dusting his clothes, after one glance at Tracy. He did not expect the nut of the Second to speak to him.

"Murphy!" panted Tracy.

'Erbert blinked at him in surprise.

"Take this!" muttered Tracy, pressing a packet into 'Erbert's hand.

"What?"

"Keep it dark! Neville's after me!" panted Tracy minor. "Take that, and cut off with it, there's a good chap! I'll ask you for it afterwards!"

"What is it?"

"Never mind what it is! Keep it dark, or I shall get a fearful bekin'!"

'Erbert's lip curled.

"You're forgetting that I'm in Coventry, ain't you?" he said sardonically.

"I—I'm sorry I—I haven't spoken to you!" panted Tracy. "I say, do be a good chap, and take that packet away! Quick!"

"Oh right!" said 'Erbert.

"Quick—quick! Neville will be round the corner in a minute!" panted Tracy.

'Erbert nodded, and, thrusting the mysterious packet under his Eton jacket, he vaulted over the stile and ran across the field.

Tracy minor, breathing hard, walked on towards Rookwood, with uneasy glances over his shoulder.

CHAPTER 34.

Tracy Minor's Gratitude!

"STOP!"

Neville of the Sixth came round the bend in the lane at a run. The prefect's face was angry.

"Tracy minor! Stop, you young rascal!"

Tracy stopped.

The Sixth-Former came up, flushed and breathing heavily.

"You young sweep, what have you given me this chase for?" he demanded.

"I—I didn't see it was you!" stammered Tracy. "I—I thought it was one of the Bagshot chaps—"

"Don't tell lies!" said the prefect savagely. "You cut off because I saw you talking to the man from the 'Bird-in-Hand!'"

"He just stopped me and asked me the time, Neville," said the fog mee. "I couldn't help that, could I?"

"He handed you something!" said Neville.

Tracy shook his head.

"Didn't he hand you a packet of some sort?" exclaimed the prefect, eyeing the fog sharply.

"No, he didn't! Why should he?"

"Yes, why should he, you little rascal?" said Neville. "He did, and I know what was in it—cigarettes. I've had my eye on you some time, Tracy minor. I know pretty well that you've been smuggling smokes into the school for some senior."

"I—I haven't, Neville!"

"Give me that packet."

"I haven't one."

"Turn out your pockets."

Tracy minor turned out his pockets.

As 'Erbert had vanished across the field with the telltale packet, Tracy was quite willing to do that.

Neville eyed him very suspiciously. He was almost certain that he had seen the man from the Bird-in-Hand handing Tracy minor a packet. But certainly there was no packet about the fag.

"I suppose you've thrown it over the hedge," said Neville, "intending to pick it up when I'm gone. Well, get back to Rookwood at once, and don't go out of the gates again to-day."

"Yes, Neville."

Tracy minor cut off to Rookwood.

The prefect looked after him angrily and doubtfully, and then crossed the stile and looked along the hedge. He looked about him for a good ten minutes, but he could find no trace of a packet of cigarettes, and he had to conclude that he had been mistaken, or that Tracy minor was an especially deep young rascal.

While Neville was thus occupied, Tracy minor reached Rookwood breathless, and proceeded to Adolphus Smythe's study in the Shell passage. Smythe and Howard and Tracy major were there.

"Got it?" asked Smythe.

"Neville spotted me."

The nuts of the Shell looked alarmed.

"You silly young ass!" exclaimed Tracy major. "You've let a prefect find out—"

"It's all serene! I looked him!" said the fag. "I got another chap to cut off with it. I'll get it back when he turns up."

"So Neville didn't find anythin' out?" asked Howard.

"No fear!"

"Good!"

"Well, get the smokes as soon as you can," said Smythe. "I'm right out of 'em, an' I must have a smoke after tea. Cut off!"

And the fag left the study.

Tracy minor waited for 'Erbert to

come in, in a rather uncomfortable mood. He had made use of the outsider, under the stress of circumstances, and had thus broken the law of 'Coventry.' His Form-fellows would be "down" on him if they learned it, and still more down upon him if they knew what his errand had been.

The young rascal was used to performing this kind of errand for the nuts of the Shell, and sometimes for Carthew, of the Sixth, but it was a great secret. Jones minimus would certainly have punched him severely for bringing discredit on the Second Form in that way. The truculent Jones had punched Tracy major himself for having asked him to smuggle in cigarettes.

"Rotten luck!" Tracy minor growled to himself. "The beastly little cad will want to be friendly now, now I've spoken to him. I'll jolly soon let him see that that won't do, though."

Neville of the Sixth came in, and gave the fag a grim look as he passed him in the quadrangle. But he did not speak. He was not certain of the young rascal's delinquency, and he could not act without proof.

"'Erbert had saved the nut of the Second from a severe licking, but Tracy minor was not troubled with considerations of gratitude. He was only thinking that the service he had rendered would cause 'Erbert to assume familiarity with him. And it would be necessary to be diplomatic with the outsider until he had recovered the cigarettes, at all events. After that Tracy minor intended to put him in his place sharply enough.

'Erbert appeared at last, and Tracy waylaid him under the beeches.

"Got it?" he asked.

"'Ere you are!" said 'Erbert. "Look 'ere, Tracy, this is a cigarette packet."

"I know it, you ass!"

"It ain't allowed to bring this 'ere into the school," said 'Erbert. "Master Silver told me so."

"You mind your own business!" said Tracy minor. "Give me the packet."

"Ere it is!"

Tracy minor slipped the packet into an inside pocket. Then he hurried away, and the precious articles were soon safely delivered in Adolphus Smythe's study.

Erbert went in to tea in Hall looking rather more cheerful. Tracy minor had broken through the rule of Coventry of his own accord. One fellow in the Form, at least, was willing to speak to him. Erbert felt that it was a beginning.

And when the fags went to the Form-room for evening preparation with Mr. Wiggins, Erbert nodded in a friendly way to Tracy minor.

A cold stare was the response.

Erbert reddened.

"Lost your tongue, Tracy?" he asked bitterly.

Tracy walked on without speaking.

"Can't speak to a cove now—wot?" said Erbert, with resentful contempt. "You could speak fast enough this afternoon."

"What's that, Tracy?" exclaimed Jones minimus, catching the words. "Have you been speaking to that fellow?"

Tracy sniffed.

"Not likely!" he said.

"Why, you know you did!" shouted Erbert angrily. "Didn't you ask me to take that there packet away when Neville was arter you? You know you did!"

"It's a lie!" said Tracy minor calmly.

And he went to his place.

Erbert gave the fags a bitter look.

"I ain't good enough for you," he said. "You can't speak to a cove. But I ain't the bloke to tell dirty lies like that there. That bloke's a liar!"

There was no reply from the fags, though some of them looked very suspiciously at Tracy minor. Mr. Wiggins came in, and Erbert went to his place with a sullen brow. His short-lived hopes had been dashed to the ground. Tracy minor could speak

to him when it served his turn, but not otherwise. The outcast of Rookwood was still in Coventry, so far as the Second Form was concerned.

CHAPTER 30.

Jimmy Silver's Idea!

"FEED the brute!"

Jimmy Silver made that remark quite suddenly in the end study the following day.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome stared at him. As they had been discussing a forthcoming football match with Greyfriars, Jimmy's remark seemed a little out of place.

"What are you burbling about now, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

"Feed the brute!" said Jimmy. "That's an old maxim. You can always get round a brute by feeding him."

"What the merry dickens——"

"About young Erbert, you know!"

"Oh, bless young Erbert!" said Newcome. "Look here, I'm sorry for young Erbert, but we don't want this study haunted by young Erbert."

"Mornington asked my advice."

"Like his cheek!"

"Well, I said I'd do my best, and I'm going to, and you fellows are going to help."

"Oh, we'll take him to our manly bosoms and weep over him, if you like!" said Raby resignedly. "Anything for a quiet life!"

"But what's that about feeding him?" asked Raby. "And what are you calling him a brute for?"

"Fathhead! That's the idea. The noble youths in the Second Form have sent him to Coventry. It's partly because Mornington put their backs up by swanking. I dare say they'd swallow Erbert if Mornington hadn't chipped in like a high-handed ass, as he is. I've got an idea for bringing them round. Feed the brute, you know! We'll ask them to an extra special feed in this study!"

"Eh? Ask who?"

"Jones minibus, and Fisher, and Snooks, and Tracy minor—the leading lights of that tremendously important Form, the Second."

"You frabjous ass!" said Lovell, in measured tones. "Do you think we're going to have gangs of grubby fags feeding in this study?"

"It's for the good of the cause, you know," explained Jimmy. "A first-class feed in a study like this will bring the little beasts round. They'll be enjoying their grubby selves on the fat of the land, and when everything's going rippingly, in walks Erbert. He joins the party, and we, with great tact

"Rats!"

"With great tact, we act as if there was nothing the matter. And, after being civil to Erbert round the festive board, the little rotters will be bound to treat him a bit more decently. It will break the ice, you know."

And Jimmy Silver smiled with great satisfaction over that really excellent plan.

"Well, what do you think of the idea?" he asked, as the Co. glared at him.

"Rotten!" said Lovell.

"Fatheaded!" said Raby.

"Idiotic!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver laughed. There was a plentiful lack of enthusiasm for his ripping idea. But Jimmy Silver did not mind, so long as he had his way.

"I've had a whacking remittance to-day," he went on. "That's really what put it into my head. My pater's sprung a whole quid. We can turn the study into a laud flowing with milk and honey."

"To entertain a gang of fags!" snorted Lovell.

"To see Erbert through his troubles," said Jimmy Silver chidingly.

"I suppose you're going to have your own way," growled Lovell.

"I suppose so," assented Jimmy, with a smile.

"It will end in a row."

"Oh, rot! Good manners will keep Jones & Co. from any incivility to Erbert while they're our guests, you know."

"Precious lot of good manners you'll find in the Second."

"Well, we'll give them a chance. Come and help me do the shopping," said Jimmy.

Van Ryn tried something of the sort," remarked Raby. "He asked all the little beasts to baked chestnuts in his study. They walked out when they saw Erbert."

"I know. But this isn't baked chestnuts; it's going to be a feed to make their mouths water."

"It's a shocking waste of good grub, feeding fags," said Lovell. "But we'll try it if you like. It won't do any good."

"Bow-wow!"

After a considerable amount of grumbling, the Co. prepared to back up their study-leader, as they generally did. The Pistical Four proceeded to the tuckshop to do the shopping, which was done upon an unusually lavish scale.

When it was done most of Jimmy Silver's pound-note remained in charge of Sergeant Kettle, and the Pistical Four returned to their study laden with good things.

While Lovell and Raby and Newcome prepared the festive arrangements, Jimmy looked for Jones minibus.

He found Jones and Fisher and Snooks and Tracy minor in the Second Form Room, engaged in comparing notes as to what kind of feed could be raised for the moderate sum of five-pence-halfpenny, instead of tea in Hall.

"Hallo, Fourth Form cad!" growled Jones, as the captain of the Fourth came in. Jimmy Silver did not seem to hear that polite remark.

"Hallo! I've been looking for you chaps," he said genially.

Jones & Co. relaxed at once. "Kids" would have roused their wrath; but "chaps" from the captain of the Fourth was flattering.

"Anything on?" asked Jones.

"Yes; we're killing the fatted calf in my study," said Jimmy Silver. "Would you fellows like to come?"

The "fellows" exchanged glances of satisfaction.

This generous invitation settled the problem of the fivepence-halfpenny in the most satisfactory manner.

"We'll come, rather!" said Fisher immediately.

Jones minimus frowned at him. Jones did not want to appear to be too eager for a feed, even in the end study.

"We shall be pleased to accept your kind invitation, Silver," said Jones, with dignity.

"Certainly!" said Tracy minor.

"Hear, hear!" said Snooks.

"Then come on," said Jimmy Silver genially.

"I suppose my major won't be there?" asked Jones, pausing. "If he's there, I'm not coming."

"I haven't asked Jones of the Fourth," said Jimmy. "I'll do just as you like."

"Then don't ask him," said Jones minimus promptly. "He punched my head the other day, and I'm going to punch his when I grow up."

Jimmy Silver nodded, and led his flock away to the Fourth Form passage.

The end study was looking very merry and bright.

A big fire blazed in the grate, and a spotless cloth garnished the table, and good things were set out in enticing array. Jones, with manifold efforts, kept up an appearance of lofty indifference, and Tracy minor strove to cultivate an aristocratic repose of manner. But Fisher and Snooks simply devoured the good things with their eyes. It was going to be a feast of the gods, and it was a rare chance for the heroes of the Second. They could only wonder what Jimmy Silver was doing it for.

Lovell & Co. received the guests with marked politeness. Their manner was grave and genial.

Jimmy Silver left them in the study, and hurried off to look for Erbert. He found that young gentleman looking on at the senior football-ground.

"Busy?" asked Jimmy, tapping him on the shoulder.

"Only lookin' round," said Erbert. "If there's anythin' I can do for you, Master Silver—"

"I want you to come to tea, kid."

Erbert's face clouded a little.

"It's werry kind of you, sir," he faltered. "But—but—look 'ere, I ain't plantin' mesself on you, Master Silver!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"But I want you to come," he said. "In fact, I want you very specially this time. Don't be proud, you know."

Erbert chuckled.

"Met!" he ejaculated. "I ain't proud, Master Silver. I'll come like a blooming bird!"

"Quarter of an hour, then," said Jimmy.

"Wotso!"

Jimmy walked back to the end study, feeling satisfied. He felt that it was a really nobby scheme. Under the softening influence of a handsome spread, and the courteous attentions of the Fourth-Formers, Jones & Co. were bound to be in a good humour; and they would see, too, that the despised Erbert was thought much of by such important persons as the Fistical Four of the Fourth. And, anyway, they were bound to be civil in another fellow's quarters.

The ice would be broken; and after that cheery and chaffy tea-party, the grim sentence of Coventry would die away of its own accord. So Jimmy Silver hoped, at least. It was a scheme quite worthy of Uncle James of Rookwood; and it only remained to see how it would work.

CHAPTER XX.

And How It Worked!

JIMMY SILVER wore his sweetest smile as he came back into the study.

The feast of the gods was already going strong.

Jones, minibus, Fisher, Tracy-minor, and Snooks were seated round the table, on the chairs belonging to the Fistical Four.

Lovell and Ray and Newcome sat where they could; but they were on their feet most of the time, attending to their guests.

Jimmy Silver piled in at once to help.

Jones & Co. were looking eminently satisfied. Poached eggs—and new-laid ones, too—and gammon rashers, were rather a "catch." And there were sardines, and there was blonster-paste, and there was ham. There were pickles, and there were crackers and cheese.

And to follow the more solid portion of the entertainment, there were two kinds of jam, marmalade, jelly, biscuits, cake, apples, and dough-nuts.

In all Jones' career as a fag at Rookwood, he had never been asked to such a feed; he had never seen such a feed, excepting in his dreams.

Jones' chubby face wore an expansive smile, and he felt full of friendly cordiality towards Jimmy Silver & Co. He considered that they weren't such rotters, taken all in all, though they were in a higher Form.

Lovell & Co. backed up Jimmy manfully. From their courteous manners, it might have been supposed that the end study delighted to honour the young gentlemen of the Second Form; and that they felt it as a supreme honour that Jones & Co. had consented to come to tea.

When Jones began to talk football he was listened to with great respect. His comrades were too busy feeding to be able to answer him, but Jimmy Silver & Co. listened unto him as unto an oracle.

"And what do you think of Bulkeley's play, Jones?" asked Jimmy Silver sweetly.

As Bulkeley was head of the Sixth and captain of Rookwood, a Second-Former's opinion of his play was really unimportant. But Jimmy Silver seemed to consider it a matter of great moment.

"Oh, so-so!" said Jones loftily. "Bit too slow in taking a pass, if you ask me."

Lovell gasped.

"Bulkeley would like that!" he murmured.

"Knowles is a bit of a fumbler, too," remarked Jones, who was evidently a very severe football critic. "I don't think much of Sixth Form footer, as a matter of fact. Pass the ham, young Tracy."

Young Tracy was too busy, but Jimmy Silver passed the ham.

"Jolly decent of you fellows to ask us, I must say," remarked Fisher, as he started on the cake. "You must come to a feed in our Form-Room, you chaps."

"Awfully pleased!" murmured Jimmy Silver, repressing a shudder. The fearsome feeds in the Second were not attractive.

"Pass the jam!"

There was a tap at the door.

"More chaps coming?" asked Snooks.

"Yes, one more. A chap in your Form—a new chap," said Jimmy Silver carelessly.

Jones & Co. exchanged quick glances.

"New chap!" murmured Jones.

"Come in!" called out Lovell.

Erbert came in.

He gave a slight start at the sight of the fags of the table, and coloured. Jones & Co. looked very grim.

There was a momentary pause in the rapid disappearance of the good things.

The Fistical Four did not appear to notice it.

"Sit down, kid!" said Jimmy, with

great heartiness, "Here's your chair! You're a little late, but never mind. You know Jones, I think?"

"Yes," gasped Erbert.

Jones did not speak.

"I think you know all these chaps—all in your Form. Begin with the eggs and rashers, young 'un. Lemme see—you were going to tell us about your match with the Third, Jones. You beat Wegg's lot, I think?"

"Yes," said Jones curtly.

"But after a tussle, I suppose?" said Jimmy insinuatingly.

Jones did not answer. He was not to be drawn.

Jones minimus was not a genius—but he was not exactly a duffer. He had wondered why the Plastic Four were entertaining a gang of fags in this way. He knew now.

Van Ryn, the good-natured South African, had done something of the sort, and Jones had retired majestically from his study, insensible to the allurements of baked chestnuts.

But this feed was a stunning feed—a feed worthy of the old gods on high Olympus, and that made a difference.

Jones could not make up his mind to turn his back majestically upon two kinds of jam, several sorts of jelly, cake, and biscuits, and apples.

So he decided it was up to him to be civil, as he was a guest in the study.

His civility, however, was only for his kind entertainers.

He saw Jimmy Silver's little trap quite clearly, and declined to walk into it.

His comrades followed his lead.

"Erbert, awkward and blushing," joined in the feed, and in his nervousness he made several blunders. He ate sardines with a knife, and poured his tea into his saucer.

Jones & Co. smiled satirically as he did so.

Otherwise, they took no notice of Erbert.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exerted themselves to keep the conversation going. But they exerted themselves in vain.

The fass had been asked there to a

feed, and they were feeding. They had not undertaken to talk, and they did not talk.

They answered remarks in monosyllables. One or two timid attempts from Erbert were not answered at all.

Lovell & Co. were grinning by this time.

Jimmy Silver's idea of bringing about good feeling and fellowship by "feeding the brutes," was turning out rather a frost.

Jimmy was dismayed, but he did not give in.

He nobly resisted the hapuise to knock Jones & Co.'s heads together, and exerted himself to pour oil upon the troubled waters. But it was in vain. The four fags resolutely declined to take the slightest notice of Erbert's existence.

In the discouraging silence of the guests, the Plastic Four's conversational efforts failed at last. There was silence in the study, broken only by the clinking of crockery and the champing of Second Form jaws.

The feast was coming to an end. Both kinds of jam had been liberally sampled, and the guests were a little sick. Jones & Co. had eaten enough—indeed, they had eaten too much.

Jones gave his comrades a look, and rose to his feet.

"Not finished yet?" said Jimmy Silver hospitably.

"Thanks, yes!" said Jones politely.

"Thanks awfully for the feed! We've had a good time, really!"

"Oh, don't hurry away!" said Lovell genially. "We were going to ask you to give us a song after tea, Jonesey—that ripping song of yours about death and glory, or something."

This was really a brilliant effort on Lovell's part. Jones minimus rather fancied himself as a singer. He was quite great at fag entertainments in the Second Form Room.

But Jones minimus was impervious to flattery now.

"So sorry!" he said. "The fact is we've got another engagement. Another time, old chap!"

"There's a meeting of the Second Form Debating Society," said Fisher, with lofty dignity.

"Well, if you must, you must," said Jimmy Silver regretfully. "By the way, you might take young Murphy to the debating society; he's new here, and it would rather interest him."

Jones grinned sardonically. Jimmy's surreptitious efforts at promoting good fellowship having failed, he was coming out into the open. But Jones minimus was quite equal to the captain of the Fourth.

"Murphy!" he said vaguely. "I don't know anybody named Murphy."

"Erbert, you know," said Jimmy. "I don't think I know anybody named Erbert," said Jones calmly.

"I'm sure I don't," remarked Fisher. "Not acquainted with any chap of that name?" said Tracy minor, with a curling lip.

"No fear!" added Snooks. "Oh, come off!" broke out Erbert angrily. "Don't play the giddy hox! You know me well enough, you silly howl!"

"Ahem!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you fellows!" said Jones minimus, with great loftiness. "Good-afternoon, Silver!"

"As for your blooming debating society, I wouldn't be found dead in it!" said Erbert resentfully. "I seen you once—set of silly young howls a-toik'n' sily rot, and fancying you're like the Sixth!"

"You cheeky little beast!" roared Jones minimus, forgetting that Erbert was in Coventry, in his indignation. "I've a jolly good mind to pull your ear!"

"You couldn't do it in a month!" said Erbert disdainfully. "Take yer face away and bury it, dol! It worries me! Ah, would yer?"

Erbert uttered that ejaculation as Jones minimus, forgetful of all decorum, made a jump at him.

Erbert leaped up as the angry fag's grasp closed upon him, and there was a struggle.

The Fisticai Four exchanged glances of dismay.

Jimmy Silver's chums had not expected the great wheeze to be a success; but they had not expected this.

"Order!" roared Lovell.

"You rotten cheeky cub——"

"You silly, swankin' howl——"

Crash!

Erbert's chair went over backwards, and Erbert nearly followed it. But he exerted himself, and bore Jones minimus back. Jones crashed into the table, and it went flying. There was a terrific crash of crockery as the table pitched to the floor.

"Stop it!" shrieked Raby.

Jones and Erbert were rolling on the floor in deadly combat, heedless of broken crocks. Erbert got his opponent under, and proceeded to rub Jones' nose in the carpet, and Jones roared lustily.

Jones' chums were not going to stand that. They hurled themselves upon Erbert, and dragged at him. Erbert hit out on all sides, and in a few moments the whole party of fags were a scrambling heap.

"Look here, I'm fed up with this!" roared Lovell wrathfully. "Kick the whole gang out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

But his chums did not hold on. It was trouble enough entertaining a gang of the Second while they behaved themselves; but to have the study turned into a cockpit in this manner was rather too "thick."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, heedless of Jimmy Silver, started operations on the struggling crowd of fags with their boots.

There were wild yells from the Second-Formers.

They rolled and sprawled to the door, helped by the vigorous application of Fourth Form boots, and all five of them went rolling into the passage—Erbert and Jones and Fisher and Snooks and Tracy minor sprawling and rolling together.

In the passage they sorted themselves out, and went their ways.

Lovell slammed the door after them. Three separate glares were turned upon Jimmy Silver. Jimmy looked round the study. It was very neatly wrecked.

"You howling ass!" roared Lovell.

"Well, my hat!" That was all Jimmy Silver could say.

"Look at the study!" shrieked Raby. "Look at the crocks! All smashed! There's dashed jam over everything!"

"And pickles!" hooted Newcome.

"And this is what comes of your wonderful schemes for feeding fags, Jimmy Silver, you frabjous cuckoo!" roared Lovell. "And you're going to be jolly well bumped for it! Collar him!"

"Here, hold on!" yelled Jimmy.

But his incensed chums collared him with great wrath, and Jimmy Silver smote the study carpet thrice with his person with great force. Then Lovell & Co. left him sitting amid the wreckage, gasping for breath.

And that was the outcome of Jimmy Silver's great scheme for promoting fellowship in the Second Form. There was, unfortunately, no other outcome.

CHAPTER 41. In Deadly Peril

"SKATE, young 'un?"

It was Saturday afternoon. There was a hard frost, and the river was frozen harder than ever.

Half Rookwood had turned out to skate or slide.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came down to the bank together, and Jimmy spotted 'Erbert looking on at the skaters.

The little fag was alone, as usual.

Jones & Co. were sliding. They had made a slide right across the river, and were enjoying themselves immensely. 'Erbert had joined in the slide, but he had been shouldered off without ceremony, and had retired to the bank.

"I've been slidin', Master Silver," said

'Erbert. "I don't skate—leastways, I've never tried."

"I'll show you how, some time," said Jimmy. "All right, you chaps, I'm coming."

The Pistical Four glided out on the ice. 'Erbert watching them with keen interest. He would have been glad to join the skaters, or, still more, the humbler sliders of his own form. Mornington came along with Townsend and Topham and Peele. He gave 'Erbert a friendly nod, but did not stop to speak.

There was a sound of wrathful voices on the ice. Higgs of the Fourth persisted in skating over the Second Form slide, to the intense exasperation of Jones & Co. Higgs, the bully of the Fourth, was delighted as he scattered the fags right and left. He was able to cause discomfort to a dozen fellows at once, which was quite a pleasure to Higgs.

"Keep off our slide, you rotter!" bawled Jones minimus.

"You fags can clear off," said Higgs. "Get out of the way, you cheeky little rotters."

"Let their slide alone," said Jones minor of the Fourth, coming to his brother's rescue.

Higgs grinned, and charged at Jones, and sent him sprawling on the bank. Then he turned his attention again to Jones minimus. The fags had to scatter as the heavy Fourth Former charged through them. Mornington & Co. joined in Higgs' little amusement with great zest.

Jones & Co. had to retreat to the bank at last.

"Come along farther down," said Jones minimus, breathing wrath. "We'll have to make another slide."

"There's thin ice farther down," said Tracy minor.

Jones minimus snorted.

"If you're funky you can keep off," he snapped.

"Well, I'm not going on thin ice."

"Go and eat coke then!"

"It's all right," said Fisher. "The thin ice is on the other side, and there's

a danger-board. So long as we keep clear of the board it's all right."

"I'm going, anyway!" growled Jones minimus.

Jones led the way, and the fags followed him down the stream. It was narrower here, and the ice was rugged, and left alone by the sliders. Across the river a notice-board showed over the ice, bearing the legend in large letters: "Danger!"

Tracy minor remained on the bank, but the rest of the fags were soon on the ice, driving a fresh slide across.

They were out of the reach of Higgs & Co. there, and the bully of the Fourth did not follow them up.

Erbert went on the ice to slide by himself when the fags were gone, but he was soon cleared off by Higgs of the Fourth. The bulky Fourth Former charged him, and Erbert slid away down the river, leaving Higgs roaring with laughter.

"Here comes that rotter again!" growled Snooks, as Erbert came sliding along to where the fags were disporting themselves.

"Shove him off!" said Jones.

The fags gathered round Erbert.

"Let a bloke alone, can't you?" howled Erbert indignantly. "I'm going farther on—"

Jones & Co. did not reply, but they hustled the outsider to the bank, and pushed him off the ice. Erbert stumbled in the frozen rushes, and sat down; and the fags, grinning, went on sliding again.

"Ow!" gasped Erbert.

There was a chuckle near him, and he looked round and saw Tracy minor.

"What yer grinning at?" demanded Erbert resentfully.

Tracy minor turned his back.

"Lot of rotten 'oligans, that's wot I call 'em!" said Erbert savagely, "and if you give me any of your hairs, young Tracy, I'll jolly soon give you a wipe round the kisser."

Tracy moved off hastily.

Erbert rose rather painfully to his feet. The bump in the rushes had hurt

him. He stood with a clouded brow, watching the sliders.

Jones & Co. were enjoying themselves immensely. They had that part of the river quite to themselves, and their slide extended from bank to bank. They whizzed along it one after another in great glee, with scarves floating in the wind.

"You're jolly near that board, you fellows!" called out Tracy minor.

The sliders did not heed.

Jones minimus, leading a long string of sliders, stumbled on the ice, and went down. His followers, unable to stop themselves, piled on him in a yelling heap.

An anxious look came over Erbert's face.

"That there hicc won't stand much of that!" he muttered.

Crack!

The reckless fags were within measurable distance of the danger-board. As

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the heap of fallen fags struggled on the ice there was a long and ominous sound of cracking under them.

"Look out!" yelled Tracy minor. "The ice is goin'!"

The fags scrambled hastily away. Crack!

The strain had been too much. From the cracked ice came a gush of dark water.

Jones minimsus sat up dazedly.

"Come off!" shrieked Fisher, who had already gained the bank.

"Look out, Jones!"

"My hat!"

Jones staggered to his feet, and as he did so his foot went through the cracked ice.

There was a sharper and louder crack, and as the frightened fag strove to withdraw his foot, the other foot went through.

Down through the cracked ice he went, his arms coming upon the frozen surface with a force that further smashed the ice.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tracy minor. "He's in."

The water gushed over the ice. Jones minimsus was fairly in, holding on to the jagged edge of ice, and turning a white, terrified face towards his comrades on the bank.

"Help!" he panted.

"Get a plank, somebody!" gasped Snooks helplessly.

The broken ice crumbled in Jones' frozen fingers, and with a choked cry he went under.

"Help!" screamed Fisher.

'Erbert's face was white. He caught Tracy minor by the shoulder.

"He's your pal!" he muttered huskily.

"Go in for him! You can swim—I've seen you!"

Tracy shook his hand off furiously.

"Don't touch me, you cad! Go in yourself if you want to be drowned!"

"Help!"

Jones' head came over the surface. His face was white as death. His frozen fingers caught feebly at the ice.

A lithe figure leaped out from the bank.

"Old on!" shouted 'Erbert. "I'm a-camin'!"

CHAPTER 22.

By Shier Pluck!

S PLASH!

'Erbert was in.

Jones was going under again, frozen and helpless, when the edge of ice crumbled under 'Erbert's feet, and he was in the water beside him.

Forgotten in that moment was the bitter persecution the outcast of the Form had suffered at the hands of the terrified fag, struggling in the water. 'Erbert had forgotten that. All he saw was a fellow in danger, and he rushed to the rescue with unthinking courage.

The fags on the bank watched him spellbound. Fisher was shouting mechanically for help.

From up the river the skaters were coming. The shouts had been heard. But they came too late to be of any aid to Jones minimsus.

The freezing waters were sucking him down to death when 'Erbert's sneaky young arm closed round him and held him back.

"Old on to me," panted 'Erbert.

Jones instinctively held on.

His weight dragged on 'Erbert, and the brave lad was dragged under the water. The gap in the ice showed nothing but the sullen surface of the river as Jimmy Silver dashed up.

"What's happened?" shouted Jimmy.

"Jones is in," stuttered Fisher. "He's gone under. Murphy's in, too. He went in after him. They'll be drowned! Oh!"

"'Erbert!" gasped Jimmy.

"There he is!" yelled Lovell.

'Erbert's head came into view. In that half-minute under the bitter waters, 'Erbert had fought wildly to keep from being sucked away by the current. He had succeeded—how, he did not know. But he came up in the

gap, with Jones minimus still in his grasp.

Jones was almost insensible, but he was still clinging to the outsider of the Second. "Erbert struck out to keep himself afloat, though he was blue with cold.

"Elp!" came in quivering tones through his frozen lips.

Jimmy Silver had kicked off his skates, and he was speeding for the gap.

"Hold on, Jimmy!" shouted Lovell.

"Here comes Bulkeley with the plank!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth was speeding up. The long plank, kept in readiness for a possible accident, was in his grasp.

"Stand back, Silver!" he shouted.

Jimmy stopped.

"Elp!" mumbled Erbert through his frozen lips.

He was holding on to the crumbling ice now with one hand, and holding Jones minimus' head above water with the other. But his strength was almost gone. His face was white as death, his nose and lips blue.

Bulkeley pushed the broad plank out over the ice, with the help of Neville and Knowles. The end of it came over the gap in the ice, and Erbert changed his grip to the wood.

"He can't get out!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Bulkeley, let me get along the plank. I'm lighter than you. The ice may go—"

Bulkeley nodded.

"Get along," he said.

He looped the end of a rope round Jimmy Silver, and the Fourth-Former crawled along the plank, which lay across the gap in the ice like a bridge.

There was a buzzing crowd on the bank and the ice by this time, and all eyes were fixed upon Erbert.

The news had spread like wildfire that a fellow was in, and that another fellow—a fag—had gone in for him.

"Erbert, by gad!" said Mornington of the Fourth, as he came up. "Erbert! The young ass!"

"What the merry dickens did he worry about Jones for?" said Town-

send in wonder. "Jones has been down on him ever since he went into the Second. I'd have left him to shift for himself, I know that. Must be potty!"

"Erbert's not your sort!" broke in Lovell savagely. "You're not fit to clean his boots!"

Townsend shrugged his shoulders.

"Go it, Jimmy Silver!" sang out Mornington.

Jimmy Silver had reached the gap now.

The ice was shivering under his weight, and it certainly would not have stood the weight of Bulkeley. But it held.

Jimmy grasped Erbert.

The little fag looked up at him.

"Take 'em!" he muttered.

Jimmy nodded, and took Jones, now quite unconscious, from Erbert's grasp. He drew him carefully upon the plank.

He crawled back along the plank, dragging Jones after him by the shoulders, till he reached the firm ice, and many hands relieved him of the fag.

Erbert was still holding to the plank.

His strength was too far spent for him to crawl out upon the plank, and he could only hold on with numbed fingers.

Jimmy Silver crawled back. The ice had stood the strain so far, but it was cracking ominously.

"Here you are, kid!" panted Jimmy Silver.

He reached over and grasped the fag, and drew him from the water. Erbert's wet arms closed round his neck for support.

Crack! Crack-ack!

"Buck up, Silver!"

"My hat! It's going!"

The ice gave way, and the plank plunged in. Jimmy Silver was precipitated into the water, with Erbert in his arms.

But the rope was safe round him, under his shoulders, and a dozen willing hands dragged forcibly upon it.

The captain of the Fourth was drawn out, still with 'Erbert safe in his grasp.

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" gasped Bulkeley. "Lend a hand here, you fellows! Get them to the school!"

"I'm all right!" gasped Jimmy. "I can walk all serene!"

"Run, then!"

Bulkeley caught up 'Erbert in his arms, and Neville picked up Jones minimus, and they dashed away towards the school. Jimmy Silver did not need help. The ducking had not hurt him.

"Come on, Jimmy!" exclaimed Lovell, grasping him by the arm. "Put it on! You'll catch your death of cold!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Jimmy.

And he ran his hardest for Rookwood, and arrived there quite warm.

A rub down in the dormitory and a change of clothes were enough for Jimmy; but 'Erbert and Jones minimus had been put to bed, with hot-water bottles at their feet, and blankets piled on them, and the Head had telephoned for the school doctor.

The story was all over the school now.

There was much searching of heart among the Second-Formers. 'Erbert, the rank outsider, the fellow they had despised and condemned, had gone in for Jones, the leader of his persecutors, at the risk of his life. Well they knew the fearful risk he had run, how close he had been to the grim King of Terrors!

"He ain't a bad sort after all!" said Fisher to his friends. "Fancy him going in for old Jones, you know! Jones would have been drowned if he hadn't!"

"Plucky little beast, anyway," said Snooks.

"I—I should have gone in," added Fisher, as an afterthought. "But—but I didn't seem to think of it just at that moment, somehow."

"Murphy did," remarked Smith minor.

"I—I say, it was jolly decent of him!" said Fisher, in a shamefaced way. "After all, the poor beast can't help eating with his knife if he was brought

up like that. I—I rather wish we hadn't been so down on him."

"He's a good sort!" said the repentant Snooks. "I'm jolly well not going to send him to Coventry after this, for one!"

"What rot!" said Tracy minor, with a sneer. "Of course, the young cad will be thinking of that. I dare say that's what he did it for."

"He did it to fish out old Jones," said Snooks warmly, "and he might have been drowned himself!"

"Rot! Anyone would have done it!"

"You didn't do it!" snorted Fisher, "and if you say anything more about Murphy, I'll do you on the nose, young Tracy!"

"Well, I shan't speak to the cad, anyway!" sneered Tracy. "He can't come over me with a trick like this!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Dry up, Tracy!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Tracy sneered and walked away. There was evidently a revulsion of feeling in the Second Form on the subject of 'Erbert. But the snob of the Second pinned his faith to Jones minimus. Tracy reasoned it out that Jones would be more ~~won~~ upon the rank outsider than ever after this, for nothing could be so bitterly exasperating as to receive a favour from a fellow he disliked and despised. It would have made Tracy feel bitter enough in Jones' place, and he credited Jones minimus with his own feelings.

It was some hours later when Jones minimus was allowed to come down. He was looking pale and subdued, but otherwise he did not seem much the worse for his experience. 'Erbert was still in the dormitory.

"All serene, Jonesey?" asked Tracy minor, joining him.

"Right as rain," said Jones minimus. "The doctor Johnny said I needn't stay in bed. Jolly glad of that! Jolly queer, wasn't it, that that beunder Murphy came in for me? Blessed if I set on to it at all!"

"Just like one of his tricks," said Tracy. "I was just going to come in, but that rotten had to shove himself forward, as usual."

"Eh?"

"Of course, he will be trying to make capital out of this," pursued Tracy minor. "He's the kind of pushin' and that would. He'll think we're going to let him out of Coventry just because he fished you out of the river. Of course, you won't stand anything of the sort. The cad's got to be kept in his place, all the same—what?"

Jones minimus did not reply.

He looked fixedly at Tracy, with a sort of wonder in his face, and an expression that made the snob of the Second feel uncomfortable.

Then, still without speaking, Jones minimus raised his right arm and smote Tracy full upon the nose.

"Yaroooh!"

Tracy staggered back and sat down with a bump. Jones minimus pushed back his cuffs, and danced round him.

"Come on, you cad!" he roared.

"Yow-aw-ow!"

"Get up, you funk! Get up and have some more!" roared Jones.

"Grooooh!"

"Ragging already?" grinned Fisher, as he came up with a crowd of the Second. "What are you punching Tracy for?"

Jones minimus gave his Form-fellows a truculent look.

"Because he was running down my pal," he answered.

"What pal?" asked the mystified Fisher.

"Murphy."

"Your—your pal?"

"Got anything to say against him?" roared Jones.

"I've made it up with Murphy," continued Jones minimus. "You know what he did—came in for me, after I'd been a beast to him. You'd been a beast, too, Fisher."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Fisher.

"So had you, Snooks. We'd all been rotten to him. And it was Tracy's fault more than anybody's, and now he wants me to be down on the kid after he's saved my life. You rotten funk! Are you going to get up and have some more?"

Tracy minor preferred to remain on the ground. He felt safer there.

"Here he comes!" added Jones minimus. "Come on, Murphy!"

'Erbert came up, with a very red face.

"Shoulder high!" said Jones minimus. "Come on, Murphy!"

"Oh, my 'at!" said 'Erbert.

"Up with him!" said Fisher.

"Hurrah!" roared Snooks.

The fags grasped the blushing 'Erbert, and up he went on the shoulders of Jones minimus and Fisher. With a crimson face, the wail of Rookwood was borne shoulder-high round the quadrangle, amid cheers and wild yells from the Second.

The Head glanced out of his study window at the uproar, and smiled. Jimmy Silver & Co. came in from the skating, and met the uproarious procession. 'Erbert grinned down at Jimmy Silver from his perch.

"Well, that's rather a change!" said Lovell, with a whistle.

"Doesn't look much like Coventry for 'Erbert now," said Jimmy Silver. "Give him a cheer!"

And the Pistical Four joined in the cheering with powerful voices, and the old quadrangle rang with cheers for the outcast of the Second Form—now the dear pal of Jones minimus and the hero of the fags. Jimmy Silver had not yet succeeded in solving the problem of setting 'Erbert right with his Form; but Uncle James' assistance was no longer needed. 'Erbert had succeeded in winning his way.

THE END.

HOW TO SPEND MONEY

HAS it ever occurred to you that if anyone were to give you a million pounds you would have to spend one hundred and forty pounds every day to prevent yourself getting any richer?

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Think for a minute—how could you spend so much money? I know what you'll answer to that: "Just you give me a chance—I'll show you!" Very well, then, just to prove to you how difficult it is, we'll give you a chance.

You wake up in the morning with one hundred and fifty pounds to "blue" before bed-time. How are you going to set about it? You could buy a car, of course; but then what will you do with the one hundred and fifty pounds which to-morrow will bring forth. You can't go on buying cars.

Let's see!

A very good way of getting rid of a little loose change would be to spend the day flying over to Paris and back. If you were to charter a private plane, this might easily set you back fifty pounds; and lunch in the French capital—if you were lucky enough to find one of the really expensive restaurants—might get you through another three pounds. Add an extra ten pounds for cars to and from Le Bourget aerodrome, taxis, tips, etc., and by evening, when you arrived back in London, you'd be minus sixty three pounds.

Dinner—Seven Pounds!

After your lunch, you probably won't feel like a big dinner, so we'll have to

tempt you. Plovers' eggs, when you can get them at all, cost round about five shillings each—say, four of them. Then a dish made from the tail of kangaroos, if you can get it, may cost you anything up to another two pounds. Finally, since it's nearly Christmas, how about some strawberries? These are grown in hot-houses in the South of France and flown to this country wrapped carefully in cotton-wool. They will cost you one shilling each, so you may be able to get rid of another three pounds this way. With extras and tips for the waiters we will say that your dinner has cost you seven pounds.

A stall in the most expensive London theatre will cost an extra eighteen shillings and sixpence—or five pounds if you happen to go on a first night—and a luxurious car to carry you there and home again, another two pounds.

So here you are at the end of the day, and you've spent—just seventy-seven pounds.

Of course, you can use up a great many days' allowances in one fell swoop by buying a car. The most expensive you can buy is not, as you might suppose, a Rolls-Royce, but an American Duesenberg for three thousand five hundred pounds. You might also care to take up motor-racing as a hobby. A modern car, such as an E.R.A., will cost one thousand five hundred pounds, and on top of that you will require a couple of skilled mechanics, and a lorry to cart it from track to track. Cost of entering each race will average about one hundred pounds. Oh, yes, motor racing is very nearly the most expensive hobby in the world.

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