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SMYTHE'S UNCLE IN A MERRY MOOD! (See Our Grand School Tale.)

## SMYTHE'S TERRIBLE UNCLE!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

### The 1st Chapter. Mysterious!

Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, was wearing a worried look. Everybody had noticed it. Even Jimmy Silver of the Fourth, who seldom paid any attention to Adolphus, had observed that that lofty and nutty youth was looking down in the mouth, and wondered what was the matter with him. Smythe of the Shell generally looked quite satisfied with himself and the world. He was the nuttiest of the nuts of Rookwood—what he did not know about silk hats and neckties was not worth knowing. He was accustomed to surveying the universe through his eyeglass.

But just now Smythe seemed down on his luck. He was much less talkative than usual—and in talking he sometimes actually forgot to drop his final g's—a proof that something was very wrong with Adolphus. His nutty chums could not make it out. Howard and Tracy, his study-mates, asked him the question point-blank what was bothering him, without getting any satisfactory reply. His pals in the Fourth—Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower, and Mornington—were equally in the dark. Mornington, who could be good-natured, had even asked him whether it was bad luck with the geegees that worried him, and offered to stand a

fiver to see him through, if that was the trouble. But that wasn't the trouble. Adolphus was not in need of money. Neither had Joey Hook, the bookie, been cutting up rusty. Neither was Adolphus in more trouble than usual with his Form-master—he had only been doing the usual amount of slacking. But something was evidently oppressing Adolphus. He failed to join the little card-parties in Mornington's study. He dropped going down to the Bird-in-Hand with the nuts to see the sporting gentlemen there. For the first time in his nutty career Adolphus seemed to find life not worth living. And when one afternoon Mornington proposed to make up a party to go

over to Latham and see the soldiers, Smythe turned quite pale, and refused abruptly. Why such an innocent suggestion should worry Smythe of the Shell was a deep mystery. But evidently it did. Moreover, his friends noted that he had ceased going out of gates altogether. On a half-holiday he would "mooch" about the quad or stay in his study—not being much given to cricket. Some of the nuts surmised that Smythe was afraid of meeting somebody if he went out of the school precincts; though how that could be the case was another mystery. Jimmy Silver, of the Fourth, did not care two pins about Adolphus—indeed, he had sometimes knocked

Smythe's shining topper off, in mere high spirits.

But Jimmy hated to see a fellow worried and depressed, so he took a little interest in the matter, when Smythe's peculiar state had lasted more than a week.

The Fistical Four were heading for the school shop, after lessons one afternoon, when they spotted Smythe under the beeches. The dandy of the Shell was standing with a letter in his hand, and a woebegone expression on his face.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him, and Lovell, Raby, and Newcome glanced at him, too, very curiously. If ever a fellow was in deep trouble, Adolphus Smythe was at that moment.

"What on earth's the matter with the chap?" said Lovell, in wonder. "Looks as if he's just had a big bill he can't settle."

"Mighty uncertain things, those geegees," grinned Raby.

"Can't be geegees this time," said Newcome. "Smythe's in funds. I know he had a fiver from his pater this week; he always lets fellows see 'em."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows. "I think I'll speak to him," he said.

"Bow-wow!" yawned Lovell. "Let him rip!"

"You chaps go on and get the grub," said Jimmy, unheeding.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome went on to the tuckshop. The purchases for tea did not draw very heavily upon the study funds; the amount was fixed by decree of the Head. Jimmy's assistance certainly was not needed to carry the purchases to the end study.

Jimmy Silver changed his direction, and joined Adolphus Smythe under the beeches.

The Shell fellow hastily crumpled the letter in his hand, as if anxious that it should not be seen.

But he did not give Jimmy his old supercilious glance. He gave him a grim and troubled look.

Jimmy coughed a little. He was not on very friendly terms with the nut of the Shell, but he felt quite friendly at that moment.

"Anything up, old scout?" he asked.

"Oh, nothin'!"

"Look here, Smythe, you've been looking like the ghost of a merry nut for a week or more," said Jimmy. "If there's anything wrong, and a fellow could help you out, you've only got to say so."

"Not at all," said Smythe, with as much of his old loftiness as he could assume in his present depressed mood.

"Oh, all serene, then!" said Jimmy, and he was turning away.

"I—I say—"

Jimmy turned back.

"Yes, old son?"

"I—I—I—"

Smythe hesitated.

Evidently he felt the need of confiding his trouble to somebody, perhaps of getting good advice for dealing with it.

Jimmy Silver was certainly a queer confidant for the Shell fellow to choose, in a way. In another way, however, he was the right sort.

Jimmy was not one of Smythe's pals; but he was a much more reliable fellow than any of those nutty pals, and he would have gone a good deal out of his way to help a fellow in trouble—even a fellow he did not like.

Smythe did not like Jimmy Silver. He knew that instinctively.

But he hesitated.

"Fire away, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "I'm your man, if there's anything I can do. You've got into some fix by your fat-headed game of mixing up with bookies—what?"

"No, no!"

"Oh, good! Then I'm blessed if I can guess what it is!"

(Continued on the next page.)



## SMYTHE'S TERRIBLE UNCLE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"I'm in trouble," said Smythe at last.

"Yes, that's pretty clear," agreed Jimmy. "Is there anything a chap could do?"

"I—I don't know! I—I don't think so," mumbled Smythe. "I—I'm dashed if I know what to do about it! Of course, nothin' may happen. But somethin' may."

Jimmy did not reply to that. There did not seem to be any reply to be made to so excessively vague a remark.

"You're a fellow to be trusted, Silver," went on Smythe hesitatingly. "You wouldn't jaw it all over the school if I told you?"

"Of course not."

"I'm afraid my pals might, if they knew."

Jimmy did not express his opinion of the pals. He thought the more.

"They'd cackle no end," said Smythe miserably. "Especially Mornington. He would cackle me to death, confound him!"

"Is it something awfully serious?"

"Yes!" groaned Smythe.

"Well, if you'd rather not tell me, don't," said Jimmy Silver in wonder.

"But if you like to, do, and I'll do anything I can."

"You might be able to advise a chap," mumbled Smythe. "I—I think I'll tell you, Silver, only keep it dark."

"That's understood."

"My—my—my—" Smythe stammered.

"Yes—your—"

"My uncle—"

"Yes, your uncle?" said Jimmy encouragingly.

"M-m-my uncle—m-m-my uncle's at Latcham!" gasped Smythe.

### The 2nd Chapter. An Awful Secret!

Jimmy Silver stared at Smythe of the Shell blankly.

From Smythe's manner, it might have been supposed that he was going to confess to a murder, or a burglary at least.

Jimmy was quite dumbfounded for a minute or so.

"Your uncle's at Latcham?" he ejaculated at last.

"Yes."

"And that's what's worrying you?"

"Yes."

"Well, my only hat!" exclaimed the astounded captain of the Fourth.

"And that's what's worrying you, Smythe?"

"Ye-es."

"Not off your rocker, by any chance?" asked Jimmy.

"You—you don't understand."

"No, I'm blessed if I do! Suppose you explain. Do you mean your uncle's come to live at Latcham, and he's not an agreeable neighbour?"

"He's a soldier."

Jimmy's perplexity increased.

"One of the recruits at Latcham Camp, do you mean?"

"Not a recruit. He's been in it from the beginning—joined up the day after war was declared."

"Good man!" said Jimmy.

"Thumping ass, you mean!" growled Smythe. "He's over military-age, and he could have kept out of it if he'd liked. Even conscription couldn't have touched him."

As Jimmy Silver had come to Smythe with friendly intentions, he did not pull Adolphus' nose at that point. But the temptation to do so was a strong one.

"Well, what's the trouble?" he asked, less cordially. "Has he been wounded?"

"Oh, no!"

"You're anxious about what may happen when he goes back to the Front?" asked Jimmy, sympathetic again.

"My dear chap, we all have to go through that. I've got two near relations at the Front this minute, and Rawson's got a brother a prisoner in Germany."

Adolphus snorted.

His snort was expressive. Evidently it was not the ultimate fate of his uncle in khaki that was worrying Smythe.

"Well, what is it?" asked Jimmy, perplexed again.

"It wasn't so bad when he was broad," said Adolphus. "I never

expected to come into contact with him. My pater never speaks to him. The family don't recognise him. But—but now he's stationed at Latcham—may be there for weeks, perhaps months. And—and a fellow may fall in with him any minute. He might even take it into his head to come here."

Smythe shuddered.

"I—I've been worried to death about it since I had his letter. I—I've got the letter here. Nothin' very bad in it. He's not askin' himself to Rookwood. He's askin' me if I'd like to go over and see the camp—thinks a schoolboy might like that. But—but suppose he should come here!"

"Is there anything wrong with him?" asked Jimmy, astounded by this peculiar tale of woe. "Is he a waster who's disgraced his regiment, or anything like that?"

"No, no! I believe he's a good soldier enough," said Smythe impatiently. "He got a medal, or a cross, or somethin', for somethin' he did out there. I've heard—somethin' to do with chargin' guns, or somethin'."

"Good man!" said Jimmy again.

"Well, what's the trouble?"

Smythe crimsoned.

"He's a—a—a—" he stuttered.

"A what?"

"A private!"

The awful secret was out at last.

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the ground.

He knew that Adolphus Smythe was a duffer. He knew that he was a snob. He knew that he was several other things.

But he had not expected this.

Smythe was looking at him for sympathy and advice. Jimmy Silver breathed hard through his nose.

As it happened, Jimmy Silver's own uncle had enlisted as a private, which perhaps made him better able to appreciate the full extent of Smythe's terrible trouble.

"You see how it stands," mumbled Smythe wretchedly, while Jimmy Silver stood dumb. "I've never seen the chap, an' don't want to. But suppose he should come here. He might. Pushin' cad, of course. He spells his name Smith, too, instead of our way. The fellows would cackle no end, especially my friends."

"Do you know that the Tommies are keeping the Huns from burning Rookwood to the ground, and you in it, perhaps?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh rats!"

"Do you know my uncle's a private?"

"Yaas. It doesn't matter so much for you," said Smythe. "You're that sort. Excuse me. I mean, you don't care about such things. But I've always held my head high, and I belong to a good family, and all that. One of my cousins is a captain, and one a major. Not promoted to it," added Smythe hastily. "Never been in the ranks, I mean."

Adolphus was very anxious to make that clear.

"Do you know that we're beating the Germans now, and that a large number of our officers have been through the ranks?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, I dare say it's all the better as far as fightin' goes, an' so on," said Smythe. "I'm not thinkin' about that. But—but suppose that fellow should come here—Private Smith, you know." Adolphus shuddered. "You're a sensible chap, Silver. Advise me what to do. Would you advise me to write him a very cuttin' letter?"

"Eh?" gasped Jimmy.

"That might keep him away. I've thought of that. On the other hand, it might put his back up, and make him come," mumbled Adolphus. "I haven't answered his letter—more'n a week—I don't know what to do. You're a sensible chap, can't you advise me?"

"Yes, I advise you not to be a silly, sneaking, crawling worm and a snob," said Jimmy Silver. "I advise you to chuck up being a silly fool, and try to get a little sense into your silly, snobbish head!"

"Look here—"

"You mean-spirited worm!" said Jimmy, his anger breaking out at last. And, quite forgetting his friendly intentions, he seized Smythe by the nose and tweaked that prominent organ. "There, you cad! There, you sneak! There, you rotter!"

"Gugugugugug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar under the belches.

Leggett of the Fourth, of the

Modern side of Rookwood, came into view. He was yelling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver released Smythe's nose.

"Crawl away, you worm!" he said. "I've given you my advice; and if I hadn't come to you as a friend, I'd mop up the quad with your silly carcase. Pah!"

And Jimmy Silver stalked away in high dudgeon, repenting him that he had taken the trouble to listen to Smythe's tale of woe.

Adolphus Smythe rubbed his nose, which was fiery red.

But he was thinking less of that indignity than of the fact that Leggett was chortling at him.

Jimmy Silver, disgusted as he was, would not have repeated a word of what Smythe had confided to him.

But Leggett was under no such restraint.

The cad of the Fourth had evidently been listening behind the big beech, and had heard nearly every word of Smythe's confession.

Smythe gazed at him in anguish. It would be all over Rookwood now, as soon as Leggett could spread it.

Leggett had many a lofty sneer from the superb Adolphus to repay.

"Ha, ha! Private Smith!" roared Leggett. "What larks! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggett, old chap!" Smythe's voice was imploring. "Leggett, I—I—I say, keep it dark, old fellow! I—I—"

"Too jolly good to keep!" grinned Leggett.

"I—I say—"

Leggett, still chortling spasmodically, dashed off, to spread the story at the earliest possible moment.

Adolphus Smythe leaned against the beech, and wiped his perspiring brow. It was out now. All Rookwood would know! And the nut of the Shell groaned in anguish of spirit.

### The 3rd Chapter.

#### Mornington Takes a Hand.

Smythe of the Shell did not show himself in the Common-room that evening.

He dared not.

He bitterly repented having confided his troubles to Jimmy Silver for advice. It had earned him only a painful tweak of the nose.

Jimmy had not said a word, of course. But Leggett had said a good many words.

Most of the juniors had noticed Adolphus' troubled state of mind. Leggett cheerfully enlightened them as to the cause of it.

The Rookwood juniors, Classical and Modern alike, chortled over Smythe's extraordinary difficulty.

In an hour it was the standing joke of the Lower School.

Snobbish fellows like Smythe himself grinned over it, and shrugged their shoulders. But most of the fellows were tickled by Adolphus' absurd snobbery taking that peculiar form.

To have a relation in the Army who had not secured a commission was a deep and troublesome worry to Smythe's mind. And a fellow with a mind like that was an object of amused curiosity.

The fact that the said relation had "got a medal or somethin', for chargin' the guns or somethin'," would have been a source of pride to almost any other fellow at Rookwood.

The fact that he had gone of his own accord, although legally exempt from service, would have been a still greater source of pride; but Adolphus did not see it in that light.

Adolphus might have forgiven him for spelling his name "Smith" if he had been Captain Smith or Colonel Smith.

But Private Smith was too much for Adolphus. It did not occur to the nut of the Shell that he, superb as he was, might have been a good deal too much for Private Smith if that gentleman had known him.

Adolphus was alone in his study, with a moody brow, when Howard and Tracy came in. They were suppressing smiles.

He looked at them glumly.

"Well?" he snapped. He knew what the smiles meant.

"Well, you are an ass, old chap!" said Howard. "If you wanted to keep your uncle dark, what did you tell Leggett for?"

"I didn't tell him. The cad was cavedroppin'!"

"Well, all Rookwood knows now!" smiled Tracy. "Is that what you've been lookin' so horrid glum about for a week?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Is your uncle a terrific out-and-outter?" asked Howard pleasantly.

Howard was Adolphus' chum, but he took a certain pleasure in "rubbing it in."

"Hang my uncle!" growled Adolphus.

"Is it only because he's a private?"

"How would you like an uncle a private to hang about you?" snarled Adolphus.

"All my relations in khaki have commissions!" smiled Howard.

"How did you come to have an uncle like that, old scout?"

"A rotten, poor relation!"

"You've never mentioned your poor relations before."

"Well, you haven't mentioned yours!" snapped Adolphus. "After all, I've heard a chap say that your father was a pawnbroker, Howard!"

Howard turned crimson.

"It's a lie!" he exclaimed furiously.

"Well, leave my uncle alone, and I'll leave your pater alone!" said Adolphus surlily.

"I hope he's not comin' here to see you!" said Howard tartly. "You needn't ask me to speak to him. I sha'n't do it!"

"He's not comin' here," muttered poor Adolphus.

"Leggett says he is."

"He's not, I tell you!"

"You haven't asked him?"

"Of course I haven't!" shouted Smythe. "What sort of an ass do you think I am?"

There was a tap at the door, and Mornington of the Fourth came in.

Smythe gave him a hopeless look. He expected more chipping than ever from Mornington, who was extremely highly-connected and aristocratic.

Morny had as many titled relations as he could count on the fingers of both hands.

"Oh, don't you begin!" said Smythe. "Look here, I'm not goin' to stand it, Morny! I warn you!"

"I'm not goin' to chip you," said Mornington coolly. "I only want to know the facts. Your uncle's a private in the camp at Latcham?"

"You know he is, confound you!"

"What regiment?"

"10th Loamshires!" grunted Adolphus.

"What is he—an ex-convict, or somethin' of that sort?"

"No!" yelled Adolphus.

"Tramp, or somethin'?"

"No, you ass! He was in a pretty good way when he chucked it all up and joined up!" snarled Adolphus.

"Chucked up everything, the duffer! Let it all go to smash, and joined up. I don't believe he even stopped to think whether he might have got a commission. Just joined up. Nice for us, wasn't it?"

"Well, it was nice for us, I should say," said Mornington. "If all the chaps had waited for commissions, I don't quite know where the privates would have come from, and I fancy the Huns would have burned down Rookwood before this."

Adolphus stared. This was not the remark he would have expected from the dandy of the Fourth.

"You—you think he did right?" he ejaculated.

"I don't think he did; I know he did. I know what's worryin' you," said Mornington coolly. "You want the fellows to think that your people have influence enough to get a man a commission if they like, an' they haven't."

Howard and Tracy grinned, and Smythe turned crimson. Perhaps that was at the bottom of Smythe's trouble, after all.

"I never did think much of you, Smythe!" resumed Mornington.

"Now, I'm goin' to give you some advice."

"You can keep it!"

"Have him here," said Mornington, unheeding.

Smythe jumped.

"Here!" he repeated.

"Yes. Ask him to Rookwood."

"Are you dotty?"

"Not at all. Ask him here, give him tea in the study, take him round Rookwood, an' make a fuss of him."

"You silly ass!"

"I suppose he deserves a bit of a fuss after what he's done for the lot of us," said Mornington. "You shriekin' ass, if he was my uncle I'd go right down to Latcham and have him here in a jiffy! It's the only way to set yourself right with the fellows. They're cacklin' no end—"

"I know they are!" groaned Adolphus.

"But it's not because your uncle's a private, but because you're such a thumpin' snob an' fool as to be ashamed of it!" explained Mornington.

"Look here—"

"Have him here," repeated Mornington. "It's up to you!"

"I won't!" yelled Smythe. "And—and look here, I'm goin' to deny it. Leggett's a liar, anyway. That's well known. Jimmy Silver won't say anythin'. I'm goin' to deny the whole story."

"Best thing you can do," agreed Tracy. "We'll back you up. It reflects on us, as your friends."

Mornington gave him a look of contempt.

"You're goin' to have your uncle here, Smythe," he said.

"Hang you! I'm not!"

"Will you bike over to Latcham tomorrow an' ask him?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I will!" said Mornington.

Smythe collapsed helplessly into his chair.

"You—you will?" he stutered.

"Yes—in your name."

"You cheeky cad!" gasped Smythe. "I won't allow you to use my name."

"How are you goin' to prevent it?"

"You—you rotter!"

"Look here, Morny—" began Howard.

"You ring off!" said Mornington. "The man's comin' here. I don't care whether he's a rank outsider personally. Khaki covers everythin'—"

"He's not!" snarled Smythe.

"He's decent enough, only—"

"Well, he's comin' here."

"He's not! I won't allow it. I'll—I'll—" Smythe almost babbled.

"Are you comin' over with me to ask him, like a dutiful and affectionate nephew?" asked Mornington.

"No, you interferin' hound!"

"Then I'll go alone."

"You meddlin' cad! If you dare—"

Slam! Mornington left the study.

Adolphus Smythe gazed at his study-mates in helpless consternation. He had expected snobbishness from the dandy of the Fourth, like his own. But this was worse than the severest chipping could have been.

"The awful rotter!" gasped Smythe. "Do you think he'll do it?"

"You know Morny!" growled Howard. "If he says he'll do a thing, he'll do it. You're in it, Smythe!"

Adolphus groaned.

### The 4th Chapter.

#### Morny Means Business.

Mornington wheeled out his bicycle after dinner the next day. It was a half-holiday, and Morny was going to spend it at Latcham.

Smythe of the Shell was watching him, and he bore down on the dandy of the Fourth in the gateway.

"You're not goin' to Latcham, Morny?" he said imploringly.

"Yes, I am."

"You—you're not goin' to see my uncle?"

"Yes. Any message?"

"Oh, you rotter! Look here!" Smythe drew a deep breath. He was not a fighting-man, as a rule, but the worm will turn, and undoubtedly Adolphus was a worm. "Look here, you sha'n't go! I'll jolly well lick you first!"

Mornington laughed.

"Jimmy Silver!" he called out.

Jimmy, who was in the quad, looked round.

"Hallo!" he replied.

Adolphus. "Look here, Morny, be a good chap, an' don't interfere. It ain't your bizney!"

"I'm makin' it my bizney." "I won't speak to him if he comes!" howled Adolphus desperately.

"You'll have to," said Mornington coolly. "You can go out if you like, but I'll parade him all over Rookwood as your uncle, all the same. If you avoid him, it will only make it more pointed!"

"Oh, you rotter!" "Well, is that lickin' comin' off?" asked Mornington. "I'm waitin' for it!"

Smythe gave a snort, and turned away. The licking evidently was not coming off.

Mornington grinned, and took his machine from Jimmy Silver.

"Hold on, Morny," said Jimmy quietly. "Wait a bit. I agree with you that that silly snob wants suffocating; but there's the soldier chap to consider. It will hurt his feelings if Smythe cuts up rusty with him here!"

"It won't," said Mornington. "How do you know it won't?" demanded Jimmy.

"Leave that to me. The way I'm goin' to work it, Smythe's uncle won't have his feelin's hurt," said Mornington. "I've got some taste, Jimmy Silver!"

"Yes; but—" "It will be all right, I tell you!"

And Mornington ran his machine out into the road, mounted, and pedalled away.

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums with a somewhat clouded brow. A dozen fellows had heard the talk, and there was much chortling over Mornington's extraordinary scheme.

"It's a rotten trick, though!" said Lovell. "Mr. Smith will feel cut up if that swanking fool pretends to be ashamed of him before the fellows!"

"Morny ought to be stopped!" growled Raby. "It don't matter a rap about Smythe, but there's his uncle!"

"Well, I don't see how we can stop him," said Jimmy Silver. "Smythe may play up and stop acting the goat when he's fairly in for it!"

"He may," assented Lovell doubtfully.

"Anyway, it's decent of Morny in a way," said Jimmy. "You wouldn't have expected him to take this view of it. He's not a silly snob, at any rate!"

The Fistical Four went down to the cricket.

The news that the dandy of the Fourth had gone to Latcham to invite Smythe's uncle to Rookwood was soon known to all the fellows.

Smythe had already attempted to deny the truth of Leggett's yarn, and to disclaim his uncle altogether; but he found no believers.

And Smythe's absurd attitude on the matter made most of the fellows believe that his uncle was some awful and impossible person—some ruffianly hooligan, who was probably a discredit to his regiment. Leggett, indeed, suggested that Mr. Smith had been a convict, while Tubby Muffin knew for a fact that he had been a burglar.

Indeed, unless there was something extremely "shady" about Smythe's uncle, Adolphus' attitude was hard to explain.

Yet, so far as the facts were known, Adolphus had more reason to be proud of his uncle than his uncle had to be proud of Adolphus. He had not asked himself to Rookwood, as Smythe feared he would. He had simply written to Adolphus, inviting him to see the camp—an excursion any of the juniors would have been glad to make.

It was a kindly action enough. All the Rookwood fellows had relations in khaki, and, naturally, a good proportion of them were Tommies. Excepting for a few miserable fellows like Tracy and Townsend, nobody would have thought of chipping Adolphus because his uncle was not an officer. It was the knowledge of how he would have acted himself in a similar case that made Smythe so uneasy.

While Jimmy Silver & Co. were at cricket practice, Smythe of the Shell was in his study in a depressed mood.

Howard came in to smoke a cigarette with him, and to administer consolation.

"It's all right, old man," said Howard. "Morny's an interferin' cad, but you can put the stopper on. It stands to reason that he can't bring your merry old uncle here this afternoon. Soldiers can't get leave all of a sudden like that!"

"I know that!" growled Smythe. "I'm not expectin' him to-day. But he'll come on his first leave, if he's asked in my name!"

"Then all you've got to do is to write an' stop it."

Adolphus looked hopeless.

"That might put his back up, and make him come all the more," he said.

"Not if you're careful. Find out from Morny when he's comin', and write to him the day before, sayin' you're goin' home because your pater's jil. Then he won't come. You can put it nicely."

Smythe brightened up. "By gad! That's a good idea!" he exclaimed.

"He won't get leave again in a hurry," said Howard. "You'll be all right. An' you won't tell the fellows you've written, an' it will look as if Morny was gassin', and as if Leggett was gassin', and you can go on denyin' that you've got an uncle at Latcham at all!"

"Good egg!" said Smythe, much comforted.

And Adolphus felt so cheered up by that friendly advice that he found himself able to take a hand in a game of nap.

The 5th Chapter. Nice for Adolphus.

"Here's Morny!" Jimmy Silver & Co. had come off cricket practice, and were refreshing themselves with ginger-pop, when the dandy of the Fourth was spotted wheeling his bicycle in at the gates.

A dozen fellows surrounded Mornington at once. They were very curious to know the results of his mission to Latcham.

"Is nunky coming?" grinned Leggett.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Jimmy to his chums.

"Whither bound?" asked Raby.

"We're going to see Smythe. We've got to talk to him," said Jimmy Silver, compressing his lips.

Adolphus' voice was heard as Jimmy Silver tapped at his study door and opened it.

"Your deal, Howard."

The Shell fellows stared at the Fistical Four as they came in. Howard slipped the cards into the table drawer.

"What do you want?" snapped Adolphus.

"Morny's got back," said Jimmy Silver.

"Hang Morny!"

"Your uncle's coming this afternoon. He'll be here in an hour. He's coming in plain clothes," said Jimmy.

Smythe sprang to his feet. "This afternoon?" he yelled.

"Yes."

"Oh, the rotter! Oh, that meddlin' cad! Oh, dear!"

"We've come to speak to you about that, Smythe," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "It's not our business to interfere between a silly fool and his relations under ordinary circumstances. But this is a special case—the man's a soldier. You're going to be civil to him, Smythe."

"I'm not. I won't speak to him. I—I—" spluttered Smythe.

"You will speak to him, and you'll be civil, and you'll make him welcome, and you won't let him have a

you to meddle with me?" howled Adolphus furiously.

"Yes, I do; you can't help it. Mind, don't make any fuss, or you'll have a thick ear to show your uncle!"

Adolphus gazed helplessly at the captain of the Fourth. It really seemed that Smythe was not to be allowed to have a say in any of his own affairs, at this rate.

But it was no use raising objections. Jimmy Silver could have knocked him into a cocked hat with one hand, and Jimmy was quite ready to do it.

"I don't say it was good taste of Mornington, asking the man where he's unwelcome," said Jimmy. "But he's not going to know that he's unwelcome. That's the important point."

"I suppose he ain't your uncle!" mumbled Smythe. "What are you interferin' for?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand!" said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "But you can understand this—that you've got to toe the line!"

Smythe set his teeth and moved towards the door.

"I'm goin' out!" he said.

Lovell took him unceremoniously by the collar. With a swing of his sturdy arm he pitched the Shell fellow into his chair.

Crash!

"Yow! Woop!" gasped Smythe.

"Stay there!" said Lovell grimly. And Smythe stayed there.

in the lurch. But we're standing by him!"

"Same here," chortled Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to see Smythe's uncle. I say, is that the fellow?"

All eyes were turned upon a figure advancing up the road.

Was that Smythe's uncle?

With one accord the crowd of juniors ejaculated:

"Oh, crumbs!"

The 6th Chapter. Smythe's Uncle.

"This 'ere Rookwood?" The stranger halted at the school gates.

He was not in uniform, but the juniors did not expect that. Mornington had told them he was coming in plain attire.

He was a man of approaching middle age. He certainly did not look much like a soldier. It was doubtful whether the smartest uniform would have made him look soldierly.

He was of a stumpy form, and considerably stout. He had a rough beard and moustache, and his face needed washing. His clothes were far from neat and tidy. His boots were ill-made and thick with dust.

His face was red—and the flush was not caused wholly by the sun. The juniors guessed that he had paused to refresh himself at the Bird-in-Hand as he passed. A fragrant aroma of spirits hung about him.

"Come in, Mr. Smith!" said Mornington at once.

That settled it!

It was Smythe's uncle!

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

He had not expected a visitor like this. It was inexplicable how a man could be so frowsy who belonged to the Army. Perhaps he had put off his soldierly habits along with his uniform.

Indeed, that was the only possible explanation. Certainly his sergeant would have indulged in some very plain speaking if he had seen Mr. Smith in this state.

But Jimmy Silver did not retreat. Smythe's uncle was not a favourable specimen, but he was a man who had fought for his country, and that counted more than anything else.

"Welcome to Rookwood, Mr. Smith!" said Jimmy loyally.

"Bravo, Smythe's uncle!" chortled Leggett.

"Hurrah!"

"This 'ere Rookwood, hay?" said Mr. Smith, blinking at the juniors with bleared eyes. "My nevvie about—wot?"

"We'll take you to him, sir," said Lovell.

"Thanky kindly!"

"Come right in!" said Mornington.

The rough-looking customer came right in. Out came old Mack, the porter, from his lodge, like a lion from his den.

"Now, then, hout you go!" exclaimed Mack.

"Shut up, Mack! This is Smythe's uncle!" said Mornington.

"Eh?"

"You keep off the grass!"

"Oh, my eye!" said Mack.

He blinked dazedly at Smythe's uncle as that gentleman was marched in, in the midst of a crowd of smiling juniors.

Right across the quadrangle Smyth's uncle was marched, more and more juniors joining the procession from all sides.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, met the crowd in the doorway of the School House, and held up his hand.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "What—what—who is this?"

"Afternoon, sir!" said Smythe's uncle cheerily.

"What—what?"

"It's Smythe's uncle, sir, from Latcham Camp," said Jimmy Silver. "He's come to have tea with Smythe, sir."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. And he beat a retreat.

He had certainly never suspected Smythe, the dandy of the Shell, of possessing an avuncular relative like that.

With joyous smiles the juniors marched Mr. Smith up the big staircase and into the Shell passage.

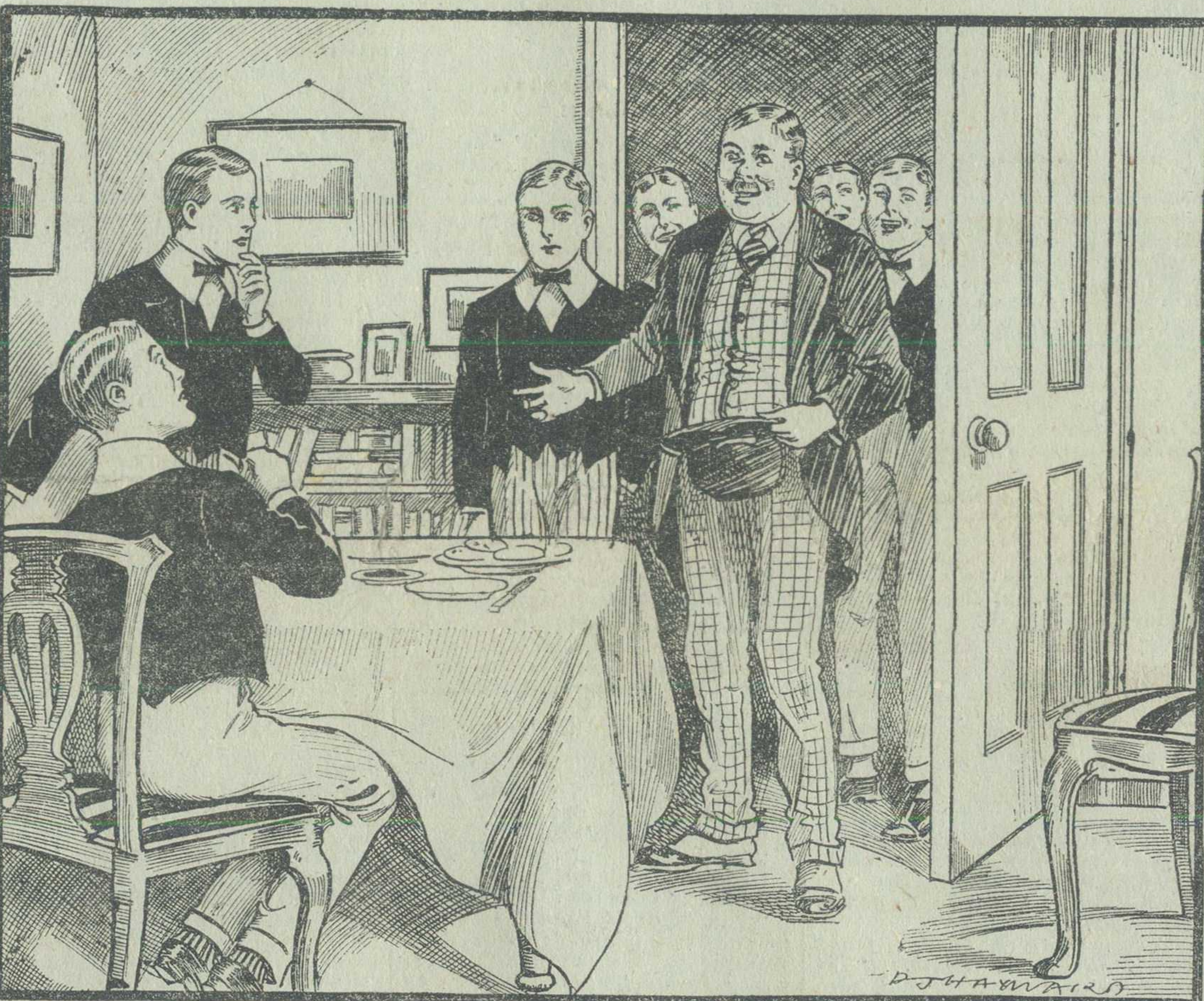
The Rookwooders were enjoying the situation.

A fellow who was not snobbish might have dreaded a visit from a near relative like this at such a school as Rookwood.

But to a snobbish fellow like Smythe it was certain to be bitter anguish.

And nobody had any sympathy for him.

It was known that he had never seen his uncle, and therefore he could not have known that he was such a frowsy and beery personage. He



Adolphus Smythe's eyes were glued upon the new-comer, as if it were a horrid spectre that came before his horrified vision. The dandy's uncle had arrived!

"When is he coming, Morny?" asked Townsend.

"Oh, let it be soon!" grinned Peele.

"This afternoon," said Mornington.

"Oh, my hat!"

"This afternoon!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Great Scott!"

"Jolly queer to get leave all of a sudden like that!" said Oswald.

"He was free for to-day, as it happened," explained Mornington. "I caught him on leave, you see!"

"Oh, I see!"

"The fact is, the chap didn't know what to do with the afternoon, and he's glad to come along to Rookwood to tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver's face was very grave.

"When is he coming?" he asked.

"He'll be here about an hour after me. He hadn't a bike, of course."

"What's he like, Morny?" chirruped Tubby Muffin. "Is he really a burglar?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, perhaps a bit rough," said Mornington. "He's a bit doubtful about Smythe wanting a private soldier to visit him, so he's coming in plain clothes!"

"Is that allowed?" said Newcome.

"Well, that's what he's goin' to do."

And Mornington wheeled his machine away to the bicycle-shed, whistling cheerily.

suspicion that you're a sneaking, snobbish, crawling worm!" said Jimmy Silver, with biting contempt.

"I'm warning you! If you don't play the game, we'll take you afterwards and give you such a thundering ragging that you won't know yourself again."

"You—you—"

"We'll help you entertain him, if you like," said Jimmy. "In fact, we're going to be present, to see that you play the game. And if you let out any of your dirty snobbery to that soldier chap, we'll simply smash you! See?"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. heartily.

Smythe blinked helplessly at the Fistical Four.

"I—I—I'm goin' out!" he said feebly.

"You're not going out. You're going to do the honours to Private Smith."

"Look here—"

"We'll help you. We'll stand a feed—he will want tea," said Jimmy. "But you're going to do the polite thing—as you'd want to, if you weren't a miserable apology for a worm!"

"You're an insultin' cad, Jimmy Silver! I'm not goin'—"

"No, you're staying. We're going to keep an eye on you from this minute till your uncle's gone!"

"Do you think I'm goin' to allow

Howard slipped quietly out of the study. Smythe had no aid to expect from him.

Lovell remained in the study, to keep a watchful eye upon Adolphus, while Newcome and Raby got tea ready, and Jimmy Silver went down to the gates, to join the already numerous crowd who were waiting for Private Silver to arrive.

Never had the junior portion of Rookwood been so keenly interested in anything as in the coming of Smythe's uncle.

Classicals and Moderns crowded at the gates, watching for him. Mornington had said that he was "rather rough." Leggett joyfully suggested that he might come along tipsy.

"Isn't Smythe goin' to be here to greet his uncle?" asked Mornington, with a grin, as Jimmy Silver came up.

"No; he's waiting for him in his study," said Jimmy.

"I suppose Smythe will be civil to him?" said Erroll of the Fourth doubtfully. "It would be rather rotten if—"

"That's all right," said Jimmy. "Smythe will be civil—very civil. If he isn't, there will be a dead Adolphus lying about afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to help Adolphus entertain him," explained Jimmy. "His own pals seem to have left him



SMYTHE'S TERRIBLE UNCLE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

had been ashamed of him without knowing him. He richly deserved to have this "merchant" planted on him under a crowd of mocking eyes.

Everybody was anticipating the sight of Smythe's face when his uncle should dawn upon him.

Jimmy Silver threw open the door of Smythe's study.

"Here we are!" he announced.

Lovell rose, starting a little at the sight of Mr. Smith.

Adolphus did not rise.

He could not.

His eyes were glued upon the newcomer as if it were a horrid spectre that came before his horrified vision.

This his uncle!

In his most hopeless moments he had never dreamed of anything like this. He gazed at the visitor as if he were hypnotised.

"Here's your nephew, sir!" said Mornington. "Here's your uncle, Smythe!"

Smythe did not move.

Mr. Smith bestowed an amiable grin on the Shell fellow.

"Ow are you, Adolphus?" he asked affectionately, seizing Smythe's limp hand and shaking it warmly.

"Ow are you, my boy? Ow's your father? Still in the same old show—wot?"

"The—the what?" murmured Tracy, who was looking in from the passage.

"Glad to see your old uncle—eh?" continued the jovial visitor. "Give us yer fin, kid! That's right! 'Ow's the old man? 'Ow's business in these 'ard times? Makin' piles of money in the grocery bizness these days—wot?"

"Grocery business!" murmured Howard. "Did you know Smythe's father kept a grocery, Tracy?"

"Never till now!" grinned Tracy. "Smythe's kept that dark."

"Oh, gad!" mumbled Smythe helplessly.

Mornington helped him to his feet. Smythe looked about him almost wildly.

He would gladly have disclaimed his uncle, treated him as a stranger, and bidden him go forth. But that he could not do. He would have had to reckon with the Fistical Four.

Besides, it was useless. No amount of denials on Smythe's part would have made the Rookwooders believe that Mr. Smith was not the uncle of the dandy of the Shell.

"So good of you to ask me 'ere!" continued Mr. Smith affably, breathing an aroma of rum over the unhappy Adolphus. "I was bucked, I can tell you, when that young gent kim and asked me. Werry kind of 'im."

"Oh, don't mench!" said Mornington.

"We're all jolly glad to see you, sir!" said Lovell. "I hope you're ready for tea. Smythe's got a ripping tea ready."

"Well, I could peck a bit," said Mr. Smith candidly. "I'll sit here, next to my nevv'y."

Adolphus sank limply into a chair. His terrible uncle sat beside him, beaming with satisfaction.

In spite of war-time economy, the board was well-spread. The Fistical Four had nobly sacrificed their own tea allowance for the occasion, and the table was graced with little extras from the tuckshop.

"Tea or coffee, sir?" asked Mornington. Mornington had constituted himself one of the entertainers. Certainly there was no snobbery about the dandy of the Fourth.

"Nuther!" said Mr. Smith. "I 'as my own drink, if you'll hexcuse me."

And he took a flask out of the inside pocket of his coat.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy. "Got a glarrss?" inquired Smythe's uncle.

A glass was forthcoming, and the liquor gurgled into it. Mr. Smith added water—a very little water—and drank with great satisfaction.

Then he ate.

Mr. Smith's methods of eating were peculiar, and certainly could not have been learned in the Army. He used only one implement—a knife. But he helped it out when necessary with his fingers.

Smythe of the Shell sat in dumb misery.

"Prime!" said Mr. Smith. "Spiffin'! I'll 'ave some more of that there rabbit."

Jimmy Silver helped him, apparently not noticing Mr. Smith's peculiar methods of helping himself. If Private Smith chose to eat with his fingers, it was nobody's business but his own, though Jimmy was certainly surprised.

He had seen a good many soldiers, but most assuredly he had never seen one like this before. But it was nobody's business to criticise a man who had fought the Germans.

There was no privacy about that tea-party. The study door remained open, and fellows kept looking in. Quite a little army had invaded the study to help look after Smythe's uncle. Smythe's uncle was the one object of interest at Rookwood that afternoon.

Certainly he was an interesting character.

The meal finished. Mr. Smith leaned back in his chair and proceeded to pick his teeth with a fork. It was the first time he had used a fork.

Even then the juniors did not turn a hair.

Smythe suppressed a groan.

He wondered whether he would ever hear the end of this. How was he ever to hold up his head again at Rookwood?

"You've done me proud, young gents!" said Mr. Smith. "I'm 'aving a 'appy afternoon. I wish my brother could see me now! We ain't been on speakin' terms for a long time, me bein' poor and Adolphus' father 'aving made a lot of money in 'is shop."

"My pater doesn't keep a shop!" said Smythe faintly.

"Wot! 'Ave he sold the old shop?" asked Mr. Smith, with an air of interest.

"He never did keep a shop!" gasped the miserable Smythe.

"Parted with it afore you was born, p'r'aps," assented the terrible uncle. "He'd be makin' a pot of money now if he'd kept it on, wot with war prices and sich. Does he still spend his evenin's at the Red Cow, like he used to?"

"No!" moaned Smythe. "I—I never heard of the Red Cow!"

There was a chortle from the passage. The Rookwooders were learning things about the Smythe family that they had never suspected before.

"I reckon I'll 'ave another drink," remarked Mr. Smith, and out came the flask again.

"Better go easy!" murmured Mornington, looking a little disquieted.

"Don't you be afeared, sir! I can stand it!" said Mr. Smith reassuringly. "You don't think I'd git squiffy in me nevv'y's quarters—wot? Bless your little 'eart, I'm used to it! You should 'ave seen Adolphus' father and me in our young days at the Red Cow, that you should!"

Adolphus shuddered.

It appeared that there were incidents in the earlier career of Smythe senior which had never been confided to his hopeful son.

Mr. Smith finished what was in the flask. His eyes began to look a little glassy, and his breath came thickly. Even Jimmy Silver, hospitable as he was, began to think it was about time the honoured guest took his departure.

The 7th Chapter. Spoofed!

"Time you were gettin' back to the camp, sir!" suggested Mornington.

"Camp! What camp?" asked Mr. Smith, turning a dull and glazy eye upon the dandy of the Fourth.

"Watcher talkin' about?" Mornington looked uneasy.

The Fistical Four exchanged glances.

Mr. Smith was evidently getting into an advanced state of intoxication. It was more and more surprising. But it was evidently the case.

Adolphus Smythe fixed a beseeching glance upon the Fistical Four. If only they would have got his uncle off the premises, the dandy of the Shell would have owed them a life-long debt of gratitude!

What had happened was bad enough, but suppose the tipsy man became quarrelsome! Suppose there was a row! Adolphus felt as if he would faint at the thought.

"Shall we see you to the gates, sir?" asked Jimmy Silver, uneasily but respectfully.

"Who yer torkin' to?"

"Ahem!"

"Come on, Mr. Smith!" said Mornington firmly, taking the honoured guest by the arm.

"Who yer callin' Smith?"

"Ahem!"

"My name ain't Smith!"

"Ahem! Come on!"

"'Ere, 'ands off!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. And he smote Mornington violently on the nose. Mornington gave a fearful yell, and sat down on the hearthrug.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Hanybody else got anything to say?" roared Mr. Smith, putting up his hands in a very warlike way.

"I'm ready for yer! Come on!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Who says I'm drunk?" continued Mr. Smith. "Who says so? That's what I want to know! Don't talk to me about early closin'! I ain't goin'! Don't you put your 'ands on me, young feller, 'cause you give me a pound!"

"Get him away!" breathed Smythe, in anguish.

Mornington got up, holding his nose. His nose was hurt. He kept a good distance from Mr. Smith.

Jimmy Silver was in utter dismay.

There was a hysterical chortle from the passage. The word was passing round that Smythe's uncle was squiffy, and was kicking up a shindy. Fellows came from far and near to see the shindy.

Mr. Smith lurched against the table, and set it rocking. Jimmy Silver caught his shoulder to steady him, and caught also a back-hander from the irate Mr. Smith, which sent him spinning.

"Yarool!" roared Jimmy.

"'Ands off!" roared Mr. Smith. "Think you can 'andle a gentleman, 'cause he's 'ad a drop to drink! Talk about chuckin' me hout! Bring out a man who can chuck me hout! I want to see that man! I'll make a beautiful corpus of 'im! Bring him hout, that's wot I say!"

"Oh, dear!"

"I—I say, Smythe, you'd better quieten your uncle."

Smythe only groaned with anguish.

Mr. Smith cast a defiant glare round the study, and in a stentorian voice invited all and sundry to "come on."

Nobody came on, and the irate gentleman staggered to the door. The juniors in the passage crowded back to make room for him to pass.

The honoured guest cast a look back into the study.

"I'm goin'," he announced. "I ain't stayin' 'ere any longer. Your beer's bad, an' I tell you so to your face! Your beer's bad, an' you charge too high. And if you don't like it, you foller me out. I'm goin' to wait outside for yer!"

And Mr. Smith, evidently under the impression that he was shaking the dust of a public-house from his feet, zigzagged away down the passage.

"Oh, by gad!" murmured Mornington.

The fellows in the corridor crowded out of the honoured guest's way, and with great relief saw him lurch out into the quadrangle. Fortunately, the dusk was falling, and Mr. Smith's zigzaggy course to the gates was not generally observed. He stopped a few minutes at the gates, to tell Mack the porter what he thought of him, and then disappeared into the road, leaving old Mack dumbfounded.

In Smythe's study, Jimmy Silver wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Phew!" he remarked.

"Cheer up, Smythe, he's gone!" said Lovell encouragingly.

Smythe only groaned. The victims of the Spanish Inquisition probably never suffered more severely than the dandy of Rookwood at that moment.

Mornington, who was watching from the window, turned back into the study with a grin on his face.

"He's cleared off," he remarked. "That's luck. I never knew anything about the flask. I knew he was a boozy beast, but I didn't foresee that."

"Don't call him names," said Jimmy Silver tartly. "I dare say he's been through a lot, and there's lots of excuses for him."

"Through a lot of drink, you mean," grinned Mornington.

"Smythe, old scout, don't you wish you'd invited your uncle to Rookwood yourself?"

Smythe rose to his feet, his face quite white.

"You rotter!" he said. "You cad! You knew what he was like, as you'd seen him, and you planted him on me here. You rotter! I shall get out of Rookwood after this. I shall write to my father to-night, to take me away."

Even Jimmy Silver felt sorry for Smythe of the Shell at that moment. If ever a wretched snob had been severely punished, Adolphus Smythe had been.

"Oh, it's not so bad 'as that, Smythe!" said Mornington.

"Do you think I can look the fellows in the face again?" groaned Adolphus. "Oh, gad! I—I never dreamed he was anything like that!"

And Smythe almost broke down.

"It was rather thick," remarked Oswald. "But cheer up, Smythe! You didn't bring your uncle up, you know."

Mornington laughed.

"Yes, cheer up, old scout," he said. "You've only got yourself to thank for this, you know. If you hadn't been such a measly, rotten snob, you'd have seen your uncle before—"

"What difference would that have made, you rotter?"

"Lots!" grinned Mornington. "If you'd been to Latham to see your uncle, or asked him here, as any decent fellow would have done, you'd have known him by sight, and then you'd have known that this chap wasn't your uncle."

"What!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Wha-a-at!" stammered Adolphus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington. "It's all serene, Smythe. It wasn't your uncle; your uncle's in khaki at Latham Camp, and I've never set eyes on him."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Then—"

"Not my uncle!" stammered Adolphus.

"Ha, ha! No."

"Then who was he?" shrieked Smythe furiously.

"A loafer at the Bird-in-Hand," said Mornington coolly. "I gave him a quid to come here and spoof you."

"Oh, gad!"

"If you hadn't been a howling ass you couldn't have been spoofed like that!" said Mornington. "Do you think they'd have that frowsy ruffian in the Army? You utter ass! He's a pub loafer, and hasn't had a bath in his life. And if you'd treated your uncle decently, you couldn't have been spoofed. Feel better now?" he added, with a grin.

Smythe's face had brightened wonderfully.

"Oh, you—you rotter!" he gasped. "He ain't my uncle, thank goodness; but—lots of the fellows will say he was, all the same."

"Then you'd better ask your real uncle here, to prove that he wasn't," grinned Mornington, and he walked out of the study.

The Fistical Four followed him, chortling. It had been "spoof" from beginning to end, and when they came to think of it, Jimmy Silver & Co. were surprised that they hadn't guessed it.

Adolphus Smythe sank into a chair, gasping. He had been through a terrible afternoon. But the discovery that that awful personage was not his uncle, was comforting.

All Rookwood chortled over Morny's little joke, and agreed that it served Adolphus right. Some of the fellows, however, persisted in affecting to believe that that dreadful visitor was Smythe's uncle, all the same, and in self-defence Smythe had to do what he ought to have done at first.

And one afternoon he was seen coming in at the gates with a middle-aged but very sturdy and well-set-up man in khaki—the real uncle at last—a handsome, soldierly-looking man of whom any of the Rookwood fellows would have been proud.

All Rookwood was welcome to see Private Smith—and all Rookwood treated him very respectfully—and the snob of the Shell was quite satisfied with his uncle. Whether Private Smith was equally satisfied with Adolphus for a nephew was another question.

THE END.

(Another magnificent long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND, entitled: "Left in the Lurch!" Don't miss this fine story.)

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