

"Andy" Ducat of Fulham and Billy Williams of West Ham on Football! IN THIS ISSUE.

# The BOYS' FRIEND <sup>1d</sup>/<sub>2</sub>

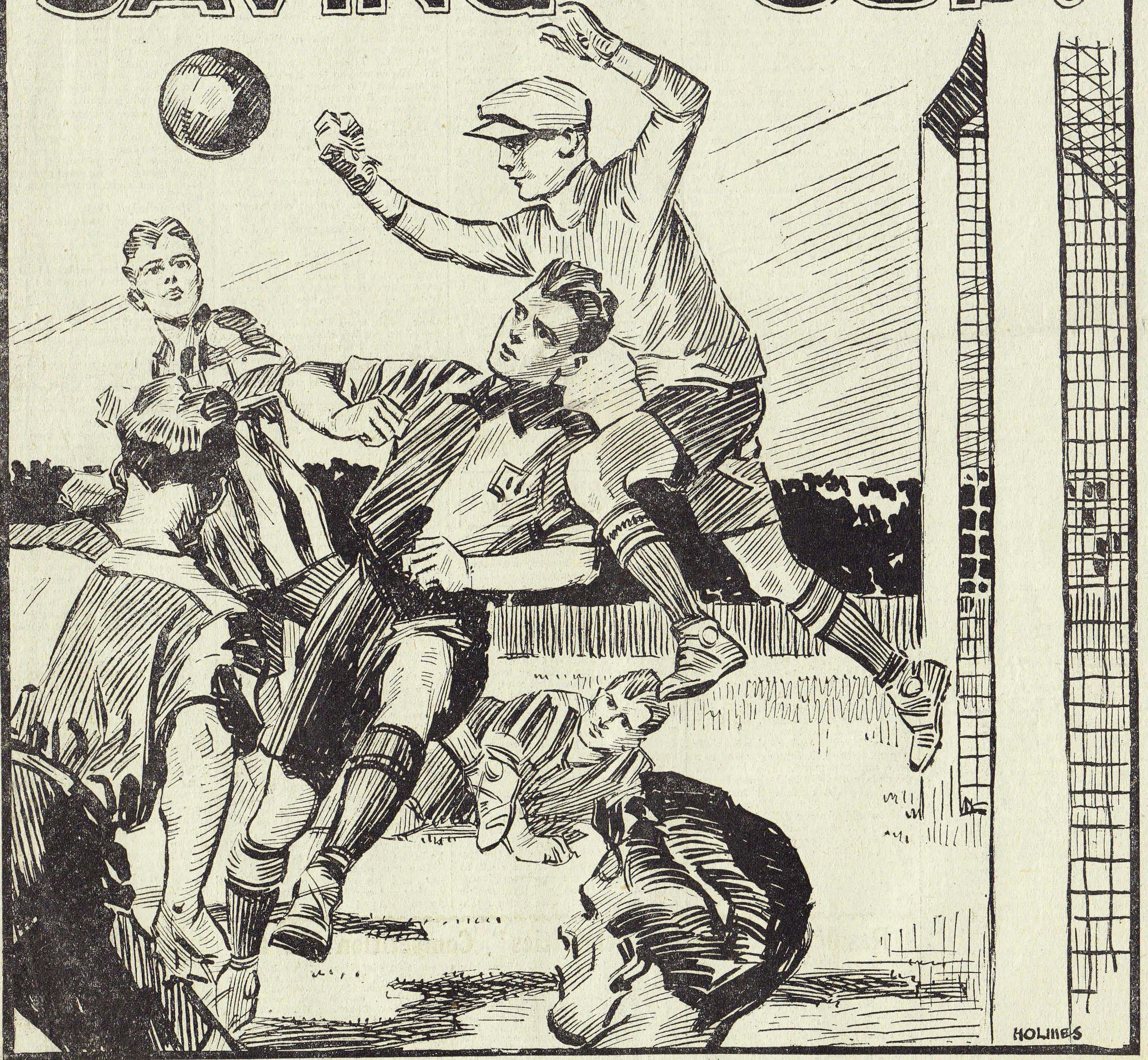
TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending October 8th, 1921.

## SAVING THE CUP!

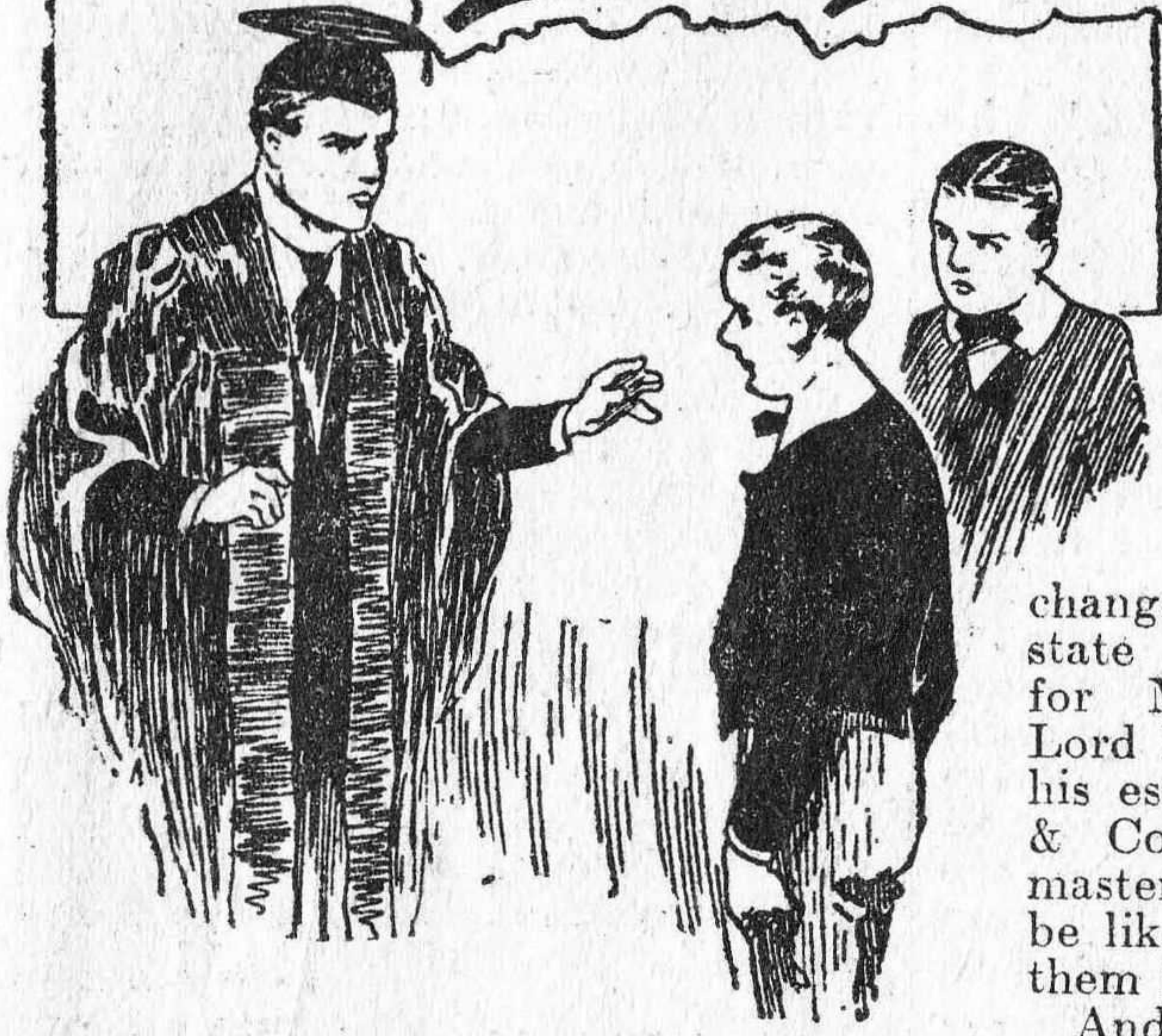


**"WELL SAVED, SIR!"**

Two of the Weldeley forwards came rushing right up to the mouth of the goal, and there was a dull thud as one of them sent the ball soaring ahead—straight for goal. But the young player between the sticks remained quite cool, and at the right moment fisted the leather out of the danger zone. Among his many accomplishments it was very evident that Mr. Edwards of London could keep goal!

A LONG, COMPLETE, ROOKWOOD SCHOOL STORY BY OWEN CONQUEST.

# The Forbidden Fight!



## The 1st Chapter.

### Mr. Dalton Puts His Foot Down!

"Old Dalton's in a wax!" The gentleman to whom Arthur Edward Lovell referred in that free-and-easy manner was Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

There was no doubt that he was in a "wax."

The Rookwood Fourth were all in their places when Mr. Dalton came into the Form-room that morning, and as soon as the frown on his brow was perceived, all whispering and shuffling of feet ceased as if by magic.

The Fourth Form decided upon the spot to be very good that morning. Tubby Muffin even jerked a chunk of toffee from his fat cheek, and slipped it hastily under his desk.

When that frown was seen on Mr. Dalton's brow, all the Rookwood Fourth knew that it was time to be good.

Only Valentine Mornington lounged back in his seat a little, with a careless air, as if, to let the other fellows see that he was not dismayed by a frowning Form-master.

Mr. Dalton stopped before the class, and fixed his eyes upon them. It was clear that something was coming before lessons.

The Fourth sat tight, and waited for the thunder to roll, as it were.

Jimmy Silver hastily ran over in his mind the sins he had lately been guilty of, wondering whether it was upon his devoted head that the storm was going to burst.

Upon the whole, Jimmy's conscience was fairly clear. It was true that he had "stumped" Morny in the end study the previous evening, for his own good, but Mr. Dalton couldn't know that.

It was true that he had, with the assistance of Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, ducked Tommy Dodd's head in the fountain in Little Quad that morning. But that was only a joke on a Modern fellow.

True, he had knocked off Smythe's silk hat in a playful moment. But the silk topper of Smythe of the Shell was really fair game.

On the whole, Jimmy felt fairly well satisfied that he was not the culprit. But somebody was the culprit, that was clear.

There was only a moment or two of suspense, but those few moments seemed very long ones to the juniors. Then Mr. Dalton's deep voice sounded.

"Mornington!" Everybody but Mornington looked relieved.

It was the scapegrace of the Fourth who was in trouble again. Only Erroll, Morny's chum, looked concerned.

"Yes, sir!" said Mornington calmly.

"Stand out before the class!" "Certainly, sir!" said Mornington coolly.

He loafed out from his desk with a studied impertinence of manner that was not lost on his Form-master. Mr. Dalton, however, did not seem to heed it.

"Morcom!" The new junior at Rookwood started.

A very startled look came over his handsome, careless face. Morcom of the Fourth had a secret known only to Jimmy Silver & Co. in all Rookwood. For the moment he thought that Mr. Dalton had discovered it, and he was startled and dismayed.

"Oh! Yes, sir?" faltered Morcom.

"Stand out here!" The new junior stepped out quietly. Jimmy Silver gave him a sympathetic glance as he passed.

The thought was in Jimmy's mind,

too, that Morcom's secret was discovered; that the school authorities had learned that Lord Bob Egerton had come to Rookwood in the name and place of Dick Morcom, the gamekeeper's son.

The Fistical Four exchanged glances, and waited in a state of almost painful anxiety for Mr. Dalton's next words. Lord Bob had done no harm by his escapade; but Jimmy Silver & Co. knew that the Form-master and the Head would not be likely to see eye to eye with them in the matter.

And they liked Lord Bob—all the more because, though he was a marquis' son, he was chummy with the son of a gamekeeper, valuing his chum for his own personal qualities and nothing else.

Mornington and Morcom stood facing the Form-master, and for some moments a pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth Form-room.

The only movement was made by Tubby Muffin, who ventured to replace the chunk of toffee in his capacious mouth, feeling that Mr. Dalton's attention was now fully engaged elsewhere.

Contrary to the expectations of the Fistical Four, and of Morcom himself, it was Valentine Mornington whom Mr. Dalton addressed first.

"Mornington, I have to speak very severely to you."

"Indeed, sir!" said Morny coolly.

"Yes, I understand"—here Mr. Dalton turned to the class—"I understand that a set has been made in this Form by some members of it against the new boy, Morcom. Some members of the Fourth affect to look down on the boy because he is a gamekeeper's son, and assume that he is not good enough for them to associate with. This snobbishness is despicable."

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled, and looked relieved at the same time. Evidently Lord Bob's secret was safe. In Mr. Dalton's eyes he was still Dick Morcom, the gamekeeper's son.

Townsend and Topham looked very uncomfortable, and Lattrey and Peele and Gower kept their eyes on their desks. They had been the chiefs of the "set" against Morcom in the Fourth.

They had been offended by the cheek of the gamekeeper's son in coming between the wind and their nobility, as it were, little dreaming that the "outsider" whom they loftily despised was in reality the son of the Marquis of Maybrook.

"Mornington, I understand, is a leader of this contemptible movement," resumed Mr. Dalton.

He fixed his eyes now on the dandy of the Fourth.

"Quite so, sir!" said Morny, with the same impertinent coolness as before.

"You admit it, Mornington?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" exclaimed the Fourth Form-master sternly.

"Not at all, sir!"

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips, and some of the Fourth grinned.

"I understand," continued the Form-master, after a pause, "that you have quarrelled with the new boy, Mornington, and that a fight is in contemplation."

"Yes, sir."

"I need not ask who began the quarrel, Mornington."

"That's not necessary, sir. It was I."

From somewhere in the Form a chuckle was heard. It died away instantly as Mr. Dalton glanced over the class.

"This impertinence will not benefit you, Mornington," said the master of the Fourth, after a slight pause.

"Excuse me, sir. I wasn't meanin' to be impertinent," said Mornington cheerfully. "I was only answerin' your questions, sir."

"I forbid this fight to take place!" said Mr. Dalton. "You hear me, Mornington?"

"I hear you, sir."

"And you, Morcom?"

"Very well, sir."

"Silver, as head boy of the Form, I leave it to you to see that this fight does not take place," said Mr. Dalton.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I will not allow so silly and snobbish a persecution to proceed in this Form while I am master!" said Mr. Dalton. "I trust, Mornington, that reflection will lead you to take a more manly and worthy view."

"It's not likely, sir!" said Morny. Mr. Dalton looked grim.

"Morcom, you may return to your place. Mornington, I shall cane you for your insolence!"

He picked up his cane from the desk.

"Your hand, Mornington!"

For a moment the scapegrace of Rookwood hesitated, as if it was in his mind to defy his Form-master there and then. But wiser thoughts prevailed, and he held out his hand.

Swish!

Mornington winced under the severe cut; he could not help it. But no sound came from his lips.

"You may go back to your place, Mornington," said the Form-master curtly.

Valentine Mornington returned to his desk.

His eyes were glittering, and when they turned on Dick Morcom, they glittered yet more venomously. Morny was very quiet and subdued during lessons that morning; but his face was hard and set, and several times he glanced at Morcom with a glitter in his eyes. And most of the Fourth opined that, in spite of Mr. Dalton's prohibition, the fight would come off all the same after lessons.



**TIMELY INTERVENTION!** "You will 'ave it!" snarled the tramp, whirling his cudgel into the air. But the blow did not fall. There was a sound of running feet on the path, and a heavy fist crashed on the ruffian's ear. "Morcom!" gasped Mornington.

## The 2nd Chapter.

### Morny Means Business!

Jimmy Silver touched Morny on the arm, in the corridor, when the Fourth were dismissed.

Morny gave him a sullen look.

"You heard what old Dalton said, Morny," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Your scrap with Morcom is off."

"I heard what old Dalton said, and my scrap with Morcom is not off," answered Mornington deliberately.

Jimmy set his lips.

"It's left to me to stop it," he said.

"Stop it if you can," said Mornington, with a shrug of the shoulders; and he turned his back on the captain of the Fourth, and walked away.

Jimmy Silver breathed very hard. But he did not follow Mornington then. He joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome in heading for the football-ground, to punt a ball about before dinner.

The task that his Form-master had set him was not an agreeable one to Jimmy; but there were responsibilities attached to the position of Form-captain, and that was one of them. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and Jimmy had intended to devote it to football practice and coaching. It looked as

if he would have to waste this afternoon keeping an eye on Valentine Mornington—which was not a pleasant prospect, and was, in fact, very exasperating.

Mornington strolled into the quadrangle with his hands in his pockets, and Kit Erroll joined him there. Morny gave him a cheery nod.

"You're goin' to be my second?" he asked.

"The fight's not coming off—"

"The fight is comin' off!"

"Morny, you can't—"

"Will you be my second?" interrupted Mornington curtly.

"Not in the circumstances," said Erroll. "I wish you'd give up the idea, Morny. It's not worthy of you to act as leader to a gang of silly snobs like Towny & Co. It's not like you to be down on a poor chap for things he can't help—even if there were anything to be ashamed of in a fellow having poor parents. You never were really a snob."

"Preachin' again!" yawned Mornington.

Erroll flushed.

"If you call it preaching, to ask you to act like a decent fellow, instead of acting like a silly snob, like Towny or Smythe—"

"That's enough!" said Mornington.

He sauntered away, leaving his chum alone. Townsend & Co. were by the beeches in the quad, and Morny joined them. He received smiles of welcome on all sides.

Towny & Co. had hardly hoped that a fellow like Mornington would join in their little game, and even become their leader in it. The Knuts of the Fourth were prepared to welcome Morny with open arms.

"Rotten, Dalton chippin' in like that!" said Townsend, arranging his

"Bravo, Morny!"

"Which of you fellows is goin' to be my second?" asked Mornington.

The enthusiasm of the Fourth Form Knuts seemed to subside a little. They were keen enough to see the rank outsider licked by Mornington or to hear he had been licked. But no one in the Knutty crowd seemed eager to incur the wrath of Mr. Dalton by taking part in the proceedings.

Morny surveyed them with a slightly sarcastic smile.

The snobs of Rookwood had welcomed him as their leader; but Morny was not exactly proud of his followers.

At the bottom of his heart he was ashamed of the line he was taking; ashamed of the leadership that had fallen into his hands. But he was in one of his evil moods, and nothing would have induced him to turn back.

"Don't all speak at once!" he remarked satirically. "You're all eager, of course. What about you, Towny?"

"Hem!" murmured Townsend.

"You, Toppo?"

Topham looked very uncomfortable.

"Or you, Smythe—"

"Hem! If your Form-master's forbidden it—"

"He has!"

"Well, I hardly think a fellow from another Form ought to chip 'in, in that case," said Smythe, shaking his head.

"You—you see, Morny, it's bound to come out, and Dalton will be in a fearful wax," said Townsend.

"Then Silver will be chippin' in, after what Dalton said to him. I really think it would be better for you to go into this on your own."

"Especially as Morcom won't have any second, in the circus," said Gower. "He's made friends here—Silver and that set—but they won't

spotless cuffs. "Like his cheek, I think."

"Oh, rather!" said Topham.

"Don't see how he knows anythin' about the fight bein' arranged," said Gower. "Has Morcom sneaked to him to get out of it?"

"Very likely," remarked Smythe of the Shell.

"I dare say he heard some talk; there's been enough talk about it," said Mornington carelessly. Perverse as he was, Morny would not join in what he knew to be unjust detraction; he knew that Morcom was incapable of acting as Gower suggested.

"Anyhow, the fight's goin' on just the same."

"Morcom won't, after what Dalton said!" observed Tracy.

"Then I shall make him."

"Good old Morny!" said Townsend approvingly. "Of course, that's exactly what the pushin' outsider wants—a good thrashin' from one of us!"

"Exactly!" assented Topham.

"He's goin' to get it, if I can give it to him," said Mornington. "It can't take place here; but it will be easy enough outside the school, and to-day's a half-holiday."

second him after what Mr. Dalton's said."

"Give him a jolly good lickin', Morny," added Townsend. "You have our very best wishes, of course."

"But you won't second me?" sneered Mornington.

"Well, you see—"

Smythe and Tracy strolled away. Townsend & Co. looked very uncomfortable. Morny had their very best and sincerest wishes for what they were worth. But it was very clear that they weren't going to risk the wrath of their Form-master in the matter.

"Well, it may interest you to know that I never expected any of you to have grit enough to stand out against Dalton," said Mornington. "I was only pullin' your leg. I knew you were all too jolly funky!"

And with that, Valentine Mornington walked away, leaving the Knuts of the Fourth looking more uncomfortable than ever. Morny had a bitter tongue when he let it go; and there never was any telling when he would let it go.

The dandy of the Fourth sauntered about the quadrangle till he came on Morcom. The new junior was

feeding the pigeons in Little Quad when Morny came up.

"What time and place will suit you this afternoon, Morcom?" asked Morny.

Morcom looked at him.

"The fight's off," he said.

"Not at all. It's no good thinkin' of shelterin' yourself behind what Mr. Dalton said!" sneered Mornington. "You're goin' to stand up to me all the same."

"Can't be done!"

"Then you're afraid, as well as bein' a low hound and a pushin', shovin' outsider!" said Mornington. Morcom coloured.

"If you don't fix up time and place, outside Rookwood, and meet me this afternoon," continued Mornington, "I'm goin' to give you the coward's blow before all the fellows. Perhaps that will stir you up a little!"

"I think you would be stirred up a little if you did," said Morcom. "I should knock you down at once!"

"That means a fight here instead of outside the school."

"I suppose it does!" said Morcom, after a pause. "Well, I'll go out of gates after dinner. I'll wait for you on the footpath in Coombe Wood!"

"Done!" said Mornington.

And he walked away, with his hands in his pockets, whistling, apparently in a very cheery mood.

### The 3rd Chapter. In Coombe Wood!

"Football!" said Lovell, after dinner. And Raby and Newcome nodded.

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful. "We ought to be getting on with practice," he said. "But what about Morcom and that confounded Morny? I've got to see that they don't scrap."

"Let's give Morny another ragging, same as we did when he came to our study after the new kid!" suggested Lovell.

"That wouldn't stop him."

"Look here," said Arthur Edward Lovell warmly, "we can't waste a dashed afternoon looking after a dashed hot-headed dummy like Mornington. Besides, Erroll's his keeper, not us."

"Let's make him come down to the footer!" suggested Raby.

"He wouldn't, in the circus."

"Then let's make Morcom come to the footer. He would. Morny can't fight him then."

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's all right! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Rats! Let's gather up Morcom, and take him along."

The Fistical Four proceeded to look for Morcom. Football was beginning at Rookwood, and the chums of the Fourth were very keen on it—there were big matches coming along, and Jimmy Silver wanted to be prepared for them. Certainly he didn't want to waste that sunny, fine autumn afternoon. But when Morcom was found, he didn't seem very keen on footer.

"I—I was going out—" he said.

Jimmy linked an arm in the new junior's.

"We know all about that," he said. "Morny's going out, too, I suppose?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Well, if he's going out, you're staying in. Come along and help to trundle the ball, dear boy," grinned Jimmy.

"But—"

"This way!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

And Morcom was walked off to the football ground.

He went very reluctantly and undecidedly, especially as he saw Morny, in the distance, strolling down to the gates. Morny was going to keep the appointment in the footpath in Coombe Wood, and he would wait there for his adversary. But it was clear that Jimmy Silver & Co. were not to be argued with—indeed, they were prepared to walk their new friend off by force, if he refused to accompany them. So Morcom changed into footer rig, and joined in the practice—much to Jimmy's satisfaction. Morcom's presence on the football field enabled the captain of the Fourth to kill two birds with one stone, as it were—to see that the fight did not take place, and to get on with the footer. And Jimmy, busy with his duties as captain and coach, did not think of guessing that the new junior was only waiting for an opportunity to slip away and keep his appointment in the wood.

Meanwhile, Valentine Mornington was strolling down Coombe Lane at a leisurely pace. He looked back once or twice to see whether Morcom was following, and he gave a start at the sight of Kit Erroll hurrying down the lane after him. He did not stop,

but Erroll broke into a run and came up with him.

"Hold on, Morny!" he said, rather breathlessly.

"Changed your mind?" asked Mornington, with a cynical grin. "You're goin' to be my second after all?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what do you want?" asked Mornington roughly.

"I want you to come back to the footer," said Erroll quietly, but with a note of pleading in his voice. "Morny, old man, do listen to me—"

"Go and eat coke!" said Mornington deliberately. "I'm goin' to wait for the outsider in Coombe Wood. It's arranged."

"He can't come. Silver's taken him to the footer—"

Morny's eyes glittered.

"You're goin' to play footer?" he asked.

Erroll nodded.

"Then you'll see Morcom. Give him a message from me. Tell him I'll wait an hour, if necessary, in Coombe Wood. If he doesn't turn up by that time, I shall conclude that he's afraid to come, and I shall come back, and give him the coward's blow on the footer field."

"I shall certainly not tell him anything of the kind," exclaimed Erroll angrily.

"Well, I'm keepin' to that, whether you tell him or not. And now let me alone."

Mornington walked on again. Erroll stood for some minutes, looking after his perverse chum with a clouded brow. Then he turned away, and slowly made his way back to Rookwood. There was nothing he could do further—his appeals were lost on his wilful chum. But Erroll's face was not so cheery as usual as he joined Jimmy Silver & Co. on Little Side.

The dandy of the Fourth turned into the footpath through Coombe Wood, and walked on towards the heath. He stopped about a quarter of a mile along the path, in the loneliest spot in it.

There he leaned against a gnarled old oak, and waited.

There was a twittering of birds in the trees and thickets round him; brown leaves were already falling in the autumn winds, and they carpeted the ground. Save for the birds, and the rustle of the leaves in the wind, the wood was very silent.

Mornington stood watching the path from Coombe Lane, expecting every moment to see Morcom appear. But the well-knit figure of the outsider did not show up on the footpath. The minutes passed, and Valentine Mornington stirred uneasily again and again.

In the silence and solitude of the brown woods, Morny was thinking—he could not help thinking. His black mood was passing—as it always passed, in the long run, giving place to better thoughts. Why, after all, had he quarrelled with Morcom? Why had he placed himself at the head of the snobs? He was not a snob himself—that was not one of his many faults—though his careless words might often have led others to think so. He did not care a button whether a gamekeeper's son came to Rookwood or not—indeed, he openly liked Rawson, the scholarship junior, whose father was a plumber. Why had he allowed his unruly temper and dogged pride to lead him into this bitter quarrel? Because Morcom had not been civil, he told himself savagely. But the inward monitor answered: Morcom had been civil enough, but he had not been servile—and that, in truth, was what the dandy of the Fourth had expected of him. He flushed at the realisation of that came home to his mind.

His whole line of conduct had been—what? There was only one word for it—it had been mean! He was a worthy leader of Townsend & Co.—the fellows who had egged him on in this quarrel, but had not had the grit to stand by him in it and take the same risks as himself! Morcom, whatever he was, was worth the whole bunch of them.

In the silence and solitude, Mornington's unavoidable reflections were doing him good! But his handsome face set hard and dogged—even the knowledge that he was in the wrong—utterly in the wrong—was not enough to move the perverse junior from his purpose. What he had said he would do, that he would do, come what might! Right or wrong, he would go on as he had started. When Morcom came, there was going to be a fight under the old oaks and beeches—a fight to a finish.

But Morcom did not appear. Morny glanced at his watch—the hour had elapsed. Was the fellow a coward after all?

He almost jumped at the thought

—as a justification of his attitude towards the new junior. If he was a coward, it didn't matter how a fellow treated him! He would have been glad to think Morcom a coward—and yet he knew all the time that the probability was that Morcom was unable to get away from Jimmy Silver's watchful eye. But if he didn't come—

There was a footfall on the dead leaves of the path. But it came from behind Mornington. Had the fellow, new to the country, missed his way, and come by another path? Mornington looked round, along the path leading to the heath, expecting to see Dick Morcom. He started a little as his eyes fell upon a bull-necked, broad-shouldered man, in dirty, ragged garb, with a thick stick under his arm, and an evil leer on his beery face.

The tramp—the most evil-looking tramp that Morny's eyes had ever fallen upon—stopped as he saw the junior, and then came quite close to him, breathing out an aroma of mingled beer, rum, and stale tobacco that made the junior move back in disgust. His expression did not escape the ruffian's notice, and a scowl came over the evil, beery face.

"Elp a pore man on his way sir," said the tramp, letting his stick slide down into his dirty hand in a very suggestive manner.

"I've got nothin' for you!" said Mornington curtly.

"Haven't you, sir?" The ruffian looked up and down the path. It was lonely and deserted, as far as it could be seen to the windings in either direction. "I'll trouble you for something, all the same, my young bantam. Waitin' 'ere for somebody—what?"

"Mind you own business."

"Just my luck to 'appen on you in this 'ere beautiful spot!" grinned the ruffian. "'Ere's me, thirsty as a man can be what hasn't had a drink since mornin'; and 'ere's you, with your pockets full of money, and a gold watch and chain. Why, this here is a regular windfall, this here is. You goin' to turn out your pockets?"

"No!" said Mornington, between his teeth.

He backed away along the footpath, but he would not take to his heels.

"Not goin' to 'and over that there watch and chain?"

"No, you thief!"

"It's no odds, I'm going to take them, my young bantam!"

And the man made a rush at Mornington.

Morny sprang lightly aside, and as the ruffian swerved round on him he hit out with all his strength. There was a gasping howl from the rough as Morny's hard knuckles crashed on his nose.

"Thunder! I'll settle yer!" he roared.

Morny struck again as the ruffian closed in on him. Another blow landed in the beery face, and then a lash of the stick caused Morny's arm to fall helpless to his side. The next moment the ruffian's grip was on him, and he was borne to the earth.

"Now, then, my young cock-chaffer!" said the ruffian through his clenched teeth. "Now—Oh!"

With his left Morny struck up at the brutal face bending over him, and the tramp gave a howl as his teeth rattled under the blow. He spat out a fearful oath, and whirled his cudgel into the air.

"You will 'ave it!" he snarled. In spite of his nerve and courage, Mornington closed his eyes as the heavy cudgel swept above his head.

But the blow did not fall. At the same moment there came a sound of running feet on the dead leaves of the path, a heavy fist crashed on the ruffian's ear, and he went spinning away from his victim. Mornington rolled over, panting, staring.

"Who—what—" He gasped. "Morcom!"

### The 4th Chapter. The Right Thing!

Dick Morcom had caught sight of the startling scene on the footpath, as he came round the bend among the beeches and oaks. He was only just in time. The new junior of Rookwood was clad in football shorts and jersey. He was just as he had slipped away from Little Side, while Jimmy Silver's busy eye was elsewhere. It was fortunate for Mornington, as it turned out, that Morcom had eluded there to keep his appointment in Coombe Wood.

He had come there to fight Valentine Mornington; but he did not think of that as he saw the ruffian bending over the fallen junior with upraised cudgel. He rushed in at top speed, and struck before the ruffian was quite aware of his arrival.

Morny sat dazedly in the grass, blinking and staring as the tramp rolled over.

But the ruffian was down only for a few moments. He scrambled to his feet, with a furious oath.

His cudgel had fallen from his hand as he fell, and he dived towards it, but Dick Morcom was first. He had no time to pick up the cudgel, but he set his foot on it, and faced the ruffian with his fists.

"Back up, Mornington!" he shouted.

"By gad!" gasped Morny.

He staggered to his feet. His right arm was almost paralysed by the blow it had received from the cudgel, but Morny hardly felt the pain. He was not likely to stand idle while his rescuer faced the burly ruffian alone.

Morcom stood up gallantly to the ruffian, but the man's weight and strength bore him backward. He hit out, and his blows were hefty ones, but they had little effect on the hulking brute before him. A fierce drive that landed on his chest sent Morcom spinning against a tree, and the tramp followed him up, cornering him there. His savage, stubby face glared close to Morcom's, and his knuckly fist was drawn back for a blow that would have crashed Morcom's head back against the tree-trunk.

But Mornington had the cudgel in his left hand now, and was rushing at the tramp from behind.

Crash!

Mornington was not likely to stand on ceremony just then. He put in that blow with the cudgel with all the strength of his arm. It caught the ruffian on the side of the head, and he crumpled up under it.

Morcom gasped as the hulking form went limply into the grass. Mornington stood, with blazing eyes, ready to repeat the blow without mercy, if the ruffian tried to get on his feet again. But that blow had been enough. The tramp was stunned, or nearly so, and he lay in the grass, gasping stertorously.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Morcom.

"Better get out of this," said Valentine Mornington coolly. "Shall I give him another to keep him quiet?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Morcom hastily.

Mornington laughed.

"Then let's clear," he said.

"The sooner the better," said Morcom. "That brute is a bit too hefty for my taste."

The two juniors went down the footpath towards Coombe Lane together, Mornington keeping possession of the cudgel, in case the ruffian followed. But the tramp had had enough. He sat up in the grass, holding his damaged head with both hands, and poured out a stream of gasping curses, but he did not follow the juniors. Tough as he was he was not feeling equal to taking any more.

The Rookwooders did not run, but they walked pretty fast. They came out into the open sunshine of Coombe Lane at last, and there Valentine Mornington tossed the cudgel away over the tree-tops.

Morcom looked at him rather queerly.

"That's rather spoiled our programme," he remarked.

"You're late," said Mornington.

Morcom laughed.

"Jimmy Silver was keeping a fatherly eye on me. I couldn't get away sooner. Sorry! Still, it's lucky I wasn't later."

"I believe that boozey brute would have cracked my skull in another minute," said Mornington, with a little shiver.

"Looked like it."

"And you stopped him," said Mornington, with a very curious look at the new junior. "Do you know you might have been smashed up for chipping in like that?"

"I didn't stop to think about that," said Morcom, smiling. "Anything the matter with your arm?" he added.

"I got a crack on it; it feels pretty stiff," said Mornington. "I'm rather afraid our scrap's off, Morcom. My arm won't be fit for punching a fellow's face for a week, I fancy, if by then. And—and there's another reason." He paused a moment. "You chipped in to help me, like a really decent and plucky fellow, Morcom."

"What rot!" said Morcom. "I suppose you'd have done the same. That needn't make any difference."

"That isn't all," said Mornington, speaking very slowly. "The fact is, I'd done some thinking before that happened. It occurred to me that I've been acting like a rotten cad, and—and I beg your pardon, Morcom?"

"Oh gad!"

Morcom stared at him. This was about the last remark he had ever

expected to hear from Valentine Mornington.

"I mean it," said Morny. "I'm not such a silly snob as I made myself out to be, and I'm sorry!"

"Were you going to tell me this when I met you in the wood?"

Mornington coloured.

"No; not if that hadn't happened. But now, I'm telling you. If you're bent on a scrap, I'm your man, when my arm's better. But—but—but I'd rather shake hands with you, Morcom, if you can look over my acting like a snob and a rotter!"

Dick Morcom held out his hand impulsively. Mornington shook it with his left.

"I never did care a rap about who or what you are," added Mornington remorsefully. "I'm not really a snob. It was only my rotten temper. If I've hurt your feelings, I'm sorry. Sorry, honest Injun!"

Morcom chuckled.

"You haven't hurt my feelings, old top," he said. "I'll relieve your mind on that score, now we're friends. Keep it dark, though. You see, I happen to be Lord Bob Egerton and—"

"What?"

"And Dick Morcom's gone on my holiday in Cornwall, while I came here in his place, to see what the place was like before he put his nose in," said the new junior, chuckling. "I'm glad I did. Poor old Dick would have had his feelings hurt; no mistake about that! But my feelings are quite proof against bein' hurt, under the circumstances. See? In fact, I believe Towner and Topsy will be quite repentant when they find out that they've been makin' a dead set against a son of the Marquis of Maybrook. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington stared blankly.

"Is that—is that true?" he gasped. "Sorry—I mean, does anybody else know?"

"Jimmy Silver & Co. I met them in the holidays in my own name," chuckled Morcom. "They're keeping it dark—and you're going to."

"Of course!" said Mornington dazedly.

The two juniors walked back to Rookwood together. Valentine Mornington did not speak till they reached the gates of the school. Then he broke the silence suddenly.

"By gad! I'm glad I—I did the decent thing before I knew the facts, Morcom! I'm jolly glad of that!"

And Lord Bob nodded and smiled.

### The Fifth Chapter. A Slight Surprise!

"Here they are!"

"Collar them!"

Four incensed juniors rushed on Morcom and Mornington, as they came in at the gates.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were wrathful.

"You cheeky rotters!" bawled Arthur Edward Lovell. "You've been out scrapping, after Mr. Dalton told Jimmy specially to see that you didn't! Well, now you're going to have some more, both of you!"

"Yes, rather!" said Raby vengefully. "We've had to chuck footer to look for you; and now we've found you—"

"You wanted scrapping, and now you're going to get it," said Newcome. "Mop up the ground with them, you fellows!"

"Pile in!" said Jimmy Silver tersely.

"We haven't been fightin', you crass chumps!" howled Mornington.

"What?"

"You asses!" exclaimed Morny, as the Fistical Four released the two, in sheer astonishment. "Do you think we should trot home together like this if we'd been scrapping?"

"Well—no—but—"

"I thought—" began Jimmy Silver, in bewilderment.

"My dear man, you can't think," said Mornington. "We've been havin' a pleasant chat in the lane, haven't we, Morcom?"

"Yes," grinned Morcom.

"Like good friends, as we are!" continued Mornington.

"Exactly!"

Mornington strolled on through the quad with Morcom, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. staring blankly.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell. Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose.

"Blessed if I understand!" he said. "But a chap never does understand Morny! It seems all right, though. Let's get back to the footer."

And the Fistical Four returned to Little Side, puzzled but satisfied. It was evident that the forbidden fight was not coming off, and that was all they cared about.

THE END.

("The Rookwood Charity Boy" is the title of the grand, long, complete Rookwood School story appearing in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. Secure your copy by ordering NOW!)