

SAVED FROM DISGRACE!

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the Adventures of Jimmy Silver and His Merry Chums at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST, (Author of the Grand School Yarns appearing in the "Boys' Friend.")

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Adolphus is Disgusted!

"MORNINGTON minor, by gad!" Smythe of the Shell chortled as he made the remark. His bosom pals, Howard and Tracy, chortled, 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.

Not that he was any relation to Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth.

His name was 'Erbert, and, so far as he knew, he had no other name.

He did not belong to Rookwood; but he was there. Mornington, the slacker and dandy, and the great chief of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood, had brought him into the school in the first place.

Morny's pals simply did not know what to make of it.

Morny had found him hungry and footsore by the wayside, and had picked him up and brought him home in his car, to the intense indignation of his nutty pals, whose excursion had been spoiled by Morny's unexpected philanthropy.

As Townsend had remarked, with almost sulphurous wrath, what the dickens did the grubby little beast matter to Morny or anybody else? Weren't there plenty of workhouses for his sort? What were workhouses for?

As for Mornington, of all fellows, to set up as a kind-hearted philanthropist! A fellow might have expected that sort of thing from Jimmy Silver or his pals. They were that kind. But Morny!

The disgust of the Nuts knew no bounds. But, in spite of their exasperation—perhaps because of it—Mornington had insisted upon giving up the excursion, and bringing the ragged little vagrant into the school. To the further astonishment and annoyance of the Nuts, the Head had allowed him to remain there. Really, the Nuts had expected better than that of Dr. Chisholm. It was, as Torny said, "Shockin'!"

But there he was. What was going to be done with him nobody knew; but there he was, for the present, at least.

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 eyeglass 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.

A 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 on," 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?" said Smythe. "He can't be allowed to stay here, surely!"

"What are you doing here?" asked Howard.

"Lookin' round," said 'Erbert.

"You're staying at Rookwood?"

"Master Mornington says so."

"Like his cheek!" said Smythe. "Blest if I understand Morny! What is he playin' this fatheaded 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 isn'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 Vere 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' 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, can'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!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. 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. Smythe, dear boy, what are you ragging Morny's pal for?"

"Yow! Wow!" said Smythe.

"Mind your own bizney, you interferin' 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. "Ho that bumpeth likewise shall he 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.

"What did they go for you for, kid?" asked Newcome.

"'Im 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 Rookwood, kid?"

"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 nutty pals. Morny had a sardonic vein of humour in him. He was the chief of the Nuts, and a more reckless and hardened young rascal than any of them; but he hardly concealed his scorn for them, while he associated with them.

But Jimmy Silver, though he was on the worst of terms personally with Mornington, was willing to give him credit for the real kindness he had shown to 'Erbert.

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 protege without another look or word to the Fistical Four.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

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 into tea. Tea was always a plenteous 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 sometimes brought Mr. Bootles' 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 unpleasantnesses 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 rotter 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 pro-

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gress. "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, an' I'm going 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.

"Yaas; 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.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Looking After 'Erbert.

"HALLO! Trouble in the family?"

Jimmy Silver paused on his way up the passage, with a bundle from the tuckshop 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 "out up rusty" 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."

"Me 'ave tea 'ere!" said 'Erbert.

"Yes. Come and help me do the shopping. I'll let you carry the parcels," said Mornington, laughing.

"Wotto!" said 'Erbert at once.

Mornington, having removed the signs of the combat, left the study with his protege. 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 mind 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 Smythe.

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 sha'n'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 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 snobbishness. 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.

"Wot!" 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. Morny 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. in a week for their study brews. That was Morny'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.

Morny'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.

But 'Erbert's cooking was a good deal better than Peele's or Gower's, and Morny 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 appar-

ently news to him, but he tried at once to carry out Mornington's instructions.

"That's better," said Morny 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 armchair 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."

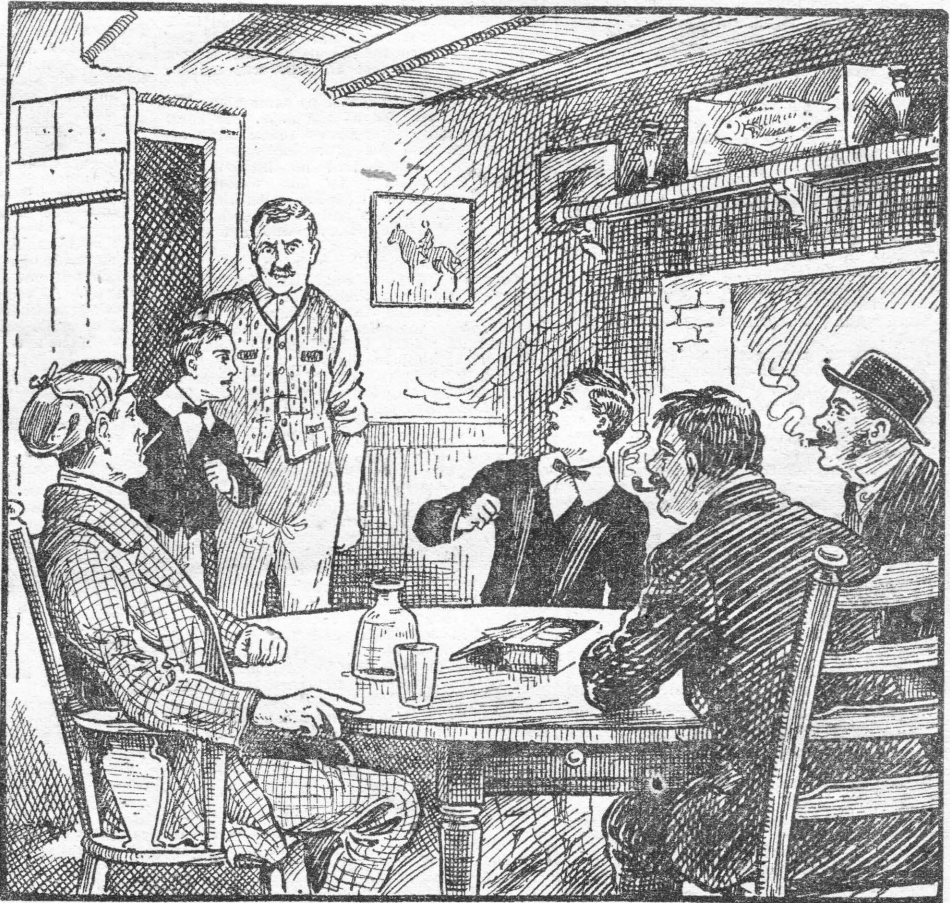
had taken a liking to the good-natured, good-tempered captain of the Fourth; and he wondered how it was that a splendid fellow like Mornington did not get on with him.

"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."

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 had gone. He had no desire to come in contact with Peele and Gower,



The door of the parlour opened and the landlord of the "Bird-in-hand" came in with 'Erbert in tow. "They're after you, sir!" gasped 'Erbert to the startled Mornington. (See page 13.)

"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 not. 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 doin' 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."

"Suttin'ly, sir!" said 'Erbert; but he looked a little downcast for a moment. He

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 light the gas 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.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

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 still.

"Comin'!" repeated Townsend.

Mornington nodded.

"Yaas. Have you forgotten our appointment for this evening? Better get out before 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 foolin' 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 lounged away down the passage.

His manner was careless, but his eyes glittered. He had not expected this set-back. In his usual arrogant way, Mornington expected to treat his friends as he liked, and find them still at his beck and call.

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! You've made a new pal among the seniors since your old pal Beaumont was sacked, Morny!"

"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 bouncer 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 'Erbert; 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. Beastly 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

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at school at all for! He could slack and smoke without taking the trouble to come to Rookwood to do it. I wonder how long it will be 'fore he's bowled out and sacked?"

And the Fistical Four went up to the end study, and began their work.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

'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 waif 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, one which descended almost to the floor—one of Mornington's expensive luxuries.

The little waif, 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 sendin' 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 pass-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 town'-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—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 dufer 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 Nuts 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 wanter ask you something, Master Silver."

"Go ahead!"

"Do you know a place called the Bird-in-Hand, 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 'Evin's sake, Master Silver, tell me 'ow to get there!" panted 'Erbert. "I got to warn '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 hurry. 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. Bare-headed and panting, the waif 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.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

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's come to speak to you, Master Mornington," said Mr. Flack. "I wouldn't let him in, only he says—"

'Erbert strove to speak. "They're after you, sir!" he got out, in great gasps.

"Eh?"

"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 hey!" 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', kid! 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 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 sha'n'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 of four 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 pulled 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 dodg—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."

"A—a—a Rookwood chap!" stuttered 'Erbert. "Like you!"

"Like me," smiled Mornington.

"Oh, my! Oh, crumbs!" 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 super-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."

'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.

THE END.

(Another story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next Friday, entitled: "PANKLEY'S LATEST!" Order your copy now.)