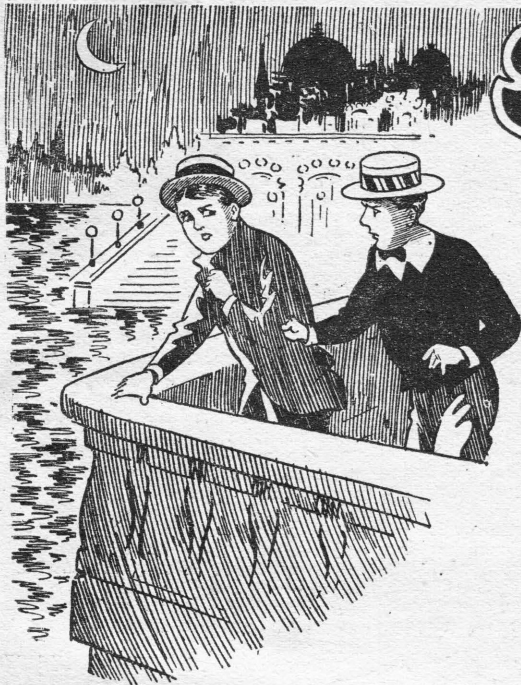


FACING THE MUSIC!

Mornington has to face—the consequences of his folly to the reckless junior!

Disgraced in the eyes of his friends, ruined, and alone in a foreign land, that is the penalty Val



Saved From Himself!

A Dramatic Long Complete Story dealing with the amazing Holiday Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., and Valentine Mornington of Rookwood.

By Owen Conquest.

(Author of the famous tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Boys' Friend" every week.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Shadow of Shame!

"JIMMY!"

"Jimmy Silver!"
"Jimmy, you fathead!"
"Jimmy, you ass!"

George Raby and Arthur Newcome of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood were calling out simultaneously.

Apparently they were anxious to get in touch with Jimmy Silver.

The sun was setting behind the low hills, and already there was a glimmer of the rising moon on the sea. The cliffs of the French coast, stretching away towards Boulogne and Calais, were growing dim.

Raby and Newcome were seeking up and down the garden-paths at Le Bosquet for Jimmy Silver and the rest of the Co.

It was the second day of Jimmy Silver & Co.'s holiday in la belle France. They had spent most of the time at Le Bosquet, a few miles from Boulogne, and now they were going to dine in the big, white salle-a-manger in the annexe to the white-walled Casino; or, rather, they should have been going to dine there.

"Shut up, you fellows, for goodness' sake!"

Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, stepped out of the shades of a dusky alley under the trees. Raby and Newcome closed in on him at once. But they did not shut up. They were hungry, and they were wrathful.

"You burbling ass!" said Raby. "We're waiting dinner. Your pater's sitting at the table all on his lonely own. I began to think you'd had some blessed accident!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Newcome. "Are you all here? What the thump is this dashed secret meeting about?"

The two seekers could discern the rest of the party now, in the shadows. Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell had unusually grave faces. Erroll was

pale as chalk; and Algy Silver, the fag of Rookwood, was quivering with excitement, and there were stains of passionate tears upon his usually cheeky face. Raby and Newcome blinked at them in astonishment.

They could see that something had happened, though they could not even imagine what it was.

"Dinner—" recommenced Newcome. "Oh, bother dinner!" grunted Lovell. "You're generally ready for dinner, old top," said Raby; "and it's long past seven, the time we fixed. Has anything happened?"

"Yes," muttered Jimmy Silver. "What's happened?" demanded Newcome. "Have you fallen in with Mornington again, and been rowing with him?"

"Morny isn't here," said Raby, glancing round.

Certainly Valentine Mornington of the Rookwood Fourth was not visible. But it was easy to guess that if there had been trouble, Valentine Mornington had had something to do with it. There had been trouble more than once since the party had met Mornington on the Channel boat.

"We'd better get in to dinner," said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "The pater isn't to know anything about this. It's rotten enough without dragging him into it."

"What about my money?" hooted Algy Silver.

"Hang your money!" snapped Jimmy. "You deserve to lose it, you young rascal. I've a jolly good mind to give you a hiding along with it!"

"What the thump—" said Raby.

"Has Algy lost his money?"

"I've been done out of it!" hissed Algy. "Mornington's bagged it!"

"What rot!"

"He has, I tell you. He"—Algy of the Third trembled with wrath and chagrin—"he promised to take me into the Casino to play, and took my money

to change for me into French—fifteen pounds—and then he disappeared. And—and Erroll and Lovell saw him going into the Casino without me. He's gone in to gamble with my money!"

"My only hat!"

Kit Erroll stood motionless, but he winced under Algy's words. Mornington was his chum—his best chum. He had striven to stand between the wayward junior and his reckless folly. There was still a mark on his cheek where Mornington had struck him aside the previous day. Yet he was still loyal to his friendship, and his heart ached for the wretched waster who had brought this black shame upon himself.

"Three fivers!" continued Algy Silver, full of his wrongs, and regardless of any other consideration. "He said he'd get them changed into French money for me, because they wouldn't change them for a kid, and—and he left me here, and never came back, and—and now—"

Algy gave a breathless sob. His disappointment and rage were almost too much for him. His prospects of a "flutter" had dwindled down to zero now. Even if he could elude the watchful eyes of his uncle and his cousin, it was useless now, now that his money was gone.

"Mornington's a thief—a thief!" he gasped. "He's got my money—"

"You'll keep your mouth shut, Algy," continued Jimmy Silver. "As for Mornington, we're done with him. I dare say he'll make the money good somehow later on. If not, you can lose it, and serve you right! Now, let's get in to dinner, you fellows, or the pater will be coming to look for us himself."

"It's a shame," quavered Algy—"a shame! I—I—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Jimmy roughly. "What you want is a thundering good hiding, you young goat; and you'll get it if you're not jolly careful!"

"Come on, Erroll!" called out Lovell, as the juniors began to move off towards the brilliantly lighted dining-hall.

Erroll shook his head.

"I—I can't come in now," he said huskily. "I—I've got to—to—"

"The pater will miss you, Erroll," said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

"Tell him I've gone to look for Morny. You needn't tell him any more. Don't wait dinner. Just get on with it, and—and I'll join you later. I—I can't come in now. I couldn't stand it."

"Oh, all right!" said Jimmy. It was pretty clear that if Erroll joined the dinner-party his pale face and agitation would warn Mr. Silver that something had happened. "All right. Come on, you chaps!"

"And buck up!" added Raby, remembering that he was hungry.

Jimmy Silver & Co moved off towards the big white building, leaving Erroll standing where he was. It was with difficulty that they composed their looks as they came in and met Mr. Silver's eyes, and the dinner-party was not so merry as it might have been. Erroll was looking for Mornington with loyal friendship and a troubled heart, but Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling anything but amiable towards the scapegrace of Rookwood. Indeed, the chief feeling in the party of juniors was a strong desire to be within hitting distance of Valentine Mornington's handsome, reckless face.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Faithful Friendship!

ERROLL stopped at the wide stone steps that gave admittance to the Casino of Le Bosquet.

The wide vestibule was almost empty. Two or three croupiers, released from the tables, now that the "game" was shut down for the dinner interval, were talking and grinning together in a corner, and a "chasseur" was lounging on one of the velvet-covered seats. There was no sign of Valentine Mornington as Erroll looked in, and he wondered where the scapegrace was. He could not be playing, as the tables were closed down; and Erroll knew that they had already been closed for dinner at six, when Mornington had played his miserable trick on the fag. The money Mornington had obtained was still in his pockets, therefore, and he could not recommence his folly until the "jeu" opened at eight o'clock. It wanted ten minutes to eight when Erroll glanced into the gaudily decorated vestibule.

It went against the grain with Erroll to enter the place. Mr. Silver had brought his young charges to the Casino gardens to listen to the band, to mingle in the gay throng, and to dine in the *salle-a-manger*; but it was, of course, on the very strict understanding that no member of the party entered the gambling-rooms. Erroll would not have thought of entering the "*salle-de-jeu*" on his own account. He was probably the steadiest and most level-headed fellow in the Rookwood crowd. Even now he hesitated, though it was for Mornington's sake that he was acting.

But his hesitation was brief. He stepped into the vestibule, and glanced around him there. Several doorways opened in various directions—one to a dancing-hall, another to the music-hall—and Erroll, unsure of his way, approached the group of chattering croupiers to inquire.

The Rookwood junior passed down a broad corridor, at the end of which a long, lofty room opened. In the centre of the room was a long, green-baize

table, now covered with cloths, as it was not in use. In one corner of the room was a "caisse," or desk, where money could be changed. This evidently was the gaming-room.

It was untenanted now, so far as Erroll could see. The crowd had cleared off for dinner; the money-changer was gone from the locked *caisse*; the croupiers and the *chefs-de-partie* had been only too glad to get out of the vitiated atmosphere and rest from their peculiar labours. Erroll walked the length of the room, his footsteps echoing on the polished parquet. There were couches round the walls, all of them vacant; but at last, coming to the end of the room, Erroll caught sight of a figure in a chair. He recognised Valentine Mornington at once, though the scapegrace of Rookwood had a small, curly black moustache affixed to his upper lip. That was a device of Morny's lest he should be refused permission to play on account of his youth. Not that there was much danger; the proprietors of the Casino of Le Bosquet were not particular as to the age of the sheep they sheared.

Mornington did not look up. He must have heard the footsteps on the floor, echoing in the deserted room, but probably he thought it was simply some croupier or changeur. Certainly it did not occur to him that his chum was there. The scapegrace of Rookwood sat stretched out in the chair, his hands driven into his pockets, his gaze fixed before him with a gloomy, almost savage, stare that saw nothing.

Morny was having his fling, but to judge by appearances he was not in a mood of enjoyment.

Erroll's face shadowed still more as he looked at his hapless chum and noted the grim, worn lines in the young face. Apart from the false moustache, Valentine Mornington looked years older than he had looked a few weeks earlier at Rookwood School. Feverish excitement and anxiety had told upon him, and left a deep mark.

Erroll came over to him, and not till he was close did Mornington raise his eyes and fix a stare upon him. Then he started and half-rose to his feet.

"You here, Erroll!"

"I was looking for you, Morny," said Erroll quietly.

Valentine Mornington broke into a chuckle that had very little merriment in it.

"You haven't come in for the game?"

Erroll shook his head.

"Of course not, old sobersides!" grinned Mornington. "But can you stand the awful sight of the green tables? Fortunately they're covered up at present. Don't wait till they take the cloths off, Erroll. It would be too painful a sight for you."

Erroll did not heed the bitter mockery in his chum's tone. He dropped into a seat beside Mornington.

"You're waiting for the game to reopen?" he asked.

"What else?" said Mornington. "Do you think I've come in for the air? Fairly thick, ain't it?"

"Poisonous, pretty nearly, I think! You haven't been playing yet?"

"How could I? I lost all my tin at Calais yesterday!" growled Mornington. "I came along here to spin a yarn to Silver's father and get a loan out of him. But Silver stopped that. Hang him! I shall have a flutter to-night, in spite of him, anyhow!"

"Morny, I've just seen young Algy Silver. He's told us what—that you've done."

Mornington's face went a shade paler,

and he dropped his eyes. Then the colour began to steal into his cheeks, and burned there.

"So—so you know?" he asked, after a long pause.

"I know."

"Can't be helped," said Mornington in his old tone, shrugging his slim shoulders. "I was bound to raise the wind somehow. All the better for that young fool to be kept off the game. I shall send him the money when I get home. I suppose you don't think I'm a thief?"

He winced as he uttered that word.

"You've still got the money, old fellow?" said Erroll in a low tone.

"I've changed it into French."

"But still—"

"And spent a few francs on coffee and sandwiches," said Morny. "I'm not joinin' the merry dinner-party. Won't they miss you, Erroll?"

"Never mind that. Morny, you've still got the money. Come out with me now, and give it back to young Algy."

"Don't be an ass! What do you think I stole it for?" said Mornington with bitter mockery.

"If you give it back to him it's not stolen. Morny, for mercy's sake think what you are doing!" said Erroll earnestly. "This rotten gambling is blackguardly enough, but—but what you've done—don't you know what you have done? For your own sake, Morny—"

Morny raised his eyes and fixed them on his friend with a peculiar expression.

"Have you ever heard of what it's like to rob a tigress of her cubs, Erroll?" he asked. "Well, it's like that to come between a fool and his folly—between a gambler and his game. I'm goin' to have my run on the green table. I don't care what happens afterwards. I diddled that fool of a fag. Serve him right! I'd have taken him by the scruff of the neck and lifted the money if there had been no other way. Catch on?"

Erroll shivered a little.

"I hit you yesterday for trying to stop me," said Mornington. "You were fool enough to take it quietly. Now you're playing the fool again. Why the deuce can't you leave me alone?"

"Because I'm your friend."

"I'm not fit to be your chum, or anybody's, and you know it. I'm a bad hat. It's bred in the bone," said Mornington cynically. "When I was rich I used to play the goat all I could; now I'm poor I've got a thirst for it. I'd rather stand at the green table, and go to prison afterwards, than walk out of the Casino with you now, Erroll. I'm goin' to have my chance. I may win." The hapless junior's eyes sparkled for a moment. "Yesterday, at Calais, I had a run of luck, but it changed. I—I'm goin' to be more careful to-night. If I get through I'll settle up with that confounded fag at once!"

"And if not?" asked Erroll, forbearing to argue with the infatuated boy on the possibilities of his "getting through."

"If not, I'll get the money from my guardian later and send it to him. I'm not a thief—yet."

"And suppose your guardian won't part?"

Mornington muttered a curse.

"Sir Rupert Steepole stood you a tinner for the holiday," said Erroll. "I fancy he will open his eyes if you ask him for fifteen pounds as soon as you get home."

"I shall find the money somehow!" muttered Mornington sullenly.

There were footsteps in the deserted room now. Two or three uniformed

attendants had come in, and were removing the coverings from the gaming-table. Mornington looked up and breathed more quickly. The sight of the green cloth seemed to him like the sight of water to a thirsty horse in the desert. His hands trembled.

Erroll felt an ache at his heart.

He could see, only too clearly, that his chum was past reasoning with—at least, so long as this mad mood should last. It was not easy to save a fellow like Valentine Mornington from himself.

The strains of the band were beginning again. There was already a sound of shuffling feet in the dancing-hall, next to the gaming-room. Well-dressed, chatting crowds of idlers began to appear, and in twos and threes they sauntered into the long room. The chef-de-partie, buttoned tight in a black frock-coat, came mincing in and took up his position in the high chair, from whence he overlooked the jeu. The croupiers began to take their places, uncover their little piles of counters, and pick up their long-handled rakes. The odd-looking arrangement of little wooden horses on wires was disclosed, and the man whose business it was to work it took his stand at the handle of the machine. The petits-chevaux were about to begin. Mornington stirred in his seat, and Erroll dropped a hand on his arm.

From the table came the drone of the croupier's voice:

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux! Messieurs, les jeux sont faites!"

The machine was grinding; the nine little horses raced round the bowl. Bone counters rained on the table from the gamblers gathering round. Mornington rose, but Erroll's catch on his arm pulled him back. He gave his chum a fierce look.

"Let me go, you fool!"

"Morny—"

The racing chevaux came to a standstill.

The drone of the croupier was heard again.

"Le neuf!"

Mornington shook himself passionately.

"You fool—you fool! I was goin' to begin on nine! Now—"

"Morny—" pleaded Erroll.

Valentine Mornington shook his detaining hand savagely away, and strode towards the green table.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Les Petits-Chevaux!

"FAITES vos jeux, messieurs!" More and more loungers were crowding in, and the seats round the gaming-table filled fast. Behind the seated punters others stood, tossing their stakes over the shoulders of those seated, whence arose, occasionally, a dispute as to whom a stake belonged, in case of a win. Mornington had succeeded in getting a seat; Erroll, following him more slowly, stood behind his chair, with a heavy heart, watching. Morny had turned out his money on the table, and fifteen pounds in English money made quite a respectable sum when translated into francs. In his hot haste and hurry Morny threw a fifty-franc note on pair—even numbers, and the "changeur" immediately appeared, grabbed it off, and put bone counters in its place. The money that used to glimmer on the Casino tables before the War had given place to bone counters, which had to be changed into paper money at the "caisse," after the game, if a player was lucky enough to leave the table a winner. There were

red counters to represent louis, or twenty-franc pieces; yellow counters, for twenty-five franc pieces, and little metal counters for single francs.

Seven was the winning number, so as Morny was on even numbers his stake was lost. There was a yelp from the "chef-de-partie":

"Changeur!"

He indicated Mornington, and the fat little "changeur" edged up to the youth. Mornington quickly made the exchange of his banknotes into bone counters.

He piled them up before him, one heap of red and one of yellow. The single-franc counters he disdained.

Mornington tossed a red counter—a louis—on the number he fancied, and by chance it came up a winner.

Seven louis were handed over to him.

His eyes glittered.

He remembered Erroll, and looked round. He smiled up at Erroll's clouded face, a smile that was almost infantile, and that went straight to Erroll's heart.

"A few more like that—what?" smiled Mornington.

Erroll did not speak. It was useless to speak. He could only watch in silence, waiting for the inevitable.

A little man, with a grey beard and a grey face, bottled up in a tight frock-coat, was grinding at the petits-chevaux machine. He looked like some hideous gnome performing some mysterious rite. His little, narrow black eyes twinkled incessantly along the tables, though why he should be interested in seeing where the stakes were laid was a mystery to those who did not suspect the inwardness of the proceedings. Erroll, whose

head was clear and cool, utterly untouched by the prevailing fever of greed, was not slow in divining the cause of the gnome's interest in the stakes. He had no doubt whatever that the little rogue in black was able to control the machine whose handle he turned, and that the numbers came up winners or losers, just as the gnome desired.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."

"Rien ne va plus."

Mornington had another win with a louis, and his face brightened, though if he had been in a mood to calculate he would have observed that he had lost, in several spins, more than his win of seven pieces. But it was his winnings that filled his excited mind, not his losses. He spread four louis over four numbers for the next spin, and they all went. He tried the same again, and again they disappeared under the remorseless rake of the croupier.

He set his lips and came back to single stakes. But he was no longer favoured with a win.

His pile of red counters diminished rapidly, and disappeared.

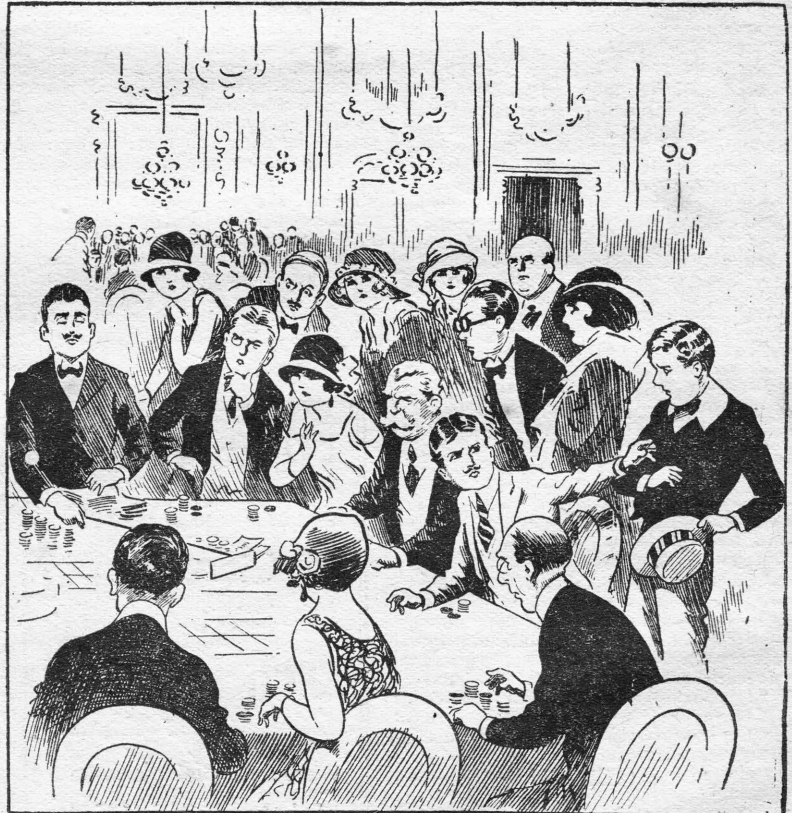
In ten minutes he was at the second stage. He was playing with yellow counters, representing five francs each.

He looked round suddenly, as though conscious of Erroll, though his chum had not spoken. There was bitterness in his face, almost hatred.

"What are you stayin' for?" he said, in a shrill whisper. "You're not playin'! What do you want? You're bringin' me bad luck, with your confounded long face."

Erroll stepped back.

Mornington hated him at that moment.



AT THE TABLES! Mornington looked round suddenly at Erroll. There was bitterness in his face, almost hatred. "What are you staying for?" he said in a shrill whisper. "Can't you go away? You're bringin' me bad luck with your confounded long face!" Erroll stepped back. Morny hated him at that moment. He hated everybody and everything, including himself. (See Chapter 3.)

He hated everybody and everything, including himself.

Erroll walked away to the end of the room and sat down. He would not trouble his chum, since he could not help him. He waited patiently till Mornny should leave the table. At his present rate of progress it was not likely to be long.

Mornington forgot his existence the next minute.

His stake was on the board. His eyes were on the whizzing, whirling wooden horses.

A blaze came into his face as his number came up a winner. Seven five-franc counters were spun across to him.

"It's changed!" he breathed. "The luck's changed! Now—"

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."

The petits-chevaux were spinning again.

"Rien ne va plus."

"Le sept!"

It was seven, and Mornington was on fire. In the next spin he dropped his stake on seven, and there came the announcement:

"Le cinq!"

It was five this time.

Mornington had all his pieces in one hand now. There was plenty of room for them.

In ones and twos they went, till the last five-franc counter remained alone in his palm.

He gazed at it something like a fellow in a dream.

Finally, he tossed it across to the croupier opposite him, who was watching him with a covert grin.

"La monnaie, si'l vous plait."

The croupier spun across five metal counters—single francs. Mornington had reached his third stage.

With his five last francs Mornington played. He was favoured with a win at the first spin, and he cursed himself under his breath for not having risked the five-franc piece whole. Then one by one the counters went. When the last was on the board he watched it with mesmerised eyes. It won, and again he had seven pieces thrown over to him, and, mindful of his former error, he put them all on a single number—five.

The petits-chevaux raced round the board again, and Mornny's eyes watched them with eager fascination.

Number five nearly stopped at the winning line, but it jerked on and eight stopped just at the line.

"Le huit!"

With iron indifference came the croupier's drone.

Mornington rose from the table shakily. His last piece was gone, and already another punter, tired of standing, was edging for his chair. There was no need for a "lame duck" to sit watching the game.

The scapegrace of Rookwood moved away from the table.

He caught sight of Erroll coming towards him, and was about to turn away to avoid him. Then, struck by another thought, he hurried to his chum.

"Lend me some money!" he muttered.

"Mornny—"

"Will you lend me some money?" hissed Mornington.

"Not for that! Old fellow, what's the use—"

"Hang you, then!"

Mornington swung away, and as Erroll's hand touched his arm he shook it savagely off.

He strode away, and went blindly down the wide corridor, where idle promenaders were lounging and listening to

the band. Erroll followed him more slowly. He was determined not to lose sight of his chum, at least. There was a look on Mornny's face that scared him.

Heedless of him, Mornington hurried out into the brilliantly lighted vestibule, and down the steps into the shadowed gravel walk. He hurried on towards the high bronze gates that gave on the street.

He was striding on towards the "plage," where the silver sea glistened under the moonlight, when Erroll came out of the gates.

"Hallo, old scout!"

It was Lovell's voice. A bunch of cheery juniors came along, and Arthur Edward Lovell caught Erroll by the arm.

"Going for a stroll by the giddy sea—what?" said Lovell cheerily. "You'll miss the fireworks. There's a merry jeu d'artifice in the gardens to-night. It will remind you of Bonfire Day at home. Don't miss it!"

Erroll jerked himself away without even an answer, and hurried towards the plage.

Lovell stared after him blankly.

"What the dickens is the matter with Erroll, Jimmy?" he demanded.

Jimmy Silver gave a shrug.

"Let him alone," he said. "He's looking after Mornny, I suppose."

"Oh, bother Mornny!" snorted Lovell. "I'm fed-up with Mornny! He's spoiled everything since he turned up."

"I say, come and see the fireworks, you chaps!" called out Algy. That sportive youth seemed to have recovered his spirits somewhat since dinner. "You'll miss them."

The "jeu d'artifice" was beginning already in the moonlit gardens, and Jimmy Silver & Co., who had had a walk along the sea since dinner, turned in at the gates again. The crash of the orchestra, the buzz of talk and laughter, mingled with the detonations of the fireworks. The whole scene was one of careless gaiety and holiday merriment. Across the dark blue heavens streamed red and golden sparks. At the little tables under the foliage corks were popping and glasses tinkling. But in the gay throng there was probably more than one heart as heavy as that of the wretched scapegrace hurrying down to the dark sea—who had had his "flutter," and who felt the forbidden fruit turning, like the fruit of the Dead Sea of old, into ashes in his mouth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Loyal to the Last!

HE stood by the stone balustrade overlooking the lapping waters, leaning on the cold stone, looking downwards. Twenty feet below him the water lapped and murmured, glimmering in the moonlight, reflecting the brilliant lamps of the esplanade. Faintly from the distance came the strains of music, and the echo of gay laughter from the crowded gardens of the Casino. Mornington heard nothing—not even a light step on the promenade behind him. He saw nothing but the cold gleam of the waters below.

What was he thinking of as he leaned there, his face as white as the white stone upon which his elbows rested?

What terrible thoughts were passing through the fevered brain, now cooling into the sickness of reaction?

The wastrel had had his fling. His money was gone—to the centime—his own money, and that which was not his. He was alone, stranded in a foreign country, without even a roof to shelter him for the night, unless he humbled his pride to ask it of Jimmy Silver's father. Without a friend, he had spurned away his last and most loyal chum.

"What's the good?" He muttered the words aloud, huskily. "What's the good? I'm sick of it—sick of everything. But there's a way out!" The cold, glimmering waters seemed to fascinate him with their gleam.

He made a movement.

A strong grasp closed on his arm, and he turned with a start. It was Erroll's face that looked at him in the moonlight, Erroll's grasp that had held him from—what?

For a moment or two the juniors looked at one another in silence. Then Erroll drew Mornington's hand within his arm, and drew him away, and they walked together along the esplanade. Mornington went without resistance. His resistance was gone now. He was feeling old, strangely old, and sick. It was as if an elder brother, almost a father, had taken charge of the wilful, wayward boy.

Erroll drew him at last to one of the seats on the promenade. He sat down heavily.

"Mornny, old fellow, what madness was in your mind? Thank Heaven I followed you!" said Erroll, in a husky voice.

"Better if you had not. What's the good? The game's up!" muttered Valentine Mornington. "It's all over with me! What did you follow me for? A blackguard, a gambler, a—thief—"

He choked.

Erroll drew a deep breath.

"Leave that out, Mornny, old fellow. There's the future to think of—"

"The future?" Mornington gave a hard laugh that almost ended in a sob. "Oh, don't talk to me, Erroll! Leave me alone! What are you stickin' to me for? What's the good?"

"Because I'm your pal, old chap," said Erroll quietly. "Because I'm going to help you see this through."

"You can't! I tell you, my guardian will see me in Tophet before he hands out the money for Algy Silver! I—I thought—I mean, I lied to myself. I can't pay him! I knew I couldn't when I did it. If I could I should be a thief all the same." He shuddered. "But I can't! And—and they all know I'm a thief and a gambler! I can't face Rookwood again! You'd better drop me while you've got the chance, Erroll. I struck you yesterday—"

"Never mind that—"

"Oh, you're a fool—a fool!" said Mornington. "Why didn't you mop up

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the ground with me? Why don't you now? I could cut off my hand for you. The best chum a fellow ever had! Leave me to myself, Erroll! Leave me alone, I tell you!"

Erroll waited quietly.
"It will be all right about the money," he said. "When the shops are open to-morrow, I can manage that, and Algy will be squared."

"You can't—you sha'n't—"
"I can, and shall," said Erroll gently. "Leave that out! What's mine is yours, old fellow. But you'll go back to England, Morny—you must—and I'm coming with you—"

Mornington shook his head.
"We'll stick together for the rest of the vac, old scout!" said Erroll cheerfully—much more cheerfully than he felt. "In the long run, you'll forget all this; it will be only like a bad dream."

"I tell you, it's no good!" muttered Mornington. "Haven't we been through it before? Haven't I promised, and then— I tell you it's no good! Leave me to what I've earned for myself!"

Erroll rose from the seat.
"Now that's settled," he said. "Come on! We're going to get some supper."

"I—I can't face them; I won't! I'd rather pitch into the sea and finish it all," said Mornington hoarsely.

"No need. They'll be late to-night, and you can be in bed before they come in at the hotel, and gone before they turn out in the morning," said Erroll. "Come along, old fellow!"

Mornington resisted a moment longer, and then he moved away with his chum.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had a surprise on the following day.

When they came down to breakfast at the Hotel Royal du Bosquet, they found that Mornington had passed the night there, and had breakfasted, and Erroll with him. The chums had finished a rather late breakfast when Kit Erroll came in alone. He had an envelope in his hand, which he tossed on the table before the surprised Algy.

"With Morny's thanks!" he said.
"Eh, what?" ejaculated Algy.

He opened the envelope. Three five-pound notes were inside. Algy blinked.

"Mum-mum-my banknotes!" he stuttered. "My sainted aunt! Then Morny was only pulling my leg, the beast!"

"So you've got your money back,

Algy!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Now, as soon as the pater comes along you'll hand it to him, and ask him to mind it for you."

"Will I?" said Algy rebelliously.

"Yes; or else I shall tell him enough to make him send you back to home at once," said Jimmy. "I mean that; so chew on it, and make up your mind!"

And the sportive Algy, having "chewed" on it, made up his mind; and a little later his banknotes were in the safe possession of Mr. Silver, there to remain until the end of the holiday. And the vision of a "flutter" at the green tables faded away from Algy like a beautiful dream. Which was certainly all the better for him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. asked Erroll no questions. They preferred not to know exactly what had occurred; the money had been returned, and that was all they cared to know. If they suspected that Erroll's gold watch had vanished, they did not comment upon it, even to one another.

The Co. were left to their own devices that morning while Mr. Silver made a run down to Boulogne, to see Mornington through the difficulties of getting across the Channel without a passport. Erroll went with him, and Mr. Silver returned to Le Bosquet alone. And though the Rookwood holiday party missed Erroll, they felt that he had done right to go home with his wayward chum.

On the Channel boat that sunny day two juniors stood and watched the white cliffs of England rise out of the sea. They stood long in silence; but at last Mornington turned to his chum. Perhaps it was the spray that made his eyelashes wet.

"Old fellow," he muttered, "It's no good talking. You've pulled me through once more. I'm not worth the trouble, but you've done it. I—I'm going to try—try hard—as hard as I jolly well can. But for you—" He paused, with a break in his voice. "After this, Erroll, I'm goin' to play the game straight. I really mean it this time. Honour!"

And Erroll pressed his arm by way of reply.

THE END.

(Another splendid long complete story, dealing with the holiday adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, entitled, "A Holiday Hoax!" in next week's issue. Don't miss it.)

"PAYING OUT PECKOVER!"
(Continued from page 6.)

only hope Mrs. Peckover gets hold of him again, and takes him back to Athabasca!"

"Yes, rather!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards & Co. chuckled.
"You're sure it was really Mrs. Peckover?" asked Frank.

Dicky Bird nodded.
"Well, there's only her word," he said. "But I'm sure enough. If she wasn't Mrs. Peckover, she couldn't want him, I guess. Blessed if I know how any woman could have married Peckover, with his face and manners. But she must have done so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Anyhow, I hope she'll get him," said Dicky Bird. "She's welcome to the beast—quite welcome."

"I'm afraid she won't get him," said Frank Richards, laughing. "I think her performance was for one afternoon only."

Dicky Bird stared at him.
"What do you know about it?" he asked.

"Lots!" chuckled Frank. And he went on, suddenly, in a high-pitched voice, "Is my husband at home, little boy?"

Dicky Bird jumped.
"Why, that—that—that's her voice!" he stammered. "How—what the—"

"I've ruined an umbrella," said Frank. "But it was jolly good cause. Thank you very much for standing by me as you did, little boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"You!" yelled Dicky Bird. "You!"

"Jevver hear of the Cedar Creek Thespians?" chortled Bob Lawless. "When it comes to acting we can lay over Hillcrest every time. You won't see Mrs. Peckover again. Sempronia's Christian name is Frank! Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Bird gasped.
"You!" he repeated dazedly.

And Frank Richards & Co. sauntered away, leaving Dicky Bird still dazed.

Mrs. Peckover was never seen again. The amazing happenings at Hillcrest were the talk of Thompson for quite a long time, and during that time Mr. Peckover was a very subdued gentleman, much to the benefit of his pupils. Public opinion in Thompson quite condemned Mr. Peckover at first; but the non-appearance of the claimant gradually gave colour to his strenuous denials. It was admitted at last that Sempronia must have been an impostor. Who or what she was, the Hillcrest master never dreamed; and few ever knew the part Frank Richards had played in the coming of Mrs. Peckover.

THE END.

(Look out for "The Ten Thousand Dollar Horse!" A thrilling long complete story of Frank Richards & Co. of Cedar Creek. Next Tuesday.)

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