

A Schoolboy's Temptation!

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



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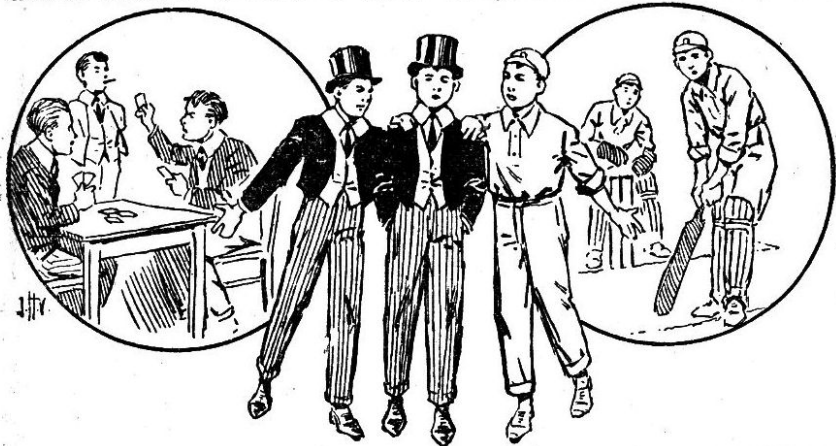
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A SCHOOLBOYS' TEMPTATION!



A Rousing Story of School Life at Rookwood, introducing VALENTINE MORNINGTON and JIMMY SILVER & Co.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1. Mornny's Way.

"MORNY here?"
Lattrey of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, asked the question, as he looked into Study No. 4.

It was tea-time, and Peele and Gower, Mornnington's study-mates, were there, with dark and discontented expressions on their faces.

Mornnington, the dandy of the Fourth, was not to be seen.

"Where's Mornny?" said Lattrey.

Peele gave a grunt.

"Talking to Erroll and Jimmy Silver," he replied. "They're down in the quad."

"You can see 'em from the window if you want to see how chummy they are," said Gower with a sneer.

Lattrey crossed to the window and glanced out.

Three juniors were chatting near the beeches, apparently on the best of terms. They were Kit Erroll, Jimmy Silver, and Jimmy's old rival, Mornnington.

Lattrey gave them a bitter glance, and turned back into the study.

"I left 'em talking cricket!" said Peele. "Mornny's gettin' very keen on cricket. He's goin' to squeeze into the junior eleven, if he can, for the Bagshot match. He's throwin' us over."

"It's, that rotter Erroll," said Gower. "Before he came, Mornny was one of us—a bit ahead of most of us. Cricket!" Gower gave a snort of angry contempt. "What's that? Kid's game! Mornny's wastin' his time on cricket—and advisin' us to do the same! Us, you know!"

"This won't do!" said Lattrey.

"It's no use saying that. You can't stop it."

"I'm going to try," said Lattrey between his teeth.

He moved restlessly about the study.

Lattrey, the blackest of the black sheep at Rookwood, could not quite understand the change that was coming over Valentine Mornington, and it irritated him all the more because he could not understand it.

The supercilious dandy of the Fourth had been the leader in all the shady escapades of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood, till of late.

And Mornny, who was rolling in wealth, was too valuable a pal to be lost by that select circle.

The three juniors looked round sullenly as Mornington came into the study at last.

He was looking very cheerful.

"Hallo, tea ready?" he asked.

"If you call it a tea!" grunted Peele.

"There's nothing much here!"

"Hard lines!" grinned Mornington. "Try cricket, old scout. It makes any sort of grub go down like toffee."

"Hang cricket!"

Mornington laughed, and sat at the table and helped himself to bread and cheese. He ate the plain fare with a keen appetite. His chums watched him in angry silence.

"Is that all you're goin' to have?" asked Peele at last.

Mornington nodded.

"Then you can have it to yourself," snapped Peele, and he went out of the study, followed by Gower.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders, and ate his bread and cheese. He seemed amused by the irritation of his friends.

Lattrey remained in the study with him, watching him.

"Why are you so keen on cricket, Mornny, all of a sudden?" he asked.

"Erroll's been jawin' me; you see. He's pointed out the error of my ways." Mornington chuckled.

Lattrey's eyes glittered.

"Are you always going to do as Erroll tells you?" he sneered.

"Why not? Says the trouble of thinkin'."

Mornington finished his bread and cheese, and rose. The dark look on Lattrey's face evidently amused him.

Mornny was not an easy customer for even the cunning cad of the Fourth to deal with. It was useless to seek to "put his back up" by sneering at Erroll's influence, as it were.

for the amiable purpose of irritating his pals.

Lattrey controlled his temper, with an effort.

"Well, sit down, Mornny," he said. "Got the cards here?"

"Cards?" repeated Mornington.

"Yes—you remember I was going to show you how to play poker."

"Poker!" yawned Mornington.

"It's a ripping game," said Lattrey. "Beats bridge and banker hollow. A real game for sportsmen."

"Another time," said Mornington, taking his bat from a corner.

"Where are you going?"

"Cricket practice!"

"Look here, Mornny, I've put off something else to come here."

"Sorry! You shouldn't have—I never do," said Mornington coolly. "Er'instance, I'm not goin' to put off cricket now."

Lattrey's eyes flamed. Mornington's cool insouciance was hard even for him to bear.

"Has it struck you that fellows may get fed up with your cheek, in the long run, Mornny?" he asked.

"Let 'em."

"You may find yourself cut if you keep on like this," said Lattrey savagely. "You can't ride rough shod over your friends."

"Cut away!" grinned Mornington. "My chap, you wouldn't cut me. You'd never find it in your heart to drop my acquaintance."

"Don't be too sure of that!"

"I'm quite sure of it," said Mornington coolly. "You wouldn't quarrel with anybody better heeled than yourself, Lattrey."

Lattrey flushed with rage.

"You think everybody wants your filthy money," he said bitterly.

"A good many fellows do—an' I know you do. That's why you're goin' to teach me poker."

"Mornington! You cheeky cad—"

"Oh, cheese it. As a matter of fact, I'm goin' to pay for the lessons, and I'll have 'em when I choose. I don't choose now."

With that, Mornington walked out of the study with his bat.

Lattrey stood quite still, his lips set in a tight line, his eyes like pin points, glittering like steel. He drew a deep, deep breath.

Lattrey of the Fourth was not sensitive, but Mornny's words would have penetrated

the thickest skin. At that moment Lattrey hated Mornington more than he hated Erroll or Jimmy Silver, or any other fellow in the wide world.

CHAPTER 2.

"N. G."

"I'M ready, Master Mornington."

A Third Form fag looked into the study, while Lattrey was still standing there, with glittering eyes and clenched hands, a prey to savage rage and hatred and all uncharitableness.

"The fag was "Erbert," of the Third, the little waif who had been brought to Rookwood by Mornington, and was paid for there by Mornny's guardian. He was called Murphy on the school books.

"Ain't Master Mornington 'ere?" asked 'Erbert, as he saw the occupant of the study was Lattrey.

"No, confound you!" growled Lattrey. "What do you want?"

"Master Mornington told me he wanted me to bowl to 'im, sir," said 'Erbert, looking curiously at Lattrey's furious face. "Has he gone down to cricket, do you know?"

"You're fagging for Mornington?"

"Yes."

"Step in a minute, kid," said Lattrey.

'Erbert hesitated a moment, and then stepped into the study. The fag did not like Lattrey of the Fourth. 'Erbert's feelings towards his benefactor amounted almost to worship, and he resented Lattrey's evil influence over the reckless dandy of the Fourth.

Lattrey kicked the door shut.

"You fetch smokes into the school sometimes for Mornny?" he remarked.

"I 'ave done so," said 'Erbert, after a pause. "You know that."

"And you've taken messages for him to the Bird-in-Hand!"

'Erbert nodded.

He knew that Mornny's shady associate was aware of the fact, so there was no reason for not acknowledging it.

"Mornny gives you a written note sometimes, I think?"

"Yes."

Lattrey drew a quick breath.

"You don't have any too much tin, Murphy," he said, in a very friendly tone.

"I 'as enough," said 'Erbert. "Sir Rupert Stacpoole sends me an allowance, same as

other chaps in the Third, through Master Mornington's kindness."

"Still, it's none too much, especially now tuck is at war-price. How would you like a quid?"

"I'd like a quid all right," said 'Erbert, in wonder.

He could not suspect Lattrey of intending to "tip him a quid." Lattrey was not generous in money matters.

To his astonishment, Lattrey took out a little case, and flicked a pound note from it, and held it up.

"There's the quid!" he said. "That's for you, kid, if you like—I only want you to do me a little favour."

'Erbert looked dogged at once.

"You can put it away, sir," he said quietly. "I ain't doing nothing of the kind. I does everything Master Mornington tells me, but I ain't fetching smokes or carrying messages for you or no one else. It's agin the rules of the school, and I won't do it."

"I don't want you to, you young fool," Lattrey laughed slightly. He was not likely to put anything into writing, to be taken to a place like the Bird-in-Hand Inn. He was a good deal worse than Mornington, but he was not quite so reckless. "I've no messages for you to take. The fact is, the next time Mornny gives you a note for Joey Hook or anybody at the Bird-in-Hand—"

He paused.

"Yes," said 'Erbert.

"I want you to bring it to me."

"Oh!"

"In case Mornny is writing anything that would be dangerous to him, if the paper gets left about, I mean," said Lattrey, eyeing the fag narrowly as he spoke. "Mornny is reckless, as you know, and he might put something in writing that would give that shady set a hold over him. I really want to take care of him—only he's so independent that a chap can't give him advice. But we should all feel it very much if he were found out and sacked."

'Erbert did not speak.

"You're grateful to him for what he's done for you, Murphy. If you do as I tell you, you may be saving him from getting the chopper. You'll do it?"

'Erbert gave a bitter smile.

Lattrey had made a mistake in offering the fag money. But for that appeal to his

cupidity, 'Erbert might have trusted his explanation.

"Well?" said Lattrey, with a smile.

"I can't do it."

"Why not? It's for Morny's sake, you know."

"Ow do I know?" said 'Erbert grimly.

"You can take my word, as Morny's friend."

"You ain't a good friend to Mornington, like Master Erroll," said 'Erbert. "'Ow do I know what you want 'is paper for? Anyway, I shouldn't show anybody 'is letters without 'is knowin'. He wouldn't forgive me if I did, and it would be a mean trick, too. 'Ow do I know that you don't want to get a 'old over him yourself, like you say those blokes might."

Lattrey started. The keen-witted little waif had read his thoughts as if they were written in an open book.

"You cheeky young hound!" he exclaimed, starting forward. But he controlled his savage temper with an effort. "Look here, Murphy, it's for Monty's sake—it may save him from the push, if I keep a friendly eye on his correspondence with shady cads like those sporting touts at the Bird-in-Hand—they might keep a letter of his as a hold over him—"

"So might you," said 'Erbert coolly, "and you're more likely to do it."

Lattrey ground his teeth.

The fag's opinion of him was not flattering, but it was well deserved.

"Then you won't do it?" he asked between his teeth.

"No. I won't!"

"I'll make it two quids—"

"You can keep your quids," said 'Erbert scornfully. "I know where you get your quids—you win them from Master Morny at cards. I ain't going to give you his letters, but I'm going to warn 'im that you're trying to get 'old of them, and put 'im on 'is guard."

'Erbert opened the study door with that. The next moment he was torn back by a savage clutch on his collar, and Lattrey's furious fists were beating on him. The cad of the Fourth had lost all control of his temper now. He lashed at the fag with savage force.

'Erbert kicked and struggled and yelled.

"Yow-ow-ow! 'Elp! Yah!"

"Hallo!" The Fistical Four were coming along from the end study, on their way

down to the cricket after tea. Lovell and Raby, Jimmy Silver and Newcombe, stopped at once. "Hallo! What—"

"'Elp, Master Silver!" panted 'Erbert.

Jimmy Silver did not need asking twice. He rushed into the study and collared Lattrey. His chums were only a second behind him.

Four pairs of hands fastened on the cad of the Fourth, he was swept off his feet, and he smote the study carpet with a thud.

Lattrey uttered a fiendish yell as he sat down.

"Now, you rotten bully!" said Jimmy Silver sternly. "Now you're going to have a dose of your own medicine."

"Let me go!" shouted Lattrey furiously.

"Not till you've had your dose."

"Yaroo! Oh, oh, oh!"

The Fistical Four rolled Lattrey over, and, with cheerful determination, rubbed his nose in the carpet. Jimmy Silver picked up a stump, and laid on six of the best, Lattrey being in a very good position to receive them.

'Erbert looked on, grinning.

He had been hurt by Lattrey's savage attack, but certainly he had not been hurt so much as the cad of the Fourth.

"That's a lesson, Lattrey," said Jimmy Silver, pitching down the stump. "You'll get another if you ask for it! Ta-ta!"

The Fistical Four left the study with the fag. Lattrey sat up, his face white, his breath coming thick and fast.

Matters were not going prosperously with the cad of Rookwood School. His luck was out!

CHAPTER 3.

Morny Loses His Temper!

"WELL bowled, Morny!"

It was Jimmy Silver who spoke, in hearty tones.

Kit Erroll was at the wicket, and Mornington of the Fourth was bowling to him, when the Fistical Four arrived upon Little Side.

Morny was in great form.

Erroll's wicket had gone down, though Erroll was a very good bat. Conroy took his place, and Jimmy Silver watched, with interest, Morny's bowling against the Australian.

Conroy was one of the best bats in the

Fourth, but he was not quite equal to playing Morny in his present form.

The third ball sent his bails flying.

"By gad, Morny's improving," remarked Lovell. "I'll give him a trial. Chuck us that bat, Conroy, if you've done with it."

Conroy nodded, and passed the willow to Lovell. Morny grinned as Arthur Edward Lovell took the batsman's place. Since Morny had chummed with Erroll, he had been on better terms with Jimmy Silver & Co., but he was still very much up against the four.

He put all he knew into the next ball he sent down. Lovell put all he knew into his guard, too; but the leather curled round the bat, and the off stump was whipped up.

"How's that?" chuckled Mornington.

"How's that?" echoed Townsend and Topham and Smythe of the Shell and the rest of the nuts, who were looking on.

"Jolly good!" said Jimmy Silver. "Try Rawson."

Tom Rawson, the scholarship junior in the Classical Fourth, took his bat to the wicket. Rawson was a solid, stolid batsman of the stonewall variety, and could generally be depended upon to keep his end up.

Morny's bowling was brilliant, there was no doubt about that, but Rawson, in his quiet way, faced it steadily, and knocked away ball after ball.

"Well hit, Rawson!"

"Well stopped!"

Mornington's face changed. He had been enjoying the practice, so far. He liked the limelight, and he liked to hear his name shouted on the cricket-ground. So long as he was triumphant, his good humour had no limits.

But as he expended all his skill in vain upon Tom Rawson's wicket, his handsome face grew darker, and his well-cut lips set hard.

The lofty Morny could not endure opposition or defeat, and it always roused his hasty, passionate temper.

It was for that reason that, in spite of his really first-class powers as a bowler, he was little use as a regular member of the Junior Eleven. A fellow who could not control his temper, or keep in check his desire to "swank," was of no use as a cricketer.

Morny's bowling fell off in quality as his temper rose.

It became faster and more erratic, and Rawson played it more easily than ever. Rawson was grinning now.

To his quiet, sedate mind there was something ridiculous and amusing in the resentful annoyance of the defeated bowler.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

He had been thinking of Morny as a rod in pickle for the Bagshot bounders in the next match. But as he watched Morny's face now he was changing his mind. Mornington was making himself ridiculous, as well as spoiling his bowling, and Jimmy knew how a Bagshot crowd would have cackled, if they could have seen such an exhibition on their ground.

"Silly ass!" commented Raby.

"Swanking duffer!" grunted Newcome. "Why, he's simply chucking the ball! Call that bowling?"

"Keep your temper, Morny!" yelled Higgs of the Fourth—a remark that made Mornington all the angrier. It was followed by a loud laugh.

Mornington cast a savage look at the on-lookers.

It was bitter enough to his lofty pride to find that he was being laughed at for a childish exhibition of temper. He had drawn it upon himself, but that did not make it any pleasanter.

Kit Erroll had a troubled look.

His sincere friendship for the dandy of the Fourth did not blind him to Morny's faults, and he was feeling keenly the ridicule his chum was bringing upon himself.

He had urged Jimmy Silver a dozen times to give Morny a chance in the Junior Eleven. Morny deserved it, on his form. But what was the use of a cricketer who could only keep his temper so long as he was winning?

"My hat! Call that bowling?" exclaimed Van Ryn. "For goodness' sake, chuck it, Morny!"

"He is chucking it!" said Pons, with a chortle. "You can't call it anything else. Give somebody else the ball, Morny."

Mornington gave the Colonial juniors a fierce look. He sent down the ball again with savage force, and it rose from the pitch like a bullet and caught Tom Rawson on the shoulder with a heavy shock. Rawson uttered a sharp cry of pain.

Whether Morny had done that deliber-

ately, or whether it was simply rotten bad bowling due to his temper, was not clear. But the result was the same—Tom Rawson was hurt. He dropped the bat, and came off the pitch.

"Clumsy fool!" said Oswald.

"Clumsy rotter, you mean!" exclaimed Lovell. "The cad meant to hurt Rawson."

"Faith, and it looks like it!" exclaimed Flynn. "Mornny, it's a sneaking Hun ye are!"

"Rotter!"

"Dash it all, be fair!" exclaimed Erroll. "Mornny didn't mean that—it was an accident!"

"Rats!"

"You can bat to Mornny, then, if you like?" said Rawson savagely. "I've had enough of his bowling. Better let him take your wicket, or you'll get a crack like this!"

Mornington strode off the pitch.

"It was an accident, Rawson," he said, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, I've had enough of your accidents," said Rawson, rubbing his shoulder. "You won't catch me batting to you again in a hurry."

Mornington clenched his hands.

"Do you dare to say I did it on purpose?" he cried.

"I dare say anything I choose!" retorted Rawson contemptuously. "I don't say that, because I don't know. But if you didn't do it on purpose, you did it because you were in a rotten temper, and didn't care where the ball went; and it was because you couldn't take the wicket. You wouldn't have done it if you hadn't been a silly, swanking cad!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lovell.

"You rotten scholarship bounder!" said Mornington thickly. "You dare to talk to me, you poverty-stricken cad!"

"Shut up!" said Jimmy Silver savagely.

Mornington turned fiercely on the captain of the Fourth, but Erroll slipped an arm through his, and drew him away. He gave Erroll a fierce look for a moment, as if about to turn on his own chum, but he restrained himself and left the field with him. A derisive shout from the juniors followed him.

"Hang them!" muttered Mornington.

"Hang them all!"

Erroll set his lips a little.

He would not argue with Mornny in his

present frame of mind, but his face expressed pretty clearly what he was thinking.

Mornington jerked his arm away.

"You're down on me, like all the rest?" he snapped.

"Why can't you keep your temper, Mornny?"

"Oh, let my temper alone!"

"Mornny—"

"Do you think I hit Rawson with the ball intentionally, then?"

Erroll shook his head.

"No. But as Rawson said, you didn't care where it went—"

"So you agree with that scholarship cad?"

"Rawson isn't a cad," said Erroll quietly.

"He's one of the best, and it's caddish to throw his poverty in his face, Mornny!"

Mornington's eyes glittered.

"Thanks! That's enough!" he said, between his teeth. "If you think so much of Rawson, you'd better go and chum with the fellow, and leave me alone!"

And the dandy of the Fourth strode away, leaving Kit Erroll with a very dark shade on his brow.

CHAPTER 4.

Uncle James Gives Advice!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were working at their prep. after the cricket, when there was a tap at the door of the end study, and 'Erbert of the Second Form looked in.

Jimmy gave him a kind nod.

"Trot in, kid!" he said.

"I come to speak to you, Master Silver," said 'Erbert hesitatingly. "I—I'll come in again if you're busy."

"Don't call me Master Silver, you young ass! My name's Jimmy Silver. And I'm rearly done. Sit on the coal-locker and wait a minute."

"Orlright!"

'Erbert sat down and waited till the Fistical Four had finished their prep. Lowell and Raby and Newcome quitted the study to go down to the Common-room, leaving Jimmy Silver alone with the waif of Rookwood.

Jimmy yawned, and pushed his books away, and rose.

"Go it, kid!" he said.

Jimmy Silver, in his character as Uncle James to everybody in general, had been very kind to the little waif, who often came

to the end study for advice, and sometimes help with difficult lessons.

Rookwood School was very different from the insalubrious quarters at Dirty Dick's, off the Euston Road, which had once been poor 'Erbert's home, and he had much more to learn, in various ways, than the average fag at Rookwood.

Mornington meant to be very kind to him, but he had many occupations, and he often forgot the little fag for weeks together, and 'Erbert would not trouble his patron. The little waif had a keen sensitiveness of feeling that the superb Morny never even suspected.

But there was a hearty cordiality about Jimmy Silver that encouraged 'Erbert to bring his little troubles to the end study. He was always good-tempered, and he was always patient, and he would always have gone a mile out of his way to help a lame dog over a stile.

"Pile in, my pippin!" said Jimmy Silver, as the fag hesitated. "What's the merry trouble? Keep smiling, you know. Been fighting again with Jones minimus of the Second?"

"No. Me and Jones is great pals now," said 'Erbert brightly. "So's me and Snooks. I don't get on with Tracy minor, that's all! But he ain't a fightin' sort!"

"Then all is calm and bright in the halls of the Second—what?"

"Yes," grinned 'Erbert.

"But you've come across a deponent verb, and that's doubled you up?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Trot it out, and we'll double up the deponent verb."

"Tain't that, Master Silver. 'Tain't them blessed verbs this time. It—it's about Master Mornington!"

"Oh, Morny!" Jimmy Silver became serious. "I've told you before, 'Erbert, what I think about Morny making you fetch smokes for him!"

"He don't make me, Master Silver!" said the fag eagerly. "He wouldn't ask me if I didn't want to!"

"Well, well! Never mind Morny. I know you're potty on that subject," said Jimmy, with a smile. "But what is it you've come about?"

"It's about Master Mornington. I—I want to ask your advice, sir."

"Good! No charge! Only, if you call me 'Sir' again I'll pull your ear! Go on!"

"You chipped in when that beast Lattrey was a-ammering me, sir!" said 'Erbert. "He'd asked me to do something, and I wouldn't."

"Quite right! Don't ever do anything Lattrey asks you!" said Jimmy. "Give him a wide berth. He's not wholesome!"

"I know he ain't, Master Silver. An' I wish Master Morny wasn't friends with him neither. He don't mean any good to Master Morny. But—but— Course, sir, if I tell you wot's worrying me, you won't say nothing?"

"I won't say anything, if that's what you mean."

"Yes, sir! Well, sir, Master Mornington sometimes gives me a written message to take to a place—some place—"

"The Bird-in-Hand!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I know!"

"Lattrey asked me to 'and him the next letter Morny give me to take there," said 'Erbert. "He says, says he, it was to see that Morny didn't write anything that might get him into trouble. But—but I don't trust Lattrey. He's a bad egg!"

"Quite right!"

"He said some shady rotter at the Bird-in-Hand might keep Morny's paper to keep a 'old over 'im!"

"Likely enough!"

"But—but I figured it out, sir, that that's what Lattrey wanted Morny's letter for 'isself."

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He don't like Morny, though they're friends," said the fag shrewdly. "He makes a lot of money out of 'im. I know that! He hates Master Erroll, who's a good pal to Morny. I know he's afraid of Morny chucking him over, and I believe he wants to get a 'old over Morny."

"Very likely. Don't do as he asks you, anyway."

"I ain't going to, Master Silver. But that ain't all. Suppose he had a letter like that there, it would do Master Mornington a lot of 'arm if it came out—to the 'Ead or the Form-master—wouldn't it?"

"Might get him the sack!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"And then Morny would be under Lattrey's thumb?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, then, as he can't make use of me to get 'old of a paper like that, he may try some other trick," said the fag. "And—and I was a wondering, Master Silver, if I

ought to warn Morny? Course, I don't want to make trouble atween friends, an' I don't want to be tellin' tales. But—but s'pose Morny, in a careless way, wrote somethin' that Lattrey got 'old of, and—and kep'—” He paused, his eyes fixed earnestly on Jimmy Silver's face. “Morny's so careless, sir. He might let Lattrey get a 'old over 'im like that, and then—then he wouldn't never be able to throw Lattrey over if he wanted to.”

“My hat!” murmured Jimmy Silver, staring at the fag.

He did not doubt that the keen-witted little waif had read aright the cunning scheme in Lattrey's brain. Lattrey's hold on the richest junior at Rookwood was very precarious. Morny was very unreliable, and Erroll was doing his best to win him from shady pursuits. It was only too likely that Lattrey was seeking to strengthen his hold upon his associate and dupe.

“So, p'raps you'll advise me, Master Silver,” Erbert went on. “I—I don't like to seem to be tellin' tales and making trouble; but—but don't you think Master Mornington ought to know what Lattrey wants?”

“He ought to chuck up playing the giddy ox!” growled Jimmy Silver. “But, as he won't do that, he ought to know that his precious pal is trying to serve him a dirty trick. You'd better warn him.”

Erbert rose from the coal-locker.

“Thank you, Master Silver! I—I thought I'd ask you first. You think I'd better tell Morny wot Lattrey wanted?”

“I think you'd better!” said Jimmy, after a pause. “Morny has a right to know. He's fool enough to land himself into anything.”

“Thank you, sir!”

The fag quitted the study, relieved in his mind. He placed great faith in Jimmy Silver—much more than in Morny—in spite of his unbounded admiration of the dandy of the Fourth.

Jimmy smiled as he went down to the Common-room to join his chums. He rather fancied himself in the role of Uncle James, giving sage counsel to youths in trouble.

And he felt that he had done Morny a good turn, and though he was not feeling very friendly towards Morny just then, he was glad of it. He did not want even a reckless scapegrace like Mornington to fall into the clutches of a scheming, unscrupulous rascal like Lattrey of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Revelation!

TUBBY MUFFIN smiled a genial smile of welcome as Mornington of the Fourth came into the first study.

Lattrey, Tubby's study-mate, was there, finishing his prep. He did not even look up. But Tubby was all smiles.

“Come in, old chap!” said the fat Classical affectionately.

Mornington gave him a cool stare.

Tubby's affection was founded upon Morny's ample wealth, but it was not in the slightest degree reciprocated by the dandy of the Fourth.

“You can cut off, Muffin!” said Morny curtly.

“Eh?”

“Cut off! I've come here to speak to Lattrey.”

“Oh!”

“Outside!” said Mornington.

Even the worm will turn, and Tubby Muffin, instead of cutting off, gave a snort of indignation.

“Cut off yourself, you snob!” he said independently. “You're not going to turn me out of my own study!”

“Get out, Tubby!” said Lattrey, rising.

“Look here—”

“I'll kick you out if you don't!”

“I'll kick him out, anyway!” said Mornington.

Tubby Muffin dodged out of the study and fled. Mornington closed the door after him, and turned to face Lattrey.

The latter eyed him sneeringly.

“I've no time now for poker,” he said.

“Thanks! I haven't come to play poker, dear boy!” said Mornington. “I've come to tell you what I think of you!”

“You needn't trouble!”

“You want to get something in my writing,” said Mornington—“something addressed to Joey Hook, or a chap of that kind, that would get me into trouble if it came out. You asked young Murphy to sell me out.”

“Did he tell you so?” sneered Lattrey.

“Yes; to put me on my guard.”

“Well, it's a lie!”

“It isn't a lie,” said Mornington calmly.

“Erbert doesn't tell lies; his upbringing has been quite different from yours, Lattrey. It's the truth; and you were schemin' to get me under your thumb, you cad!”

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

“I knew all the time that you were a

sneakin' cad!" went on Mornington. "I've been friendly with you because I've a queer weakness for the company of rotters and out-and-out rascals!"

"Take care what you say!" muttered Lattrey.

"It's my way," said Mornington. "I chum with Towny and Toppy, a pair of vicious duffers; and Peele and Gower, a pair of vicious rascals; and you, worse than the lot of them put together! I find you all rather amusin'. As for you, of course I knew you were after my money all the time, and I never bothered. It doesn't hurt me to lose a few quids at banker and bridge, and I dare say you're hard up an' want the money."

Lattrey's eyes glistened like a rat's.

"But that's comin' to an end now," added Mornington. "I was a fool ever to speak to a fellow of your sort. I knew you were a schemin' cad, but I didn't know what a dangerous scoundrel you were."

"Take care!" muttered Lattrey, clenching his hands almost convulsively.

"What else are you?" sneered Mornington. "You wanted to get somethin' compromisin' written in my hand, to hold over my head, to make me dance to your tune—what? That's what lawyers call blackmail. You're a blackmailin' scoundrel, Lattrey!"

Lattrey made a step forward. Mornington stood cool and calm, his face scornful, quite prepared for an attack, and welcoming it. But it did not come.

"Come on, if you choose!" said Mornington coolly. "I'm feeling just inclined to wipe up your study with you, you treacherous cad!"

Lattrey's eyes burned, but he did not come on.

"After this," continuing Mornington, "you can give me a wide berth. I'm going to drop your acquaintance, dear boy! I'm goin' to warn the other chaps what to expect from you—what kind of a pal you are, an' what it may cost them if they trust you. Savvy?"

He smiled grimly.

"You're a criminal, Lattrey, that's what you are! Goodness knows where you come from. From a family of criminals, I should say. But that kind of thing won't do for Rookwood. It may be all right in the reformatory you ought to belong to, but it's not quite good enough for Rookwood. You'll have the exceedin' kindness not to speak to me any more, and to keep your distance. I fancy the other fellows won't

want much to do with you, when they know the kind of game you're prepared to play. I'm sorry I shan't be able to learn the wonderful game of poker from you." He laughed satirically. "You've seen the last quid you're goin' to see from me!"

Lattrey drew a deep breath.

"Keep it up!" he muttered. "You will come down off your perch some day, Mornington, I can tell you that. Your money! You've shoved your money at me pretty often. Your money!" He burst into a bitter, sarcastic laugh. "Your money, you beggar!"

Mornington was turning to the door, having said his say. But he turned back at that.

"What did you call me?" he asked.

He was not angry, only surprised and amused. Truly, "beggar" did not seem quite the description to apply to the richest fellow at Rookwood, who had more fivers in his pocket-book than any other fellow had half-crowns.

"Beggar!" repeated Lattrey. "Beggar and impostor! That's what I call you! Money—your money! You haven't a cent in the world. Every shilling you spend is somebody else's money. And if that somebody else claims it, what are you going to do then? You'll lose your fine feathers. You may be glad to speak to me then, you swanking pauper!"

"Pauper!" repeated Mornington.

"Yes, pauper! You like me to believe that you didn't know it!" sneered Lattrey. "You didn't know I knew it, certainly!"

Mornington looked at him in wonder.

"Have you gone off your rocker?" he asked calmly. "I don't see how you can know anythin' about my affairs, anyway!"

"You see that I do!"

"Not at all. Unless you're mad, you're dreamin'," said Mornington. "But you're going to explain, Lattrey. What do you mean by what you just said?"

Lattrey gave him a hard, searching look. "You mean to say that you don't know?" he asked at last.

"I know you're talkin' out of your hat! That's all."

"By gad!" Lattrey breathed hard. "Then your guardian's kept it dark from you. Sir Rupert Staepoole hasn't told you —"

"Told me what?" exclaimed Mornington, a vague sense of uneasiness creeping over him, in spite of his scornful disbelief. "What do you mean? Out with it!"

"That you're a beggar!" Lattrey enunciated every word with slow relish. "That you haven't a quid in the wide world of your own money. That every shilling you spend may have to be accounted for if the right owner turns up, and he will—he will!"

Mornington searched the hard, bitter face with his eyes. There was intense earnestness in Lattrey's look. He was telling the truth, or so he believed. The dandy of the Fourth stood very still.

Could there be anything in it, he was wondering.

"Tell me what you mean, Lattrey?" he said at last, and his voice was very low and quiet.

"I'll tell you fast enough. You stand to inherit twenty thousand pounds a year when you're twenty-one. What?"

"That's so, though I don't see how you know it!"

"You see that I do know it. And the Mornington estates—yours, if your cousin does not turn up; but whose, if he does?" grinned Lattrey.

"My cousin?"

"Your cousin, Cecil Mornington, the heir of your father's elder brother," said Lattrey. "And you never knew?"

"It's a lie!" said Mornington. "I have no cousin Cecil!"

"Your uncle never told you?" Lattrey laughed. "No. I dare say old Stacpoole thought it wouldn't make you exactly happy to know the facts, and Cecil Mornington may never turn up. So he never told you."

He laughed.

"My father and his brother are both dead," said Mornington. "I was my father's only son, and his brother had no children. So I always believed."

"Your father's brother had a son. He married late in life, and his son is younger than you. That son was lost when he was a baby, and never found. But there has been search going on for him for ten years, and it's still going on. Sir Rupert Stacpoole is still paying the inquiry agents who are searching for him. If he's alive, he will be about twelve years old now. And why shouldn't he be alive? And if he's found, he takes everything—everything." Lattrey gave the dandy of the Fourth a gloating look. "You're left a beggar—your father was a beggar, dependent on his elder brother for an allowance. Old Stacpoole knows it. You'll be dependent on him for

the bread you eat, if your cousin turns up, and he will!"

"And how do you know all this?" asked Mornington quietly.

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Because my father's the head of Lattrey & Co., the inquiry agents," he said coolly. "That's how I know."

"Your pater's a sneakin' detective, you mean," Mornington's lip curled. "Do inquiry agents confide matters of this kind to their sons?"

"Ha, ha! I imagine not! But there's precious few things went on at home that I did not know about, all the same!"

"I see! Followin' in your father's footsteps like a sneakin' spy. What!"

"Put it like that if you like. You see that I do know it."

"I shall ask my guardian if it's true."

"Do!" sneered Lattrey. "You'll find that it is!"

"But whether it's true or not, you've no right to know anythin' about it," said Mornington, his eyes glittering, "an' whether I'm goin' to be a beggar or not, I don't allow a sneakin' spyin' cad to call me one. Put up your hands, Lattrey! I'm goin' to thrash you!"

The dandy of the Fourth came on as he spoke.

Lattrey put up his hands quickly.

But his defence did not save him.

For five minutes there was a trampling and scuffling of feet in the study, and fierce panting and gasping.

Then Lattrey lay on the floor on his back, knocked completely out. He blinked at Mornington through half-closed eyes, with blood on his face, groaning.

Mornington gave him a contemptuous look, and left the study.

CHAPTER 6.

A Change of Prospects!

"LET me alone, confound you!" Peele and Gower looked darkly at their study-mate.

It was the day following Mornington's interview with Lattrey of the Fourth. He had not spoken to the new junior since.

All that day Mornington had been in a thoughtful and irritable mood.

He said to himself a dozen times that he did not believe a word of Lattrey's story.

But, in spite of himself, belief crept into his mind.

Lattrey could not wholly have invented such a tale.

But if it was true—

If his wealth, his prospects, everything depended upon whether the right claimant to the Mornington estates was found?

What then?

It haunted Mornington.

What if he was, as Lattrey sneeringly declared, a beggar? He had always been used to plenty of money—more money than was good for him. To be poor—poor like Rawson, whose poverty he had ungenerously thrown in his teeth, poorer than Rawson, for Rawson had gifts, brains, that Morny did not share. What would it be like?

Peele and Gower knew nothing of what was in his mind. Morny was not likely to confide it to them. Lattrey had said nothing. Probably it was only his vindictive rage that had made him betray his knowledge to Mornington himself.

It was only by surreptitious means that Lattrey could have learned so much of his father's business. It was not to his advantage to let it be known that he knew. He had told Mornington because Morny's bitter insolence had goaded him into it as retaliation.

Was it true?

Morny was in no mood to be troubled by Peele and Gower, and when they proposed a game of nap after tea, he burst out on them savagely. He had not spoken a word during tea. He made up for it now.

"Give us a rest! Hang your cards, you measly, blackguardly rotters! Don't play the giddy ox now! Clear out, and let ree alone."

Peele gritted his teeth.

"By gad, I'm getting fed up with you, Morny!" he said savagely. "I shan't stand much more of your airs and graces, I warn you!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Leave him alone," growled Gower. "I'm sick of him! Let's get out."

The sulky nuts left the study, and Mornington was alone.

He remained in the armchair, his legs stretched out, his hands driven deep into his pockets, thinking, with a deep pucker in his brow.

Was it true?

He had written to his guardian to ask

him. He expected that Sir Rupert Stackpoole would come down to Rookwood. Until he came Morny would not know.

But if he knew—what then? Knowing it would not alter the facts. Did his wealth, his consequence, his position in the world, depend upon a mere chance? Might it all be swept away in a moment by circumstances over which he had not the slightest control?

It was a bitter thought to the proud-spirited junior.

There was a tap at the door, and Erroll looked in. He glanced rather doubtfully at Morny. They had not spoken since they had parted in anger the previous day, after the scene on the cricket-ground.

Erroll was not a fellow to bear malice, and he was quite ready to go on as if nothing had happened, if Morny had got over his tantrums. But had he?

Mornington gave him a dark look for a moment, but then his face cleared.

"Come in," he said.

"Coming down to the cricket, Morny?"

Mornington laughed.

"I'm not thinkin' of cricket just now," he said.

"The fellows are going down to practice," remarked Erroll.

"If you want to go—"

"Not if you want me, Morny. Don't be so touchy."

"I'm a touchy ass!" said Mornington. "I'm a purse-proud, swanking idiot, Erroll, and I wonder you were ever ass enough to pal with me!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"But you did," said Mornington. "And you never gave a thought to tin, did you?"

Erroll flushed.

"You think too much about your money, Morny," he said. "You surely can't imagine that I gave it a thought?"

"I know you didn't! You wouldn't think any different of me if I lost it?" said Mornington, eyeing him.

Erroll laughed.

"Not much danger of that, I suppose," he said. "I can't imagine you without plenty of money."

"I can't, either; but it might happen."

"What rot!" said Erroll. "Your money isn't invested in shoddy companies, is it?"

"It's a landed estate, worth twenty thousand a year, and no end of tin in ready money in the bank," said Mornington.

"Something to swank about—what? But suppose it all melted away, like fairy gold?"

Erroll looked at him sharply, and then closed the door of the study.

"Has anything happened, Morny?" he asked. "Tell me, if it has. Whatever should happen, you know I'm your pal."

"I do know it," said Mornington, with a nod. "So I'm goin' to tell you. You won't jaw about it, of course. Listen to this!"

Erroll did not interrupt him once as he related what Lattrey had told him the previous day. His face became very grave, however.

"Well, what do you think, Erroll?" concluded Mornington.

"I'm afraid there's something in it, old chap," said Erroll. "Lattrey couldn't quite have made up a yarn like that. But your guardian will tell you, when you ask him. But I don't think you need feel alarmed. If the kid was lost ten years ago, and hasn't been found, there isn't much chance of his turning up now. It's a queer state of things, but it's not likely you will ever see your Cousin Cecil. I—I don't know whether you want to—"

He hesitated.

Mornington laughed sarcastically.

"Of course, I ought to be eager to have him found, and restored to his rights!" he sneered.

"No, I don't think that could be expected of you," said Erroll quietly. "Luckily, it doesn't depend on you, either way."

"I wish it did!" Mornington gritted his teeth. "I'd make jolly sure that Cousin Cecil didn't turn up!"

"You wouldn't," said Erroll. "But that's neither here nor there. There isn't one chance in a million of the other claimant turning up. If he does, you'll have to make the best of it, and you've got pluck enough to face it like a man. But it's not likely to happen."

"If it did, I should be a beggar, as Lattrey says—a miserable worm like Rawson."

"Rawson isn't a miserable worm, Morny. He's quite as happy as you are, in his own way. He's going to work his own way in the world; and, to come down to facts, that's a bit more manly than living in idleness on dead men's money. It mightn't be a bad thing for you to have to fend for yourself, instead of browsing on other people's work."

"What rot!" said Mornington.

Erroll was silent.

"All the same, I think I could face it," said Mornington, after a pause. "I like money and comfort, but I've got some grit, too. But, by gad, how the nuts would stare! I should lose a lot of charmin' acquaintances at this school!" He laughed bitterly. "They'd give me the go-by, and no mistake!"

"There's one pal you wouldn't lose, Morny."

Mornington smiled.

"An' that one's worth all the rest," he said. "Well, I'm not goin' to brood over it. I'm goin' to shove it out of my mind till I see my guardian. Let's get down to the cricket."

"Good!" said Erroll, relieved.

The chums of the Fourth went downstairs, and passed Lattrey in the lower passage.

Lattrey gave Mornington a quick look.

The dandy of the Fourth passed him without a glance, looking as cool, as cheerful and as supercilious as of old. Whatever he felt inwardly, he did not intend to give the cad of the Fourth a triumph over him.

Lattrey looked after him darkly as he sauntered out into the quadrangle with Erroll.

He had lost Mornington. All was over between him and the Dandy of the Fourth. And, so far as he could see, he had not even succeeded in making Morny troubled and disquieted.

"Hang him!" muttered Lattrey between his teeth. "If—if his cousin could only be found, that would bring his head down a bit lower. If only—"

Lattrey's mutterings were interrupted as the Fistical Four came out with their bats. Lattrey was in the way, and the quartette walked into him. They went on their way, smiling, leaving the cad of the Fourth sitting on the steps, his face black with rage.

CHAPTER 7.

A New Leaf!

MORNINGTON'S handsome face wore a very thoughtful expression as he walked down to Little Side with Erroll.

Lattrey's story was true—in its main facts, at least. He felt it to be so. And the uncertainty it introduced into his future was troubling. It would have disturbed most fellows' equanimity. But Mornington, slacker as he often was, blackguard as he

generally was, dandy and nut as he always was, had grit.

He found a peculiar sardonic amusement in contemplating the change in his condition, if the rival claimant should be found.

Smythe of the Shell, and Towny and Topham, and the rest—he knew how they would treat him. Their friendship was of the fair-weather sort. They had no use for a pal who was down on his luck.

The nuts would give him the “go-by”—fellows like Peele, in fact, would rejoice over his downfall. The best he could expect from any of them was a supercilious pity.

If he received any sympathy, it would not be from them, but from—he smiled as he thought of it—his old rival, Jimmy Silver, and very likely Rawson, the scholarship fellow. They would feel for a chap who was down.

Jimmy Silver, whose enemy he had always been—Tom Rawson, whom he had called a scholarship cad, and twitted with his poverty!

“Erroll”—he broke the silence at last—“I’ve been a silly fool, old chap!”

Erroll looked at him. He was aware of that fact.

“I think Lattrey’s done me good with his precious yarn,” said Mornington. “It seems to have opened my eyes—to some things. You never preach at me, old scout, but I know what you think. Look here, I’m goin’ to have a jolly good try to—” He paused, and laughed. “I’m goin’ to try to cut out a rather different line. I’ve been wastin’ my time playin’ the fool with those duffers. By gad, I’m not quite the important fellow I thought I was! There’s goin’ to be a bit of a change, Erroll.”

“Yes?” said Erroll.

“Hallo, Morny!” Smythe of the Shell bore down upon them. “I’ve been lookin’ for you. Come on!”

“Where?” asked Mornington.

“Cheery little party in the study,” smiled Adolphus. “Howard and Tracy, and Townsend and Topham, an’ you, old chap. Smokes galore, an’ a merry little game. You come, too, Erroll.”

“Thanks, I’d rather not!” said Erroll dryly.

“Oh, buzz off an’ play cricket, then!” said Adolphus. “You’re comin’, Morny?”

“No, I’m not comin’,” said Mornington.

“I’ll give you a tip instead, Smythe.”

“Eh? Racin’s stopped!” said Smythe.

“I don’t mean that kind of tip, fathead!”

Mornington grinned. “My tip is this—chuck it!”

“What?”

“Chuck playin’ the giddy ox!” said Mornington, enjoying the astonishment in Smythe’s somewhat vacant face. “When you’re smokin’, Smythe, you don’t know what a ridiculous ass you look!”

“Wha-a-at!”

“When you’re playin’ cards you think you’re awf’ly sportin’, but you’re not. You’re only a shady ass!” said Mornington. “I’m goin’ to chuck it. You do the same, old chap, an’ try to cultivate a little hoss-sense!”

“You cheeky ass!” gasped Smythe.

“I’m really self-denyin’ in givin’ you this tip. I’ve found you no end entertainin’ with your sportin’ ways,” said Mornington calmly. “You’re no end of a funny merchant, Smythe, when you’re paintin’ the town red. You’re as good as a comic paper without knowin’ it. Chuck it, old chap, and I’ll find somethin’ else to amuse me in dull times.”

Mornington walked on, leaving Adolphus Smythe the stuttering with wrath.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were already on Little Side, and some of the cricketers looked rather grimly at Mornington. His exploit of the previous day had not been forgotten. Unheeding the looks of the Classical juniors, Mornington came up to Rawson, who was talking with the Fistical Four.

“Excuse me a minute!” he said.

Rawson stared at him.

“I owe you an apology,” said Mornington, while the chums of the Fourth stared at him blankly. “I hurt you yesterday. It was an accident, but it was owin’ to my rotten temper, just as you said.”

“My hat!” ejaculated Rawson.

“I’m dreamin’!” murmured Lovell. “Morny talking like a decent chap! Pinch me, somebody!”

“I’m sorry it happened, Rawson,” continued Mornington. “I called you names afterwards. It was caddish, and I’m sorry. I can’t say more than that.”

“I suppose you’re not pulling my leg?” gasped Rawson.

“Not at all. I’m serious. I apologise.”

“All serene!” said Rawson.

Mornington took the ball, and went on to bowl to Erroll, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. blinking.

“Something’s happened to Morny!” said Raby, in wonder. “Dash it all, perhaps

we've been a bit hard on him. Fellow can't do more than own up."

"We'll see how he shapes now," remarked Jimmy Silver, his fixed intention with regard to Mornington beginning to waver a little.

Mornington was bowling in great form. There was no doubt that he was a bowler any junior team might have been proud of—at his best.

Jimmy signed to Van Ryn to take the bat, and the South African junior went in. Van Ryn's batting was as good as any in the Fourth, and he stood up to Morny's bowling without turning a hair.

Whatever Mornington sent him he sent back, and half a dozen overs ended with the same result.

Then Mornington threw the ball to Oswald, and came off. He paused to speak as he passed the Africander at the wicket.

"Good man!" he said. "I'm goin' to keep on till I can take your wicket, old scout! Try you again later."

"I'm your man!" grinned Van Ryn.

Jimmy Silver gave Mornington a peculiar look. A momentary suspicion had come into his mind that the dandy of the Fourth was playing a part. He knew Morny's duplicity of old.

But Morny's face was quite frank and cheerful, and in spite of his doubts, Jimmy could not help being convinced. He joined Mornington and Erroll when they left the field after the practice.

"Not booked up for Wednesday, Morny?" he asked.

"No."

"Care to play in the Bagshot match?"

"My hat!"

Erroll's face lighted up.

"Morny's worth his place," he said.

"He'll be a rod in pickle for Bagshot, Jimmy."

"That's why I'm asking you," said the captain of the Fourth.

"I'm your man!" said Mornington, with a smile. "I had a little engagement on for Wednesday, but, as it happens, I had already decided to put that off permanently."

"Good! Only"—Jimmy paused a moment—"no more smokes between now and Wednesday, Morny. You've got to be fit."

"I've given up smokin'."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Au' if you want a pack of cards, quite good, an' a set of bridge markers, I've got some you can have—as a present."

"Put 'em in the fire!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "I don't quite make you out, Morny, but if you mean business, I'm jolly glad."

That evening the cricket list for the Bagshot match was posted up, and the name of Mornington was in it. Lattrey had the pleasure of reading Mornington's name among the others, and the additional pleasure of seeing the dandy of the Fourth in deep discussion of cricket with Erroll and the Fistical Four, all apparently on the best of terms. Lattrey did not look as if he enjoyed the pleasure.

CHAPTER 8.

Morny Resigns.

"TROT in, Morny!"

Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, was sitting on the corner of the table in the end study, needle and thread in hand, repairing a rent in a pink-and-white blazer.

He looked up and nodded cordially as Mornington of the Fourth looked in.

Jimmy's manner was very friendly.

It was quite a new thing for Jimmy Silver to be friendly with the dandy of the Fourth, but Mornington had held out the olive branch, and Jimmy, with his usual good temper, had been willing to meet him half-way.

And Morny, who had given up breaking bounds, and smoking in the study with Lattrey and Peele and the other "nuts"—at least, for the present—was quite a new character just now.

Jimmy Silver hoped that the change in him would last, and the nuts of Rookwood hoped precisely the reverse. There was certainly no telling. Morny was never quite reliable.

There was a cloud on Morny's brow as he lounged into the study.

"Mendin' your clothes—what?" he asked, staring at the blazer in Jimmy's hands.

"Exactly!"

"By gad!"

Jimmy Silver went cheerfully on with his mending. He could not afford to be so extravagant in clothes, or in anything else, as the wealthy Morny. And he did not want to be.

Mornington's lip curled for a moment—

Jimmy affecting not to observe it. He did not want to quarrel with Mornington.

"Well, about the Bagshot match this afternoon?" said Mornington abruptly.

"All serene! We're starting immediately after dinner," said Jimmy. "Don't tell me you're not fit."

"I'm as fit as a fiddle!"

"Good!"

"I suppose you'd miss me a lot if I stood out of the team?" said Mornington sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"I've put you in the team, Mornington, because you can bowl," he said. "I think you can be stood in the eleven because you have got over your swank a good deal. But if you want to get out I can replace you easily enough."

"I don't want to get out!"

"That's all right, then. You'll come to Bagshot with us," said Jimmy, more amiably. "I rather fancy we shall pull it off this afternoon. Three bowlers like you and Erroll and my humble self will rather surprise Pankley & Co."

"I've looked in to tell you I can't come, after all!"

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed. He had half expected some "rot" from Mornington on the eve of the match. It was exactly like the old Morny, to work his way into the junior eleven, and throw it over like this at the last minute.

Jimmy dug the needle savagely into the blazer.

"I was an ass to think of trusting you," he said. "This is just like you, Morny. Another engagement, I suppose?"

"Yes!"

"And it's turned up since your name was down for the eleven?"

"Yes!"

"And you're not coming to Bagshot?"

"I can't!"

"Go and eat coke then!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Keep your precious engagement. What is it—billiards at the Bird-in-Hand?"

"No!"

"Banker in Lattrey's study—what?" growled Jimmy Silver.

"No!"

"Well, I don't care a rap what it is! Buzz off and don't bother!"

Mornington gritted his teeth.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome came into the end study before he could reply.

"Finished that rag, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

"Just on."

"It's close on dinner. Hallo, Morny!"

Mornington did not speak.

"You fellows haven't been rowing?" said Lovell, glancing from one to the other. "I thought rows were off now Morny's taken up cricket, and joined the eleven."

"Morny's resigned his place!" snapped Jimmy. "He won't be playing against Bagshot this afternoon."

"Isn't that just like him?" exclaimed Lovell, in tones of exasperation. "Right at the last minute Oswald's gone home for the afternoon. He'd have stayed if he'd known. Morny couldn't tell you before, of course. Just one of his old tricks!"

"Look here——" began Mornington savagely.

"Oh, ring off!" exclaimed Lovell.

"What are you resigning for? Has somebody come between the wind and your nobility? Did you expect Jimmy to lick your shoes, and the rest of the team to bow down and worship? B-r-r-r-r!"

"Did you expect to be kow-towed to, you swanking ass?" said Raby, in tones of deep contempt.

"Or did you want to leave the team in the lurch by sticking out at the last minute?" snapped Newcome. "You'll have to play another Modern chap, Jimmy."

"I'll find somebody," said Jimmy. "And I shall know better than to trust Morny again!"

"Does that mean that I'm out of the team for good?" sneered Mornington.

"Yes, it does!"

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Lovell indignantly. "How often do you expect to be able to play tricks like that? Do you want us all to go down on our knees, and beg you to play?"

"That's it!" growled Raby. "We've got to be jolly civil, and then the dear fellow will condescend to play, after all! I'd rather kick him out of the eleven myself!"

Lovell threw the door open wide.

"There's your way, Morny, and be glad you don't get a boot behind you to help you out!"

Mornington looked furiously at the Fistical Four of the Fourth. His hands were clenched hard.

"You confounded cheeky cads——" he broke out fiercely.

"That's enough! Get out, or——"

"Or what?" sneered Mornington.

"Or you'll be put out!"

"Put me out then, you cad, if you think you can do it," said Mornington between his teeth.

"What-ho!"

Edward Arthur Lovell was not slow to accept the challenge. He ran straight at the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington met him fiercely enough.

Lovell grasped him, receiving, without heeding, two or three savage blows, and swung him through the doorway.

There was a crash as Mornington landed in the passage.

He rolled over, gasping, and Lovell glared at him from the doorway. Mornington picked himself up, his brow like thunder and his eyes glittering. He gave Lovell a deadly look, and went down the passage.

Jimmy Silver slid off the table, and put away his needle and thread.

"Finished!" he said. "Let's get down. There goes the bell!"

And the Fistical Four went down to dinner.

CHAPTER 9.

A Little Too Hasty!

JIMMY SILVER wore a thoughtful look at dinner.

He had the responsibilities of junior cricket skipper on his shoulders. He had been very well satisfied with the eleven he had made up for the match at Bagshot School. Now he had to replace Mornington.

Jimmy could not help feeling exasperated.

Morny had shown up so well in cricket practice lately, and he seemed to have overcome his tendency to "swank" and temper so much since he had chummed with Kit Erroll, that Jimmy had put aside his old distrust, and let his old rival into the team.

Now Mornington had let him down at the last moment—and at an awkward moment.

Oswald, who could have filled his place, though not so well, had gone home for the half holiday, and he had taken Rawson, one of Jimmy's most reliable men, with him.

Neither was available now, though either would willingly have played if Jimmy had known it in time.

The captain of the Fourth could not help thinking that Morny had timed his resignation on purpose—doubtless with the intention of being entreated to play. That sort of thing was quite in keeping with Morny's old character.

Jimmy Silver was not likely to entreat anybody to play. His problem was to replace Mornington with the least possible danger to the team.

He decided upon Towle, of the Modern side, and after dinner he cut across the quad to Mr. Manders' house to tell Towle.

The three Tommies of the Modern side—Dodd and Doyle and Cook—were in the eleven, and they were pleased to hear Jimmy's news, their opinion being that there weren't enough Moderns in the team anyhow.

"Good for you!" said Tommy Dodd heartily. "Sure you don't want a few more Moderns in the team, old scout? We want to beat Bagshot, you know, and I don't quite see how we're going to do it with such a gang of Classical duffers."

"Rats!" said Jimmy Silver.

"But what is Mornington standing out for?" asked Towle. "I'm glad to play, of course, but my bowling isn't a patch on Morny's, to tell the truth."

"His lordship has another engagement," said Jimmy Silver sarcastically. "A merry engagement that's turned up since he was put in the eleven."

"Swanking ass!" commented Tommy Dodd.

"Of all the nerve, to tell you so!" remarked Tommy Cook. "Morny's got plenty of cheek."

"A little too much for a member of the Rookwood junior eleven!" grunted Jimmy Silver. "Get ready, you fellows! We've got to start early, as we're walking over to Bagshot."

"Ready, my son. If you'd like a few more Moderns in the team——"

"Bow-wow!"

Ten minutes later the Rookwood cricketers walked out of the gates. A good many juniors were going over with them to see the match, but Mornington was not among the crowd that came out into the road.

The eleven was a good one, consisting of

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome, Erroll, Conroy, Van Ryn (Classicals), and Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, Tommy Doyle, and Towle (Moderns).

But Jimmy would have been glad to have Mornington in the ranks—if only that superb youth could have forgotten his swank and learned to play the game.

Kit Erroll joined Jimmy Silver as the cricketers strode down the lane, en route to Bagshot.

"Hard cheese on Mornny, isn't it?" Erroll remarked.

Jimmy stared at him.

"I don't see it," he answered dryly. "I don't want to say anything against your special chum, Erroll, but I'm sorry I didn't give him a thick ear before I left."

"Jimmy!"

"Blessed if I know how you can stand the swanking ass, Erroll," growled Raby. "Fancy resigning at the very last minute—"

"He couldn't help it, could he?"

"I suppose he could," growled Jimmy Silver. "Banker in Lattrey's study may be awfully important, but not quite so important as a cricket match."

"Didn't Mornny tell you why he couldn't come, then?"

"He told me he had another engagement."

Erroll frowned.

"He couldn't come, Jimmy. He's bound to stay in this afternoon, as his guardian's coming down to the school especially to see him."

"His guardian coming down?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes: Sir Rupert Stacpoole."

"Oh!"

"Sir Rupert's letter was delayed in the post, and Mornny only got it just before dinner," said Erroll. "He came to you at once to tell you—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

The Fistical Four looked at one another. Their faces were rather pink, and they looked sheepish.

Erroll looked at them inquiringly.

"Didn't Mornny tell you that?" he asked.

"Nunno. I—I don't think—perhaps—I gave him much time," murmured Jimmy Silver. "I—I concluded that it was some more of his swank."

"And I slung him out of the study," mumbled Lovell.

"And—and he wanted to come and couldn't!" said Raby. "I—I must say it was rather hard cheese on Mornny."

"I think it was," said Erroll very quietly.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows as he walked on.

He had been a little hasty.

Mornny, in fact, was a dog with a bad name, and Jimmy Silver & Co. had judged him on that without giving him a chance. Certainly Mornny could not leave Rookwood that afternoon if his guardian was coming down specially to see him.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Jimmy at last. "It was so exactly like Mornny's old swank, that—that—"

"That's how it was," murmured Lovell.

"Still—"

"We'll tell him we're sorry when we get back," said Raby.

"Yes, rather."

The cricketers went on their way, the Fistical Four, and especially Arthur Edward Lovell, wishing sincerely that they had been a little more patient with Mornington of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 10.

Mornington's Protege!

"HANG them!"

Mornington uttered that comment as he stood at the window of No. 4 Study, and watched the cricketing crowd stream out of the gates of Rookwood.

Mornington was in a savage temper.

The misunderstanding in the end study had enraged him, and certainly he had some cause for complaint.

He could have nipped that misunderstanding in the bud by hastening to explain to Jimmy Silver, but he had not chosen to do so, his lofty temper being at fault. He really had himself to thank for it, but he did not look at it in that light.

He was annoyed at having to cut the cricket match, enraged with Jimmy Silver for the way his resignation had been accepted, and discontented generally.

The visit of his guardian was not a pleasant matter, either. Mornny had his

own reasons for looking forward to it with uneasiness.

As he stared gloomily from the window, Lattrey of the Fourth passed below, and, glancing up, caught his eye.

Lattrey smiled sneeringly.

Lattrey, at least, knew of the secret misgiving that weighed upon Morny's heart, and he rejoiced to know of it, since his bitter quarrel with the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington watched him savagely out of sight. Then he swung round from the window as the study door opened.

Peele and Gower and Townsend looked in.

"Comin'?" asked Peele.

"Where?" snapped Mornington.

"We're going to have a little game in the abbey ruins. As you're not playin' cricket it seems—"

"Be a sport, old scout," said Townsend. "Lattrey's goin' to be there, an' he's willin' to overlook your little tiff with him."

"I'm not!" growled Mornington.

"Are you keepin' this game up?" asked Peele, with a sneer. "Is banker off for good—and billiards?"

Mornington glared at the smiling nuts.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"You're not coming, dear boy?"

"No!"

"Go an' eat coke, then!" grinned Peele, and he slammed the door, and the nuts of Rookwood went their own way.

Mornington paced the study with knitted brows and restless strides. He had broken with his old friends—the nuts—as much for Erroll's sake as anything else. He had taken up cricket and got into the eleven, and now—

He was in a savage and discontented mood. He spun round angrily as a tap came at the door. It was a fag who entered—Murphy of the Second Form, more familiarly known as "Erbert."

The waif of Rookwood glanced timidly at Mornington's scowling face.

Much as little 'Erbert admired the superb youth who had rescued him from want, and to whom it was due that he was admitted to Rookwood, he was generally a little timid in approaching him.

Morny's temper was uncertain.

He was capable of great generosity, as when he picked up the little vagrant on the road and brought him to Rookwood.

He had stood 'Erbert's steady friend, and he had prevailed upon his guardian to enter the little waif at Rookwood and pay his fees there.

But for Mornington the little nameless waif would still have been tramping the roads, in misery and want.

But all the same, Morny was as likely as not to snap his head off when he approached, as 'Erbert had learned from experience.

He might be overflowing with generous kindness, or in a savage and irritable mood—there never was any telling.

It was the latter mood that had the upper hand now, and as soon as 'Erbert saw his face he repented him that he had come to the study.

"Well?" snapped Mornington.

"I—I— Ain't you going over to Bag-shot, Master Mornington?"

"No."

"I—I was going over with Snooks and Jones to see you play, sir," said 'Erbert. "As you didn't start with them—"

"Well, I'm not going. Old Staepoole's coming this afternoon," growled Mornington.

'Erbert, who was backing through the doorway, stopped.

"You're guardian's coming, sir?"

"Yes."

"P'raps he'll want to see me, Master Mornington. I'd better not go out."

"Why should he want to see you?" growled Mornington. "Don't be a young ass!"

'Erbert's face crimsoned.

"I—I—"

"Oh, don't stutter!"

"No, sir—I—I—thought—Sir Rupert generally does say a word or two to me when he comes," faltered 'Erbert. "I—I shouldn't like him to think as I wouldn't stay in to see 'im."

"Oh, rot! Old Staepoole's comin' down specially to see me about a private matter," said Mornington impatiently. "You won't be wanted. You can clear off with the fags, and the sooner the better."

'Erbert's lip quivered.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a low voice.

Mornington caught his expression as he withdrew hastily into the passage, and his own expression changed.

"Hold on, 'Erbert!" he said. "Come in,

kid! Don't mind my beastly temper; I'm worried horribly to-day."

The little waif's face cleared at once.

"I don't mind, sir," he said brightly. "I didn't mean for to bother you, sir, only—"

"That's all right, kid." Mornington paused, and looked curiously at the fag. "I believe you care a little bit about me, 'Erbert."

"I'd do anythin' for you, Master Mornington," said 'Erbert earnestly. "Only you jest say the word."

Mornington smiled.

"You were pretty hard up when I found you, 'Erbert, weren't you?"

"Starvin'," said 'Erbert simply.

"Dashed queer position for a chap to be in," said Mornington musingly. "Suppose—suppose for a minute, 'Erbert, that I got into the same fix—what?"

'Erbert stared.

"You, Master Morny?"

"Yes. Suppose I lost my money, and hadn't anything left but the clothes I stand up in—what?" Mornington laughed sardonically. "Then I'd be in your old fix, 'Erbert—except that I have a name to be called by, and you hadn't."

"But—but there ain't no danger of that, Master Morny!" exclaimed 'Erbert breathlessly.

Mornington did not answer.

He moved restlessly about the study, and the waif of Rookwood watched him with uneasy, troubled eyes.

The dandy of Rookwood turned to him at last, with a smile.

"All serene, 'Erbert. I was only gassin'. Are you goin' over to Bagshot to see the match?"

"Not if you ain't playin', Master Morny," said 'Erbert simply. "Snooks and Jones would rather come for a swim, so we'll be goin' up the river, if you don't want me to stay in."

"Right-ho! Cut off, and I hope you'll have a good time. Don't get out of your depth."

'Erbert grinned.

"I'm a good swimmer, Master Morny."

"Yes—I remember your fetchin' Jones minibus out of the river," said Mornington. "How do you get on with Jones now?"

"We're pals," said 'Erbert. "Old

Jonsey don't mind my droppin' my aitches now—he's a good sort."

The little waif left the study, much cheered by Morny's return to good-humour. But there was something of a cloud on his face.

Morny's reference to a possible fall from his high estate troubled him, though he could not think that the Fourth-Former was speaking seriously. Mornington continued to pace the study restlessly.

'Erbert's devotion to him, which, with all his cynicism, he knew was genuine, touched him a good deal. 'Erbert, with his queer language and his dropped aspirates, had been looked down upon and sneered at by Morny's friends, the nuts; but he would be loyal to his benefactor if disaster came.

Certainly he was not so aristocratic as the elegant Townsend or Topham—he did not even know what his name was; Murphy merely being the name of the kind-hearted soldier who had taken charge of him, and who had since given his life for his country in an Indian Frontier fight.

But the nameless waif of Rookwood had qualities in his nature that Townsend and Topham did not share.

It came into Morny's mind that, if the worst happened, he would not be able to carry out his plans for 'Erbert's future—the waif of Rookwood would be left without a friend again. Somehow, that was a troubling thought, even to the cynical black sheep of the Fourth.

The sound of wheels in the quadrangle aroused him from moody thoughts, and he went downstairs to meet his guardian.

CHAPTER 11.

The Missing Heir!

SIR RUPERT STACPOOLE came up to Study No. 4 with his ward. The baronet had come down specially to see Mornington. There was a grave expression in the old gentleman's face as he sat in Morny's armchair.

The junior stood before him with knitted brows.

"You know what I wanted to see you about, uncle?" he said, plunging directly into the matter.

"I gathered from your letter that someone had been talking indiscreetly to you, my boy."

"I want to know whether it's true," said Mornington abruptly.

Sir Rupert pursed his lips. He tugged uneasily at his white moustache. It was easy to see that this interview was not a pleasure to him.

"What is it you have been told, Valentine?" he asked.

"There's a fellow here, in my Form, named Lattrey——"

"Lattrey?"

"You know the name?"

"Yes. Go on!"

"Lattrey's the son of a man who runs an inquiry agency, or somethin' of the kind—sort of private detective," said Mornington. "At least, so he's told me. He's a sneak-in', spyin' sort of cad, and accordin' to his own account, he's spied into his pater's business, and learned a lot of things that don't concern him. He's told me that his father is employed by you, sir."

The baronet shifted uneasily.

"That is true, Valentine."

"That you've employed Mr. Lattrey for years and years, making an inquiry."

"That's correct. The boy has no right to know anything about it, however," said Sir Rupert, frowning.

"And he's told me about the inquiry."

"The young rascal!"

"He says that my pater's elder brother had a son, who would be my cousin," continued Mornington quietly. "My cousin Cecil. You never told me that I had a cousin, uncle."

Sir Rupert was silent, gnawing his moustache.

"It sounds a queer yarn," went on Mornington. "Accordin' to Lattrey, this kid Cecil was lost, stolen, or strayed, and never turned up. He's younger than I am—a mere kid, Lattrey says. If he's alive, he's the heir to the Mornington property, and I'm a beggar. Is it true, uncle?"

"My dear boy——" began the baronet gently.

Mornington drew a quick breath.

"That means that it's true," he said.

"I had not intended to tell you, at least till you were older," said Sir Rupert quietly. "There is not one chance in a hundred that your cousin will ever be found, Valentine. But the search for him is still proceeding. That matter was left in my hands, and a large sum of money set aside for the purpose. Naturally, it is

my duty to do all that can be done. But I have no hope of success."

"How did it happen, uncle? I never heard of this fellow, Cecil—never saw him."

"You were a child at the time, Valentine. You were only five or six years old when your cousin was three. He was lost at that age."

"Then he would be nearly thirteen now?"

"About that."

"And all that time he's been searched for, and hasn't been found?"

"That is so."

"Not a clue to him?"

"None."

"It looks as if he won't be found, then?"

"Most likely not, Valentine! He may be dead; it is quite probable. It is simply by the wish and the arrangement of his dead father that the search is still carried on. It was not necessary for you to know anything about the matter; it would simply have made you uneasy without cause. It was infamous for this boy Lattrey to tell you what he knew—infamous of him to have found out anything about it. I shall speak very severely to his father, and dispense with his further services."

Mornington hardly seemed to hear.

"But if it happened that the kid turned up, uncle, he would take everything, I suppose?"

"I—I fear so. The Mornington estates are strictly entailed."

"And there would be nothing left for me?"

"You would still be my nephew, Valentine. And I am not a poor man, though not a rich one," said the baronet.

Mornington repressed an angry shrug of the shoulders.

"You have sons of your own," he said bitterly. "I couldn't take their money."

"I wish you could have got on better with my sons, Valentine," said the old gentleman, with a sigh. "I am afraid you were mostly to blame."

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Mornington coolly. "I generally do quarrel with fellows. Still, I couldn't pull with them."

The baronet was silent.

Mornington took a turn up and down the study. If he had to choose between beggary and dependency upon his guardian there was not much to choose.

His Stacpoole cousins, whom he had

always disliked, and who had always disliked him, would regard him as an interloper and a rival. He could imagine their sneers if he became a dependent on their father's bounty.

His cheeks crimsoned at the thought. Better a life like 'Erbert's old life than that!

He stopped as a new thought came into his mind, and looked at his uncle.

"But the money I've had, uncle! I've always had lots of money. That was my own—at least, my cousin Cecil's!"

Sir Rupert nodded.

"Cecil Mornington's death is presumed," he explained. "Of course, if he should be found living the estates go to him. But for legal purposes his death is presumed. Your late father's instructions with regard to money matters are quite legal, and are carried out by me."

"Then if Cecil Mornington turned up I should be in his debt?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Every shilling I've had, then, really belongs to him, and he could claim it?" exclaimed Mornington.

"He would not, Valentine! Your cousin would not be likely to be grasping. If he did—" The baronet paused. "But he would not, and could not. As his death has been legally presumed, it would be a difficult point in law. But it is absurd to consider such a point. I have not the slightest doubt that if Cecil Mornington were found he would be ready and willing to make proper provision for you!"

"By gad! A choice of beggary for me!" said Mornington bitterly. "I could sponge on you or on my cousin Cecil—what?"

"You should not look at it in that light, Valentine."

"But how did it happen?" exclaimed Mornington. "How was it that Cecil was lost and never found?"

"By chance. He was lost by a careless nurse, and it was supposed at first that he would be found in a few days at the furthest. He had wandered away from his nurse, who returned without him, and he was searched for at once, and for days following. It happened on the moor near Mornington Manor, within two miles of his father's home. It was learned later that a band of gipsies had passed that way, and it was surmised that they might have taken the child. But the gipsies were never

traced. And from that day to this nothing has been seen or heard of the boy."

"By gad!"

Mornington was silent for a minute.

"But if he was found, then, he would have to prove his identity!" he said at last, with a gleam in his eyes. "That wouldn't be easy for him."

"If he is found, Valentine, his identity will be easy enough to establish. Like yourself, and all the Mornington's, he bears the Mornington birthmark on his shoulder."

The junior started.

"By gad! I'd forgotten that!"

"Other evidence would certainly be forthcoming if he were found. That alone would be sufficient to establish his identity, however."

"I—I suppose so."

"But you need not be uneasy, Valentine. Ten years have passed, and no trace has been found of him. It is only because his father's dying wish cannot be disregarded that a useless inquiry is still proceeding."

Mornington looked sharply at his uncle.

"Must it go on?" he muttered.

"Valentine!"

"After all, if he's alive, he doesn't know he's a Mornington—he doesn't know what he's entitled to. It's no loss to him, when he doesn't know it. He may be a beggar, or a thief; he can't be educated; he can't be decent. What's the good of dragging such a wretch out of poverty and making him master of the Mornington estates. It would be foolish, rotten—"

The baronet rose.

"I am sure you do not speak from your heart, Valentine," he said severely. "I repeat, there is practically no chance that Cecil will ever be found; even if he is living, which I doubt. But if any efforts of mine can discover him, he will be restored to his rights. And when you are calmer you will wish the same. If it should happen, you will always have a friend and protector in me. I shall see that Master Lattrey is punished for having disturbed you with this story. Dismiss it from your mind!"

Mornington did not speak.

"I shall now call upon the Head, Valentine." Sir Rupert moved to the door. "I repeat, Valentine, dismiss the whole matter from your mind, and do not allow yourself to be disturbed by shadows."

Sir Rupert Stacpoole left the study, evi-

dently troubled and shocked by the suggestion Mornington had made.

The junior did not speak. He looked after his uncle with gleaming eyes.

"He won't be found—he can't be found—he can't be still livin'!" he muttered. "But—but if he should be——" He gritted his teeth. "A beggar—a pauper! I! And they're goin' to hunt for him still—to make him head of the Morningtons in my place! Bah!"

In a savage mood the dandy of the Fourth strode from the study. He did not want to see his guardian again. He jammed the straw hat on his head, and strode out of the schoolhouse. He was still out of gates when the station cab bore Sir Robert Stacpoole back to Coombe.

CHAPTER 12.

Under the Shadow!

MORNINGTON of the Fourth paused as he came in sight of the school.

He had tramped away from Rookwood in a savage mood, caring nothing whether his steps led him. He found himself within sight of Bagshot School, and from the distance a sound of shouting reached his ears. It came from the Bagshot cricket-ground.

A sardonic smile crossed Mornington's lips as he remembered the Bagshot match, and Jimmy Silver & Co.

Cricket was not much in his mind just then. But he was sick of his own company and of his gloomy thoughts, and he walked on to look at the cricketers.

Doubtless, in the course of time, the impression of Lattrey's story would fade from his mind.

He had enjoyed a place that was not his own, all unknowingly, for ten long years. What chance was there that the missing heir would be found after that space of time? Surely none!

He felt that in time he would settle down into his accustomed equanimity. But that time was not yet. At present he could not dismiss the lurking fear that haunted him.

Somewhere in the country there was a wretched lad—probably reared in poverty and want—perhaps in dishonesty—who was the rightful—at least, the legal—heir of the Mornington estates.

Some wretched little waster like poor Erbert! And the missing heir, if he were found, would take everything, and the

lofty, superb dandy of Rookwood would be a pensioner on his bounty!

He ground his teeth at the thought of that! Better poverty, hunger, death itself, than such a wound in his pride.

He was glad to get relief from his bitter thoughts. He joined the crowd round the pitch at Bagshot. Pankley & Co, were in the field, and Jimmy Silver and Conroy were at the wickets.

Kit Erroll was standing with the waiting bats outside the pavilion, and his face lighted up as he saw Mornington.

"Hallo, Morny!"

Mornington joined him.

"Your uncle's been?" asked Erroll.

"Yes," muttered Mornington.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

Mornington laughed.

"Oh, not at all! How's the game getting on?"

"Bagshot a hundred on both innings!" said Erroll. "We bagged forty for the first Rookwood innings, bad luck. Now we're batting for the second time, and we're two down for fifteen."

There was a shout.

"Well bowled, Panky!"

"How's that?"

Jimmy Silver came off with his bat looking rather rueful.

"Man in, Erroll!" he said. "Do better than I've done, old scout, or we shan't lick Bagshot."

"I'll try!" said Erroll, with a smile. "So long, Morny!"

Erroll went to the wickets.

"Hallo! You here, Morny?" said Jimmy Silver, colouring.

Mornington gave him a savage look.

"Yes, I'm permitted to look on at the wonderful exploits of the eleven, I suppose?" he sneered.

Jimmy took no notice of the sneer.

"I'm sorry for what happened in our study, Morny," he said quietly.

"You needn't trouble."

"It was a misunderstanding," explained Jimmy patiently. "You said nothing about your guardian coming down to Rookwood this afternoon, and I jumped to the conclusion that—well, that you were up to your old tricks. I'm sorry for the mistake."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"The other fellows say the same," said Jimmy Silver, with persistent patience. "But as a matter of fact, Morny, you could have explained if you wanted to. You got

your back up too soon, you know. Still, we're sorry, and, of course, I take back what I said about your not playing for Rookwood again, as it was a misunderstanding."

"I don't care twopence either way!" snapped Mornington.

The captain of the Fourth compressed his lips a little.

Morny was not an easy fellow to deal with.

"Well, if you take it like that I've nothing more to say," remarked Jimmy Silver. And he turned away.

Mornington stood with his hands in his pockets, looking sullenly on at the game.

Erroll was having a good innings, and his chum watched him with some interest.

In Morny's present humour he was in no mood to meet Jimmy Silver's friendly advances. He preferred to hug his grievance, as it were.

He was in a sulky, savage mood, ready to quarrel with friend or foe—indeed, he would probably have quarrelled with Erroll himself just then if they had been thrown together.

A slap on the back made him swing round savagely. Arthur Edward Lovell had come up, and he gave him a cheery nod.

"Come to see us win—what?" he said cheerily.

"Don't thump me, you fool!"

"Hoity—toity!" grinned Lovell. "Don't be an ass, Morny. Sorry about the mistake in the study. Can't say more than that."

"No need for you to say anything at all. The less you have to say to me, the better I shall like it!"

"Then I won't inflict my conversation on you!" chuckled Lovell. "Still the same swanking ass—what?"

And Lovell left him.

"Bravo, Erroll! Well hit!"

The batsmen were running again. Mornington stood sulkily by himself, looking on. The expression on his face showed the humour he was in, and the Rookwood fellows left him severely alone.

Some of the Bagshot juniors glanced at him curiously. A fellow might be in a bad temper, but it was not usual for a fellow to stand about showing his bad temper off, as it were.

Mornington caught two or three of the grinning glances, and scowled more darkly.

Erroll was still batting when Mornington turned restlessly away and left the pitch. He heard a shout as he went:

"Well hit!"

"Good man, Erroll!"

Mornington would have been glad of his chum's company if Erroll had been at liberty, but Erroll was busy now. But it was with an added sense of injury that the perverse junior left Bagshot and strode away.

With his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a sullen frown on his brow, he strode away along the towing-path towards Rookwood.

Everything seemed to be wrong that day.

The discovery of his cousin's possible existence, of the possibilities it involved, had shattered his sense of security. Doubtless it would fade in time, but now it weighed upon his mind and troubled him, and would not be dismissed.

And while that black trouble lay on his thoughts his best chum was thinking only of cricket. It was an unjust thought. It was only by chance that Mornington himself was not playing cricket with Erroll. But he was in no mood to be just.

He was dissatisfied with himself for having repelled Jimmy Silver's frank apology so roughly; yet he would have done the same again.

In the bright sunshine of the late summer's afternoon his face was dark and clouded, and restless discontent gnawed at his heart. He was sick of solitude and sick of company.

He thought of Lattrey, Peel, Gower, and the rest, and the dismal gambling in the recess of the old abbey at Rookwood. That was better than nothing to distract his thoughts. A game of bridge in the study, at least, would distract his mind, and he quickened his steps.

And then, as he strode on there came a sudden ringing call along the shining river.

"Help!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Startling Discovery!

"HELP!"

Mornington started and looked round him.

He was about a mile from Rookwood now, and the towing-path, shaded by thick old trees, was deserted.

"Help!"

"What the dickens——"

He bating sight of two diminutive figures in bathing-pants by a clump of willows at the river's edge.

They were Snooks and Jones minimus, of the Second Form at Rookwood.

They were standing, with looks of helpless-terror, staring out into the river.

Mornington, as he ran up, followed their gaze.

Far out in the river appeared a dark head on the water, and a white face gleamed up at the sun—the face of 'Erbert of the Second.

"'Erbert!" gasped Mornington.

Snooks and Jones minimus started round at the sound of the steps.

"Help!" panted Jones. "He's got cramp or something! He'll be drowned! I—I can't swim out there! I'm going to try, though——"

Jones made a desperate move into the shallows, but Snooks caught him by the arm.

"You can't get half the distance, you duffer!"

"I——"

"Don't be a fool, kid!" snapped Mornington. "Leave him to me! Stick it out, 'Erbert! I'm coming!"

The black savage mood had passed from Mornington, like a dark cloud driven away by the sun, at the sight of the Rookwood wail's deadly peril.

'Erbert was struggling feebly in the deep water, evidently a victim of sudden cramp.

Under him there was a depth of twenty feet at least, and the two fags on the bank, terrified by his danger, were unable to help him.

Mornington threw his jacket down in hot haste. He was a good swimmer, and though the task before him was dangerous enough, he never thought of hesitating. With all his faults, the dandy of Rookwood had boundless pluck.

"He would try to swim across!" muttered Jones minimus. "I—I told him not to try it! Didn't I, Snooks?"

Splash!

Mornington was in the water now.

With swift, steady strokes he swam towards the struggling fag.

There was a groan from the two fags on the bank. 'Erbert's dark head had disappeared under the swirling water.

Mornington swam on desperately, though

his clothes clogged his movements and dragged him down.

"He's under!" muttered Jones minimus.

The dandy of the Fourth had disappeared from sight. But he came up again into the red sunlight, and a dark head rose beside him in the swirling water. Mornington's strong grasp was on the drowning fag.

"He's got him!" panted Jones.

"Help!" Snooks was crying mechanically. "Help!"

"He's got him!"

With straining eyes the fags watched.

Mornington was supporting 'Erbert's head above the water, and struggling towards the bank.

But his wet clothes were heavy, and the current was strong; burdened as he was it was a fearful struggle, and there was no help at hand. The wide, shining river was deserted.

Mornington set his teeth hard, and struggled on.

The two fags plunged up to their necks in the water to help him as soon as he should be near.

He had almost reached them, with failing strength, when a swirl of the river swept him out again.

The fags watched with frozen gaze. Mornington's face was white and hard, his eyes strangely fixed. Again he was struggling, with grim determination, shoreward. Alone he could have won his way, but burdened with the helpless fag the result was more than doubtful.

Yet he never thought of letting his burden go. The thought of it did not even cross his mind.

The strain in his hard, white face could be seen as he struggled nearer and nearer to the shallows where the two Second-Formers stood. This time he reached them, with a last desperate effort, and Jones minimus caught at his hair.

It was that catch that saved Mornington from being whirled away to death in the depths of the river. But Jones held on desperately, and Mornington fought his way into the shallows. Snooks grasped 'Erbert, and dragged him into the rushes. Mornington stumbled through crashing reeds, and fell at full-length on the towing-path.

His brain was swimming, and he very nearly fainted. But he managed to pull himself together.

For several minutes he lay, so utterly spent that he could do no more than breathe in sharp gasps.

It was 'Erbert who recovered first.

The fag, with tears streaming down his wet face, bent over the dandy of the Fourth.

"Master Morny!" he muttered huskily. "Master Morny!"

Mornington moved at last. He turned his head, and looked up at 'Erbert's stricken face with a faint smile.

"All serene, kid!" he whispered.

"Oh, Master Morny!"

"You young idiot!" growled Jones minimus. Jones's alarm and fear had changed to wrath, now that his comrade was safe. "Didn't I tell you you couldn't swim across? I've a jolly good mind to punch your head, Murphy!"

"I got the cramp," said 'Erbert.

"Well, I told you you couldn't do it. You ought to be jolly well bumped!" said Jones. "Nice row we should have got into, if we'd gone back to Rookwood and said you were drowned, you image!"

"I should 'ave been drowned but for Master Morny," said 'Erbert, in a husky voice.

"You would, you young ass! Serve you right, too!" said Snooks. "If you'd been drowned we should have got licked for going in to bathe without a blessed master or perfect present. Nice for us!"

Mornington sat up. He was recovering now, and the strength was coming back to his aching limbs.

"All right, Master Morny?" said 'Erbert, unheeding the wrathful reproaches of his chums.

"Right as rain, kid. By gad, my clothes are in a rippin' state! Get the handkerchief out of my jacket, will you?"

'Erbert reached for the elegant jacket in the grass. Mornington's glance following him carelessly, but suddenly the dandy of the Fourth gave a violent start. The colour that was returning to his cheeks faded away, leaving him a ghastly white.

As if he no longer felt his weakness, he leaped to his feet, and his grasp fell on 'Erbert's shoulder, with a grip that made the surprised fag utter a cry of pain.

He would have turned, but Mornington's fierce grasp held him helpless.

"Master Morny!" he panted.

Mornington did not speak. His eyes

were fixed in a deadly stare upon the fag's shoulder. 'Erbert was in bathing costume, and his skin gleamed white in the sun.

On the shoulder, just above the arm, was a dark, strange mark, a deep, dull crimson in hue, and in shape strangely like a wolf's head.

It was evidently a birthmark.

"'Erbert," Mornington spoke at last, his voice cracked and hoarse, "what's that—what's that mark on your shoulder?"

"Let me go, Master Morny! You're 'urtin' me!"

Mornington shook him fiercely.

"Answer me, you young fool—answer me! How came that there?"

Snooks and Jones minimus stared dumbly at him. They wondered whether Mornington had suddenly gone out of his senses.

"Answer me!" shouted Mornington.

'Erbert's face was startled, almost terrified.

"I—I don't know, Master Morny. It's always been there," he faltered. "Wot does it matter?"

"You never told me of it."

"Why should I 'ave told you, Master Morny?" said 'Erbert, in wonder. "You—you're 'urtin' my shoulder, Master Morny."

A fierce oath, that startled and scared the three fags, left Mornington's white lips. He hurled 'Erbert from him so savagely that the fag reeled and fell into the grass.

'Erbert gave a cry as he fell.

Mornington did not heed him. He turned away from him, his face white and set. Without a word, but with the same fixed, furious look upon his face, he threw on his jacket and strode away.

'Erbert staggered to his feet.

"Master Morny!"

It was like the pitiful cry of a wounded animal. Mornington did not turn his head. The terrible look, unchanged, was on his face as he strode swiftly away and disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER 14.

The Heir of Mornington!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. arrived in a cheery crowd at the gates of Rookwood. They had beaten Bagshot, and they were in great spirits. Three fags were tramping in as they arrived.

"Hallo, 'Erbert!" said Jimmy cheerily, as he clapped the waif of Rookwood on the shoulder. What's up? You look like a merry ghost!"

'Erbert's lips quivered.

"The young ass has been in the river," said Jones minimus. "Mornington came along and fished him out, or he'd be there still."

"My hat! Good for Morny!" said Jimmy.

"Morny was in an awful wax, though," grinned Snooks. "Jolly near pitched into Murphy. Didn't he, 'Erbert?"

'Erbert did not reply.

He hurried in at the gates, leaving his two comrades explaining the matter to the interested cricketers.

The waif of Rookwood hurried across the quad, and up to the Fourth Form passage. He paused outside Study No. 4.

Within there was a sound of restless movement. He knew that Mornington was there. The dandy of Rookwood was pacing the study, tirelessly, restlessly.

'Erbert's little face quivered, and his lip trembled.

What was the matter with Mornington?

The scene on the river-bank had astounded and troubled him. Why was Master Morny, who had just risked his life to save him, so angry with him? What did it matter about the queer mark on his shoulder? What was there for his benefactor to be angry about? What was the meaning of that white, terrible look on Valentine Mornington's face?

The fag was troubled and almost terrified. He wanted to see Mornington again, but he dreaded to face him. A vague uneasiness and fear was tugging at his heart. Why had Morny been so harsh, so cruel?

The juniors came in a crowd along the passage, and passed him. Kit Erroll stopped, and tapped at Mornington's door and opened it.

"You here, Morny!"

Mornington paused in his fierce pacing, like that of a tiger in a cage, and gave him one glance.

"Don't come in now!"

"But, Morny—"

"Let me alone!"

Erroll gave one look at the white, savage face, and withdrew, and quietly closed the study door. Mornington of the Fourth was in no mood then to be spoken to, even by his best chum.

'Erbert touched Kit Erroll on the sleeve timidly as he turned away from the door.

"Is there something wrong?" he muttered. "Something wrong with Master Morny, sir?"

"I don't know—better not go in now," said Erroll quietly. And with a kind nod to the fag he went down the passage.

'Erbert lingered outside No. 4.

Within, the steady tramping had been resumed. Mornington was unable to keep still. 'Erbert listened to it with a throbbing heart. He knew—he was quite certain—that Mornington's fierce anger was directed against himself. Why, he could not even surmise.

What had happened? What did that mark on his shoulder mean? What did it matter to Mornington? He dared not enter the study, and he could not go. He stood there almost cowering, like a dog whose master is angry, waiting in dumb misery.

Unconscious that he was there, Mornington of the Fourth was tramping in the study with savage tread. Peele and Gower had looked in earlier, and had been driven away by Mornington's furious looks.

Weariness seized upon the junior, and he threw himself into a chair. He sat with bent brows, his eyes fixed straight before him, glittering.

His guardian told him that Cecil Mornington would never be found. At the bottom of his heart he had believed so himself, in spite of haunting doubts. And now he had been found, and he, Valentine Mornington, had found him!

There was no doubt in Mornington's mind.

He recalled with sardonic bitterness that in his thoughts of the missing heir of Mornington he had pictured his cousin Cecil as a ragged, untaught little waster like 'Erbert.

That thought had been nearer the truth than he had dreamed.

'Erbert!

The nameless waif, the adopted son of a soldier killed in India, the famished tramp whom Mornington had picked up by the wayside and brought to Rookwood!

The little outcast who had mingled with thieves and rogues at Dirty Dick's tenement in London—the ragged, footsore tramp of the country roads—and he was Cecil Mornington, master of broad acres and a stately home!

Mornington had no doubt. He knew the

birthmark of the Morningtons, which he bore himself—which all the Morningtons had borne for countless generations.

Once the clue was given he knew the truth. The missing heir was a nameless waif of 'Erbert's age. He wondered, now, that he had never thought of 'Erbert in connection with him.

It was 'Erbert, and he might have remained unknown till the day of his death had not Mornington rescued him from want, and brought him to Rookwood!

Mornington ground his teeth savagely. A terrible thought was in his mind. If he had left the waif where he was—in the river— He shuddered, but the bitter thought would return. If he was robbed of all he had, it was by his own act.

At least he would be silent. He had saved the boy's life. That would be a set-off against—against what? His cheeks burned. If he kept silent, if he kept 'Erbert in ignorance of his rights, he would be a thief!

And if he did not—

He sprang to his feet again, tortured by his thoughts. There was a timid tap at the door, but he did not hear it. The door opened softly.

"Master Morny!"

It was 'Erbert! The little waif could bear it no longer. He had to speak—to learn what it was that he had done.

Mornington spun round, his eyes blazing at the fag. At that moment, it was only a bitter, overwhelming hatred that he felt for the boy he had befriended and saved.

"You!" he muttered, between his gritting teeth. "You!"

"Master Morny! Wot 'ave I done?"

"You! You beggar—you tramp—you thief—"

Mornington started towards the startled fag, his fists clenched with fury. 'Erbert stood rooted to the floor, his eyes growing wide with horror.

"Master Morny!"

It seemed for a moment that Mornington would strike him, and 'Erbert did not move a hand to defend himself. He only gazed dumbly at Mornington, with the look of a dumb, patient animal, the victim of a wrath he could not understand.

Mornington's hand dropped to his side. "Get out!" he muttered. "Get out of my sight, before I do you a mischief! Do you hear?" His voice rose passionately, furiously. "Get out!"

Without a word, without a sound, stricken

to the very heart, the fag dragged himself from the study, and the door closed upon him.

Mornington was alone with his fury and despair. In the Second Form room, dark and deserted at that hour, the waif of Rookwood leaned upon his desk, his face buried in his hands, sobbing as if his heart would break.

CHAPTER 15.

The Last Word!

"COME into my study," said Peele. "Morny's there."

"Blow Morny!"

The nuts of the Fourth were standing in an elegant group in the window of the Fourth Form passage.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at cricket practice, but that kind of occupation did not appeal to Peele and Gower, Townsend and Topham and Lattrey.

The merry nuts were thinking of the delights of "banker" in the study.

But the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood were under difficulties. Townsend and Topham shared their study with Rawson, the scholarship junior, and Rawson wouldn't allow either smoking or card-playing in No. 5.

It was like Rawson's cheek, the nuts considered. But Rawson was too burly, and too hard a hitter, to be argued with. Lattrey shared a study with Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, and the most inveterate talker and tattler.

A quiet game was impossible there. Peele and Gower belonged to Mornington's study, which had generally been the headquarters of the nutty brigade.

But Mornington of late had become savage and disagreeable, and he seemed to have quite thrown over his old amusements.

Peele was looking angry and obstinate now, however.

He had had enough of Morny and Morny's temper. If Morny chose to stand outside the select circle of the Giddy Goats, let him. But let him mind his own bizney at the same time. That was Peele's view.

"Come into my study," repeated Peele. "Hang Morny! It's my study as much as his."

"He will be sure to cut up rusty," said Townsend.

"Let him!"

"Well, there's somethin' in that," remarked Topham. "If Morny don't like it, he can lump it!"

"He's on fightin' terms with Lattrey now," remarked Gower.

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll keep the peace, if Morny does," he said. "If he cuts up rusty, let's sling him out of the study. I've had enough of his cheek, too!"

"Come on," repeated Peele.

And the nuts, having made up their minds, marched on Study No. 4 in a body, prepared to deal with Mornington if he "cut up rusty."

Peele opened the door and strode in, followed by his comrades.

Mornington scowled savagely.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"We're not goin' to get out," said Peele coolly. "I've brought my friends here, an' they're goin' to stop. How would you like to join in a game of banker?"

"Rot!"

"You wouldn't care for it?"

"No."

"Well, suit yourself. We're goin' to play."

Mornington rose to his feet, his face flaming. His eyes blazed as they rested on Lattrey.

"You cad! I've told you not to set foot in this study!" he said, between his teeth.

Lattrey laughed.

"I'm here at Peele's invitation," he said coolly. "You haven't bought up the study, I suppose?"

"Get out!"

"Rats!"

"Yes, rats, an' many of them," said Peele. "You can be sociable if you like, Morny. If you don't like, get out yourself. I can tell you I'm fed up with your airs an' graces!"

"Fed up to the chin!" said Gower.

"If you want to turn over a new leaf, an' become a model youth," continued Peele, "you're welcome to. But we're not goin' to turn over a new leaf at precisely the same moment."

"Blessed cheek, I call it!" said Townsend.

Mornington advanced towards Lattrey, his fists clenched. The rest of the party lined up round Lattrey at once.

It was evident that if Mornington tackled the cad of the Fourth he had the whole party to deal with.

For a moment or two he eyed them savagely.

Then, gritting his teeth, he passed them, and left the study. A loud and derisive laugh followed him.

Mornington strode down the passage, his brow black.

'Erbert of the Second was hanging about the landing, and he gave Mornington an appealing look as he came by.

Mornington replied with a black scowl.

The fag approached him hesitatingly.

"Master Morny—"

"Let me alone."

"Wot 'ave I done?" said poor 'Erbert. "Master Morny, tell me what I've done! I ain't never intended to do nothing to offend you, sir."

"You're an offence in yourself," said Mornington bitterly. "I hate the sight of you! I wish I'd left you to starve on the road. I wish I could be rid of you!"

'Erbert's face was white.

"You mean that, Master Morny?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

Mornington laughed savagely.

"Mean it? Of course!"

"You'd like me to go away from Rookwood, sir?"

"Yes. But you won't. You're goin' to hang on here till I can get rid of you, somehow," said Mornington sneeringly.

"I ain't, Master Morny," said 'Erbert, with a deep, sobbing breath. "You brought me 'ere, and if you don't want me, I'll go. I won't trouble you no more, sir."

"Hold on a minute," said Mornington, as the fag turned away. "Do you mean that Murphy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll leave Rookwood?"

"Yes."

"And where will you go?"

'Erbert made a weary gesture.

"I don't care! Back to Dirty Dick's tenement, per'aps. I don't care!"

"You can't go to starve," muttered Mornington. "I—I want you to go. But—but I've plenty of money. I'll see that you don't want for anythin'." He felt in his pocket.

"Look here—"

The fag stepped back.

"I don't want your money, Master Morny," he said steadily. "You've been too good to me as it is. I desay I ain't deserved it. I'd like you to give me a

friendly word afore I go, but I don't want your money."

"You can't starve," said Mornington harshly.

"I've starved afore," said 'Erbert bitterly. "I can starve again. But I won't touch your money, Master Morny. I'll leave Rookwood as I came. I know this ain't a place for the likes of me. Good-bye, Master Morny!"

Mornington stood still and silent. The fag gave him a last look, turned, and went quietly down the passage.

He disappeared down the staircase, and Mornington drew a deep breath. He knew that 'Erbert meant what he said.

The little fellow, wounded to the very heart, was probably glad to feel that his days at Rookwood were ended. As he had come to Rookwood, so he would leave it, and disappear from Mornington's life for ever.

"By gad, he's goin'!" Mornington's eyes gleamed. "Let him go! Let him go! Once he's gone, he disappears, and I need not fear!"

He gave a hard, sardonic laugh.

Then, as he turned towards the dormitory stairs, he started.

Lattrey was looking out of the doorway of Study No. 4.

There was a very curious expression on Lattrey's face. It was clear that he had heard what had passed between Mornington and the waif of Rookwood.

Mornington gave him a fierce look.

Lattrey laughed, and turned back into the study. But Lattrey was looking very thoughtful as he joined the nuts round the study table, and it was not wholly of banker that he was thinking.

Mornington was glad that 'Erbert was going—glad to be saved from the danger that the fag's presence at Rookwood meant for him.

But Mornington was not all bad. The pitiful, wounded look on 'Erbert's face, like that of a hurt animal, haunted him, and remorse was stirring in his breast.

But Mornington, like Pharaoh of old, hardened his heart. If the waif of Rookwood chose to go forth into the hard, grim world, to the misery and want Mornington had saved him from, let him go. Mornington's hand, at least, would not be raised to stay him.

CHAPTER 16.

Lattrey Wants To Know!

JONES minimus was indignant.

Jones was fed-up.

Jones, the great chief of the Second Form at Rookwood, had "palled" with 'Erbert, the waif and outcast, thereby greatly honouring the waif of Rookwood.

And for days now 'Erbert had been in the bluest of blues, hardly speaking a word, and avoiding the society of his friends—even the fascinating society of Jones minimus himself.

Jones minimus was getting up a boxing match in the Form-room after prep that evening, and he looked for 'Erbert to take a hand.

He found him sitting on his bed in the dormitory, with a pale, troubled face and heavy eyes. Jones surveyed him with rising wrath.

"Come down!" he said.

'Erbert shook his head.

"We're going to box," said Jones. "I told you you'd be wanted. What are you moping up here for?"

"I ain't moping, Jones!"

"You've been moping for days on end!" said Jones minimus, exasperated. "Looking like a boiled owl all the time. What's the matter with you?"

No answer.

"Are you seedy?" demanded Jones.

"No."

"Well, what's the row, then?"

"There ain't no row!"

"Are you coming down to the Form-room?" snapped Jones.

"Not jest now!"

"Well, you're a silly ass, and I'm fed-up with you!" said Jones minimus emphatically.

And he marched out of the dormitory, and slammed the door with unnecessary force.

'Erbert did not even glance after him.

His heart was too heavy for Jones' wrath to move him in any way. In fact, in a few seconds he had forgotten Jones' existence.

"I've got to go!" murmured 'Erbert, staring with blurred eyes at the darkening square of the window. "'Tain't no good saying nothin'. The 'Ead wouldn't let me go if I arsked. I got to get out quiet. I got ten bob, and p'r'aps that'll last me till I get a job somewheres."

He sighed. Life at Rookwood had made

the old life of want and dirt and privation seem very far behind.

Going back to that dreary life came as a shock to 'Erbert now. It was harder and grimmer, since he had known better things.

But the loyal-hearted fag did not hesitate for one moment. Mornington had brought him to Rookwood, and persuaded his guardian to pay his fees there. He owed everything to Mornington. If Mornington did not want him any longer, he would go.

The door opened, and 'Erbert looked round wearily, expecting to see Jones minus or another fag of the Second. But it was Lattrey of the Fourth who entered, closing the door softly behind him. All Lattrey's movements were soft and stealthy at all times.

'Erbert gave him a quick look of dislike.

He disliked, distrusted, and vaguely feared the cad of the Fourth, and he had resented Lattrey's evil influence over the superb Mornington. That certainly was at an end now. The two could not have been on worse terms than at present.

"I thought I'd find you here, kid!" said Lattrey, with a note of kindness in his silky tones.

'Erbert did not answer.

"I heard what you said to Jimmy Silver this afternoon," said Lattrey, "and what you said to Mornington in the passage."

"You're always 'earin' somethin' that don't concern you!" said 'Erbert, with quiet scorn. "You're a sneakin' spy, that's wot you are!"

"I've had my eye on you for some time!" said Lattrey coolly. "I've noticed how Morny has turned on you, and it's made me curious."

"Can't you mind your own business?"

Lattrey laughed.

"Perhaps I don't choose to!" he said.

"Keep a civil tongue, kid! You intend to bolt from Rookwood it seems. A word dropped to the Head would jolly soon put a stop to that!"

'Erbert started.

"You ain't goin' to sneak?" he muttered.

"Not at all. I don't care twopence whether you go or stay; in fact, I think Rookwood isn't the place for your sort!" said Lattrey contemptuously.

"Nor for your sort, neither!" said 'Erbert.

"The 'Ead would boot you out fast enough if he knowed what you was like, Lattrey.

And if you tell 'im about me, I might tell 'im about you. So you better look out!"

"My dear street arab, I'm not going to stop you from clearing off! The sooner the quicker as far as I'm concerned!"

"Leave me alone, then!" said 'Erbert.

"Wot you come 'ere for?"

Lattrey regarded him curiously. His curiosity was keenly aroused by Mornington's strange and savage conduct towards the waif he had recklessly befriended.

Jimmy Silver attributed it to the changeable and false nature of the dandy of the Fourth.

But Lattrey was accustomed to looking deeper into things, and he knew that there must be something more than that in it. What it was he did not know, but he meant to know.

That there was something behind it—something to Mornington's discredit—Lattrey was assured.

If there was anything to be discovered which would give him a chance of repaying Mornington's contempt and scorn, Lattrey meant to discover it.

'Erbert did not speak, and he did not look at Lattrey. The latter broke the silence.

"You've fallen out with Morny, kid?"

"Find out!"

"Not much finding out needed."

"Well, if you know you needn't ask me!"

"But why?"

No reply.

"Morny's an unreliable fellow, but I don't see why he should turn on you like this for nothing. You haven't given him away?"

"Course I ain't!" growled 'Erbert.

"I know you've been mixed up in his shady games, fetching and carrying messages, and so on. Have you been keeping back some letters he's given you to keep a hold over him?"

'Erbert gave the cad of the Fourth a look of bitter disdain.

"That's the sort of trick you might play," he said. "I ain't that sort!"

"Look here, kid, if you've got something—something compromising—in Morny's handwriting, I'll make it worth your while to hand it over to me."

"Oh, shut up!" said 'Erbert contemptuously. "You make me sick!"

"Then it isn't that?"

"If you wasn't a low 'ound, worse nor a Prussian, you wouldn't think it could be!"

Lattrey's eyes glittered for a moment. But he kept his temper. He intended to know the facts, but bullying was the least likely method of getting them out of 'Erbert.

"Don't be rusty, kid!" he said. "The fact is, I know Morny better than you do, and I was wondering if I couldn't heal the trouble between you. I'd do anything I could."

'Erbert gave him a quick look. He did not trust Lattrey or his motives. But so far as he could see, there was nothing to be lost by Lattrey's intervention, and the bare possibility of being reconciled to Mornington made his face flush with hope.

"You couldn't do anything," he muttered. "Even if you would—and you wouldn't. You don't like to see fellers friendly and 'appy."

Lattrey bit his lip. But his voice was soft and friendly as he answered.

"Tell me what the trouble is, and I'll guarantee to set it right, if it can be done. You'd like to be on good terms with Morny again?"

"Course I would!"

"Well, then, it's only some misunderstanding, I suppose, and I dare say I could see right through it at once and set it right."

'Erbert looked at him doubtfully.

"You might!" he admitted.

"Well, then, what's the cause of the row?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" ejaculated Lattrey, staring at the fag, taken aback by that reply. 'Erbert nodded without speaking, and Lattrey gazed at him in silence and perplexity.

CHAPTER 17.

Lattrey's Discovery!

LATTREY broke the silence at last.

"You don't know what Morny's got against you?" he asked.

"No."

"Hasn't he told you?"

"No."

"Have you asked him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Well, my hat!"

Lattrey was utterly at a loss. Evidently

the matter was not as he had suspected vaguely—that the fag, used by the dandy of the Fourth to communicate with his shady friends outside Rookwood, had gained a hold somehow over Mornington. It was not that.

"But how did it begin, then?" asked Lattrey, after a pause. "Perhaps somebody's been pitching Morny a yarn?"

"Tain't that."

"How do you know?"

"It was that arfternoon the fellows was playing at Bagshot," said 'Erbert. "You 'ave 'eard of it. I went out of my depth, an' got cramp, an' Master Morny came in for me an' pulled me out. Then—"

"It was decent of him," said Lattrey.

"I wondered why he took the risk."

"You wouldn't 'ave," said 'Erbert, with a curl of the lip.

"Do you mean that Morny turned on you after saving your life?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"I don't know."

"He can't be mad, I suppose!" said Lattrey musingly.

"I can't understand it, and you can't neither," said 'Erbert. "And Master Morny, he won't explain. He won't say nothin'! Arter he pulled me out of the river he turned on me, 'cause why, I dunno!"

"But something must have happened," said the puzzled Lattrey.

"It wasn't nothing. Only he saw that mark on my shoulder," said 'Erbert. "He spoke about that, and arsked me why I'd never told 'im it was there. But why should I 'ave mentioned it? I never thought nothing about it. It couldn't be because I 'adn't told 'im of that, could it?"

"A mark on your shoulder!" said Lattrey, in a slow, distinct voice.

"Yes."

"What sort of a mark?"

"It's a birthmark, I s'pose! Lots of fellers 'ave birthmarks," said 'Erbert. "Leastways, I've been told so. Nothin' agin a chap!"

Lattrey looked at the fag with a strange expression in his eyes.

"How old are you, Murphy?" he asked suddenly.

"'Ow should I know! I s'pose I'm about thirteen. I dunno!"

"Your name isn't Murphy, I understand?"

"Course it ain't! Old Bill Murphy looked arter me for years afore he went to India an' was killed on the Frontier. That's why I was called Murphy."

"And where did Murphy find you, then?"

"I was left on a common arter some gipsies 'ad been there, so I've 'eard. I don't know nothin' about it! Wot does it matter? All that ain't got nothin' to do with Master Mornny, I s'pose?"

Lattrey laughed a strange, low laugh, that made the waif of Rookwood start and look at him sharply.

But the cad of the Fourth became grave again at once.

"I fancy you've done well to tell me about it all, kid," he said. "I rather think I can set matters right, after all."

"You can't."

"Suppose Mornny came to you, and asked you to stay at Rookwood?"

"He won't!"

"He might! But let me see that mark on your shoulder, kid! I'm rather curious about it."

"Oh, rot!" said 'Erbert irritably. "Wot does it matter?"

"It won't hurt you, I suppose. And, I tell you, I think I can set matters right between you and Mornny."

"If you could do that——"

"I think I can. Let me see that mark!"

'Erbert impatiently unfastened his collar, and turned down his jacket and shirt, exposing the shoulder to view.

Lattrey scanned his shoulder, and the strange mark on it, with eyes that glittered like diamonds.

A mark of deep crimson hue, in form strangely like the head of a wolf, and evidently a birthmark, was what met his eyes.

"By gad!" muttered Lattrey. "By gad!"

"Well, are you done?" grunted 'Erbert.

"Yes."

The fag refastened his collar.

Lattrey watched him with a strange expression. He understood the whole of the mystery now, though he did not choose to acquaint the fag with his knowledge.

His eyes were burning.

"Stay here, kid," he said. "You're not to go, mind that! You're not going to disappear from Rookwood, and vanish where you can't be found again!" He laughed softly. "No fear! You're going to remain

at Rookwood, where a finger can be laid on you at any minute, if you're wanted."

'Erbert stared at him.

"What are you gettin' at?" he said. "I ain't going to stay unless Master Mornny wants me to, and he don't!"

"He will ask you to stay!" said Lattrey coolly.

"'Ow do you know?"

"I'm going to use my influence with him," said Lattrey, with a smile.

"You ain't got no influence with him. He can't stand you!" said 'Erbert. "He won't 'ear a word from you!"

"I fancy he will!" Lattrey turned away, but turned back. "Look here, 'Erbert, don't talk to fellows about that mark on your shoulder!"

"I never does," said 'Erbert. "I ain't mentioned it to nobody. Why should I? I'd forgot all about it till Master Mornny saw it that afternoon."

He gave Lattrey a quick look.

"You don't mean to say as that has got anything to do with Master Mornny turnin' on me as he did?" he exclaimed.

"Never mind that, 'Erbert. But I can tell you that if you talk about it among the fellows you'll offend Mornny worse than ever!"

"But wot does it mean?"

Lattrey paused. He did not intend to tell the fag what he knew. But it was evident that he must tell 'Erbert something to elude his inquiries.

"I can't tell you, 'Erbert, without giving away private affairs of Mornnington's," he said, at last. "But I can tell you this, if you don't do as I say, it may mean injury to Mornny; worse than you could guess. That's why he turned on you. But—but if you keep silent about the matter, he will come round. If he chooses to tell you, he can—I can't!"

"I don't want to ask Master Mornny nothing he don't choose to tell me," said 'Erbert. "But I don't understand, neither."

"Let it go at that," said Lattrey.

And he left the dormitory. He left the fag in a puzzled and troubled frame of mind, but with a new hope in his breast. To the loyal little waif all the light of life depended upon Mornnington's good-humour and friendship. He was quite content to let everything else go, mystified as he was, if only he could regain that!

Lattrey went down the dormitory stairs



A sharp, terrified scream left 'Erbert's lips as, in Mornington's strong grasp, he felt himself forced to the giddy verge of the precipice. For a moment quarry and gorse and sky swam round him, and the dusky depths seemed to be rushing up to meet him. (See chapter 30.)

CHAPTER 18.

Brought to Heel!

with a smile upon his face—a smile that had something feline, almost tigerish, in it. He had the whip-hand of the superb Mornny at last, and he meant to use it without mercy. And 'Erbert, all unsuspecting, was the instrument of his power.

The Fistical Four were in the Fourth Form passage, and they looked at Lattrey, struck by the expression on his face.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver. "What dirty trick have you been playing? You look in high feather."

And the Co. chuckled.

Lattrey laughed lightly.

"I'm feelin' specially chippy, because I'm doing a good deed," he said.

"My hat!"

"Draw it mild!" remonstrated Lovell.

"Honest injun!" said Lattrey calmly. "I do good deeds by way of relaxation, you know—a sort of relief from my usual ways. Now I'm goin' to act in a way that Good Little Georgie himself might envy."

"Off your rocker?" asked Jimmy Silver in wonder.

"Not at all. I suppose you've noticed that Mornington has been hard on that scrubby little rascal, 'Erbert, and making him sit up, with his airs and graces? Well, I'm going to chip in, like a good model youth, and make it up between them."

"You?" exclaimed the Fistical Four, with one voice.

"Little me!"

"You can't, and you wouldn't if you could!" said Raby directly. "You'd rather see any fellows on bad terms than good terms."

"Well, wait and see!" said Lattrey. "I'm going to use my moral influence over Mornny, and persuade him to better things. Ha, ha, ha!"

He went along to No. 4, Jimmy Silver & Co. staring after him. Lattrey had succeeded in astonishing the Fistical Four.

"Gas, I suppose," said Newcome.

"Blessed if I know," said Jimmy, much mystified. "But if Lattrey does that he isn't half the cad I've thought him. I hope he'll succeed, if he's telling the truth."

And the Fistical Four "waited and saw," with considerable curiosity, sincerely hoping that little 'Erbert's troubles were going to end, even by so miraculous a happening as a kind and friendly action by Lattrey of the Fourth.

PEELE and Gower were working at their prep in Study No. 4, and Mornington was smoking a cigarette in the armchair. He was not working, and the self-willed dandy of the Fourth was accustomed to neglecting his work when he chose. He preferred to "chance it" with Mr. Bootles in the morning.

He scowled at the sight of Lattrey, who smiled.

"You fellows nearly done?" asked Lattrey.

"Just on!" yawned Peele.

"I'm done!" said Gower, rising. "Come down, for goodness' sake! Can't stay here with that scowling image!"

Peele was finished a few minutes later.

"Comin' down, Lattrey?" he asked.

"In a few minutes," said Lattrey.

"You're not stayin' here with Mornny?" exclaimed Gower in astonishment.

"Yes; just a minute."

"You're welcome to him!" grunted Peele. And the two juniors left the study, leaving Lattrey alone with the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington rose to his feet, his eyes glittering. Lattrey watched him coolly as he pushed back his cuffs.

"No need for that, Mornny," he said softly. "I'll get out of the study if you want me to. Do you?"

"Yes, you cad!"

"Only if I go it will be to borrow Mr. Bootles' telephone and send a message to my father!"

"What do I care?"

"I think you do, Mornny. Mr. Lattrey, I think I told you, is the inquiry agent employed to find Cecil Mornington, the missing heir to the Mornington property."

"I know your father is a sneaking spy, like his son!" said Mornington contemptuously. "What does it matter to me?"

"I have some information to give, dear boy."

Mornington stood very still.

"The pater would be very pleased to hear what I happen to be able to tell him," smiled Lattrey. "He has been engaged for years on a merry inquiry after the missing heir of Mornington. He stands to finger a handsome reward if ever he finds him."

"He never will find him!" said Mornington in a low, husky voice.

"Who knows? He's looking for a kid about twelve or thirteen, who was stolen by gipsies, and who bears on his shoulder the birthmark of the Mornington family—the red wolf's head. The same mark that you have on your own shoulder, Mornny, that all the Morningtons are born with," Lattrey laughed. "And I could tell him where to look for the merry youth, old scout!"

Mornington breathed hard.

"You could?"

"I could!"

"And where?"

"Rookwood School!"

There was a deep silence. Mornington sank back into the chair he had risen from. Evidently he was no longer thinking of kicking the detective's son out of the study.

Lattrey smiled and seated himself on a corner of the table, swinging his legs. He was master of the situation now.

"It puzzled me why you turned on 'Erbert as you did," he continued in careless, drawling tones. "I thought the kid might have got some hold over you, and might pass it on to me. I knew there was something behind it, and meant to know what it was. Knowledge is power, dear boy. But I never dreamed of this. Pass me a cigarette, old chap."

Mornington did not move.

Lattrey helped himself to a cigarette from the case on the table, lighted it, and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

He was enjoying the position.

The superb Mornington, whose lofty contempt and disdain had so often made him writhe with helpless rage, sat almost crouched in the armchair, pale, hunted, stricken. There was a keen relish for the cad of the Fourth in watching his white face. He could afford now to feed fat his old grudge.

"I never dreamed of this," Lattrey continued, smiling, and showing his teeth. "By gad! I wonder I did not—I know you'd turned on the kid just after you'd pulled him out of the river. Of course, you saw the mark on his shoulder then; you'd never seen it before. You knew then that he was your cousin—Cecil Mornington, the rightful heir to all you have and hold. That if he knew the truth you'd be a beggar—a beggar!" He repeated the word with enjoyment. "That you'd be dependent on him for your daily bread—a change with a

vengeance! What a merry chance, Mornny. The tramp you picked up on the road last term was your own cousin! If you'd only known it! What a chance! Don't you bless yourself for the good deed?"

No sound came from Valentine Mornington. He sat still, only his eyes fixed upon Lattrey's mocking face, with burning hatred in their depths.

"Erbert of the Second, the waif and ragamuffin, master of Mornington Manor and the Mornington millions!" Lattrey laughed. "If he only knew! And my father's the detective employed to find him! I might finger a slice of the reward if I told him what I knew. Not a big slice, perhaps. The pater's a bit close in money matters. But you're going to make it worth my while to hold my tongue, Mornington."

Still no word from the dandy of the Fourth.

"You'd like him to leave Rookwood—and vanish." Lattrey grinned. "You could snap your fingers even at me, then—what? It won't do, Mornny. If he goes, I shall see that my pater gets on his track! But he won't go. You're going to ask him to stay, Mornny. You're going to be decent to him an' make him stay. I want him to remain at Rookwood. Are you going to do as I want?"

Mornington did not speak.

"I'm waitin' for your answer, Mornington," said Lattrey grimly.

"Yes."

The word came almost in a whisper from Mornington.

"Good!"

"You cad! You hound! What else do you want?" muttered Mornington.

Lattrey laughed.

"Oh, you guess that I want somethin' else?" He smiled. "Yes, I shall want a good deal. You were my pal when I came here, Mornny; we were birds of a feather. I feel friendly towards you now. You're a bigger rascal than I am, aren't you? I rather admire you for it. We're going to be friends again. Are we going to be friends, Mornny?"

There was a threatening note in Lattrey's voice.

"Yes."

"Good! You're going to give up the goody-goody game, and you're going to be your old self—one of the merry boys. One of the merry nuts, Mornny. You're going

to give Jimmy Silver and Erroll and the rest the go-by, and stick to your dear old pals. Are you?"

"Yes," breathed Mornington.

Lattrey slipped off the table.

"Good!" he said. "I'm glad you're so sensible, Morny. You've got to toe the line, and it's remarkably sensible of you to do it without a fuss. I'm not a chap to bear malice." He chuckled. "Not a bit of it! I'm willin' to be friendly and enjoy your charmin' society, Morny. I'm not goin' to pay you out for your airs and graces. Some fellows would; but I'm easy-goin'. We're goin' to be great pals, and if you choose to back up against Jimmy Silver, I'll help you to become captain of the Fourth. I could work it. I've got more brains than all that gang in the end study put together. And when I'm hard up you're goin' to hand out a banknote or two, like a real pal. You'll never miss it. Besides, it won't be your own money! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is there anything else?" asked Mornington, in a dull voice.

"That's all at present."

Lattrey stepped to the door and opened it.

"Jimmy Silver!"

"Hallo!" said Jimmy, looking round.

"Morny's sorry about 'Erbert. I've used my good influence. If you'd like to make the dear kid happy, bring him here, and behold the reconciliation."

Jimmy Silver came along to the study. He looked grimly at Mornington.

"Do you want 'Erbert?" he asked.

"Well, I'll fetch him, if you like. I'm glad you're going to act decently," said Jimmy.

"He's in the Second dorm!" said Lattrey.

Jimmy nodded, and walked towards the upper stairs. Lovell and Raby and Newcome gathered round the study, surprised and interested. It really looked as if Lattrey had done the good deed he had told them about.

The deadly paleness of Mornington's face struck them at once. They looked in a puzzled way from one to the other of the two juniors in the study. Lattrey met their glances smilingly. Mornington did not look at them at all.

Jimmy Silver came along in a few minutes with 'Erbert.

"Come in, kid!" called out Lattrey.

'Erbert entered the study timidly.

His eyes were fixed anxiously, questioningly, upon Mornington.

"It was all a misunderstanding, kid," said Lattrey airily. "I've made Morny see it, and he's sorry. Ain't you, Morny?"

Mornington looked up.

His eyes burned as they fell on 'Erbert. But his face cleared. The eager, wistful expression on the little waif's face struck some chord in his breast.

This was the lad he had befriended with thoughtless generosity, and whom he was wronging with deliberate intent. And the lad, ignorant of the truth, ignorant of what his existence meant for Mornington, was only hoping for a kind word from his lips.

Some better feeling surged up in Mornington's breast. Perhaps it was the contrast between poor little 'Erbert's eager, loyal affection and the cynical villainy of Lattrey of the Fourth.

Morny's face softened, as if in spite of himself, and he made a step towards the waif of Rookwood.

"I'm sorry, 'Erbert," he said huskily. "Don't remember anything I said to you. It was only my rotten temper! I—I was worried by something—never mind what! I don't want you to leave Rookwood. Forget all about it, kid."

Lattrey gave him a curious look. The words came from Mornington's heart, and Lattrey could see it, and it perplexed him. He did not understand the better impulses in Morny's wayward heart.

'Erbert's face lighted up.

"Oh, Master Morny!" he stammered. "I—I don't mind. I felt 'urt, that was all. I don't mind at all. I desay I worried you, wot has always been too good to me, and I never deserved it. I wouldn't go for to offend you for anything in the world, Master Morny!"

"All serene, kid," said Mornington.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away. Jimmy wore a perplexed frown.

"I don't catch on!" he said, at last.

"My hat! You don't mean to say there's anything that Uncle James of Rookwood doesn't catch on to!" exclaimed Lovell, with an air of great astonishment, and the Co. grinned.

"Fathead!" said Jimmy Silver, frowning. "I don't catch on! On the whole, I rather

think he meant what he said to that kid just now."

"He's a queer fish," said Newcome.

"He's made it up with 'Erbert. I'm glad of that, and he seems to have made it up with Lattrey. He's a queer beast. There seems to me to be something behind this, and I don't catch on."

Other fellows in the Classical Fourth were surprised, as well as Jimmy Silver, when Mornington came into the Common-room that evening. He was walking with his arm linked in Lattrey's, and the two seemed on the best of terms. Apparently the old friendship was quite restored between the two black sheep of Rookwood, and in public, at least, Lattrey did not betray the fact that he held the whip-hand.

CHAPTER 19.

Between Good and Evil

MORNINGTON of the Fourth looked up with a sullen brow as Kit Erroll came into his study.

The dandy of Rookwood was stretched in the armchair, with his feet on another chair, and a cigarette between his lips.

Peele and Gower, his study-mates, were sitting on the table, also smoking.

The atmosphere of Study No. 4 was far from agreeable, at least to Erroll's healthy lungs, though the nuts of the Fourth seemed to like it.

Peele and Gower grinned at the expression that came over Erroll's face as he entered.

"I've looked in for you, Mornny," said Erroll.

"You can look out again!" remarked Peele. "Mornny's booked for this afternoon. We're only waiting for Lattrey."

Erroll took no notice of Peele's remark. His eyes were fixed questioningly upon Mornington.

The latter nodded, without meeting Erroll's eyes.

"Sorry; I'm engaged," he said. "We're goin' out."

"You don't care for cricket this afternoon?" asked Erroll quietly. "Jimmy Silver asked me whether you were coming down."

Mornington hesitated.

There was bright sunshine streaming in

at the study window, and a breeze rustled the branches of the old beeches outside. The study was smoky and oppressive. Mornington threw his half-smoked cigarette into the fender.

"It's ripping weather for cricket," said Erroll. "There won't be much more of it. Better come, Mornny!"

"I—I'd like to—"

"Look here; you're booked!" exclaimed Gower. "Bother the cricket! Bother Jimmy Silver! What do they matter, anyway?"

"Don't be an ass, Mornny!" urged Peele.

Opposition had its usual effect upon the dandy of the Fourth. He rose from the armchair, and stretched his limbs.

"I'm comin', Erroll!" he said.

"Good!" said Erroll. "Come on, old scout!"

"Look here—" Gower began again, angrily.

"Oh, rats!" said Mornington irritably. "I'm goin' to do as I like. Hang your shabby razzles at the Bird-in-Hand! You can go pub-hauntin' without me!"

The door was pushed open, and Lattrey of the Fourth stepped into the study.

His thin, keen face hardened at the sight of Erroll, and a glitter came into his narrow eyes.

"Ready, Mornny?" he said. "Get a move on, you chaps."

"We're ready," said Peele. "Mornny says he's goin' to play cricket with Jimmy Silver's gang!"

Lattrey smiled.

"That's only one of Mornny's little jokes," he said. "Mornny's coming with us. Come on!"

"I'm goin' down to Little Side," said Mornington.

Lattrey looked at him.

"I want you with us this afternoon, Mornington," he said, very distinctly. "You'd better come."

"I won't!"

"I think you'd better!"

There was a pause in the study.

Gower and Peele looked on curiously. They had noted more than once, of late, that Lattrey had a remarkable influence over the dandy of the Fourth.

Mornington, who never submitted to control, who was always rendered obstinate by the slightest opposition, had fallen into the way of following tamely the lead of the blackest sheep at Rookwood.

Mornington's face flushed now, and his manner became hesitating. Kit Erroll took his arm.

"Come on, Morny!" he said.

"Morny's coming with me," said Lattrey coolly. "You can get out, Erroll! You're not welcome in this study!"

Erroll gave him a look of contempt.

He drew Mornington towards the door, but the dandy of Rookwood jerked his arm away.

"You're coming?" exclaimed Erroll.

"On the whole, I think I'll go with these chaps!" said Mornington, in halting tones. "It was arranged, anyway!"

Erroll compressed his lips.

"To the Bird-in-Hand, I suppose?" he said.

"Why not?" said Mornington, with a sarcastic laugh. "Where do you expect Lattrey to spend an afternoon? He won't change his habits till he gets sent to a reformatory!"

"You needn't go with him, Morny. I don't understand you," Erroll broke out. "What do you have anything to do with him for?"

Lattrey gritted his teeth.

"That's enough!" he snapped. "Mornington, come along, and leave that rotter alone!"

Mornington paused one moment, and then he followed Lattrey from the study. Peele and Gower followed on, grinning.

They did not understand Lattrey's strange power over the dandy of the Fourth, but they were glad to see it. Erroll had very nearly succeeded, once, in winning Mornington away from the honourable society of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood. But evidently Erroll had no chance against Lattrey.

Kit Erroll was left alone in the study, with a moody and frowning brow. He was puzzled and perplexed.

"What does it mean?" he muttered.

"What can it mean? That rascal has some hold over Morny somehow, but how——"

"Hallo, coming along?" Jimmy Silver's cheery voice interrupted Erroll's glum reflections. "No time to waste, my infant!"

Erroll joined him in the passage.

"Where's Mornington?" asked the captain of the Fourth.

"He's going out!"

"Cricket not in his line—what?" smiled Jimmy Silver. "I thought once he was

going to take it up seriously, but he changes pretty fast—never sticks to anything long. It's a pity; he's a ripping bowler when he likes!"

"I can't understand it," said Erroll. "He wanted to come down to the cricket, but that fellow Lattrey persuaded him——"

"They're awfully thick lately," said Jimmy. "Birds of a feather, as a matter of fact. Why don't you let Morny slide his own way?"

"Because he's my pal!" said Erroll quietly. "Morny's too good for that kind of game. I don't understand his following Lattrey's lead in this way. There's something underhand in it. Lattrey's rotter enough for anything!"

"I suppose Morny's his own master!"

"I—I suppose so. But——"

"Well, if he doesn't turn up to practice, he won't be in the eleven for the Woodend match," said Jimmy Silver. "I was willing to give him a chance. Don't look glum about it, my infant! Keep smiling! I dare say Morny's going to enjoy himself in his own way."

The two juniors joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome, and they went down to the cricket-ground together. But Erroll could not take Jimmy Silver's advice and "keep smiling." Morny, with all his faults, was his chum, and had been a good chum, and Erroll could not help feeling troubled about him.

CHAPTER 20.

The Worm Turns!

MORNINGTON'S face was dark and sullen as he left the gates of Rookwood with the three nuts of the Fourth.

It was pretty clear that the dandy of Rookwood did not want to accompany Lattrey's party, and Gower and Peele wondered why he came.

Gower and Peele walked on ahead, cheerfully enough, and Lattrey slackened pace to keep with Mornington, who was walking slowly.

"Better get a move on!" Lattrey remarked. "We don't want to be too late, Morny!"

"The later the better, as far as I'm concerned!" snapped Mornington.

Lattrey laughed.

"You used to be keen enough on a little game at the Bird-in-Hand," he said. "It

was you first took me there, when I was a new fellow!"

"I don't want to come!"

"Oh, you'll like it all right!"

Mornington halted and fixed a savage look upon his companion, Gower and Peel were out of hearing now.

"Look here, Lattrey," said Mornington, between his teeth, "there's got to be a limit. If you think you are goin' to order me about—"

"Not at all! I only want to be pally!"

"You're about the last fellow at Rookwood I should choose as a pal!"

"Why? Our tastes are quite similar," said Lattrey, with a smile. "You'd pull with me ever, so much better than with Erroll, if you only made up your mind to it. He is a goody-goody nincompoop, after all."

"Do you want me to knock you into the ditch?" said Mornington, compressing his lips.

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"You've got the whip-hand of me, I know that," continued Mornington. "You've made me take up a lot of things I never intended to touch again. But there's a limit, an' I warn you you'd better not go too far. I'm not a safe fellow to play with!"

"You'll have to toe the line," said Lattrey coolly. "What's the good of talking? I've only got to open my mouth, and what becomes of you? You've got to toe the line, and you know it!"

Mornington gritted his teeth, and Lattrey laughed.

"I'll make it easy for you so long as you take it smiling," continued Lattrey. "But if you jib, you'll be brought to order, sharp enough. I've got a lot of cheek from you to pay out, you know. I've stood a good deal of swank from you, and this is where you eat humble pie, and look as if you liked it—see?"

"I tell you it's a dangerous game to play with me," said Mornington, in a low voice. "I've never knuckled under to anybody yet!"

"You're going to knuckle under to me!"

Mornington clenched his hands hard.

He felt an intense longing to plant his clenched fist full in the hard, sneering face of the cad of the Fourth. It was only the knowledge that Lattrey could ruin him that restrained his anger and hatred.

Lattrey knew his secret. And he had

only to speak for Mornington to lose all that made his life worth living. Though he knew himself to be at Lattrey's mercy, there were moments when Mornington's pride and passionate temper almost boiled over, and he came near throwing everything to the winds.

"Come on!" said Lattrey. "We're wasting time!"

Mornington stood still.

"Why should I come with you?" he muttered. "I tell you I'm sick of the game—sick of that dingy gang and their dirty gamblin'! Sick of it all! I never half liked it when I was free to do as I liked! Now I hate it!"

"You'll come because I want you," said Lattrey.

"I won't come!"

"That will do!" snapped Lattrey. "Come on, I tell you!"

"I won't!"

Mornington did not move. An angry flush came into Lattrey's hard face. He had had more than one scene with Mornington, since the dandy of the Fourth had been under his thumb, and Morny had always given in, in the long run.

It was a pleasure to Lattrey to humiliate the superb Morny, to repay with interest the contempt he had received from him.

He slipped his arm through Mornington's, and led him along the lane.

"Let go my arm!" said Mornington thickly.

Lattrey did not heed.

"Will you let go my arm?"

"No!"

"Then take that!"

Mornington's arm swept up, and a backhander across the face sent Lattrey spinning.

He staggered two or three paces, and fell at full length in the dusty road.

Mornington stood looking down upon him with blazing eyes.

"Oh!" gasped Lattrey.

He was more surprised than hurt. The worm had turned at last with a vengeance.

"You blackmailin' cad!" said Mornington, through his teeth. "I've stood from you all I'm goin' to stand! Get up and have some more!"

Lattrey staggered to his feet.

Mornington rushed at him as he did so, his left and right coming out in swift succession. Crash! Crash!

Lattrey yelled, and went spinning into the road again.

This time he did not rise, but lay with his eyes gleaming like a snake's, fixed on Mornington.

The latter gave him a look of savage scorn, and strode back the way he had come, towards Rookwood.

Lattrey slowly picked himself up, his eyes burning with rage. He passed his hand over his face; his nose was streaming red. He dabbed at it savagely with his handkerchief.

For some moments he hesitated, and then he went on his way, after Gover and Peele.

Mornington, without looking back, strode on towards Rookwood.

CHAPTER 21.

A Surprise for Erroll!

"HALLO, here's Morny!"

Jimmy Silver made that remark, as the dandy of the Fourth arrived on the cricket-ground.

Erroll's face lighted up, and he ran to join his chum.

"You've come, after all!" he said, with a smile.

"Yes, here I am!" Mornington laughed.

"Let's have some cricket."

"Lattrey—"

"I left Lattrey on his back in Coombe Lane."

Erroll laughed.

"Then you're off with him again?"

"Never mind that. Let's get some cricket."

"Come and bowl to me, Morny," called out Jimmy Silver.

"Right-ho!"

Erroll tossed the ball to Mornington, who went on to bowl to the captain of the Fourth. Mornington was in great form that afternoon. He seemed to have thrown aside the trouble that had been weighing on his mind for many days, and to be thinking only of the cricket. He took Jimmy Silver's wicket, and even Conroy, the Australian, failed to keep his sticks up to Morny's bowling.

When the practice was over, and the juniors went in to tea, Jimmy Silver joined Mornington, with a cheery smile.

"I'm glad you turned up, Morny," he said. "You're in topping form. Shall I

put your name down for the Woodend match next week?"

"If you like," said Morny.

"I mean, are you going to stick to practice?" said Jimmy, laughing. "I'd like you in the eleven; but I want to know whether I can depend on you."

"You can depend on me if I'm still at Rookwood," said Mornington, resolutely. Jimmy stared.

"You're not thinking of leaving Rookwood?" he exclaimed.

"I might have to!"

Mornington left him with that remark, leaving Jimmy Silver in a state of considerable astonishment.

He hurried after Erroll.

"Come up to my study to tea, Erroll," he said.

"Right-ho!"

"I want a jaw with you!"

"Any old thing," said Erroll, with a smile.

The two chums had Morny's study to themselves, Gower and Peele not having returned from Coombe.

Mornington had said that he wanted a "jaw" with his chum, but during tea he sat silent, hardly uttering a word.

Erroll waited patiently for him to speak. He did not need telling that his chum was in some trouble that he could not understand, and that it was connected with Lattrey, the cad of the Fourth. What the trouble was he could not guess, though he had thought a good deal about it.

When tea was over, Mornington took out a cigarette, and then, catching Erroll's look, laughed impatiently, and thrust it away.

"You needn't mind me, Morny," said Erroll quietly. "I'd rather you didn't smoke, all the same. You might leave that kind of rot to Lattrey and his set."

"I'm one of his set!" said Mornington.

"You needn't be!"

"I've no choice!"

"I don't see that. You quarrelled with that rotter once, and cut him, and I don't see why you can't do the same again!"

"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I dare not!"

"Are you off your rocker?" exclaimed Erroll. "Do you want me to believe that you are afraid of a worm like Lattrey?"

"I'm goin' to tell you how the matter stands," said Mornington. "I'm rather

curious to hear your opinion. I dare say you won't want to be friendly with me after I've told you."

Erroll shook his head.

"Whatever you've done, I stick to you," he said quietly. "I'm not a chap to change. You can rely on me!"

"Suppose I tell you I'm a thief?"

"I shouldn't believe you."

"It's true!"

"You must be out of your senses!" said Erroll, in wonder.

"Perhaps not exactly a thief—perhaps swindler is the better word!" said Mornington sardonically. "There isn't much to choose between them. Do you want to hear the details?"

"Yes," said Erroll.

"You remember I told you, some time ago, about my cousin, Cecil Mornington? He was stolen by gipsies when a little kid, and has never turned up. If he turned up he would take everything, and leave me on my uppers!"

"I remember."

"Well, he's turned up!"

"Morny!"

"Nice for me, isn't it?" said Mornington, with a bitter laugh. "I've been brought up to believe myself the master of Mornington, with twenty thousand a year comin' to me when I'm of age, and as much as I like till then. And now—"

"But—but if the kid's turned up—I don't understand. Where is he?"

"It's not known. He doesn't know himself," said Mornington. "I know, an' I'm not goin' to tell. See?"

Erroll's face became very grave.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"I mean, is there proof?"

"Plenty of proof."

"And Lattrey knows?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Lattrey knows."

"And he's holding it over your head?" exclaimed Erroll, understanding at last.

"Exactly."

There was a long silence in the study. Mornington lighted a cigarette, unheeded by his chum. Erroll was staring at him blankly.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Erroll, breaking the silence at last. "You mean, then, that you could find Cecil Mornington if you liked?"

"Yes."

"You know where he is?"

"I could put my finger on him any minute."

"And he doesn't know it himself?"

"Not in the least. He was brought up among a gang of gipsies, and he's lived as a tramp ever since!"

"Good heavens!"

There was another silence.

"What are you going to do, Morny?" asked Erroll at last.

"Nothin'!"

"You can't keep silent now, you know."

"I can, and I'm goin' to!"

"But—but everything belongs to your cousin, I understand?"

"Legally, yes," smiled Mornington. "It doesn't seem quite fair to me, for every thing to go to the eldest son or his heir. I never thought about it before, but I can see now that it's a rotten system. Why should my pater's elder brother have taken everything, and my pater nothing? You can't call it just, can you?"

"It's not just," said Erroll. "but it's the law, and it's by that law that you have what you hold now, Morny. You've got a crowd of further-off relations who would share equally in the estates if it wasn't for that law."

"By gad! That's so, too!" Mornington laughed. "You see, the law is all right so long as it suits me, and all wrong when it doesn't. I suppose that's what it comes to."

"You can't keep silent, Morny. If—if you don't let your cousin have his rights, it—it's—"

"Swindlin'!" said Mornington.

"Well, yes!"

"I told you I was a swindler," said Mornington, with a sardonic grin. "You'd better leave me alone after this. I shall contaminate you."

Erroll watched his face, alarmed and anxious. In spite of Morny's flippancy of manner, he could see that he was suffering; that self-contempt, the bitterest of all to bear, was eating into his very heart.

Morny could not resolve to do what was right; he could not resolve to part with wealth and consequence. But he despised himself for his weakness as he would have despised it in another.

"And you're quite sure, Morny? There's no mistake?"

"Not the shadow of one! I've seen my beloved cousin, and talked to him."

"And—and—"

"What's your advice, old scout?"

"To tell your guardian at once what you've found out," said Erroll, without hesitation.

"An' give up everything?"

"It's worth it for a clear conscience."

"Give up everythin', and be as poor as Rawson or Tubby Muffin!" grinned Mornington. "Become dependent on my dear cousin--what? I don't quite think that would suit me, Erroll!"

"You'll come to it," said Erroll. "You can't keep this up!"

"You'll see!"

"And Lattrey," said Erroll. "He won't keep it dark. Why should he, if he knows?"

"He will so long as it pays him. But I don't know. I knocked him down this afternoon."

"I'm glad of that!"

"He was goin' too far with his insolence. I don't know whether he'll keep it dark after that. I don't care much. I know I'm not goin' to stand too much from him."

"It will be better for you if he speaks," said Erroll. "But I'd rather that you spoke out yourself, and did what was right."

Mornington gave a shrug.

"I've told you in confidence, of course," he said. "It's a relief to tell somebody. It's a secret, of course!"

"I understand that. I've no right to repeat what you've told me, but—"

"But you'd rather I hadn't told you?"

"Well, yes," said Erroll frankly.

"It's the penalty of pallin' with a swindler, dear boy! Why don't you throw me over, and look the other way when you see me?"

"I shan't do that. I'm your pal through thick and thin," said Erroll. "I know, too, in the long run you'll do what is right!"

The door opened, and Lattrey came in. Mornington grinned as he looked at him. Lattrey's nose was red and swollen; he showed very plain signs of the fracas in the lane.

His manner was very quiet, but his eyes were gleaming. Erroll rose, with a look of dislike at the cad of the Fourth. He left the study without a word.

LATTREY closed the door after Erroll, and stood looking at Mornington, his thin lips set, his eyes gleaming.

The dandy of the Fourth regarded him mockingly. Mornington was in a reckless mood.

"Have you enjoyed your little game?" he smiled. "Did they ask you how you came by that nose?"

"I'm writing to my father this evening," said Lattrey.

"Give him my kind regards, and my congratulations that he's still out of prison," said Mornington.

"I'm telling him where to find Cecil Mornington."

"Go ahead!"

Lattrey gritted his teeth.

"Chuck this fooling!" he said savagely.

"Do you think you're going to make me believe that you don't care? I'm willing to give you another chance, Morny."

"I thought you would be."

"I don't want to ruin you unless you force me. But we've got to have an understanding."

"I think we understand one another pretty well," said Mornington, with bitter coolness. "I'm swindling my cousin, and you're blackmailing me to keep it dark. Isn't that how the matter stands?"

Lattrey winced.

"Keep to your limit, and I'll stand it," continued Mornington. "But I've had enough of bein' under your thumb. I don't allow anybody to dictate to me."

"They were disappointed not to see you this afternoon," said Lattrey. "Joey Hook was expecting you."

"They'll be disappointed again."

"I'm going again to-night, after lights-out."

"Go, and be hanged!"

"I've told Hook I shall bring you with me."

"Another disappointment for dear old Hook!" smiled Mornington. "He's never goin' to win any more of my money! I'm done with breakin' bounds after lights-out."

Lattrey looked at him in silence, with compressed lips.

"Keep your limit!" repeated Mornington.

"You make a pretty good thing out of me, and it will pay you to keep your tongue between your teeth! But I'm not goin' to

the Bird-in-Hand again—with you, at all events! I don't enjoy your company, dear boy!"

"When I go out to-night," said Lattrey, in concentrated tones, "I shall take the letter to my father in my pocket. If you're not with me, I shall drop it into the letter-box."

"Do as you choose!"

"You think you can afford to defy me, you swindling hound?" exclaimed Lattrey, his temper breaking out at last.

Mornington rose, and threw open the door.

"There's your way, Lattrey!" he said. "Get out!"

"I'll go when I choose!"

"You'll go when I choose," said Mornington, advancing upon him.

Lattrey, with a look of hatred, stepped into the passage, and Mornington kicked the door shut after him.

The two juniors did not meet again till bed-time, when the Classical Fourth went to their dormitory.

Lattrey gave the dandy of the Fourth a glance in the dormitory, but Mornington did not meet his eyes.

The Fourth-Formers turned in, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were soon asleep. But there were two who did not close their eyes.

Half-past ten had tolled out, when Lattrey slipped quietly from his bed and dressed silently in the dark.

He bent over Mornington's bed.

"Morny!"

"Hallo!"

"Oh, you're awake?"

"So it seems!"

"Are you coming?"

"No."

Lattrey gritted his teeth.

"Then you know what to expect! Good-night, and pleasant dreams!" he said, and he glided away towards the door.

From a back window the rascal of Rookwood dropped to the ground, and flitted away cautiously in the darkness towards the school wall.

There he paused, listening.

From the dark quadrangle behind him there came a soft sound of cautious footsteps.

Lattrey crouched against the wall, in the deep shadow of a beech tree. He wondered whether the footsteps were those of

a suspicious master making a late round, or whether Mornington had changed his mind, at the last moment.

The footsteps came closer.

Lattrey's heart thumped.

"Are you there?" came a whisper in the darkness.

Lattrey drew a breath of relief. The whispering voice was Mornington's. The dandy of the Fourth had come to heel, after all.

"I'm here!" he muttered sullenly. "You startled me, you fool!"

Mornington chuckled softly.

"Did you think it was a prefect?"

"Never mind what I thought," growled Lattrey. "Are you coming?"

"I'm comin'!" Mornington's voice was mocking and sardonic. "You needn't trouble to post the letter, dear boy. Come on!"

Lattrey grinned in the darkness, and the two juniors climbed the wall together.

It was two hours later when Jimmy Silver awoke, in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, at the sound of a movement.

Jimmy sat up in bed, and blinked round him in the gloom.

"Hallo! Is that a merry sleepwalker?" he asked drowsily.

"Not at all, dear boy," came Mornington's voice. "Only a couple of merry blades just come home!"

"Mornington! You rotten blackguard!"

"Quite so! Any more cheery remarks to make?"

"You ought to be kicked out of Rookwood!" growled Jimmy Silver, in utter disgust.

"Granted!"

"Don't shout, you silly ass!" came Lattrey's whispering voice. "Do you want to wake the house, Morny?"

"I don't care much," yawned Mornington. "What a giddy surprise for Bootles, if he dropped in on us now—what?"

"Serve you both jolly well right if he did!" grunted Lovell, who had been awakened by the voices.

"Agreed; it would," said Mornington coolly. There was a heavy bump in the silent dormitory, as the dandy of the Fourth kicked off a boot.

"Will you be quiet?" came in a savage whisper from Lattrey.

Mornington laughed, and kicked off the

other boot. Then he turned in, without heeding the remarks that were addressed to him from several beds. The black sheep of Rookwood was quite his old, black-guardly self again. Lattrey had won.

CHAPTER 23.

Lattrey's Plunge!

JIMMY SILVER was looking very thoughtful when Erroll joined him in the junior Common-room a few days later. Jimmy had a slip of paper before him, and was chewing the stump of a pencil.

"Cricket list?" asked Erroll, with a smile.

"Yes—for the Woodend match."

"Morny's playing, I hope?"

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"That's just what I was thinking out," he said. "He seems to be in pretty good form. But—"

"He's been sticking to practice every day," said Erroll. "I—I know about his playing the giddy ox the other night, Jimmy, but—but that wasn't quite his own fault."

"I suppose he's his own master," growled Jimmy Silver. "He wasn't bound to go out with that worm Lattrey."

"Lattrey's got a lot of influence over him," said Erroll, colouring. He could not tell Jimmy the nature of Lattrey's power over Mornington. That was a dead secret. "Morny would rather have nothing to do with him."

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy. "Morny isn't a silly kid to be twisted round a chap's finger. Still, so long as he keeps in form, I don't know that it's my business if he makes a fool of himself. Is he in good form?"

"Topping! You've seen him at practice!"

"You've kept him up to it, I suppose?"

"Lattrey, too," said Erroll. "It's queer enough. The fellow doesn't care for cricket, but he's kept Morny to practice as much as he could. I've heard him several times lately urging Morny not to miss practice at the nets."

"I've noticed that myself," said Jimmy. "I can't quite make that fellow Lattrey out. Well, Morny goes in! We want Morny's

bowling. If he fails us, we'll make an example of him, that's all!"

"He won't fail you, Jimmy!"

And Erroll, with much satisfaction, saw the list of the junior eleven posted up on the board, with Mornington's name in. A crowd of juniors gathered to read down the list, which ran:

J. Silver, A. Lovell, G. Raby, C. Erroll, V. Mornington, Tommy Dodd, Cook, Doyle, Conroy, Oswald, Rawson.

Lattrey was among the crowd and he smiled as he noted Mornington's name in the list.

He lounged away to Townsend's study in the Fourth. Townsend and Topham were at home, Rawson, their study-mate, being downstairs. In the absence of Rawson, Torny and Topy were indulging in cigarettes—which they never ventured to do when Tom Rawson was there.

"Hallo; trot in!" said Townsend. "Our bete noir is out, so we're having a smoke. Have a cig, dear boy!"

Lattrey lighted a cigarette.

"Anythin' doin'?" asked Topham, with a yawn. "No racin' to-day to have a little flutter on. Is life worth livin'?"

"There's other things to have a quid or two on," said Lattrey, with a smile. "What price cricket?"

"N.G.," said Townsend. "I've been tryin' to book bets on the Woodend match, but there ain't any takers. Everybody knows that Rookwood's goin' to win."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Lattrey thoughtfully. "Woodend are a good team!"

"Nothin' like the form of Rookwood. Hold on, though," said Townsend, with a grin. "If you fancy Woodend's chance, I'll take you on, two to one."

"Same here!" grinned Topham.

"Two to one against Woodend?" said Lattrey, as if thinking it over.

"That's the figure!"

"In quids?"

"Quids, if you like," said Townsend. "But I warn you to keep off the grass. I don't want to rob you, old scout!"

"I tell you Woodend haven't a look in," said Topham. "I offered Smythe three to one against Woodend, and he wasn't takin' any."

"Oh, I haven't all that faith in Jimmy

Silver," said Lattrey lightly. "I'll take you on—two to one!"

"Done!" said the two nuts at once.

"Tracy'll hold the stakes!" said Townsend. "Money up, you know!"

"Oh, of course."

"Come along and find Tracy, then!"

"I'm your man!"

The three nuts proceeded to the Shell passage, to the study of Adolphus Symthe, the great nut and sportsman of the Shell. They found Smythe and Tracy and Howard there.

The three Shell fellows chuckled as they heard of the bet.

"You haven't an earthly, Lattrey," Adolphus warned him. "I tell you I saw Woodend play last week, and they're nowhere near Rookwood form."

"Jimmy Silver's eleven will knock spots off them!" said Tracy, with a nod.

"Oh, hang Jimmy Silver!" said Lattrey. Adolphus chortled.

"Yes, I know you love Jimmy Silver as much as a Prussian loves the truth!" he remarked. "But that's got nothing to do with cricket. You're throwing your money away just because you're up against Jimmy Silver. You're an ass!"

"Let him have his own way!" grinned Townsend. "His quid will come in useful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bets were duly booked, and the stakes deposited with Tracy of the Shell. Townsend and Topham grinned with satisfaction. They attributed Lattrey's reckless wagers to his dislike of Jimmy Silver. He hoped that Jimmy would lose the match, and the wish was father to the thought.

And Smythe and Howard, with the idea of making hay while the sun shone, booked bets with Lattrey, too, and when the cad of the Fourth left the study he stood to win ten pounds if Jimmy Silver were defeated on the morrow, and to lose five if Jimmy scored a victory.

Lattrey did not seem at all disturbed, however.

He looked in at Mornington's study a little later, and found Gower and Peele there. They grinned when they saw him.

"Chuckin' your money away—what?" asked Peele.

"If you've got any more to chuck away, I'll take you on!" remarked Gower. "Two to one on Rookwood to-morrow, old scout!"

Lattrey laughed.

"I'm your man, but I shall have to bet on paper. I've put up all the ready I happen to have."

"All serene!"

Lattrey's "plunge" was the subject of some merriment among the nuts of Rookwood that evening. It was quite unlike the old, calculating Lattrey to plunge on anything but a certainty, and this time it looked as if he would burn his fingers badly.

What Smythe & Co. did not know about cricket would have filled many books, but they knew enough to know that the chances in the match were all in favour of Rookwood.

But Lattrey appeared satisfied. If he had forgotten his usual caution, he did not seem to realise it.

Mornington spoke to him on the subject in the Common-room that evening. Since the night they had gone to the Bird-in-Hand together there had been outward friendliness between the two.

Mornington seemed to have thrown up all thought of resistance now, and to be content to swim with the current. His struggle towards better things had failed, and for once it was not wholly his own fault.

"I hear you're makin' bets against Rookwood to-morrow," he remarked.

"That's so."

"What's the game? Rookwood's sure to win."

"I hope not."

"Woodend hasn't an earthly," said Mornington, "not unless we get awful bad luck, an' that's not likely."

"Well, you may get bad luck!" said Lattrey calmly.

"You haven't had news of any dark horse in the Woodend team—what?" asked Mornington, puzzled.

"Not at all."

"Well, I don't savvy. But if you're anxious to lose money, I'll take you on to any amount you like."

Lattrey laughed.

"Thanks! I've got enough bets booked," he said. "I stand to lose eight pounds now if I have bad luck, and to win sixteen—"

"You'll lose the eight!"

"We shall see!"

And Lattrey said no more.

CHAPTER 24.

Lattrey's Little Game!

THE next day was Wednesday, the day of the Woodend match. It was a bright and sunny afternoon, and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked very cheerful when they came out after dinner. Woodend were expected early, and Jimmy went down to the pitch with his chums.

Mornington was chatting under the beeches with Erroll, when Lattrey joined them.

Erroll walked away at once.

He was aware that Morny could not break with the cad of the Fourth but he would not endure Lattrey's company himself.

Lattrey looked after him with a sneer.

Mornington made a move to follow his chum to the cricket-ground, but Lattrey stopped him with a light tap on the arm.

"Hold on!" he said.

"No time to waste!" said Mornington. "Woodend may be here any minute now. What is it?"

"About the match—"

"Gettin' nervous about your merry wagers?" grinned Mornington. "Well, you need not be nervous. You're goin' to lose."

"I'm not going to lose," said Lattrey quietly. "Rookwood's going to lose, and I'm going to win."

"You'll see!"

"It's a dead cert!" said Lattrey calmly. "That's what I want to speak to you about. You're in the team, Morny."

"I don't need telling that, I suppose!"

"Are you in good form?"

"Toppin'!"

"You'd better get out of form pretty quick, then!"

"Eh?"

"The fact is, I want you to see that Rookwood doesn't win!" said Lattrey, in a low tone. "Savvy?"

Mornington stared at him.

"You want me to see that Rookwood doesn't win?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes."

"Why, you sneaking hound!" Mornington understood at last. "Do you mean that you want me to give the match away?"

"It's easy enough. They're depending on your bowling. Well, you bowl for runs instead of for wickets—see? You get a duck's egg in your innings—that means a

wicket short. You're one of the best players in the team; and if you play up for Woodend's benefit instead of Rookwood's, there won't be much doubt of the result—see?"

Mornington looked at him in silence.

Morny was not always a scrupulous fellow himself, but the baseness of the proposal almost took his breath away for a minute. He was asked to betray his side treacherously in order that Lattrey might win his rascally bets, and the cad of the Fourth evidently expected him to consent.

Mornington drew a deep breath.

"So that's why you've been urgin' me to keep up the cricket lately!" he said at last. "You wanted me in the team."

Lattrey nodded.

"So that you could make bets against Rookwood, an' win them by gettin' me to give the match away!"

"Right on the wicket!"

"And you think I'm goin' to do it?"

"I know you are!" said Lattrey coolly. "Don't let's have any talk. You know you're going to do it!"

Mornington clenched his hands, and Lattrey stepped back a pace.

"None of that!" he said sharply. "I've stood that from you once, Morny. Not for a second time. I swear that if you don't toe the line, and without making any bones about it, that letter will be posted to my father to-day. You can take your choice."

There was a long silence.

"You stand to win or lose somethin' rather decent on this, I think?" remarked Mornington at last.

"Yes."

"Well, get some more bets booked, and you can stand me a whack in the winnings!" said Mornington coolly. "There's Selwyn and Tracy and some of the Modern chaps who will take you on. May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb—what?"

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Rely on me!" said Mornington. "The way I'm goin' to play will make you open your eyes if you come down an' watch!"

And, with a cool nod, the dandy of the Fourth sauntered away towards the cricket-ground.

Lattrey laughed softly.

He had expected some show of resistance from Mornington, and this complete surrender surprised as well as gratified him. It showed how completely the once proud

and restive Mornington was under his thumb.

"By gad! He's learning to dance to my tune!" murmured Lattrey, with a grin. "I've fairly brought him to heel at last, by gad!"

And Lattrey walked away, to proceed to book bets against Rookwood with every fellow of a "sportive" tendency who was willing to do so.

And when he sauntered down to Little Side an hour later he had bets booked with nearly every member of the honourable society of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood. And he was looking forward to a rich harvest.

CHAPTER 25.

Game to the Last!

JIMMY SILVER won the toss, and Rookwood opened their innings, with Jimmy at one end and Tommy Dodd at the other. It was a single-innings match. Woodend went into the field.

There was a crowd of Rookwooders round the ground, both Moderns and Classics turning up in great force to see the match. There was a very general anticipation of a Rookwood victory.

And the way Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd began showed that the anticipation was likely to be fulfilled. The two batsmen made the running fast, and the score was at 30 when Tommy Dodd was caught out.

Lovell came in next, and then Conroy, and then Oswald, with Jimmy Silver still batting. It was about that time that Lattrey of the Fourth came down to the ground.

"How's it going?" he asked Townsend. Townsend grinned.

"Forty-five for three!" he said.

"Oh, good!"

"Good for Rookwood, but not for you, old scout!" chuckled Topham. "You must have been potty to stake against Rookwood!"

"Oh, cricket's an uncertain game!" said Lattrey carelessly. "Hallo, there's Morny going to the wickets!"

Oswald was out, and the dandy of the Fourth had taken his place. Lattrey looked on smilingly to see the first duck's egg scored for Rookwood.

The ball came down from the Woodend

bowler, and Lattrey waited for the crash of the wicket.

Smack!

The gleaming willow met the ball, and sent it on its journey.

Lattrey stared.

From the Rookwood crowd came a ringing shout:

"Well hit, Morny!"

The batsmen were running.

Four had been taken before the leather came in from the country, and Mornington faced the bowling again.

"Good old Morny!" said Smythe of the Shell. "I don't bother much about cricket, as a rule, but this is a good game. Morny's in toppin' form!"

"Rippin'!" grinned Topham. "What do you think, Lattrey?"

Lattrey did not answer.

For the first time a chill of doubt had come into his breast.

Was Mornington playing him false? Dared he play him false? He could not believe it, and yet—

He remembered the scene on the Coombe road, when Mornington's passionate temper had got the better of his prudence. Mornington had been at his mercy then, as now, but he had struck him down, and taken the risk. Was he taking the risk again now?

Lattrey gritted his teeth at the thought. If it was so, he would have no mercy on the dandy of Rookwood a second time.

Morny was still batting; a 2 at the finish of the over had given him the bowling again. And he was going great guns.

Erroll came in to join him, with a smile and a nod as he passed him at the wicket. Erroll was pleased at the splendid show his chum was making at the good old game.

The Woodend fieldsmen were leather-hunting to their hearts' content—and a little more. Kit Erroll had bad luck, being caught out at point after taking 3. Another and another batsman came in, till last man was called, and Mornington was still batting.

The dandy of the Fourth had made 40 runs on his own, the largest Rookwood score in the match.

Last man in fell to the bowling, and there was a cheer as Mornington left the wicket—not out.

His face was flushed and smiling as he came back to the pavilion.

Rookwood had scored 107, and it was a

score Woodend could not hope to touch, without the aid of a miracle.

Jimmy Silver clapped Mornington on the shoulder gleefully.

"Ripping, old scout!" he exclaimed heartily. "We're playing you for your bowling, and I'm blessed if you're not batting the best in the bunch, too!"

Mornington laughed.

"I'm rather in form to-day," he remarked.

"You are, by gum!"

"You are, old son!" exclaimed Townsend. "I fancy Woodend won't be keepin' it up till dark—what?"

Lattrey came towards Mornington, his face quite pale.

Mornington's innings had hit him hard. For the cad of the Fourth had taken Morny's advice, and he was "in" very deep. If Rookwood won the match, it was not only Lattrey's money that was lost, but he would owe money on all sides—it would be a staggering loss to him. The thought of it almost turned him giddy.

"Morny!" he muttered thickly.

Mornington nodded to him genially.

"Hallo, Lattrey! Anything the matter? You look rather seedy."

"Ha, ha!" chortled Smythe. "Lattrey's been backin' Woodend!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Glad to hear it!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "It will be a bit of a lesson to you, Lattrey, about making your filthy bets on cricket matches."

Lattrey did not answer him. He drew Mornington aside, careless of the eyes that were upon them.

"What does this mean?" he muttered, when they were out of hearing of the cricketers. "Morny—"

"Anythin' wrong?" yawned Mornington. "Are you playing me false?" hissed Lattrey, through his clenched teeth. "By gad! If you dare—"

"Don't you know that I don't dare?" smiled Mornington. "Ain't I fairly under your thumb, dear boy—quite at your mercy—what? Should I dare to refuse to play a mean, dirty trick when you order me? What rot!"

"You've piled up runs—"

"Wait till you see me bowl," said Mornington reassuringly. "You know the tip you gave me—bowlin' for Woodend's benefit, you know. Wait an' see."

Lattrey eyed him uneasily

"Rookwood's a long way ahead now," he said. "It won't be so jolly easy to give Woodend the game, if you try your hardest."

"That's all right. You wait an' see!"

"Mind, if Rookwood win, you know what to expect!" said Lattrey, in a low, hard voice.

"Quite so."

"If you're fooling me—"

"Foolin' you!" Mornington laughed. "You're too sharp to be fooled, old scout. You're as keen as Sheffield steel—what? My dear chap, you're dreamin'! How could I fool you?"

"Look here—"

"Comin'," said Mornington, as Erroll called to him, and he walked away to join his chums, leaving Lattrey standing alone, a prey to doubt and dismay.

The Rookwood side went into the field, and Woodend opened their innings. Jimmy Silver bowled the first over, and a catch came Mornington's way.

The Fourth Form dandy's hand went up like lightning.

There was a roar.

"Bravo, Morny!"

"Well caught!"

"By gad, Morny's goin' it this afternoon!" said Smythe of the Shell. "Never saw old Morny in such toppin' form, by gad!"

"Like to settle up now, Lattrey, instead of waitin' for the finish?" chortled Townsend. "It's all over, bar shoutin', you know!"

Lattrey did not speak.

He realised the truth now, though he still hoped against hope. Mornington had sought to reassure him between the innings, simply from sardonic humour—like a cat playing with a mouse.

He was playing his very best for Rookwood, and he intended his side to win. And he had deliberately encouraged the cad of the Fourth to "plunge" in his betting on the match, as a punishment for having asked him to betray his side. Lattrey understood it all now, only too clearly.

Yet he still hoped. He hardly dared to think of the position he would be in if he lost his many bets on that match. More than once before his cunning had overreached itself, but never so seriously as this.

His only consolation was revenge upon Mornington; that would be but a poor satisfaction, after all.

He knew that he could not meet the debts he had piled up in confident anticipation of a treacherous success.

His thin, hard face was pale now as he watched the game.

Jimmy Silver had put Mornington on to bowl, and Lattrey hoped once more, as he saw the dandy of the Fourth go to the crease.

By skilful bowling to favour the batsmen, Mornington could certainly have made a great difference to his team's prospects—though it is doubtful if he could have enabled Woodend to make up the leeway at this stage.

Whether it was possible or not, it was soon clear that it was not Mornington's intention.

His first ball laid a Woodend wicket low, and it was followed by another and another.

There was a jubilant roar from the Rookwood crowd.

"The hat trick!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Morny!"

Lattrey of the Fourth leaned against the pavilion, sick at heart.

There was no hope now.

If he had wished, after this, Morny could not have staved off defeat for Woodend, and evidently he did not wish. He had been playing with his blackmailer; Lattrey knew that now.

The Woodend batsmen were putting up all they knew, but they were outclassed by most of the Rookwood bowling.

Three more wickets fell to Mornington's bowling, before the innings came to an end for the inglorious total of fifty runs.

The Rookwood crowd cheered vociferously.

Smythe & Co., the merry nuts, were as pleased as the cricketers. The Rookwood victory meant a little golden harvest for them.

Under the beech-trees Tracy of the Shell handed out the stakes he had been holding, and the fellows who had betted with Lattrey "on paper," looked for him to give him a hint that it was time to see about settling for his I O U's.

But even Peele and Gower, when they saw Lattrey, forbore to press for payment just then—the plotting Fourth-Former looked so sick and overcome.

They left him on a seat outside the pavilion, where he had sunk down, as if his strength had deserted him.

From where he sat, Lattrey of the Fourth could see Mornington, surrounded by the crowd of cricketers, receiving congratulations.

It was Morny's match, as Jimmy Silver said heartily; both at batting and at bowling the honours were with Mornington.

Erroll, in great delight, clapped his chum on the shoulder, and Arthur Edward Lovell clapped him on the other shoulder.

The Woodend team took their departure in subdued spirits; they had received a record beating on the Rookwood ground.

Mornington chatted cheerfully with his friends, apparently oblivious of the crouching figure on the seat by the pavilion and of the burning eyes that were fixed upon him with deadly hatred.

He walked off the ground at last, with Erroll on one side of him and Jimmy Silver on the other.

Lattrey pushed his way through the juniors, and stepped into Mornington's path, his face white and his eyes burning.

"Mornington, you cad, you swindler!" he panted.

"Hallo! What are you burbling about?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Mornington laughed lightly.

"Lattrey's got it in the neck!" he remarked airily. "The dear fellow arranged with me to give away the match—"

"What?" roared Jimmy Silver.

"He's been bookin' bets on all sides, countin' on a win for Woodend, and this is the merry result! Looks as if he enjoyed it, don't he?"

"You rotten cad!" shouted Jimmy Silver, shoving Lattrey savagely aside as he strove to speak. "Get away!"

Lattrey reeled; but he forced his way back as the juniors went on. He shook his fist in Mornington's face.

"Mornington, they're going to know now! There's a good deal more than that to tell the fellows, and I'm going—"

Before he could speak further Mornington raised his hand and struck him full in the face.

Lattrey fell with a crash.

Mornington walked on, without another glance at him. Erroll pressed his arm.

"Morny——" he whispered.

"The game's up!" Mornington smiled grimly. "The game's up! But I'm game at the finish, old scout! Let's go and have tea."

And the dandy of Rookwood hummed a merry tune as he walked on.

CHAPTER 26.

Under the Shadow!

MASTER MORNY!"

Mornington of the Fourth spun round as the timid voice spoke in his study doorway.

Morny had been standing by the window, staring out gloomily into the quadrangle of Rookwood.

The green old quad was bright in the summer sunshine, and the sound of cheery voices floated up from below. But Mornington's face was dark and gloomy as he stared out.

Little 'Erbert of the Second Form, the waif of Rookwood, stepped timidly in at the open door.

He retreated a pace as Mornington turned upon him, so dark and savage was the look of the dandy of the Fourth.

"So you've come?" said Mornington, between his teeth.

"Yes, Master Morny," faltered 'Erbert.

"Lattrey's told you?"

"I——"

"Lattrey's told you!" repeated Mornington, making a stride towards the fag. "And you've come to tell me you know, you young rotter! After all that I've done for you, you are going to rob me of everything! Hang you!"

The fag stared at him.

"Master Morny!"

"I brought you to Rookwood," pursued Mornington, bitterly. "I found you starving on the road. If I'd left you there you'd never have troubled me again. I brought you in. I made my guardian enter you in the school. I've made you into a Rookwood chap instead of a ragged tramp, and stood by you all through. And now you're going to rob me and leave me bare!"

"Master Morny! Wot are you sayin'?" he ejaculated. "You must be fair off your chump, Master Morny. 'Ow can I rob you?"

Mornington gritted his teeth.

"Hasn't Lattrey told you, then?" he exclaimed.

"I ain't seen Master Lattrey."

"Oh, I thought——"

"I knows all you've done for me, Master Morny," said 'Erbert. "I knows 'ow you took me up, me that ain't got even a name of my own, and looked arter me. I ain't likely to forget it, sir!"

"You don't know—yet?" muttered Mornington. "I thought Lattrey had told you, when you came."

"Wot could he tell me?"

"Wait till he tells you!" he replied. "Oh, the cad, the rotter! This is his game, to keep me in suspense. The cat and the mouse over again." The dandy of Rookwood clenched his hands. "And I've got to stand it—I've got to stand it from him!"

"Master Morny," faltered 'Erbert.

"What did you want here?" exclaimed Mornington harshly. "If Lattrey hasn't sent you, what do you want?"

"I came with a message from Jimmy Silver, sir!"

"Hang Jimmy Silver!"

"Master Silver says he'd like you to come down to the cricket——"

"Hang the cricket!"

"Well, that's all, sir."

'Erbert of the Second made a movement to retreat from the study, sorry that he had come there. Mornington had been kind and generous to him, but 'Erbert had learned that his patron's temper was very uncertain. And the wild words with which the dandy of Rookwood had greeted him had really caused him to entertain a doubt as to whether Valentine Mornington was quite in his right senses.

Mornington's eyes followed him, gleaming with hatred.

It was clear that Morny was not quite himself.

"To give up everything—for you!" he muttered. "You—you ragamuffin—you tramp! You!"

"Master Morny!"

"Get out of my sight!"

Mornington made a spring towards the

dismayed fag, and caught him savagely by the shoulder.

In another moment 'Erbert would have gone whirling through the doorway.

"Morny!"

It was Kit Erroll of the Fourth who spoke, as he stepped quietly into the study.

At the sound of his chum's voice Mornington released the fag, the colour flooding crimson into his face.

'Erbert staggered.

"Morny, are you off your rocker?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Pretty nearly, I think," he said. He looked at the fag. "Run along, 'Erbert! Don't mind my temper. I'm out of sorts—horribly out of sorts!"

"I don't mind a bit, Master Morny," said the fag loyally.

He hurried out of the study, disturbed and troubled in his mind. For many days past there had been passionate outbreaks of Mornington's temper, and the little fag wondered miserably what strange trouble was at the root of it.

Kit Erroll shut the door after the fag had gone.

Then he fixed his eyes on Mornington, who stood with a gloomy brow, his hands driven deep in his pockets.

"Morny! You needn't rag that poor little chap," he said reproachfully. "What's the matter with you? That kid would go through fire and water for you if you asked him."

"I'm not in a reasonable mood," he said. "You know how the matter stands. Lattrey holds me in the hollow of his hand, and he is still keeping silent. He is playing with me, and I've got to stand it!"

"That's not 'Erbert's fault."

"You don't understand."

Erroll gave him a quick, searching look.

"Morny!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "It's not possible!"

"So you've guessed it!" sneered Mornington.

"You've told me the story—that your missing cousin, Cecil Mornington, has been found, and that you and Lattrey know where he is," said Erroll quietly. "I wondered how it could be. You told me he was a poor, unknown beggar, who did not know his own name. I wondered!"

"You needn't wonder any more," sneered

Mornington. "You might have guessed."

"I suppose I might have guessed," assented Erroll. "It's 'Erbert!'"

"Yes; it's 'Erbert.'" Mornington's lip curled sardonically. "The beggar I picked up starving on the road—he's the missing heir of Mornington. I found it out by the birthmark on his shoulder. And Lattrey's found it out, too. That's what Lattrey's been holding over my head; that's why I've been under his thumb. And now I've broken with him, he's going to betray the secret, and I'm going to become a nobody, and that young tramp is going to take my place as heir of Mornington. I—I could stand it if I could get it over. Why doesn't Lattrey speak and have done with it?"

"It's rotten hard lines on you, Morny," said Erroll softly. "But I knew you'd do the right thing in the long run, and let your cousin have his rights. And you won't be a beggar. Your uncle's rich, and—"

"I'm not complainin'," said Mornington. "I can stand it. I can get out of Rookwood; I'll never take a back seat here. I don't care much what happens to me. But—but"—he paused, his eyes gleaming—"if Lattrey intends to keep the secret after all—"

"Morny!"

"Do you think I'm anxious to be a beggar?" exclaimed the dandy of Rookwood fiercely. "I was a fool to quarrel with Lattrey—a dashed fool! He wanted me to give away a cricket-match to let him win his rotten bets. I was a fool to refuse!"

"You were right, Morny, and you'll be glad of it yet!" said Erroll. "No good ever came of doing what you know to be wrong."

Mornington laughed scornfully.

"I'm going to see Lattrey. There may be a chance yet."

"Morny!"

But Mornington left the study, and Kit Erroll was left alone, with a clouded brow. Mornington, between good and evil, had chosen good, but his resolution had already wavered.

The catastrophe that threatened him had dazed him, as it seemed, and he was not quite himself. Erroll stepped into the passage, only in time to see Mornington enter Lattrey's study and close the door.

And Kit Erroll went his way, with a deeply-troubled heart, only hoping that his wayward chum would yet find the right path and follow it.

CHAPTER 27.

Too Late!

COME in, Morny, old scout!" It was Tubby Muffin, Lattrey's study-mate, who greeted the dandy of Rookwood in affectionate tones. Tubby Muffin beamed upon him, in fact. Lattrey, the cad of the Fourth, was smoking a cigarette in the study, and he did not even look up.

"Had your tea, Morny?" pursued the fat Classical. "Nothing much here. You know how mean Lattrey is, and I happen to be short of money for once. But I'll tell you what. I'll come to tea with you, if you like."

"Get out!" said Mornington.

"Oh, I say——"

Mornington made a menacing gesture, and Tubby Muffin scuttled out of the study. It was his own study, and Morny had no right to turn him out of it, but Morny was not troubling himself about the rights of the matter.

He kicked the door shut after the fat junior, and turned to Lattrey, who was now regarding him with a sneering smile through the smoke of the cigarette.

"Well?" said Mornington.

"Well?" repeated Lattrey.

"You don't seem to have told your yarn yet," said Mornington.

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Any hurry?" he yawned.

"I've been thinking over the matter."

"And you've come here to beg for mercy!" jeered Lattrey.

"I've come to make terms, if you choose."

"After knocking me down before all the fellows, and telling them I tried to get you to give away the Woodend match!" Lattrey laughed. "It's too late, my infant! I'm fed-up with you, Morny!"

"You mean to make terms, or you would have blabbed before this!" said the dandy of the Fourth, eyeing him.

Lattrey laughed.

"It's too late!" he said. "I'm fed-up! I'm making terms, but not with you!"

"You haven't spoken to 'Erbert. I know that."

"I don't intend to. I've written to my father."

"Oh!" Mornington drew a deep breath. "You've told him——"

"I've told him that I'm on the track of the missing heir of Mornington!" grinned Lattrey. "That I can put my finger on him any time I please. I've asked him how I stand for a whack in the reward if I do put my finger on him. I haven't mentioned that he's at Rookwood. I'm not giving too much away. The pater will be too keen to let a chance slip. The game's up—for you. You've got yourself to thank for it."

Mornington was silent.

The malice in Lattrey's hard face told him that there was no further hope. It was indeed too late to make terms with the unscrupulous junior who had blackmailed him.

"I'm expecting an answer from my pater by every post," continued Lattrey, enjoying the expression on Mornington's face. "When it comes I shall blab, as you call it, fast enough. Until the pater's agreed to my whack in the reward, I hold my tongue. That's all. Make the most of what time you've got left. It may be a day or two."

Mornington set his teeth hard.

Without a word further, he turned and quitted the study, followed by Lattrey's mocking laugh.

He understood now.

Lattrey was enjoying the suspense in which he was keeping him, but it would not last long now.

In a day or two—two or three days at the most—the truth would be told. Little 'Erbert, the waif of Rookwood, would be known as the heir of Mornington. And Mornington of the Fourth would be known as—what? A beggar, dependent on his cousin's bounty—dependent on the ragamuffin he had saved from want! It would be a strange reversal of the position.

Mornington's face was white as he quitted the School House.

If the blow would only have fallen quickly, he felt that he could have borne

it better. The suspense was, tearing his nerves to tatters.

He walked down to the cricket-field aimlessly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at practice at the nets, and several voices greeted Mornington as he came up.

"Come and give us some bowling, Morny!" called out Jimmy Silver.

Erroll, who was about to bowl, tossed the ball to his chum at once. He was glad to see Morny there.

Mornington smiled sardonically.

Cricket was not much to him at that moment. His old ambition to shine as a member of the Rookwood Junior Eleven seemed a very small thing to him now in the presence of the black trouble that weighed upon his heart and his mind.

But he went on the crease, hoping that the game would help to drive away black care.

Morny was one of the best bowlers in the Fourth when he was in the mood, and the junior bats were glad to get him to practice. A wicket needed watching when Morny was bowling against it, as a rule.

But the dandy of the Fourth was not in form now.

His bowling was wild and erratic, and the first ball did not even go within reach of the bat, let alone near the wicket.

Jimmy Silver stared as Lovell started after the wandering leather.

"Wide!" grinned Raby.

"Very wide!" chuckled Newcome. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Do you call that bowling, Morny?" chirruped Tommy Dodd, the Modern.

"Classical bowling, you know!" said Tommy Cook disparagingly. "That's how they bowl on the Classical side! Huh!"

Mornington scowled as he heard the uncomplimentary remarks of the junior cricketers.

Lovell tossed back the ball, and he bowled again, as badly as before, and the third ball went wide.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "You're off your form, Morny! What the merry dickens is the matter with you?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Mornington. "Hang cricket!"

He drove his hands into his pockets savagely, and strode off the field, leaving the juniors laughing.

Erroll joined him as he went.

"What is it now, Morny?" he asked.

The dandy of the Fourth laughed bitterly.

"I'm out of sorts! I've seen Lattrey, and it's too late! You needn't be alarmed for me, old scout. I've no chance of making a bargain with the cad. He's written to his pater, the sneaking detective who's been hunting for my lost cousin. The game's up!"

Erroll's face was very grave.

"It's hard cheese," he said. "But think a minute, Morny. You've been jolly good to 'Erbert. You saved him from starvation when you brought him to Rookwood. You risked your life to pull him out of the river. He's devoted to you. You can't suppose he'll want to take everything and leave you quite stranded. He's bound to treat you generously."

"Do you think I want to take charity from him?" sneered Mornington.

"It won't exactly be that. A rich fellow expects to help his relations."

"And I'm goin' to be a poor relation—me a poor relation hangin' after a chap for what he will give me!"

"You look on the worst side of it," said Erroll. "There's your uncle, too. He will see you through."

"And to think that I pulled that kid out of beggary, and brought him here," said Mornington, with bitter emphasis. "But for that, he'd never have been found. I owe it all to myself."

"You did a kind and decent thing, Morny, and you can't be sorry for it."

"And I dragged him out of the river! If I'd left him there—"

"Morny!" muttered Erroll.

"Am I shockin' you?" Mornington grinned satirically. "Well, I'll shock you some more. I wish I'd left him in the river, hang him!"

"You don't, Morny," said Erroll quietly. "Don't talk like that! It's hard lines on you, I know, but you've got the pluck to stand it."

"And the pluck to prevent it, if there's

a chance left," muttered Mornington, with a dark look.

"It can't be prevented now, Morny—now that Lattrey has given it away."

"Who knows?"

"What are you thinking of now?" asked Erroll, troubled and uneasy, and almost alarmed by the expression on Mornington's face.

Mornington laughed again—a hard laugh that had no merriment in it.

"I won't tell you, old chap. I'd shock you too much! Get back to your cricket. Jimmy Silver wants you to bowl."

"But—"

"Ta-ta!"

Mornington walked away, and Erroll, with a deeply troubled brow, went back to the cricket-pitch.

He was wondering uneasily what thought was in Mornington's mind, that brought that strange look to his face.

He would have been more alarmed if he could have guessed the dark and terrible thoughts that thronged the fevered brain of the dandy of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 28.

A Surprise for Joey Hook!

"COMIN' out, Morny?"

The nuts of the Fourth were standing in an elegant group, chatting, by the gateway. When Mornington came down to the gates.

Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower eyed him curiously.

Morny's savage temper of late had almost estranged his nutty friends. Towny had complained that there was no standin' Morny now, and the other nutty youths quite agreed with him. If there was much more of it, Towny declared, they would have to drop Morny entirely.

Mornington's face was pale now, and his eyes had an unnatural glitter in them. He hardly glanced at the nuts as they greeted him. Townsend & Co. followed him into the road.

Then Morny turned on them.

"What do you want?"

"What price a run down to the merry old Bird-in-Hand?" said Townsend. "Old

Hook's there, and we can get up a game of billiards."

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, where are you goin'?"

"Never mind where I'm goin'," said Mornington savagely. "I don't want your company."

"By gad!"

Mornington strode away down the lane, and the nuts stared after him in utter disgust and wrath, without following him further.

"Morny's manners are improvin'," remarked Topham, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Townsend set his lips.

"I'm fed up with the cad," he said. "I'm not standin' any more of it. I'm not goin' to speak to him again."

"Same here!" said Gower.

Quite regardless of the anger of his nutty friends, Mornington strode on. He forgot the existence of Townsend & Co. in a minute or less.

He turned from the lane into the path that led to the long inn garden behind the Bird-in-Hand, and entered the garden by the little gate under thick trees.

That quarter was strictly out of bounds for Rookwood, but Mornington was not in a mood to heed such restrictions now.

He walked up the path in the inn garden, and stopped at the open French windows of the billiard-room.

There was a clicking of ball and cue in the room.

Joey Hook, the bookmaker, was there, killing time with a game with the marker, while waiting for pigeons to flutter in for plucking.

He laid down the cue at once, and turned with an agreeable grin at the sight of the handsome, elegant Rookwood junior in the doorway.

"Arternoon, sir," he said heartily. "You've looked in for a hundred up, eh—what?"

"No. I want to speak to you."

"Go a'ead, sir."

"Come out here."

"Right you are!"

The beery, greasy marker glanced curiously at Mornington's white face as the Rookwood junior went back into the garden.

Joey Hook followed him with alacrity.

The wealthy and reckless Rookwood fellow was one of the richest pigeons Mr. Hook ever had the chance of plucking, and his manner towards Mornington was servility itself.

The junior led the way to a little summer-house in the garden, where they were safe out of earshot.

Hook followed him in, and sat down. Mornington remained standing.

"Well, wot is it, sir?" asked Joey Hook cordially. "Always at your service, sir."

Mornington fixed his eyes upon the red, harsh face of the bookmaker. Joey Hook, warned off the Turf for malpractices there, was one of the most unscrupulous rascals outside prison walls, as Mornington well knew. Sharper, gambler, welsher, gaol-bird—such was Mr. Joseph Hook.

"I want you to do something for me, Hook," said the junior abruptly.

"Hanything, sir."

"It might be risky."

"Oh!" said Mr. Hook, eyeing him narrowly. "Well, I don't mind, sir. You've 'ad a quarrel with some young gent at the school, and you don't want to soil your 'ands on 'im. I'm your man, sir!"

Mornington shook his head impatiently.

"It's more serious than that."

Hook whistled softly. He could see that Mornington was in a strange, unusual mood, and he was beginning to wonder.

"Well, s'pose you tell me wot it is, sir," he said. "I'd do anything I could to oblige a young gent like you, sir."

"You know I'm rich, Hook," said Mornington quietly. "I can get all the money I choose to ask my guardian for, within limits."

"I know it, sir."

Mr. Hook, indeed, knew it well. It was the reason why he had so much soapy servility to spare for Mornington.

"And I could raise as much as I wanted from the moneylender over at Latham," continued Mornington. "I've done it once or twice already, when the gee-gees went wrong. I could lay my hands on a hundred pounds if I wanted it—or two hundred."

"Yes, sir," said Hook, in wonder.

"You'd like to earn a hundred pounds, Hook?"

Joey Hook's beery eyes glistened.

"Wouldn't I just!" he said emphatically.

"Well, I'll pay you that, if you do what I want, and another hundred after it."

"My heye!"

Joey Hook stared at the junior in blank amazement. He could not imagine any service for which the dandy of Rookwood would pay him by the hundred pounds.

"Well, will you do it?"

"But—but wot is it, sir?"

"There's a chap at Rookwood—never mind his name now—a chap whom I dislike —" Mornington paused.

"You want 'im bashed?" said Hook.

"I want him to leave Rookwood."

"Ye-e-es?"

"And never return," said Mornington.

Joey Hook started violently.

His beery eyes were open and round now, and almost terrified, as they were fixed on the junior's white face.

"And—and—and never return!" repeated Hook mechanically.

"Yes."

"Master Mornington!"

Mornington burst into a hard, bitter laugh.

"You understand what I mean? The fellow's in my way—never mind how. Will you undertake to get him out of the way—for two hundred pounds?"

Joey Hook gave him a steady, searching look, and rose to his feet.

"I think you ain't quite yourself this afternoon, Master Mornington," he said quietly. "You look rather queer about the eyes, sir, if you don't mind my sayin' so. You'd best forget wot you've said to me, and I'll forget it, too. Good-af-ternoon, sir!"

And with that, Mr. Hook left the summer-house, and stode away towards the inn, without looking back.

Mornington stood still, his hands tightly clenched.

The ruffian had refused! Money could not tempt Joey Hook to such a crime as Mornington had hinted at.

After a few minutes, Mornington left the inn-garden by way of the towing-path.

His face was white, and there was still the same strange, strained look about his eyes that Joey Hook had noted. He did not return to the school, but strode away by the path to Coombe Heath.

While the sun sank lower and lower, Mornington tramped over the heath, amid the dangerous old quarries, careless of the pits that yawned about his feet.

He stopped at last upon an abrupt verge, and stood staring downwards into the gloomy depths below, with iron nerve.

Far below, there was a faint echo of running water. Late rains had flooded the old quarry.

For many minutes the junior stood there, staring into the gloomy abyss, the expression on his face growing darker and darker. He turned away at last, in the thickening dusk, with the seal of a terrible resolution on his face.

CHAPTER 19.

'Erbert is Pleased!

"MORNINGTON!"

Mr. Bootles was taking the roll-call in Big Hall at Rookwood.

Mornington of the Fourth did not answer to his name.

"Mornington!"

The master of the Fourth blinked round over his spectacles, and marked down Mornington as absent.

"Morny's goin' it again!" remarked Townsend, as the juniors came out of the hall. "Keepin' it up at the Bird-in-Hand, I'll bet you!"

"An' he didn't want us with him!" growled Peele. "Well, I hope he'll get a lickin' for missin' call-over!"

Kit Erroll went to the door, and looked out into the dusky quadrangle, wondering where his chum was. He glanced down as he felt a touch on his elbow, and nodded to 'Erbert of the Second Form.

"Master Morny ain't come in, sir," said the tag, in a low voice.

"Not yet," said Erroll.

"There's somethin' that ain't goin' right with Master Morny, sir," said 'Erbert. "I wish I knowed what it was. P'r'raps you know, bein' his pal."

Erroll looked at him very curiously.

He could not tell Mornington's secret: it had been imparted to him in confidence. But he wondered what the waif of Rookwood would have thought, and said, if he could have known that he was the cousin of the

superb youth who had befriended him, and heir to the estates that were supposed to be Mornington's.

'Erbert would know it soon—that was certain. The news would be strange and startling enough for the little waif who did not even know his own name.

"You know what's the matter with 'im, sir?" said 'Erbert.

"Yes," said Erroll, after a pause.

"You couldn't tell a chap?"

Erroll shook his head.

"I wish as I could 'elp 'im, some'ow," said 'Erbert, with a sigh. "Master Morny's got a quick temper, but he's done a lot for me, and I'd go and drown myself, sir, if it would do 'im any good. Course, I can't 'elp him nohow, but I—I wish there was somethin' I could do. Sometimes, sir, I've thought as Morny's trouble was somethin' to do with me."

Erroll was silent.

"A few weeks ago he wanted me to get out of the school, sir, and then he changed his mind, arter Lattrey interfered," said 'Erbert. "If it would give him any pleasure, I'd run away to-night, though I don't know why he's turned agin me." 'Erbert's voice trembled. "He don't like me now, can't bear the sight of me, an' I haven't done nothing as I knows on."

"Don't think about it, kid," said Erroll kindly. "Suppose——" He paused. "Suppose the time came, 'Erbert, when you could repay Morny for his kindness to you—you'd be glad of the chance, wouldn't you?"

"Wot!" said 'Erbert.

"It may come, kid. In fact, I'm sure of it. When it does, you'll remember that Mornington stood your friend when you needed one."

"I ain't likely to forget it, sir," said 'Erbert. "Mean to say that I shall never be able to 'elp Master Morny like he's 'elped me?"

"I think so."

"Wouldn't I be glad of the chance!" said 'Erbert, his eyes glistening. "P'r'raps Master Morny would be friendly again then."

There was a step in the darkness without, and the fag hurried away. He knew Mornington's step.

"You're late, Morny," said Erroll, as the dandy of the Fourth came up the steps, pale, and breathing hard.

"Yes; I've been on the moor."

"You'll have to report to Bootles," said Erroll, watching Mornington's face uneasily. "Yes, I know."

Mornington went to the Fourth Form-master's study, where he was duly awarded fifty lines for missing call-over.

Erroll met him in the passage as he came out from Mr. Bootles' study.

"You haven't had your tea?" he asked.

"No; I forgot it."

"Come up to my study. I've got some grub."

"I don't feel hungry."

"Rubbish! Come along!"

Erroll took his chum's arm, and led him upstairs. Jimmy Silver called to them in the Fourth Form passage:

"Hallo, you slackers! Meeting of the Classical Players in the box-room, in five minutes!"

"Morny hasn't had his tea. We'll be along a bit later."

"Oh, bother Morny's tea!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily, and he went on to gather up the members of the dramatic society.

Erroll led his chum into No. 2, where Higgs and Jones were engaged in a warm argument as to who should wash up teacups.

"Players' meeting in the box-room!" said Erroll, and Higgs and Jones minor left the study.

The question of washing up the teacups was deferred till another occasion.

Erroll pushed Mornington into a chair, and speedily placed his meal before him. Mornington ate mechanically.

"I've been talking to young 'Erbert," said Erroll.

"Hang him!"

"Morny, considering what's going to happen, you're not taking the right line with that kid."

Mornington's lip curled.

"Do you think I'm going to suck up to him, because he's going to have my money? Am I the kind of chap to curry favour for charity?"

"It's not like that. The kid thinks all the world of you, and he is cut up by your being so rusty to him. It's rather rotten."

"I know it's rotten," said Mornington grimly. "I can't help it, though. I'm a rotter, you know—a rotter, through and through. If you knew what I've been at this afternoon, you'd pitch me out of your study neck and crop!"

Erroll eyed him uneasily.

"I won't ask you any questions, Morny."

"Better not. I shouldn't answer them."

"But about 'Erbert—why don't you treat him a bit more decently? When he knows the truth, Morny, he will be anything but pleased. I am sure of that. He won't want to take your place, and he will be anxious to make it as easy as possible for you."

Mornington gave his chum a strange look.

"Perhaps you're right," he remarked.

"I'll be a bit more civil to the kid. In fact, I'll ask him to come out with me to-morrow."

"That's better!" said Erroll, relieved. "The poor kid can't help it, you know. He can't help being who he is, Morny."

"I know he can't! And I can't help wishing that I'd let him go to the bottom of the river, instead of pulling him out, like a fool!" Mornington laughed impatiently as he caught the look on Erroll's face. "Don't give me a sermon, old chap, for goodness' sake! I can't stand it now. Cut along and join the merry Players. I'm not comin'."

"What are you going to do, Morny?"

"Oh, I'll drop in and see 'Erbert!"

"Oh, good!"

Erroll left the study, and Mornington finished his tea, and followed a few minutes later. He sauntered away in the direction of the Second Form-room. The fags were gathering there for evening preparation, and 'Erbert came along the passage with Snooks and Jones minimus.

He sighted Mornington at once, and looked at him with very much the expression of a dog watching a master who may be angry.

The dandy of the Fourth gave him a nod and a smile, and 'Erbert's face brightened up.

He left his chums, and joined Mornington, as the latter beckoned.

"I was a bit rusty with you to-day. 'Erbert," said Mornington. "Don't mind me. You know I've got a rotten temper."

"I don't mind a bit, sir."

"Would you like to come for a run out to-morrow afternoon?" asked Mornington. "It's a half-holiday, you know. We could have a walk across the heath, and see the camp at Latham."

'Erbert's eyes danced. It was the first time his superb patron had asked him to walk with him.

"Oh, Master Morny, I'd like it like anything!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Then it's a go, 'Erbert?"

"Wot to! And—and you ain't waxy with me any more?" asked 'Erbert timidly.

"Not a bit of it!"

Mornington nodded and walked away, and 'Erbert, with a very bright face, followed the fags into the Form-room.

Mornington went to his study, and Peele and Gower came in later to do their prep. They found Mornington idly sketching with a pen on the blotting-pad. The two nuts stared at the scratchy sketch.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Peele. "That's a cheery subject to draw, I must say!"

Mornington had drawn a picture of a gallows. Peele and Gower stared at it and at him. The slumbering fire in his eyes vaguely alarmed them. Morny tore up the sheet of blotting-paper, and threw the fragments into the fender.

His face was twisted into a strange, sardonic grin. He did not speak to his study-mates, but left the study to them.

Gower and Peele exchanged glances.

"Somethin's jolly wrong with Morny," said Peele sagely. "Did you notice his eyes, Gower—how jolly queer they look?"

Gower nodded.

"He's got somethin' on his mind," he said. "It almost looks to me——"

He paused.

"It looks to me," said Peele deliberately, "as if Morny's goin' off his blessed rocker!"

"That's what I meant."

"Blessed if I half like having him in the study," growled Peele. "If ever a chap looked cracked, Morny does!"

Mornington did not return to his study for prep. Neither did he turn up in the box-room for the meeting of the Classical Players. He was not seen again till bedtime, when the Classical Fourth went to their dormitory. And then he turned in without a word, even to Erroll.

CHAPTER 30.

On the Verge of a Crime!

JIMMY SILVER glanced at 'Erbert of the Second, and smiled.

The Fistical Four were heading for the river on that Wednesday afternoon, and they had come down to the gates in a merry crowd.

'Erbert was waiting there.

The waif of Rookwood looked unusually cheery, and he was unusually nicely clad. He had on his best Etons, his tie was carefully tied, his shoes were well brushed, and his straw hat was set straight on his head. And he was smiling a smile of contentment.

"Hallo! Have you come into a fortune?" asked Lovell.

"You're looking jolly chippy, 'Erbert," said Jimmy Silver.

'Erbert nodded, and grinned.

"Quite 'appy, thank you!" he said.

"What's on?" asked Raby. "Has the Head asked you to tea?"

"Or has Miss Dolly asked you to go for a walk?" grinned Newcome.

'Erbert chuckled.

"No, they ain't," he said. "I'm goin' to Latchem with Mornington."

"Oh," said Jimmy Silver, laughing, "that accounts for the merry milk in the coconut!"

"Master Morny's asked me for to go out this artemoon with him," said 'Erbert proudly.

"Have a merry time, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. And the Fistical Four went on their way, much pleased by 'Erbert's pleasure.

Mornington came down to the gates as they left, and cast a dark, suspicious glance after them.

Jimmy paused, and looked back.

"You two are going to Latchem—what?" he asked.

"Yes," muttered Mornington.

"Like us to pull you there in our boat? We're going to make an artemoon of it."

"No, thanks! We're going to walk."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver hurried after his chums, and the Fistical Four launched their boat, and forgot all about Mornington.

"Come on!" said Mornington abruptly.

'Erbert went out into the road with the dandy of the Fourth. Townsend & Co. were chatting in the road, and they looked with great disfavour at the two as they passed.

"Morny's taken up that young ragamuffin again," said Townsend, with a sneer and a shrug. "I thought he'd dropped him for good."

"You never know how to take Morny," complained Topham.

Peele glanced after Morny.

"I don't like the look in his eye," he said. "I say, you chaps, have you ever heard whether there's insanity in the Mornington family?"

"My hat! Not that I know of."

"He looks cracked!" said Peele. "Blessed if I'd care for Morny's company this afternoon. I tell you he's got a queer look in his eye!"

Headless of the comments of the nuts, Mornington strode on, little 'Erbert trotting by his side.

'Erbert was in the seventh heaven.

Morny's having asked him to take that walk on that sunny half-holiday was more than enough to make the little fag happy.

It indicated that Morny had "come round"—that the magnificent Mornington had got over these strange fits of temper that had troubled him, and intended to be kind, as of old, to his loyal protege.

But if 'Erbert had expected pleasant and congenial conversation on the way he was disappointed.

Mornington did not speak, and the fag did not venture to break the silence.

Once or twice Morny glanced at him, and then 'Erbert was surprised and a little startled by the strange, deep fire in his eyes.

He began to wonder, in a vague, uneasy way, whether Morny was ill.

They turned into the path for the moor, and tramped along in silence, and slowly the brightness died out of 'Erbert's face.

Mornington was in a strange mood he could not understand, and he could not keep from wondering why Morny looked at him strangely.

The wide heath stretched round them now, rising in the far distance towards Latcham, with the red roofs of Coombe far away on the left.

Mornington turned from the path, and then 'Erbert spoke.

"It's right on to Latcham, Master Morny," he said timidly.

"We'll go this way."

"Orl right, sir."

Knee-deep in grass and ferns, they walked on, Mornington a little ahead of the fag, and walking so fast that 'Erbert had trouble to keep up with him.

The roofs of Coombe had disappeared now, and round them the wide heath stretched, with billowing gorse, to the hori-

zon. Overhead the summer sun shone from a sky of almost cloudless blue.

A vague sense of loneliness settled on 'Erbert. Why was Mornington so strangely silent? This was not the happy walk he had been looking forward to.

"Stop here a bit," said Mornington at last.

'Erbert halted.

They stood on the edge of the old, disused quarry, where Mornington had paused, the previous evening, and looked so long into the dusky depths.

Deep down in the old excavations eternal twilight reigned.

Mornington picked up a stone and tossed it into the quarry. From far below came a faint, echoing splash.

'Erbert stole a timid glance at him.

"It ain't safe 'erc, so near the edge, Master Morny," he murmured. "And—and we've got a long way to go to Latcham now."

Mornington smiled sardonically.

"We shan't get to Latcham this afternoon," he said.

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"Jest as you like, sir."

'Erbert shrank away from his companion as he looked at him. Mornington's eyes seemed on fire with a strange, unnatural light. A strange and terrible suspicion shot through the fag's mind as he caught Morny's eyes.

He wondered, and feared. Was the dandy of Rookwood quite in his right senses? Instinctively he moved back from the grassy verge of the quarry.

"Is that a seagull?" said Mornington suddenly.

He swept his hand towards the quarry.

'Erbert turned to look in the direction he pointed.

His back was towards Mornington.

And as his back was turned a sudden, terrible grasp was flung upon him from behind, and he felt himself forced to the giddy verge of the precipice.

A sharp, terrified scream left the fag's lips.

For a moment quarry and gorse and sky swam around him. The dusky depths seemed to be rushing up to meet him. The solid earth was no longer under his feet. And in that fearful moment the icy hand of death seemed to lay its clutch on his very heart.

The next instant he was drawn back from the giddy edge, and thrown in the thick grass, in safety, and Mornington fell on his knees beside him.

As through a mist he heard Mornington's voice, dimly he saw the white face at his side.

"'Erbert! You're not hurt! Don't be scared, kid! You're not hurt!"

'Erbert sat up dazedly.

CHAPTER 31.

After Darkness, Light!

'ERBERT sat in the grass panting.

His brain was in a whirl.

For that one fearful moment Mornington's iron grasp had held him over the very edge of the precipice, helpless to avert his fate, and then had drawn him back to safety.

Was it only a horrible joke?

"Masty Morny," groaned 'Erbert, "you— you scared me, sir! I—I—"

His voice trailed off and broke.

"You're all right, kid! Did you think I was going to pitch you in?"

Morny's voice was mocking, and he laughed tunelessly.

"I—I was afeared—"

'Erbert ceased to speak. He was ashamed of the terrible fear that had gripped his very heart and soul as he spun on the edge of the abyss.

"Come!" said Mornington abruptly.

He helped the still shaking fag to his feet, and led him away from the quarry. 'Erbert was glad to follow him. Mornington stopped at last, and sat down on a jutting rock among the gorse, and motioned 'Erbert to do the same.

Mornington's face was white as chalk, and there were thick beads of perspiration on his brow. But the wild light had died out of his eyes, and his manner was curiously calm.

"I've got somethin' to tell you, 'Erbert," he said quietly.

"Yes, sir," faltered 'Erbert.

"Do you know why I brought you out here this afternoon?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

"Because I was out of my senses, I think," said Mornington. "I don't quite know what was the matter with me. Too much worry, I suppose. But I was goin' to pitch you into the quarry, 'Erbert!"

The fag shrank back with a cry.

"Oh, Master Morny! Wot 'ave I done?"

"Nothin'," said Mornington. "Only being yourself, my dear kid, and standing in my light. But—but don't look at me like that, 'Erbert. I tell you I was mad just then. As soon as I came to carry out what was in my mind I understood, and"—he pressed his hand across his brow—"I'd rather have pitched myself in than you, 'Erbert!"

"Wot 'ave I done, Master Morny?" said the waif miserably. "I know you hate me, and I don't know for why. If you asked me in earnest I'd go and jump into that there quarry if it would 'elp you!"

Mornington laughed.

"By gad, I half believe you would, 'Erbert!" he said. "But I shan't ask you. I've got something to tell you, kid. You remember what you told me long ago, when I found you on the road—about yourself?"

"Yes," said 'Erbert.

"You've been a ragamuffin and an out-cast all your life, never even knowing the meaning of the birthmark you bear on your shoulder."

Mornington paused.

He tore open his collar and turned back the shirt, exposing the white skin of his shoulder to view.

"Look!" he said.

"My eye!" muttered 'Erbert, in wonder.

On the white skin showed the deep crimson mark, strangely in the form of a wolf's head—the birthmark of the Morningtons.

"That's the same mark wot I 'ave on my shoulder, Master Morny—wot you see the day you pulled me out of the river," said 'Erbert, in amazement. "You got it, too!"

Mornington refastened his collar.

"Every Mornington has it," he said.

"But I 'ave it, sir!"

"You are a Mornington!"

'Erbert of the Second Form stared at him. It was not easy for the nameless waif of Rookwood to comprehend at once the full meaning of Valentine Mornington's words.

"Me!" he said at last. "Me, sir! Me a relation of yours, sir! That ain't possible!"

"It's not only possible; it's true," said Mornington quietly.

"But—but—" stammered 'Erbert dazedly.

"I had a cousin," said Mornington, "the son of my father's elder brother. He was lost, and taken by gipsies, when he was a little kid."

"I was brought up by gipsies," muttered 'Erbert.

Mornington nodded.

"He had that birthmark on his shoulder," he said. "He would be about thirteen now if still living."

"Your cousin!" said 'Erbert, still dazed.

"Oh, Master Morny, you don't mean as 'ow I am your cousin?"

"That's what I mean."

"Oh, sir!"

There was a long silence.

'Erbert was trying to assimilate that startling information in his dazed mind. It was too amazing to be fully comprehended at once. Mornington watched his face.

'Erbert looked at him at last.

"Master Morny, I—I'm your relation, and you've found it out?"

"Yes."

"I'd be glad of that, sir, if you was glad," said 'Erbert humbly. "I—I think I knows now why you turned agin me. You don't want to own the likes of me for your relation. I—I wouldn't think of tellin' anybody, sir—not if you don't like. You've found it out, but nobody else don't know it. There ain't no need to tell anybody. P'r'aps, later on, arter I've been a good bit at Rookwood, when I'm improved, sir, you won't be ashamed of me. Then p'r'aps you'll tell folks, but not if you don't choose. I ain't goin' to say not a single word!"

Mornington drew a deep breath.

"What a rotten brute I've been!" he said. "'Erbert, my dear kid, I'm not ashamed of you. It's you that ought to be ashamed of me!"

'Erbert grinned.

"Me ashamed of you, sir!" he said. "Oh, Master Morny!"

"You know why I brought you out here, 'Erbert? I've told you."

The waif shook his head.

"That was all rot, sir! You couldn't have done it! If you even thought of such a thing, it was because you was a little orf your 'ead. You nearly got drownedd pullin' me out of the river. Oh, sic!"

"I hated you," said Mornington—"or, rather, I thought I did. What with losing everything, and that cur Lattrey troubling me, I think my head got a little queer."

"Lattrey!" said 'Erbert. "Does Lattrey know?"

"Yes."

"So that's 'ow he was worriting you, the 'ound!" said 'Erbert.

"Yes."

"But—but if you ain't ashamed of me as a relation, Master Morny, I don't see—" said 'Erbert.

"You don't understand. Your father was my father's elder brother."

"Wot does that matter?"

Mornington smiled faintly.

"You don't know what an entail is?" he said.

"Never 'eard of it, sir," said 'Erbert. "Wot is it?"

"The Mornington estates are entailed on the eldest son. That means that everything goes to the eldest."

'Erbert started.

"Master Morny!"

"Do you understand now?"

"I ain't the eldest of us two," said 'Erbert, beginning to understand. "You're a good two year older than me, sir."

"That makes no difference. Your father was the elder brother of my father, and everything was his. It came to my father because you were lost, and could not be found, and your death was presumed, as the lawyers call it. Now you are found, and take your place as the heir of Mornington."

"Oh!"

"You will be rich!" said Mornington grinsly. "You will have twenty thousand a year when you are twenty-one, 'Erbert."

"Me, sir!" gasped 'Erbert breathlessly.

"Yes."

"My 'at!"

'Erbert was silent for a long time, contemplating the amazing prospect opened up before him by Mornington's words.

"Pounds?" he said, at last.

Mornington laughed.

"Yes."

"My hey!"

'Erbert was silent again. Then he looked suddenly at Mornington, with quick suspicion.

"And wot will you 'ave, sir?"

"Nothin'."

'Erbert's lips quivered.

"Then—then this 'ere money, wot I'm goin' to 'ave, it's your money—it's wot would 'ave come to you, sir, if I 'adn't been found?"

Mornington nodded.

"That's why you said I was a-robbin' you, yesterday!" said 'Erbert, with a flash of recollection. "I—I understand now."

"I wasn't quite myself then, 'Erbert. I'm not goin' to make a fuss. You're goin' to have your rights."

"I'm not goin' to rob you, sir," said 'Erbert quietly. "P'r'aps you're mistook arter all. P'r'aps I ain't your cousin what you think—"

"There's no mistake."

"I understand now," 'Erbert's little face was puckered in thought. "And if you'd left me to starve when you found me that day on the road, sir, you'd never 'ave knowed I was your cousin, and I'd never 'ave knowed. You can't think, sir, as I'm goin' to rob you. I ain't goin' to touch nothing of it. I ain't going to claim your money!"

Mornington smiled.

"You can't help it, kid. It's yours, not mine."

"Not if I don't choose to say nothin'," said 'Erbert.

"Lattrey knows, and his father."

"Wot 'ave they got to do with it?"

"Lattrey's father is the detective employed to search for Cecil Mornington. The search has been going on for years. Your father left instructions for it. Even if you said nothing, 'Erbert, it would come out. And"—Mornington drew a deep breath—"I should not say nothing, 'Erbert. I intend to write to my guardian to-day and tell him the whole story."

'Erbert's face was dark and distressed.

All the pleasure of the discovery had faded for him now.

"No wonder you 'ated me, Master Morny," he said. "I'd 'ate myself if I touched your money, arter all you done for me. I ain't goin' to touch it! I can go back to wot I come from, and they'll never find me!"

The little waif's voice was deeply earnest. Mornington looked at him fixedly. Once again the temptation rose in his breast. After all, why should he give up everything to this wretched waif, who could never have claimed it but for his kindness in the first place?

Was he to pay this price for an act of charity towards a nameless vagrant? The temptation was strong; it seemed like the whisper of an evil spirit in his ear. But the dandy of Rookwood threw it aside. Mornington had fought his battle, and won it.

In that terrible moment on the edge of the old quarry, the scales had fallen from his eyes, the fevered mists had cleared from his brain. He had found the right path, as Erroll had hoped he would find it, and there was no going back for him.

He rose to his feet, and his hand dropped lightly on 'Erbert's shoulder.

"No more of that, 'Erbert! Come along!"

"Where, Master Morny?"

"To Rookwood."

"But—but—"

"Come!"

And 'Erbert obeyed.

ruddy and cheery from the river, when Mornington and 'Erbert of the Second reached Rookwood. Erroll had joined them in the gateway, with Conroy and Pons and Van Ryn of the Fourth. Mornington came up to the group, with a smile on his face.

"May I introduce my Cousin Cecil?" he asked urbanely.

Erroll gave him a quick look, and his face lighted up. The other juniors looked astonished.

"I don't see your cousin," said Jimmy Silver.

"Here he is!"

"'Erbert!" ejaculated Conroy.

"Yes."

"Is that a joke?" asked Jimmy Silver in perplexity.

"Not at all. You remember when I first brought 'Erbert to Rookwood the fellows nicknamed him Mornington Minor. It wasn't so far wrong—he will be Mornington secundus!" said the dandy of the Fourth. "I happen to have found out who 'Erbert is, and he's my cousin, Cecil Mornington, heir to the Mornington estates, and the richest fellow at Rookwood—worth knowing, I assure you."

"Gammon!" said the astonished Lovell.

"It's true!" said Erroll.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver in astonishment.

"My cousin is still quite friendly with me," pursued Mornington, with ironic coolness. "He doesn't understand yet that a poor relation, with expensive tastes, is a fellow better kept at a distance. But as soon as Towny & Co. hear the news he will have plenty of friends who will point it out to him." Mornington paused as he caught sight of Lattrey in the quad. "Lattrey, dear boy!"

The cad of the Fourth gave him a disagreeable scowl.

"Lattrey, my dear infant, I fear that your estimable father will not finger the reward for finding my Cousin Cecil!" said Mornington urbanely. "You will not finger the whack in it that you have been anticipating. I have wired to my uncle that Cecil is found. Congratulate him, old fellow!"

And with a light laugh the dandy of Rookwood sauntered on into the quadrangle, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. staring after him in astonishment.

"My hat!" was all Jimmy said.



SPORTSMAN'S PIE!

By PERCY LONGHURST.

One of the best known athletes from a foreign country was George Hackenschmidt, perhaps the finest Continental wrestler ever born. Certainly no other wrestler ever appeared to English athletes as did Hackenschmidt. He gave a life to the sport of wrestling that it could very well do with to-day. When he was beaten by Gotch, the American, everyone felt sorry. Hackenschmidt was a big man in every way—at eighteen he had 15 in. biceps and a 44 in chest—a big wrestler, weight-lifter, and jumper. He was also a big eater. Mr. C. B. Cochran, his manager, used to tell a story about him that I haven't forgotten. He invited Hackenschmidt to his flat to dinner one evening, and the big Russian polished off nine eggs, a big steak, and a whole Camembert cheese. He was asked if he would like any more. "No, thank you," he said politely. "I'm going to have supper with some friends, and I don't want to spoil my appetite."

Big Wrestlers.

I recall another mat performer with a huge appetite. He was John Middle Sky, an Indian from some remote part of Arizona. He was a bit over six feet in height, and the biggest athlete I've ever seen in my life. He weighed 27 st.; and when his manager brought him into the office I happened to be in, a boy had to be sent to fetch another chair, one not being enough for him to sit on. A dozen fried eggs, a whole shoulder of mutton, two loaves, and a gallon of coffee, made John's breakfast. He was about the colour of a new penny, and his hair was tied up with blue silk ribbon. The newsboys much enjoyed seeing John walk about London. Wrestling with him must have been like trying to put an elephant on its shoulders. One big Swede, a good man of over 16 st., had a shot at him, and he was handled very much as you or I would handle a shilling doll. Yet there have been bigger wrestlers than even Middle Sky. The Japanese Sumo champion weighed 29 st. Queer fellows, these Sumo wrestlers; they appear to be just mountains of fat, but there's no doubt they are immensely strong in spite of their fatness; they're active as well. A few years ago, however, when a famous Sumo champion was induced to have a contest with an instructor in Ju Jitsu—who didn't weigh one half the Sumo player's weight—he, the Sumo champion, was doubled up and admitting his defeat inside thirty seconds.

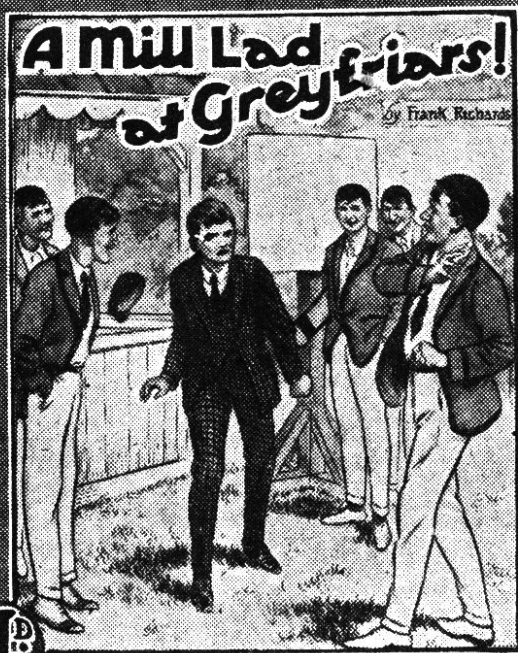
Ju Jitsu.

Ju Jitsu is certainly a wonderful art; but, like most skilled systems, it requires a great deal of practice for a player to become an expert. There is one golden rule in learning any Ju Jitsu trick, no matter what it is. First learn to make the throw accurately, however slowly. Then, when it is mastered, practise, practise, practise until it can be made not only accurately, but with great rapidity. A slowly executed Ju Jitsu trick will only get its performer into trouble. So if you think of learning the art, try to master half a dozen tricks, and know them well, rather than get a limited knowledge of twenty. And don't exercise to get big and very hard muscles, but do your best to develop and toughen every part of yourself.

Training.

Eastern ideas of training are very different from our own. Japanese and Indian wrestlers use very simple exercises and not a large variety. I spent a day once in the quarters of a famous Indian champion wrestler, who was training for a big contest. It was summer, and the only garment he wore was a loin cloth. First he had a bout with Indian clubs, and he kept up the swinging of the clubs for so long that I became tired and went off for a half-hour stroll. When I returned, he was about to begin his second exercise—very much the same as the exercise familiar to most of you as "deep knee bending." But instead of standing upright, this wrestler held on to the top of a post while doing his dipping up and down. For nearly three-quarters of an hour, without a break, he stuck to the job, moving sometimes fast, sometimes slow, and the perspiration was dripping from him as though he was standing under a shower bath. I wondered his legs didn't give way. Then his trainer took him in hand and rubbed his moist skin with dry mustard mixed with some other stuff. Then he wrapped himself in a blanket and had a rest. He must have needed it. When dinner came—only one square meal per day—he ate nothing but curried chicken, rice, big dry biscuits without yeast in them, and drank a little water. "A cigarette after? His trainer would have had a fit if you'd offered him one. The exercises I have described above, together with some easy running, made up the whole of his training.

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