

Sir Japhet's Heir!



By
OWEN
CONQUEST.

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SIR JAPHET'S HEIR!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

—◆◆◆—
A Gripping Long Complete
Tale of the Chums of
Rookwood.
—◆◆◆—

CHAPTER 1.

A Very Special Occasion!

"JIMMY——"
"Hallo!"
"Will you lend me——?"
"No!"
"Will you lend——"
"Rats!"
"Will you——"
"Buzz off!"

The dialogue was taking place in the end study. Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, was doing lines at the study table; Tubby Muffin was standing in the doorway.

Jimmy was in a hurry. His chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, were waiting for him downstairs. But the lines had to be handed in to Mr. Bootles before Jimmy was at liberty that sunny afternoon.

So his answers to Reginald Muffin were short but not sweet, and he went on with Virgil while he answered, without looking up.

But Reginald Muffin was not to be disposed of easily.

"Jimmy, old chap——" he recommenced.
"Scat!" snapped Jimmy Silver.
"Will you lend me——"
"Buzz off!" roared Jimmy Silver, looking up at last. "Can't you see I'm busy? Dry up and travel!"
"Will you lend me——"
"I'll lend you a thick ear if you don't travel!" howled Jimmy Silver. "How am I to get through my impot at this rate?"
"Will you——"

Jimmy grasped the inkpot. Tubby Muffin made a swift, strategic retreat into the passage. And Jimmy Silver, with a grunt, laid down the inkpot again, and proceeded with P. Vergilius Maro.

But his pen was no sooner scratching than Tubby Muffin's fat face came round the door again.

"I say, old chap, you might lend——"
"You—you—you fat villain!" hooted Jimmy Silver. "I've got nothing to lend! Stony! Stony! Stony! Savvy?"

"But——"
"Nothing to lend—and I wouldn't lend it if I had! Now clear before I take the ssker to you!"

"If you think I've come here to borrow money of you, Jimmy Silver—" began Tubby Muffin, with a great deal of dignity. "Eh—haven't you?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Certainly not!"

Tubby Muffin was lofty; he felt that he had a right to be lofty. For once he had been misjudged. Amazing as it was, he was not seeking financial aid.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, in astonishment. "What do you want, then?"

"I want to borrow—"

"If it's a dictionary, you can take it. And buzz off with it."

"It isn't a dictionary!"

"If it's a lexicon—"

"It isn't a lexicon! Look here, Jimmy, I want you to lend me—if you don't mind, you know—"

"What?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Your Sunday topper."

"Eh?"

"Your Sunday topper, old chap," said Tubby Muffin. "I—I've got to meet a chap this afternoon—rather an important chap. Awfully rich, you know. My topper has never been the same since it got mixed up with the toffee, and I want to look rather nice, as it's a special occasion."

"You want to look nice?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Yes, that's it."

"Then you'd better go to a barber and—"

"What?"

"And ask him to shave off your features. You'll never look nice with that lot."

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin wrathfully. "I don't want to hear any of your jealous remarks about my good looks. It's not my fault I'm the best-looking chap in the Fourth."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What I want is a really decent topper," said Tubby Muffin. "Meeting a rich chap, I want to look well. Will you lend it to me?"

"No, I, jolly, well won't!" answered Jimmy Silver. "You've got one of your own—"

"It's rather mucked up with toffee, and—"

"Well, I don't want mine mucked up with toffee!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Ask Morny! Morny's toppers are better than mine."

"I've asked the beast, and he chucked Liddell and Scott at me."

"Good! Now run off, or I'll chuck P. Vergilius Maro at you!"

"Look here, Jimmy, old chap, you might stand by a pal on an important occasion!" urged Tubby Muffin. "It's really important. That chap Beresford-Baggs—"

"Who?"

"The new chap, you know—young Beresford-Baggs. He's no end rich, and a chap wants to look decent, meeting him at the station—"

"Never heard of him!" said Jimmy Silver, looking at Reginald Muffin with a little interest at last. "Is it a new chap coming into the Fourth Form?"

"Yes; I heard Mr. Bootles saying he was coming this afternoon," explained Tubby Muffin. "He mentioned that the chap would arrive at half-past three. That must mean the three train at Coombe, mustn't it?"

"I suppose so. Do you know him?"

"Well, I don't exactly know him," admitted Tubby Muffin cautiously. "I'm going to, you see. As it's a half-holiday, I thought it would be only kind to walk down to the station and meet him."

"Because he's no end rich?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Nunno! Of course not! Because he's a new chap, and I want to be kind to him."

"B-r-r-r!"

"He's simply rolling in tin, you know," said Tubby Muffin, his round eyes glistening. "The Beresford-Baggs are millionaires, you know: I've seen their name in the papers. Made it out of sausages—Baggs' Famous Sausages, you know. Piled it up tremendously. And young Beresford-Baggs is coming here. And I thought it would be only civil to look after him a bit. But a chap wants to look decent. Can I have your Sunday topper?"

Jimmy Silver rose to his feet.

"That's right!" said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "Hand it over, old chap. I'm really very much obliged!"

But Tubby Muffin's sense of obligation vanished the next moment.

Jimmy Silver did not hand over his Sunday topper. He handed over the business end of a cricket-stump.

There was a loud howl from Tubby Muffin as he received it.

"Yarc-cooh!"

"Prod, prod!"

"Yow-ow-woop!"

Tubby Muffin had—minus the topper.

Jimmy Silver kicked the door shut after him, and sat down to finish his lines. And he was not interrupted again by Reginald Muffin. Apparently the fat Classical was seeking in other quarters for the loan of a Sunday topper.

CHAPTER 2.

Only Civil!

"SOME rotten outsider, of course!"

"No doubt about that!"

"Some awful cad," pursued Townsend, of the Fourth. "Reekin' with money, you know."

"Smellin' of it!" agreed Topham.

"Probably droppin' his aitches!"

"Most likely."

"Eatin' with his knife, very likely."

"Oh, gad, I suppose so!"

"What a catch for Rookwood!"

"Blessed if I know what the Head's up to, lettin' in such a rank outsider," remarked Topham.

Townsend nodded.

"All the same, I think we might as well be a bit civil to the fellow at first," he said.

"Civil to him!" said Topham, with a stare.

"Yaas. I don't say we're goin' to be awfully friendly. But we may as well give him a trial," said Townsend. "You see, whatever sort of a rank rotter he is, he's rollin' in tin, and that's somethin'. There's no doubt that he'll make plenty of friends at Rookwood. Smythe & Co., of the Shell, will be after him, and Peele and his set. You see, I know somethin' about these Beresford-Baggsses."

"What a name!" yawned Topham.

"Of course, their name's Baggs," said Townsend. "Since the millions happened, the old johnny has tacked Beresford on to it. I think he took that up along with his title. You know he's a Baronet, I suppose. I don't know what that cost him. Titles are cheaper than they used to be, but they don't go for nothin'. Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs—"

"Ye gods!"

"It does sound a bit of a corker," said Townsend. "But there's no doubt that they're a good bit sought after, and it may pay to be civil to the young sprig. I was thinkin' that, as we happen to know he's

comin' this afternoon, we may as well walk down to the station an' meet him."

Topham made a grimace.

"I say, he's bound to be some awfully loud sort of an outsider," he objected. "Might be civil to him there. But walkin' about with him in public—"

"I've thought of that. If he's too awfully awful, we'll get a cab an' bring him in that way. He will take it as a kind attention. Of course, we shan't explain that we don't want to be seen with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've nothin' special to do this afternoon," went on Townsend. "It would be rather amusin' to steal a march on the other fellows. I can tell you, Peele an' Smythe will be after him like a shot. If he's anythin' like approachin' decency, we might bag him for our study. There's advantages in havin' a rich outsider in the study when a fellow happens to be hard up. He will be keen to get pally with decent chaps like us, an' we can make him pay his footin'—standin' motor-cars on half-holidays, an' all that."

"If we can stand him," said Topham doubtfully.

"Well, we'll try."

"Oh, I'm game!" said Topham heroically.

"Come in an' get your topper, then. May as well impress him. He will feel no end bucked at two decent chaps meetin' him an' speakin' to him."

"Bound to," agreed Topham.

And the two nuts of the Fourth, who had been holding that important discussion in the quad., strolled into the School House, to put a few finishing touches to their attire, in order properly to impress the heir of the Beresford-Baggs title and millions.

Townsend and Topham came along to their quarters in the Fourth Form passage. Rawson, their study mate, was out of gates, but the study was not unoccupied. Tubby Muffin was there. He was standing before Towny's handsome cheval-glass—Towny's furnishings were all in great style—trying on a silk topper.

"That'll do!" Tubby Muffin murmured as the two astonished nuts halted at the doorway and glared at him. "Better than Jimmy Silver's old hat, and no mistake! Blow Jimmy Silver!"

"You cheery rotter!" shouted Townsend. "What are you doin' with my hat?"

Tubby Muffin jumped. He spun round towards the doorway in great alarm.

"Oh! I—I—say, I—I—I—" he stut-tered. "I—I—I didn't see you fellows! I—I was tryin' on your hat, Towny, old chap—"

"Put it down!"

"I—I want you to lend me this hat, Towny. I—I was going to ask you, of—of course. I'm meeting a fellow this afternoon— Yaroooh! Keep off, you beast!" howled Muffin.

The topper went sailing across the study as Tubby Muffin dodged round the table.

He just escaped Townsend's lunging boot.

But Topham was waiting for him, near the door, and his boot was ready as the fat Classical fled for the passage.

Thud!

"Yarooop!"

Topham's boot was fairly planted upon Tubby's fat person as he dodged through the doorway. There was a crash as the fat Classical landed in the passage on his hands and knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Topham.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Give him another, Topy!" panted Townsend. "He's been ruffin' my topper with his fat paws! Give him another!"

"What-ho!"

Topham rushed into the passage, to give Reginald Muffin another. The fat Classical scrambled to his feet in frantic haste and fled.

He went down the stairs two at a time.

It was just ill luck that he met Lovell and Raby and Newcome coming up. The Co. were coming along to see whether Jimmy Silver had finished his impot. Tubby Muffin landed on them midway, like a bolt from the blue; or, to be more exact, like a barrel from the blue!

Crash! Bump!

"Oh! Ah! Ow!"

Lovell & Co. went spinning on the lower landing. Tubby Muffin sat down on the stairs and gasped.

"Oh! Ow! Ooooooh!"

"You—you—you mad porpoise!" shrieked Arthur Edward Lovell. "Wharrer you—ow—up to?"

"Bump him!" howled Raby.

"Squash him!" shrieked Newcome rubbing his head. "Oh, my hat! Burst him!"

"I—I—I say—" spluttered Tubby Muffin. "I—I say—"

But Tubby Muffin was not given time

to say much. He was grasped by the vengeful three, and rolled down to the landing roaring, where he was given a bumping that changed his roars into feeble gasps. Tubby Muffin was still going through it when Townsend and Topham strolled by, grinning as they passed, and went down to the quadrangle.

The two nuts disappeared, leaving the hapless Tubby still in the hands of the Amalekites.

"There!" gasped Lovell at last. "Now you'll think twice before you spin fellows downstairs again, you fat maniac!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Give him one more!" gasped Raby.

Bump!

"Wow-wow-ow!" moaned Tubby Muffin.

Then the Co. went on their way to the end study, and for several minutes Tubby Muffin sat and gasped. When he had recovered his wind, he staggered to his feet.

"Oh, oh! Ow!" he spluttered. "The awful rotters! I'd go after 'em and lick 'em all soundly, only—only I've no time to waste! Ow! I suppose it will have to be Smythe's topper, after all!"

And Reginald Muffin limped away to the Shell quarters in quest of the beautiful topper of Adolphus Smythe.

CHAPTER 3.

The More the Merrier!

"D ONE!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, good!" said Lovell's voice, in the doorway.

Jimmy rose to his feet. He had finished that troublesome imposition, just as his chums arrived in search of him.

"Cut in to Bootles with it," said Raby. "You've been a jolly long time, Jimmy."

"That ass Muffin interrupted me. Come on!"

The Fistical Four quitted the end study together and went towards the stairs. Three juniors met them near the staircase—Peele and Gower and Lattrey, of the Fourth.

"Hold on a minute, you chaps!" called out Cyril Peele.

"Well, what's wanted?" asked Jimmy, rather gruffly.

The Fistical Four were not on good terms with the shady trio of the first study.

But Peele's manner was very civil. He was in search of information, and it was worth a little civility.

"Have you heard about a new fellow

comin' into the Fourth?" he asked. "A new chap comin' this afternoon, I hear."

"Muffin was saying something about it," answered Jimmy. "A chap named Beresford-Baggs, according to Muffin."

"That's it! Is it the celebrated Beresford-Baggs?" inquired Peele.

"Blest if I know! Is there a celebrated Beresford-Baggs?"

"Of course there is. The millionaire, you know."

"But I don't know," said Jimmy. "Muffin said something about the chap being rich, though."

"Then it must be the same!" remarked Gower.

"You fellows know when he's comin'?" inquired Lattrey eagerly.

The Fistical Four looked grim. They could guess the reason of Peele & Co.'s interest in the new junior now.

"No," said Jimmy shortly. "Muffin said something or other. I forget."

"I'd like to know—"

"Better find out, then."

And with that reply, Jimmy Silver walked on with his chums. Peele & Co. looked at one another rather doubtfully.

"May as well get along to the station," said Peele, at last. "It won't hurt us to wait a bit there. If this is the genuine Beresford-Baggs, he's the son of a millionaire. His pater is simply rollin' in it. And it's not a common name."

"Rather unique; in fact," grinned Gower.

And the three black sheep of Rookwood grinned as they went down the stairs after the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to Mr. Bootles' study, where the impot was duly delivered to the master of the Fourth.

Then the chums strolled out into the quadrangle, just in time to observe Peele & Co., disappearing out of gates.

"Who on earth is this merchant Baggs that they're so keen about?" asked Lovell.

"Blessed if I know! According to Muffin, he's the son of a sausage millionaire, and rolling in tin," answered Jimmy Silver.

"It looks as if he will have plenty of friends at Rookwood. Hallo, here's Tubby!"

Tubby Muffin came out of the School House rather hastily, looking very red and flustered. He cast a wrathful and reproachful glance at the chums of the Fourth as he passed, on his way to the gates. He was wearing a topper, but it was evidently his

own topper, for it was decidedly untidy, and there were sticky stains of toffee on it.

"Hallo! Off to meet your Baggy pal?" asked Jimmy Silver cheerily, as the fat Classical rolled by.

Tubby Muffin paused.

"You fellows can sheer off!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"I don't want your company this afternoon," said Tubby loftily. "None of your wedging in, you know."

"Wedging in!" exclaimed Lovell.

"That's it! You're jolly well not coming to the station with me!" said Tubby Muffin emphatically. "I've found out about young Beresford-Baggs, and he belongs to me—practically. You fellows should have found out for yourselves if you wanted to make up to him."

"Make up to him!" repeated Raby blankly.

"Yes; you leave him alone."

"You fat rotter!" roared Lovell. "Do you think we'd touch the boulder with a barge-pole?"

Tubby Muffin sniffed.

"Well, you sheer off," he said. "I don't want you wedging in. Beresford-Baggs is going to be my pal, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"You—you—" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin rolled on, but he paused again.

"If you'll lend me your topper, Jimmy, I'll introduce you to Beresford-Baggs later. Honour bright! I say, you might play up, you know. That beast Smythe, of the Shell, kicked me when I asked him for—"

"Then I'll follow Smythe's example," said Jimmy Silver, raising his foot.

Tubby Muffin rolled on hurriedly, without giving the captain of the Fourth time to follow Smythe's example.

"Young Baggs is going to be popular," grinned Newcome. "I suppose it's something to be a millionaire, even if it's made in sausages. I wonder what sort of an outsider the fellow is?"

"Oh, he may be decent," said Jimmy Silver tolerantly. "No need to be down on him before we see him. Hallo! Here's the merry Adolphus in all his glory."

Smythe, of the Shell, came out with his chums, Howard and Tracy. The great Adolphus certainly was in all his glory. He generally was glorious, so far as his gar-

ments went; in fact, the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the Shell. Now he was more glorious than ever. Never had he topper looked so shiny, or his beautiful boots so polished, or his trousers so elegantly creased. Adolphus was evidently dressed to kill.

He condescended to bestow a nod upon the grinning Fourth-Formers. But that was not merely graciousness. It was soon apparent that Adolphus was in search of information, like Peele, of the Fourth, a short time before.

"You fellows heard about the new chap?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes!"

"Just a few!" grinned Lovell.

"Know exactly when he's arrivin' at Rookwood?" asked Smythe.

"Not exactly!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "But he's coming this afternoon. His father's a millionaire, and he's rolling in oof. His family crest is an oof-bird, on the wing—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose he'll come by the three train," remarked Adolphus carelessly.

"Muffin thought so," smiled Jimmy Silver. "You fellows going to meet him?"

"Well, we thought of strollin' along. Nothin' special to do; and a chap may as well be civil to a new kid."

"Oh, quite! This is the first time you've wasted any civility on a new kid in the Fourth but better late than never. Give him our kindest regards," said Jimmy Silver, "and tell him we'll have him to tea if he's sufficiently gilt-edged."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Adolphus Smythe replied with a sniff, and walked on with his nutty comrades.

"Hadn't we better go along to the station?" grinned Lovell. "A good part of Rookwood seems to be congregating there this afternoon. We don't want to be the only chaps who don't know the Oof King!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. headed for the gates, but did not turn into the road to Coombe. They were rather curious about the new fellow, whose coming was causing such a flutter in a certain section of the Lower School at Rookwood. As a matter of fact, they might have dropped in at the station to speak a word or two to a new fellow who was unacquainted at the school, but on the present occasion such a kind atten-

tion would certainly have been misunderstood.

Moreover, there was no lack of fellows to welcome Master Beresford-Baggs. Certainly he wouldn't feel lonely when he arrived.

So the Fistical Four turned into a path that led to the Rookham road. They were out for a ramble, and were quite willing to leave making the acquaintance of Beresford-Baggs till a later time; indeed, they were not particularly anxious to make it at all.

"Hallo! That's a whackin' car," Arthur Edward Lovell remarked as they came out of the footpath into the high-road to Rookham.

An immense motor-car was halted there, and the chauffeur seemed to be in discussion with a stout, red-faced gentleman, in a white waistcoat and silk hat, inside the car. Beside the stout gentleman sat a lad in Etons—a rather good-looking lad, with a chubby face and a cheery manner.

The Fistical Four glanced at them, and as they came by the stout gentleman ceased speaking to the chauffeur, and called to them:

"Hi!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped politely.

"Which is the turning for Rookwood School?" inquired the stout gentleman, blinking at them over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. "There seems to be no sign-post about. Do you know, what?"

"Certainly!" answered Jimmy Silver, rather interested to find that the "whacking" motor-car was bound for Rookwood. "Turn to the right about a quarter of a mile on."

"Oh! Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes!" said Jimmy, with a smile.

"We belong to Rookwood, you see."

"Oh! Rookwood boys, what?" said the stout gentleman, staring at them. "Arthur, these are some of your future schoolfellows."

"Yes, father."

The boy in the car looked at the Fistical Four, and the Fistical Four looked at him. The same thought came into four minds at once. Evidently this was the new fellow.

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "The new chap for the Fourth! Might I ask if your name is Beresford-Baggs, sir?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

The car restarted, the chums of Rookwood respectfully "capping" the stout gentleman as he departed. The huge car disappeared in a whirl of dust.

Then the Fistical Four looked at one another.

"Beresford-Baggs!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "That's the giddy millionaire, and that's the new kid! He's not coming down by train, after all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And those silly asses are waiting for him at the station!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The big car whirled on to Rookwood—and at the station in Coombe several youths waited to welcome the millionaire's son who was arriving by another route. And Jimmy Silver & Co., as they thought of it, chortled loud and long.

CHAPTER 4.

He Cometh Not!

"OH, gad! What do they want?" Townsend and Topham were lounging elegantly on the platform in Coombe Station when Peele & Co. arrived. The nuts of the Fourth looked at the new arrivals with considerable suspicion.

They knew why they themselves were there—so they couldn't help suspecting why Peele & Co. were there.

Peele, Lattrey, and Gower seemed equally suspicious. They came along to speak to Tonly and Topy.

"Fancy meetin' you fellows here!" remarked Cyril Peele.

"Fancy meetin' you!" grunted Townsend.

"Waitin' for somebody?"

"Oh, we're expectin' a new chap."

Townsend and Topham exchanged a glance. This was confirmation of their suspicion.

"Look here——" began Topham.

"You waitin' for the same chap?" asked Gower sarcastically.

"We're thinkin' of showin' some civility to young Beresford-Baggs," said Townsend haughtily. "I don't see why you fellows need wedge in."

"I suppose we can be civil to a new chap, can't we?" demanded Lattrey warmly.

"I think I know what your civility to a millionaire's son means!" retorted Townsend, with a curl of the lip.

"And what does yours mean?" sneered Lattrey.

"If you mean, Lattrey, you cad, that——"

"Oh, I don't mean any more than you mean," said Lattrey. "I'm goin' to be civil to young Beresford-Baggs, that's all."

"Don't rag," suggested Peele. "Not to put too fine a point on it, we're all on the same game, an' I suggest whackin' out the Baggs bird, there's enough of him to go round."

"That's fair!" grinned Gower.

Townsend curled his aristocratic lip still more. He was far too lofty to have it put on that footing. There was, in fact, a difference between Tonly and Peele.

Townsend and Topham intended to make of the millionaire's son a useful acquaintance, whom they would patronise and snub and make use of; while Peele & Co. were planning to initiate the hapless youth into the mysteries of banker and poker, and thus relieve him of some of his too ample cash.

Tonly and Topy had no idea whatever of placing themselves on a level with the shady trio.

Instead of accepting Peele's offer to "whack out" Master Beresford-Baggs, therefore, Townsend turned haughtily upon his heel, and walked away with Topham to the other end of the platform.

"Cheeky cad!" said Gower angrily. "They're on the same lay, but they won't give it a name."

Peele shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyhow, we're going to bag Baggs!" he said. "If necessary, we'll jolly well mop up those two noodles. Baggs is our game."

"Hear, hear!"

It was still very early for the three train, and the five juniors waited—the two parties eyeing one another morosely. There came an interruption to the suspicious mutual eyeing, however. Tubby Muffin, fat and shiny, in a sticky silk hat, rolled on to the platform.

Five pairs of eyes were turned upon him at once.

"That fat rotter!" murmured Peele.

"Surely he's not got the cheek to——Hallo, Muffin, what are you here for?"

Tubby blinked at him suspiciously.

"I've come along to meet my friend Beresford-Baggs," he answered. "What are you fellows doing here?"

"You don't know Beresford-Baggs!" exclaimed Gower angrily.

"Well, you don't, either," retorted Tubby.

Peele made a threatening gesture.

"You clear off, Muffin!" he exclaimed.

"I'm jolly well not going to clear off!"

exclaimed Reginald Muffin indignantly.

"Clear off yourself, if you come to that!

I'm going to be civil to the new kid, and make him feel at home——"

"We'll do all the civility that's required——"

"You jolly well won't!" said Tubby emphatically. "I know what you want, Peele; you're after the new kid's money! That's your sort. I'm going to protect him from you rotters. I can tell you!"

"Look here——"

"Yah!"

Townsend and Topham exchanged a lofty glance of scorn.

"What a scene!" murmured Townsend loftily. "Awful gang of outsiders, the lot of them. It will be rather pleasant for the new chap to find a couple of decent fellows here to speak to him; otherwise, I wouldn't remain."

"Oh, exactly!" concurred Topham.

There was a further exchange of compliments between Tubby Muffin and Peele & Co., but the fat Classical had his way—he stayed. It was not quite feasible to eject him by force from the station—and certainly there was no other way of getting rid of him.

Six juniors were now waiting for Arthur Beresford-Baggs to arrive; and they were all feeling very restive. They could not help wondering what effect such a reception would have upon Master Baggs. One or two or three fellows welcoming him was all very well, but half a dozen—divided into three hostile parties—was really rather overdoing it.

But none of the rival parties was inclined to yield the prize to the others, so they all remained, glowering at one another.

And then came the arrival of Smythe & Co., of the Shell. Smythe and Howard and Tracy sauntered elegantly upon the platform, and stopped dead at the sight of six Rookwood juniors there.

"By gad!" ejaculated Adolphus Smythe. "Oh, crumbs!" murmured Cyril Peele in dismay. "The Shell have got on to it now!"

Smythe & Co. came elegantly on, after a pause of astonishment.

"What may you fellows be happenin' to be doin' here?" asked Adolphus.

"I'm waiting for Baggs!" piped Tubby Muffin.

"We're waiting for a new chap," said Peele, glowering at Adolphus Smythe. "Chap comin' into the Fourth! I suppose you're not here to meet him?"

"Yaas, as it happens."

"You fags had better clear off!" suggested Tracy.

There was a snort of angry dissent from the Fourth-Formers.

"You clear off!" exclaimed Gower. "The new kid's Fourth, not Shell; he's nothin' to do with you!"

"Look here——"

"You look here——"

"Rats!"

"I jolly well tell you——"

"Hallo! Here comes the train!"

The altercation ceased as the three o'clock train came rolling into the station.

"Keep together, you chaps," whispered Peele. "We've got to bag him before any of those pushin' cads can get hold of him."

"Yes, rather!"

The train stopped, and three or four doors were thrown open. Nine pairs of eyes watched the passengers hungrily as they alighted.

Nine faces gradually lengthened.

Exactly what Master Beresford-Baggs was like the Rookwooders did not know, but there was no one among the passengers in the local train from Rookham that could possibly have been a new fellow for the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

There was, in fact, no boy at all among the half-dozen passengers who alighted and made for the exit.

The train rolled out, leaving nine disappointed and angry millionaire-hunters glowering on the platform.

"He's not come!"

"Oh dear!"

"Rotten!"

"After all, we weren't certain of the train," murmured Peele. "Better wait for the next."

"That's an hour!" groaned Gower.

"Can't be helped."

Peele & Co. decided to remain. Towny and Topy evidently came to the same decision, for they continued sauntering at their end of the platform.

Smythe & Co. stood in a group, discussing the situation; but they wound up by staying. As for Tubby Muffin, he was a

fixture. He would have waited from early morn till dewy eve for the first chance at a new fellow who was "rolling in tin."

So the nine juniors waited, with growing impatience and chagrin. It seemed an age before the next train came in from Rookham.

But it came in at last.

And again it was drawn blank. Peele, gritting his teeth, cut away to the booking-office to make an inquiry. He returned with the news that the only other local train that afternoon would come in at six—evidently too late to be the bearer of the new junior.

"He—he—he isn't coming, after all!" babbled Gower.

"Oh crikey!"

"Or—or he's come down another way!" mumbled Peele. "May have come by car."

"You ass, not to think of that before!"

"Well, you didn't think of it."

"Oh rats!"

Peele & Co. stamped savagely out of the station. Smythe & Co. followed them. Then came Townsend and Topham, and last but not least, Tubby Muffin.

A tired and chagrined procession started for Rookwood School. Tubby Muffin wearily bringing up in the rear.

Eight fatigued and exasperated juniors arrived at the school gates, with a still more fatigued and exasperated Tubby rolling on behind. Smythe called to old Mack, the porter.

"Has a new chap arrived, do you know?"

"Yes sir; came in a car, sir."

"Oh!"

"Car still here?" asked Peele.

"Been gone an hour, sir."

"Oh!"

And the exasperated nine trudged on to the School House, with feelings that could not have been expressed in words.

CHAPTER 5.

Bagging Baggs!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. came in from their ramble as a tremendous car snorted out of the gates of Rookwood School. In the car sat the stout gentleman in the white waistcoat, lofty and important.

It only needed a glance at that stout

gentleman to see that he was what Reginald Muffin would have called "rolling in it." He was a very expensive-looking gentleman from top to toe, worth probably, as Raby remarked, a couple of hundred "quid" in what he stood up in.

His car was worth two thousand in all probability.

"Looks a good natured old codger, all the same," Lovell observed, as the Fistical Four stood aside for the big car to pass. "Loud as a big drum, but I dare say his heart's in the right place, though perhaps his features aren't quite."

"So he's off!" said Jimmy Silver, as the car whirled away. "He's left young Hopeful to the tender mercies of Rookwood."

"Rookwood's mercies will be tender enough to the heir of that motor-car and that waistcoat."

The juniors chuckled.

"He's made lots of friends already!" grinned Lovell. "There's that noble army of martyrs waiting for him at the station—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And there will be plenty more to take care of him here. I wonder who will bag him for a pal?" continued Arthur Edward Lovell reflectively. "He will have his uses as a pal. Shall we rope him into the end study and make him exude pound notes?"

"Well, a pound note would come in handy this afternoon," remarked Jimmy Silver. "Never mind. Rawson's asked us to tea, and, as we're next door to stony, we'd better drop in on Rawson."

"Right you are!"

The Fistical Four walked into the School House, where they found a good many fellows discussing the newly-arrived heir of millions. Mornington came up to them.

"Seen him?" he asked.

"Whom?" inquired Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"Haven't you heard? Where were you born?" grinned Mornington. "Don't you know young Beresford-Baggs has arrived? Didn't you spot the car? Talboys of the Fifth was offerin' two to one that it was too big to get through the gates. Millions of money—made in sausages. The old gent was breathin' it. He tipped the junior Baggs before he went, and what do you think he tipped him?"

"Well, what?"

"Two tenners!" said Mornington. "Before all the fellows—a couple of tenners! Quite a little dramatic scene, with a dozen chaps lookin' on! How does that strike you?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, if the poor man is happy with his tenners, let him be happy," he said indulgently. "Perhaps he hasn't always had tenners."

"That's jolly certain. It's pretty well known that he used to be poor," said Mornington. "He hasn't even yet learned to take care of his finger-nails, and he doesn't know that he oughtn't to put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. He did it."

"A man may put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and yet be honest!" said Jimmy Silver sententiously.

"Possibly," yawned Mornington; "but he is a merry old corker, an' no mistake. The kid seems a bit better—not exactly a chip of the old block. He's with Bootles now. Conroy saw him comin' out after seein' the Head, and he says the Head looked quite pale. I suppose that old johnny could buy up Rookwood, lock, stock, and barrel without missin' the money. I call it rotten! If a bounder must make a fortune out of sausages, he needn't send his son to Rookwood on the strength of it."

Morny's tone was a little bitter.

"Why not join in the chorus and bag some of his superfluous cash?" suggested Lovell. "I dare say he's been sent here to get on friendly terms with some of the nob. You're a nob, Morny."

"Oh, rats!" said Morny ungraciously. "I shall cut him, I know that!"

And he walked away.

"Poor old Morny's got his rag out!" murmured Raby. "Everybody don't seem keen on young Sausages, after all. I don't see being down on the kid, but for goodness' sake let's keep clear of him, or we shall be lumped with Peele and Smythe and that crowd."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Jimmy.

The Fistical Four made their way to the Fourth Form passage, not failing to observe, as they went that several fellows were hanging about near Mr. Bootles' study, with the evident object of fastening on to the youthful millionaire when he came out.

CHAPTER 6.

Enter Beresford-Baggs!

"HALLO, you fellows!" Tom Rawson called out, as the Fistical Four came along to the fifth study. "Come in!"

"Right-ho!"

There was tea in Rawson's study. Townsend and Topham were absent; they were just then still on their weary way home from Coombe. Jimmy Silver & Co. were not sorry that the nuts of the Fourth were not there. The table was spread, and Rawson was making a mountain of toast. It was not often that Rawson "stood" tea to anyone, having little in the way of cash apart from his scholarship allowance; but for once he was in funds, and he had asked the Fistical Four, who were his best friends in the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. lent a hand, and the five juniors soon sat down to tea in a cheery mood. They chatted, but not on the subject of Master Beresford-Baggs, being probably the only fellows in the Fourth who were not discussing that interesting young gentleman. As a matter of fact, in discussing the footer prospects of the season the Fistical Four forgot all about the existence of Master Baggs.

But they were destined to be reminded of him. Tea was half over when there came a tap at the door of the study, and it opened.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, presented himself. The five juniors rose respectfully to their feet.

"Ah! I am sorry to interrupt!" said Mr. Bootles, blinking over his glasses at the tea-table in his kind way. "You may come in, Baggs."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur Beresford-Baggs followed the Form-master in. Apparently Mr. Bootles found the double-barrelled name too cumbersome for common use. At all events he addressed the new junior simply as "Baggs."

"Is not Townsend here?" inquired Mr. Bootles.

"He's out, sir!" said Rawson.

"And Topham—"

"Out with Towny, sir."

"Well, well, never mind!" said Mr. Bootles. "I have brought Baggs here to introduce him to his future study-mates.

"You will be his study-mate, Rawson, as well as Townsend and Topham."

"Yes, sir!" said Rawson.

"Baggs, this is Rawson of the Fourth Form, who will be your study-mate. He will introduce you later to the others. I hope you will be very comfortable here, Baggs."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"As—h'm!—head boy in my Form it would be an act of kindness on your part to—h'm!—give Baggs any information he may require, and any assistance in your power," said Mr. Bootles.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" answered Jimmy Silver, wondering whether the Baggs' millions had not been quite without their effect even upon Mr. Bootles.

"I will now leave you to your new Form-fellows, Baggs."

"Yes, sir."

And Mr. Bootles retired from the study, leaving the new junior with the Fistical Four and Rawson. There was rather an awkward silence. Rawson had heard all about the new boy, but was not much interested in him, and as the poorest fellow in the Form he was conscious that too much civility on his part was likely to be misconstrued. Jimmy Silver gave his chums a rather comical look. They had determined to keep clear of the heir of millions, in order to avoid misconstruction, and here he was landed on them at the very beginning! They certainly could not leave the study with their tea unfinished to avoid him.

Master Baggs had coloured a little, and he looked rather shy, as any fellow might have looked in the circumstances. It was up to Rawson to make him welcome, as it was Rawson's study, and after an awkward moment the scholarship junior did his duty.

"Here you are, kid!" he said, pulling along a chair for Beresford-Baggs. "Sit down! You haven't had your tea, I suppose?"

"N-a-no."

"Then you're just in time!" said Rawson cheerily. "Shove the kettle on again, Lovell, will you? Where's that toasting-fork?"

The supplies of tea and toast were renewed, and under their genial influence the new junior looked rather more happy and

comfortable. The Fistical Four felt that it was up to them to talk, so they talked.

"How do you like Rookwood?" said Lovell genially.

"I haven't seen much of it so far," answered Beresford-Baggs. "I like it, though. Jolly, old place."

"Been to school before?" asked Raby.

"No; I've had a tutor."

"That's rather jolly," remarked Lovell; not that he thought it was specially jolly, but for the sake of politeness.

"I had a first-class man," said Master Baggs. "Cambridge M.A. Father paid him a whopping salary."

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Hem!"

Beresford-Baggs seemed a little puzzled by those non-committal ejaculations, and he turned his attention chiefly to the tea and toast. By the time tea was interrupted, Lovell, as he remarked afterwards, had noted that Master Baggs had made precisely fifteen references to money. Apparently Lovell was keeping count. Possibly Master Baggs would have made some more references to the important topic, but the interruption came.

There was a tramp of feet in the Fourth Form passage, a thump at the door, and it was thrown open. Quite a dusty little army crowded the doorway. Smythe & Co. of the Shell, Peele and Gower and Lattrey, Townsend and Topham, and Tubby Muffin, all arrived together.

They had come home at last, and they learned that the valued new junior was in Study No. 5. To Study No. 5, therefore, they marched, tired as they were. They were not too tired to make the acquaintance of a millionaire. Towny and Topypy were smiling. Fortune had played into their hands: without effort on their own part the new junior was landed in their study as an inmate.

"Here he is!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I say, Beresford-Baggs, old chap—"

"Good-evenin', kid!" said Adolphus Smythe.

"Glad to meet you!" said Peele.

And they crowded in.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rose. Tea was over, and evidently their presence was no longer required for the entertainment of the new fellow. That could be left in abler hands.

"Well, so long, Rawson, old chap!" said

Jimmy Silver. "See you again sometime, Baggs."

And the Fistical Four departed. Rawson stared at the crowd of invaders. "What the thump do all you fellows want in here?" he demanded.

Smythe & Co eyed him scornfully. They certainly did not want Rawson's company, but they wanted that of Beresford-Baggs very much indeed.

But for once Townsend and Topham, who were generally at variance with their study-mate, were in full agreement with him. They were anxious to see the last of their rivals.

"Get out of this, Muffin!" snapped Townsend.

"Look here, Towny——"

"Travel!"

"Look here, if you think you're going to keep him to yourself——" bawled Tubby Muffin in great indignation. "Yow-ow-ow! Keep off, you beast!"

Beresford-Baggs looked on in great astonishment as Reginald Muffin departed suddenly, with the assistance of Townsend's elegant boot.

"So you're the new chap, kid!" said Townsend, with great geniality. "Been having tea? My dear chap, we're going to stand you somethin' better than that. Sit down, dear boy."

"You're very kind," said the new junior, with a stare.

"Not at all! Jolly glad to have you in our study! I'm Townsend—this chap is Topham. Smythe, do you want anything here?" continued Townsend in the most pointed way.

Adolphus Smythe gave a sniff, and walked out with Howard and Tracy. His designs on the new boy, whatever they were, had to be postponed. Peele and Gower and Lattrey looked rather surly, but they felt that Towny and Topy had the upper hand in their own quarters, and after some hesitation they followed Smythe & Co. Never had Towny and Topy been so glad to see their backs. And to add to their satisfaction Tom Rawson quitted the study. There was a scornful expression on his face as he went; but Towny and Topy did not mind that. They had eyes only for the new junior, whom they had bagged against all rivals.

When next Arthur Beresford-Baggs was seen by Rookwood he was walking between

Townsend and Topham, who had linked arms with him on either side. And it was quite a triumphal march.

Whatever the friendship of his new friends might be worth, the heir of the millionaire seemed to have fallen into clover. He looked very merry and bright. His troubles at Rookwood had not begun yet. But they were going to begin.

CHAPTER 7.

Painful for Peele!

"YOU blokes——"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, you chaps——" stammered Arthur Beresford-Baggs, the new junior in the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled. They couldn't help it.

The four juniors were chatting in the quadrangle at Rookwood when the new fellow came up. His manner was very friendly, and the Fistical Four were quite cordial in return. But there was a certain limit fixed upon their cordiality. They were very anxious not to be counted in with Peele & Co. of the Fourth and Tubby Muffin.

"You—you chaps——" said Arthur. "I—I meant to say you chaps, you know. Did I say blokes?"

"You did!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Now, I wonder," said Arthur, "what made me say blokes?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not wonder.

They had already observed certain signs and traces about the hopeful son of the millionaire which hinted that his earlier training had not been in the circles of Vere de Vere.

But that really was not against him. As Raby had tolerantly remarked, everybody couldn't be born with a silver spoon in his mouth. And if poverty was a crime, it was a crime of which the Beresford-Baggs family had repented, that was certain.

"I wonder!" repeated Arthur, looking uneasily from one to another of the Fistical Four. "However, I was going to say to you blokes—I—I mean, you fellows, that I'm going to have a car out this afternoon."

"Lucky bargee!" said Lovell.

"I'm taking out a little party," said

Arthur beaming. "My study-mates are coming—Towny and Topy, you know. I'd like you fellows to come, too."

"Oh!"

"We're going on a long run, right down by the sea," said Arthur. "Stopping at a swanky hotel for some grub, too. My treat, you know. I really wish you fellows would come."

"Room for a crowd in your car?" asked Newcome.

"Oh, lots!"

"H'm!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

A spin in a big car on a sunny bracing afternoon was by no means an unpleasant prospect, even with the company of Townsend and Topham thrown in. But—There was a but. In the distance in the quad Jimmy Silver noted that Peele of the Fourth was eyeing the little group with a sour eye. Peele was evidently looking upon them as rivals for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Cyril Peele's opinion was not much to be regarded; but there were others.

"Like to come?" asked Arthur, perhaps a little perplexed by the hesitation of the Fistical Four.

"Well, it would be ripping," said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, wouldn't it just?"

"It's really very kind of you to ask us, too."

"Not at all!" said Arthur, with another beaming smile. "Fact is, I should like you fellows to come."

"Do Towny and Topy know you're asking us?" said Lovell.

"Eh! No! I suppose I can ask anybody I like?"

"Certainly. it's a free country," said Jimmy Silver. "Well, you fellows, I suppose Towny and Topy can stand us, if we can stand them."

"I should think so," grinned Raby.

"But—"

"H'm!"

Owing to their keen desire not to be counted among the toadies the Fistical Four would have preferred to decline the invitation, attractive as it was. But the new junior was so unsuspecting and so friendly that they hated to hurt his feelings by a refusal. It was possible to carry independence to the extent of ungraciousness, and

Jimmy Silver & Co. naturally did not want to do that.

"You'll come?" asked Arthur, blissfully unconscious of the thoughts that were passing, through the minds of the four juniors.

"Yes, kid, if you want us."

"Good!" said Arthur. "The car will be here at half-past two."

"We'll be ready."

"Right you are!"

And with a friendly nod Arthur Beresford-Baggs sauntered away towards the School House.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances that did not express complete satisfaction.

"May as well go," said Jimmy at length. "He's not a bad chap, and I don't see why we should hurt his feelings by being stand-offish. Morny has been insulting to him, and we don't want to be like that. But—"

"But?" said Lovell.

"There's a merry 'but,'" said Jimmy Silver. "Still, it won't hurt for this once. We'll go."

"Oh, yes!"

Cyril Peele came across to the Fistical Four, with an exceedingly unpleasant expression on his face. Peele had been one of the keenest competitors for the friendship of the new junior, but he had not had much luck so far. Townsend and Topham had captured him, so to speak, and they were doing their best to keep off rivals in the field. During the few days Arthur had been at Rookwood, Peele had found himself kept at arm's length. It was very annoying to Cyril Peele to see the Fistical Four, without an effort on their part, succeeding where he had failed.

"So you're after him, too!" was Peele's sneering remark as he came up.

Jimmy Silver & Co. fixed their eyes upon Peele.

"What does that mean?" asked Jimmy very quietly.

Peele's lip curved.

"You're going in his car this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes; he asked us."

"That's what you've been buttering him up for!"

"We haven't been buttering him up, and we don't care twopence about his car, Peele."

"Gammon!"

"You don't believe that?"

"No fear! You're after his money, like Towny and Topy, and Tubby Muffin, and Smythe of the Shell, and—— Yaroooooh!"

Cyril Peele broke off, with a loud yell, as the Fistical Four closed round him, and four pairs of hands were laid upon him. The chums of the Fourth were angry.

"So you can't take our word?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell grimly. "Tap his napper on the tree, you chaps!"

Tap, tap!

Peele howled as his "napper" came into contact with the trunk of a big beech.

"Yoop! Leggo! Oh!"

"Take our word now?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, you rotters——"

Tap, tap, tap!

"Leggo!" shrieked Peele. "I—I—I take your word, of—of course. Yaroo!"

"That's better!" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't you play Doubting Thomas where we are concerned, Peele. It's likely to give you a pain in the top-knot. Sit him down."

Cyril Peele was sat down, with a bump, at the foot of the beech. The Fistical Four walked away and left him there, gasping for breath and rubbing his head. Whether Peele's doubts had been dissolved or not it was certain that he repented of giving utterance to them.

"The measly worm!" growled Lovell, as the chums of the Fourth strolled away. "I supposed that's what he would think!"

"It looks——" began Raby, and paused.

"Well?"

"Dash it all, I wish we hadn't arranged to go around with young Baggs!" said Raby uneasily. "It does look a bit—— Well, I'm afraid that more decent chaps than Peele may think the same as he does."

"Bother 'em!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Anyhow, we're booked now," said Lovell. "Dash it all, we can be civil to the chap, even if he is oozing tenners! We don't want any of his dashed tenners!"

"But fellows may think——"

"Blow them!"

Jimmy Silver & Co were not feeling satisfied. But, as Lovell had said, they were booked now, and if their action was misunderstood in the Fourth, it couldn't be helped.

CHAPTER 8.

Confidential!

"THIS here is prime!"

Arthur Beresford-Baggs made that remark to himself.

He had gone to his study after dinner, and was standing at the window, looking out.

The window gave a view of part of the old green quadrangle of Rookwood and a strip of the playing-fields; with the woods beyond in the distance.

Certainly it was a very pleasant view; indeed, it was "prime," as Arthur remarked: though "prime" was not much in use at Rookwood as a descriptive epithet.

Arthur's chubby face was very cheerful. His lines had fallen in pleasant places, so far, at the old school. It was possible that the millionaire's son had arrived with some lurking doubts in his breast. If so, they had been removed. Nothing could have exceeded the cordiality of his welcome.

Assuredly, his training had not been so lofty and select as that of his new aristocratic friends. There were only too many traces of that. Once or twice he had made them shudder. But Towny and Topy had tolerantly decided that they could "stand" him; indeed, they hoped that their select society would end by improving him. Their motives were mixed; but undoubtedly Arthur found them very agreeable, and was glad to drop so easily into a friendly circle at the big, strange school.

"Prime!" he repeated. "Jest prime! I cert'nly never knowed how prime it was going to be!"

There was a step in the doorway, and Arthur turned quickly from the window. He had been muttering aloud; and he was conscious that when he was off his guard his speech betrayed him. Even years with an expensive tutor at home had not quite eliminated from Arthur's speech certain peculiarities that were not likely to find favour at Rookwood.

It was Rawson who came in. He had a big Liddell and Scott under his arm, which he had borrowed from Jimmy Silver. The scholarship junior could not afford a big Liddell and Scott on "his own." He nodded pleasantly to Arthur, giving no sign of having heard his muttered remarks.

"Hallo!" said Arthur. "You working this afternoon?"

"Yes; I'm going to have a dig at Greek."

answered Rawson. "You needn't mind me, if you're staying in the study."

"Not me!" said Arthur promptly and ungrammatically. "I say, you haven't got to work, have you?"

"Not exactly got to," said Rawson, with a smile. "I'm working for the Greek prize this term."

"Oh, my eye!" said Arthur. "Rather you than me!"

He eyed Rawson, as the latter sat down with his books and a sheaf of foolscap.

"Look here," said Arthur. "You chuck that up this afternoon, and come out in my car!"

Rawson shook his head.

"Wouldn't you like to come?" asked Arthur. "Lots of room. I've told 'em to send the biggest car in the garage at Rookham."

"My hat! That will run you into a pretty bill!" said Rawson, opening his eyes.

Arthur grinned.

"That don't matter," he said. "I've lots of oof—lots! And if I run out I've only got to write to father—I mean the pater. Besides, father's—I mean, the pater's—opened an account at Rookham Garage, so that I can telephone for a car whenever I want one."

"It must be jolly nice to be as rich as that!" said Rawson, rather wistfully, though quite without envy.

Arthur nodded gleefully.

"I can tell you it's topping!" he said. "Bit of a change for us, and no mistake!"

"Oh! You weren't always rich?"

Arthur hesitated.

"Well, p'raps not always as rich as we are now," he said cautiously, evidently feeling that he had said a little too much. "But our family was always distinguished, father says. We're Beresfords, you know, so father—the pater took on the name when he was made a baronet. I dessay you know my father—pater is a baronet."

"I've heard so," assented Rawson, smiling.

"Your folks rich?" asked Arthur.

"No fear. Poor."

Arthur Beresford-Baggs opened his eyes wide.

"I didn't know there was any poor blokes—I mean chaps—at this here school," he said.

"Very few," answered Rawson. "I was

lucky enough to get a scholarship here, or I couldn't have come."

"What's your father, then?" asked Arthur curiously.

"A workman."

"My eye! I say—" Arthur hesitated, and then spoke confidentially. "I don't mind tellin' you, Rawson, we ain't always been what we are now. You'd 'ardly believe, seeing me, that I'd ever swep' out a shop, would you?"

"You certainly look as if you'd got on since," said Rawson.

"Course, I don't want you to tell all the blokes, but you wouldn't do that," said Arthur.

"Not at all."

"Fact is, I rather like 'aving somebody to speak to," said Arthur, his speech, as he proceeded, becoming less and less that of a Beresford and more and more that of a Baggs. "'Course, this 'ere is tip-top, and father says I'm a gentleman now, and am to behave as such. Are you a gentleman, Rawson?"

"Oh! I—I hope so."

"Why not? said Arthur. "'Tain't what a chap's born, but what he is, ain't it?"

Arthur was growing quite confidential now. The discovery that one of his study-mates was poor, and not at all lofty, seemed to afford him some relief. Possibly the grandeur of the Beresford-Baggses was, at times, a little oppressive to a youth who had once enjoyed the freedom and easiness of a mere Baggs. Certainly Arthur was talking now as he would not have ventured to talk to Towny or Topy; and it was evident that he found relief in it.

"That's it," assented Rawson, watching his new study-mate with some curiosity.

"We're rich now," pursued Arthur. "Fair rolling in it! All the same"—here he actually winked—"all the same, I don't go much on the Beresford branch. I never 'eard of any old Beresfords before we made our money. We was Baggses, jest Baggses."

"Oh!"

"And it ain't all lavender!" pursued Arthur. "F'rinstance, shakin' off relations what has always been good to a kid; I don't 'old with it. Course, father knows best; but it seems to me rather 'ard. I s'pose he's right, and it wouldn't do for Uncle William to come along 'ore with his fish-barrer."

"Oh!"

"But Uncle Bill is a good sort, I can tell you; and we was glad to 'ave some fish off his barrer when I was a nipper. Then there's Aunt Sarah—she's a good old sort! Many and many a time she give me a 'a'penny when I wanted one, in the old days."

"My dear chap," said Rawson quietly, "don't you think you're talking a bit too freely? I'm not asking you questions, you know."

"Oh, you won't split!" said Arthur.

"Won't what? Oh, you mean I won't tell! Certainly I won't! I wouldn't talk like that to Towny and Toppo, though!"

Arthur winked again.

"Wotto!" he answered. "But you're all right; you won't give a bloke away. I tell you, I get a bit tired of it sometimes; it's been jest like play-actin' ever since we made our money. I'm going to be a Beresford to Towny and Toppo; but I don't mind being jest Baggs to you, 'cause we're much of a muchness—see?"

Rawson laughed.

"Now, you come out in the car with us this afternoon," said Arthur, "I'd really like you to come!"

"I'm afraid Towny and Toppo wouldn't!" said Rawson.

Arthur nodded comprehensively.

"I've noticed that they seem a bit down on you," he said. "They don't like poor blokes—what?"

"They don't!"

"Never mind, you come all the same. It's my car, you know—I can do as I like, and 'ave who I like—"

"I'll stick to swotting, I think, thanks all the same!" said Rawson. "Hallo, here are your pals for you!"

Townsend and Topham came into the study. They did not glance at Tom Rawson; the nuts of the Fourth generally made it a point to ignore Rawson's existence as much as possible. But they bestowed the most agreeable smiles and nods upon the heir of Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs.

"The car's comin' in, old top!" said Townsend. "Come along!"

"Certainly, dear boy!" answered Master Beresford-Baggs, with a startling change from his tone and manner with Rawson.

And he left the study with his nutty friends. Once more he was Beresford, and Baggs was in the background.

CHAPTER 9.

Not Nice!

"WHERE'S Jimmy Silver?"

"Eh?"

"Jimmy Silver!"

Townsend and Topham exchanged a glance.

"What do you want Jimmy Silver for?" asked Townsend.

"He's comin', with his friends!" explained Arthur. "I've asked them."

"Oh! I was thinkin' of suggestin' some friends of ours—"

"I've asked them!"

There was an unexpected firmness in Arthur's manner, and the two nuts, after another exchange of glances, decided that it was necessary to give the millionaire's son his head.

"They're in the quad. I think," said Topham. "This way!"

Pécle & Co. were hanging about the passage; but Towny and Toppo hurried their new friend on, without giving Pécle a chance to speak to him. Tubby Muffin was on the landing; and Tubby was not to be eluded so easily.

"I say, Beresford, old chap—" he began.

"Scat!" growled Townsend.

"I'm speaking to Beresford!" said Tubby Muffin, with dignity. "I say, old scout—"

Towny and Toppo hurried the new junior downstairs, and Tubby's remark was cut short. But the fat Classical followed on behind. He rolled out into the quadrangle with the trio.

The Fistical Four were there; Mornington and Erroll had joined them, and they were chatting near the School House. On the drive stood the big car from Rookham, with several admiring juniors round it.

"Ready, you fellows?" called out Arthur cheerily.

"Ready, old top!" answered Jimmy Silver.

Valentine Mornington raised his eyebrows.

"You goin' out with Baggs?" he asked.

"Yes."

Mornington's lip curled.

His look was distinctly exasperating to Jimmy Silver & Co., though they were, as a rule, friendly with Valentine Mornington. Erroll hastened to speak.

"I hope you'll have a jolly run," he

said. "Come on, Morny; we're going down to Coombe."

"You fellows come, too!" said Arthur hospitably. "Look at the car—plenty of room in it. Like to come?"

Erroll hesitated, and glanced at his chum.

There was no reason why the two juniors should not have accepted the invitation, cordially given.

But Mornington was not in a pleasant mood.

A good many times, since the arrival of the millionaire's son, Morny had gone out of his way to be disagreeable to him; but Arthur had, as a matter of fact, not observed it. He had made plenty of friends at Rookwood; and one ungracious face among so many cordial ones had not impressed itself on his attention. But the other fellows were well aware of Mornington's feelings, and there was an awkward pause.

They had little enough sympathy with Morny in the matter. The fact that he had once been wealthy, and was now poor, was no excuse for his bitterness towards the millionaire's son. It was quite unreasonable, though it was, perhaps, not unnatural.

"You're awfully good," said Mornington, in a sarcastic tone, of which the sarcasm was quite lost on Arthur Beresford-Baggs.

"Not a bit of it!" answered Arthur cheerily. "You're welcome to come if you'd like to!"

"Come along, Morny!" said Townsend.

"My dear man, I'm no end honoured!" said Mornington, with the same sarcastic inflexion in his voice. "It's a distinction to drive with a Baggs, I know! Your name is Baggs, I think?" added Mornington, with a gracious smile to the new junior.

"Beresford-Baggs," answered Arthur, still unaware of the fact that Morny was attacking him. He was not accustomed to attacks camouflaged under a polite graciousness of manner.

"Ah, yes; my mistake!" drawled Mornington. "I forgot the Beresford! Somehow it always seems to me that it should be just Baggs!"

"Come along, Morny," murmured Erroll. "Wait a minute—I'm talkin' to Montgomery-Baggs!" answered Mornington, with a smile.

Some of the juniors grinned.

"Not Montgomery-Baggs—Beresford-Baggs!" said Arthur.

"There I go again!" smiled Mornington. "It's not an easy name to remember. I shall be callin' you Money-Baggs next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur joined in the laugh heartily. He seemed quite tickled at the idea.

"I'll tell father that—I mean the pater!" he said. "Money-Baggs! Ha, ha, ha! It will make him laugh."

"Oh!" remarked Mornington, quick to catch poor Arthur's slip. "You call your father pater?"

"Yes."

"What for—if I may ask?"

"Oh, it's class!" said Arthur, taken off his guard. "I don't see any sense in it myself. Pater's a Latin word and it means just the same. But it's class!"

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Mornington, who had really not hoped to draw the "boulder" to this extent. "I see! It's class!"

"Here, let's get into the car!" exclaimed Townsend hastily. "You can go and eat coke, Morny, if you don't want to come."

Towny and Topsy were feeling extremely uncomfortable, and blushing for their new friend. Even the big car, and a pocketful of fivers, could hardly compensate for solecisms like this.

"Certainly I'm not comin'!" said Mornington deliberately. "Like the fellow's cheek to ask me, I think!"

Arthur started.

Good-natured and unsuspecting as he was, he could not mistake that remark. His cheeks flushed.

"Look here——" he began hotly.

"Shut up, Morny, there's a good chap!" murmured Erroll.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see any cheek in asking you, Mister Mornington!" exclaimed Arthur. "I've asked these blokes—I mean chaps, and they've said they'll come. They're as good as you, I s'pose?"

Jimmy Silver's eyes were glinting. Morny's remark was as disparaging to Arthur's companions as to Arthur himself.

"You'd better hold your tongue, Morny," said Jimmy Silver. "If you can't be civil, you can shut up!"

"I'll please myself about that!" yawned Mornington. "You know my opinion of that outsider, and of the fellows who suck up to him for his money, too."

"You cheeky cad——" roared Lovell.

"If that means us——" began Raby hotly.

"Who are you calling an outsider, Mornington?" inquired Arthur Beresford-Baggs.

"If you mean whom, I am callin' you an outsider!" answered Mornington calmly.

"What are you calling me names for, I'd like to know?" said Arthur. "I ain't done nothing to you, 'ave I?"

In his excitement and resentment, poor Arthur's grammar was betraying him. Mornington's lip curled mockingly.

"Here, come along!" said Townsend, catching Arthur by the arm.

"But that cheeky bloke——"

"Come along, I tell you!"

Cecil Townsend fairly dragged Arthur away to the car. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed, with feelings of great discomfort. Mornington shrugged his shoulders again, and walked away with Erroll, who was very red. For once he was thoroughly ashamed of his chum.

There was already an occupant in the big car. Tubby Muffin was seated on the cushions, and he eyed the party rather uneasily as they came up.

"Out of that, Muffin!" snapped Townsend.

"I say, Beresford, can't I come?" piped Tubby Muffin.

"Let him come if he likes," said Arthur. "He ain't a cheeky rotter like that bloke Morny, anyhow."

Townsend gritted his teeth.

"Look here, we don't want that fat bouncer in the party," he exclaimed. "You've asked too many fellows already."

"Rot! Let him come!" said Arthur, whose temper had been ruffled by the unpleasant talk with Mornington. For once he was not disposed to accept dictation from his aristocratic chums.

"Look here, if he comes, we shan't come, then!" growled Townsend, quite "fed" at last with his peculiar friend.

"Suit yourself!" snapped Arthur.

"Oh, very well, then! Come away, Pappy!"

Topham cast a regretful glance at the big car; but he followed his friend. The two nuts felt that the only tolerable way of getting on with Beresford-Baggs was to keep the upper hand of him, and the upper hand was now evidently in danger. They turned their backs and walked off.

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Arthur.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged a glance. They would have given a good deal to get out of that excursion, if it could, have been done civilly. But they could not appear to share the snobbishness of Morny, or the uppishness of Townsend and Topham. Jimmy set the example of getting into the car.

Arthur followed the Fistical Four in. There were six fellows in the car, but there was room for more.

"Any other fellows you know who'd like to come, Silver?" asked Arthur.

"Shall I ask somebody?"

"Yes, do!"

"Conroy, old top, looking for a car?" called out Jimmy Silver, catching sight of the Colonial Co. in the quad. "Room for three!"

Conroy and Pons and Van Ryn looked round.

"Come on, you fellows!" called out Arthur.

Conroy & Co. laughed, and came on; so the big car was full as it rolled out of the gates of Rookwood, and it was a merry enough excursion, after all; and Towny and Topy, nursing their sulky dignity at Rookwood, were certainly not missed. Indeed, as Lovell humorously remarked, Towny and Topy had made the excursion a success by staying out of it.

CHAPTER 10.

Looking for Trouble!

"MORNy, old chap——"
Kit Erroll spoke hesitatingly. He hardly knew what to make of his chum that afternoon.

Mornington and Erroll had been out of gates that afternoon; a rather silent ramble.

They were coming in, still silent, when a whirl and a cloud of dust along the road announced the arrival of a big car. Valentine Mornington stopped, and, as he recognised the Rookwood car, he remained in the gateway, watching it advance, with a very moody expression on his face.

He did not seem to hear his chum's voice. He remained with his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the big car as it came swinging up the road. Erroll touched him on the arm, and then Morny glanced round.

"Well!" he said.

"Let's go in!"

"No hurry! See, the conquering hero comes!" said Mornington sourly. "We're just in time to see young Money-bags arrive in state, with his merry friends. Fancy Jimmy Silver, the captain of our Form, suckin' up to that rank outsider for his cash!"

Erroll frowned.

"You know you're unjust, Morny," he said tartly. "Jimmy Silver's doing nothing of the kind."

"Even Towny and Topsy drew the line, after the exhibition he made of himself in the quad this afternoon," pursued Mornington, unheeding. "But our dear Uncle James doesn't mind!"

"You ought not to have drawn him as you did."

"Why not?" sneered Mornington. "A low cad ought to be shown up when he wedges in among his betters."

"I don't see that he's specially low; and as for being a cad, he's not so caddish as fellows who are flattering him for his money."

"Meanin' Jimmy Silver?"

"Certainly not; you know that!" said Erroll, speaking more sharply than he was wont with Morny. "You know the fellows I'm referring to. Baggs seems harmless enough."

"He's rolling in money, made out of sausages!" said Mornington. "The fellow ought not to come here. The Head ought to be a bit more careful about a fellow's antecedents."

Erroll smiled slightly.

"My dear fellow, lots of great fortunes were made in funny ways," he said. "Dash it all, Baggs might ask you how your ancestors came by their estates."

"Quite so! My ancestors got their land by stealin' it!" said Morny cheerfully. "They came over with William the Norman, an' bagged all they could lay their hands on. They haven't left much of it to me, though, bother them. You're right, Erroll. I'm picking holes in the fellow about the way his money came, when it's really the fellow himself I dislike."

"I don't see why you should dislike him, Morny."

"You wouldn't," said Mornington moodily. "What do you think I feel like

when I see that rank outsider rollin' in money—and I as hard up as Muffin?"

"Not quite so bad as that," said Erroll, with a smile.

"Very nearly! When I came to Rookwood, I was the richest fellow here. I could 'phone for a car in those days. I never looked at a fiver before I changed it. It was no fault of mine that made me poor. Now I have to look at a half-crown before I spend it. And to see that low rotter, who might be happy in a fried-fish shop, scatterin' tenners about—"

Mornington broke off with an angry grunt.

"Isn't that rather unreasonable, Morny—"

"Of course it is; I'm an unreasonable chap."

There was really nothing to be said in reply to that. Nobody's eyes were wider open to his faults than Morny's; but clearly as he saw them, he did not seem to feel called upon to cure them. The big car was close at hand now, and Erroll slipped his arm through Morny's and drew him away from the gates. He was anxious to avoid another unpleasant encounter.

Erroll was a little angry with his chum's wrong-headedness, but he could feel for him, all the same. Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, the dandy of the Fourth had fallen from a high estate, and great was the fall thereof. And though outwardly Morny gave no sign, there was little doubt that inwardly he felt the change keenly enough.

Morny's face was dark as they crossed the quadrangle. In the doorway of the School House he stopped to exchange a remark or two with Smythe of the Shell, who was lounging there. Smythe's drawling conversation was not specially entertaining, and Erroll could not help suspecting that his chum was purposely lingering to encounter the motor-party as they came in.

"Aren't you coming in to tea, Morny?" he asked.

"What's the hurry?" yawned Morny. "Be a good chap and run in and get the merry kettle going."

Erroll did not take the hint, however. He did not need telling that his chum wanted him off the scene when the excursionists came in. It was pretty clear that Morny was going to look for trouble.

The big car had stopped at the gates,

where the numerous passengers alighted. They came across the quad in a cheery crowd, and even in the distance Tubby Muffin's fat face could be seen beaming like unto a full moon. Evidently the fat Classical had "done" himself well on that excursion with the millionaire's son.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs looked as cheery as anyone. But his face clouded a little as he came up the steps and met Mornington's sneering smile turned upon him.

He paused, and made a turn towards Mornington. Jimmy Silver caught him by the sleeve.

"Come on, old top!" he said.

"I'm going to speak to Mornington," said Arthur. "I'm not going to have him grinning at me!"

"Never mind Morny, let's get in," said Jimmy, anxious to avoid trouble. "Tea in our study, you know."

"Oh, all right!"

Arthur suffered himself to be led away, but he glanced back at Morny from the staircase, and his glance was full of defiance. Now that he quite understood Mornington's attitude, the "bouncer" was prepared to stand up for himself, it was plain.

Fortunately, he was got to the end study without trouble. Mornington went to his own quarters with Erroll, a discontented frown on his face. Tubby Muffin looked in on them there. The fat Classical bestowed a patronising nod on Mornington.

"Had a jolly time?" asked Morny sarcastically.

"Tip-top!" said Tubby, with great satisfaction. "Sorry you didn't come! He, he, he! I say, we've been a hundred miles at least. My pal doesn't care how he spends money. We stopped for tea—early tea, you know—at a swagger hotel at the seaside. It was gorgeous—simply gorgeous!"

And Tubby Muffin chuckled over the happy recollection.

"I'm ready for tea now, though," he added. "That beast Lovell shut me out of the end study! I'll have tea with you fellows, if you like, and tell you all about where we've been and what we've—"

"Get out!" snapped Mornington.

Tubby blinked at him.

"Did you tell me to get out, Morny?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, and I mean it!"

Tubby's fat lip curled in a portentous sneer.

"Jealous, what?" he asked.

"What, you fat rascal?" shouted Mornington.

"He, he, he! You needn't think I want to stay in this study," said Muffin scornfully. "Not at all, I assure you. I've got wealthy friends, Morny, and I can tell you I don't mean to waste my time on a fellow like you. Who are you, anyway? Poor and stuck-up! Yah!"

With that Tubby Muffin turned on his heel haughtily to walk out of the study in lofty scorn. His crushing departure, however, lost a little of its effect, as the enraged Mornington rushed after him and planted his boot on Muffin's fat person.

"Yaroo!"

Tubby went sprawling into the passage with a fiendish yell. The door slammed after him.

Mornington returned to his chair with a sullen brow. There was a howl through the keyhole.

"Yah! Cad! Come out here, and I'll dust the passage with you! Yah! Funk!"

Morny made a savage rush to the door and threw it open. There was a rapid patter of feet in the passage. As Morny reached the passage, Tubby Muffin reached the stairs, and he went down them two at a time. Apparently he had changed his mind about dusting the passage with Morny.

CHAPTER 11.

Face to Face!

JIMMY SILVER frowned.

Jimmy was coming along the passage after prep., and he came on Mornington and Erroll near their study. Erroll was speaking to his chum very earnestly, and Jimmy could not help hearing his words as he came up.

"For goodness' sake, Morny, let the chap alone! It's simply rotten to pick a quarrel with him for nothing."

"It's not for nothin'!"

"What is there, then—"

"I don't like the fellow. He annoys me," answered Mornington coolly. "I dare say it will do him good to give him a hiding. It will do me good, anyhow. It will be a satisfaction."

That was why Jimmy Silver frowned. He did not need telling whom the two juniors were discussing, and Jimmy paused.

"Excuse my barging in," he said. "It seems that you're looking for trouble with young Baggs, Morny."

Mornington nodded coolly.

"You've got it," he answered.

"Do you mean to say that you're going to pick a quarrel with a fellow who's done you no harm, and pitch into him?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily and scornfully.

"He's done me harm."

"How, then?"

"He offends my fastidious nerves," explained Mornington calmly. "His mere existence is an offence to me. I shall get a lot of satisfaction out of giving him a licking!"

"And you think that's reason enough for picking a row with him?" asked Jimmy, breathing hard.

"Quite."

"Well, I don't."

"Sorry you disagree with me, old top!" said Mornington politely. "It won't make any difference."

"It will make a difference!" answered Jimmy Silver grimly. "That kid is new here, and he's not going to be bullied. I don't suppose for a moment that he can stand up to you; he doesn't look it. You're not going to have the satisfaction, as you call it, of thrashing a chap who's done you no harm. If you meddle with Baggs, I shall meddle with you, quick enough, as captain of the Form."

And, without waiting for a reply, Jimmy Silver went downstairs and joined his chums in the Common-room.

Mornington laughed lightly.

"I suppose you don't want a row with Jimmy Silver, old chap?" said Erroll. "For goodness' sake give up the idea!"

"I don't mind," answered Mornington.

"If Jimmy Silver rows with me, he'll get as good as he gives. I'm all the keener on it now, to show Silver that I mean to have my own way."

"That's utter rot!"

"Thanks!" said Mornington, unmoved.

"Look here, Morny—"

"You needn't back me up," yawned Mornington. "Keep in the study and dig at Greek, if you like! I'm goin' down."

Erroll remained undecided for a few moments after his chum left him. But he finally followed Mornington. Perhaps

he still hoped to restrain that wilful youth, though the hope was a faint one.

Most of the Fourth had gathered in the junior Common-room after prep., and Mornington found the room pretty crowded when he entered. The Fistical Four were there—Jimmy Silver with rather a clouded brow, which did not clear as Mornington came in. Arthur Beresford-Baggs was also there, and he was talking with Rawson, Townsend and Topham hovered at hand, but they had not quite got over their sulks, and had not, so far, made any advances towards their estranged friend. Tubby Muffin was listening to Arthur's observations to Rawson with an expression of great admiration on his fat face. Evidently Tubby was prepared to regard as a pearl of wisdom any word that fell from such gilt-edged lips.

Valentine Mornington came towards them, and the expression on his handsome face drew a good many glances upon him. Morny's temper was always uncertain, and his look was well-known when he was "looking for trouble."

Jimmy Silver made an impatient movement.

"What's the row, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

"Look at Morny!"

Lovell glanced round, and grinned.

"Dear old Morny's on the war-path," he remarked. "Is it the new fellow?"

"Yes; and if he rows with him—"

Jimmy set his lips.

"Better let them alone, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver shook his head. Letting Mornington have his wilful way did not consort with Uncle James' stern idea of his duties as captain of the Fourth.

Arthur noted Mornington's approach, and he met him with an aggressive look. Poor Arthur's manners certainly were not quite so polished as Morny's. He proceeded, involuntarily, to play into his enemy's hands.

"Looking for me, p'r'aps!" he blurted out.

Mornington eyed him.

"You let my pal Beresford alone!" blustered Tubby Muffin. "You needn't show off your jealousy of my pal Beresford. Oh!"

Mornington reached out, and Tubby Muffin dodged behind Arthur. Under that protection he emitted a defiant "Yah!"

Morny brushed past the new junior, intent upon Tubby's fat ear, or, perhaps,

regarding him as a good opening for a "row." He brushed past roughly, and Arthur staggered a pace. The next moment he shot forward, and thrust himself between Mornington and Tubby.

"You let 'im alone!" he gasped.

"Don't touch me, you unspeakable cad!" shouted Mornington, as Arthur, in his excitement, caught his shoulder.

"Who are you, that you mustn't be touched?" jeered Arthur, and, instead of letting Mornny's shoulder go, he tightened his grasp, and swung him away from Tubby Muffin, much to the latter's relief.

"Oh, ye gods!" murmured Townsend. "What manners! What an accent! What a flow of language! Oh, ye gods!"

"Couldn't possibly stand him!" murmured Tonham.

"Oh, never!"

Mornington recovered himself, and turned upon the new junior, his eyes blazing, and his fists clenched.

"You—you horrid cad! You—you—" Mornny was stuttering in his wrath. "Put up your hands, you rorter!"

He advanced upon Arthur with his hands up.

"Shut the door!" murmured Smythe of the Shell. "There's goin' to be a circus! No prefects wanted."

Tracy shut the door, and put his back to it. There was a buzz of excitement in the Common-room. Jimmy Silver strode forward, and interposed between the two adversaries.

"Stop it, Mornny!" he said curtly.

"Mind your own business!"

"This is my business! If you touch the new kid you've got to deal with me!"

"How much money has he lent you?" sneered Mornington.

"Why, you—you—I—" stuttered Jimmy Silver, greatly enraged by the insinuation. "I—I—"

He was interrupted by Arthur. The new junior pushed him gently aside.

"Let 'im come on!" said Arthur. "It's very kind of you, but I can look arter myself!"

"Arter!" murmured the horrified Townsend. "Did you hear that, Toppo?"

Toppo shuddered.

Under the stress of excitement, the hapless Beresford-Baggs was undoubtedly giving himself hopelessly away. Three years of an expensive tutor rolled off him like water from a duck's back. There was a

chuckle from the crowd of Rookwood juniors.

"My dear man," said Jimmy Silver, "you stand off! You can't tackle Mornny. Mornny's a big fighting-man here!"

Arthur grinned.

"I've scrapped since I was a nipper of seven," he said. "Let 'im come on, and you'll see!"

Jimmy Silver looked very doubtful, but he stepped aside. There was no gainsaying a youth who seemed determined to rush on his fate in this way.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Stop when you get fed!"

"He won't stop till I've thrashed him!" said Valentine Mornington, through his set teeth.

"That's not for you to settle," said Jimmy coldly. "Go it, Baggy, if you're determined on it!"

Jimmy backed into the ring that was forming round the two adversaries. He wondered a little whether there was more in the chubby Beresford-Baggs than met the eye. He was soon to learn. Kit Erroll came quietly into the Common-room, and Tracy closed the door again carefully. When a fight happened in the room, as it sometimes did, prefects and masters were not wanted on the scene. Distressed as he was by his chum's wrong-headed obstinacy, Erroll was there to back him up, so much as he could.

But there was little formality about the "scrap." The juniors did not remove their jackets, and gloves were not forthcoming. There was no time to be lost if the fight was to take place uninterrupted. Mornington's angry fury would not admit of delay, either. He pushed his cuffs back hurriedly, and rushed at the "bounder."

His fierce attack drove Arthur back a few paces, and Mornny's fists came home on the chubby face. But it was only for a moment or two that he had the advantage. Arthur recovered himself quickly, and attacked in his turn, with an energy that made the Rookwooders open their eyes. It was only too clear to Mornny, as well as the rest, that there was more in the millionaire's son than met the eye.

Mornington, good fighting-man as he was, was driven back under a shower of blows.

"My only hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "My only merry Aunt Jane! That's the chap I was going to protect!"

"He doesn't seem to want much protecting!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha! No."

Mornington was driven right round the ring, panting and furious. In earlier, less-moneyed days, Arthur Baggs had had his full share of "scrapping" among a rough set, whose fighting was perhaps a little more vigorous than that the schoolboys were accustomed to. He piled into the combat with terrific vim.

But Morny was game. Whatever his faults, he had never been accused of want of pluck. He needed all his pluck now.

Hammer and tongs the fight went on for a good five minutes, and then Mornington went down, with a heavy fall.

Arthur stepped back, and Erroll helped his chum to rise. To his surprise, Morny gave him a rather wry smile.

"There's some beef in the cad!" Morny murmured.

"There is, and no mistake," said Erroll.

"But I'm goin' to lick him!"

"H'm!"

Morny came on again, and the fight recommenced. Arthur received a good deal of punishment now, but he returned it with interest. It was, in fact, growing clear that, good fighting-man that Morny was, he had met more than his match in the heir of the Beresford-Baggs millions.

But he would not give in.

Arthur went down with a crash; but he was up again as actively as a cat. And when Morny went to the floor again he stayed there. The fight had lasted ten minutes, and those ten minutes had been exciting. Arthur stood gasping as Morny, in vain, attempted to rise. Erroll ran forward to help him to his feet.

"Any more?" gasped Arthur.

Mornington made an effort to toe the line again, but he reeled, and would have fallen had not Erroll caught him in time. Erroll made a knee for him, and the dandy of the Fourth sank upon it, gasping. There was a loud cachinnation from Reginald Muffin.

"He, he! Morny's licked! He, he, he!"

"You shut up!" growled Arthur unexpectedly. "Whate'er want to crow at a bloke for when he's down?"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

Mornington gasped for breath.

"I'm done!" he said. "I came here to lick you, but, by gad! life is full of sur-

prises. Give us your fist, kid! I'm sorry I ragged you!"

And Mornington held out his hand frankly enough. Arthur grinned as he took it. Then he rubbed a darkening eye.

"All serene!" he said. "I don't bear malice. I don't see what you wanted to row with me for."

"My dear man, I was lookin' for trouble, and I've found 't! I'm sorry, not because you've licked me, but because I really think you're a good sort, in your own way. Erroll, old scout, come and help me bathe my eye!"

Erroll led his chum from the room. And Jimmy Silver & Co., grinning, marched Arthur away to repair damages. Both parties, however, had received damages that were not easily repaired, and that attracted Mr. Bootles' eye in the Form-room the next morning, leading to severe impositions for the two heroes. But Arthur, much to his astonishment, found that he had made a new friend as the unexpected result of that tough encounter in the Common-room.

CHAPTER 12.

Many Pals!

"MONEY makes the mare go!" Lovell of the Fourth made that sapient observation. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome grinned assent.

The Fistical Four, of the Fourth, had come out of the School House on their way to the gates, and Lovell's observation was called forth by the sight of Arthur Beresford-Baggs, who was walking in the quadrangle.

Smythe of the Shell sauntered on one side of him, Tracy of the Shell on the other.

The two nutty youths were airing their very best manners for the benefit of Beresford-Baggs.

The Fistical Four could not help smiling at the sight of Arthur sauntering gracefully between the two nuts of the Shell. Undoubtedly, as Lovell had remarked, it was money that made the mare go.

Without his ample cash, Arthur Beresford-Baggs would have received the stoniest of marble eyes from Smythe & Co. From an honoured Beresford he would have declined into a despised Baggs.

"He's not a bad sort!" remarked Raby.

"Not at all!" chuckled Lovell. "But I don't really think that it's for his good qualities that Smythe and Tracy are so kind to him."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Well, plenty of cash is a good quality," remarked Newcome, with a laugh. "That kid has more pound notes than another chap has tanners. Tubby Muffin has been in clover ever since he came to Rookwood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver glanced back from the gateway. Townsend and Topham had joined Arthur & Co. in the quad, with their kindest smiles on. Towny and Topy were Arthur's study-mates, and there had been a little tiff in the study; but Towny and Topy had got over that.

They felt that, as his study-mates, they had first claim on the millionaire, and they did not intend to take a back seat.

Peelo and Gower and Lattrey came scudding up to join the circle of admirers, and Leggett of the Modern Fourth was hovering in the offing, evidently desirous of joining up.

Jimmy Silver grinned as he turned from the gates, and started up the road to Coombe with his chums. Arthur Baggs had begun life in the humblest circumstances, but he was on the best of terms with the most expensive and nutty set of fellows at Rookwood, and on quite good terms with the rest, including Jimmy Silver & Co., who did not care for his money at all.

"Skuse me, young gents!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had nearly reached Coombe village, when a stranger met them in the lane and addressed them.

The Fistical Four politely stopped, regarding the stranger with some interest.

He was a middle-aged gentleman, with a fat, shiny, good-natured face, which seemed, somehow, familiar to the chums of Rookwood, though they were not aware of having met the gentleman before. He was dressed in what was evidently a "best suit," somewhat loud tweeds, in which, as in Joseph's celebrated coat, many colours were mingled. The many creases in that best suit hinted that it had been recently unpacked, and was seldom worn. No doubt it had been donned for some special occasion.

Round the fat gentleman hung a fishy

odour, which was accounted for by a large rush-bag he carried. From the rush-bag, such as fishmongers use, protruded a tail. It was the tail of a big fish. In his other hand the fat gentleman carried an umbrella, of the gamp type. That umbrella, with the gold knob and its ample waist, was a striking object in itself.

It was a rather warm day, and the fat gentleman did not seem much used to walking, and he was plainly feeling the heat. Perspiration bedewed his shiny face. His bowler-hat, with a very curly brim, was pushed back on his head, displaying a ridge of well-oiled hair below.

"Skuse me!" he repeated, stopping. "Pr'aps you young gents can tell me whether I'm on the right road for Rookwood School?"

"Right as rain!" answered Jimmy Silver, wondering what the shiny gentleman could want at Rookwood. "Keep straight on!"

"Fur?" asked the shiny gentleman.

"Eh?"

"Fur?"

"I—I don't quite catch on," said Jimmy, in perplexity. The mention of fur, on quite a warm day, was puzzling.

The shiny gentleman blinked at him. Jimmy was perplexed, and the happy stranger seemed perplexed by his perplexity.

"I asked you, is it fur?" he said.

"Is what fur?" ejaculated the astounded schoolboy.

"That there place, Rookwood."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy, comprehending suddenly. "No, it isn't far. I—I didn't catch your meaning for a moment. It's not very far; less than a mile from here."

"Oh crimes!"

A mile was not much to the Rookwood juniors, but it seemed a good deal to the fat gentleman, who, moreover, was carrying a rather weighty bag, not to mention the weight of the umbrella, which must have been considerable.

"I s'pose there ain't a keb to be 'ad?" asked the dismayed stranger.

"There's sometimes a cab at the station, in the village," answered Jimmy. "Not always."

"There wasn't when I got outer the trine."

"The—the trine! Oh, the train? I—I

see! Well, I'm afraid you'll have to walk it," said Jimmy Silver. "There's a stile along here, if you'd like to rest a bit."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the fat gentleman, brightening up. "I ain't used to the country. I'm used to jumpin' on a bus at the street corner, you see. Walkin' ain't much in my line. This here cod weighs a bit, too!"

The fat gentleman hooked his umbrella over his right arm, and with his left hand extracted a large pocket-handkerchief. It was a very handsome handkerchief, of a scarlet hue, contrasting somewhat with the hues of his coat, but matching, on the other hand, the colour of a very brilliant necktie. He dabbed his perspiring forehead with relief, and then blew his nose with a report like a pistol. The Rookwooders looked on at these operations with gravity. Politeness forbade them to smile.

"Where's that there stile?" asked the fat gentleman, at length.

"This way. I'll show you," said Jimmy.

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

"Not at all."

Jimmy Silver turned obligingly, and his chums turned with him. They did not mind losing a few minutes for the sake of a stranger in distress. The juniors led the way to the stile, which was a little off the road.

"You young gents know Rookwood?" asked the shiny gentleman affably, as they proceeded.

"Well, a little," answered Jimmy, with a smile. "We belong to Rookwood, you see."

"Blow me, you don't say so!" exclaimed the fat gentleman.

"Oh, yes!"

"My eye! Then p'raps you know my neevy?"

"Your—your nephew?"

"Yes, young Art."

"I—I—I don't think— I—I'm not sure—" stammered Jimmy Silver blankly. "Is he at Rookwood School?"

"You may say so!" answered the shiny gentleman impressively. "You may lay to that. I'm going to see 'im, and takin' 'im a present. Look 'ere!" He opened the rush-bag, and displayed a half of a very handsome cod. "Look at that there! Ain't he a beauty?"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Jimmy.

"That's for Art!" said the fat gentleman

proudly. "'Arf a cod. A present from his Uncle William. Won't Art be pleased? Not 'arf!"

And the fat gentleman smiled expansively.

The Fistical Four looked at one another. Who "Art" might possibly be they did not know. But it seemed scarcely credible that the shiny gentleman was the uncle of a Rookwood fellow, and was taking him a present of half a codfish, even of such a handsome codfish. There seemed to be a mistake somewhere.

"Are—are you sure you've got it right, sir?" asked Lovell, very politely. "Your nephew is at Rookwood?"

"You may lay to that."

They had reached the stile now, and the fat gentleman sat down on the step, with evident satisfaction. He laid the bag and the umbrella at his feet, and had recourse to the scarlet handkerchief again, mopping his damp brow with considerable vigour.

"What's the chap's name, if you don't mind telling us, sir?" said Raby. "His surname, I mean."

"Same as mine—Baggs!"

"Oh!"

The Fistical Four ejaculated "Oh!" in chorus. They understood now. This was a relation of Beresford-Baggs, of the Fourth, evidently not on the Beresford side of the family. That was why his plump features had seemed familiar at first sight. Now they looked at him more attentively they could see a distinct likeness to Arthur. And their immediate feeling was one of concern for Arthur. They could not help wondering what effect the arrival of this relative would have upon him, and upon the nutty pals they had left surrounding him.

CHAPTER 13.

A Good Turn!

MR. WILLIAM BAGGS continued to mop his manly brow with satisfaction to himself. Now that he was comfortably landed on the stile, there was no reason for Jimmy Silver & Co. to linger, but they lingered. Mr. Baggs was in a genial and conversational mood, and they did not feel that they were intruding.

"You know Art?" inquired Mr. Baggs, in an interval of the mopping.

"We know him," said Jimmy. "He's a new fellow. He's been only a few weeks at Rookwood."

"That's it. Any of his folks been there to see 'im yet?"

"His father came with him—Sir Japhet."

"My brother Jap!" assented Mr. Baggs, the genial good humour of his face clouding for a moment. "Sir Japhet in these days, and awfully grand. P'r'aps I shall be Sir William one of these here days, if I make a fortune in the fish line. Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Rookwood smiled, as the shiny gentleman laughed with great heartiness.

"Ain't his Aunt Sarah been to see 'im?" asked Mr. Baggs.

"I—I think not."

"Nor his cousin, 'Erb?"

"N-no."

"Poor ole Art!" said Mr. Baggs, with deep commiseration. "He will be feelin' lonely and lef'. It's 'ard on 'im, so it is. 'Owsundever, his old uncle ain't going to give 'im the go-by. Not 'arf! Won't he be pleased to see me, with that there cod, too!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had very extensive doubts on that point. There was nothing, so far as they knew, snobbish about Arthur Beresford-Baggs, but the least snobbish fellow might have been dismayed by a visit from such a fishy uncle at a school like Rookwood. But it was not their business to cloud the happy satisfaction of Mr. Baggs, who clearly was paying that visit from the kindest and most affectionate of motives.

"Since Jap got on so well," continued Mr. Baggs, "I ain't seed him so much. Jap 'as grown 'aughty. He was always the clever one of the family, he was—sharp as a needle! We always knowed he'd get on. Why, bless your 'eart, when I was still pushin' a fish barrer, Jap was in business for himself, and makin' money 'and-over-fist. Proud of 'im, we was, when his business was turned into a limited company. It went bust arterwards, and lots of folks lost money in it. But not Jap. Jap 'ad sold out afore the bust came. Sharp as a needle, he was," said Mr. Baggs admiringly. "And then when he

got on to the sausage line, I says to my old 'oman, I says, 'You see,' I says, 'my brother Jap will make a good thing of this here!' And didn't he? You believe me."

Mr. Baggs paused to attend once more to his perspiring brow.

"You believe me!" he pursued. "Why Jap 'ad his own factories going—you believe me! Now he's a baronet, Jap is, but you mark my words, one of these here days he will be a dook."

And Mr. Baggs nodded emphatically.

"Does your nephew expect you at Rookwood?" asked Jimmy casually.

The shiny gentleman smiled.

"Not 'im," he answered. "This here is a pleasant surprise for him. You see, Sir Japhet—my brother Jap—don't see us much now, nor tell us things. Liberal enough with money, if it comes to that; but we move in different spears now, he says, and I desay he's right. I never knowed Art was at Rookwood at all till he wrote to me. Art ain't forgotten the old days when he swep' out my shop, and when the family was glad if Uncle Bill dropped in with 'arf a salmon, or a few plaice as a present. He's a good boy, and he's got a good 'eart. He ain't puffed up, and he told me so in that there letter. Ain't forgotten his own folks, he ain't, and says he's sorry he never sees us now, and I know it's the truth.

"Then I 'ad an idea. I says to the old woman, 'Maria,' I says, 'young Art's suck all by hisself in a big school, feelin' lonesome, I'll be bound. What price droppin' in to see 'im, casual like, and takin' him a little present out of the shop,' I says, 'like as it was in the old days afore Jap made 'is pile?' I says, 'Jest like you to think of it, William,' she says to me, says she. So I takes this here arternoon off and 'umps along, and I've brought 'arf a cod—that there cod—for a present for young Art! Won't he be pleased!"

"My hat!" murmured Lovell.

Jimmy Silver was silent.

To say a word that would hurt the feelings of the kind-hearted old gentleman was impossible. Besides, it was no business of his.

But he could not help thinking of poor Arthur, when this astounding relative landed on him under the eyes of all Rookwood.

Mr. Baggs' good faith was a touching thing to see.

Apparently it had not crossed his mind that there was any objection of any sort, to his paying a visit to Rookwood.

Indeed, he had evidently dressed up in his best clothes in order to do proper credit to his nephew.

By this time the shiny gentleman had sufficiently rested himself. He rose from the stile and gathered up his umbrella and the rush bag.

"Straight on—eh?" he said.

"Yes," gasped Jimmy. "Follow the road, and you'll land right at the school gates."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

And the cheery gentleman tramped on.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"Well!" ejaculated Lovell, at last.

"He's a good old sort!" said Jimmy.

"Yes, rather; but—"

"But—" grinned Newcome.

"But—ahem—" murmured Raby. "I—I suppose Baggs will be glad to see him, as he's his uncle. But—"

"What on earth will Adolphus say?"

"And Towny—and Toppo—"

"Poor old Baggs!"

Jimmy Silver's brows were wrinkled as he glanced after the shiny gentleman trotting away cheerfully in the direction of Rookwood School. While his chums were exchanging comments Jimmy was thinking.

"It's a bit rough on Beresford-Baggs," he said at last. "All the more because the chap isn't a snob, you know. If he'd known that his uncle was coming, I dare say he could have met him somewhere outside the gates of the school. It would have been—ahem—better. Look here, Baggs isn't a bad sort—perhaps we could help him out!"

"I don't see—"

"There's a short cut across the fields. We could get to Rookwood a long way ahead of that merchant; he's a slow walker, and going by the road."

"And warn Baggy of the wrath to come?" chuckled Lovell.

"Well, yes; put him on his guard, you know."

"We were going to Coombe—"

"Never mind Coombe; it would be too rough for that cheery old merchant to take

Baggy by surprise, with his merry codfish, too."

"Oh, all right," said Lovell. "This is going to be our self-denial afternoon, I can see. When Uncle James says turn, we all turn. Come on!"

"Any old thing," yawned Raby; and Newcome nodded assent.

So Jimmy Silver & Co. plunged through a gap in the hedge, and started across the fields at a rapid trot. While Uncle William was progressing slowly by the road, his young acquaintances were covering the ground in rapid style by the short cut; and the gentleman with the half cod was still at a good distance, when the Fistical Four arrived breathless at Rookwood.

CHAPTER 14.

Very Nice for Arthur!

"SEEN Baggs?"

Tubby Muffin of the Classical Fourth, was the first fellow the juniors encountered as they came trotting in at the big gates. Jimmy Silver paused to ask the hurried question.

Tubby looked at him.

"If you mean my pal, Beresford-Baggs—" he began.

"Yes, yes!"

"Then don't call him Baggs!" said Tubby reprovingly. "Call him Beresford-Baggs if you speak to me about him! He's my pal!"

"You silly ass, where is he?" roared Jimmy Silver. "It's important!"

"Is it?" Tubby's eyes glistened. "Is it a hamper?"

"What?"

"Has something come for him—a hamper, or—"

"No!" howled Jimmy. "Where is he, fathead? I want to see him at once!"

"A visitor, perhaps?" asked Tubby. "Is it his pater? His pater gave him two tenners when he was here last. I saw him. Real tenners, you know—I know a tenner when I see one. If his pater's coming—"

"It's not his pater, you fat duffer!" Jimmy caught Tubby Muffin by the shoulder and shook him. "Where is Baggs?"

"Ow! Leggo! I don't know where he is!"

"You—you—you— Couldn't you tell me that at first, you burbling jabberwock?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

He sat Tubby Muffin down in the quadrangle, and ran on towards the School House with his chums.

Teddy Grace of the Fourth was coming out, and Jimmy called to him.

"Putty! Seen Baggs?"

"With Smythe, I think," said Grace. "They went to Smythe's study some time ago—"

"Thanks!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried in to the Shell quarters.

There was a sound of cheerful voices in Smythe's study. Smythe & Co. appeared to be entertaining a guest there. Jimmy Silver rapped on the door and opened it at once.

Smythe, Tracy, and Howard were there with their guest. The three nuts of the Shell were smoking cigarettes. Arthur Beresford-Baggs was reclining gracefully in an armchair, evidently enjoying being made a fuss of by the three elegant young gentlemen; but he was not smoking. Adolphus had pressed him in vain to try one of his expensive gold-tipped cigarettes.

Smythe frowned at the sight of the Fistical Four in the doorway. The cheer Co. were not wanted in Adolphus' elegant quarters. And Smythe & Co. were intending to enlighten Arthur as to the joys and pleasures of the game of banker that afternoon.

"Oh, you're here, kid!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Want me?" asked Arthur, with a pleasant nod.

"Yes; I want to speak to you!"

"Go ahead, old scout!"

"Will you come along with me for a minute?" asked Jimmy. He felt that it would not serve Arthur's interests to explain about the fishy gentleman in Smythe & Co's presence.

Adolphus interrupted at once.

"Let Beresford-Baggs alone!" he snapped. "Beresford-Baggs is our guest this afternoon. You fags can buzz off."

"It's important, kid," said Jimmy Silver. Arthur looked puzzled.

"Can't you tell me here?" he asked.

"I'd rather not."

"Beresford-Baggs has no secrets with you.

Silver," said Tracy. "What do you want to come and bother the chap for?"

Arthur rose to his feet.

"You chaps excuse me for a minute or two?" he said. "I won't be long."

"Oh, all serene!" said Smythe, as gracefully as he could. "Come back, you know."

Arthur nodded, and followed Jimmy Silver from the study.

Jimmy led him along the passage, out of the hearing of possibly inquisitive ears.

"Well, what is it?" asked Arthur, in great surprise. "You're jolly mysterious, Silver."

"It isn't exactly my business," said Jimmy. "But I thought I'd tell you that your uncle is coming."

Arthur gave a start.

"My uncle! Which uncle?"

"Uncle William—Mr. Baggs."

"Comin' 'ere?" In his surprise Beresford-Baggs dropped into his ancient mode of speech. "Old Uncle Bill comin' 'ere?"

"Yes. We met him coming up the road from Coombe."

"My eye!"

"He's bringing half a cod, in a bag, as a present for you, old chap!" said Lovell solemnly. "A jolly good fish! We've seen it."

"We have—we has!" murmured Newcome.

Arthur stared blankly at the Fistical Four.

"You—you—you're sure?" he stammered.

"We had a talk with him," said Jimmy. "Of course, we don't want to interfere; but I gathered from him that it's a surprise visit, so I thought that—"

"Thank you!" said Arthur, in a low voice. "I'm glad to know. I wrote to the old boy from here. I wasn't going to turn him down, you know. He's always been a good uncle to me."

"Good for you, old top!"

"But—of course—" Arthur hesitated. "Of course, it—it isn't exactly the—the thing for him to visit me here, under the—the cires. Father said so, and I s'pose he knows. I felt 'orrid mean not asking him to come when I wrote. But, poor old Uncle Bill, he doesn't mean any harm. He'd cut off his 'and rather than 'urt me."

The chums of the Fourth were silent.

They liked Arthur for his evident regard for his rough old uncle, and at the same

time they understood his feeling that Rookwood School was not precisely the place for the old gentleman, kind-hearted as he was. Arthur had had three years of an expensive tutor since the days when he had swept out his uncle's shop. Mr. Baggs had not had that advantage. It made a deal of difference.

"I'm much obliged to you chaps," said Arthur. "I'm glad to know he's coming. Is he far away?"

"He ought to be here in about ten minutes, I think," said Jimmy. "I thought I'd give you the tip, old chap."

And the Fistical Four walked away, having done what they had come back to Rookwood for.

Arthur stood in the passage, with a deep wrinkle of thought in his brow.

He was evidently troubled.

Not for a moment did the good-hearted lad think of failing in his duty and affection towards a relative who had been kind to him in the days when he needed kindness. But—

There was a big "but." For the shiny gentleman, with his fishy gift, to roll into the Rookwood quadrangle, amidst a crowd of well-dressed fellows—Poor Arthur could imagine the snobbish horror of Smythe & Co., the supercilious sneers of Towny and Toppo.

It would not be agreeable for the old gentleman himself. He was coming in good faith, unsuspecting; but he would not be long in learning how some of the Rookwooders, at least, regarded him—in realising that he had done harm to Lis nephew in his new surroundings.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were on the stairs when there was a patter of feet behind them. Arthur overtook them breathlessly.

He had forgotten about the nutty party in Smythe's study now. There were more important matters to think of at this juncture.

"Old on!" gasped Arthur.

"Yes, old top?" The Fistical Four stopped. "Anything we can do?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"I—I 'ope so." In his trouble poor Arthur had quite dropped the Boresford, and was undisguisedly all Baggs. "I—I say, I'm in a 'ole. Don't you blokes think I'm lookin' down on my uncle—my own flesh and blood. I ain't! But—but I'm fair in a 'ole, ain't I?"

"Ahem!" murmured Lovell.

"Some of the blokes will sneer at 'im. I know that. I wouldn't 'ave 'is feelings 'urt for the world—not 'arf! Uncle Bill's got a 'eart of gold," said Arthur. "I wouldn't 'ave wrote to 'im if I was ashamed of him. And I ain't, nor I won't never be. It's jest the kindness of his 'eart that 'ave made him come 'ere. I—I say, 'ow do you think my friends, Towny and Toppo, will treat 'im?"

"H'm!"

"They won't speak to 'im—nor won't Smythe," said Arthur miserably. "'Course they won't! And his feelings'll be 'urt. He ain't no fool, Uncle Bill ain't, and he'll see. He'll think he's done me 'arm comin' 'ere. And—and I wonder what the 'Ead will think of 'im?"

Jimmy Silver was sharing that wonder.

"P'raps you could advise a bloke?" said Arthur helplessly. "What would you do, Silver?"

In that extremity the heir of Baggs, Limited, did not think of appealing to his nutty friends. But an instinct warned him that Uncle James, of Rookwood, was the fellow to help him out.

"You'd like me to advise you?" asked Jimmy, hesitating.

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I—I think it would be wiser, all round, for Mr. Baggs not to show up here," said Jimmy.

"'Ow's he to be stopped without 'urtin' his feelings? I'd rather he showed up all round than 'urt his feelings."

"Good man!" said Jimmy. "I wouldn't hurt his feelings for worlds. He's a jolly decent old chap, in my opinion. But suppose you met him outside the gates, and introduced him to some friends—"

Arthur shuddered.

"I daren't let Smythe see 'im—nor Towny nor Toppo, neither!"

"Well, we'll be your friends for the afternoon," said Jimmy, with a smile. "We like your uncle. Don't we you chaps?"

"Hear, hear!" murmured the Co.

"We'll all gather round him, and take him to tea somewhere," said Jimmy. "That will be nice for him and he won't be hurt at all. We'll all see him off after tea, and—and there you are!"

Arthur brightened up.

"Thank you!" he said. "You're a good sort, Jimmy. You're more a gentleman than all them 'igh-class blokes 'at

wouldn't back-up a chap. You're more high-class than all of them, if you ask me!"

"Many thanks," chuckled Jimmy, "Come on! No time to lose!"

"Git a move on, then," said Arthur.

And the five juniors hurried out of the House together.

CHAPTER 15.

Looking After Uncle!

JIMMY SILVER and his comrades scudded down to the gates. There was no time to be lost, if the visitor was to be headed off. But as they came by the porter's lodge Jimmy paused.

"You fellows get on," he said. "I'll follow!"

And Jimmy ran into the lodge.

Arthur hurried out of the gates, with Lovell and Raby and Newcome. Some idea had evidently come into Jimmy Silver's head, but they did not stay to inquire what it was. Uncle William was sure to be drawing near to the school by that time.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Raby suddenly, as they scudded down the road.

A hundred yards from the school gates was Uncle William, umbrella and fish-bag and all. But he was not alone. He had halted under the trees by the road, and was mopping his brow again, while he conversed with Tubby Muffin!

Arthur suppressed a groan.

Of all the Rookwood fellows, the chattering Tubby was the one he would least have desired to speak to Uncle Bill.

But Tubby was there! He had guessed, from what Jimmy Silver had said, that a visitor was coming for Beresford-Baggs, and it was not hard for him to guess that there was something unusually interesting about the visitor.

So Reginald Muffin had rolled out of the gates to see who was coming.

The fat Classical grinned at the juniors as they came up.

"I say, here's Baggs' uncle!" he exclaimed. "I say, Baggs, you didn't tell us your Uncle William was coming! He, ho, he!"

Arthur did not heed him.

Mr Baggs dropped his fish bag, and extended a damp and fishy fist for his affectionate nephew to shake.

"Hallo, Art!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, uncle!"

"My word!" said Mr. Baggs, surveying him admiringly. "What a swell you look, Arthur!"

"D-d-d-do I?"

"You do, and you may lay to that," said Mr. Baggs. "Blessed if I shouldn't be ashamed to meet you, Art, only I thought of puttin' on my Sunday clothes to come. I wouldn't disgrace you afore your swell friends."

"Oh!" gasped Arthur.

There was a cachinnation from Reginald Muffin, which was suddenly cut short by Lovell grasping his collar.

"Shut up, you little beast!" said Lovell, in a ferocious whisper.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Look 'ere, Art, what I got for you!" continued Mr. Baggs, opening the fish-bag.

"Arf a cod, my boy! Ain't he a beauty?"

"Ripping!" stammered Arthur.

"The best thing I 'ad in the shop this morning," said Mr. Baggs impressively.

"I says to your Aunt Maria, I says, 'I ain't selling that there,' I says. 'Not if they offers me its weight in quids,' I says. 'That there's for young Art,' I says. And here it is, Art!"

"Thank you!" gasped the new junior of Rookwood. "You're awfully good, uncle!"

"Don't mention it!" said Mr. Baggs, with a wave of a shiny and fishy hand. "I ain't forgot my nevvie, you may lay to that. Your father, Art, 'ave growed a bit 'aughty since he's been a baronet; but there's nothing of that there kind about you. You're the same old Art. And s'long as you're the same old Art, I'm the same ole Uncle Bill—wot?"

There was a clatter of hoofs on the road, and a trap dashed up, with Jimmy Silver driving. He halted by the group in the road.

Then his chums understood why he had stopped at the porter's lodge. A liberal tip to old Mack had induced him to lend the trap. Jimmy Silver was a driver who could be relied upon; and a ten-shilling note had overcome old Mack's objections.

Mr. Baggs glanced at Jimmy, and then at the other juniors. He was rather surprised at meeting them again, after having left them so far behind him on the road.

Jimmy Silver smiled down to him.

"I've borrowed the trap, kid!" he called out to Arthur. "I thought you'd like to give your uncle a drive and take him to

tea. "We'd all like to come, if Mr. Baggs doesn't object!"

"Object!" said Mr. Baggs, in his hearty way. "No fear, my boy! The more the merrier. Werry glad I am to see young Art getting on so well with 'igh-class friends."

"Arthur's very popular in the school, Mr. Baggs," said Lovell solemnly.

"He would be," said the admiring uncle. "My Art would make 'is way anywhere. I don't say as I'd object to some tea, too. Is there a place 'andy? I dessay there's some difficulty about getting tea for visitors at the school, you being a nipper in a low star-dard, Art."

"It's not tea-time yet at Rookwood, you see," explained Jimmy Silver. "My idea was a bit of a drive round, to show you our country. We're rather proud of our scenery in this part, you know. And there's a jolly little place by the river where we can have tea, if you like."

"I'm game!" said Mr. Baggs. "My eye! What would the old gal say if she could see me a-driving round the country with you, 'igh-class young gentlemen in a pony-trap! My eye!"

"Jump in!" said Jimmy. "Help your ankle in, Arthur!"

"Right-ho!" gasped Arthur.

Mr. Baggs sat down in the trap with great satisfaction. He had had quite enough walking—too much, in fact. And the feeling that he was being made much of by Arthur's high-class schoolfellows was very gratifying to the old gentleman.

"And in that there bag," he said. "Don't you drop it! That there cod is a beauty, and mustn't be spilled!"

"Here you are!" said Newcome.

The fish-bag was handed in, and safely disposed of by Uncle William. It was a roomy trap, and there was space for the five juniors with Uncle Bill. But there was no room for Tubby Muffin.

Neither was Tubby, for once, eager to join up. Even tea at a jolly little place by the river would not have compensated the aristocratic Tubby for "being seen" in company with Uncle Bill. Tubby Muffin believed in drawing a line somewhere, and he drew it at Uncle Bill.

The fat Classical was also eager to get into Rookwood to spread the description of Uncle William there. It was an item of news that he could not possibly have kept to himself—and he forgot the numer-

ous loans he had extracted from Beresford Baggs during the past few weeks. Gratitude for favours received never troubled Reginald Muffin very much.

There was a very supercilious expression on Muffin's fat face as he watched the party stow themselves in the trap.

He was preparing to emit a scornful cachinnation as the trap started; but as Jimmy Silver cracked the whip, the lash caught Tubby under his fat chin—by accident or design. So what Tubby actually emitted as the trap started was a fiendish yell.

"Yaroooooh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were off, bowling away at a good speed, and Tubby Muffin was left rubbing his fat chin. He shook a fat fist after Jimmy Silver as the trap disappeared round a bend in the lane, and then rolled away into the gates—full of news!

CHAPTER 16.

A Happy Afternoon!

THAT half-holiday was a very interesting one to Jimmy Silver & Co.

They enjoyed the drive. A drive on a mild afternoon, with tea at the Angler's Rest, was quite enjoyable, and the presence of Uncle Bill did not make it less so.

True, the waiter at the Angler's Rest was surprised at finding such a fishy gentleman as Uncle Bill in company with Rookwood juniors, and was rather stand-offish in his manner. But the waiter's disapproval did not worry the cheery Co. They felt that they could survive it.

Arthur enjoyed himself, too.

In fact, he fairly beamed in the company of his affectionate uncle; and there was no doubt that he regarded the old gentleman with very affectionate feelings.

Three years of a high-class tutor, and three weeks of a high-class public-school, had possibly had a slightly oppressive effect on "Art"—much as he was elated by his good fortune.

With his uncle he was his old self; and he inquired with great eagerness after Aunt Maria and Aunt Sarah and cousin 'Erb.

As for Uncle William, he was beaming with satisfaction all the time.

It transpired that he had had some

slight doubts as to whether Art's new friends at the big school would think him "good enough." For, that reason he had been careful to put on his very best clothes, and had bought an entirely new necktie, in order to disarm all possible criticism.

Any doubts he had had on the subject were entirely set at rest now by the kindly attentions he received from Jimmy Silver & Co.

Perhaps those cheery young gentlemen took Uncle Bill as a huge joke, but they were very careful to maintain a due decorum of manner.

They did not even wince when Uncle William ate jam with his knife, and picked his teeth with a fork. It was a free country, and Uncle Bill had a right to do as he liked with his cutlery. Arthur gave them more than one grateful glance during the happy meal. He was fervently thankful that Jimmy Silver & Co. were with him, and not Adolphus Smythe, or Towny and Poppy. He had a feeling that even his ample cash resources would not have compensated for Uncle Bill in the eyes of the Nuts of Rookwood. He had observed that never in Tubby Muffin.

Tea was a long and ample meal. Uncle William's train was at 6.15, and there was just comfortable time to drive to the station.

The merry party piled into the trap again, and Jimmy Silver, who drove, sagely selected a route which did not run up by Rookwood School. He did not want to drive Arthur's uncle through crowds of Rookwooders coming in for call-over, even in the dark.

Mr. Baggs chatted genially all the way to Coombe Station. The Rookwood juniors learned without inquiring a good many particulars concerning the fish business, and the earlier life of Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs, baronet. They wondered how pleased the baronet would have been if he could have listened also.

Glad as Arthur undoubtedly was to see his uncle again, it is possible that he was a little relieved when the trap stopped at the station in Coombe.

He alighted to accompany the old gentleman to the platform, the Fistical Four waiting with the trap outside.

"Take care of that there 'arf cod, Art!" said Mr. Baggs, as he received his umbrella

from Lovell. "I s'pose you can get it billed all right at the school—eh?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Arthur.

"Don't you young gents put your feet on it in the trap."

"No fear!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You wouldn't get a cod like that in this here neighbourhood. You see, being in the business, I know what's what."

"Better get in, uncle," murmured Arthur.

"Right you are! Good-bye, young gentlemen!" said Mr. Baggs, shaking hands all round with the juniors, with a large, damp, and fishy hand. "Werry pleased to 'ave made your acquaintance, and to 'ave 'ad such a 'appy arfternoon. If you ever find yourself in Camden Town, you give me a look in. Me and the old woman will be always pleased to see yer."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said Jimmy.

"Good-bye, sir!"

And the shiny gentleman rolled into the station at last, piloted by his dutiful nephew.

The Fistical Four looked at one another and smiled.

"What a merry arfternoon!" murmured Lovell. "I—I say, he's a good old sort, I—I rather like him!"

"A hearty old gentleman," said Jimmy Silver. "No deception about him. I can't say there's no cod—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors heard the train roll away, bearing Uncle William to Latham Junction and thence to London. The old gentleman was departing well pleased with his visit to Rookwood. Arthur came out of the station, and his face was a little red as he climbed into the trap.

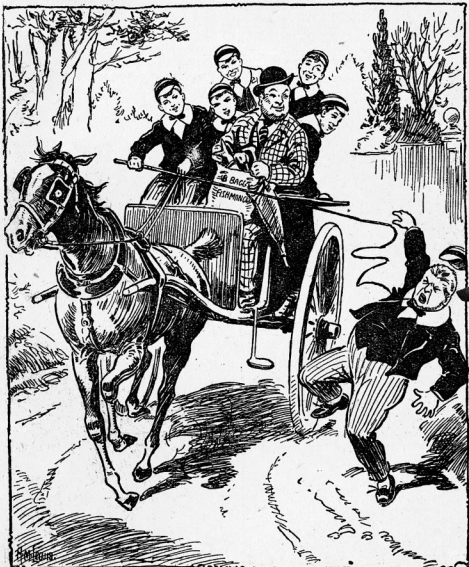
Jimmy Silver cracked the whip, and they started for Rookwood.

It was a rather silent drive. Arthur seemed busy with his thoughts, and the Co. did not interrupt him. Rookwood was in sight when Arthur spoke at last.

"I—I needn't ask you fellows what you think of my uncle," he said, in a low voice. "He's a good man, and I'm fond of him; but you wouldn't think of him as I do. I—I suppose you—you won't jaw at Rookwood about—about—"

"Of course not, you duffer!" said Jimmy.

"But Tubby——" said Lovell dubiously.



Tubby Murn watched the Co. stow themselves in the trap with a supercilious expression. He was preparing to emit a scornful cachinnation as they started, but the lash caught Tubby under his chin and the cachinnation changed to a yell.

"That's all right," said Jimmy Silver. "If Muffin has said anything unpleasant about Mr. Baggs, we can bear witness that Tubby doesn't know anything about it. We've had an afternoon out with Mr. Baggs and if we're pleased with him, Muffin doesn't matter."

"You're awfully good," said Arthur.

The trap stopped. Beresford-Baggs insisted upon indemnifying Jimmy for the tip to Mack, as was but just. The five juniors crossed the quad together, and they did not fail to note that some curious glances were turned upon them by fellows in the quadrangle. Reginald Muffin had not allowed his startling news to grow cold.

Quite a little crowd gathered round the doorway of the School House, as the chums came in. For once, Arthur's nutty friends did not give him an effusive greeting. They seemed to be in a state of doubt.

Arthur passed quickly through the crowd, and went up to his study. But the Fistical Four had to stop. They were surrounded by questioners.

"I say, Silver——"

"Muffin says——"

"Is it true——"

"Beresford-Baggs' uncle——"

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh.

"One at a time!" he said. "Now, then, what's up?"

"I've told the chaps about that awful old guy!" chortled Tubby Muffin. "He, he, he!"

"Muffin's spun us a queer yarn," said Conroy. "I suppose it's his gas, as usual."

"Just tell us how the matter stands, Silver," said Smythe, of the Shell, anxiously. "We've rather taken up young Beresford-Baggs——"

"In a way——" said Tracy.

"And if it's true——"

"You might tell a chap," said Townsend. "I don't want to be hard on Beresford-Baggs, certainly; but if his people are anything like Muffin's description—— Oh gad!"

"What is he like, Silver?"

"Like!" said Jimmy reflectively. "Well, he's a man, you know—genus homo, species sapiens——"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Is he an awful blackguard?" asked Adolphus Smythe irritably.

"Certainly not."

"Oh, he isn't! What is he, then?"

"You've really seen him, as Muffin says?" asked Adolphus.

"We've had a drive with him, and tea with him at an inn, and seen him off at the station."

"Oh! Then he can't be such an awful——"

"Such a fearful——"

"Such a——"

"I can't say I found him fearful or awful. He's just Baggs' uncle—that's all. Rather like Baggs to look at."

"Well, Baggs looks decent, whatever he came from!" remarked Topham judiciously.

"Did you like the man, Silver?"

"Oh, yes! I think he's a good sort."

"Did he bring a codfish as a present? Muffin says he did."

"He brought his nephew a very handsome and expensive present of fish," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "It's left at the porter's lodge just now, if you want to see it. I dare say Baggs will get the cook to handle it, and stand a fish supper."

"Well, a fish supper is all right," said Smythe. "It looks to me as if that lying porpoise has been pulling our leg about Beresford-Baggs' uncle! I said so all along, in fact."

"So did I," said Tracy.

"Bump the cad, and teach him not to spin yarns about the relations of friends of ours," continued Adolphus.

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four walked on, grinning, while Adolphus & Co. closed round the hapless Tubby. Wild yells from Muffin followed them.

"Yow-ow! Leggo! I tell you he was an awful character——Yoop! Reeking with fish! Ow-ow-wow! Dropping his—ow!—atches——Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

And Tubby Muffin's voice died away in a dolorous howl.

CHAPTER 17.

Tubby Muffin Hears Too Much!

"THICK as thieves!" growled Peele. Cyril Peele was standing at his study window, looking down into the quadrangle of Rookwood. Lattrey and Gower were lounging near him, also looking out.

They seemed interested in a group of juniors chatting under the beeches.

There were five juniors in the group—Jimmy Silver & Co. and Arthur Beresford-Baggs.

Peele eyed them morosely.

It was clear that Arthur Beresford-Baggs was on the best of terms with the Fistical Four, even if they were not precisely as "thick" as thieves, as Peele described it.

Peele was evidently not pleased by the sight of the cheery cordiality reigning between the Co. and the schoolboy millionaire.

"Silver seems to have taken him up!" remarked Gower

"After his money, like the rest!" said Lattrey.

Peele grunted.

"That's rot! Jimmy Silver doesn't care for his money, and wouldn't borrow a bob of him at any price. What's the good of rottin'? We all know that."

"Well, you were after his cash, anyhow, Peele, old scout," said Lattrey tartly, "and it wasn't much use. You were going to teach him banker and poker. Has he learned yet?"

Gower grinned, and Peele grunted again angrily. Peele's grunt indicated that the gilt-edged youth had not, so far, been initiated into the delights of banker and poker.

"He won't even come into the study," continued Lattrey. "He won't even come to tea. He's no fool. He knows what you

grinned Lattrey. "Everybody knew what you were after, and the way Baggs has turned you down makes the fellows chortle no end."

"I know," said Peele quietly, his eyes still on the chatting group in the quadrangle. "And I'm going to make the cheeky cad pay for it. If he won't have me for a friend, he will have me for an enemy."

"You can't hurt him. He's licked Morny, and Morny could make rings round you. Better let him alone."

"I'm not thinkin' of pitchin' into the cad. I'm goin' to show him up," said Peele. "There's Tubby Muffin's yarn about some awful uncle of his who came down to Rookwood—some terrific character, accordin' to Muffin. Baggs contrived to keep him away from the school, and only Muffin knows—"

"Muffin's gas!" said Gower. "Nobody believes Muffin."

"I believe him," answered Peele. "It stands to reason. This fellow Baggs is a rotten upstart. When he's off his guard he speaks like a slum bounder. He's no class, and his pater's no class. It stands to reason that they've got awful relations they wouldn't dare to have seen—"

"Very likely. But Baggs is pretty sure to be careful to keep his relations dark. If his uncle was really a fearful outsider, he took care to keep the old jobney away from

and grinned, and several others of the juniors followed his glance, and grinned, too.

Cyril Peele stepped hastily back from the window.

"They're grinnin' at you, old top!" remarked Gower pleasantly.

"They'll be grinnin' at Baggs soon!" said Peele between his teeth. "Wait till his relation comes here!"

"His relations won't come here to please you, I suppose?"

"That's my idea. The cad has an Aunt Sarah. Muffin's heard him speak of her—"

"I dare say; but Aunt Sarah won't show up at Rookwood."

"She will—on Saturday afternoon."

"Eh? How do you know?"

"Because I'm, going to fix it," said Peele coolly.

His chums stared at him.

"You're goin' to get the old girl to come here?" ejaculated Gower. "Do you know where she lives?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then how the thump—"

"Oh, you're dense!" said Peele. "You remember when we did the play last term—'Charley's Aunt'—I did the Aunt."

"I remember. What about it?"

"Didn't I do it well?" demanded Peele.

"Yes. We all know you're the best actor in the club, and even Jimmy Silver can't do without you in the plays, though I fancy he'd be glad to if he could!" grinned Lattrey.

"Well, if I can do Charley's Aunt, I can do Arthur's aunt," said Peele coolly. "I'm going to the costumier's at Rookham to make up as Charley's Aunt—I mean as Arthur's aunt. I'm coming here as Aunt Sarah."

"Wha-a-at?"

"My hat! You wouldn't have the nerve." Peele smiled contemptuously.

"I've got the nerve. Besides, what's there to be afraid of? Even if it comes out, it's only a practical joke."

"But—but that chap will know whether you're his Aunt Sarah or not!" exclaimed Gower.

"The other chaps won't."

"But he'll tell them."

"And they'll think he's ashamed of his aunt, and denying the relationship for that reason," said Peele coolly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I've thought it out," said Peele. "I had an appointment on Saturday with Joey Hook at the Bird-in-Hand, but I'm going to work this stunt instead. I'm coming here got up as Arthur's aunt; and you can bet it will be a terrific old lady who won't do him credit—terrific clothes and a gamp and a bottle of gin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And when he says I'm not his aunt, I'll put on the pathetic about his bein' ashamed of his relations now he's well off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Gower and Lattrey.

"I fancy that will bring him down!" chuckled Peele. "On the face of it, his denials won't be any use. Why should an old lady come here claiming him as her nephew, if he isn't her nephew?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you can bet— Oh!" Peele broke off suddenly and made a spring to the study door, and dragged it open. "Muffin, you spyin' cad!"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical almost pitched into the study as the door was dragged open.

"You fat rotter!" roared Peele, utterly enraged by the discovery that the Peeping Tom of Rookwood had overheard his precious scheme. "You've been listening—"

"I haven't!" stammered Tubby. "I—I was just passing—"

"You heard me!"

"I—I didn't! I didn't even know you knew Baggs had an Aunt Sarah, and—and I don't believe you could make up— Yaroooooooh!"

Peele fairly jumped at the fat Classical.

His beautiful scheme for humiliating Arthur, which he had thought of with such care, was evidently useless now. It was not of much use for a pretended aunt of Beresford-Baggs' to turn up at Rookwood on Saturday when the tattling Tubby knew all about it in advance.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Thump, thump!

Tubby Muffin had suffered many a time for his prying proclivities. But never had he received so terrific a thrashing as he received now.

Peele was so enraged by the "dishing" of

his clever scheme, that he did not care how hard he smote; and he smote very hard indeed.

Tubby Muffin's frantic yells rang the whole length of the Fourth Form passage.

It was not till Peele was breathless that he desisted, and sent the fat Classical whirling into the passage.

Tubby Muffin collapsed there, howling.

Peele slammed the study door, with a black brow. Lattrey and Gower grinned at one another. They seemed to find something entertaining in their chum's furious disappointment.

Cyril Peele's brow was still dark when the bell rang for classes, and he came into the Fourth Form room. He gave Arthur Beresford-Baggs a black-look which the heir of Baggs, Limited, did not even notice. Arthur Beresford-Baggs was too happy at Rookwood School for Peele's morose enmity to make any difference to him.

CHAPTER 13.

A Telegram for Arthur!

"**B**ERESFORD-BAGGS!"

"Baggs!"

"Where's Baggy?"

After dinner on Saturday several voices were inquiring for the new junior.

Townsend and Topham, his nutty study-mates, were among the inquirers, also Tubby Muffin, and Smythe of the Shell.

"Anybody seen Baggs?" called out Towny.

Grace of the Fourth came in from the quadrangle in time to hear the inquiry.

"Seen him, Putty?" asked Topham.

"Baggs is in the quad, and I think Beresford is with him," answered Putty Grace humorously.

"Fathead!"

And the inquirers hurried out in search of Beresford-Baggs. That wealthy youth was in conversation with Jimmy Silver & Co. Jimmy was speaking as Smythe and his companions came up.

"We're holding a rehearsal this afternoon," he said. "You haven't seen the Classical Players at work yet, and you can come along if you like. If you want to join the dramatic club, Newcome's sec."

"I'd like to," said Arthur.

"Right you are. Hallo, you seem to be

wanted!" said Jimmy, as Adolphus & Co. came up.

Arthur glanced round.

"Telegram for you, Beresford-Baggs!" said Smythe.

"The kid's waitin' in the hall, old top," said Townsend.

"Right-ho!" said Arthur; and with a nod to Jimmy Silver & Co, he went towards the School House, Smythe and the rest keeping him company.

"The dear boy is still as popular as ever!" Lovell remarked, with a grin. "I wonder what would have happened if his merry uncle had set foot inside Rookwood?"

"I wonder!" chuckled Raby.

"Even Tubby turned up his nose at the poor old gentleman!" remarked Newcome. "He seems to have got over it now, though. He's been cadging regularly from Baggs since."

"Well, Baggs' uncle was a good old sort, though a bit rough-and-ready," said Jimmy Silver; "and the fellows have agreed that Tubby's description was all gas. Baggs is all right, unless Aunt Maria or Aunt Sarah or Cousin 'Erb should turn up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, there goes Peele!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We want that bouncer this afternoon. Hallo, Peele!"

Cyril Peele was heading for the gates, when the captain of the Fourth bore down upon him.

He paused and looked round as Jimmy Silver called.

"Where are you off to?" asked Jimmy.

"I'm goin' out of gates," answered Peele sourly.

"There's a rehearsal on in the box-room this afternoon," said Jimmy. "The Classical Players, you know—"

"I've got an engagement."

"Well, you know you're wanted in the play when it comes off," said Jimmy. "I don't want to have to fill your place—"

"I can't stay in the afternoon, anyhow; I tell you I've got an engagement!" said Peele sourly.

"Come where the booze is cheaper; come where the pots ho! more!" sang Edward Lovell softly; and there was a chuckle from Newcome and Raby.

Peele's little habit of dropping in at the Bird-in-Hand on a half-holiday was pretty well known. But Jimmy Silver looked at Peele rather suspiciously.

"Muffin was saying something the other day—" he began.

"Hang Muffin!"

"About some jape you were planning against Baggs—making yourself up as a relation, or something, to come here and worry him—"

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, don't do it," said Jimmy. "Baggs knows what to expect, and he will most likely pitch into you. That game's no good, you know, now that Muffin's spread it all over the Form—"

"I'm not thinking of anythin' of the kind!" exclaimed Peele savagely. "If you particularly want to know, I'm goin' out for a game of billiards. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Jimmy Silver!"

And with that, Cyril Peele swung out of the gates, and started along the road to Coombe.

"Silly ass!" commented Lovell. "A prefect ought to have heard that. Peele's game of billiards would be nipped in the bud!"

"Well, he's his own master, I suppose," said Jimmy Silver. "No biznoy of ours if he plays the goat. If he doesn't attend rehearsal, though, I shall cut him out of the cast, though I admit he's our best man. Bother him, anyhow—let's call the fellows together."

And the Fistical Four headed for the School House to prepare for the important business that was to take place in the box-room.

CHAPTER 10.

A Pleasant Prospect!

"O H, crikey!"

That emphatic, if inelegant ejaculation escaped from Arthur Beresford-Baggs, in tones of dismay.

He had opened the telegram.

The youth from the post-office stood waiting, cap in hand, while Arthur looked at his telegram. Round the son of the millionaire were grouped the nuts of Rookwood, with expressions of friendly interest. Tubby Muffin was looking not only interested, but eager. Tubby had heard of money being sent by telegram, and he was wondering whether this was a handsome tip for Arthur from his pater, the baronet.

If it was, Tubby Muffin intended to have his "whack" somehow, by hook or by crook. Half-crowns were all very well, but in the case of a handsome remittance from the millionaire, Reginald Muffin meant to "put in" for a quid.

But Arthur's expression did not indicate that it was a handsome remittance, or good news of any sort.

He looked blankly dismayed.

"Any news, old top?" asked Smythe rather curiously.

"Er—yes—no!"

"Nobody ill, I hope!" murmured Townsend politely.

"N-no!"

"Any answer, sir!" asked the telegraph youth.

"No, no! All right," said Arthur.

He dropped a half-crown into the boy's hand; Arthur was always liberal with his tips.

Then he moved away to the staircase.

The telegram was crumpled in his hand, and it was evident that he did not intend to show it to any of his nutty friends.

"Aren't you comin' out this afternoon, old fellow?" asked Townsend.

"N-no!"

"Come into my study for a little chat," said Smythe.

"I—I'll see you later."

What that, and no further explanation, Arthur Beresford-Baggs mounted the stairs rather hurriedly.

Smythe & Co. exchanged rather curious glances.

However, it was clear enough that the millionaire's son did not desire their honourable company just then, and the nuts strolled away.

Even Tubby Muffin realised that there was "nothing doing," and he rolled away in the direction of the tuckshop, there to feast his eyes upon the good things which, at present, were out of his reach.

Arthur hurried to his study in the Fourth-Form passage, the telegram crumpled in his hand, and a deep wrinkle in his brow.

Rawson was in the study, and he glanced in some surprise at the troubled face of the wealthy youth.

"Hallo! You in?" said Arthur.

"Yes, I am here. You're not doing any swotting this afternoon, I suppose!" said Rawson, with a smile.

"No fear!"

"Then I shan't be in your way. I'm having another go at Greek."

"Oh!" said Arthur.

He crossed to the window and looked at the telegram again. He wanted to be alone just then, though Rawson's company was less irksome than Towny's or Topy's would have been.

Rawson glanced at him once or twice, as he stood in the light of the window, but Arthur's eyes were fixed on the telegram. The message it conveyed was dismaying enough to the millionaire's son—whose father had not always been a millionaire or a baronet.

"Beresford-Baggs, Rookwood School, Coombe. Expect me early this afternoon. —AUNT SARAH."

That was the cheering message.

Arthur stared at it.

Uncle Bill had been warded off successfully; but it was clear that Aunt Sarah could not be warded off.

She was coming!

Early that afternoon—and it was already getting on for three! The good lady might arrive any moment, and he did not even know which way she was coming.

"Oh lor!" groaned Arthur.

Rawson looked at him again. Rawson was rather interested in the peculiar fortunes of his new study-mate.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, yes!"

"If I can do anything—"

"Read that!" mumbled Arthur, tossing the telegram on the table.

Tom Rawson read it.

"You don't want your aunt to come?" he asked quietly.

Arthur flushed.

"Don't you think I'm looking down on my Aunt Sarah, Rawson!" he exclaimed. "It ain't that! She's a good old sort, as good as my Uncle Bill that I told you about. But—but I—"

Rawson nodded.

"I understand! Not exactly the thing for Rookwood, do you mean?"

"I've told you what we was afore dad got on," said Arthur, dropping unconsciously into old ways of speaking. "Father was a bit different from his brothers and sisters. They're good sorts, and they are always very fond of me. I wrote them all

from 'ere and told them about Rookwood, and you see, I mentioned that I was sorry I never 'ad a chance of saying good-bye to them afore I came to school. I'm ^{just} as fond of 'em as ever I was, and I ain't lookin' down on them, but—"

He broke off.

"It's a rather difficult position," said Rawson. "You don't want to hurt the old lady's feelings?"

"I'd die first," said Arthur earnestly. "All the same, I don't see wot's to 'appen if she comes 'ere. I don't know what the 'Ead would think of 'er, or Mr. Bootles—or—or the blokes—I mean the fellers—"

"You can't stop her now. Look here," said Rawson quietly. "You meet her at the gates and bring her in and get her into the study. I'll get some tea ready. You can treat her nicely here and put her at her ease; and most likely nobody will even know she's here. She won't want to see the Head, I suppose. Most of the fellows are out this afternoon, and there won't be many about—"

Arthur looked thoughtful.

He was undoubtedly in a difficult position, between his horror of acting snobbishly towards his affectionate relations, and the impossibility of producing those extraordinary persons at a school like Rookwood.

"If she'd given me more notice I could 'ave managed same as with Uncle Bill!" he muttered. "But, but—I dessay she never knowed till the last minute that she could 'ave the day off!"

"The day off!" repeated Rawson.

"She'll 'ave 'ad to get somebody to mind the shop, you know."

"The shop! Oh!"

"In the greengrocery line!" explained Arthur.

"I—I see."

"Father's wanted 'er to give it up, and let 'im provide for 'er," said Arthur; "but she's independent. He wanted to make 'er a handsome allowance to live at the seaside, but p'r'aps she guessed he wanted to shift 'er off to a good distance. 'Sides, she's independent. But she was always fond of me, and so was I of 'er, too, and so I am now. But—but—"

Poor Arthur broke off again. There was an incongruity between his former and his present surroundings that could hardly be reconciled. Between Arthur Beresford-Baggs, of Rookwood, and Arty Baggs of

former times, there was a great gulf fixed, of which the kind-hearted and affectionate Aunt Sarah was not aware.

"You're a good sort, Rawson," he went on, at last. "I ain't ashamed of my old aunt, but, of course, I don't want all the blokes to see 'er 'ere. I—I think I'll get down to the gates."

"That's right!"

Arthur left the study.

He scouted down the stairs very cautiously. He did not want to fall in with any of his nutty friends just then.

But he escaped easily enough. The merry nuts were gathered in a little party in Adolphus Smythe's study, and he did not encounter any of them on the stairs or in the passages.

He left the School House, and scudded down to the gates.

There he took up his stand to wait for the arrival of Aunt Sarah, only hoping that he would be able to get that good dame quietly into his study without attracting general attention, where she could be "kept dark" during her visit. It was an unhappy expedient, and he was not pleased with it; but it really seemed that it was his only resource, in the remarkable circumstances.

CHAPTER 20.

Tubby Muffin Sees it All!

ARTY!"

"Auntie!"

Aunt Sarah had arrived!

Arthur Beresford-Baggs detached himself from the gateway to greet the striking-looking lady who came rather breathlessly up the road.

There was no doubt that Aunt Sarah was striking to the view.

Her dress was of a rusty black. But to compensate for that she wore a shawl of brilliant blue. Her bonnet was, in itself, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—in size, in design, and in colour. The amount of floral decoration crowded upon the bonnet was really remarkable. Bright flowers nodded and waved as Aunt Sarah moved.

The good lady's face was somewhat plump, with red cheeks. It expressed great good-nature. It was plain that in Aunt Sarah's disposition there was no shortage of the milk of human kindness.

About the good lady hung a taint aroma of spirituous liquor, with which she had doubtless refreshed herself during the journey to Rookwood.

"My, Arty! What a swell you are!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah admiringly. "All in noo clothes, too! And a silk 'at! Oh, my!"

"I—I——"

"You 'ad my telegram, Art?"

"Yes, auntie; only a little while ago——"

"I spent a shilling on that there telegram," said Miss Baggs impressively. "I wouldn't take you by s'prise. Your Uncle Bill took you by s'prise last week, but he's so thoughtless, and so I told 'im. Soon as I found Mrs. Gudge would look after the shop for the day, Art, I sent orf that there telegram to you."

"It was—was very kind——"

"And this 'ere," said Miss Baggs, "is Rookwood, is it?"

"Yes, auntie."

"'Ow do the young gentlemen treat you, Art?"

"Oh, jolly well!"

"They don't look down on you because you was poor afore your father made 'is money?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, that's werry nice of them," said Aunt Sarah, with an approving nod, which made a whole botanical garden of flowers nod on her bonnet. "Werry nice, indeed, and shows they're real gents. Fancy you, Art, feelin' quite at 'ome in a big place like this here, with real swells. 'Oo's that cove?" asked Miss Baggs, breaking off.

The "cove" alluded to was Mack, the porter.

Miss Baggs' voice was a powerful one, and it had reached to the porter's lodge inside. Naturally, old Mack had looked out to see what was going on.

He looked at Miss Sarah Baggs, and looked again, and his eyes remained glued upon her, as if fascinated.

Old Mack had never seen anybody quite like Miss Baggs before.

"That—that's our porter," stammered Arthur.

"Porter—eh? Don't he know better than to stare at a lady?" said Miss Baggs warmly.

"Oh, he's rather an old ass, auntie!" said Arthur, in a low voice. "Never mind him."

"Right! I won't!" said Miss Baggs, with another nod, to a horticultural accompaniment. "Let's get in, Art. I s'pose you're goin' to offer your old aunt a cup o' tea arter her journey?"

"Of—of course! This way, auntie!"

Arthur, with a beating heart, led his aunt in at the gates.

He had hoped to act upon Rawson's suggestion, and slip the good old lady quietly into his study, unseen by the general eye.

But it seemed improbable that the horticultural hat would cross the quadrangle unnoticed. It seemed to be calling aloud for notice.

Old Mack continued to blink at it.

Miss Baggs paused as she passed him, and eyed him with a severe eye. She did not seem satisfied with the Rookwood porter's manners.

"Go you staring at?" she inquired.

"Oh!" stammered Mack. "Master Beresford-Baggs, you—you're not allowed to take this—this pusson into the school, as you well know!"

"Person!" ejaculated Aunt Sarah.

Arthur flushed red, but he gave Mack a savage look.

"What the thump do you mean?" he demanded. "This lady is my aunt."

Mack almost collapsed.

Such an aunt had certainly never been produced before by any Rookwooder. Old Mack stood dumbfounded as Arthur walked on with Miss Baggs, and the botanical hat nodded its way onward.

"My heye!" murmured Mack, at last.

Two or three fellows in the quadrangle glanced at Arthur and his companion without concealing their smiles.

Arthur's flush deepened.

But a gleam came into his eye. He was not ashamed of his affable relative, though he would gladly have concealed her from public view. He raised his head proudly as he walked on. Lattrey and Gower were lounging about the School House door, and they stared blankly at Miss Baggs as she drew nearer.

"Who—who—who is it?" stammered Lattrey.

"A relation of Baggs'."

"He wouldn't be idiot enough to bring her here if she was!"

"Then who is it?"

There was a fat chortle from Tubby Muffin, who looked out of the doorway just then.

"Oh, my word! What a nerve! Peele's done it!"

"Peele!" exclaimed Lattrey and Gower together.

"He, he, he! Who'd have thought it was Peele?" giggled Tubby Muffin. "I don't think I should have been taken in, but I reckon you fellows would. Of course, I can see it's Peele."

"He's doing it jolly well if it's Peele," said Gower, staring.

Two or three more fellows gathered round, all interested in the oncoming visitor.

The word ran round the group that Peele was "at it," and there were many comments and chuckles.

Arthur's face was very pink as he came up to the grinning group in the doorway. He was only too glad to see, however, that there was no Rookwood master in sight. A master would certainly have required him to explain who his surprising companion was.

"Is that your mater, Baggs?" sang out Jones minor.

"No; it isn't!" snapped Arthur.

"Introduce us, old chap!" giggled Gower.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, do!" said Lattrey.

"This way!" murmured Arthur, striving to get his excellent relative into the house as quickly as possible.

But Miss Baggs was in no hurry.

"Interdooce the young gent, if he wishes, Art," she said.

"Later! Tea's ready now in the study—"

"Oh, all right, Art!"

Arthur hurried the good lady to the staircase. He had caught a glimpse of Mr. Bootles at his study window as he passed, and he was in momentary dread of seeing the Fourth Form-master come out to make inquiries. What on earth Mr. Bootles would think of Aunt Sarah was a question Arthur simply dared not ask himself.

Fortunately, Aunt Sarah allowed her nephew to guide her onward without loss of time.

Arthur breathed freely when they were in the Fourth Form passage.

There they were likely to be seen only by juniors, and juniors did not matter.

He felt that there was a load off his mind when Miss Baggs was safely escorted into Study No. 5, where Tom Rawson was waiting with his politest smile to greet her.

CHAPTER 21.

Tea for Auntie!

"WHO—what—what—"

Mr. Bootles came along to the grinning crowd in the doorway, with great astonishment in his face.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "Oh, my hat! What a neck, you know! I'll bet none of you fellows would have known it was Peele if I hadn't told you. He, he, he!"

"What—what—"

"He's got up jolly well, if it's Peele!" said Jones minor. "Baggs seems to be playing up. I don't see why he should!"

"He, he! You see, he's been over to the costumier's in Rookham to be made up," explained Tubby. "I heard him—"

"Muffin!"

"Oh, yes! Yes, sir! I—I didn't see you, sir!"

"Who is that—that—that extraordinary-looking female who came in with Beresford-Baggs?" demanded Mr. Bootles.

"Oh! It's only a joke, sir—a joke of Peele's!" gasped Tubby. "Peele's got up as Charley's Aunt, sir, for a joke on Baggs."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles. "Do you mean to tell me that that person was Peele, of the Fourth, in an extraordinary disguise?"

"Yes, sir; only a joke—private theatricals, you know, sir."

"Private theatricals are all very well," said Mr. Bootles severely. "But boys are not allowed to appear in the open quadrangle in theatrical costumes, as Peele is very well aware. Go to Peele at once, Muffin, and tell him he must confine his theatrical pranks to the House."

"Ye-ee-es, sir!"

"If he appears in the open again, dressed in that ridiculous manner, I shall cane him!" said Mr. Bootles. "Tell him so."

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Bootles whisked back to his study, very annoyed. Tubby Muffin made his way up the big staircase to carry the message to the supposed Peele. Many of the juniors were heading in the same direction.

The impression was general now that the lady in the botanical bonnet was in reality Peele, of the Fourth, in a clever disguise.

Peele's skill in that line was well known, and Tubby Muffin had confided to all the

Fourth the little scheme he had overheard Peele explaining to his chums a few days before.

The juniors had supposed that Peele had given up the idea, now that his intended victim was put on his guard; but now it appeared that Master Cyril was carrying out the scheme, after all.

Quite a crowd gathered round Study No. 5, in the Fourth Form passage, greatly interested in the visitor. What puzzled the juniors was Arthur's action in the matter.

Having been forewarned by Tubby Muffin, Arthur certainly ought to have known that his visitor was Cyril Peele—if it was Peele. In any case, he could scarcely suppose that it was a relation of his own—unless it really was a relation of his own.

So the juniors were perplexed.

Tubby Muffin came wedging through the crowd in the passage, and thumped at the door of Study No. 5 and threw it open.

"Peele, old bean—" he began.

"Scat!" exclaimed Rawson.

"I've got a message for Peele—"

"Peele isn't here, you fat ass!" growled Arthur.

Tubby Muffin winked.

Miss Sarah Baggs was seated in the study arm-chair, evidently pleased to rest after her walk, and Rawson was making tea at the fireplace. Tubby jerked a fat thumb towards Miss Baggs.

"You may as well own up, old top!" he said. "Bootles says you're not to go into the quad, again in that rig-out!"

Miss Baggs blinked at the fat Classical.

"Are you addressing me, young man?" she inquired.

"Of course I am! Where on earth did you dig up that hat?" asked Tubby, with a fat chuckle. "Did you get it at Rookham?"

"Clear off!" shouted Arthur, while his astonished aunt stared at Reginald Muffin in speechless indignation.

"Oh, all right!" said Tubby. "I say, are you standing Peele tea? I thought you'd have punched his nose for pretending to come here as your Aunt Sarah. Blessed if I know what you're in the game for, Baggy. Are you pulling the fellows' legs?"

Arthur looked at him.

He was so worried just then that he had not taken Tubby's drift at first, but now he comprehended.

He remembered what he had heard of

Peele's scheme, overheard and duly reported by Reginald Muffin.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "You fat duffer! That isn't Peele, you chump It——"

Tubby winked again.

"Keeping it up?" he asked. "He, he, he! But what's the joke? I don't see why you should keep it up, Baggs. Besides, you can't take me in. Do you think I believe anybody's really got a face like that?"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah.

"Arty, who is that rude boy?"

"Don't he do it well?" chuckled Muffin.

"All the fellows would have been taken in if I hadn't told them it was Peele."

"Get out, Muffin!" roared Arthur.

He enforced the command with a lunge of his boot, and Reginald Muffin went headlong out of the study with a yell.

Arthur closed the door after him quickly. One glimpse of the array of grinning faces in the passage was enough for him.

"Ow, ow, ow! The awful rotter-kicked me!" gasped Tubby Muffin, as he scrambled up in the passage. "He wants to keep it dark that it's Peele. I'm blessed if I know why! Ow!"

Tubby Muffin hurried off to spread the news. Jimmy Silver & Co. were declaiming Shakespeare in the box-room when Muffin arrived there, breathless with excitement.

"A horse—a horse—my kingdom for a horse!" Lovell was spouting as Tubby rolled in.

"Here's a donkey, if that will do!" remarked Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you chaps——"

"Get out!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "We're rehearsing. Buzz along, Tubby!"

"Peele's come!" shouted Muffin.

"Bother Peele! Travel along."

"He's got up——"

"What?"

"Got up as Aunt Sarah, you know," spluttered Tubby Muffin. "Just as I heard him telling Lattrey and Gower the other day, you know. Old Bootles was waxy about his going out into the quad, like that, I can tell you. Baggs is keeping it up that it's not Peele—blessed if I know why!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Do you mean to say that Peele has had the nerve to come here in that rig after all?"

"He's in Baggs' study now!"

"Perhaps it isn't Peele!"

"Oh, I know him—knew his voice, too, though he tried to disguise it," said Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to tell Smythe!"

And the fat Classical rolled away.

"Let's go and see," suggested Lovell.

"Come on!" said Jimmy.

The Shakespearean rehearsal was postponed. All the juniors were curious to see Peele in his extraordinary escapade. Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried along to Study No. 5, and Lovell threw open the door.

Aunt Sarah was raising a cup of tea to her lips, under the nodding adornment of her bonnet, as the juniors looked in.

"Is it—is it Peele?" ejaculated Lovell.

"No. Cut!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Fistical Four promptly retreated. Smythe & Co. came along the passage, with excited looks. Adolphus caught Jimmy Silver by the sleeve.

"Is it true?" he ejaculated. "Is that cad Peele playing a trick on Beresford-Baggs?"

"Blessed if I know!" confessed Jimmy Silver. "There's somebody in the study. She—or he—doesn't look much like Peele——"

"Oh, you can't mistake Peele's nose!" said Tubby Muffin. "He's got it painted red, but you can't mistake it."

"I'm goin' to see," said Adolphus.

He opened the door and looked in.

Aunt Sarah was disposing of cakes and buns with a good appetite. Tom Rawson and Arthur were waiting on her assiduously. Adolphus gazed on the scene in great surprise.

"I say, Beresford-Baggs——" he began.

"Sorry—engaged now, old fellow," said Arthur calmly. "I'll see you later. Shut the door after you."

"But is it—is it——"

Arthur closed the door, almost on Adolphus' aristocratic nose.

In the passage Adolphus rubbed his nose, in deep reflection, and in great perplexity.

"If it's Peele, he's got up awfully well," he said. "But we know what a clever beast Peele is at make-up."

"He's got the colour on a bit too thick," remarked Townsend, with a shake of the head. "Not quite natural, that."

"No, you're right! I don't think I should have been taken in, even if Muffin hadn't warned us," said Smythe sagely. "But I'm

bleased if I can see why Beresford-Baggs is playin' up to him, instead of kickin' him out."

"Pullin' his leg, perhaps."

"Tryin' to pull our leg, more likely," opined Topham. "I should say it's really a game between the two to see how we take it."

"Blessed if I quite catch on, all the same!" confessed Adolphus. "I should have expected Beresford-Baggs to pitch into the cad. Still, I dare say old Beresford-Baggs knows his own bizney best. Let's get back to our game."

And the nuts departed, considerably perplexed. They had not expected Peele to carry out his "stunt," and they certainly had not expected Beresford-Baggs to take it like this if he did. Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to the box-room and Shakespeare, also perplexed.

"Is it Peele, Jimmy?" murmured Lovell.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! The bouncer told me he had an engagement this afternoon, and couldn't come to rehearsal; so—"

"And we know what Muffin heard—"

"I give it up," said Jimmy Silver. "I fancy it's the genuine article, and Peele is at the Bird-in-Hand all the time. But perhaps it will be better for Baggy if the fellows think it's Peele."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get on, anyhow."

"A horse—a horse—my kingdom for a horse—"

And the rehearsal proceeded in the box-room, whilst a happy tea-party proceeded in the study of Beresford-Baggs, of the Fourth,

CHAPTER 22.

Pleasant for Peele!

AUNT SARAH was enjoying herself at Rookwood.

Her nephew and Tom Rawson vied with one another in their attentions to the good old lady, and the tea was of the very best. Aunt Sarah talked freely over tea, and the time passed quickly—to Aunt Sarah, at least.

Arthur was a little thoughtful.

So far only the juniors knew of his visitor, and they supposed that it was Peele, carrying out a practical joke. But

when the time came to go, and the departing visitor found herself in the midst of a crowd of Rookwooders, coming in after the half-holiday—

After tea, Aunt Sarah mentioned her train.

"I'm very glad to 'ave seen you 'ere. Art, among so many 'igh-class friends," said Miss Baggs. "They'll be glad to 'ear at 'ome that you're comfortable and 'appy. But I shall 'ave to be going. It's a long way back. I s'pose I ought to call on the 'cadmaster while I'm 'ere."

Arthur trembled.

"Not at all necessary," said Rawson, coming to the rescue.

"He—he's a very busy man!" stammered Arthur.

"I dessay—I dessay! But won't he think it's a bit rude of me, comin' to the school and never speaking a word to 'im?"

"Not a bit of it! We—we often have visitors who don't call on the Head."

"Well, you know best, Arty. I'll 'ave another cup of tea, and then I'll be movin'."

"Miss Baggs might care to look at the gardens before she goes," murmured Rawson. "We—we'll go out that way, I mean."

"Jest wot I should like," said Aunt Sarah. "I'm in the vegetable way myself; kep' the same shop for thirty year."

"Good idea!" said Arthur.

And when Aunt Sarah had disposed of her final cup of tea, the two juniors escorted her from the study. The Fourth Form passage was fortunately empty by that time. They did not return to the big staircase, but descended by a staircase in the rear of the house, which gave access to quarters generally not visited by the juniors. By a back door they emerged into the kitchen garden.

Outside the School House, in front, a number of juniors were gathered, on the watch. They were waiting for Peele—if it was Peele—to reappear. But Tom Rawson's suggestion baffled them. Aunt Sarah was departing by a different route. Only Tupper, the page, beheld the good lady as she was taken out; and Arthur slipped five shillings into Tupper's hand. The astonished page held his peace—and the shillings.

Miss Baggs was very pleased with the extensive kitchen gardens. She knew the value of every cabbage there. It was some

time before her escort could pilot her to a back gate, but at length the good old lady stood in the lane behind the school grounds. There Rawson shook hands with her and went in, while Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked with his affectionate aunt to the station.

He walked by the lanes and fields, and arrived in Coombe without meeting any Rookwood fellows.

There was an affectionate farewell on the platform. Diplomatic as Arthur was with Miss Sarah Baggs, he was fond of the old lady, and he was quite sincere when he told her he had been glad to see her. It is possible, however, that he was just as glad when the train at last bore the good old soul away, waving her hand from the carriage window, to a terrific nodding of flowers in her hat.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked back to Rookwood in a thoughtful mood, and entered as he had left. He found Rawson in the study—at Greek. Rawson looked up with a smile.

"All serene?" he asked.

"All serene. Thank you for seeing me through."

"Not a bit of it! I like your aunt—she's a good sort."

"She is a good sort," assented Arthur.

He was staring thoughtfully into the fire, when about half an hour later there was a tap at the door, and Smythe of the Shell looked in.

Adolphus glanced round the study in surprise.

"Hallo! Where's Peele?"

"Peele! Blessed if I know!"

"He's gone?"

Arthur grinned.

"Well, he isn't here!" he said.

"I knew it was Peele, of course," said Adolphus, with a smile. "But why didn't you boot him out, Beresford-Baggs?"

Arthur did not reply to that question. He had excellent reasons for not "booting" out his visitor, which he did not choose to explain to Adolphus.

"Well, come and have tea in our study," said Smythe.

"Thanks, I've had tea—"

"Come and have another, then! We want you!"

And Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked away cheerily with the dandy of the Shell.

A good many of the Rookwood fellows were anxious to see Peele of the Fourth again—especially when they learned that Arthur's visitor had departed unseen. But Peele was not seen again till calling-over, when he came in hurriedly just in time to answer to his name. Peele was looking tired—probably from his exertions in the billiard-room at the Bird-in-Hand. He looked surprised, too, when a crowd of juniors surrounded him in the passage, after roll-call.

"So you've turned up again?" said Adolphus Smythe

"How did you get out without our seeing you?" demanded Tubby Muffin. "I was going to jerk your wig off in the quad."

"My what?"

"Wig!"

"What the thump—"

"Where did you change your clobber?" demanded Townsend.

"My—my clobber! I haven't changed my clobber."

"Oh, talk sense!" snapped Smythe. "You came here rigged up as an old woman—"

"In a screaming bonnet—"

"And a shawl—"

"And Baggs knew it was you—"

"And you—"

"You silly asses!" snapped Peele, utterly astounded. "I did nothing of the sort!"

"Gammon!"

"I gave up that idea after Muffin—"

"Rot! You came—"

"Got up—"

"Like Charley's Aunt, only more so—"

"Why we saw you—"

"I didn't!" shrieked Peele. "If any old bouncer came here as Baggs' aunt, it was Baggs' aunt."

"Rats!"

"I tell you—"

"Gammon!"

Nobody believed Peele, which was not to be wondered at, considering how extremely that youth was opposed to the principles of the late G. Washington. When Peele learned the whole story, he was furious. Arthur's aunt had come and gone, and was supposed to have been Peele playing a practical joke—his plan to "show-up" Beresford-Baggs had had the unexpected result of saving Beresford-Baggs from a "show-up." Peele could have kicked himself—hard!

CHAPTER 23.

The Letter!

"LETTER for you, Beresford-Baggs!"
 "Here you are, Arthur!"
 "Beggin' letter, I should say!"
 remarked Smythe of the Shell.
 "Looks like it, begad! Look at the fist!"
 "And the spellin'!" smiled Townsend
 of the Fourth.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Beresford-Baggs was coming along the passage with Jimmy Silver & Co., when his friends called to him.

It was Smythe who handed him the letter from the rack.

That letter had been on view, as it were, for some minutes, and it had excited a good deal of comment already.

Smythe's opinion that it was a begging letter seemed probably right. At all events, it did not look like the kind of letter a Rookwood fellow would receive from home.

The superscription was in a scratchy hand, and it ran:

Mister Arthur Beresford-Baggs,
 Esquire,
 Forth Forme,
 Rookwood Skool,
 Coombe.

The "Mister," in addition to the "Esquire," rather tickled the Rookwooders.

It did not seem to tickle Arthur Beresford-Baggs as he glanced at the grubby envelope.

His face became very grave.

"Only a beggin' letter, what?" asked Adolphus Smythe. "Some bounder has found out that your pater's a millionaire, and he's writing to you for money, dear boy."

"That's it!" said Townsend. "I really wonder Mr. Bootles let the letter pass."

Arthur started.

He had not opened the letter. He stood with it in his hand, and was apparently in no hurry to open it.

"Our Form-master keeps an eye on the letters, of course," said Townsend. "He must have noticed that—at least he ought to have noticed it. I wonder he didn't stop a beggin' letter."

"I—I don't think it's a begging letter."

"Must be, in that fist! Not from a re-

lation of yours, I suppose?" smiled Townsend.

"Why not?" struck in Peele of the Fourth. "Baggs has got such a queer lot of relations—"

"Shut up, Peele—"

"Give us a rest, Peele!" said Adolphus Smythe severely. "We're fed with your talkin' about Baggs' relations. Dry up!"

Beresford-Baggs did not seem to hear. He was regarding the letter in his hand with a troubled look.

"He doesn't think it's a beggin' letter," grinned Peele. "Of course, it might be from a poor relation."

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was not at all sure that Peele was wrong; but his view was that that was Arthur's business, and nobody else's.

"Let Baggs tell us whether it's from a giddy relation," persisted Peele. "Can't you speak, Baggs?"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Beresford-Baggs, seeming to come suddenly out of a reverie. "What's that?"

"Is that letter from a relation of yours?"

"I don't see that it matters to you," answered Arthur.

"That's as good as yes," grinned Peele.

"Not at all!" said Smythe of the Shell. "Beresford-Baggs is simply puttin' you in your place, Peele. I'd pull your nose!"

"So I will!" said Arthur promptly.

He made a sudden movement, and Peele gave a yell as his somewhat prominent nose was gripped between a finger and thumb.

"Yooooooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele jerked his nose away, crimson. He clasped it with both hands in anguish.

"Ow, oh! You rotter— Groooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asked for it, Peele!" said Raby, laughing. "You've only got what you asked for. Why can't you let Baggy's relations alone?"

"Ow, ow!"

Arthur had slipped the letter into his pocket now, and he stood with his hands ready, expecting a rush from Peele. But the cad of the Fourth, with a black brow, backed away among the crowd of juniors. He was not looking for a "scrap" with the new junior, who had already proved himself a good man with his hands.

Tubby Muffin came along the passage and called to Arthur.

"Mr. Bootles wants you, Baggy!"

"What the thump does he want me for?"

"He says you're to take your letter with you," said Muffin.

"Oh!"

"It's all right, kid!" said Adolphus Smythe reassuringly. "Bootles only wants to know who's been writin' to you. It's his duty, you know. Nothin' to be afraid of."

Arthur Beresford-Baggs nodded, and walked away to his Form-master's study. Jimmy Silver cast a rather curious glance after him. He could not help wondering if that queer letter portended the arrival of another astounding relation. But that surmise the captain of the Fourth kept to himself.

The path of a new-made millionaire was sometimes a little thorny. It was not a case of roses, roses all the way! Arthur Beresford-Baggs was certainly experiencing the thorns as well as the roses.

CHAPTER 24.

A Treat in Store!

MR. BOOTLES glanced at Arthur as the junior presented himself in the study. The Form-master's glance was inquiring, and rather curious.

"Ah! I sent for you, my boy," said the little gentleman kindly. "You are doubtless aware that it is my duty to keep—ah!—an eye upon the—hem!—correspondence of boys in my Form—what, what?"

"Yes, sir!" said Arthur.

"A letter was delivered for you by the midday post—"

"I have it here, sir."

"The superscription was—hem! of a somewhat unusual nature," said Mr. Bootles.

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"Probably it was from some—ahem!—person who has no right to—hum!—communicate with you at all," said Mr. Bootles. "If so, you will hand the letter to me, Baggs. If, however, the handwriting should be known to you—"

"It is known to me, sir."

"Oh! Ah! Hem! Indeed! You are

familiar with that—ahem!—somewhat extraordinary hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then from whom is the letter, Baggs?"

"From—from a relation, sir," stammered Arthur, colouring.

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"You are sure upon that point, Baggs?"

"Quite, sir."

"In that case, you may retain the letter, Baggs. You had better, perhaps, give me the name of the relative in question."

"My cousin 'Erb, sir."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I—I mean, my cousin Herbert."

"Oh, I see! Very well, Baggs, you may keep the letter. That is all."

And Mr. Bootles waved his fat little hand in dismissal.

Arthur left the study with a thoughtful brow. He did not rejoin the crowd of juniors in the passage, but scudded out into the quadrangle by himself. The millionaire's son wanted to be alone just then.

He cut across the quadrangle, and through the archway, into Little Quad where he stopped and sat on a bench and opened the letter.

His brow was gloomy as he read it through. It was a letter that would have excited smiles among his nutty friends at Rookwood, if they could have seen it.

"Dear Art,—I seen Aunt Sarah since she came ome arter seeing you at school. She says you ain't put on no side since you been at a gentleman's school, with lots of dibs in your pokket. She says as you was glad to see er, like Uncle Bill said. Praps I been ard on you, for I own up I thort you'd want to give your folks the go-by now you was so grand. But, seeing as you ain't so, I'm thinking of givin you a look-in meself. I been mending the ole bike, and I ope to ave a run down to see you this week, and praps I can come along on Toosday arfternoon. I'll be glad to see you among all the swells; if you ain't ashamed for them to see your cousin.

"Yours trooly,

"ERB."

"Oh crikey!" murmured Arthur as he came to the end of that remarkable epistle.

He sat staring at the letter in dismay.

He remembered his cousin 'Erb very well indeed. There had been a certain amount of bitterness in that young gentleman's breast on account of Arthur's great good fortune. 'Erb didn't think that it was merited and he made caustic remarks on folks that made fortunes.

'Erb—at Rookwood! How was 'Erb to be explained away, to lofty, nutty fellows like Smythe, Townsend and Topham and the rest?

Arthur almost groaned.

Certainly he was not ashamed of his people, or he would not have written them affectionate letters from Rookwood, thus giving away his whereabouts, which, he realised now, his father had had good reason for not communicating to all the family.

Uncle Bill had been warded off, Aunt Sarah had been explained away, more or less, and now cousin 'Erb was coming. Without being a snob, Arthur trembled at the prospect.

But his clouded brows cleared a little as he glanced over the letter a second time.

"Tuesday!" he murmured. "After all, the fellows will be in class. Lucky it ain't a 'arf-oliday." In speaking to himself Arthur often dropped the Beresford for the Baggs. "Arter all, it may turn out all right. I'll get leave from Mr. Bootles to cut classes and see 'im, and nobody else need see 'im. Poor old 'Erb! I'll be glad to see 'im, if it comes to that. But—but the others fellers needn't. I can show 'im over Rookwood to-morrer, while all the blokes are in class, and he can't say I'm ashamed of him."

Arthur felt considerably relieved when he had come to that decision.

After some little reflection, he repaired to Mr. Bootles' study.

There he preferred his request to his Form-master for leave from lessons on Tuesday afternoon, for the purpose of seeing a relation who was to be "in the neighbourhood." Arthur did not deem it wise to be more explicit than that.

Mr. Bootles looked at him very curiously, but he gave the required permission.

Arthur left the study very relieved in his mind.

Cousin 'Erb could come, and go, on Tuesday, and nobody would be the wiser. That was better for Arthur and better for 'Erb. 'Erb was suspicious and touchy, and

if he met fellows like Smythe or Townsend it was quite certain that his sensitive feelings would be hurt. With a single curl of the lip Adolphus Smythe could have made poor 'Erb feel superlatively wretched, and there was no doubt that the lofty Adolphus would have done it. In fact, Adolphus prided himself upon his gift for keeping bounders in their place, and most assuredly he would have regarded 'Erb as a bounder of the first water.

"Toosday!" murmured Arthur, as he walked out into the quad with a clear brow. "Toosday's all right."

"What's going to happen on Tuesday, old top?" asked Tubby Muffin's fat voice at his elbow.

Arthur bit his lip. He had not observed the fat Classical.

Tubby eyed him inquisitively.

"Eh? Oh, nuthin'!" stammered Arthur.

"Somebody coming to see you?" asked Tubby.

"Oh, rats!"

"Your uncle?" grinned Muffin.

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Arthur; and he walked on, frowning.

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"I wonder what's going to happen on Tuesday?" he murmured. "I'm going to keep an eye open on Tuesday. He, he, he!"

CHAPTER 25.

Waiting for 'Erb!

"BELL'S gone, Baggy!"

Jimmy Silver called to Arthur Beresford-Baggs on the following afternoon, in the quad.

The Fourth-Formers were heading for their class-room; but Arthur Beresford-Baggs, sauntering under the beeches, did not seem to have observed it.

He glanced round as the captain of the Fourth called to him.

"All serene!" he answered.

"Well, aren't you coming in?" asked Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

"No."

"My dear chap, you can't cut classes," said Newcome. "Even giddy billionaires can't do that!"

"I've got leave from classes," explained Arthur.

"Oh, I see! Ta-ta, then."

The Fistical Four ran on towards the School House. But Tubby Muffin, who was close behind them, stopped, to turn a very inquisitive blink upon Beresford-Baggs.

Reginald Muffin had not forgotten what he had overheard the previous day. He had determined to "keep an eye" on Beresford-Baggs that Tuesday; but it looked now as if the millionaire's son was to escape Tubby's watchful eye.

"You've got leave from classes, Baggy?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Arthur shortly.

"Did you ask Bootles?" demanded Tubby.

"Of course I did, ass!"

"And I never knew!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin wrathfully.

Arthur grinned.

"I don't see that you need worry about it," he remarked. "I suppose it breaks your record, though. It's the first time you haven't had your car to a keyhole, what?"

"I say, old chap," said Tubby, unheeding that insinuation. "What's on for this afternoon?"

"Find out!" answered Arthur politely.

"What did Bootles give you leave for?"

"For the afternoon," answered Arthur humorously.

"I mean, why did he give you leave?" exclaimed Tubby peevishly.

"Find out!"

"Well, that's what I'm trying to do, old fellow," urged Tubby. "Of course, I'm not inquisitive. I'm just asking you a question. What have you got on for this afternoon?"

"A cap!"

"You silly ass!" howled Tubby. "I didn't mean that. I mean, what are you up to?"

"Snuff!"

"What?"

"Snuff!" replied Arthur cheerily. "Too much up to snuff to satisfy your silly curiosity, old top."

"There's something going on," said Muffin suspiciously. "Something underhand. Is your uncle coming again?"

"Better ask him."

"Or your aunt?"

"Better ask her."

"I say, Baggy, old fellow, I don't think you ought to keep secrets from an old pal," urged Tubby Muffin, almost burning with curiosity. "I say, I won't give you

away. If it's some of your shady relations coming to—"

"What?"

"I won't tell the fellows! After all, you needn't keep it dark from me. I've seen your uncle, you know, and I know that your relations are a set of awful corkers—"

Arthur made a stride towards the fat Classical. Reginald Muffin promptly backed away.

"Don't you get waxy!" he admonished. "I'm only asking a civil question, ain't I? Look here, Baggy, if—"

Bulkeley of the Sixth came along from the gates, and he paused as he saw the two juniors under the beeches.

"Now then, why aren't you in your classroom?" he inquired.

"I've got leave, Bulkeley," answered Arthur.

"And what about you, Muffin?" inquired the prefect.

"I—I was just talking to Baggs," stammered Tubby.

Bulkeley took Muffin by one fat ear.

"You're late already!" he said. "Come along!"

"Yow-ow!"

Tubby Muffin went along. He had no choice about that. Bulkeley kept hold of his fat ear, and Tubby had to break into a breathless trot to keep pace with the long strides of the Sixth-Former.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs chuckled as they disappeared in the direction of the School House.

He was feeling quite easy in his mind now.

The quadrangle was deserted. All the fellows were in the Form-rooms, excepting the Modern Juniors, who were in the "Lab" with Mr. Manders. The whole of Rookwood was busy with the afternoon's work, and there was no one to keep an eye on Beresford-Baggs. Cousin 'Erb might have arrived, and walked all round Big Quad without any Rookwooder being the wiser, excepting old Mack at the gate, and old Mack did not matter. Old Mack had been the recipient of many liberal tips from the millionaire's son and was in a perpetual state of expecting more.

"Poor old 'Erb!" murmured Arthur, as he sauntered down to the gates. "I'll jest take him for a trot round the school, and then get my bike out and we'll ave a spin.

and I'll see 'im off. He can't complain of that, though he's touchy. Thank goodness Towny and Topy are in the Form-room, and Smythe, too! I—I—I wonder what they would think of 'Erb?"

Fortunately, the nuts of Rookwood were not likely to see 'Erb, and so what they would have thought of him was not a pressing question.

As for Reginald Muffin, Arthur did not give him another thought. The fat Classical was safe in the Form-room till four, and by four o'clock Arthur intended Cousin 'Erb to be far out of the range of Tubby's inquisitiveness. But, as a matter of fact, if he had only known it, in reckoning without Tubby, he was reckoning without his host. He had not done with Tubby Muffin yet.

CHAPTER 26.

Muffin Keeps an Eye Open!

"MUFFIN!" Mr. Bootles rapped out the name, as the fat Classical rolled into the Form-room, nearly five minutes late.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"You are late!" said Mr. Bootles sternly. "I believe I have told you before, Muffin, that procrastination is the thief of time. I have warned you, Muffin, to be more punctual. I am sorry, Muffin, that it will be necessary for me to cane you. Come here, Muffin! Bless my soul! What is the matter with the boy?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, staring at him.

All the Fourth were staring at Tubby, too.

Master Muffin was doubled up, as if with an inward pain, and he had given utterance to a deep groan.

"Bless my soul! Are you ill, Muffin?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, all his wrath evaporating at once.

"Ow! Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Muffin.

"I—I—I've got a pain, sir—"

"Dear me! What sort of a pain, Muffin?"

"Like—like burning daggers, sir." Tubby had a vivid imagination when he let it go. "Like—like red-hot carving-knives, sir—"

"Muffin, where do you feel this pain?"

"In—in— Under my waistcoat, sir!"

"I am afraid you have been over-

eating yourself, Muffin. I have had occasion to speak to you on this topic before."

"Oh, no, sir! I—I hardly ate anything at dinner, sir!" gasped Tubby. "I—I—I only had three helpings of beefsteak pudding, sir, and—and two of pie, sir. I—I was hungry when I left the table, sir."

"Nonsense! Do you still feel this pain?"

"Ow! It's awful, sir!" said Tubby Muffin pathetically. "I—I think I'm going to die, sir!"

"Absurd! Go to the matron at once, and tell her your symptoms," said Mr. Bootles. "She will give you something for it."

"Ye-e-es, sir. Shall—shall I go and lie down if she tells me, sir?"

"Certainly, if she tells you! Not otherwise."

"Ow! Yes, sir. Yah!"

"Muffin—"

"Yarooooh!"

"Bless my soul! The boy really appears to be ill!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Lovell, how dare you laugh? Silver, you are laughing, also. This is very unfeeling! Have you no sympathy with the sufferings of your schoolfellow? Muffin, go to the matron at once!"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Muffin.

He tottered to the door, and tottered out.

The big door closed behind him, and Mr. Bootles looked quite concerned as he turned to his class again.

The class did not look very concerned, however. They knew Reginald Muffin better than his Form-master did, and they had no doubt whatever that Tubby's sudden illness was simply a "stunt" for eluding lessons that afternoon.

If Mr. Bootles could have seen Reginald Muffin after the door closed on him, no doubt he would have been of the same opinion as his class.

As soon as he was out of sight Muffin's sufferings ceased instantly. He straightened up, and ceased to groan, and even indulged in a fat wink at space.

"All serene!" he murmured. "Silly old duffer!"

With that grateful remark Reginald Muffin rolled away, but his steps did not lead him towards the matron's room.

He rolled out into the quadrangle.

There, like Moses of old, he looked this

way and that way; but the quad. was deserted, and there was no eye to see him.

Finding that the coast was clear, Reginald Muffin proceeded on his way with a fat grin on his face. Having "spoofed" Mr. Bootles, and escaped from the Form-room, he was at liberty to carry out his intention of "keeping an eye" on Arthur Beresford-Baggs. Tubby Muffin more than suspected that another relation of Beresford-Baggs was turning up, and if a relation of the gilded youth did turn up, Tubby meant to know all about it. Beresford-Baggs was not to be seen within the walls of Rookwood. But the fat Classical guessed where he would find him. He rolled down to the gates.

The gate was partly open, and in the opening he discerned the very well-dressed figure of the millionaire's son.

Arthur had his eyes on the road, looking out for an old, patched bicycle and a loudly-dressed youth, and he did not see Tubby Muffin, or hear him, till Tubby tapped him on the shoulder from behind.

Then he spun round with an exclamation, to stare into Muffin's fat and grinning face.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Little me, dear old top!" answered Muffin, with a friendly nod. "I thought I'd come and see how you were getting on."

"What are you doing out of the class-room?" demanded Arthur.

"I've got leave, too."

"More likely you're playing 'truant,'" said Arthur suspiciously.

"How would I, ass, when Bulkeley took me to the Form-room?" said Tubby Muffin. "I've got leave. I asked Mr. Bootles. Do you think you're the only chap in the Fourth who can get leave? I've got a lot of influence with Bootles, I can tell you. If I asked for an exeat for the whole day he'd give it to me."

"Rats!"

"Hasn't he come yet?" asked Muffin.

"He! Who?"

"The relation you're expecting."

"How do you know I'm expecting a relation, you fat fraud?"

"He, he, he!"

Arthur's hand flew to his pocket. For a moment he feared that cousin 'Erb's letter had fallen into Muffin's hands.

Tubby was not supposed to be above looking at another fellow's correspondence when his inquisitive instincts were aroused.

But the letter was safe. Arthur withdrew his hand from his pocket; but the gesture had given him away. Tubby Muffin's suspicion was quite confirmed now.

He grinned expansively.

"Is it Uncle Bill, the fishmonger?" he asked.

"No, blow you!" growled Arthur.

"Or Aunt Sarah, the greengrocer? He, he, he!"

Arthur regarded him with lowering brows. Tubby Muffin already knew too much of his family affairs—too much for Arthur's comfort at Rookwood. If he saw cousin 'Erb—perhaps talked to him—

Arthur cast an uneasy glance along the road. In the distance a cyclist appeared, coming along at a furious pace. The rider was too far off to be recognised, if it was cousin 'Erb. Tubby peered out of the gate inquisitively.

"Is that the chap?" he asked, with a nod towards the distant cyclist.

"Mind your own business!"

"Look here, Baggs—"

"You prying cad!" broke out Arthur hotly. "What does it concern you, anyhow? You've pulled Mr. Bootles' leg somehow, to make him let you off lessons. I've a jolly good mind to—"

He made a stride towards Tubby Muffin with his fists clenched, and a glitter in his eyes that made the fat Classical jump back in alarm.

"I—I say, keep your wool on!" stuttered Tubby. "I—I—"

"Will you clear off, you prying rotter?"

"Oh, if you don't want my company, I'm sure I don't want yours!" said Muffin, with dignity.

And he retired about six yards, where he took up his stand, grinning and watchful.

Arthur's eyes gleamed at him, but he controlled his temper. It was not much use thrashing Muffin; it certainly would not have made him less watchful. The dusty cyclist was drawing nearer, and if it was cousin 'Erb—

Evidently there was no time to be lost if cousin 'Erb was not to make the acquaintance of the chatterbox of Rookwood.

Arthur calmed his wrath with an effort, and walked across to the fat Classical.

"The tuckshop's open, I believe, Muffin," said Arthur.

"I believe so!" grinned Tubby.

"Could you do with five bob?"

"Yes, rather!" said Reginald Muffin promptly.

"Here you are, then! Now cut off!"

Tubby Muffin counted the five shillings that were slipped into his fat hand, and transferred them to his pocket. But he did not cut off. He disposed himself a little more comfortably against a stone but-
tress of the old, grey wall.

"Well, why don't you go?" snapped Arthur.

"No hurry, old top!"

"Why, you—you—you fat fraud!" shouted Arthur, in great wrath.

Evidently Reginald Muffin, having pocketed the bribe, intended to remain and pry on the visitor just the same!

"I say, don't you call me names, Baggs!" said Tubby, in an injured tone. "The—
the fact is, I'm tired, and I'm taking a rest. I suppose a chap can lean on the wall if he wants to!"

Arthur breathed hard.

"Will you go?" he exclaimed.

"No, I won't!"

"You prying rotter——"

"Who's prying?" demanded Muffin warmly. "What is there to pry into, if you come to that? Other fellows don't mind their relations being seen when they come to Rookwood!"

Arthur turned away without replying, his lips compressed. He looked out at the gates. The dusty cyclist was nearer now, and he discerned a large necktie of red, barred with green—the most prominent feature of the cyclist at that distance. He could still not recognise the rider; but that necktie warned him that it was probably cousin 'Erb. And Tubby Muffin, within a few paces, was watching with all his eyes!

CHAPTER 27.

Trapping Tubby!

SIMMY SILVER & CO., in the Fourth Form-room, found early Roman history a little soporific that afternoon. They envied Beresford-Baggs, who had the afternoon free, and wasn't being worried about any boring ancient Romans.

But, as a matter of fact, Beresford-Baggs would willingly have changed circumstances just then with any fellow in the Fourth.

He was sure now that the approaching cyclist was cousin 'Erb. Never could he have had a better opportunity of receiving such a visit—but for Tubby Muffin.

Everybody was in the Form-rooms or the lab. There was not an eye to fall on cousin 'Erb's flaming necktie—if only the spy of the Fourth had not been there. If an earthquake had suddenly happened, and Reginald Muffin had been swallowed up from all human ken, probably Beresford-Baggs would not have shed any tears over the catastrophe.

But he was not likely to be relieved of the spy by any such heroic happening. Even kicking Muffin across the quad, was no use; he would come back. And a lurid description of cousin 'Erb would be waiting for the Rookwooders when they came out of class!

Arthur reflected rapidly, as the dusty cyclist drew nearer and nearer on the road. He came back towards Tubby Muffin at last. Tubby watched him with a grin. But Arthur did not stop; he walked on towards the School House.

"I say, Baggs!" called out Tubby, in surprise.

Arthur did not turn his head; he walked on quickly. Tubby Muffin promptly detached himself from the buttress and followed. What Arthur's object was he did not know; but he knew that he did not mean to let the millionaire's son out of his sight.

Apparently unaware that Muffin was close on his track, Arthur entered the house. Muffin followed him in, panting a little from the quick walk. He saw that Beresford-Baggs was hesitating, and stopped to watch him. If Arthur had intended to slip through and escape at the back of the house, he changed his intention, and ran lightly up the big staircase.

After him Tubby Muffin came, panting.

Arthur grinned as he stepped into his study in the Fourth Form passage. Tubby was still labouring breathlessly behind, as Arthur took the key from the door and slipped it into his pocket.

A minute later Tubby's fat face grinned in at the open doorway.

"Hallo, Baggs, old chap!" he said cheerily. "Here we are again!"

Arthur nodded amicably, rather to Tubby's surprise. The fat Classical was prepared to dodge a boot.

"Come in, Tubby!"

"Certainly, old bean!"

Reginald Muffin rolled in—still keeping a wary eye on the millionaire's son. If Arthur had produced a cricket-stump or a fives-bat, Tubby was ready to flee. But that did not seem to be Beresford-Bagg's intention.

"Like some toffee?" he asked.

"What-ho!" said Tubby.

"Try this!"

Arthur opened the table-drawer, and took out a packet of toffee. More and more surprised, Tubby Muffin sampled it. He came to the conclusion that Beresford-Bagg, having realised that he could not get rid of him, was planning to get into his good graces. At that thought, Reginald Muffin became very lofty and patronising indeed.

"Sit down, kid," said Arthur, pointing to the study armchair.

"I don't mind if I do, old top," said Tubby Muffin, sinking into the big chair. "I say, this is good toffee! I don't mind if I have some more."

"Help yourself, Tubby."

"Thanks; I will!"

Arthur strolled carelessly towards the door. Tubby Muffin's eye was on him at once.

"Hold on, I'm coming!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, sit where you are," said Arthur, with his hand on the door.

Tubby chuckled.

"No fear; I'm coming!"

He jumped up, and rolled doorwards as Arthur stepped out into the passage. Before the junior could draw the door shut after him, Tubby's fat paw was on it.

What happened next was like an earthquake to Tubby Muffin.

Arthur made a quick stride towards him, and his fist smote Tubby on the chest with a terrific smite.

"Yarooop!" gasped Muffin.

Bump!

He sat down on the carpet with a concussion that made the study shake.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow, wow!" spluttered Muffin. "Why, you beast—you awful rotter—yow-ow-ow— I'll—I'll ow, wow!"

Slam! Click!

The door was shut, and the key turned

in the lock. Tubby Muffin struggled frantically to his feet.

He clutched at the door-handle, and dragged. But the door did not come open. Outside, Arthur slipped the key into his pocket. Tubby rattled furiously at the door-handle.

"Yah! Lemme out!" he roared. "Baggs, you rotter—lemme out of this room. Do you hear, you cad?"

"Caught!" came Arthur's chuckling voice through the keyhole. "You can finish the toffee, if you like, Muffin. Ha, ha!"

"Blow the toffee! Lemme out of this!" roared Reginald Muffin.

"Good-by-eee!"

"Yah! Lemme out—I'll yell——"

Arthur Beresford-Bagg's walked away down the passage, grinning. Tubby Muffin was safely disposed of; for the present, at least. In the study, the fat Classical rattled the door-handle, and thumped furiously on the panels.

He understood now why Arthur had returned to the house; that the junior had been leading him into a trap all the time. And the thought of how he had walked, quite unsuspectingly, right into the trap, made Tubby Muffin splutter with rage.

Arthur's footsteps died away down the passage, and Tubby Muffin ceased to thump on the door. It was pretty clear that Beresford-Bagg's would not come back to release him, and Tubby had his own reasons for not wanting to attract the attention of anyone else. Mr. Bootles supposed that he was ill, and was under the care of the matron, and a discovery of the facts would have led to painful results for Muffin. He was a prisoner in Study No. 5 until Arthur chose to release him, or until the juniors came out of the Form-rooms after lessons.

"Oh, the awful rotter!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Fancy shutting a chap up like this for a whole blessed afternoon, too! Oh, dear! Just because he's got some beastly shady relative coming! Oh, crumbs! And—and I ought to go back to the Form-room before four. If Mr. Bootles finds out—oh, dear!"

Tubby Muffin's only consolation was in finishing the toffee. But the toffee was soon finished. Then the fat Classical roamed to and fro in the study, a great deal like a caged lion, or, to be more exact, like a caged guinea-pig.

CHAPTER 28.

'Erb!

"THIS 'ere Rookwood?"

Old Mack started.

The old Rookwood porter was sunning himself outside his lodge, when a somewhat untidy head, surmounted by a rather greasy cap, was inserted in the opening of the gates.

Old Mack fixed a stern look upon the inquirer.

Besides the head and the cap, he had a view of a soiled collar and a necktie that would have attracted attention anywhere within a radius of a quarter of a mile of its owner. And old Mack was not pleased with the view.

"This here is Rookwood!" he answered curtly.

"Oh, all right."

"Don't you shove that there gate," snapped old Mack. "The likes of you ain't allowed in 'ere."

A round, rather pimply face looked at him in reddening wrath. The newcomer was a youth of about sixteen, very dusty from a long ride. He eyed old Mack as if he could have bitten him.

"The likes of me!" he ejaculated.

"That's wot I said!" answered old Mack stolidly. "The likes of you, young man! You get on with yer, and don't you lean that bike up agin them gates. Now, then!"

Instead of heeding the porter's injunction, the newcomer gave the gate an angry shove, and it flew open. Then he wheeled a dusty bike in.

Mack watched that proceeding with wide-eyed astonishment and gathering wrath.

"My eye!" exclaimed old Mack. "Of all the neck! Get out of 'ere, you young raskil, afore I come to yer."

"So this is 'ow a bloke is treated when he calls on his relation 'ere," said the stranger bitterly.

"You ain't got no relations 'ere, young man," said Mr. Mack. "If you're a relation of Tupper, the boot-boy, this ain't the gate for you to come in, and you knows it!"

"Blow your boot-boy!" retorted the youth.

"Do I look as if I was a relation of a boot-boy?"

"You don't look 'arf respectable enough!" said Mr. Mack. "Now, then, are you goin' out, or are you asking to be put?"

"Go and fry your features!" was the disrespectful reply of the youth with the necktie.

Old Mack flushed with wrath and made a stride towards the newcomer. There was a patter of footsteps as Arthur Beresford-Baggs came panting up to the gates.

Mr. Mack looked round at him.

"You know this young pusson, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes—yes; he's a—a friend of mine," stammered Arthur.

Cousin Erb burst into a laugh—a bitter, socialistic laugh.

"Friend o' yorn!" he ejaculated. "That's

right; don't you let on to your blooming flunkies that I'm your cousin."

"Oh!" murmured old Mack, comprehending. And Mr. Mack beat a discreet retreat to his lodge. Mr. Mack could really have kicked himself for his mistake. He wondered whether that little unpleasantness would make any difference to his next munificent tip from the millionaire's son.

Arthur's face was crimson. He held out his hand to his dusty cousin, and 'Erb shook it in rather a gingerly fashion. 'Erb's touchy feelings had evidently been wounded.

"Passin' me orf as a friend o' yorn!" he ejaculated. "I'm s'prised at you, Art!"

"I—I never meant—"

"Course, we ain't all rolling in oof," said 'Erb satirically. "We can't all make fortunes out of sausages!"

"Come on, old fellow," said Arthur. "I'll trot your bike in. This way!"

"Don't you be in too big a 'urry," admonished 'Erb. "P'raps I ain't good enough to come to this 'ere plice."

Mack had vanished into his lodge for which Arthur was duly thankful. And he was deeply, deeply thankful that Tubby Muffin was safely locked up in a study, and that it was a half-holiday. If the old quad had been crowded with Rookwood fellows just then it would—

Fortunately, it wasn't! For it could not be denied that Cousin 'Erb's voice and manners left very muen to be desired.

"If I ain't good enough," said Cousin 'Erb independently, "I'll go! I come 'ere quite friendly, but if I ain't good enough—"

"Of—of course, you're good enough, old fellow!" said Arthur soothingly. "Never mind the porter—"

"A bloated menial!" said 'Erb bitterly.

"N-n-not et all. He—you—"

"Liveried flunkey!" said 'Erb, with increasing bitterness. "The kind the bloke torks about on the stool at the street corners. You a-settin' of bloated menials on to your own relations, Art—I'm ashamed of yer!"

"But I—I didn't—"

"You've growed into a snob, Art!" said 'Erb, pointing an accusing and rather grubby forefinger at his dismayed cousin. "That's what's the matter with you, Art! You've growed into a snob, 'ere among swells and such."

"I—I haven't—not really—"

"Taking me for a relation of a blooming boot-boy!" exclaimed 'Erb, with breathless indignation—which seemed to hint that 'Erb himself was not quite free from snobbery.

"Won't you come in, old chap?" urged Arthur. "I'll leave your bike here—we'll go for a spin presently."

"I didn't come 'ere to go for a spin," said 'Erb. "I came to see you. You want to get me out of sight of the swells—what?"

"Oh, 'Erb!"

"Well, I ain't goin' for any old spin," said 'Erb. "I've done enough for a bit. I wouldn't

mind settin' down, and p'r'aps havin' a cup o' tea—"

"Come along!" said Arthur brightly. "The tuckshop's open, and we can get what we want in there."

'Erb hesitated; but he followed Arthur in, leaving his dusty bike leaning against the wall. Arthur led the way to Sergeant Kettle's little shop behind the beeches. Then 'Erb stopped.

"Ain't we going into the 'ouse," he asked.

"We can't get any tea there," explained Arthur. "It isn't tea-time yet."

"I don't mind waiting till tea-time," said 'Erb. "I thought you'd show me the plice. You got a study or something, ain't you?"

"Y-e-s—"

"And friends 'ere, I s'pose?" said 'Erb.

"Oh, yes! But—but it's lesson time," explained Arthur, the fellows are all in class. I've got leave to see you, or I should be in class with the rest."

"I see. I shan't see your friends till they come outer class, is that it?" inquired 'Erb, watching him narrowly.

Poor Arthur looked troubled. He could not explain to 'Erb that he was to go before the fellows came out of class.

"P'r'aps you'd rather they didn't see me?" said 'Erb quick to take offence.

"You—you see—"

"Aunt Sarah said you wasn't growed snobbish, like your father," said 'Erb. "I didn't quite swaller it then. Now I know."

"Never mind my father—"

"I don't mind 'im," said 'Erb loftily. "I don't mind Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs. I can tell you! I'd like 'im to tell me where he found the Beresfords; there ain't any in our branch of the family, I know that."

This agreeable remark elicited no reply from Arthur. The hapless youth was looking very distressed. Uncle Bill and Aunt Sarah were nothing like cousin 'Erb. It was clear that 'Erb had come in a suspicious mood, and that he would have been rather disappointed than otherwise if his suspicions had not been confirmed. But they were confirmed; so he was saved from that disappointment. He was quite anxious to find his wealthy cousin a snob; and he was satisfied that he had found him one.

"Where's your 'eadmaster?" asked 'Erb suddenly.

"He's—he's busy. He takes the Sixth Form, you know."

"I don't know," answered 'Erb.

He turned his back on the tuckshop and came through the beeches again. He stared up with some interest at the great facade of Rookwood.

"So the 'eadmaster's busy, and all the blokes are busy," he remarked. "There ain't nobody for me to see. I cessay the 'eadmaster won't be busy all day, though. Are you goin' to interaooose me to your 'eadmaster?"

"There—there's no need—"

"Ain't there?" said 'Erb, with mocking sarcasm. "No, I s'pose there ain't, Art! And

Aunt Sarah said you wasn't growed a snob! You pulled the wool over 'er eyes proper."

"I say, 'Erb—!" murmured Arthur.

"There's a bloke there a-watchin' of us!" said 'Erb, indicating a distant study window with a dirty thumb. Arthur started, and glanced in the indicated direction. The fat face of Tubby Muffin was framed in the window of Study No. 5 in the Fourth.

"Let's get into the shop and have some tea!" gasped Arthur.

"You don't want that bloke even to see me?" sneered 'Erb. "Was a fool to come 'ere. I knowed what to expect, and you're jest as I expected to find you, Art. Well, I ain't goin' to disgrace you afore your swell friends. I'm goin'!"

"'Erb!" exclaimed Arthur in great distress. But cousin 'Erb did not heed. He strode away towards the gates, with settled determination in his lowering brow.

Arthur hurried after him.

"'Erb, old chap, you'll stay a bit and—"

"No, I won't!" answered 'Erb, dragging his bicycle away from the wall. "I ain't wanted 'ere, and I knows it!"

"I'm glad to see you, 'Erb—"

"Are you goin' to interduce me to your 'eadmaster?" demanded 'Erb, with the air of a fellow propounding a "poser."

"There's no need; Dr. Chisholm won't expect to see you. Do be reasonable, 'Erb, old fellow—"

"I ain't reasonable now, ain't I?" said 'Erb. "Well, I'm goin'—if you'll horder your pampered menia; to hopen that there gate."

"I'll open it—but—"

Cousin 'Erb wheeled his bike out into the road. Arthur watched him, hardly knowing whether to be more pleased at his departure or distressed by his perversity. 'Erb stood holding his bike for a minute, while he addressed a gracious farewell to his cousin.

"Good-bye, Art!" he said. "I knowed what to expect, and it's 'appened. That's all!"

And with that, cousin 'Erb threw a leg over his bike, mounted, and pedalled away.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs stood gazing after him until a turn of the road hid him from sight.

Then he sighed, as he turned back into the gateway of Rookwood School. Cousin 'Erb's visit had not added to his happiness.

Jimmy Silver clapped Arthur on the shoulder cheerily when the Fourth came out of their class-room. He found the gilded youth "mooching" rather aimlessly in the quad, with a clouded, thoughtful brow.

"Had a good time this afternoon?" asked Jimmy cheerily.

"Oh, ripping!" said Arthur glumly.

"Seen anything of Muffin?"

"Muffin! Oh, my hat!"

Arthur ran into the house. Jimmy Silver's question had recalled Tubby to his mind, whom he had completely forgotten. He ran up to the

Fourth-Form passage to release the fat Classical.

"You—you—you rotter!" spluttered Tubby Muffin, as the door opened. "I saw him—I saw the boulder from the window! I'll tell Topsy and Topy and Smythe and—yarooooop!"

Tubby Muffin fled from the study with the exasperated Arthur's boot behind him. Arthur slammed the door after the fat Classical as he fled. Then he threw himself into a chair glumly. He was thinking of cousin Erb and his satirical bitterness; and wondering, too, what effect Tubby's description of the visitor would have upon his nutty friends. Undoubtedly there were thorns in the path of the son of a millionaire whose relatives had not become millionaires also!

CHAPTER 29.

Tubby Muffin Means Business!

"JIMMY, old chap—"

Tubby Muffin tugged at the sleeve of Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Jimmy was in the quadrangle with Lovell and Raby and Newcome when Reginald Muffin thus made himself observed.

"Jimmy, come with me, will you?"

Jimmy Silver jerked his sleeve away.

"That depends," he answered. "I'm not coming to the tuckshop, Tubby. I don't want to stand treat, you know. I'm not wealthy enough."

"Tain't the tuckshop this time, it's business," said Tubby Muffin earnestly. "I want you to come with me to speak to Beresford-Baggs."

"Can't you speak to him without my help?"

"Well, he might cut up rusty," said Tubby cautiously. "You never know how to take the fellow, you know. I've got to talk business with him, and—and if he cuts up rusty and—"

"Well, suppose he cuts up rusty," demanded Jimmy Silver, "what am I to do?"

"Oh, you can give him a licking, you know!" said Tubby. "I'm not in form just now to lick him myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, old fellow!" urged Tubby Muffin. "He's in his study now, and I want to catch him while Topsy and Topy and Rawson ain't there. You might oblige me, Jimmy. Just for a few minutes."

"Blessed if I catch on!" said Jimmy Silver, quite mystified. "Still, I'll come if you like. Anything for a quiet life!"

"That's right, old top!"

Jimmy Silver nodded to his chums and followed Tubby Muffin into the house.

What the fat Classical's "business" with Beresford-Baggs might be Jimmy could not guess, neither was he very much interested in the matter. But Jimmy always found it easier to say "Yes" than to say "No." And so he followed Muffin up to the Fourth Form

passage and stopped at the door of Study No. 5.

Tubby Muffin tapped at the door, opened it, and blinked in.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs was there. He was walking about the study with his hands in his pockets, with a worried wrinkle in his brow. He did not seem quite at his ease, and it was plain that he was thinking disagreeable thoughts.

Arthur stopped his walking to and fro as the two juniors entered, and fixed his eyes upon them inquiringly. To Jimmy Silver he nodded in a friendly way, but on Reginald Muffin he bestowed a look that was far from cordial. And he seemed surprised to see them together.

"Come in, Jimmy!" said Tubby Muffin. "Better shut the door. We don't want all the fellows to hear."

"What the thump—" began Arthur Beresford-Baggs.

"Don't ask me," said Jimmy Silver. "Tubby asked me to come here, because he's got something to say to you, and he thinks you might pitch into him. I'm to protect him, as far as I can make out. I suppose he's wandering in his mind, as usual."

Arthur knitted his brows. Perhaps he had some anticipation of what Master Muffin was going to say.

"Now, we'll come to business!" said Tubby Muffin, keeping Jimmy Silver between himself and Arthur. "Yesterday, Baggs, your cousin came to see you."

"No business of yours," said Arthur gruffly.

"I saw him!" continued Tubby Muffin. "You got leave from classes, and so did I. You locked me up in this study so that I couldn't see him. But I saw him from the window."

Jimmy Silver interrupted.

"Is that what you've got to say to Beresford-Baggs, Tubby?" he inquired.

"Yes, and some more!"

"Then I'll get out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Muffin, in alarm. "I want you to see me through, Jimmy. You can see that Baggs is looking rather raty already."

Jimmy burst into a laugh.

"I don't see why Baggs should mind if you saw his cousin," he remarked.

"He was spying!" growled Arthur.

"I saw him, but, for Baggs' sake, I'm going to keep it dark. I've offered Baggs to keep it dark, and he kicked me, Jimmy!"

"Oh!"

"He did really! I simply asked him for a loan at the same time, and he said I was trying to get money out of him—"

"What?"

"Would you believe it?" said Muffin, more in sorrow than in anger. "He did really, you know. Of course, I thought a quid pro quo was fair. I keep his rotten cousin dark, and he lends me five pounds. He's got plenty of money. Five pounds isn't much, is it, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver stared blankly at the fat Classical.

"He could scarcely believe his ears.

Tubby Muffin had brought him there as a protection while he "squeezed" cash out of the millionaire's son in consideration of keeping dark what he had learned by prying!

It was incredible. But it was true.

Tubby Muffin did not seem to think there was anything extraordinary in his remarkable line of action—in fact, he was appealing to Jimmy Silver for a candid opinion.

"That's how it stands—I keep his relation dark, and he stands me five pounds," he said.

"Do you think that's fair, Jimmy?"

"Fuf-fuf-fair!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Of course, I want to be quite fair," said Tubby, blinking at him. "I shouldn't like to do anything mean."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You—you—you wouldn't like to do anything mean?"

"No fear! Some fellows are not so particular as I am, I know. But the fact is, in dealing with a low bouncer like Beresford-Baggs, I feel that it's up to me to remember very carefully that I am a gentleman," said Tubby. "It's setting Baggs a good example, and all that—helping him to see how really well-born people behave. So I want to do the fair thing, Jimmy. And if you think five pounds is too much, I'll take four pound ten."

"Oh, my hat!"

"A tenner would be nearer the mark," said Tubby Muffin. "But I'm a fellow of my word; I'll make it four pounds ten shillings. I always was too generous. What do you say, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver gasped for breath.

"I—I—I don't quite know what to say," he stuttered. "I—I don't think it's much good saying anything to you, Muffin. Actions are better than words, in your case. Have you a cricket stump in your study, Baggs?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind giving Muffin a dozen, while I hold him over the table?"

"With pleasure."

"Here, I say!" roared Tubby Muffin, in great alarm. "Wharrer you at, Jimmy Silver! I brought you here to keep him off—yaroooh—leggo! I—I—I'll take three pounds—yaroooh!"

Jimmy Silver's grasp had closed on the fat Classical. Tubby Muffin found himself whirled upon the study table, face downward, with Jimmy's iron grip on the back of his neck pinning him there. Arthur Beresford-Baggs, grinning, picked a stump out of a corner.

"A dozen, well laid on!" said Jimmy.

"You bet!"

Whack! whack! whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-woop!"

There were sounds of anguish in No. 5 Study.

Tubby Muffin had thought it very astute to bring Jimmy Silver with him, as a protection while he carried on his negotiations with the millionaire's son. But it was not turning out much of a success. His protector's hand

gripped his collar and pinned him to the table, while the stump rose and fell with great vigour.

Whack! whack! whack!

"Ow! ow! ow! Yooooooop!"

CHAPTER 30.

A Peculiar Predicament!

ARTHUR BERESFORD-BAGGS laid on the dozen, with undiminished vigour. He seemed to find some solace in it. It was quite otherwise with Tubby Muffin; his yells of wrath and anguish ran along the Fourth-Form passage from end to end.

When the punishment was completed, Jimmy Silver jerked him off the table and whirled him to the door.

"Sow, you fat rascal——"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Let me catch you trying to squeeze money out of Baggs again, and I'll make it really warm for you."

"Woooooop!"

"Now get out!"

Arthur opened the door, and Jimmy, with a whirl of his arm, sent the fat Classical spinning into the passage. Jimmy felt it was time Tubby Muffin had a lesson; he certainly needed one. Tubby spun across the passage, and brought up against the opposite wall, and collapsed there.

"Hold on a minute, Silver," said Arthur, as the captain of the Fourth was following Muffin out.

"Yes, old scout."

Jimmy turned back into the study. Arthur closed the door, and stood looking at him with a worried brow.

"You've been pretty decent to me, ever since I came to Rookwood, Silver," he said, in a low voice.

"No reason why I shouldn't be," said Jimmy cheerily.

"You've seen my relations——"

Jimmy smiled.

"Don't you worry, old top," he said. "We're not all Muffins, you know. Besides, your relations are all right. Uncle Bill is a good old sort, and Aunt Sarah is quite nice. I haven't seen your cousin."

"I—I—I've been rather a fool," muttered Arthur. "When I came here, it seems that my father never let them know I was at Rookwood. But—but I wrote to them; I didn't want to give them the go-by. I—I never thought about them visiting me here. Of—of course, I'm not ashamed of my relations; but—but they're low, there's no getting out of that. And—and there's more to come."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"It's getting too 'ot," said Arthur, unconsciously dropping into old modes of speech, as he often did when worried. "Altogether too 'ot. Uncle Bill was kep' off, and Aunt Sarah was explained, in a way—and cousin 'Erb got

rusty and cleared hout—only that cad Muffin saw him. But—but—father's got to 'ear of it. He sees them sometimes, you know. I—I'm afraid he rather patronises them. And they've told him about 'aving come 'ere, and he's wrote to me in an awful wax."

"That's rather bad," said Jimmy sympathetically.

There was an interruption, as a fat voice bawled through the keyhole:

"Yah! I'm going to tell Smythe about cousin 'Erb! Yah!"

Arthur made a furious stride towards the door.

But the rapid patter of footsteps in the passage told that Reginald Muffin had fled. Doubtless he was gone to the Shell quarters to convey interesting information to Adolphus Smythe.

Arthur wrinkled his brows.

"I shouldn't worry about that fat idiot, kid," said Jimmy Silver. "Nobody takes much notice of his yarns; he's too well known as an awful fibber."

"That isn't all," said Arthur restlessly. "I—I've had some letters from my other relations. Uncle Peter wants to see me—and—and Aunt Jane! And my cousins, the Hopkinsees—and—and—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And father's in an awful wax, and he's coming down to see me about it," said Arthur dismally.

"The worst of it is, that father's coming on Wednesday afternoon, as it's a half-holiday," said Arthur, "and—and—and—they're coming the same day."

"Phew!"

"Uncle Bill's written to me, too. He says 'Erb came back in a rotten temper, saying that I was stuck-up, and all that. Uncle Bill thinks he's mistaken, and—and he's persuaded 'Erb to come here again on Wednesday, with all the rest, just to show him he's wrong. They're making up a family party of it!" groaned Arthur.

Jimmy Silver was silent.

It was an extraordinary situation, and undoubtedly very awkward for the son of the millionaire.

"There'll be seven or eight," said Arthur. "I—I can't tell 'em to keep away. I'm not going to wound their feelings. They was kind to me when I was a nipper, and they're fond of me now. Even 'Erb's a good sort, though he's bitter and jealous now. But—but what is a bloke to do?"

"Blessed if I know," said Jimmy Silver, candidly. "I suppose your father was right in keeping your address here a secret, considering."

"I suppose so; but I've b'en and gone and let it out. And—and you know 'ow Smythe and Towny, and the rest, will turn up their noses when they see my people," mumbled Arthur.

"Let 'em," said Jimmy.

"And—and what father will say, if he finds

them all here when he comes, I don't dare to think!"

"Can't you warn him?"

Arthur shivered.

"I don't dare to. He would be so wild! P'raps I can get rid of them before he comes. Or—or p'raps I can put them off. What would you do, Silver?"

Jimmy reflected.

"Well, a chap has the right not to receive visitors if he doesn't want them," he said. "I'd put them off."

"I dunno if it will make any difference—they ain't got much tact. They'd cut up rusty, too, if they thought I was looking down on 'em!" muttered Arthur miserably. "I—I think I shall ask father to send me to some other school. And—and then I shan't write to them; I'll manage to see them in the 'olidays, and that will do. I—I think I'll write to Uncle Bill, and tell him my father's coming here on Wednesday, and so it will be better for him to put off bringing his party."

"That's a good idea!" said Jimmy.

Arthur sat down at the table, with pen and ink, and Jimmy left the study. He was feeling very sympathetic towards Beresford-Baggs; but he could not help smiling.

Jimmy Silver found Townsend and Topham in earnest conversation at the end of the passage. They stopped him as he came by.

"Is there anything in this, Silver?" asked Towny.

"In what?"

"Muffin's yarn."

"Bother Muffin!"

"We know he's an awful fibber," remarked Topham. "But—but—we've made friends with Beresford-Baggs. We took him at face value. He's a fellow worth knowin' in a way—"

"In a way!" agreed Townsend.

"But—but if it's true that he's got such a crew hangin' on to him—"

"Then we couldn't know him—"

"Impossible!"

"Oh, quite impossible! What do you think, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver snorted.

"I think you're a pair of silly asses and snobs!" he answered, and he went downstairs, leaving Towny and Topy to digest that candid reply.

CHAPTER 31.

The Cold Shoulder.

"WHAT'S the matter with Smythe?" Lovell of the Fourth asked that question with a grin.

It was the following day, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were walking in the quadrangle after lessons.

Smythe, Tracy and Howard of the Shell were sauntering elegantly under the beeches, when Arthur Beresford-Baggs came by.

On all previous occasions when Adolphus Smythe had encountered Beresford-Baggs he had

smiled his sweetest smile and nodded his graceful nod. But now there was a change.

Smythe glanced at the millionaire's son and slightly changed his direction, so as to pass him without meeting him.

Arthur noted the movement, doubtless without comprehending it; for he also changed his direction a little, so as to meet the nuts of the Shell face to face as he came up.

Then Adolphus Smythe took another turn to starboard, as it were, and sheered off once more.

Arthur, still not comprehending, took a turn to port, so that he was still coming on directly towards the nuts of the Shell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped to observe these peculiar evolutions.

"Smythe's dodgin' him!" said Raby.

"Only he don't see it!" grinned Newcome.

"But what the thump is he dodgin' him for?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, perplexed. "They were as thief as thieves! Smythe was his giddy shadow, followin' him everywhere!"

"There he goes again!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Adolphus Smythe turned several points to the starboard now, and was walking away from Beresford-Baggs.

This was too plain for Arthur to misunderstand, and he stopped, a flush creeping into his cheeks.

Having thus shaken off the "bounder," Adolphus Smythe strolled on elegantly with his comrades, all three of them smiling.

Arthur glanced round, and saw the Fistical Four, and his flush deepened. Then, after a moment or two's thought, he quickened his pace and overtook Adolphus Smythe & Co.

"Smythe!" he exclaimed.

Adolphus seemed deaf.

"What about a walk out of gates, you fellows?" he said to his comrades.

"Good egg!" said Howard.

"Oh, come on," remarked Tracy. "Too many bounders trottin' about in the quad."

"Smythe!" shouted Arthur.

Smythe & Co., still hard of hearing, walked towards the gates.

The next moment Smythe met with a surprise. A hand grasped his shoulder from behind, and he was spun round, so suddenly that he nearly collapsed.

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Adolphus.

Arthur glowered at him.

"Now, I'd like to know what this 'ere means!" he exclaimed hotly.

"This 'ere!" murmured Howard. "Oh, gad! This 'ere!"

"Dreadful!" murmured Tracy.

"You jest tell me what this game is!" said Arthur angrily. "You 'eard me! I was speakin' to you!"

"Ahem!"

"You don't want to speak to me, what?"

"The fact is, dear boy, that your society has 'alled," said Adolphus Smythe, recovering his coolness, and his insolence at the same time.

"You mean Muffin's been tellin' you——"

"What with one thing and another, dear boy, we've grown rather fed with your acquaintance," said Adolphus, with cheerful impertinence.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Old on!" said Arthur, as his nutty friends—friends no longer—were moving away. "I've got somethin' to say to you, Smythe."

"Sorry, I've no time, dear boy!"

"You'd better find time," said Arthur grimly. "You take another step till I give you leave, and I'll wipe up the ground with yer!"

Arthur advanced grimly on Smythe with his hand raised, evidently with offensive intentions towards Adolphus' nose. Smythe backed away in great alarm.

"Keep off, you low cad! Oooooooch!"

Adolphus put up his hands, as his nose was seized. Howard and Tracy, feeling strong in numbers, rushed to his aid.

"This is where we chip in!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Fair play's a jewel!"

"You bet!" grinned Lovell.

And Howard and Tracy were promptly collared by the Fistical Four, and spun away whirling under the beeches. Adolphus Smythe was left to deal alone with Arthur. He did not have good fortune. The millionaire's son drove him back with a series of taps upon his aristocratic features, till he stumbled over his sprawl-

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ing comrades under the beeches, and fell across Tracy, gasping.

Then Arthur drove his hands into his pockets, and walked away with a moody brow.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered on, grinning. Adolphus Smythe and Tracy and Howard sorted themselves out, and scrambled up.

"Oh gad!" moaned Adolphus, feeling his nose. "Jever hear of such an awful cad! Such a rotten outsider! Ow!"

"Such a beastly ruffian! Wow!" mumbled Tracy.

"Wow-ow!" said Howard. "Those beasts were backin' him up—ow!—or we'd have handled him—ow! I'm goin' to cut him dead after this! Wow!"

"Same here! Ow!" Adolphus & Co. kept their word. The hapless boulder of Rookwood was cut dead by that select company. And in his own study he found Townsend and Topham decidedly standoffish. They seemed to be taking their cue from Adolphus.

Poor Arthur felt that it was the beginning of the end, and that the end would come with a crash when the "family party" arrived at Rookwood. After that—He did not like to think of his career at Rookwood after that!

CHAPTER 32.

Many Visitors!

"**NONSENSE!**"

Jimmy Silver glanced up. It was Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at Rookwood. And it was a fine, clear day, and the Fistical Four of the Fourth were feeling very cheery. They were debating what they were going to do with the afternoon, when their discussion was interrupted by a powerful voice, pronouncing in emphatic accents "Nonsense!"

A tremendous motor-car was standing on the gravel, which everybody guessed to belong to Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggis. That tremendous car had been seen at Rookwood before. And it was Sir Japhet who was entering the house in company with his hopeful son, to whom he was expressing his opinion in such emphatic accents.

"Nonsense! Utter nonsense!"

"But, father—"

"Nonsense!"

"Will you come into the visitors' room, father?" asked Arthur, with a rather uneasy glance round.

"Yes!" snapped the baronet.

It was evident that the baronet was angry. He raised a podgy forefinger and shook it at his son.

"Nonsense!" he said. "I took every precaution to inform your relatives of nothing in connection with your school; and you must write to them from here! And you did not think! You ought to have thought! Haven't you any brains?"

"My brother William," pursued the baronet, "has been here—William, whose utterly low tastes and manners were a disgrace to the family in the days when we were not as we are now. And Sarah—Sarah, who persists in keeping a small greengrocer's shop, and in refusing my offer to pension her in a comfortable seaside home at a safe distance. And my nephew Herbert—a low young rascal! What do you expect a school like Rookwood to think of you, with such relations coming here! Nonsense!"

The angry gentleman puffed and blew.

"You were popular, I understand, when you first came here, Arthur?"

"Yes, dad."

"Have any of your schoolfellows changed to you since your poor relations came?"

Arthur hesitated. He thought of Smythe & Co., and of the growing distance in the manners of Towny and Topy.

"You need not answer!" snapped the baronet. "I can see that there is a change. With a little sense, you would have expected it. Uncle Bill, Aunt Sarah, Cousin Herbert! Aunt Jane and Uncle Peter next, I dare say!"

Arthur lowered his eyes.

He simply dared not state that those undesirable relatives might quite possibly turn up at Rookwood School that very afternoon.

True, he had written to Uncle Bill to postpone the family visit, but he was not at all sure that Uncle Bill would take the hint. Uncle Bill could be very obtuse sometimes.

If they came—

"Nonsense!" grunted Sir Japhet. "Really, it looks as if I shall have to take you away from Rookwood. You were sent here, sir, to get polish, and to make desirable acquaintances. Instead of that, you allow a band of undesirable relatives to follow you here and disgrace you! I am ashamed of you! Pah!"

And the baronet puffed and blew again; and, indeed, at that moment looked so like his brother William, that, save for the expensiveness of his clothes, it would have been difficult to distinguish the baronet from the fish-merchant.

"I shall have to consider about this," said Sir Japhet. "It may be necessary to remove you to another school. Then, I trust, you would be sensible enough not to write to your poor relations; at all events, not to give them your address."

"Yes, father," said Arthur, in a low voice.

He gave a violent start the next moment. From where he stood before his father, he had a view of a window, and the window gave a view of the school gates. The gates were open, and several fellows were loafing there. In from the road came a fat, red-complexioned man, and Arthur's heart almost stood still as he recognised his Uncle Bill. Following Uncle Bill came a striking-looking lady in an immense hat with nodding botanical adornments. It was Aunt Sarah.

The baronet, fortunately, had his back to the window, and did not see the visitors. He was

still speaking, but his dutiful son was no longer listening. His eyes were fixed on the distant gates, as if by fascination. Uncle Bill and Aunt Sarah had come in merrily, and the juniors at the gates were "capping" them with smiling faces. Following them came a youth in a loud, emphatic necktie, and pimples, recognisable as Cousin 'Erb. And even that was not all.

There now appeared an angular gentleman in rusty black clothes, and a rusty silk hat, known to Arthur Beresford-Baggs as his Uncle Peter. With him was a stout lady with a very high complexion, whom he had known in old days as Aunt Jane.

The family party had evidently decided upon that afternoon.

Two youths of about thirteen completed the party. These were the Hopkins cousins. Both of them had plump red cheeks, bulging with toffee; but they were dressed in their best. The cut of their best clothes was not exactly what Towny or Topsy would have regarded as "the thing."

Arthur hardly breathed.

He was in terror lest his father should glance round at the window and behold the happy family party.

Fortunately, the baronet was too deeply interested in his own remarks, which he was firing off at a great rate, without noting that his son and heir was failing to pay him proper attention.

Sir Japhet jerked to his feet at last.

"Remember all I have told you, Arthur!"

"Ye-e-es, father."

"I am now going to see the Head," said Sir Japhet. "I shall see you again before I leave."

"Ye-e-es!" gasped Arthur.

CHAPTER 33.

The Family Party

"HI, young shaver!" That elegant address was directed to Jimmy Silver, in the powerful tones of Mr. William Baggs. The Fistical Four had gone out into the quad, intending to go out of gates. But the sight of the newly-arrived family-party stopped them.

"Oh, my hat, they've come!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Baggy's people?" asked Lovell, with a stare.

"Yes."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What a merry crew!" grinned Mornington of the Fourth. "Young Baggs will be pleased!"

"Poor old Baggy!" murmured Raby.

"His father's here, too!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "He, he, he! I say, do you think old Baggs will be glad to see the other Baggses? He, he, he!"

"Hi, young shaver!"

"He's calling you, Jimmy!" chortled Lovell.

"Go and see what he wants! Dash it, let's all go! We know the gentleman."

"He, he, he!"

Smythe & Co. were looking at the family party from a distance with almost breathless horror. Townsend and Topham were regarding them from Little Quad, archway. In all directions fellows were looking at them. Uncle Bill & Co. might have been a visiting circus, from the interest and entertainment they were exciting.

The Fistical Four bore down upon them. Whatever Smythe & Co. thought, Jimmy Silver saw no reason for lacking civility towards the visitors. He raised his cap gracefully to the ladies, and his comrades followed his example, and he had the gratification of hearing Aunt Sarah whisper to Aunt Jane, "What a nice little boy!"

"Remember me, what?" said Uncle Bill, in his hearty tones.

"Oh, yes, rather, sir!" said Jimmy.

"We've come to give young Art a look-in!" said Uncle Bill affably. "Where's young Art?"

"I'll go and call him," squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"Thank you kindly, young gentleman!"

Tubby cut off, in huge delight.

"Fine ole plice this!" said Uncle William, pushing his bowler-hat back on his head, and taking a survey of the great facade of Rookwood.

"Topping, isn't it!" said Lovell.

"Nice for young Art to be 'ere!" said Mr. Baggs.

"I believe you," said Uncle Peter. "Bit of a change from old times, Bill!"

"You may lay to that!" agreed Uncle Bill.

"Something for me to do in my line 'ere," continued Uncle Peter. To Jimmy Silver's amazement, he took hold of the junior's jacket, and appeared to examine it with great care. "I deessay Art would put in a word for me, for the sake of the family," he went on. "You young gents ever sell your cast-off clothes?"

"N-n-unno!" gasped Jimmy.

"More's the pity!" said Uncle Peter. "I'd give you good prices. I'd make it worth your while if you ever thought of disposing of them. That's my line, you know—gents' cast-off wardrobe."

"Gent's cast-off wardrobe!" murmured Lovell dazedly.

"That's it," said Uncle Peter cheerily. "I'd make you a good price for them jackets when you've done with 'em. Clothes is fetching big prices now. By gum, if I'd the refusal of all the second-hand clothes in the school like this, it would be the making of me in my trade! P'raps the 'Ead would be willing to 'ear a business proposition on the subject."

"I don't s'pose the 'eadmaster sells his clothes to a dealer, 'eter," said Aunt Jane, with a shake of the head.

"I don't see why not," answered Uncle Peter.

"These are 'ard times, and we give a good price. Jane! You see, young sir," continued

Uncle Peter, addressing Jimmy, "my idea is this, give a good price for a good article. You can't beat that. I'm open to look over any gents' or boys' left-off wearing apparel. You rely on me to give you full value."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Thank you!" stammered Jimmy

"Sale or exchange," explained Uncle Peter further. "You can come and look over my stock, and anything you sees, you p'int it out—see? I've got a lounge suit in grey that would jest suit you. I bought it of a young nobleman only last week. It would s'prise you, the people that are selling their left-off wardrobes in these 'ere days. Rich folks, you know—really grand people, what wouldn't look at the likes of you or me!"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

Lovell chuckled helplessly. Jimmy's civility to Uncle Peter had the rather inevitable result that Uncle Peter cheerfully reduced him to his own level at once.

"I got a young gent's overcoat," pursued Uncle Peter, who evidently had an eye to business wherever he found himself; "practically noo, that would suit you down to the ground. Only been worn about three times."

"I—I—"

"Sold to me by the son of a big fish dealer in 'Igh Street, Camden Town," said Uncle Peter impressively. "Real 'igh-class young gent, what wouldn't wear anything that wasn't real nobby. I can assure you! I'd let you have that overcoat—"

"Here's Art!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah.

"This way, Art!" bawled Uncle Bill.

Arthur came hurrying out of the School House. Tubby Muffin met him outside the door, and started to speak; but the worried junior gave him a push, which made Tubby sit down all of a sudden. Then the millionaire's son came scudding across the quad, to meet his relations.

He was immediately embraced and kissed by his affectionate aunts, and shaken hands with by the uncles and cousins. Even Cousin 'Erb shook hands, though with a rather reserved air. Cousin 'Erb was on the watch for any trace of "stuck-up," and prepared to take mortal offence at the slightest sign of it.

"Ow well the boy do look, to be sure!" said Aunt Jane. "You find this place good for your 'ealth, Art?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Thought we'd come, as you said my brother Jap was 'ere to-day," said Uncle William. "No need to put off a visit on that account, like you suggested in your letter, Art. I says to t' old woman, says I, 'Why with Jap there, we'll be quite a 'appy, united family, same as in the old days, afore Jap made 'is money and became so grand!' says I. 'Right you are, Bill,' says the ole woman!"

"Oh, dear!"

"'Erb," continued the hearty uncle—"Erb comes round t'other day, and says, says 'Erb, that you'd growd stuck-up, 'ere at the big school, among all the swells, says 'Erb. 'Not a bit of it,' I says. 'I been down to see Art,' I says,

'and found him all right,' I says; 'and I speak as I find,' I says. 'You're mistook, 'Erb,' I says, 'and you come alonger me and see Art again,' I says, 'and you'll find 'im just the same old Art what used to sweep out the fish-shop,' I says."

What to do with his cheery relations was a puzzle to Arthur. It was pretty clear that there was no getting rid of them. Uncle Bill was leading the way towards the house, and did not even seem to hear the stammered remarks of his nephew.

"Where's Jap?" he inquired.

"I—I think he's with the Head!" mumbled Arthur.

"Good! We'll see the 'Ead while we're 'ere," said Uncle Bill heartily. "I was thinking, Art, whether I could do any business 'ere, supplying the school with fresh fish at reasonable prices. I s'pose your father wouldn't mind. You could put in a word for me, p'r'aps—speaking as one who's worked in my shop and knows the quality of the goods."

"I—I—"

"Trust young Art to do a relation a good turn," said Uncle Peter. "Art's going to put in a word for me, too. I can tell you, Bill, there's a big business to be done 'ere, in takin' up the young gentlemen's cast-off wardrobes—"

"Hallo, here's Uncle Jap's ear!" said Cousin 'Erb, with bitter admiration. "Ain't we nobby?"

The family party gathered round the tremendous car to admire it. Cousin 'Erb was bitter, but the rest of the party were in high good-humour, and evidently out to enjoy themselves. Arthur, feeling as if all the eyes at Rookwood were upon him, but unable to desert his happy relations, stood in the noisy crowd with a scarlet face.

And just then a portly form appeared in sight, and Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs, Baronet, stepped out of the house, and met his charming family circle face to face.

CHAPTER 34.

Exit Arthur!

"E RE'S Jap!"
 "Howdy do, Jap, old man?"
 "My! Ain't we dressed up!"
 Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs gave the family party a frozen look. He seemed rooted to the old stone steps.

His expensive chauffeur was surveying the party with a lurking grin. It was borne in upon Sir Japhet's mind, even at that moment, that he would have to sack that chauffeur.

The unfortunate millionaire was simply overwhelmed. He seemed only able to blink at his relations, and gasp for breath like a fish out of water.

"S'prised to see us, what?" said Uncle Bill heartily. "We come down to see Art at 'is grand school. We 'eard you was 'ere, Jap, old boy, and glad I am to see you, for one."

"He ain't glad to see us," sneered Cousin 'Erb.

"You shut up, 'Erb. You're always a-picking of faults in folks," said Uncle Bill. "That's what comes of listening to them spouters at the street corners. You take off your 'at to your uncle!"

Cousin 'Erb shrugged his shoulders. He was at no loss to interpret the expression on Sir Japhet's eloquent countenance.

"Upon my word!" gasped Sir Japhet, at length.

Mr. Bootles loomed up in the doorway behind the baronet. Mr. Bootles was in a state of amazement. He had seen the invasion from his study window, and he wanted to know what it was about.

"Who—who—who are these—these persons?" stammered Mr. Bootles. "Do you know them, Baggs?"

"Persons!" sneered Cousin 'Erb. "That's what we are—persons! Ho!"

"They—they—" stammered Arthur. "They—they're my relations, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"Young Art's uncles and aunts and cousins, come to see 'im among the swells!" said Uncle Bill heartily. "That's 'ow it is, sir!"

"Dear me! 1-1—"

Mr. Bootles did not feel himself equal to the situation. He beat a hasty retreat into the house. In his haste he almost collided with the Head, who was coming doorwards.

"Who—who are these people, Mr. Bootles?" ejaculated Dr. Chisholm.

"They—they—they appear to be the—the—the relatives of Beresford-Baggs, of my Form, sir!" habbled Mr. Bootles.

"Oh!"

Uncle Bill's voice was heard again.

"What's the matter with you, Japhet? I'd like to know why you're standing there like a stuck pig instead of speaking a word to your own flesh and blood!"

Uncle William was apparently approximating to the opinion of Cousin 'Erb.

The baronet seemed to wake up suddenly as from a trance.

"Arthur!" he gasped.

"Yes, dad?" mumbled Arthur.

"Get into the car!"

"Ye-es."

Arthur Beresford-Baggs stepped into the big car. His father followed him in. He rapped out one fierce word to the chauffeur.

"Home!"

The car throbbed.

"My heye!" exclaimed Uncle Bill. "Not goin' without a word to your own flesh and blood, Jap?"

"What did I tell you?" sneered Cousin 'Erb bitterly.

"Japhet—"

"Look 'ere—"

"I'd like to know—"

The car moved along the gravel. Sir Japhet sat bolt upright in it, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Arthur sat by his side, his eyes cast down, his face like a beetroot.

"Well, my heye!" said Uncle William.

"Yah! Stuck-up!" howled Cousin 'Erb.

"Jever see the likes of it, Jane?"

"No, I never did, Peter!"

"Yah! Stuck-up!"

The car disappeared out of the gates of Rookwood, carrying away the schoolboy millionaire and his father. Beresford-Baggs' place in the Fourth Form at Rookwood was to know him no more.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

That was all Jimmy could say.

It was over. Beresford-Baggs and his father the baronet were gone; and the family party departed in a very dissatisfied and indignant frame of mind—Cousin 'Erb more bitter than ever.

Probably the schooldays of Arthur Beresford-Baggs were to be continued in another quarter—of which the precise address would not be known to his affectionate relatives.

At all events, Rookwood saw him no more. His belongings were sent after him the next day, and that was the last of Beresford-Baggs, so far as Rookwood School was concerned.

Adolphus Smythe and his nutty friends declared that they breathed more easily when he was gone. Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather sorry he had departed. They had grown rather to like the heir of Sir Japhet Beresford-Baggs. But doubtless Arthur was happier in another school—safe from the affectionate attentions of his worthy relatives.



OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

DRAKE'S DRUM!

Beating to Quarters!

The old sea-dogs' spirit which prepared, and still maintains, premier right of way for Britain's ships up and down the Seven Seas exists strongest, they say, to-day around the rugged scaboard of the West Country. More especially because the shade of Drake—as again they say—hovers vigilantly there still, ever in readiness to lend courage to the modern sea-dogs engaged in hazardous undertakings on behalf of our wonderful Empire.

Many West Country seafarers believe that sometimes there may be heard a stirring roll, the tapping of an invisible drum, out to sea off Plymouth Hoe—Drake's drum, beating to quarters, keeping his spectral crew at their posts aboard the centuries-gone Golden Hind.

That self-same drum, that was sounded at the great sea-adventurer's burial, exists still, "in the flesh" along with other exciting relics of the hardy old seaman who sailed around the world in Queen Elizabeth's day in an absurdly tiny vessel of 100 tons—the Golden Hind, of imperishable fame.

The Gallant Golden Hind!

There is Drake's sword and stick, his snuff-box, his drinking cup and embroidered cap, his portrait, his queer old navigating instruments, the Bible that went round the world with him, the chart of that amazing voyage, bearing his signature; and, even more precious to-day, a chair and table made from the actual timbers of the gallant Golden Hind.

Some of these things are in the Royal United Services Museum. The table is in London, in the great hall where the legal big-wigs daily foregather. The chair is at Oxford. With the exception of these two-items, every scrap of the Golden Hind has long since vanished. The pity of it is that that wonderful little craft was not preserved to lie alongside Nelson's flagship, the Victory which now stands in great state in dry dock at Portsmouth.

When the Golden Hind got back to England, from her record-making and memorable journey—its crew were the first English mariners to sail round the world—loaded with much Spanish loot, by the way, the citizens who swarmed excitedly to view her riding at anchor in the Thames were so carried away by enthusiasm that they demanded

she should be hauled in triumph through the City's streets and then be hoisted to the very summit of St. Paul's Cathedral—the old St. Paul's, which was later destroyed in the Great Fire of London—to take the place of the spire which a furious storm had whirled away one night.

In a Deptford Shed!

Drake was honoured by a visit of the Queen to the Golden Hind, who bade him kneel on the deck and arise Sir Francis. His men were feasted and feted, and the little Golden Hind was a nine days' wonder. Until people ceased to visit her, the Golden Hind was docked in a Deptford shed, in whose roof a hole was cut to let the masts poke through. Then she went the way of most things which arouse such burning admiration for a short time.

She became just old sea-junk, and was broken up for firewood. All that was saved of her carcass was the timber which now exists as the London table and the Oxford chair. Such was the inglorious end of the Golden Hind, of whose tiny dimensions—she was but sixty feet long and twenty feet wide—we get a better notion when it is realised that she could be dumped quite comfortably into the dining-saloon of any of our modern ocean greyhounds, without so much as the speckless paint of the liner's saloon wall being scratched.

The Dread of the Spanish Main!

The crew that went aboard her when Drake set out on his momentous voyage numbered ninety, all told. Before the trip was half completed, the ninety had dwindled—through sickness and pitched battles with the richly laden merchantmen of Spain—to fifty-six. Even with such a small crew as constituted the Golden Hind's full complement there was no room in the vessel left for "spares." Drake had a way of his own of getting such emergency stores, with promptitude and dispatch, when the need arose.

Many a time did he stop a Spanish ship and "pinch" her sails and masts when his own had carried away. No wonder the Spanish Main, whose waters the daring old navigator calmly used as a happy hunting-ground dreaded the sound of Drake's drum.

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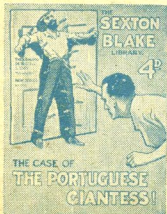
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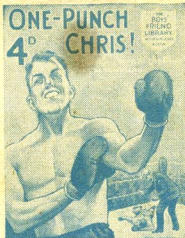
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